Complicating chineseness : the female characters' engagement with landscape in Amy Tan's novels

Chen Ma

▶ **To cite this version:**

Chen Ma. Complicating chineseness : the female characters' engagement with landscape in Amy Tan's novels. Literature. Université Bourgogne Franche-Comté, 2022. English. ⟨NNT : 2022UBFCC004⟩. ⟨tel-03969968⟩

HAL Id: tel-03969968

https://theses.hal.science/tel-03969968v1

Submitted on 2 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

HAL Authorization

THÈSE DE DOCTORAT DE L'UNIVERSITÉ BOURGOGNE FRANCHE-COMTÉ
Ecole Doctorale Lettres, Communication, Langues, Arts (LECLA)
Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires et Transculturelles (EA 3224)

Ecole Doctorale LECLA
Doctorat de littérature anglophone
Par
Chen MA

Sous la direction de
Madame la Professeure Pascale Guibert
et de Madame la Maîtresse de Conférences Margaret Gillespie

Complicating Chineseness: The Female Characters' Engagement with Landscape in Amy Tan's Novels
Lorsque les personnages féminins des romans d'Amy Tan Interagissent avec le paysage : la sinéité en question

Thèse présentée et soutenue à Besançon, le vendredi 25 mars 2022.

Composition du Jury :
Monsieur le Professeur Jean-Marie FOURNIER, Université de Paris – Rapporteur.
Madame Margaret GILLESPIE, Maîtresse de Conférences, Université de Bourgogne Franche-Comté, Besançon - Co-Directrice de thèse.
Madame la Professeure Pascale GUIBERT, Université de Bourgogne Franche-Comté, Besançon, Directrice de thèse.
Madame Christine LORRE, Maîtresse de Conférences, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3 – Présidente.
Madame la Professeure Claire OMHOVERE, Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier – Rapporteure.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special thanks to my supervisors, Mme. Pascale Guibert and Mme. Margaret Gillespie, who have made this dissertation possible. I could not imagine what this journey would be like without their unwavering support and helpful advice at every step. The image of us three initiating the sparks for my research project will always be one of my most treasured moments of life: in Pascale's sun-lit office in one early spring, we brainstormed about the possibilities of my project. Their attentive listening, expert, and friendly advice kindled my enthusiasm to explore what China and Chineseness mean to Chinese American writers like Amy Tan. Thanks to their support, I have also gained the opportunity to reconsider China myself from new perspectives.

I appreciate my chance of living in France for the last five years. This exceptional experience has endowed me with a refreshing and rich cultural atmosphere, not to mention some of the French territory's various forms of landscape that I visited. I am also very grateful for all the Chinese landscape paintings that I was lucky enough to catch a glimpse of from the online exhibitions of the Palace Museum. They have enlightened my first bit of "fire" in my heart to dig into the interplay between landscape and its literary representation.

It goes without saying that my longest-standing debt is to my family, and especially to my beloved husband Mengjia Wang who has accompanied me through this long journey, rain or shine. My serendipitous discovery of both the different and the intimate connection between Chinese and French landscapes could not come into shape without his generous and patient accompany. His passion for Chinese landscape poems has offered these irreplaceable angles of analysis. I want to express my love for my parents, who have always stood beside me even though they are oceans apart.

I am grateful to Mme. Laurence Gaida, the directress of my research group CRIT, for her kind help with all the paperwork required by the doctoral school. I would also like to thank the CRIT peers who helped me become familiar with the research environment in France, especially Lilia Androsenko, Clémence Mesnier, Cécile Moore Hopson, and Darlyn Sanchez. I would like to thank Mme. Claire Omhovère, Mme. Pascale Smorag, Mme. Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni, Mme. Christine Lorre-Johnston, M. Philippe Laplace, Mme. Jennifer Murray, and Mme. Sabine Lauret-Taft. I am fortunate to have these experts in my research area as my comité suivi de who have shared their experiences and given me the most effective and concrete suggestions. I am also very grateful to Mme. Anne Dussarrat. She helped me with the Prêt-entre-Bibliothèques (PEB), which compose one indispensable part of my research.

Thanks also to the friends I have met at Besançon, in particular Zhihua, Wentao, Yinjuan, Xumin, Weibin, Nana, Li Jun, Zhangran, Sensen, Pengbai, Yating, Jianghan, Nannan, Jifei, Xu Ke, Zhihao, Chen Li, Zhang Hao, Yunqian for their warmth, intelligence, generosity, and vitality. I have felt at home at Besançon because of their bounteous encouragement and, of course, their excellent Chinese cuisine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS 3

INTRODUCTION 5

1 TENSION-SETTING NETWORKS OF OPPOSITION AND CORRELATION 31

Introduction 31

1.1 Gazing and Roaming 44

1.1.1 The Self & the World 46

1.1.2 The Perceptual & The Affectual 57

1.1.3 Landscape as View and Landscape as Living: 68

1.2 The Matter and Spirit of Landscape 81

1.2.1 Displacement of the Inseparability of Matter and Spirit 85

1.2.2 Reconstruction of the Humanistic Landscape 96

1.2.3 Transcendence in Tan's Written Landscapes 111

2 TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS 131

Introduction 131

2.1 Transition in Tan's Novels 145

2.1.1 The Sublime and the Beautiful 145

2.1.2 Landscapes of Life and Death 161

2.1.3 "Modern" and "Primitive" Landscapes 173

2.2 Transformation in Tan's Novels 188

2.2.1 *Yin-Yang* forces in Tan's female characters' bodies: instituting the body of *yin* 188

2.2.2 *Fengshui*: Living environment as landscape 207

2.2.3 The Silenced Landscapes in Tan's Novels 222

3 RETURN 241

Introduction 241

3.1 *Dao* – Against Subject and Beyond Being 256

3.1.1 The Undifferentiated *Dao* 256

3.1.2 Return to the Root: The Bland 277

3.2 Progression and Regression—Time in Tan's Landscapes 296

3.2.1 The Historicized Landscapes in Tan's Talk-stories 299

3.2.2 Landscape beyond Time: 317

3.3 Translation in Tan's Landscapes 338

3.3.1 Difficulty of Translation—Tensions 340

3.3.2 Impossibility of Translation — Transformation 355

3.3.3 Openness of Translation — Return and New Reflectivity 369

CONCLUSION 387

BIBLIOGRAPHY 397

INDEX OF NAMES, WORKS, AND CONCEPTS 425

Introduction

Chineseness is an appropriate point at which to begin rethinking the critical status of Amy Tan's novels. A second-generation Chinese immigrant in America, Amy Tan is one of the most widely read Chinese American contemporary novelists. Despite her popularity, Tan's novels are also controversial and have been read with "respect and voyeurism, admiration and condescension, humility and self-congratulation."[1] They have been labelled as simple and clichéd, as recording nothing more than the melodramatic struggles,[2] reconciliations and identifications between mothers and daughters or between Chinese and American cultures.[3] Amy Tan has been said to be too simple a writer who produces clichés aiming to cater for the Western audience with "excessively" detailed descriptions of Chinoiseries[4] and one-dimensional portrayals of Chinese landscapes pervasive of mysticism, degradation, and superstition. Her writings' characteristics are argued to intensify further the mysterious and inscrutable image of Chinese people, landscapes, and cultures. My intention here is to contradict these accusations and instead argue that Tan's landscapes display a Chineseness that goes through a more complicated development than those these criticisms are ready to acknowledge.

---

[1] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 8.

[2] When questioning Tan's Orientalism for commercial gain, Wong wonders whether the mothers in Tan's novels are featured with "entangled, sometimes bizarre, and frequently melodramatic stories as denigration of Chinese history and culture" (WONG, Cynthia F. Asymmetries: Loss and Forgiveness in the Novels of Amy Tan." *China Fictions/English Language*. Brill Rodopi, 2008, p. 57).

[3] Heung argues that "For the Joy Luck mothers, the construction of a self in identification with a maternal figure thus parallels, finally, a revisioning of the self through a reinterpretation of the past" (HEUNG, Marina. "Daughter-text/mother-text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Amy Tan,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 8).

[4] Ma argues that Tan's *The Moon Lady* and the children's book *The Chinese SiAMESe Cat* are "an amalgamation of the style of chinoiseries on the one hand, and of ethnic stereotypes of Chinese, on the other" and "Chinoiseries idealize a mythic China while ethnic stereotypes demonize the Chinese people" (MA, Sheng-mei. "Amy Tan's *The Chinese SiAMESe Cat*: Chinoiserie and Ethnic Stereotypes." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1999, 202).

The present study will explore how Tan's portrayal of landscape and her female characters' engagement with landscape complicates Chineseness. Dealing with Tan's first novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Marc Singer detects a normative American viewpoint rather than a native Chinese one, which is reinforced, he argues, by the order and arrangement of the tales.[1] But viewing Tan's novels from the perspective of her evolving way of representing landscapes, this thesis will argue, on the contrary, that Tan's novels have gone through what will be termed as a "spiral" transformation as far as her representation of China and Chinese landscapes goes. The present study argues that the spiral development of Tan's representation of landscape might be read as a crucial starting point to discuss how Chineseness—Chinese ways of looking at, of engaging with and of artistically and literarily recording[2] landscape—has been complicated. I will focus on Tan's six novels—from her debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) to the latest, *The Valley of Amazement* (2013)—as case studies to illustrate how her ambiguous and fluid descriptions of landscape reflect her characters' inaccessibility or hindered accessibility to Chineseness. I will pay particular attention to Tan's writerly negotiation with the Chinese past and Chinese literary heritage. I will finally show how this negotiation enables the emergence of new ways in which Chineseness can be (re)defined and lived in Tan's written landscapes.

Amy Tan is a second-generation Chinese American immigrant. She was born in Oakland, California in 1952, the second of three children to Chinese immigrant parents. She was raised in a culturally-rich environment, benefitting from both her mother's adherence to Chinese tradition and her father's Baptist faith, the American language used at school and the Chinese dialects, pidgin English, and a mixture of

[1] SINGER, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, p. 336.

[2] The word "record" here is different from the Western "represent". The depiction of landscape in the Chinese tradition refers to the process by which certain landscape elements speak to the minds of the poets. The poets then record their encounters with, interpretation of, and responses to the world, which will help them belong back to the universe. Therefore, literary creation is the act of the living mind discovering an analog for the self. See OWEN, Stephen. "Omen of the world: meaning in the Chinese lyric" (Dale, Corinne H, ed. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*. SUNY Press, 2004, p. 91).

English and Chinese at home. A jazz lover, Tan has found inspiration in numerous pieces of jazz the compositional structure of which has informed her own "improvisations" as she portrays the life circumstances of her various characters and develops their stories. At college, Tan took classes in spoken Chinese and Asian history to become knowledgeable about Chinese culture and history.[1] She visited one of her half-sisters who lived in Shanghai with her mother back in 1987 and commented on this experience in a 2001 interview with the *Guardian*, saying that she felt "in that stupid, traveller sense […] suddenly Chinese, the minute [she] touched China."[2] Then, haunted by the question of where the past begins or rather how things happen, Tan started a doctoral degree in linguistics at UC Berkeley. She studied the intricacies of a dead Mongolian language. After quitting her doctoral program before completing it, Tan took a job in assessing the communication skills of disabled children under five years old. During this time, she developed compassion and the belief in the limitlessness of hope within the limits of human beings—an essential training she would use in her future writer's career first as a columnist for several magazines on economics and then as a novelist. As a yearlong amateur nature sketcher, too, Tan is able to consider imperfection as normal, which facilitates her writing.

Her unusual family history has fascinated and disturbed both her literary creation and her literary critics. According to Tan's interviews and essay collections, her first two novels *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), her fourth

[1] In an interview with the *Guardian*, Tan gave the reason for taking classes in spoken Chinese and Asian history, "You go through a more activist period of being angry that your history books never had any positive role model of Asians, just had them working the railroads, and that wasn't my background. But it's necessary to find a balance, being comfortable and knowledgeable about your own culture, and not feeling guilty that you're not really Chinese. It's an evolution of ethnic identity, but it's a lifetime's process." (JAGGI, Maya. "Ghosts at my shoulder." *Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[2] In the same interview with the *Guardian*, Tan commented on her first visit to China with her mother and her husband after her mother's accidental heart attack. JAGGI, Maya. "Ghosts at my shoulder." *Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019. Tan also depicts these contradictory feelings in the third novel *HSS* when the American-born Olivia visits China for the first time with her half-sister—the Chinese-born Kwan.

novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) and her latest novel *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) were inspired by the life stories of her mother and grandmother. Her mother was married to an abusive husband and had three daughters back in China. Her grand-mother was forced to remarry as a courtesan into a prominent and wealthy family. Tan did not know she had three half-sisters in China until late in the 1980s when her mother told her after a heart attack that nearly left her dead. Tan's background is of great relevance to her evolving sense of China.[1] For her literary creation, on top of her scattered first-hand knowledge about China through her family reunions or her visits to China, Tan also researches Chinese stories through old novels, visits to museums and looks at tabloid newspapers dating from the time when her novels take place.[2] That is to say, Tan gains her understanding of China from both first and second-hand sources. This mixture makes up a site of open interpretations and multiple translations.

With all these connections with China, Tan still thinks of herself as an American "steeped in American values. But [she knows] on an emotional level what it means to be of the Chinese culture."[3] In a 2013 interview with the *China Daily*,[4] Tan mentioned that it was precisely her visit to China that intensified her sense of being

---

[1] In the 1950s and 1960s, from the stories told by her parents, Tan thought that "If America was heaven, Formosa would be limbo, and China would be hell." When her father and brother died of brain tumor, her mother told Tan about her previous marriage and daughters, then China changed from "an invisible jail" to somewhere Tan now "imagined herself living [in China], wearing a conical hat and writing letters late at night to [her] mother, in beautiful Chinese calligraphy like that of [her] newfound sisters". See CHRISTIANSEN, Kenan. "Amy Tan's Evolving Sense of China." *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/travel/amy-tans-evolving-sense-of-china.html. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[2] Dawson, Kelly Chung. "Amy Tan returns with Rules for Virgins." *China Daily*, https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2011-12/30/content_14357266.htm. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[3] When asked the question of her aim at bridging the gap between the U.S. and China, Tan answered, "I always felt hesitant in talking about Chinese culture and American culture. Listen, I am an American, steeped in American values. But I know on an emotional level what it means to be of the Chinese culture." "Amy Tan Q&A: China Then and Now, and How to Bridge the Gap." *The Wallstreet Journal*, https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/11/15/amy-tan-qa-china-then-and-now-and-how-to-bridge-the-gap/. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[4] ZHOU, May. "Amy Tan packs the House in Texas." http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-12/20/content_17186934.htm. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

an American.[1] Tan asserts that her novels do not aim to bridge the gap between the United States and China. Instead, she digs into her own emotional confusion that happens to be intertwined with Chinese history and Chinese landscapes. And this intertwining with China, which forms her family and their past, has in turn shaped Tan's own life.[2] In her first essay collection, *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life* (2001), Tan writes that her novels explore:

> questions that disturb [her], images that mystify [her], or memories that cause [her] anguish and pain [...] stories about life as [she] has misunderstood it. To be sure, it's a Chinese American life.[3]

Tan said in a 2017 interview with *NPR* that the voice in her novels comes from what she sees in the world and how she interprets the world.[4] Tan's interpretation and representation of Chinese landscapes contains that which is double, untranslatable, alien and foreign.[5] My dissertation focuses on Tan's multiple versions of China through analyzing her female characters' (mis)/(missed) readings of Chinese landscapes.

Tan's first two novels, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), mainly exhibit Chineseness through the Chinese-born mother figures' talk-stories that deal with landscapes back in China in the form of folklore and myths.

---

[1] The parallel that can be drawn between Jullien's and Tan's experiences in the understanding of their "mother philosophies" (as we would say their "mother tongue") is striking. In *The Book of Beginnings* (2005), Jullien writes, "we are called upon to arrange passage for one into the other or, again, to let one access the other, the "other" that then rightly—reciprocally—discovers itself, the "oneself" or the "one's own." Because to translate, as I have said, is itself operative: to reopen from the inside and make one see from the outside simultaneously inventories resources on both sides, activates them, and offers them—which is why to translate is, in and of itself, ethical" (JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 128).

[2] JAGGI, Maya. "Ghosts at My Shoulder," The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[3] TAN, Amy. The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life. Penguin, 2001, pp. 304-305.

[4] GROSS, Terry. "'I Am Full Of Contradictions': Novelist Amy Tan On Fate And Family." https://www.npr.org/2017/10/17/558295524/-i-am-full-of-contradictions-novelist-amy-tan-on-fate-and-family. Accessed on 07 Dec 2019.

[5] In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha points out that in "the act of translation the 'given' content becomes alien and estranged; and that [...] leaves the language of translation [...] confronted by its double, the untranslatable–alien and foreign" (BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994, 2012, p. 235).

Those Chinese landscapes are viewed in tension with American landscapes, whereas the first two novels are set at the time of the Japanese invasion. Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses (1995)* situates its landscapes at the time of the Taiping Rebellion. In this novel, Chineseness is constructed through changing perceptions of the same landscape visited by the two female protagonists. For example, the American-born character reads the Changmian caves as wavering between life and death during her visit to China. Tan's fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) delineates Chinese landscapes with a focus on calligraphy and oracle bones. Tan reflects Chineseness in an interplay between calligraphic practice and literary creation. Tan's fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) locates Chineseness in tension between East and West as she depicts the trips of twelve Americans to China and Myanmar. Tan's latest novel *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) turns its attention to identity and one's surroundings through a female character of mixed descent's struggle with the Chinese heritage on her father's side. These novels display and displace some of the most important views on the relationship between humans and nature in Chinese philosophy, such as the "oneness of man and nature (*tianren heyi* 天人合一)" and the "attachment to land (*xiangtu qingjie* 乡土情结)."

I have chosen Tan's novels because they provide a rich source of different landscapes, offering us a broad spectrum from which to study how the understanding and construction of Chineseness have evolved. In other words, the variety of landscapes in Tan's novels proves to be fruitful in illustrating how Chineseness is manifested, destabilized, relocated, and expanded. I will focus on what I see as a spiral development of her landscape depictions. The spiral shape will illuminate how conceptions of Chineseness and landscape are mutually involved and further dissolved into the Chinese American female characters' daily experiences. The spiral here traces that development in her conception of Chineseness as expressed through the landscapes of her novels: it shows how her work first departs from and then gradually returns to a Chinese way of seeing, conceiving, and recording landscape. As seen through the evolution of Tan's novels, Chineseness goes through an unceasing course of departing and returning to the "origin," if there is any. Tan's characters' (re)visits to China increase their confusion and misunderstanding of

Chineseness—which, in its turn, is confused, de-formed and re-formed. Literature professor Yuan Yuan's argument is helpful in understanding the Chineseness represented in Tan's landscapes:

> Eventually, in the novels of both Kingston and Tan, China as a geographical location is transliterated into a semiotic space of recollection; China as personal experiences is translated into a cultural repository for reproduction; and, as a text, China is reconfigured into a variety of discourses: myth, legend, history, fantasy, films, and talk-stories. [1]

As one of the indispensable signifiers of China and Chinese characteristics, Tan's landscapes evoke a specific set of interrelated ideas, images, and values related to Chineseness, which are repeated, adapted, and reworked throughout Tan's writings. Yet, landscape shares ambiguity with a certain idea of Chineseness, as both a material geographical object that emerges from "specific geographical, social and cultural circumstances," [2] and as a psychological and subjective response that is drawn from the "resources of myth and memory" [3] embedded in the perceiver of landscape.

Landscape plays a very special part in Chinese culture because it relates to some of the essential philosophical ideas of and Confucianism, ideas that have shaped and influenced Chinese people's understanding of their relationship with the universe. The Daoist classic *Dao De Jing* (around 600 BC), written by the Daoist founder Laozi, explains how all things in the universe are in correlation instead of being binary and contradictory. Correlation means that the one cannot exist and evolve without the other. Humans and nature share the same structure and aim at the same returning point in *Dao*. The boundaries dissolve between man and nature and between the self and non-self. Sharing characteristics with the myriad things in nature within *Dao*, Chinese poets or painters relay the changes they receive from

[1] YUAN, Yuan. "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan." *Critique: studies in contemporary fiction*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1999, p. 293.
[2] COSGROVE, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. xi.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

mountains and waters in pairs such as their "emptiness" and "fullness," their "height" and "lowness," and their "thickness" and "thinness."

The corresponding Chinese word for landscape is "mountains and waters (*shanshui* 山水)," which itself displays the idea of correlation fundamental to Chinese philosophy, language, arts, and literature. Correlation opens a space where *Qi* can go from one force to its opposite—such as from Heaven to Earth. Human beings always already find themselves in a tensional field of mountains and waters, one of the correlative pairs in nature constituting life. François Jullien compares this tensional field, or atmosphere, to the vapor of rice, the fragrance of perfume, or the aroma of wine.[1] When correlative pairs interact, tension arises, which enables variation and countless changes to occur. In other words, the encounter of mountains and waters sets human beings in a landscape that is free from the typically Western confine that is the horizon. We, human beings, anchor ourselves in the transitions and transformations of the mountains and waters that ceaselessly exchange their forces. We are immersed in the interplay between mountains and waters: we are alive. Life vitality is produced by the constant flowing movements exchanged between correlative pairs. So, we do not observe landscapes, but *approach* mountains and waters through numerous activities such as ascending and descending, walking, traveling, strolling and wandering… We separate no self from mountains and waters. Instead, mountains and waters invite us to explore that countless and endless tensional field, denying any limitation of landscape within the visual, the partial, and the objective.

When reading Chinese texts, Jullien takes some steps back to comprehend Western culture. Jullien's first move is to a "detour"—he studies China but aims at the West. Tan also takes a detour to view China and the Chinese past through the lens of deconstructed biblical stories, as illustrated in her third novel, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). Jullien calls his approach "external deconstruction"[2]: when

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 56.

[2] This term is mentioned as one of Jullien's reading strategy of Chinese philosophy in the article "At the Borderline of Visible/Speakable" by Zhang Ying (张颖), the translator of Jullien's

one's own culture meets an external force, the characteristics of both of the original cultures come to light. Chinese thought is seen as this external force both by Jullien and Tan. My dissertation studies how Tan's descriptions and representations of landscape revisit Chinese philosophical thought concerning landscape. *Detour* here means that I adopt a roundabout way with the help of Western philosophical thought to read how its Chinese counterpart is displayed, displaced, and enriched in Tan's novels.

Jullien's second move is in circles. He discusses the same question and returns to it constantly—but from different angles, and with different focuses so it is never the same. *Returning* in Daoist thought shares the same spirit—the myriad things depart from and unceasingly return to *Dao*. Yet this returning to *Dao* is never a coming back to the same point but opens up more opportunities for discovery. China and Chineseness are dissipated and unlocated in Tan's continuous return to the same question of what China and Chineseness mean to her. I try to read Tan's written texts as located in the "upstream" of the construction of a Chinese image—a stage pregnant with flowing, oscillating, transforming, and reversing—before any actuality of things comes into being and becomes fixed. I focus on the ambiguities of Tan's written landscapes, which bespeak this particular stage of vagueness, uncertainty, and indeterminacy. In my own three steps through this dissertation, I also pay special attention to Tan's evolving way of understanding and representing Chinese landscapes: tension, transition-and-transformation, and return.

Jullien's third move is to maintain Chinese and Western traditions in their "indifference." That is to say, Jullien does not seek the difference between the two traditions. But instead, he aims to open a space where the two cultures remove each other from their obviousness. To achieve this, Jullien has read Chinese texts from a distance with a guiding idea of not translating. "Not translating"[1] means that Jullien avoids enclosing any culture within the limitedness of foreign languages. This "not translating" strategy opens up a "spacing"—Julien speaks of and uses *écart* instead

monograph *Great Image Has No Form*. I translate this term myself from the original Chinese "外部结构."

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 4.

of *difference* between the internal and the external. When this "spacing" becomes more expansive, more new possibilities emerge. Each culture can reopen from the inside while at the same time one can see one's culture from the outside. Following the mode of procedures set before me by Jullien, throughout my work, I have tried to prevent my preconception of Chinese traditions from hindering my interpretation of Tan's written landscapes. This distance from my own country and culture has helped me see Chinese philosophical ideas with fresh new eyes. However, to read from a distance does not mean reading in a cursory, vague manner, either in Jullien's monographs or in my dissertation. On the contrary, I interpret Tan's representation of Chinese landscapes even more closely and have attempted to put aside my previous acquaintance with Chinese ways of recording landscape. My thinking and writing from a foreign country and alien culture have also enabled me to perceive China from the outside, and so, to read the Chinese texts within Tan's novels from the appropriate distance and closeness.

As with the coexistence of the ending and beginning, Daoist thought posits the correlative relationship between contradictory yet harmonious opposing forces that constantly change and transform themselves into new forms. Likewise, departing and returning, as a pair of movements, likewise, moderate each other and transform themselves into each other. Returning denotes *Dao*'s moving pattern—a coming back to *Dao* as an original point, which embraces all possibilities and contradictions. Tan's novels display, displace, and undermine this Chinese belief in Oneness. Her contradictory descriptions produce many versions of China and Chinese landscapes, manifesting the idea that there is no such thing as one China or one Chinese landscape. Here the One shows its tendency to evolve into the many: the many versions of China.

Coming back to *Dao* indicates the irresistible call of China and the Chinese past for Tan. In her second essay collection, *Where the Past Begins* (2017), Tan writes that the neediness that compels her to know is "a perpetual state of uncertainty and a tether to the past."[1] This irresistible call of China drives Tan to deconstruct the

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 6.

Chinese devices of recording landscape such as *bi* (比) and *xing* (兴).[1] For example, Tan re-contextualizes the cyclical views on time through a time that her characters experience as fragmentary. Tan's writings of landscape provide us with a multiplicity of time perceptions. However, this rewriting also indicates that Tan cannot get rid of the influence exerted by the Chinese literary tradition. Tan revisits the Chinese views on the relationship between man and nature to grasp the "mythic past [she] grew up with and broke from before returning to it as a writer."[2] This is what we will see in the subchapter "Landscape beyond Time" in Part Three, "Return." There we will see how Tan renders the mythical landscape in China as undermining the cyclical conception of Daoist time. However, at the same time, her narrative of the landscape reflects one essential feature of mythical landscapes: the lack of temporal and spatial determination. The loss of restricted dimensions of time and space can remind us of *Dao*'s vagueness, formlessness, and limitlessness. Thus Tan departs and returns to a mythic past in her representation of time in the landscape.

I have read Tan's written landscapes following a 2015 article by Zhang Longxi (张隆溪), a Chinese scholar specializing in comparative literature. Zhang argues that we should go beyond Western deconstructive or postmodern theories to build our "views and positions" to re-conceptualize Chineseness as a "complicated and historically changing concept" while firmly approving its "social reality and cultural tradition."[3] I intend to show that the concept and formation of Chineseness have been formed and transformed in the negotiation and creative integration of different cultures.[4] Once the line is broken between "Chinese" as an imagined category and

[1] "*Bi* (比 comparison)" metaphorically likens the abstract ideas and feelings to the concrete imageries gained from participating in agricultural activities (*bi* or analogy). "*Xing* (兴 affective image)" employs the concrete imageries observed in natural landscapes as a lead-in for the real subject of a poem.
[2] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 9.
[3] ZHANG, Longxi. "Re-conceptualizing China in Our Time: From a Chinese Perspective." *European Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015, p.199.
[4] The theme of integration is also manifested in Tan's most experimental and atypical novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2015). The mixed-ethnic landscapes in the Yunnan province display the respectful policies carried out toward the minorities throughout Chinese history. Some diasporic intellectuals criticize what they see as the hegemony of Han culture over

"Chinese" as a literal referent, new possibilities open for multiple versions of Chineseness. This is what Tan does in her landscapes: she undercuts China as a "natural referent" and multiplies its reflections. For example, in the episode of "A Pair of Tickets" in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Tan's references to photographs of China undermine the essentialized image of China because the referential ground is made unreliable.

Chineseness is reflected in Tan's representation of landscapes and manifested in the female characters' engagement with them. Here, considering the engagement of female characters with landscape will mean analyzing how they actively view, creatively experience and subversively create landscape. By saying that Tan's female characters display an "active and creative engagement with landscape," I mean that the female characters are represented as living subjects instead of the projection of male fantasies and fears, passive women who have been possessively and pleasurably looked at by men and have been metaphorized and objectified as the natural landscape. Considering Western myths, Gillian Rose points out in *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993) that "Landscapes are often seen in terms of the female body and the beauty of Nature. Women appear but men act. This particular masculine position is to look actively, possessively, sexually and pleasurably at women as objects."[1] For her part, in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (2015), Griselda Pollock points out that women are historically limited within either the object to be deciphered or within the dominative pleasures of the patriarchal visual field where women are deprived of the right to speak and represent themselves. For example, on the American side, the Puritans viewed the wild landscapes they discovered as a "virgin land" when they first arrived on the continent of North America. This personification associating a certain ideal of femaleness with terrain manifests the oppressive projections both nature and women can be subjected to. Women's bodies are looked at as landscape

---

minority cultures. But Tan revisions this view with her descriptions of the Yunnan landscapes as embracing many cultures.

[1] ROSE, Gillian. *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 96.

forms rather than actively gazing at the landscape themselves. In ancient Chinese legends now, Pangu (盘古), is the earliest male human life. After his death, his body parts grow and transform into various elements in nature.[1] His female counterpart falls into the category of either the Mother[2] (who later becomes reduced to the role of nurturing woman, confined to the privacy of homes); or as the vengeful Spirit at war against merciless nature.[3] The common result of the essentialization and objectification of women in the West and in China is that we know "relatively little about how women respond to landscape, how they represent it in their creative work, how they shape the landscapes of their lives, or how their lives are affected by the landscapes they experience."[4]

My readings of Tan's female characters' engagement with landscape intend to partially fill the gap of the scarcity of the representation of women as actively and creatively engaging with landscape. My analysis intends to counterbalance the abundance of the metaphorization of the female body as landscape. We will see to what extent Tan's comparison of female characters' bodies to landscape accentuates the traumatic experiences of the female characters, which disrupts the metaphorizing of women as landscape. The rupture and excess of the female characters' bodies in Tan's novels celebrate the female body and challenge conventions as they reclaim

[1] The universe was once a vast cloud of vapor shaped like a giant egg. Born inside the "cosmic egg," Pangu (盘古) proceeded to bring order out of chaos. First, he broke the egg, allowing the vapor to shape the heavens and the earth. Then he pushed the sky and the earth far apart. Finally, when he died, his body was magically transformed into the natural features of the world" (SCHOMP, Virginia. *The Ancient Chinese (Myths of the World)*. Marshall Cavendish, Benchmark, 2009, p. 35).

[2] Among the Han people, the most popular story explaining the origin of humans relates to the goddess Nüwa (Molding Mud). When heaven and earth had been created, no humans existed yet. So Nüwa created human beings by molding them from yellow earth with her hand. Yang, Lihui, Deming An, and Jessica Anderson Turner. *Handbook of Chinese Mythology*. Abc-clio, 2005, p. 68.

[3] Jingwei (精卫) is the daughter of Emperor Yan (炎帝), who "drowned in the East Sea and metamorphoses into a bird who decides to revenge the sea by filling it up with the branches. Jingwei continues her task day after day from the day she died" (袁柯。《古代神选释》。人民文学出版社，1979，90 页。 / YUAN, Ke. *Myths of Ancient China: An Anthology with Annotations*. People's Literature Publishing House, 1979, p. 90. My translation).

[4] MONK, Janice. "Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape." *Environmental Review: ER*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1984, p. 23.

women's language, history, and lives. The female characters' engagement with landscapes in Tan's novels counters the projection of the "feminized model for a dominant and conservative nationalist notion of family values" [1] among Asian American female characters. Tan's female bodies are neither asexual nor hypersexual, nor are they "fluid, volatile, messy, leaky bodies;"[2] rather they are the site of the confluence of memory, landscape, and flesh articulated by language.

One more step beyond the consideration of the intimate connection between the question of identity, landscapes, and the female characters' relationship with landscape in Tan's novels will take us to the issue of how Chineseness is complicated in Tan's written landscapes. Like Tan's criticism, the study of Chineseness in the West and China has also been broadly discussed and has remained contradictory. In the West, Chineseness first and foremost has its ideological origin that came into being as a "cultural supplement to Western discourse that also challenges the stereotypical representation of China."[3] In China, Chineseness has focused on the question of how to embrace modernity while dealing appropriately with Chinese histories, traditions, and cultures. Two major competing voices have arisen among scholars concerning the meaning, connotation, and transformation of Chineseness. One is the voice of scholars from mainland China[4] who aim to prove and reinforce the cohesive narratives of a nationalistic Chineseness with a stabilized core, from the

[1] HO, Wendy. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 81. In parallel with the landscape, the Chinese American female characters are constructed as marginalized, muted, and silenced.
[2] LONGHURST, Robyn. *Bodies: Exploring fluid boundaries.* Routledge, 2004, p. 23.
[3] Chow explains the emergence of "Chineseness" as, "Against the systematic exclusiveness of many hegemonic Western practices, the ethnic supplement occurs first and foremost as a struggle for access to representation while at the same time contesting the conventional simplicity and stereotyping of ethnic subjects as such" (CHOW, Rey. "Introduction: On Chineseness as a theoretical problem." *Boundary*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1998, p. 4).
[4] ZHANG, Longxi. "Re-conceptualizing China in Our Time: From a Chinese Perspective." *European Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015, pp.193-209; WANG, Ning, "Comparative literature and globalism: a Chinese cultural and literary strategy." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2004, pp. 584-602; Yinhong Wang and Gungwu Shi. "The Returned China with Chineseness in History and World Politics: A Deeper Understanding with Intellectual Guidance from Wang Gungwu." *China and International Relations*. Routledge, 2010, pp. 291-312.

perspectives of concrete historical, geographical, and cultural evidence. The other camp comprises diasporic intellectuals[1] who believe that there is no so-called "authentic Chineseness" based on natural elements such as a shared geography, history, language, or culture. Chineseness is then considered as a "fluid construct" based on the perceptions and representations of constant production, modification, and reproduction. These diasporic intellectuals tend to use postmodern and postcolonial theories to deconstruct its static universality and unbroken temporality.

These two contesting camps concerning the question of Chineseness are further complexified by the community of Sinophone writers.[2] These writers either adopt a "nationalism of the long-distance kind, or the anti-China politics or even nonrelation with China."[3] Whereas the Chineseness portrayed in Sinophone literature is re-visioned with local languages and culture, the Chineseness represented in Tan's written landscapes does not conform to the Sinophone writers' nationalism or anti-China tendencies. Instead, as I read them, Tan's written landscapes display different and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards Chineseness that have been brought about by her characters' marginalized, ambiguous, and in-between status. Tan's Chinese American female characters reconstruct their versions of Chineseness in their revisitings of China, in their repetitiously accounted talk-stories,[4] and in their dreams, memories, and imagination about Chinese landscapes. By so doing, multiple aesthetic possibilities emerge from Tan's descriptions and representations of China:

---

[1] CHUN, Allen. "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity." *Boundary*, vol. 2, no. 23, 1996, pp. 111-138; CHOW, Rey. "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem." *Boundary*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1998, pp. 1-24; ANG, Ien. *On not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. Psychology Press, 2001; TU, Wei-Ming. "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center." *Daedalus*, 1991, pp. 1-32.

[2] Sinophone literature is defined as one type of literature that is "written in Sinitic-language with no assumed centrality of Chinese Literature" (SHIH, Shu-mei. "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," *Global Chinese Literature*, Tsu, Jing, and David Der-wei Wang, eds. Brill, 2010, p. 34).

[3] SHIH, Shu-mei. "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production." *Global Chinese Literature*, Brill, 2010, pp. 29-48.

[4] The expression of "talk-story" originally refers to the social exchange in pidgin English during the family and friend gatherings. The "talk" is then transferred into the writing of Asian American literature. In Chinese American literature, the talk-story is transferred from the activity of 'talking' to a book in print. It serves to transmit the ancestral heritage and cultural tradition and enables the retelling of the traditional stories with a subversive voice.

this underlines the "fiction of identity and its mimetic relationship with language."[1] Tan's novels have been published since 1989 against the background of the tension between globalization and localism, which has brought about the tendency to present between-worlds (1980s) and to exhibit the trends of heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity (1990s) in Asian American literature.[2] We will see that Chineseness, in Tan's novels, is reflected in the combination of the in-between positions of the female characters and that of the multiplicity of various forms of landscapes that are in the process of development there. "Complication" will also arise from Tan's combinations of Chinese and American modes of perceiving and representing landscape. For example, in Tan's novels, the mother figures translate Chinese folklores related to landscape onto American landscapes. At the same time, they reconfigure the American view of nature as God's creation with their lived realities. By doing this, the Chinese thinking patterns are destabilized. "Complication" also resides in the way the female characters take variable distance with Chinese and American landscapes. This shows in the disjunction between the landscapes that are actually seen, the landscapes that are metaphorically and mythically preconceived, and the ontologically experienced landscapes. The female characters' engagement with landscape, in Tan's novels, voices Chinese American women's particular way of viewing, connecting with, and recreating landscapes, which invigorates and thus "complicates" the notion of Chineseness and landscape. Finally, "complication" will also be seen at work in the revision, under way here, of some of Tan's criticism

[1] Shin argues that "For exile writer like Ha Jin, homeland is in the English language and Chineseness is mediated through English, whose boundaries are also redrawn" (Shu-mei Shin, ed. *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader.* Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 23).

[2] Bella Adams points out that "Asian America was caught between worlds, one of suffering and the other of success. The Asian American literary texts selected in this chapter critically negotiate relationships between these worlds within the USA, typically in terms of family and other personal relationships" (ADAMS, Bella. *Asian American Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008, pp. 108-109). In the 1990s, Asian American literature came into a new era to "rethink the notion of ethnic identity in terms of cultural, class, and gender differences [...] we can diversify our political practices to include a more heterogeneous group and to enable crucial alliances with other groups – ethnicity-based, class-based, gender- based, and sexuality-based – in the ongoing work of transforming hegemony" (LOWE, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *Asian American Studies*, vol. 1, 1991, p 271).

contending maybe too hastily that her novels reproduce the stereotypical representation of Chinese landscapes.

The study of how "Chineseness" is complicated in Tan's written landscapes aims to enhance our perception of Chineseness in this new historical period, when China has come back to the world stage as a political, economic, and cultural power. However, undeniably, for people with Chinese ancestry living abroad, Chineseness becomes more open to representations (re)constructed by a mixture of racial, national and territorial identities. Yet no significant, sustained research has been carried out on Chineseness which goes beyond ideological issues. The question, then, becomes what kind of light can be shed on Chineseness and how effectively it is able to respond to the above-mentioned emerging tendencies. For this purpose, I am interested in how landscape is narrated in Tan's novels. For example, what is the role of the comic, ironic and playful language adopted by Tan's characters to describe landscape? How can Tan's written landscapes be re-contextualized within and beyond specific historical periods and geographical locations? I also attempt to bring landscape study to the Asian American literary scene, where research on landscape is scarce compared to discussions on cultural differences or ethnic and racial identity. By concentrating on the relationship between Chineseness and landscape, I hope to offer a new lens to recognize perceptions of landscape and re-examine the conventions of reading landscape that evolve in the tensions between the Chinese and American landscape traditions.

The study of how Chineseness is complicated in Tan's written landscapes is closely related to the negotiation process between Chinese and American landscape traditions. Hence, research on different perspectives on nature, landscape, and the relationships between man and nature has been of great relevance, especially those works comparing Chinese and Western traditions. François Jullien's monograph *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason (*2018) is particularly useful for it offers an example of explaining landscape from various viewpoints such as Chinese roaming and European gazing, Chinese language, landscape painting, and

landscape poems. It elaborates landscape from the comparative angles of Western philosophy that emphasizes hierarchy and oppositions and that of Chinese landscape painting, poems, and aesthetics, which privilege tension and correlation. I have drawn the framework for my study of Chinese philosophical landscapes from those manifested in Tan's own landscapes.

I have taken the opposition between *difference* and *divergence* that has been discussed by François Jullien to explore Chinese philosophy as my guiding line. In his monograph *The Silent Transformations* (2011), Jullien privileges the idea of "divergence" and proposes to situate Chinese philosophy in parallel with its Western counterpart. They oppose, respond to, reflect, and re-discover one other. Jullien argues that "difference" determines specific cultural features and consequently encloses and limits them within a fixed identity. "Divergence," on the other hand, "sets cultures in tension and discovers one through the other, reflects one in the other [...] displaces the viewing perspective, the hope of a fertility."[1]

As mentioned above, tensions emerge from bringing together the Chinese and American ways of seeing, conceiving and recording landscape in philosophy, literature, and the arts. Therefore, despite the comparative perspective of this dissertation, it is also necessary to refer to the books dealing with these two systems separately. Chinese landscape paintings and calligraphy, inspired by the artists' observations of landscape, are deemed miniature landscape in Chinese art. I will refer to François Cheng and Wen Fong to analyze Tan's references to calligraphy and landscape paintings in her novels and discuss her reconstruction of the self-world relationship. In *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century* (1992), Wen Fong chronicles the evolution of Chinese calligraphy and literati landscape painting from the Song to the Ming dynasties. Fong argues that from the second half of the eleventh century, painters turned from an objective naturalistic landscape to a landscape imbued with human emotion, with imagery drawn from the artist's inner response to the world. Comparably, in Tan's novels,

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 26.

the viewers' inner response to the world is represented: her female characters read and grasp different feelings from observing the same landscape painting under various scenarios. Tan expresses the contingency and elusiveness of Chineseness embodied in her characters' changing attitudes toward the same landscape painting. In the *Empty and Full: The language of Chinese painting* (1994), François Cheng, a poet and a calligrapher naturalized as French, examines "combined pairs"[1] and the "both-and" principle in Chinese paintings. The painting *Valley of Amazement* in the novel of the same name depicts several valleys that waver between darkness and light, and rain and sun. Tan shows us a landscape that is always in transition, like Chineseness, which is likewise to be formed in similar vacillations within a multitude of in-betweenness. The human body, composed of the movement and transformation of *yin* and *yang* forces, is considered as another miniature landscape in Chinese philosophy. Whereas Chinese philosopher Yang, Rur-bin (杨儒宾) has explained the theoretical formation of the conception of the body in Chinese philosophy and society,[2] Jullien's *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness* (2007) compares the conception of the body in Western philosophy and its corresponding Chinese term—"*xing* (形)." In Tan's novels, the female characters' bodies are considered as miniature landscapes where the *yin-yang* alternation unceasingly occurs. These constant movements hinder the characters' understanding of their environment, which undercuts the harmony that is supposed to be achieved in the *yin-yang* interplay within one's body, as posited in Daoism.

As for American landscape traditions, Barbra Novak's discussion of the theoretical evolution of the meaning of "sublime"[3] from aesthetic to religious fields

[1] The "combined pairs" in Cheng's early book equal what Jullien calls "correlation" in *Living off Landscape* (2018). In Cheng's books, the "combined pairs" refer to *yin* and *yang*, mountain and water, heaven and man, breath and rhythm, form and volume, brush and ink.

[2] In the monograph *Theory and Conceptions of the Body in Ancient Chinese Thoughts* / 《中国古代思想中的气论及身体观》 (1993), Yang Rur-bin (杨儒宾) explains the *Qi* theory from a social and political viewpoint informed by the classics of the Qin and Han dynasties. Yang also points out in the *Confucian Conceptions of the Body* / 《儒家身体观》(1996) that the body goes beyond the collection of *Qi* and later transforms into a site of morality.

[3] NOVAK, Barbara. *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

can be found helpful in reading Tan's revisiting of transcendentalist thought in her written landscapes. Lee Schweninger's *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape* (2008) analyzes the representation of landscape in Native American literature in the context of what he calls the "Land Ethic Stereotype." [1] Lee Schweninger's monograph provides an alternative view of landscape different from that of European Americans. It is also very fruitful to discover that the Native American land ethic[2] correlates to the Chinese principles of "oneness of man and nature" and "attachment to land." Based on this, an analysis will be launched of Tan's reconfiguration of both the Native American land ethic and the "oneness of man and nature" principle in her novels.

Another philosophical concept that will be relevant here is the idea of *process*, which will be related to the spiral transformation of Tan's landscapes. In the Daoist classic, *The Dao de jing, Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation* (2004), humans and nature are created by the same *Dao* and are made to proliferate by the movements and transformations between *yin* and *yang* forces.[3] *Yin* and *yang* forces, argued in *The I Ching: The Book of Changes* (late ninth century BC), mark the condition of the other, modify, pass into, and renew the other. Therefore, instead of thinking in terms of cause and effect or in terms of model and aim, Jullien argues that Chinese philosophy thinks of the movement and change of the myriad things

[1] Schweninger demonstrates the Native American's connection to Mother Earth to be a prevailing stereotype in cultural representations of Indigenous peoples in literature, television, and film.

[2] Schweninger writes, "As these excerpts make clear, several contemporary American Indian authors argue that there does indeed exist an indigenous relationship to, appreciation for, awareness of, or understanding of the land that is significantly different from non-Indian relationships. According to many, this deep and ethical regard for the land is thoroughly ingrained in the culture; it is in the blood" (SCHWENINGER, Lee. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape*. University of Georgia Press, 2008. p. 2).

[3] Laozi writes, "Way-making (*dao*) gives rise to continuity; Continuity gives rise to difference; Difference gives rise to plurality; And plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (*wanwu*). Everything carries yin on its shoulders and yang in its arms. And blends these vital energies (*Qi*) together to make them harmonious (*he*)" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: a Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001. p. 123).

(*wanwu*) in the universe as being in a process.[1] In *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (2008), the Chinese scholar Chan Wing-Tsit also contends that the development of the myriad things in the universe is motivated by the interactions and transformations they bring about between *yin* and *yang* forces.[2] This transformation is uniform and cyclical.[3] As a result, the opposing forces reach mutual identification, and each exists freely and easily, one not hindering or obstructing the other. When the limit is reached, things will reverse and develop themselves toward the opposite direction (*wuji bifan* 物极必反).[4] The written landscapes in Tan's novels, unfolding in the blurred boundaries of reality and imagination, are in the process of approaching one end and then reverting to the other. Their tendency to transition and reverse accompanies the characters' transforming understandings and configurations of Chineseness in Tan's novels.

The three parts of this dissertation will engage in the reading of Chinese and American landscape traditions to offer an account of the spiral development of Tan's novels. This will be achieved by locating Tan's landscapes in the tensions between traditional Chinese ways and her own way. Each of the three parts attempts to demonstrate that Chineseness emerges as elusive, contradictory, and open to diverse interpretations in Tan's written landscapes. I read the ambiguity of Tan's written

[1] Jullien says that "Chinese thought clarifies what I earlier called its processivity, that is to say, its capacity to be in process, which renews itself by itself, from phase to phase, and does not deviate (and wisdom, we are told repeatedly throughout the Classic of Change, is to put oneself in phase)" (JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Translated by Jody Gladding, Yale University Press, 2015, p .27).

[2] Chan writes, "They each exist freely and easily, one not hindering or obstructing the other. They reach the mutual identification of the opposing forces existing freely and easily" (CHAN, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, 2008, 411).

[3] Chan writes, "The succession of decline, growth, fullness, and emptiness go in a cycle, each end becoming a new beginning. This is the way to talk about the workings of the great principle and to discuss the principle of all things" (*Ibid.*, p. 206).

[4] Jullien writes, "*Wuji bifan* (物极必反)" corresponds to the idea of "reversal," which means when the *yin* and *yang* forces "while being opposed, pass over into each other without interruption; and even how the one already, as it unfolds, passes into its other" (JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 74).

landscapes as the trope of the complexity of Chineseness, which evokes a more subtle reading of her novels. The following three parts are expected to be read as the three stages of the processual representation of Tan's landscapes: tension, transition-and-transformation, return.

Part One, "Tension-setting Networks of Oppositions and Correlations," serves as an introduction to establish the foundation to discuss how Chineseness gets complicated in the tension between the Chinese and American landscape traditions. To locate Tan's landscapes in a tension-setting field of opposition and correlation here aims to display the process by which contradictory versions of Chineseness emerge from her written landscapes. The texts selected in the first part show how Chinese and American landscape traditions oppose, deny, and reconstruct each other in the female characters' everyday life, featuring cultural, linguistic, and generational in-betweenness. We will see how Tan's landscapes revisit Chinese and American landscape paradigms by adopting them while undercutting and reconstructing them. Tan's written landscapes exhibit her version of Chineseness by portraying the conflicting ways of looking at and thinking of landscape between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures.

The first chapter, "Gazing and Roaming," focuses on the mother and daughter figures' different modes of seeing and experiencing landscape. It proceeds by introducing the concept of "gazing" and "roaming," distinct in their perspectives of the self/world or subject/object relationship. Chinese philosophy has no self/world boundary, while the subject/object dichotomy characterizes Western philosophy. Tan's landscapes display her interpretation of the self/world relationship in the mother and daughter figures' distinctive modes of engaging with landscape. The self/world communion in Chinese philosophy is destabilized by her depiction of the female characters' Orientalist gaze[1] and the subversive return of the gaze—or gazing

[1] Edward Said defines "Orientalism" as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient […] [Orientalism is more about] the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (SAID, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 1978, pp. 3-8). In an interview, Said argues that

back. Finally, we will consider how the landscape is perceived as a milieu of living in Chinese philosophy and as a view from the American standpoint. I will investigate how Tan's landscapes concurrently move towards and withdraw from the Chinese and American perspectives of landscape, which renders Chineseness more complex in the characters' lived reality that unceasingly change in the contemporary United States. In Chapter Two, I posit that Tan's landscape writings, especially the valleys in the painting from *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), deconstruct both the Chinese belief in the interconnection between matter and spirit that anchors the human being in the world and the American transcendentalist belief in the power of some existence beyond human reach and understanding. Instead, the sense of being anchored in the world turns out to be deceptive, which later becomes an expression of the female characters' entrapment. This entrapment, in turn, represents the characters' hindered access to Chineseness.

Part Two, "Transitions and Transformations," continues to locate Tan's landscapes in the tensions between Chinese and American modes of viewing, experiencing, and representing landscape. In his analysis of Chinese landscape, Jullien sees tension as a threshold or a breaking point where opposing yet correlative forces gain this potential of mutual transformation. Therefore, tension itself already encompasses the possibility of transition and transformation. Tension in Tan's written landscapes produced by the mother's and daughters' conflicting ways of seeing and conceiving landscape opens up what I call a porous space where Tan's written landscapes vacillate between correlative pairs. The porous space is a space always in motion. It is also a moment which makes Chineseness more complex and difficult for her Chinese American female characters to comprehend. This porous

"Westerners do not understand Easterners because they gaze with an 'orientalist' gaze, meaning, upon people they believe to be culturally beneath them, and with an exoticized fascination which wishes not to honestly encounter an 'other' but to consume that other, and perhaps, as in colonialist history, to enslave" (STEENHUISEN, Lauve. "The Orientalist Gaze: A Conversation with Edward Said and With Myself." https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/steenhul/2013/10/21/the-orientalist-gaze-a-conversation-with-edward-said-and-with-myself/ Accessed on 29 Jan 2020).

space opened within Tan's landscapes will be explored just through a trio of correlative pairs (the sublime & the beautiful, life & death, the modern & the primitive) which manifest the motions of transition that continually displace China for Tan's female characters as well as for their author. It will then be looked for within two miniature forms of Chinese landscape practice: the human body & *Fengshui* (风水). The synecdochic lay of *yin-yang* forces within the female characters' bodies in Tan's novels adds to the vagueness and elusiveness of what is deemed "Chinese," as it also highlights its constructedness by this very choice of emblematic representation. The *Fengshui* practice displayed in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) manifests this constructedness at work, but also, silently, almost imperceptibly, gradually re-orients China and Chineseness.

Part Three, "Return," will show how the origin, as synonymous with the Chinese land, becomes deconstructed in Tan's novels. Oneness—the idea of a whole, complete and quintessential China,—is broken in Tan's ambiguous portrayal of Chinese landscapes. Chineseness is rendered in many versions that become more fragmented in Tan's female characters' mistranslations and all the mutual misunderstandings between the Chinese-born mother and the American-born daughter figures. As symbolic of a claimed "authentic" Chineseness, returning to the original *Dao* becomes equally elusive. This returning is the stage that follows tension, transition, and transformation within the landscapes represented in Tan's novels. For example, in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), the Chinese-born character returns to her own village when she views the Changmian caves in a completely different way from how she remembered them. They appear either much smaller to her or more grandiose; they change dimensions; there is not *one* cave. Like the cyclical growth and decline of the Daoist root in nature, the *yin-yang* interplay departs from *Dao*. It shows the inevitable tendency to return to *Dao*, not the original *Dao per se* but one that is enriched with new possibilities. These new possibilities are demonstrated in Tan's multiple versions of China in her female characters' changing interpretations, or rather, misinterpretations of the Chinese land as their so-

called "mother-land." Chineseness, thereby, becomes enriched and, at the same time, more difficult or impossible for Tan's female characters to comprehend. The movement of returning embedded in Tan's representation of Chinese landscapes will be explored through various formulas: her female characters' visits to China, their pursuit of the bland where *Dao* is located, and oscillation between progressing in time and regressing in time, all of which are shown in Tan's landscape descriptions.

Tan's representation of the Chinese American female characters' perceptions of the myths concerning landscape formation helps rewrite the existing set of myths. Tan's novels make room for a discourse concerning landscape (such as myths, legends, and folk stories dealing with the formation of landscape) that had been previously excluded from Chinese American literature. The written and unwritten stories, the translations and mistranslations, of China thus point not to the characters' incapacity to interpret the Chinese land. These stories, on the contrary, explore Tan's position in this world and offer her a chance to explore her belonging. The question of Chineseness emerges as "translation, translocation and transfiguration of the original experiences in China."[1] Or in other words, Chineseness is rendered as more ambivalent, complex, and contextual than previously imagined in the criticism of Tan as superficial and melodramatic.

[1] Yuan, Yuan. "Mothers' 'China Narrative': Recollection and Translation in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *Amy Tan,* edited by Bloom, Harold. Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 150.

1 Tension-setting Networks of Opposition and Correlation

Introduction

In terms of the chronological order of Jullien's monograph *Living off Landscape: Or the Unthought-of in Reason,* "correlation" is introduced first in Chapter 2 "Mountain(s) and Water(s)." The corresponding word for landscape in Chinese is *shanshui* ("mountains and waters"), which is a good example of the correlation of opposites: "mountains" and "waters." The correlation of "mountains" and "waters" presents a logic of pairing. "The one" is never without "the other." They are hitched together. Each is the other's reply. Jullien then gives the examples of *yin* and *yang*, Heaven and Earth, east and west, etc. to illustrate this idea of "correlation." Correlation helps explain the Chinese-born and the American-born female characters' different ways of looking at and conceiving landscape, which is a starting point to study the complicating of Chineseness in Tan's novels.

In Chapter 7 "Tension-setting," Jullien introduces "tension." He argues that tension draws landscape from the land. Land is promoted to landscape when the "land" is set into tension.[1] Tension is set up when the various elements in the land begin interacting and enter into a polarity. In other words, the process of correlation comes first in the chronology of landscape formation. Shitao (石涛), a Chinese landscape painter of the early eighteenth-century, gives many examples of this "tension" from Chapter Eight "Reality of Mountains and Rivers (*shan chuan pian* 山川篇)" of his book *Hua Pu* (画谱). For example, Shi Tao writes that "wind and rain interconnect with each other and form landscape's breath-energy; or the vertical and

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 72.

the horizontal becomes landscape's rhythm; the side in light and the side in shadow constitute landscape's condensation of spirit."[1] Jullien also turns his attention to aspects of the European landscape such as the shore. The shore, with its coast of capes and bays sets up tensions. Elements of the shore such as the land and sea, the vegetal and the water or the inhabited and the uninhabitable oppose and also interact with each other, thus setting up tensions.

Tension is the first as well as the fundamental step in studying how Chineseness is complicated in Tan's novels. If we consider the complication of Chineseness in Tan's novels as a process, then the tension between the two landscape traditions is the primary step because it leads to the transformation and then the return of Chineseness in Tan's landscapes. Tension is inherent in research on Chineseness and on landscape.[2] Therefore, research on exploring the complication of Chineseness by interpreting the landscape in Tan's novels cannot bypass tension.

Tension has been explained by Jullien as the conflicts and interactions between opposing poles as in the basic pairs of the "mountains and waters" of landscape. Tan's novels are set in tension between contemporary San Francisco and China in the recollections of the Chinese-born female characters.[3] In Tan's novels, female characters engage with both Chinese and American landscapes. Whether it is in mainland China or in the United States, landscape represents a tension of opposites. I found that even in the passive reaction of Tan's characters to the landscapes, their daily interactions show this tension, not to mention their observation, depiction, reversion, and re-creation of the landscapes. Tan's female characters often look,

[1] SHI, Tao. Hua Pu. / 石涛。《画谱》。四川美术出版社, 1987。The original text is "山川, 天地之形势也。风雨晦明，山川之气象也；疏密深远，山川之约径也；纵横吞吐，山川之节奏也；阴阳浓淡，山川之凝神也；水云聚散，山川之联属也；蹲跳向背，山川之行藏也。" Translation is the excerpts from JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 70.

[2] In landscape studies, we find the recurring tension between matter-spirit, subject-object, whole-part, and between culture-natural. In the study of Chineseness, it changes into tension between material-culture, core-periphery, reality-virtual, and between natural-unnatural.

[3] The recollections of China by the female characters are various, ranging from China during the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) to the 1910s-1920s Shanghai and then to China in the1930s-1940s during the Japanese invasion.

conceive and record landscapes in two different ways. Chinese landscape philosophies and thinking patterns influence their perception of American landscapes. The characters' lives and experiences in contemporary America in turn impact their attitudes to Chinese landscapes. If considered as the primary pair of *yin* and *yang* forces in the tension network, these two different approaches conflict with, but also complement, each other. So, should we not then consider tension—the interplay between opposing poles—, as a very appropriate approach to analyze Tan's novels?

Tan's representation of landscapes serves as an essential medium to evoke the question of Chineseness. Ambiguity is one of the salient features in Tan's written landscapes. Ambiguity, according to Empson in 1949, includes "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."[1] Ambiguity shows the complexity and depth of the tension network exhibited in Tan's female characters' different ways of engaging with landscape, which is a natural point to enter in the study of the complicating of Chineseness in Tan's novels. The ambiguity in Tan's written landscapes is first and foremost caused by the tension between Chinese and American landscape traditions. This ambiguity is displayed in Tan's duality of language that carries more meanings and contrasting aspects. For example, when the female characters in Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), hide in the Kweilin mountains from the Japanese bomb, Tan gives a contradictory depiction: on the one hand, the characters become blind and deaf while on the other hand, the words indicate heightened senses. The ambiguity also shows in the concurrent display and displacement of the Chinese belief concerning the relationship between man and nature. For example, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), the "world without the self" is shown in the Chinese-born mother figure's calligraphic practice, which is simultaneously destabilized in the American-born daughter figure's Orientalist comment about the mother's calligraphy. By doing this, Tan constructs her own image of Chineseness. Part One sets out to study how

[1] EMPSON, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Chatto & Windus, 1949, p. 1.

tension—the interplay between the two traditions—will animate Tan's meditation on Chineseness.

In Chinese landscape in general, the two polarities in the tension network turn into mountains and waters. In the process of tension-setting, looking at landscape comes first. Chapter One "Gazing and Roaming" will study the tension of looking at landscape in the Chinese and Western systems. "Gazing" means an outward eye projection toward landscape from an observing subject who aims to seek external information or to get their bearings. Deeply embedded in "gazing" are the multiple opposing binaries that are relevant in analyzing Tan's landscapes. In Western discourse, the human being is the acting agent who sets the vantage point of view while landscape becomes something merely to "look at." Female characters, especially minority female characters, are often excluded or are the object of the phallocentric/Eurocentric gaze. However, the tension-setting network of oppositions-correlation, offers us an alternative way of looking landscape other than "gazing." I have chosen the term "roaming" to define this wandering between two polarities because it accurately describes the way of looking at mountains and waters where tension is activated. Based on Jullien's explanation of "correlation," the moment when we look at landscape, we establish two corresponding positions, one from mountains and the other from waters that oppose and answer each other. Therefore, the eye is not fixed by a monopolizing view but will wander between these two interacting poles.[1] Gazing and roaming describe the female characters' way of looking at landscape in Tan's novels.

We can say that "gazing" takes its root in the opposition between subject and object, whereas "roaming" is an invitation to actively engage with the correlative pairs in landscape: this prevents a binary positioning that would lead to the possibility

[1] Jullien writes that "There is a monopolizing view; the eye is fixed and can no longer wander here and there; things are reduced to the absolute. The eye is conquered, pure "spectacle" indeed. It is "spectacular," as we are wont to say. We formerly did not know how to look at the open sea or mountain peaks as *spectacula* (in the sense that the Seven Wonders of the World are *omnium terrarum spectacula*). Faced with such wonders we can only fix our gaze, hold it in suspension, stare in a stupor, and halt" (JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 74).

of division. The primary binary postulated by the Western conception of landscape is the one between the "self" (as the gazing subject) and the "world" (as the gazed object). The Western self-world disassociation comes into tension with the Chinese proposal of "the world without the self" in the notion of "world (*Jingjie* 境界)," as proposed by the Chinese poet Wang Guowei (王国维 1877–1927). Subchapter One "The Self and the World" will study the contradictory views on relationship between the "self" and the "world" held by the mother and daughter figures by reading Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and her fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001). Their contradictory views constitute tension. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, this contradictory view is conveyed through the two-way misunderstandings of the mother and daughter figures on the practice of calligraphy. Tan uses humor and derogatory depictions to show that the American-born Ruth casts an Orientalist gaze on the calligraphic practice of her mother LuLing while LuLing returns with a similar if not even more critical gaze. In *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), this contradictory view of the relationship between self and world is reflected in the way Rose and Anmei look at the same seascape. American-born Rose takes a realistic, detached attitude to observe the seascape whereas her Chinese-born mother Anmei experiences the landscape directly as physical sensation. I observe an unreconciled tension between Anmei's and Rose's views of the self-world relationship despite Rose's imitation of Anmei's way of looking at the sea. The complication of Chineseness is reflected in Tan's writings that displace "the world without the self" by introducing the tension of looking at landscape between the mother and daughter figures.

The demarcation between "me" and the "world" has led to a difficulty for Western philosophers to think the exterior and the interior conjointly. Landscape, as a correlation of "mountains and waters," becomes a locus of exchange between "me" and "the world," or in other words, the exterior and the interior. When commenting on poetry Wang Fuzhi (王夫之 1619–1692), a Chinese thinker of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, proposes an idea of the "fusion of sceneries (sensitive exteriority) and emotions (reactive interiority)." Wang argues that "the landscape in

relation to emotion [or: the perceptive in relation to the emotional 关情者景] is with emotion as amber and straw." [1] We can see that poetry is not only concerned with the expression of internal emotions but also with the reflection of external scenes. The second subchapter will adopt Jullien's concepts of "the perceptual" and "the affectual" because they explain the tension between "gazing" and "roaming." The perceptual, according to Jullien, "evokes all that is amenable to perception" and "it has to do with perception globally mobilized as a fund or resource."[2] The affectual is the "pure (or primordial) capacity to let oneself be affected."[3]

In Tan's novels, I find the perceptual lies both in the natural and the city landscapes recalled in the memories of the Chinese-born mother figures. The perceptual in Tan's landscapes does not refer to some actualized perception of a certain place, view, or spectacle. Instead, the perceptual refers to landscapes, which take all that is perceptible into tension between the characters' eyes and the landscapes that are stretching before them. The affectual, in a categorical way, applies to Tan's landscapes that elicit a range of vague and undetermined emotions. I read Tan's landscapes as affectual because the triggered emotions become evasive in her characters' fluid memories and reconstructed stories. In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the fusion of the perceptual and the affectual becomes equivocal in the Chinese-born character Winnie's recalling of the cityscapes of Shanghai and the lake in Hangzhou. I find that the unstableness of memory, especially the memory in the Chinese-born characters' talk-stories, has unsettled the integration of the perceptual and the affectual. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), the fusion of the perceptual and the affectual is also destabilized in a chain of transformations. The written signs on the ground produced by calligraphic practice are transformed into a poem that

[1] Wang continues to say that "Although the emotion and the landscape are distinguished as belonging to the interiority or the matter of the world, the result is that the landscape generates emotion and the emotion the landscape. The incitement to sadness or joy as the reception of flowering or withering settle [store] one in the other and exchange between them their residence (互藏其宅)" (WANG, Fuzhi. *Jiangzhai Shihua*. Edited by Dai Hongsen, Renmin wenxue chubanshe. 1981, p. 33. / 王夫之。《姜斋诗话》。人民文学出版社。1981，33 页).
[2] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 44.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 43.

emanates from Bao Bomu's complex emotions. The poem turns out to be affectual because it elicits LuLing's capacity to be touched. The complication of Chineseness is shown in Tan's writings that locate the perceptual and the affectual setting in motion an opposition or a chain of transformation.

The separation between the "self" and the "world" and the perceptual and the affectual, have given birth to two different understandings of landscape: one as a view to be appreciated, and the other as a place of living from which people gain nourishment. The former refers to the landscape which one traverses or contemplates from afar while the latter means the landscape where one strolls through and dwells in.[1] In the third subchapter "Landscape as View and Landscape as Living," I will trace the development of Chinese landscape painting to illustrate the transformation from a landscape as a view to landscape as a place of living. Chinese landscape painting aims to grasp the movement between the correlated pairs in landscape such as mountains and waters. Chinese landscape paintings therefore attempt to entertain all possibilities and positions of the various elements of the land equally. The Northern Song landscape painter and theorist Guo Xi (郭熙 1020-1090), explains in his collected notes about landscape painting, *Linquan Gaozhi* (Lofty Record of Forests and Streams):

> There are three approaches to depicting mountains. They are namely high remove(高远), deep distance(深远）and level distance(平远). From the bottom to see the top of the mountain, it is said to be high; From the front of the mountain to see the back of the mountain, it is said to be deep; from the near side of the mountain to contemplate the far side, it is said to be flat. [2]

"San yuan" (Three approaches to depicting mountains 三远) enables the painter to discover the landscape from various angles. "San yuan" accomplishes the grasping of the fluid movement that exists between the correlated pairs. Guo connects with these polarities, allowing the mountains and the waters to activate and mobilize him.

[1] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 40.
[2] "(山有三远：自山下而仰山颠，谓之高远；自山前而窥山后，谓之深远；自近山而望远山，谓之平远)." (GUO, Xi. *Linquan Gaozhi*, p. 23. My translation).

In the eyes of Guo, landscape becomes a "set of surroundings" for living where we sojourn, we stroll, and we neighbor.

In *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the two comprehensions of landscape are juxtaposed in the Chinese-born character Lindo's description of Fen River (汾河), which she recollects from childhood. On the one hand, "landscape as view" is shown in its changing colors. On the other hand, "landscape as a place of living" is also indicated in the rotation of seasons. *The Analects* (论语) explain that if the four seasons run their cyclical course, all things grow vigorously. As recorded in *Shijing* (诗经), the earliest collection of Chinese poems, people arrange their daily activities according to the changing seasons.[1] In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the out-of-date Chinatown landscapes with all the backward and out-of-business shops form a "landscape as view" for the American-born character, Pearl. In Pearl's negotiation of the contemporary American landscape, the "landscape as view" is transformed into "landscape as living" with the flowing energies and activities of the residents including Pearl's mother. The complication of Chineseness is manifested in Tan's written landscapes that negotiate between the two understandings of the term. The notion of Chineseness as something unified and unchanging is undercut, instead it is in constant evolution with the changing historical and life circumstances of contemporary Chinese Americans.

The tension between "gazing" and "roaming" reflects another tension in Tan's written landscapes—the understandings of the relationship between matter and spirit in landscape. Chapter Two "Matter and Spirit" has located Tan's landscapes in the tension between the Western and Chinese understandings of the relationship between matter and spirit. By humorously re-telling the old stories of China, Tan constructs her own picture of the land of her ancestors.

---

[1] The poem "Qiyue" (《七月》) writes that "In the fourth month, the Small grass is in seed. / In the fifth, the cicada gives out its note. / In the eighth, they reap. / In the tenth, the leaves fall. / In the days of [our] first month, they go after badgers, And take foxes and wild cats" (四月秀葽、五月鸣蜩。八月其获、十月陨蘀。一之日于貉、取彼狐狸、为公子裘)." (("七月- Qi Yue" Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/qi-yue/ens. Accessed on 29 July 2020).

Dao De Jing clearly explains that spirit resides within the actualization of polarities—manifested as mountains and waters, which in turn, naturally manifest the spiritual. Sprit is explained by the Chinese philosopher Zhang Zai (张载 1020–1077) thus: "In *Qi* (气), there are *yin* and *yang* whose gradual operation means change. The unpredictable interaction and unity of *yin* and *yang* is what is called spirit."[1] Spirit for Zhang means the subtle changes occurring in the tensions of *yin* and *yang* forces. Matter and spirit go from one to the other and do so via the tensions of *yin* and *yang* in landscape. Laozi explains *Qi* as "ever so indefinite and vague. There are concentrations of *Qi* within it [which is] authentic and have within them true credibility."[2] Laozi continues to describe the characteristics of *Qi* as permeating "between the heavens and the earth—Isn't it just like bellows! Even though empty, it is not vacuous. Pump it and more and more comes out."[3]

The first subchapter "*Qi*—displacement of the inseparability of matter and spirit" will examine how Tan's landscapes ridicule and subvert *Qi* with their humorous depictions. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2011), the calligraphers adapt the *Qi* of their own body to that of the movement of *Qi* in their surrounding environment. This interpretation of *Qi* forms a contrast with the great demand of books with the title of *Qi* in the American book market. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Kwan tells the legend of two dragons—a male (*yang*) and a female (*yin*)—that have shaped the caves in her hometown Changmian. Tan rewrites the myth. The *Qi* of the dragons that represents bad *Fengshui* transformed into the auspicious *Qi* that brings the essential rain to the crops to the villagers. In Tan's re-telling of old Chinese stories, the dragons with good *Qi* compose a tension with the jealous Water God who hires some wild people from other tribes to kill the two dragons. Tan's imagined Chinese

---

[1] "气有阴阳，推行有渐为化，合一不测为神" （ZHANG, Zai. *Enlightenment Through Confucian Teaching*. / 张载《正蒙 • 神化》. "Spirit (神 Shen)". *Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Cultures.* https://www.chinesethought.cn/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=2217. Accessed on 30 July 2020 ）

[2] Laozi, Roger T. AMES, and David L. Hall. *Dao de Jing: Making this Life Significant: Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Dao de Jing*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 93.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 123.

mythic landscapes resist any simple answer to the question of Chineseness because the landscapes of *Qi* do not function reliably.

We recognize that landscape opens its way to the spiritual but achieves this "within the world of mountains and waters where I dwell and stroll."[1] However, landscape has its spiritual dimension. In his article "*Xu Hua* (叙画)" the Southern Dynasty Song scholar Wang Wei (王微 415-453) writes of landscape painting that "What takes root in physical actualization melts spirit [within itself] (本乎形者融灵)."[2] *Dao De Jing* says that *Dao* gives birth to both nature and humans. They are treated by *Dao* with the same degree of care without favoring one over the other. Mountains and waters, as well as human beings, are all given birth by *Dao* and therefore possess their own attributes and moralities. Laozi writes:

> The highest efficacy is like water.
> It is because water benefits everything (*wanwu*).
> Yet vies to dwell in places loathed by the crowd.
> That it comes nearest to proper way-making."[3]

In other words, there is an "equivalence of mountain and me"—the dispositions affecting the mountains and waters are equivalent to the dispositions that affect the humans.[4]

In *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the female characters cannot access *Dao*, which symbolizes Chineseness, through their observation of mountains and waters. The inaccessibility of *Dao*/landscape represents the difficulty of understanding Chineseness for the characters in Tan's first two novels. The female characters are blind and deaf to the changes of their surrounding landscapes. For the Chinese-born character Suyuan, the former Kweilin mountains are depicted as a magical place free from worry. The various shapes and colors of the mountains make Suyuan dizzy as

---

[1] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 56.
[2] WANG, Wei. *Xuhua*. / 王微，《叙画》。
[3] Laozi, AMES RT, Hall DL. *Dao de Jing: Making this Life Significant: Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Dao de Jing*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 97.
[4] Yu, Anlan, ed. *Hualun Congkan. Vol. 1.* Zhonggua shuju, 1977, p. 113. / 于安澜，《画论从刊》第一辑。中华书局，1997，113 页。

if in a dream, whereas during her flight to the Kweilin caves to flee the bombing, Tan compares Suyuan to a blind and deaf kitten that is crawling. Suyuan experiences contrasting identifications with the Kweilin landscape when struggling to arrive at a meaningful synthesis of her different feelings about the same landscape. In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the "equivalence between mountain and me" is displaced in the contrast between the luminous Kunming sky and the sufferings of the Chinese-born Winnie from her abusive husband and the loss of her children.

The "equivalence of mountain and me" is different from the American Transcendentalists' views on nature. Emerson for instance believes in the interconnectedness of man and nature. In his essay *Nature* (1836), he writes:

> Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.[1]

We can see that in Emerson's eyes, the surroundings are seen as the accurate manifestation of the Creator in symbolic form. *Yijing* (易经) on the other hand believes that fact that transcendence comes from the common birth between *shanshui* (mountains and waters) and human beings. Heaven (*yang*) and Earth (*yin*) interplay and give birth to *wanwu* (the myriad things) including mountains and waters and human beings. *Shanshui* and human beings in turn participate in the Great Process (大化 *dahua*). The development of things culminates not in a transcendent form, nor that of a deity, but in *Dao* that constitutes a fund from which the Great Process stems.[2]

---

[1] EMERSON, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29433/29433-h/29433-h.htm. Accessed August 11, 2020.

[2] Jullien elaborates the reasons why the Daoist thoughts does not concern with the question of deity, Creator or the transcendence. Jullien writes "Above all, it is a matter not of levels of being, but rather of stages or levels of coming-to-be (as we have seen, the Chinese view of the world is not ontological; rather, it envisages reality as a process). So this ordering of reality culminates not in the form of transcendence (a transcendent form, that of the God), but in the capacity that is the "basis" of reality and constitutes a fund from which the process stems (from which the process of all that exists continually proceeds, for therein lies its capital and its source). That capacity is the absolute mode of the "Way," its "virtue" of immanence, one might say (in accordance with the actual title given to this text, the *Dao de jing*, or Classic of the Way

In Tan's latest novel, *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), the American-born character Lucia's first encounter with the landscape painting *The Valley of Amazement* is portrayed with ambiguity. Tan offers an ambiguous depiction of the transference between the valleys and that of Lucia's body and mind. Lucia herself becomes the rosy valleys depicted in the painting. The oneness of man and nature is rendered with irony because the Chinese artist Lu Shing's painting is later revealed as a clumsy imitation of a Dutch painter's work. Lucia's sense of the transcendence from her own ego indeed entraps her into infatuation with both the illusionary Chinese art and the artist himself. In Tan's fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), facing the misty lake, the African American female character Vera experiences an epiphany: she understands that she should forget the affairs of the world to gain freedom. However, transcendence from the world is undercut by Vera's will to claim her ego through telling her stories. The same contradictory reaction can be discerned in the posthumous Chinese American character Bibi. Bibi at once transcends the triviality of life as a goddess with omnipresence and omniscience, and yet is constantly devoured by an ever-increasing fear of evaporation, "I was appalled at the idea. Evaporate? Would that happen to me?"[1] Vera and Bibi's transcendence from worldly worries ends up being deceptive; instead, it turns out to symbolize their entrapment in their own ego, desires, and fears. In the third chapter "transcendence," tension exists in two forms. On the one hand, it may be discerned between the Chinese and the Transcendentalist understandings of transcendence, which are destabilized in Tan's landscapes. On the other hand, tension may be perceived in the complex interplay between her female characters' entrapment and their transcendence.

In my thesis, tension—the opposition-correlation—is discerned between the tension field of the Chinese and American born female characters' perception and interpretation of landscape. It is also recognized in the interplay between gazing and roaming, between matter and sprit, and between representation and the represented

---

and of Virtue)" (JULLIEN, Francois. *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*. University of Hawaii Press; 2004, pp. 92-93).

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 229.

that are inherent in landscape. The adoption of the concept of tension to analyze Tan's novels effectively reveals Tan's struggle as a writer to negotiate two cultural heritages. Tan has positioned her characters in tension between two cultures. This gesture engenders ambiguity, but it also enables Tan to display her own (re)imagined Chinese landscapes with more artistic freedom. From the tension of looking at landscape, to the tension of conceiving landscape, and to the tension of writing landscape, we can see that the issue of how Chineseness becomes complex in Tan's landscape itself also gets deepened and broadened.

1.1 Gazing and Roaming

"Gazing" and "roaming" refer to the female characters' two ways of perceiving and engaging with landscape in Tan's novels. "Gazing" is widely used in the discussion of issues such as vision and representation. Take the flaneur strolling in the city as an example: through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, he/she observes but never interacts nor consumes the sights he/she beholds. The gaze is covetous and erotic.[1] "Gazing" means to look at landscape as the object to be gazed upon, whereas humans are the perceptual subject. The gazing subject keeps a distance from landscape and therefore gains access to conflicting feelings such as pleasure, fear, and loss.[2]

"Roaming" refers to the state when the eye no longer seeks identification or information but instead allows itself to be "'absorbed', and roaming from one thing to another—or rather between them—as it is bandied about by their polarities and then loses itself in their profusion."[3] Hence, roaming frees humans' engagement with landscape from the act of looking. Human beings listen to the various movements of mountains and waters. As a result, human beings remain implicit, "contained within the mountain and water."[4] Therefore, instead of looking at landscape as spectators, humans are immersed and lose themselves (*Qiong* 穷)[5] in the tensions between mountains and waters. Take one example of Zong Bing (宗炳 375–443), a Chinese artist who is the author of the earliest text on landscape painting,[6] and who explains

[1] POLLOCK, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. Routledge, 2015, p. 94.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 178.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 14.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[6] "The integration of spirituality and naturalism is similarly found in the short, profoundly Daoist text of the early 5th century, *Hua shanshui xu* ("Preface on Landscape Painting," China's first essay on the topic), attributed to Zong Bing. Zong suggests that if well-painted—that is, if both visually accurate and aesthetically compelling—a landscape painting can truly substitute for real nature, for, even though miniaturized, it can attract vital energy (*Qi*) from the spirit-filled void (*dao*) just as its real, material counterpart does. This interplay between macrocosm and microcosm became a constant foundation of Chinese spiritual thought and aesthetics"

roaming as spiritual travelling in bed (卧游 *woyou*) with one's eyes on landscape painting and one's mind roaming anywhere one can imagine.[1] "Roaming" also refers to the "wilderness" of American land. Thomas Cole (1801-1848), the founder of the Hudson River School, rejoices in America's lack of ploughed fields. Cole proudly describes a landscape in *Essay on American Scenery* (1836) where "the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise the temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the new pathless 'wilderness'."[2] Roaming is also closely associated with Native Americans and participated in their denigration. Even today, American Indians roam the Rockies and hunt buffalos for a living.[3]

Tan's novels situate the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures in their conflict and negotiation of the different modes of engaging with landscape. The mother figures embrace the phenomenological mode of engagement with landscape (roaming) while the daughter figures adopt the perceptual manner (gazing). Gazing and roaming are contextualized in the daughter figures' resistance to, and imitation and re-creation of their mother figures' phenomenological approaches to experiencing landscape. This dissertation argues that roaming is revised and mutated in the characters' lived realities and fluid identity. Landscape thus becomes a cultural trope that is intertwined among the Chinese and American landscape traditions as well as the particular Chinese American female experience. I agree with the comment that landscape is "self-

---

(Jerome Silbergeld, Michael Sullivan and Liu Qiyi. "Chinese Painting." *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/art/Chinese-painting/Qin-221-206-bce-and-Han-206-bce-220-ce-dynasties#ref601838. Accessed on12 Feb 2020).

[1] "One of the earliest constructs of *shanshui* comes from the story of a monk called Zong Bing of the Southern Dynasty. He then meditated in front of the finished image on the wall and enjoyed his *woyou* (卧游 spiritual travelling in bed) among these images of mountains and waters" (LAW, Sophia Suk-mun. "Being in traditional Chinese landscape painting." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2011, pp. 370-371).

[2] COLE, Thomas. *Essay on American Scenery*. Thomas Cole National Historic Site, 2018.

[3] The hunt for buffalo in the American Indians' tribes, is a time-honored story of the comings and goings of life on this ancient landscape. It was a circle that was bent, but not entirely broken—and that moment between the wolves, tribal hunters, and those buffalo. 'Every living thing is our relation', says hunting party leader Nick Eastwood, a Confederated Umatilla tribal member. (WHITTLE, Joe. "The buffalo hunt." *Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/07/buffalo-hunt-yellowstone-national-park-native-american. Accessed on 07 Nov 2019).

consciously represented with reference to organic and biological terms, underscoring the inseparability of land from racial origins and cultural ancestry." [1] Indeed, Chineseness is incorporated, unsettled and reconfigured in Tan's written landscapes that are set in tension between gazing and roaming.

1.1.1 The Self & the World

Daoism and Confucianism see nature as a unified whole. [2] Humans are not separated from nature because they share the same structure and will return to the same point of *Dao*. This helps explain the reason why in landscape paintings, the human figures only occupy a negligible space which is easily ignored without careful inspection. According to *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), heaven and earth (天地 *tiandi*) indicate the whole universe and the whole world. It is not the objective world that the Western concept of nature emphasizes. Rather, the world refers to one that is thriving with life, vitality, and regeneration. François Jullien describes the ideal landscape in his mind as "what tears down the boundaries with the self automatically withdraws and renders that Self to the world in a moment."[3] Western philosophy and grammar divide the self and the world (specifically to the natural world). Men shoulder the responsibility of preserving the aesthetic values and beauties of the natural world. With the development of modernization and urbanization, humans are dramatically and decisively divorced from nature, which has inspired a return to

[1] LIM, Walter SH. "The Sino-Japanese War and Chinese History in Amy Tan's Novels and Lisa See's *Shanghai Girls*." *Narratives of Diaspora*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 23.
[2] As just one entity among the wealth of things in existence, humans, in the eyes of these ancient philosophers, are merely small creatures: ''Between Heaven and earth I am but as a small stone or a small tree on a great hill, so long as I see myself to be this small, how should I make much of myself?" (LAW, Sophia Suk-mun. "Being in traditional Chinese landscape painting." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2011, p. 372).
[3] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 45.

nature as a gesture to counter the negative consequences of modernization during the Romantic period.[1]

Chinese poet Wang Guowei (王国维 1877–1927) proposes the notion of "world" (*jingjie* 境界) when appreciating poems. Wang proposes a world that has a self in it and a world that has no self. In the first instance, "the self observes all things and thereby has all of them tainted with the color of the self. In the world that has no self, things are observed in and of themselves, and it is impossible to know where the self begins and where the thing ends."[2] For the sake of simplicity, we shall name it "the world without self." The paragraphs from Tan's fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001)* and the episode "Half and Half" from Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) will illustrate how "the world without self" is made ambiguous in the tension between the Chinese-born mother and the American-born daughter figures' divergent manners of perceiving and interacting with landscape. The complication of Chineseness is reflected in Tan's writings that on the one hand displays the "world without the self" in the mother figures; on the other hand, Tan displaces this "world without the self" by introducing the demarcation between the "self" and the "world" discovered in the daughter figures.

The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) tells the stories of three female characters across three generations—Bao Bomu, the mute, injured and suicidal grandmother who is the nursemaid and birth mother of LuLing; LuLing, the paranoid, superstitious and angry mother who regrets the suicide of Bao Bomu, and Ruth, the silenced and confused daughter who is a self-help book ghostwriter. The novel has two narrative voices: one is the third-person point of view narrating Ruth's life and the other is LuLing's point of view recalling her past life in China. The selected paragraphs from Tan's fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) here are narrated from the third-person point of view of American-born Ruth, who recalls the scenes where her Chinese-born mother LuLing instructs her to practice calligraphy.

---

[1] GLACKEN, Clarence J. "Reflections on the history of Western attitudes to nature." *GeoJournal*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, pp. 106-110.
[2] ZHANG, Longxi. "Nature and landscape in the Chinese tradition." *New Perspectives on the Research of Chinese Culture. Springer*, 2013. p. 9.

I argue that the relationship between the self and the world is metamorphosed into the mother-daughter relationship that is rebuilt by LuLing's calligraphic training of Ruth. Tan's depictions of the tension between Ruth and LuLing's interpretation of calligraphy displace "the world without self." This displacement is a trope of the inaccessibility of Chineseness for Tan's Chinese American female characters.

Calligraphy has its inception and structures corresponding to the interplay of *yin-yang*. When practicing calligraphy, the vital energy (*Qi*) of the human body should be directed to the point of the brush.[1] The aesthetic pursuit of practicing calligraphy is to catch the "rhythmic vitality (*Qiyun*)" of nature. Calligraphers seek the ultimate harmonious effect between various components to reach the effect where the self is inundated inside the myriad things (pen, ink, paper, and the artist themselves) in calligraphy.[2] By doing this, the self and the world find their "physical equilibrium and spiritual repose."[3] In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, however, Tan destabilizes the idea of "the world without self" through Ruth's Orientalist gaze on LuLing's practice of calligraphy. Edward Said argues that:

> Westerners do not understand Easterners because they gaze with an 'orientalist' gaze, meaning, upon people they believe to be culturally beneath them, and with an exoticized fascination which wishes not to honestly encounter an 'other' but to consume that other, and perhaps, as in colonialist history, to enslave'.[4]

[1] HUA, Ling Su. "On the Relation between Chinese Painting and Calligraphy." *East and West* vol. 4, no. 4, 1954, p. 274.
[2] The Chinese American historian of East Asian art, Wen C. Fong explains the self-world communion in calligraphic practice thus: "The blank paper surface represents the universe, which in the beginning existed in undifferentiated oneness, the first stroke, born of the union of brush and ink, establishes on paper the primary relationship between yin and yang; and each new stroke, combining with the old, creates new yin-yang relationships, until the whole is reconciled and again united into the harmonious ones that is the Tao of the universe" (FONG, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century.* Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1992, p. 122).
[3] "The blank paper surface represents the universe, which in the beginning existed in undifferentiated oneness, the first stroke, born of the union of bush and ink, establishes on paper the primary relationship between *yin* and *yang*; and each new stroke, combining with the old, creates new yin-yang relationships, until the whole is reconciled and again united into the harmonious ones that is the Tao of the universe" (*Ibid.*, p. 122).
[4] STEENHUISEN, Lauve. "The Orientalist Gaze: A Conversation with Edward Said and With Myself." https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/steenhul/2013/10/21/the-orientalist-gaze-a-conversation-with-edward-said-and-with-myself/. Accessed on 29 January 2020.

Ruth's interpretation of Lu Ling's calligraphic practice as degraded is depicted thus:

> Some nights LuLing found ways to help Ruth remember the characters. "Each radical comes from an old picture from a long time ago." She made a horizontal stroke and asked Ruth if she could see what the picture was. Ruth squinted and shook her head. LuLing made the identical stroke. Then again and again, asking each time if Ruth knew what it was. Finally, her mother let out a snort, the compressed form of her disappointment and disgust.
>
> "This line is like a beam of light. Look, can you see it or not?"
>
> To Ruth, the line looked like a sparerib picked clean of meat.[1]

The Chinese characters represented in calligraphy were invented by Cang Jie (仓颉 2650 B.C.) by observing the shapes of the elements in nature and the traces left by animals and insects.[2] LuLing's cognition of the character as "a beam of light" echoes the fact that the creation and representation of Chinese characters are inspired from the observation of nature.[3] LuLing instructs Ruth to understand Chinese characters by examining their images represented on paper. We can see from the above paragraphs that LuLing's intention to transfer Chinese thinking patterns to Ruth through calligraphic practice turns out to be in vain: Ruth squints her eyes but fails to recognize the calligraphic image on paper. LuLing's failure to convey the nature-human communion is again supported by Ruth's association of the Chinese character with a sparerib, the meat of a dead animal, an object of consumption which is immediately associated with a clichéd American lifestyle. Ruth's comical

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo. 2001, p. 50.

[2] In *The Genealogy of Thousands of NAMES*, the ancient record of the life stories of famous Chinese people, the Chinese characters were created and recorded by Cang Jie (2650 BC). He is said to have had, "four eyes and engraved the rough pictures from his observing of the traces left by birds and insects on the ground, that became the elementary Chinese characters" (My translation is based on the part describing Cang Jie from *The Genealogy of Thousands of NAMES*, Vol. 52 (万姓统谱·卷五十二)).

[3] Recorded in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), Chinese characters are derived from the observation and imitation of the birds, beasts as well as the moving paths and patterns of Heaven and Earth "Anciently, when the rule of all under heaven was in the hands of Pao-hsi, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down, he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He marked the ornamental appearances on birds and beasts, and the (different) suitabilities of the soil […] On this he devised the eight lineal figures of three lines each, to exhibit fully the spirit-like and intelligent operations (in nature), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things" (LEGGE, JAMES. *The I Ching: The Book of Changes. Sacred Books of the East Vol XVI*, 1899, p. 11).

comparison of the Chinese character to a spareribs, indicates that Chineseness—as manifested in the way of seeing the world as the one with no self—is tainted. In other words, Chineseness here is open to more than one meaning in the antithesis between LuLing and Ruth's decoding of the self-world relationship: Ruth adopts the gaze that renders Chinese characters as abject, while LuLing believes that the self is supposed to fade away from the landscape manifested in the calligraphic works.

The Orientalist gaze in the context of Asian American literature and criticism means that Western discourse has trouble offering "nuanced and comprehensive representations of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean communities."[1] When we turn to the Chinese American writers in particular, we can see that the Orientalist gaze has double implications: on the one hand, it means that the Chinese American writers adopt the white gaze to project Orientalist and often racist stereotypes onto people with Chinese descent. On the other hand, it addresses the fact that some Chinese American writers can also take advantage of the Orientalist gaze to mock and undermine it. This self-Orientalization is defined by literary critic Sheng-mei Ma as a "strategic maneuver:" she contends that this reaction against the hegemonic culture is "self-empowering rather than self-loathing."[2] For Ma, Tan adopts the Orientalist gaze not to undercut the hegemonic culture but rather to indicate the Chinese American characters' failed attempt to access Chineseness. Chineseness is manifested as the comprehension of the underlying perception of the man-nature relationship in calligraphic practice—the boundaries are dissolved between man and nature, and between the self and non-self. Ruth's inability to recognize Chinese characters is developed in the next paragraph:

> LuLing went on: "Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one." She drew more lines—dots and dashes, down strokes and upstrokes, bends and hooks. "Do you see this?" she said over and over, tinktinktink. "This line, and this and this—the shape of a heavenly temple… Do it like this . . . light first, then temple. And when Ruth shrugged in response, LuLing added, "In the old style of temples," as if this word old would bump the Chinese gears of her daughter's mind into action. Ping-ping! Oh, I see.[3]

[1] MA, Sheng-mei. *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. SUNY Press, 1998, p. 25.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo. 2001, pp. 50-51.

"The world without self" reflects a fundamental cosmological understanding among Chinese people—the *Dao* of Heaven (*tian* 天) is respected as the primordial creative power that produces the myriad of things.[1] Ruth is depicted as overwhelmed by LuLing's continuous gestures, "This line, and this and this," and her unceasing interrogation of whether Ruth can "see" the shape of the characters. The sounds ("tink-tink-tink" and "ping-ping") that Lu ling makes to catch the attention of her daughter Ruth to make her focus more precisely illustrate her desire to introduce Ruth to the Chinese manner of seeing the self and the world. They also foreground Ruth's failed attempt to access the idea of the erasure of self in the close observation and connection with landscape within the calligraphic practice. Lu Ling's inquiry toward Ruth with the word "see" and questions marks is repeated three times in this paragraph. Ruth's inability to recognize the correspondence between the characters represented on paper and that of the natural elements in landscape, mirrors Ruth's distance from this Chinese way of construing the relationship between the self and the world. The word "old" in the sentence "as if this world old would bump the Chinese gears of her daughter's mind into action" further underlines the fact that Chinese landscape traditions in Tan's novels are made evasive and ambiguous in the conflict between the mother and daughter figures' manners of understanding the self-and-world relationship.

This dissertation observes an ambiguity of the Orientalist moment that arises between Ruth and LuLing's ways of looking at calligraphy. In the sentence "Finally she [LuLing] began, flicking her wrist slightly so that her hand waved and dipped like a moth over the gleam of white paper. Soon the spidery images formed,"[2] this ambiguity is evoked through the word "spidery." On the one hand, it indicates a writing style that is difficult to recognize and foreign to American-born Ruth, "consisting of thin, dark, bending lines, like a spider's legs." LuLing's gestures are seen as a spider making a web. This composes a locus of cultural differences. On the

[1] Heaven (*tian* 天) plays the role of comprehending them (the myriad of things in nature) in the cosmic order of dynamic transformation conducive to a perfectly harmonious fulfillment, and issuing in the attainment of the Supreme Good.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 50.

other hand, it can be read as praise of a graceful yet evasive bodily movement and the elegant production on the paper as we can read in "She rested the tip of the brush on the paper, so it was like a dancer sur les pointes […] turned a half-step to the left and rose."[1] The ambiguity of the word "spidery" that appears in Ruth's descriptions of Lu Ling's calligraphic practice reflects Ruth's own confusion about both the calligraphic practice and the poetic realm of "the world without self" that is inherent in this practice.

LuLing returns Ruth's Orientalist gaze with the same, if not more intense, contempt:

> Later LuLing had Ruth try her hand at the same character, the whole time stuffing Chinese logic into her resistant brain. "Hold your wrist this way, firm but still loose, like a young willow branch—ai-ya, not collapsed like a beggar lying on the road. . . . Draw the stroke with grace, like a bird landing on a branch, not an executioner chopping off a devil's head. The way you drew it—well, look, the whole thing is falling down. Do it like this . . . light first, then temple. See? Together, it means 'news from the gods.' See how this knowledge always comes from above? See how Chinese words make sense?" [2]

This paragraph deepens Ruth's distance from the Chinese past and landscapes encompassed in the calligraphic practice. Terms such as "stuffing" and "resistant" hint at Ruth's reluctance as well as the difficulty of retrieving Chinese heritage. The expression "news from the God" has been interpreted by other critics as the symbol of Ruth's searching for cultural roots and her rediscovery of her Chinese ancestry. To me, "News from the God," rather denotes the difficulty of Ruth has in seeking Chineseness. The contrast between LuLing's graceful gestures and Ruth's awkward imitation further underscores this distance. LuLing's calligraphic gesture is compared to "a young willow branch," or "a bird landing on a branch." LuLing describes Ruth's gestures as thus, "collapsed like a beggar lying on the road [...] an executioner chopping off a devil's head." The complication of Chineseness happens in the mutual misunderstandings between mother and daughter figures: this Chinese way of seeing landscape embraced by LuLing, is closely observed by Ruth, while Ruth's visions of Chineseness is ridiculed and dismissed by LuLing. But it does not

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 50.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

always apply that the mother figures represent the Chinese way of seeing landscape or the other way around. In the next section, I will discuss another scenario where a new mode of looking landscape is created by the female characters.

The episode "Half and Half" in *The Joy Luck Club*, narrates the story of the American-born daughter figure Rose and the Chinese-born mother figure Anmei. As an adult, Rose recalls one childhood accident when she lost her little brother Bing who drowned in the sea. After Bing's drowning, Anmei takes Rose to the beach in the hope of discovering Bing. Anmei attempts different ways to save her son such as praying to God or sacrificing to the Coiling Dragon in the sea. After the failure of all these attempts, Anmei summons all her willpower to believe her son has survived. Meanwhile, Rose goes through a process of change in her attitude toward her mother's various reactions after Bing's accidental drowning in the sea. Rose's feelings change from a surprise at her mother's "nengkan" which leads her to drive to the beach from home although she has never learnt how to drive, to a shock at viewing her mother Anmei's dogged hope in Bing's survival. Finally, the episode ends with Rose's acceptance of Bing's accident.

Rose and Anmei's ways of seeing and experiencing the sea that drowns Bing, illuminate two ways of looking at landscape as defined above: gazing and roaming. Gazing means that Rose looks at landscape as the object to be gazed on. Some kind of distance is created between the sea to be viewed and Rose as the viewer of the sea. The scene where her little brother is about to drown is described from Rose's perspective. Rose's monologue borrows from a cinematic depiction with the alternation of slow motion and frozen images:

> Bing, walks one, two, three steps. His little body is moving so quickly, as if he spotted something wonderful by the water's edge. And I think, He's going to fall in. I'm expecting it. And just as I think this, his feet are already in the air, in a moment of balance, before he splashes into the sea and disappear without leaving so much a ripple in the water.[1]

The ephemeral moment of Bing's falling into water, depicted in segmented sentences with numerous punctuations and stops, is thus emphatically extended. The

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 125.

reader is forced to slow down and experience the moment in Rose's detached report-like account. Bing's movements stretch the moment and deepen the reader's unease with the slow motion and close-up: "Bing, walks one, two, three steps. His little body is moving so quickly, as if he spotted something wonderful by the water's edge." The first two sentences that are stretched in slow motion stand in conspicuous contrast to Rose's unexpected anticipation of the accident, "And I think, He's going to fall in. I'm expecting it." The present continuous tense here conveys Rose's psychological time. The intentional use of the present tense builds up a tension between the victim Bing, the witness Rose and that of the raging sea. The extended temporal vacuum continues with the frozen image "his feet are already in the air, in a moment of balance," and then the extension is sped up by the word "splash" suggesting the brevity of the flickering movement: "before he splashes into the sea and disappear without leaving so much a ripple in the water." Tan's writing creates a tension between event and discourse: the event of the potential drowning is chaotic while Rose's re-creation of the scene is objective and detached and reported from a distance.

What comes directly into tension with Rose's objective observation of landscape is Anmei's embodied, mythical engagement with landscape. Anmei's experience of the sea ranges from trudging in the muddy path to praying to God, from sacrificing a piece of jewelry to the Coiling Dragon to her climbing toward the reef, from combating the turbulent sea waves with the fishing tube and finally to her acceptance of the fate of losing her son in the sea:

> My mother poured out tea sweetened with sugar into the teacup, and threw this into the sea. And then she opened her fist. In her palm was a ring of watery blue sapphire, a gift from her mother, who had died many years before. This ring, she told me, drew coveting stares from women and made them inattentive to the children they guarded so jealously. This would make the Coiling Dragon forgetful of Bing. She threw the ring into the water.[1]

Anmei engages with landscape through "embodied movements, precognitive triggers…affective intensities, enduring urges […] and sensuous disposition."[2] She

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 129.
[2] LORIMER, Hayden. "Cultural Geography: The Busyness of Being More-Than-Representational'." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2005, p. 84.

"poured out tea," "threw it [the tea] into the sea," "she opened her fist" and then "threw the ring into the water." The relationship between the sea and Anmei is an "open-ended improvisation or synchronization, through which sensing and sensible—body and world—take dynamic form […] neither preexists their relation."[1] After the futile prayer to God for Bing's life, Anmei recalls the folk tale about a mother's sacrifice to save her son from an enraged Chu Jung (the God of fire in Chinese legends).

In observing Anmei's interaction with landscape, Rose is provided with a new positioning to re-perceive landscape and her relationship to it. Rose negotiates between Chinese and American ways of looking at landscape. As James Duncan indicates, landscapes are "performed 'as members of various groups act out their identities […] repeated readings of landscapes produce new realities." [2] The engagement with the sea offers Rose an opportunity to realize her identity as a Chinese American and to recover the close connection of the self to the world in Wang Guowei's "the world without self."

However, the seemingly successful claim of Chineseness is made evasive in Rose's ambiguous identification with Anmei toward the end of this episode. By following her mother's step to trudge in the beach sand, Rose turns from gazing at the sea to roaming. Tan starts with an exaggerated description of Rose's synchronizing with Anmei, "I could feel what my mother felt." Anmei and Rose become one because they feel the same urge to find Bing. The identity between the mother and daughter figures is later rendered with comic tones as Bing grows tall and becomes a stranger who lights a cigarette:

> And then she stood up and started walking across the sandy beach as though it were a solid paved path, and I was trying to follow behind, struggling and stumbling in the soft mounds. She marched up the steep path to where the car was parked, and she wasn't even breathing hard as she pulled a large inner tube from the trunk […]

[1] GARRY, Ann. *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. 2017, p. 147.
[2] Duncan, Nancy, and JAMES Duncan. "Doing landscape interpretation." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, 2010, p. 228.

> […] We both climbed toward the end of the reef to watch. The tube had now reached the other side of the cove. [1]

Rose imitates Anmei by following Anmei as she trudges through the soft mounds. But copying her mother's movements identically does not mean that Rose adopts Anmei's roaming way of looking at the sea: to trace the twists and turns of the sands and the waves or to follow the sinuous contours of the reef. Rose continues to act as the distanced observer who reports on Anmei's act of releasing a tube in the sea. Anmei, on the contrary, participates in the active interaction with the sea through throwing a tube as a message from her to beg for Bing's life. The movements of the tube are described as thus:

> Over and over again, it dove and popped back up again, empty but still hopeful. And then, after a dozen or so times, it was sucked into the dark recess, and when it came out, it was torn and lifeless.[2]

Here the tube in the sea as a symbol of Chineseness is represented as attainable by Rose. However, just as Rose's imitation of her mother Anmei's bodily engagement with the sea does not necessarily lead to Rose's adoption of roaming as a way to look at landscape, so too is Chineseness out of range for Rose, in the image of the "torn and lifeless" tube.

In the calligraphic practice and in this interaction with the sea, we have observed a tension within the self-world relationship that is integrated into the Chinese American female characters' engaging with landscapes. Wang Guowei's idea of "the world without self" is displaced onto Ruth's debasing depictions of her mother Lu Ling's practice of calligraphy. The self-world communion which has been transformed into Rose's imitation of her mother's movements on the beach, is portrayed as elusive in the narrative distance and in Rose's ambiguous identification with Anmei.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 129-130.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

1.1.2 The Perceptual & The Affectual

In his monograph *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason* (2018) Jullien explains that landscape has the attributes of both the perceptual and the affectual.[1] The "perceptual" is something that is "amenable to perception."[2] The perceptual is associated with the non-human outside world. Further, Jullien establishes a fundamental difference between the words "perceived," "perceptible" and "perceptual." According to him, the perceptual indicates neither the completely actualized perception nor the individual perception of things. In other words, the "perceptual" must be understood from a categorical point of view. The perceived, on the other hand, is too limited and determined. As to the "perceptible," it refers to a physical capability to make "mountains and waters" noticeable. The word "perceptible" refers to the perceived at its limit and the perception at its edge.[3]

The affectual, should be seen as a capacity—a more primordial ability—to be affected.[4] The affectual lends itself to internal perception, which prompts us to discover the dormant self in which landscape essentially touches us. In the same way, the affectual is different from the affect, which means a range of diverse emotions. This diversity prevents one of the essential characteristics of the affectual, its diffuse tones.[5] Because of its diffuse tones, the affectual makes an intimate echo possible. An intimate echo means that "when we encounter a landscape, when we enter into that emerging an "Other," detaching him, we feel ourselves to be singular beings."[6] The "intimate echo," in other words, explains the mutual relationship between landscape and emotion—landscape evokes emotion and emotion engenders

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 70.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 44.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[6] According to translator Pedro Rodriguez's note, "the intimate [in Jullien's books] stands in contradistinction to love. To simplify, the intimate is quiet and exists only between two, whereas love can be theatrical and one sided. By intimate echo, when we encounter a landscape, when we enter into that emerging an "Other", detaching him, we feel ourselves to be singular beings" (*Ibid.*, p. xi).

landscape. The result is that the incitements to sadness or joy "come to rest (store themselves) within each other and trade their dwellings) (互藏其宅)."[1] Jullien describes the result of the integration of the perceptual and affectual as "a fundamental preliminary harmony" that puts us in tune with "a coevality (the self—the world) that is just starting to reemerge."[2] According to Jullien, the "affectual" and "affect" are distinct. Landscape should thus be redefined:

> […] there is landscape not only when the boundary between perceptual and affectual is erased, or when the perceptual is revealed to be at the same time, indissociably affectual […] [3]

Let us then see the relationship between the perceptual and the affectual through the poetic idea of "fusion of the emotions and sceneries" (情景交融 *Qingjing jiaorong*) in Chinese landscape poems (山水诗 *shanshui shi*).[4] The "fusion of the emotions and sceneries" aims to resolve the boundaries between the objective and the subjective. Chinese poems tend to express human emotions through images taken from nature. For example, in "In the Quiet Night (静夜)," Li Bai (李白 744-762) from the Tang Dynasty writes:

> So bright a gleam on the foot of my bed
> Could there have been a frost already?
> Lifting myself to look, I found that it was moonlight.
> Sinking back again, I thought suddenly of home.[5]

---

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 50.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 43.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[4] "Xie Lingyun (385–433) fashioned what would later be called shanshui shi (landscape poetry [literally, poetry of mountains and waters]) in his accounts of adventurous treks through beautiful and untamed mountainous regions. Differences in poetic material and style notwithstanding, both poets found nature—be it grand or domestic—a rich source for meditations on the cosmos as well as a way of life" (Cai, Zong-Qi, ed. *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 121).
[5] This poem is also translated into French, "Pensée dans une nuit tranquille/ Devant mon lit, la lune jette une clarté très vive ; Je doute un moment si ce n'est point la gelée blanche qui brille sur le sol. Je lève la tête, je contemple la lune brillante; Je baisse la tête et je pense à mon pays" (300 Tang Poems, *Chinese Classics & Translations*, English translated by Bynner and French version by Hervey, http://wengu.tartarie.com/wg/wengu.php?l=Tangshi&no=233, Accessed on 20 Feb 2020).

The bright gleam that flows on the foot of the poet's bed creates an embracing atmosphere. Here it is the instance of the perceptual because the moonlit scene is connected with "the perception globally mobilized as a fund or resource."[1] The moonlit scene is affectual because the poet vibrates with all that comes into his sight range, causing him to think about his home.

In "Crossing the Lonely Ocean" (过零丁洋), Wen Tianxiang (文天祥 1236-1283) from the Song Dynasty writes:

> My shattered country does remind me of willow-catkins swept by wind;
> My life's vicissitudes attain the aspect of duckweeds beaten by rain.[2]

This poem was written during the period after Wen had been captured as prisoner by the Mongols. The landscape with the swept willow-catkins and the broken duckweeds is the perceptual here that evokes the turmoil undergone by the poet's country. The sigh for the poet's country is affectual because the ruined landscape grasps the reactiveness that lies within the poet.

Tan's second novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) mainly narrates the life story of Winnie from the first-person point of view. However, the novel starts with narration from the American-born character Pearl who lives in California. Pearl is described as having a problematic relationship with both her Chinese heritage and her Chinese-born mother Winnie. Then the novel changes into Winnie's talk-stories that take place in China during the Japanese invasion. Winnie's story begins with her mother's mysterious disappearance which marks the beginning of a tragic chapter in her life with a sexually abusive husband and the deaths of her babies. Winnie later attempts to divorce her violent husband and remarries Jimmy Louie, a Chinese American man, whom she meets at a charity party. The novel comes back to the narration of Pearl who reveals her secret to Winnie and plans a trip for her mother to

---

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 44.

[2] Crossing the Lonely Ocean, *East Asia: History & Literature*, https://eahnc.wordpress.com/2015/09/14/crossing-the-lonely-ocean/. Accessed 19 Feb 2020. The website refers to 王知还。《古今爱国抒情诗词选》，中国对外翻译出版公司，1995。/ Wang, Zhihuan. *Selected Lyrics on Themes of Patriotism and Moral Integrity: from Ancient to Modern Chinese Classic Poetry*. China Translation & Publishing Corporation, 1995.

revisit China. The streetscapes and the lake described in the novel refer precisely to the perceptual and the affectual.

The streetscapes from Winnie's childhood are depicted with colors, sounds, and smells. The cityscape blurs the boundaries of reality, memory, imagination, dream and wish. The cityscape is the last memories Winnie has of her mother who went missing when Winnie was nine years old. The streetscapes in this novel display the fusion of the perceptual and the affectual. Chineseness, as the fusion of emotions and sceneries in this particular streetscape, is then destabilized in Winnie's memories:

> As we drove farther away from our house, I started to hear different kinds of sounds: the shouts of vendors, trolley cars grinding by, motorcars honking, and so much hammering—old buildings were being pulled down everywhere, new ones being pushed up. Hearing all those sounds, I was so happy! [. . .]
>
> [...] Although maybe it is just my imagination now that makes me think this. Perhaps she had no such intention. Maybe we saw none of these things as I have described. Maybe we did not go to all the places that I now remember. For how could we have done all this in one day? But that is what remember, and even more.[1]

The above two paragraphs are Winnie's recounting of her childhood experience in 1930s China to her American-born daughter Pearl. Here in Tan's two paragraphs, Winnie's "mental map"[2] is made up of the soundscape (the shouts of vendors, trolley cars grinding by, motorcars honking, and so much hammering). In Burton Pike's theorization of the city in literature, "an imaginary 'word city' is shaped through the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements of the 'real city', through which the individual perspective is attributed to the city and transforms it into a personalized 'word city'."[3] The perceptual here extends itself as a categorical concept to include heightened sound senses. The perceptual has the capacity to evoke the affectual. The affectual is provoked by Winnie who has been cut off from Chinese land for more than thirty years. Jullien writes that the affectual is the awakened sensibility from the exchange with all that comes into the sight. The affectual is so impregnating that we

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife.* Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 94.
[2] A 'mental map', as defined in the domain of urban studies, is a cognitive city map, which "constitutes itself in the mind of an individual through the subconscious selection of particular urban features (LEY, David. *A Social Geography of the City*. Harper and Row, 1983, p. 107)."
[3] PIKE, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton University Press, 1981, p. xi.

are not able to pinpoint a cause, to specify it or to giving it a proper assignation.[1] In this scenario, the affectual refers to Winnie's disorientation and confusion, which are displayed in the repetitive use of the word "maybe." The disorientation is also foregrounded between memory as static and credible that is exhibited in the concrete soundscapes, and memory as something full of perceptual flux that is manifested in consecutive negation ("no such intention," "none of these things" and "we did not go") as well as the ensuing interrogation and vague answer, "For how could we have done all this in one day? But that is what remember, and even more." The cityscapes are then described through the prism of Winnie's unreliable memory. Such proleptical uncertainties are constitutive of Chinese Americans' lived realities, especially the first-generation Chinese-born people like Winnie. The fusion of the perceptual and the affectual in Winnie's recollection of childhood streetscapes then becomes destabilized by the belatedness and unreliability of memory.

The fusion of the perceptual and the affectual is displaced in the scene in *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) where Winnie is appreciating the lake near home after moving with her husband, who was a pilot during the Japanese invasion:

> All that beauty was almost enough even for me. I would often walk around the lake by myself, and I would not be thinking about my past unhappiness, or my future life with my husband. I was only watching the birds who floated above the lake, then landed so lightly on the water that no ripples appeared. Just that moment. Or I would be admiring the web a spider had woven on a bush, perfectly formed and sparkling with pearls of dew. And I was wondering if I could later knit a sweater in the same design, using only this memory as a pattern. [2]

The paragraph depicts Winnie's mind as serene, cleared of personal gains and losses, "I would not be thinking about my past unhappiness, or my future life with my husband." Winnie approaches nature with a much more "minimalistic and

[1] Jullien writes that "With landscape, however, induced emotion defies complete individuation. It [the affectual] retains a measure of vagueness and indeterminacy. It is a state of sensibility (of vibration, in more elementary terms) that is awakened without our being able to pinpoint a cause, without our specifying it or giving it a proper assignation" (JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 44).

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 167.

respectful way" by emptying her mind and "letting what is there, in all its multiplicity and endless variety, come," as Gretel Ehrlich writes in *Legacy of Light* (1987).[1] The stillness, quietness and peace of mind pursued by Winnie are reflected in the floating birds over the river without ripples. However, the following "almost" and "even" in the sentence "All that beauty was almost enough even for me," already forecasts Winnie's failed attempt to seek solace in nature. To seek comfort from nature is widely depicted in Chinese landscape poems. For example, in the poem "He Xinlang 贺新郎" by Xin Qiji's (辛弃疾 1140–1207) from the Song Dynasty:

> I see in green mountains such alluring charm;
> I expect that they see the same in me,
> For in heart and in appearance.
> We are a bit similar[2]

The green mountain and the poet share the same appearance (the perceptual) and heart (the affectual). The poet responds to the green mountains and the green mountains also respond to him. In his monograph *This Strange Idea of the Beautiful* (2014) Jullien says that "it is as if a man looked at the mountain and that the mountain equally leant down in order to look at him."[3] This reciprocity is not valid in Quyuan's poems (340–278 BC) as summarized by Cai Zongqi in his anthology *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (2008). Cai writes that "Qu Yuan takes advantage of this connection and uses it to accentuate his theme, which is his loneliness and total alienation from the world."[4]

In the following paragraph, Winnie's observation of the birds and spiders walking along the lake reverses the tranquility of mind and the consolation that is supposed to be obtained from the fusion of the perceptual and the affectual:

---

[1] Sullivan Constance, ed. *Legacy of Light*. With an Introduction by Gretel Ehrlich. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987, p. 5.
[2] 唐圭璋，《全宋詞》。中华书局，1965，第三集，1915 页。/Tang Guizhang ed. *Complete Ci Poetry of the Song*. Zhonghua shuju, 1965, vol. 3, p. 1915. The Chinese version of the lines from the poem is 我见青山多妩媚，料青山，见我应如是，情与貌，略相似。
[3] JULLIEN, François. *This Strange Idea of the Beautiful*. Seagull Books, 2016, p. 144.
[4] Cai, Zong-qi, ed. *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 49.

> But then the birds would suddenly call to one another, and they sounded just like a woman crying. Or the spider would feel my breath and clench its body small and tight before scurrying away. And I would be thinking about my fears, the questions I already had in my marriage. [1]

The birds' sounds are compared to a woman's crying, which mirrors Winnie's misgivings about marriage. Winnie, like the spider, begins to realize the potential danger (sexual abuse of her husband), as proleptically displayed in "the spider would feel my breath and clench its body small and tight." The spider's scurrying away foreshadows Winnie final escape from her husband's sexual abuse and mistreatment. The above two paragraphs are rendered by Tan with quotidian and intimate details such as "I could later knit a sweater in the same design, using only this memory as a pattern." The minute details of the lake depict Winnie's feeling of estrangement and her mournful awakening to the impossibility of regaining her lost innocent girlhood. Winnie's complex emotions change from elation to misgiving and then to utter fear and worry.

The elements in landscape (the encounter between the spider and the birds with the lake as well as the encounter between Winnie and the lake as the perceptual) and the evoked human emotions (Winnie's uncertainty about her new identity as a wife, and a mother as the affectual) turn out to be different. Cai Zongqi, a scholar of Chinese and comparative literature, gives a clear description of this alienation between the perceptual and affectual in his edited anthology *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (2008). Cai says that "it is the poet's vision that connects all the things in nature and makes them into self-contained scenes in well-crafted couplets, there is an irreconcilable difference between man and nature that marks the human presence in the landscape as essentially alien."[2] For Winnie, the perceptual in landscapes is not so much a consolation but serves as a reminder of the brevity of the joy and peace of life.

Indeed, the natural landscape with the concrete components as its perceptual features, possesses the constitutive or transformative effects on people's memories

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife.* Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 167.
[2] Cai, Zong-Qi, ed. *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 137.

and metamorphoses into the affectual. Memory affects us irresistibly and profoundly and plays an essential role in Tan's depiction of the interaction between the perceptual and the affectual. In her first essay collection *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life* (2001), Tan says that memory is the most unreliable and also the most authentic element for a writer where "the world is still full of magic. Anything can happen. All possibilities. I have dreams. I have fantasies. At will, I can enter that world again."[1] In Winnie's recollection of both the cityscapes and the lake, the perceptual is manifested in all the provoked smells, textures, and sounds. Chineseness, in the interaction and mutual transformation between the elements of landscape as perceptual and that of the elusive memories, identities and man-nature relationship as the affectual, becomes likewise altering and difficult to grasp.

Despite the cityscapes and natural landscapes that are made evasive in the female characters' memory, the interplay between the perceptual and the affectual is also reinvented in the landscapes produced by the calligraphic practice in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001). These landscapes offer new angles from which to rethink the concept of and relationship between the perceptual and the affectual.

The next paragraph displays a contradiction in the correlations between the perceptual and the affectual. After Bao Bomu's suicide, LuLing encounters the uncanny incarnation of her dead mother into the body of the beggar girl who conveys Bao Bomu's message to LuLing through the calligraphic practice on the ground:

> From her [the beggar girl] other sleeve she removed a long, slender stick. With the flat length of the stick, she smoothed the silt until its surface was as flat as a mirror […] We crouched next to her. How did a beggar girl learn to do this? This was no ordinary trick. Her hand was steady, the writing was smooth, just like a skilled calligrapher's. I read the first line.
>
> A dog howls, the moon rises, it said. "Doggie! That was her nickname for me," I told the girl. She smoothed the silt and wrote more: In darkness, the stars pierce forever. Shooting stars, that was in the poem Baby Uncle wrote for her. Another sweep, another line: A rooster crows, the sun rises, Precious Auntie had been a Rooster. And then the girl write the last line: In daylight, it's as if the stars never existed. I felt sad, but did not know why.[2]

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 112.
[2] TAN, Am. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 211.

Tan's depictions of the calligraphic practice, with the traces of the calligrapher's gestures that are left on the ground compose a calligraphic landscape with strong implications of the perceptual. The calligraphic landscape itself is continuous and evanescent when the scenic snapshots overtake static portraiture, with the passing terrain so intimately harmonizing pace and observation. [1] The beggar girl is an incarnation of the deceased Bao Bomu. The beggar girl's uncanny ability to elegantly practice calligraphy is hinted in the passage, "How did a beggar girl learn to do this? This was no ordinary trick. Her hand was steady, the writing was smooth, just like a skilled calligrapher's." The beggar girl's body is depicted as the medium for the passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the gestures and calligraphic landscape which act upon her and the gestures and calligraphic landscape upon which she acts.

In the calligraphic tradition, when the human body is immediately related to the larger outside world, calligraphers are deemed to participate in cosmic creation.[2] The rhythms between man and the myriad things in nature will become synchronized. The life vitality and rhythm are consequently perceived by the eyes, reproduced in the mind, and represented on paper by bodily movement. However, the calligraphic practice with a stick on the ground, is not only unconventional compared to the practice with an ink brush on paper, but also activates a verbal replacement for the absence of Bao Bomu. Words are feeble substitutes for the human touch, which is manifested in the landscape with a fugitive radiance that is easily missed. LuLing's tracing of this ephemeral exchange between the perceptual and the affectual turns out to be as feeble as the traces on the ground.

The calligraphic landscape on the ground which overcomes death, time, and space, corresponds to LuLing's inner conflicts. As we can see here, calligraphy perfectly linking the perceptual and the affectual. The drawings on the ground manifest Lu Ling's desires and fears about Bao Bomu's message because she regrets

[1] JAMES, David. *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception.* A&C Black, 2008, p. 9.
[2] FONG, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century.* Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1992, p. 75.

Bao Bomu's suicide, which was caused by a family secret and matrilineal disconnection. Tan invests in both the calligraphic landscape and the perceptual calligraphic work that is exhibited on the ground. Tan also composes the calligraphic landscape as a space that is interpreted as a verbal representation as well as a verbal translation of an existent visual representation of the landscape and its people.[1] De Lange develops this idea when commenting on the strategy of rewriting history in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) by the South African writer Zakes Mda. Lu Ling's life is transposed into this calligraphic landscape, which is deliberately composed with allusions and symbolic meanings: "A dog howls, the moon rises. In darkness, the stars pierce forever. A rooster crows, the sun rises. In daylight, it's as if the stars never existed." Calligraphic practice balances the forces between the free-flowing strokes and that of the non-reversibility stabilized within space. This combination is analogous to the multivocality of the poetic landscape on the ground. This chain is presented in such a way by James and Nancy Duncan when explaining the production of a semiology of landscape:

> Thus when a signifier—that is, an element in a signifying system such as a landscape—is joined with a signified or the concept to be communicated it becomes a sign. Next this sign can become a signifier itself when it is associated with a new concept (signified) and thus a second-order sign is formed. This happens when the meaning of a sign which is historically and culturally variable, and thus contingent, dissipates and becomes open to new meanings. The form which may have had a rich, full history can become an empty signifier, to be filled again with a new history, another contingent significance, to become a new sign.[2]

The calligraphic landscape composes the signs on the ground—the perceptual—and constitutes the poetic landscape that is open to LuLing's interpretation. LuLing reads each sign in Bao Bomu's poem that is transmitted onto the written signs on ground, as the life stories of herself and Bao Bomu. Similarly, elsewhere in the novel the dog is the nickname for LuLing, Bao Bomu is personified as the shooting star in

[1] De Lange, Attie, et al., eds. *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. Springer, 2008, p. 173.
[2] Duncan, JAMES S., Nancy G. Duncan, and T. J. Barnes. "Ideology and Bliss, Roland Barthes and the Secret Histories of Landscape." Barnes, Trevor J., and JAMES S. Duncan, eds. *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*. Routledge, 1992, p. 21.

Baby Uncle's poem and Bao Bomu is a rooster. And the suicide of Bao Bomu is represented as a perishing of the shooting star. The perceptual calligraphic landscape becomes the dialogically agitated and tension-filled intersection of Bao Bomu's words and accents as well as LuLing's value and personal judgements.[1]

After LuLing's interpretation of the written signs on the ground, the poetic landscape transforms into a mental image[2] in the mind of LuLing. The mental image stimulated from the written signs on the ground has the power of "reproducing these impressions in the absence of sensory stimulation by the objects [where] 'sight is the most highly developed sense' and serves as the model for all the others."[3] As depicted later in the novel, when LuLing is sent to an orphanage for a while after witnessing the beggar's girl's transmission of Bao Bomu's poem, she still has the written signs etched in her mind: "When the cart turned down Pig's Head Lane, Mr. Wei began to sing a cheerful tune about the harvest moon. And I thought about what Precious Auntie had told the beggar girl to write […] I looked at the sky, so clear, so bright, and in my heart I was howling."[4] The calligraphic landscapes are constructed on the basis of a poetic text—"how they are read, and how they act as a mediating influence, shaping behavior in the image of the text."[5]

The perceptual-affectual relationship is reconsidered by Tan not as a peaceful settlement with some all-embracing reconciliation of the two traditions. Instead, the discussion of the perceptual-affectual relationship composes a sight of struggle that

---

[1] See BAKHTIN, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 2010.

[2] "Mental imagery has been a central feature of theories of the mind at least since Aristotle's De Anima, and it continues to be a cornerstone of psychoanalysis, experimental studies of perception, and popular folk-beliefs about the mind." In the Mitchell's note, he sums that "Plato compares memory images to impressions in a wax tablet in the *Theaetatus*, and his theory of Forms is often invoked in support of innate or archetypal images in the mind. Empirical studies of mental imagery have generally followed the Aristotelian tradition, inaugurated in the *De A nima's* account of perception: 'sense is that which is receptive of the form of sensible objects without the matter, just as the wax receives the impression of the signet ring without the iron or the gold'" (MITCHELL, WJ Thomas. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 14).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14

[4] TAN, Am. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 217.

[5] Duncan, JAMES, and Nancy Duncan. "(Re) reading the Landscape." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* vol. 6, no. 2, 1988, p. 121.

enables Tan to explore the complex interplay between memory, landscape and Chineseness. The fusion of the perceptual and the affectual is destabilized in Tan's depictions of female characters' reaction to the cityscape, lake, and the calligraphic landscape on the ground. The reader is encouraged to develop a historicized understanding of the fusion of the perceptual and affectual.

1.1.3 Landscape as View and Landscape as Living:

With the introduction of perspective, Western landscape was established as an object to be observed that emphasize the primacy of the visual. In his monograph *The Country and the City* (1975), with focuses on the countryside of the Black Mountains on the Welsh border, Raymond Williams argues that "the idea of landscape implied separation and observation."[1] Williams further elaborates his argument with the term "pleasing prospects" which are gained from observing with "intense interest at all the features and movements of the natural world."[2] Since the 19th century, the idea of landscape as view has been encouraged by various forces such as the earliest tourist guidebooks and the rise of mountain tourism driven by a temptation to see all such desolate and wild areas as virgin lands, not to mention the popularization of landscape painting.[3] For example, William Murray's *Adventures in the "Wilderness", or, Camp Life in the Adirondacks* (1869), lured thousands of tourists unprepared for the rigors of outdoor life to the Adirondacks.[4] Yet this focus on landscape as a way of seeing has limited landscape to the questions of representation. This dependence on vision has been critiqued by Western scholars

[1] WILLIAMS, Raymond. *The Country and the City. Vol. 423*. Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 120.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[3] MYERS, Kenneth. T*he Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820-1895*. Hudson River Museum, 1987, p. 49.
[4] PAYNE, Daniel G. *Voices in the "Wilderness": American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics*. UPNE, 1996, p. 80.

from various disciplines in the West. Michel de Certeau goes even further, condemning the visuality of landscape as the "imaginary totalizations produced by the eye."[1] He argues instead for a comprehension of the highly mobile, intertwining daily practices "down below."[2]

Phenomenological understandings of landscape further critique the epistemological definition of landscape as a way of seeing. Scholars supporting the phenomenological understandings of landscape, oppose the ideas put forward by the Age of Enlightenment when seeing and thinking were privileged over the senses. Phenomenological landscape is instead perceived as a milieu of engagement and involvement. Landscape is then seen as 'lifeworld,' as a world to live in, not a scene to view.[3] Dwelling, mobility and embodied vision and performance are therefore emphasized. For example, the British scholar Jong Wylie argues:

> Dwelling blossoms into a mobile, holistic, and processual vision, in which to live is to inhabit is to move. There is no separation between self and landscape because both are lifelines, continuous and cosanguineous within the earth's body: no distances interrupt their flow, their ongoingness.[4]

A particular representational method is born out of this phenomenological understanding of landscape as a milieu to dwell in: the human experience will be described as fully as possible through "a rich or 'thick' description allowing others to comprehend these landscapes in their nuanced diversity and complexity and enter into these experiences though their metaphorical textual mediation."[5] Landscape mediates how humans feel and perceive, what they can do and their identity.[6]

From the moment of their arrival, the white settlers imbued American landscape with a number of symbolic meanings: one key meaning was that its concrete reality

---

[1] De CERTEAU, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. University of California Press, 1984, p. 93.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[3] WYLIE, John. *Landscape: Key Ideas in Geography*. Routledge, 2007. p. 149.
[4] WYLIE, John. "Dwelling and Displacement: Tim Robinson and the Questions of Landscape." *Cultural geographies*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2012, p. 372.
[5] TILLEY, Christopher. "Phenomenological Approaches to Landscape Archaeology." *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*. 2008, p. 271.
[6] Jaggar, Alison M., and Iris Marion Young, eds. *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Blackwell, 1998, p. 143.

had to be transformed from the ""wilderness"" into a cultivated garden which they would make fertile by their own human hands. American land seemed to "offer a chance to realize one or other of a multitude of ideals, beliefs and values: social, political, religious and environmental."[1]

Native Americans, on the other hand, faithfully believe in the close link between humans and the non-human: animals, plants, minerals, the air, *etc*. People are said to be literally connected with the soil, the air, and the weather.[2] This intimate connection with the land influences their way of storytelling, where the land is in their story and their stories are in the land.[3] The Chinese "attachment to land" principle shares the same basis as that of the Native Americans. The "attachment to land (乡土情结 *Xiangtu Qingjie*)" principle traces its origin back to the Chinese plowing culture originating from 7000-9000 years ago in the Yellow River area, where nature is the land to labor on, a means to survive and a path to comfort and pleasure. The dependence and respect toward land, derived from the people's practical engagement with it, is recorded in the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry *Shijing*.[4] Chinese people and land form an intimate relationship,[5] which later becomes synonymous with the nostalgia felt when departing from or losing one's hometown/country.

Jullien explains the development of Chinese landscape painting which takes a different path from its Western counterpart in his monograph *Living off Landscape*

---

[1] COSGROVE, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 161.
[2] SCHWENINGER, Lee. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape.* University of Georgia Press, 2010, p. 59.
[3] MASON, Timothy. "One Land, Three Landscapes: Frank Gillen's Alice Springs," Guibert, Pascale, ed. *Reflective landscapes of the Anglophone countries*. Vol. 11. Rodopi, 2011, p. 110.
[4] *Shijing (诗经)* is the first poetic anthology of 305 poems (840–620 BC.) which are presented in four parts: *Kuo feng* ("Airs of the States"), *Hsiao ya* ("Lesser Ya"), *Da ya* ("Greater Ya"), and *Sung* ("Temple Hymns"). It records people's laboring lives, their personal thoughts, sentiments, their respect toward 'heaven's will" as well as the names of many plants, crops and animals.
[5] *Dao De Jing* says that "The world has its fetal beginning, that can be considered the mother of the world. You have to have gotten to this mother, before you can understand her progeny. If you go back and safeguard the mother, you will have to the end of your days without danger" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: a Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 192).

(2018). The progress of Chinese landscape painting goes in parallel with the Chinee painter's freedom from resemblance. For them, mountains and waters are the manifestation of the *yin/yang* tensions that make up the myriad things in the universe. Therefore, there is no constant form of mountains or waters, and the painters need to capture their "compossibility" which means "the act of entertaining all possibilities equally—is a resource, an unquenchable fund of forms, belonging to the mountain."[1] Chinese landscape painting emancipates itself from the obstacle of representation. Instead, the painter aims to capture the various modes of intensity and illustrate that fact that mountains and waters have many contrasting and interlinked capacities. It is with this aim in mind that Chinese landscape painting skills are summed up by the Chinese landscape painter and theorist Guo Xi (郭熙 1020-1090) from the Northern Song dynasty as "sanyuan (三远)." *Sanyuan* means seeing a mountain from its deep, flat, and high remove which enables the capturing of the compossibility of the mountain that has no constant form. The painters therefore need to walk, climb, and travel in every corner of mountains and rivers. This engagement with landscape gives rise to the idea of landscape as living. Guo Xi comments that "there are landscapes in which one can travel, landscapes which can be gazed upon, landscapes in which one can ramble, and landscapes in which one may dwell." [2] From Chinese philosophical perspectives dwelling consists in "bridge[ing] the distance between the self and landscape through a variety of means—perception, bodily movements, intentionality, emotion, etc."[3] What is recorded in literary works then is something "more-than-representational." The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in the "shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions."[4] The term

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 31.
[2] GUO, Xi. *An Essay on Landscape Painting (临泉高致 Lin Ch'üan Kao Chih).* Translated by Shio Sakanishi, Etc. John Murray, 1935, p. 32.
[3] TILLEY, Christopher Y. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Berg, 1994, p. 12.
[4] LORIMER, Hayden. "Cultural Geography: The Busyness of Being 'More Than Representational'." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 29, no. 1, p. 84.

"non-representational," proposed by the Western philosopher Hayden Lorimer, turns out to be useful in explaining the pursuit of capturing life vitality when describing landscape in the Chinese tradition. For Chinese scholar Thomé H. Fang, life aesthetics are pursued—"The Universe, as it is, represents an all-comprehensive Urge of Life, an all-pervading Vital Impetus, not for a single moment ceasing to create and procreate and not in a single place ceasing to overflow and interpenetrate." [1] The depiction of landscape in literature is the production of poeticized, moving and fluid human feelings toward life worlds.

Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses (1995)* is told from the alternative points of view of the two half-sisters—Chinese born Kwan and American born Olivia and their previous lives as Nunumu and Miss Banner during the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864). Tan's narratives walk on the edge where past and present merge and where the boundaries between self-living in reality and dwelling in an imagined parallel China blur, where historical and cultural specificity have become just layers of mirages. Instead of succumbing to stereotypical judgements from American society, Kwan gazes subversively back with her wishes, dreams and encounters with ghosts that make up her outlandish parallel life in China. Olivia vacillates between repulsion and attraction to the otherworldly stories of Kwan that are embodied in Chinese landscapes, living habits, thinking patterns and superstitions. The landscapes of a past China recounted by Kwan become a site which Olivia and Kwan constructed together and where they negotiate their identities as Chinese Americans living in America.

The following paragraph describes the Chinese-born character Kwan's re-memory of her previous incarnation—Nunumu searching for food in the mountains:

> Since I had once been a poor girl in the mountains, I knew where to look. We poked in the places beneath tree trunks where cicadas slept. We sat in the kitchen at night, waiting for insects and rats to come out for crumbs we couldn't see. We climbed up the mountains and picked wild tea and bamboo. Sometimes we caught a bird that was too old or too stupid to fly away fast enough. In the springtime, we plucked locusts and grasshoppers hatching in the fields. We found frogs and grubs and bats.

[1] FANG, Thomé H. *The Chinese View of Life.* The Union Press, 1957, pp. 18-24.

> Bats you have to chase into a small place and keep them flying until they fall from exhaustion.[1]

The "haptic," which conveys the notion that vision may also be a form of touch, indicates a key register through which the self and landscape are produced.[2] Landscape can then be defined as a concrete and sensuous concatenation of material forces from which tactile experiences emerge and remain closely connected with the visual. Tan's paragraph gives a rendition of Nunumu's embodied experience that changes the idea of landscape as view or spectacle to something as the "up-close, intimate and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice."[3] Instead of being an object to be perceived and appreciated, Nunumu's landscape is unfurled as the site of direct encounters with all the material components of the place such as the animals, mountains, rocks, and plants. Nunumu's body turns from being the thinking one[4] to the corporeal and acting one in active engagement with the landscape. According to Merleau-Ponty, "we are not spectators in the world, but rather of an opening onto the world in that 'perceptual experiences are lined together' forming an expansion of my point of view on or my 'field of presence.'"[5] Nunumu is not an onlooker who appreciates mountains, animals and plants from a distance. Instead, she walks in the forests, climbs the mountains, collects the plants and hunts for the

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 165-166.

[2] Wylie described in detail this specific sensation as he evokes a walk on the South West Coast Path, "I found myself, as happened every day, in the thick of it. In the thick of it: wet, livid green ferns all around, the Path a thin, muddy rope. Limbs and lungs working hard in a haptic, step-by-step engagement with nature-matter. Landscape becoming foothold. Walkers on the path very often find themselves in such a close visual, tactile and sonorous relation with the earth, the ground, mud, stinging vegetation. Topos in quickstep, in a succession of short sharp bursts [...]. As if the pre-established boundary between self and landscape, subject and object, could become soluble, osmotic, in the engaged, involved practice of walking" (WYLIE, John. "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2005, p. 239).

[3] WYLIE, John. *Landscape: Key Ideas in Geography*. Routledge, 2007. p. 167.

[4] Burkitt argues that "human bodies in the Western world do not exist solely as the objects of knowledge, but also as the primary foundation of the knowing subject—the person and selves [...] Sentience can be described as the body's sympathetic and responsive relation to its environment, which can be regarded as 'mindful' even though it is non-rational and pre-linguistic. Thus the body could be said to be a thinking body and to have intentionality prior to the emergence of language and self-consciousness" (BURKITT, Ian. *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*. Sage, 1999, p. 75).

[5] SIMPSON, Christophe. *Merleau-Ponty and Theology*. A&C Black, 2013, p. 40.

animals. This is Nunumu's way of exploring her surroundings. Nunumu's engagement with landscapes is marked with a series of the kinetic bodily movements (poking the tree trunks, climbing the mountains, picking tea and bamboo, catching birds, plucking locusts, chasing bats). Tan's portrayal of Nunumu's engagement with landscape is mobilised within the multiple energetic movements of the animals, plants, and hunters which here refer to Nunumu and Lao Lu.

Tan's adoption of the parallel narrative of Kwan's contemporary life in the US and her previous incarnation in a remote village in nineteenth century China is important in her visioning of Chinese landscape from the perspectives of American-born Chinese Americans: in her previous life, Chinese landscapes are experienced as a place to stroll, roam, contemplate and nourish. Tan's American-born Chinese Americans like Olivia get the chance to encounter themselves in the talk-stories via fantastic time travel. By doing this, they are able to reorient their prior understandings of landscape as a view to be appreciated—the convention in America. The landscapes from a previous life provide Tan's characters with an opportunity to review themselves in an encounter with another self. Another time and another place of writing encodes complex experiences of Chinese Americans who live in an in-between world. Kwan's previous life as the tribal girl Nunumu is portrayed via Tan's displacement of the strange creatures eaten (insects, rats, frogs, grubs, and bats) and with Nunumu's familiarity with hunting skills and strategies, ("Since I had once been a poor girl in the mountains, I knew where to look").[1] The significance of land as a living environment to local residents such as Nunumu then is paradoxically limited and intensified in Kwan's failure to separate their experience of space from that of time.[2] Kwan lives a double life—one is in modern-day America as Kwan and the other in the remote Chinese village as Nunumu during the Taiping Rebellion. From her repeatedly told talk-stories of the other life and from her revisiting of the caves

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 165.
[2] De Lange, Attie, et al., eds. *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. Springer, 2008, p. 16.

of the burial place of her previous incarnation it is clear that Kwan cannot and will not separate her current living environment from her other lifetime.[1]

Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is narrated in the structure of a story cycle made up of sixteen stories recounted from the alternative points of view of four pairs of Chinese American mother and daughter figures (June replaces and re-tells the stories of her dead mother Suyuan). Through the lens of the mother-daughter relationships, Chineseness is made fluid by geographical distances and social, generational, linguistic, and cultural gaps.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the Chinese born character Lindo's house and the surrounding environment are described with a combination of landscapes as view and landscapes as dwelling:

> Our house sat on a little hill. We called this hill Three Steps to Heaven, but it was really just centuries of hardened layers of mud washed up by the Fen River. On the east wall of our compound was the river, which my father said liked to swallow little children. He said it had once swallowed the whole town of Taiyuan. The river ran brown in the summer. In the winter, the river was blue-green in the narrow fast-moving spots. In the wider places, it was frozen still, white with cold.
>
> Oh, I can remember the new year when my family went to the river and caught many fish—giant slippery creatures plucked while they were still sleeping in their frozen riverbeds—so fresh that even after they were gutted they would dance on their tails when thrown into the hot pan.[2]

The idea of "landscape as view" is shown through the evocation of Fen River's changing colors, "The river ran brown in the summer. In the winter, the river was blue-green in the narrow fast-moving spots. In the wider places, it was frozen still, white with cold." However, these lines evoking the rotation of the season, also indicates the idea of "landscape as living," because the Chinese people arrange their activities according to the change of seasons.

---

[1] Kwan in the end of the novel saves her sister Olivia and her brother-in-law Simon in the caves where the danger of death looms. The music box found in the caves during Kwan's revisit of China with Olivia is the evidence of Kwan's previous life as Nunumu. TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses.* Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 285.

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 52.

Directly thrown into the scene, the readers' vision, hearing and touch are appealed to, making them feel the vitality of life in the sentence in which fish "dance on their tails when thrown into the hot pan." These two passages also justify the British anthropologist Tim Ingold's definition of landscape through the comparison with concepts such as land and space. According to Ingold, landscape is qualitative and heterogeneous, the everyday project of dwelling in the world instead of the peculiar and specialized project of the surveyor or cartographer.[1] In the passage from *The Joy Luck Club*, the Fen River is depicted with what Ingold terms "qualitative and heterogeneous" features that invoke mixed feelings and thus separate landscape from land, just as the Fen River is a symbol of both mercilessness and nurture, described in Tan's passage as "swallow[ing] small children," "swallow[ing] the whole town of Tai Yuan" and yet also a place where the "family went to the river and caught many fish." Tan's renderings of the Fen River therefore gather the "perceived and embodied sets of relationships between places, a structure of human feeling, emotion, dwelling, movement and practical activity."[2]

Naming a particular place is considered a way of positioning the self at a complex intersection of social, cultural, and historical routes. In *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism* (2008) Clarkson argues that "a landscape becomes literary (which is to say, it is given written form) precisely because it is named."[3] By depicting the activities such as catching and cooking fish from the Fen River, Tan's text expresses a universal emotional connection to the land, or as Christopher Tilley puts it, "experience of the world always expands beyond the particularities of place. A more holistic perspective is required, one that links bodies, movement and places

[1] Ingold writes, "But where land is thus quantitative and homogeneous, the landscape is qualitative and heterogeneous. Thus at any particular moment, you can ask of a landscape what it is like, but not how much of it there is. For the landscape is a plenum, there are no holes in it that remain to be filled in, so that every infill is in reality a reworking […] The landscape is not 'space'. To appreciate the contrast, we could compare the everyday project of dwelling in the world with the rather peculiar and specialized project of the surveyor or cartographer whose objective is to represent it" (INGOLD, Tim. "The Temporality of the Landscape." *World archaeology*, vol. 25, no .2, 1993, pp. 153-154).

[2] TILLEY, Christopher. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Berg publishers, 2004, p. 25.

[3] CLARKSON, Carrol. "Remains of the Name". *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. De Lange, Attie, et al., eds. Springer, 2008, p. 135.

together into a whole [...]."[1] The villagers' experience of landscape goes beyond the limitation of the individual and the local. Instead, they view landscape from a comprehensive way that combines various activities rather than the observation of the changing colors of the river. The villagers also construct the folklore about the formation of the river, tell the terrible stories of the devasting power of the river and go fishing according to the running patterns of the river. Based on Clarkson and Tilley's argumentation, I would argue that Tan's landscapes reflect the paradoxical combination of globalization and regionality that simultaneously limits and opens up the narration to cultural and geographical scope. Regionality is displayed in Tan's focus on the specific and local place such as the Fen River, with Lindo's observation of its changes in color and the remembrance of the catching of fish, while globalization is shown in people's endowing their landscape with awe, which turns it into a dwelling place.

Dunick has argued that Tan's depiction of Chinese landscapes in her debut novel exhibits the inability to "maintain an intergenerational cultural memory of China as a homeland."[2] Instead, I would argue that while on the one hand Lindo's recollection of her childhood living environment displays and enriches the dependence on land and dwelling perspectives in the "attachment to land" principle, on the other hand, the life aesthetics so valorized in the Chinese landscape tradition is amplified in deliberately exaggerated descriptions, such as the one evoking fish "so fresh that even after they were gutted they would dance on their tails when thrown into the hot pan."

The same Fen River later devastates Lindo's family and changes her life course completely. Lindo is compelled to live in the household of her future husband. The Fen River departs from the idea of landscape as living/dwelling and gains new meanings in the lived realities of the female characters:

> My life changed completely when I was twelve, the summer the heavy rains came. The Fen River which ran through the middle of my family's

[1] TILLEY, Christopher. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Berg publishers, 2004, p. 25.
[2] DUNICK, Lisa M.S. "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and The Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels. *Melus*, vol. 31, no.2, 2006, p. 6.

> land flooded the plains. It destroyed all the wheat my family had planted that year and made the land useless for years to come. Even our house on top of the little hill became unlivable […] You couldn't go to an insurance company back then and say, Somebody did this damage, pay me a million dollars. In those days, you were unlucky if you had exhausted your own possibilities.[1]

The dependence on the land to survive and thrive that is embodied in the "attachment to land" principle is highlighted in the negative power of landscape. The flood destroyed the wheat, land, and house which Lindo's family inhabited and relied on. In her 2014 article, "Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God's Wife*," Judith Caesar analyzes the incompleteness of narratives and the problematic nature of truth when the expression of that truth has been forbidden or distorted—as in the imperial and patriarchal suppression that occurs in official texts.[2] I would contend that Tan's (re)imagination of Chinese landscapes (Fen River included) fills out these incomplete narratives and offers a supplement to official discourse. The Fen River is depicted as a landscape of living through the devastation it spreads. In other words, it stands as the turning point in local people's lives, including that of Lindo, who later emigrates o American to find a better life. The Fen River is not merely a place, but rather a representation of a narrative style, an emotional experience, and an aesthetic. This is the new literary Chineseness I contend Amy Tan is creating through her own re-envisioning and reformation of Chinese landscapes.

In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the interplay between landscape as view and living is made elusive in Winnie's changing views on the Chinatown scapes:

> As I turn down Ross Alley, everything around me immediately becomes muted in tone. It is no longer the glaring afternoon sun and noisy Chinatown sidewalks filled with people doing their Saturday grocery shopping. The alley sounds are softer, quickly absorbed, and the light is hazy, almost greenish in cast.
>
> […] As I walk past the door, a yellow pull-shade rustles. And suddenly a little girl appears, her hands press to the glass. She stares at me with a

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 53.
[2] CAESAR, Judith. "Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views*, 2014, pp. 37-47.

somber expression. I wave, but she does not wave back. She looks at me as if I don't belong here, which is how I feel.[1]

The contradictory fresh and fading memories about Chinatown are depicted with the help of synesthesia, "everything around me immediately becomes muted in tone." The muted feelings are expressed in a series of words indicating the literal and metaphorical meanings of "fading" such as "no longer glaring afternoon sun and nosy sidewalks," "softer," "absorbed" and "hazy." Tan shows a muted picture of Chinatown by combining visual, auditory, and kinetic senses in the disconnected second-generation character Pearl. This muted picture can be read as an expression of faded Chineseness in the eyes of the American-born Pearl. Not merely apprehended as view, the muted picture composes the idea of landscape as living.

In *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*, critic Ma Sheng-mei argues that the paragraphs adopt the "white gaze at the moribund and otherworldly Chinatown landscape […] betoken[ing] a dying culture [...] in the attempt to confirm one's preconceptions of the Orient—that is stagnant, hollow."[2] I counter that Tan's depiction the out-of-date Chinatown landscapes with all the backward and out-of-business shops both represents and then de-represents the timeless Chinese traditions that have ossified in the immigrants' minds. The Chinatown scape has ontological import because it is lived in, mediated, worked on and altered, replete with cultural meaning and symbolism.[3] At the same time it serves as a contrast to landscape replete with the energies and activities that Pearl has been escaping from, "noisy Chinatown sidewalks filled with people doing their Saturday grocery shopping." Pearl has lost her intimate connection with the Chinatown landscapes because she stops making connections with Chinatown, as depicted in "I wave, but she [the little girl] does not wave back. She looks at me as if I don't belong here, which is how I feel." Despite her attempt to evade, in the eyes of Pearl, Tan's Chinatown landscape is transformed from landscape as view to landscape as living.

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife.* Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 18.
[2] MA, Sheng-mei. *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. xiii-xvi.
[3] CROUCH, David. "Flirting with Space: Thinking Landscape Relationally." *Cultural geographies*, vol. 17. no. 1, 2010, p. 9.

As a result, the sense of an enduring Chineseness as something "mythologized, Orientalized, and approached as unified and unchanging"[1] comes face to face with the lived realities of contemporary Chinese Americans. Chineseness, therefore, should be approached along with its conflicts and agencies and be interrogated, critiqued, and analyzed from the Chinese American writer's unique perspective.

[1] HE, Chengzhou. "Rural Chineseness, Mo Yan's Work, and World Literature." Duran, Angelica, and Yuhan Huang, eds. *Mo Yan In Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller*. Purdue University Press, 2014. p. 88.

1.2 The Matter and Spirit of Landscape

Qi (breath-energy) is made up of *yin* and *yang* forces. *Yang* force is heavy and stays near the earth which has the tendency to rise to the air. At this moment, the *yang* force resides aloft and changes into spirit. The *yin* force is light and remains in the space above which tends to descend as sedimentation. *The yin* force then transforms into matter. François Jullien's monograph *Living off Landscape* (2018) explores the matter and spirit of landscape. According to the French scholar, mountains and waters are manifestations of the oppositions and correlations of *yin* and *yang* forces. The play between *yin* and *yang* manifests itself in the relationship between the matter and spirit of landscape. "Matter of landscape" refers to the mountains and waters that are located in the here and now, in which one can live in and wander. In other words, "matter of landscape" refers to one of the characteristics of landscape: it can be perceived and touched by a human being. The "spirit of landscape" comes from "a transition from the physical to the spiritual [...] without metaphors or doublings, and without any overreach, of a landscape's 'spirit'."[1] The "spirit of landscape" is an extension of the matter of landscape. It comes closer to the usages of spirit in the following terms such as the "spirit of wine," the "spirit of salt," or "spirit of perfume," as in Jullien's analogy:

> Landscape elevates us into the spiritual but does so within nature, within the world and our perception of it: that is, within the world of mountains and waters where I dwell and stroll, through its alternation of the solid and the fluid, the visible and audible and the opaque and transparent [. . .] We must think of the spiritual no longer as Being (in opposition to the flow of becoming) but that's something processual.[2]

We can see that the "spirit of landscape" emanates from the matter of landscape. The matter and spirit of landscape intertwine with each other because the spirit of landscape resides in mountains and waters where people engage in various activities such as walking at leisure, relaxing or enjoying a sojourn. But for Jullien, the spirit

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 52.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

of landscape is also processual just like the combination, opposition and expansion of *yin* and *yang* forces in nature. The neologism "processual" is translated from the French term "processuelle" in Jullien's monograph. "Processual" means that matter and spirit are not to be taken distinctively but as the development of the polarity of Heaven and Earth, or mountains and waters. Matter and spirit initiate, deploy, make good of and renew each other. Let us take Chinese landscape painting (山水画 *shanshui hua*), from the era of the Five Dynasties Period to the Song dynasty (907-1279) as an example to illustrate the processivity of the spirit of landscape. Landscape paintings of that era are seen to be representative of what is known as "Chinese landscape painting." The landscape paintings of that era display a rhythmical converging and balance of shade and light, brightness and darkness, height, and depth, rising and falling. The correlative pairs display the spirit of mountains and waters. In Chinese landscape painting theory, this spirit of mountains and waters is called the "consonance engendering a sense of life' (气韵生动 *Qiyun shengdong*)."[1] Instead of the reproduction of the physical forms of landscape, Chinese landscape painting is the reproduction of correlations of matter that float between Heaven (天 *tian*) and Earth (地 *di*).[2] For example, in the *Xiao and Xiang Rivers (潇湘图)*, using only a few brushstrokes and ink dots, Dong is able to reveal the "hidden islets in the middle of rivers and depict lingering mists at the foot of forest-clad mountains."[3]

[1] HU, Xiaoyan. "The Notion of 'Qi Yun' (Spirit Consonance) in Chinese Painting", *Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics,* vol. 8, 2016, pp. 247-268.

[2] The Chinese aesthetics can be defined as an aesthetics of transcendence through sweeping away knowledge (beauty beyond description); going beyond the limitations of space (beauty of emptiness); surpassing time (beauty of eternity); opening the fixed form of configuration (beauty of the uncarved) as well as breaking the boundaries of self and nature (beauty of transcendence). 朱良志，《中国美学十五讲》，北京大学出版社，2006. / ZHU, Liangzhi. *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Aesthetics*. Peking University Press, 2006. My translation.

[3] "Scenes along the Xiao and Xiang Rivers", *The Royal Collection of Imperial China*, http://www.royalcollins.com/scenes-along-the-xiao-and-xiang-rivers/. Accessed 05 Mars 2020.

Fig. 2. Detail of the *Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (潇湘图), Dong Yuan (董源, 934–962), Five Dynasties Period (907–960), Handscroll, ink and light color on silk, 50 x 141.4 cm, The Palace Museum, Beijing.

The life vitality (*Qiyun*) of the Xiao and Xiang rivers flows through Dong's brush onto the paper where the painter has conveyed the intensity, emotion and energy of the landscape that he has felt inside himself. The matter of the Xiao and Xiang rivers mixes with the painter's own energy and vitality, gets incorporated into the painting, enabling the spirit to emerge.[1] Therefore, we can see that in *shanshui hua* (山水画 Chinese landscape painting) the matter and spirit of landscape are intimately connected. The spirit of landscape stems from the matter of landscape, which in turn is reproduced in the vitality of both painter and mountains and waters themselves.

The tangible and the spiritual are further interconnected by Jullien in his introduction of the concept of *Qi* that spreads and keeps aloft in its soaring:

> Landscape, then, is where the opposition breaks down between matter and spirit. The term's [*Qi*] primitive glyph evokes the shape of a cloud is later thought of (written) as the vapor of boiling rice. Such a term was apt to keep us in the transition from perceptible to the imperceptible, at the stage of evasive soaring and emanation.[2]

Mountains and waters are made of *Qi*. The painters transfer this breath-energy into their paintings so that the viewers can sense this vitality. The matter and the spirit of landscape, which are under the process of going from one to the other and doing so via the landscape, are reconnected.[3] What happens in Tan's novels

[1] BAKER, Jennifer Helen. *The Eight Views: From its Origin in the Xiao and Xiang Rivers to Hiroshige.* University of Canterbury, 2010, p. 49.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 57.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-60.

regarding the inseparability of the matter and spirit of landscape in the Chinese American context? Tan gives a comic depiction of *Qi*, which functions to mock contemporary American society's Orientalization of Chinese traditions. Her landscapes are rewritten from the point of view of the Chinese American female characters. However, instead of showing the human's spiritual meeting with landscape as frequently seen in the male-voiced Chinese landscape poems (山水诗 *shanshui shi*), Tan shows the indifference of landscape in her characters' encounter with the Kweilin landscapes. That is Tan's way of revisiting the inseparability of the matter and spirit of landscape in the Chinese American context.

The humanistic landscape in the Chinese tradition is born out of this vital interconnection between the matter and spirit of landscape. Landscape has its own matter and spirit just as human beings do, which engenders the humanist view of landscape. This absence of differentiation between mountains and waters on the one hand and that of human beings on the other is termed as "equivalence of mountain and me"[1]. In the novels under study, Tan's landscapes are depicted through the female characters' points of view. This sets up a contrast with male-voiced landscape poems: Tan's landscapes are nonchalant, indifferent to the horrors of war, sexual abuse, and the injustice of fate. In the female-voiced poems, nature is more often unfeeling and fails to be a site of mutual man-nature resonance. In Li Bai's poem "Spring Thoughts (春思)," the warm spring breeze, the fresh green grass and the ripened mulberry trees are not aware of the speaker's sadness and pining for her lover.[2] Tan enriches this tradition because her landscapes are actually narrated by female voices and written by a female writer.

---

[1] Tang Zhiqi (唐志契), a landscape painter from the Ming dynasty proposes this idea of "equivalence of mountain and me" which means that "'equivalent' to my 'nature' (性), or the 'disposition' affecting the mountain 'equivalent' to the 'disposition' that affects me (情). It is said that in the name of this 'equivalence' there can effectively be a shared tensional field between the one and the other" (Yu, Anlan, ed. *Hualun Congkan.* Vol. 1. Zhonggua shuju, 1977, p. 113. / 于安澜，《画论从刊》第一辑。中华书局，1997，113 页).

[2] Li Bai writes that "The frontier grass must be showing a fresh silken green, for the mulberry trees here are already heavy with luscious leaves.
When your thoughts turn towards home, know that I have long been pining.

The matter and spirit of landscape both emanate from the *yin-yang* interplay in nature. Transcendence emerges within this correlation between the matter and spirit of landscape. As a result, transcendence in mountains and waters comes from the physical. Zong Bing (宗柄 375–443), a Chinese artist who wrote the earliest text on landscape painting, finds in mountains and waters a place of emancipation. This emancipation, however, is not achieved by steering the artists to another world, as is often the norm in Western thought. Rather, emancipation is gained through the *yin-yang* tensions in mountains and waters. Transcendence in mountains and waters is then better understood as an elementary capacity that "makes itself known in a reactive and vital way"[1] in one's encounters with the world. Tan's female characters' engagement with landscape displays their entrapment within their identity struggle and their infatuation with the exotically Chinese—both of which they attempt to transcend through this very engagement. The characters' elementary capacity to vibrate with the world is depicted as an inaccessible mystified ideal.

1.2.1 Displacement of the Inseparability of Matter and Spirit

The concept of *Qi* (breath-energy) refers to the "fundamental substance from which all things rise and upon which everything depends for survival." [2] *Dao De Jing* writes that:

> Dao gives birth to One; One gives birth to two; Two gives birth to Three; Three gives birth to Ten Thousand things [. . .] The Great Void exists prior to the dao. The Oneness of dao manifests in or 'gives birth to qi and thus they are 'Three'."

To the spring breeze fluttering my flimsy curtains I say: Kindly keep out, stranger!" (Weng Xianliang's translation. The original text is 燕草如碧丝，秦桑低绿枝。当君怀归日，是妾断肠时。春风不相识，何事入罗帏？).

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 109.

[2] ZHANG, Yu Huan, and Ken Rose. "Chapter 2: *Qi* of The Philosophers, Section 1: Role of *Qi* in Ancient Cosmology and Ontology". *A Brief History of Qi*. Paradigm Publications, 2001.

> The eternal interplay between yin and yang, in other words qi, gives birth to the Ten Thousand Things—that is, everything.[1]

Everything proceeds from the *Qi* that deploys between heaven and earth. The glyph for "*Qi* (气)," which evokes the shape of a cloud, was later written as . The term "*Qi*" is to keep us in the transition from the perceptible to the imperceptible at the stage of evasive soaring and emanation. *Qi* both "condenses (forming the opacity of "bodies") and deploys (forming the "spirit" dimension)."[2] By analogy, Jullien describes the *Qi* in landscape painting as that which sustains a human body, "through breath-energy [*Qi*], which continuously makes the image emanate, just as it continually makes the world breathe. It [*Qi*] permeates the traces of the painting just as it passes through the veining of the mountain or the arteries of the human body."[3]

In their calligraphic practice, before writing, the calligraphers intimately observe the operating patterns of nature, relax their body and purify their mind. By doing this, they further adapt the *Qi* (气) of their own body to that of the whole universe in order to capture and transfer the vitality and spirit of nature on paper. This is how LuLing recalls Bao Bomu's practice of calligraphy in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*:

> I recalled for them what Precious Auntie had taught me about writing characters, how a person must think about her intentions, how her ch'i [*Qi*] flowed from her body into her arm, through the brush, and into the stroke. Every stroke had meaning, and since every word had many strokes, it also had many meanings.[4]

Bao Bomu instructs LuLing to first shift her intentions (*yi*) into the free-flowing *Qi* and then conduct the *Qi* into her moving arms. The life vitality of nature is thus transposed onto the tip of the brush pen and conveyed into the brushstrokes: "how her ch'i flowed from her body into her arm, through the brush, and into the stroke." When practicing calligraphy, LuLing's body becomes "a medium through her hand

---

[1] AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 171.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 115.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.
[4]OWEN, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought. No. 30*. Harvard Univ Asia Center, 1992, p. 226

and brush, she transmits to the paper."[1] The larger external environment and Lu Ling's body are intermingled by the *Qi* that is the meeting point of matter and spirit of landscape.

Tan deliberately gives a humorous and self-Orientalizing comment on the American obsession with the Eastern way of living through a plethora of apparently different concepts, which are all actually used to refer to *Qi*:

> Most of her [Ruth] early work had come from corporate communications clients. Her expertise had woven its way into communication in general, then communication problems, behavioral patterns, emotional problems, mind-body connections, and spiritual awakening. She had been in the business long enough to see the terms evolve from "chakras" to "ch'i," "prana," "vital energy," "life force," "biomagnetic force," "bioenergy fields," and finally back to "chakras."[2]

As a Chinese American self-help book "ghost writer," Ruth humorously comments on the evolution of the term "*Qi"* in the American book market as starting from the "'chakras' to and finally going back to 'chakras.'" For Jullien, the pursued state of *Qi* refers to the elusive state between matter and spirit that "transcends the stage of the crude and tangible and gives access to 'subtlety' and delves into the invisible."[3] Tan's humorous depictions deconstruct this elusive state of *Qi*. It should be noted here that Tan uses the term "ch'i" as the most commonly used in the West instead of *Qi* as transmitted from the Chinese accent directly. This way of presenting *Qi* denotes that Tan is an American writer. In *The Opposite of Fate* (2003), Tan writes:

> If I had to give myself any sort of label, I would have to say I am an American writer. I am Chinese by racial heritage. I am Chinese American by family and social upbringing. I live in this country and my emotional sensibilities, assumptions, and obsessions are largely American.[4]

The use of "ch'i" instead of "*Qi*" indicates that Tan's cultural and linguistic sensibilities, remains American. Tan has been criticized for betraying her status as the spokeswoman for the Chinese American community on account of her "deliberate misrepresentation of racial or national realities with an 'abundance' of

---

[1] Wiseman, Mary, and Liu Yuedi, eds. *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art*, Brill, 2011, 223.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 37.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness*. Zone Books, 2007, p. 90.
[4] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*. Penguin, 2003, p. 310.

imposed stereotypes."[1] The above passage mimics American readers' voyeuristic desire to discover the exotic sides of Asian cultures. The list of the names for *Qi* in the book market is displayed sarcastically by Tan, as she offers her reader a critique of commodified social reality and fragmented contemporary experience. British literary theorist Terry Eagleton has argued that late capitalism has proclaimed that artefacts and commodities are interchangeable where "art models itself upon a commodity form which is already invested with aesthetic allure, in a sealed circle."[2] The notion of "sealed circle" echoes Tan's description of the evolving *Qi* as departing from and returning to the same translated term "chakras" after various changes. The list of the various names for *Qi* in the American book market reveals the same misjudgment and misunderstandings of cultural and literary differences in contemporary American society. By developing or rather, by spinning the term *Qi*, Amy Tan wants to point out the dilemmas of writers with ethnic backgrounds. They want to portray their differences and diversity but more often than not, they are forced to repeat what the market needs.

Qi is represented in a comic and flippant way in the next paragraph from *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The comic depictions of *Qi* deepen the misunderstandings of characters from ethnic backgrounds living in America. The paragraph narrates a dialogue between Ruth and her client Agapi Agnos (who is a famous writer of self-help books). Ruth explains her misgivings about the car accident of her mother LuLing, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease:

> Ruth had related the incident to Agapi Agnos, who said inattention and danger could be related to depression in the elderly.
>
> She did not bring up the threats of suicide [from her mother LuLing], which she had heard so often she tried not to react to them.
>
> "I know of some excellent therapists who've worked with Chinese patients," Agapi said. "Quite good with cultural differences—magical thinking, old societal pressures, the flow of ch'i."

[1] ZHU, Aijun. *Feminism and Global Chineseness: The Cultural Production of Controversial Women Authors*. Cambria Press, 2007, p. 15.
[2] EAGLETON, Terry. "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism." *New Left Review*, vol. 52, 1985, p. 62.

> "Believe me, Agapi, my mother is not like other Chinese people." Ruth used to wish her mother were more like Auntie Gal. She didn't talk about ghosts or bad luck or ways she might die.[1]

Agapi represents the people who believe that all individuals with the same ethnic heritage are able to understand and communicate with each other. Consequently, the multiple problems confronted by the Chinese Americans can be easily solved according to her client: "Quite good with cultural differences—magical thinking, old societal pressures, the flow of ch'i." The sarcasm lies in the name of this character—"Agapi Agnos"—which is developed by Ruth as:

> Ruth was one of the few people who knew that Agapi's real name was Doris DeMatteo, that she had chosen her pseudonym because agapi meant "love" and agnos referred to ignorance, which she redefined as a form of innocence. That was how she signed her books, "Love Innocence, Agapi Agnos."[2]

Agapi indeed shows her love for "Innocence", or more precisely, her "ignorance" towards ethnic groups. Tan critic Melanie McAlister has argued that Tan has confronted Orientalist discourse, where the individual stories of different characters reflect the diversity of female characters and thus counter the criticisms that deem Tan's characters as identical and interchangeable.[3] And conversely, the above dialogue ridicules the idea that Tan's Asian American characters are exchangeable, thanks to its play on *Qi*. Ruth's differentiation between her mother and Aunt Gaul also indicates that Chinese American people are not indistinguishable. In the expression such as the one about the doctor who is "good with the flow of ch'i", Asians are depicted as "a homogeneous group, that implies we are 'all alike' and conform to 'types'."[4] Tan's text exposes the essentialization of Asian American identity as well as the suppression of the different hybridities among Asians. Her adoption of humor to render *Qi* aims to subtly explore human nature through the lens of the living realities of Chinese Americans.[5] Humor enables Tan to confront and effectively convey traumatic memories, as she explains in 2000 interview with the

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 156.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[3] MCALISTER, Melanie. "(Mis) Reading *The Joy Luck Club*", *Amy Tan,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 3-16.
[4] LOWE, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, 1991, p. 262.
[5] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 340.

Guardian newspaper: "what makes people resilient is the ability to find humor and irony in situations that would otherwise overpower you."[1]

The next paragraph uncovers the mythical landscape of the 'Immortal Heart village' in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001). The "vital energy—*Qi*" that symbolizes the mythical origin of the village, and which emanates from the holy tree, is deconstructed in Tan's ironic depiction; once again here, the mythical power bestowed from nature on the village is ridiculed:

> Rich and poor alike made a pilgrimage to Immortal Heart. They hoped that the tree's vital energy would rub off on them. They stroked the trunk, patted the leaves, then prayed for baby sons or big fortunes, a cure for dying, an end to curses. Before leaving, they chipped off some bark, snapped off some twigs. They took them away as souvenirs. Precious Auntie [Bao Bomu] said this was what killed the tree, too much admiration. When the tree died, the souvenirs lost their strength. And because the dead tree was no longer immortal, it was no longer famous, nor was our village. That tree was not even ancient, people said afterward, maybe only two or three hundred years old. As for the story about the emperor honoring his mother? That was a fake feudal legend to make us think the corrupt were sincere. Those complaints came out the same year that the old Ching Dynasty fell down and the new Republic sprang up.[2]

In Chinese natural philosophy, the understanding of the "Great Primal Beginning (*taiji* 太极)" provides humans with the origin of their thoughts, the principles of life and the foundation for man's creation. In the beginning the universe is a chaotic entity[3] pervasive of *Qi* (气) and then it separates into various forms that compose the myriad things. Communication between Heaven (nature) and man is made through the ritual whereby the witches chant and dance to communicate their *Qi* with that of Heaven.[4] The sayings about "Great Beginning" and that of the communion between

---

[1] JAGGI, Maya. "Ghosts at My Shoulder," *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features. Accessed 9 March 2020.

[2] TAN, Amy, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 153.

[3] Huainanzi writes that "When Heaven and Earth were yet unformed, all was ascending and flying, diving and delving. Thus it was called the Grand Inception. The Grand Inception produced the Nebulous Void. The Nebulous Void produced space-time; space-time produced the original *Qi*. A boundary [divided] the original *Qi*. That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; that which was heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth" (LIU, An, and John S. Major. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to The Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*. Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 247).

[4] The witches, according to the myths and records, "etch the will of the gods into a surface of sand or flour. For this ritual, two people in trance guide a writing instrument, oftentimes forked like a dowsing rod, while assistants try to make out individual characters in their scrawls, which

Heaven and men also help explain the Chinese belief in the obliteration of the spirit-matter boundaries of the myriad things (*wanwu*) including landscape.

However, in the down-to-earth description of human-supernatural communion, Tan's text undermines the idea that man and nature share the same *Qi* and can communicate with each other. Instead of manifesting the obliteration and integration of spirit and matter in the *Qi* of landscape, the myth of the blessing tree exhibits a disturbing relationship between man and nature. According to American literary theorist Philip Wheelwright, myth is derived from a curiosity about nature and a belief that what is seen in earthly presence is somehow copied from a nobler model or is following out some original divine command.[1] In her article "Landscape as Reflection in British Contemporary Art," Marjorie Vanbaelinghem views myth as either "anchor[ing] art into reality, provid[ing] reality with a meaning, weaving a web of references."[2] Or, as Bakhtin has argued, myth serves as a token of a tradition/shared culture that sublimates individual and private affairs that are connected in an intrinsic way with nature itself.[3] But the myth of the blessing tree in the above paragraph symbolizes instead the selfishness of man who destroys the gift from nature with "too much love." The repeated touch and prayers from the villagers and pilgrims are depicted with sensually tactile details such as "they stroked the trunk, patted the leaves, chopped off some bark, or snapped off some twigs." Tan renders the man and nature communion disturbing where the vital energy (*Qi*) from the blessing tree is depicted in ironic tones as fake and ill-intentioned. *Qi*, as a stage

---

will serve as a starting point for the divination" (HÖLLMANN, Thomas O. *Chinese Script: History, Characters, Calligraphy*. Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 98).

[1] Wright writes that "Ingredients of myth: ritual practices, curiosity about nature, a vague but powerful sense of presence lurking within or amidst or behind everyday objects, a developing moral sensitivity that seeks outward justification, and together with all these a readiness to believe that what is seen and enacted here in earthly presence is somehow copied after a nobler model or is following out some original divine command" (WHEELWRIGHT, Philip, *Metaphor & Reality*. Indiana University Press, 1962, pp. 129-130).

[2] Guibert, Pascale, ed. *Reflective Landscapes of the Anglophone Countries*. Rodopi, 2011, p. 188.

[3] BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 2010, p. 217.

of transition between spirit and matter that possess great potential of energy, is destabilized in Tan's text because there is too much matter in it.

The irony concerning the Immortal tree is that the tree is neither ancient nor old: "not even ancient […] maybe only two or three hundred years old." The myth behind the blessing tree is again ridiculed with the uncovering of the evil intention of the founder, who, according to the myths, was an emperor who intended to honor his dead mother, which is depicted by Tan as a "fake feudal legend to make us think the corrupt were sincere." The undermined authenticity of the blessing *Qi* given off by the holy tree exposes the failure of LuLing's epistemological quest. As Butler-Evans Elliott has argued, Tan's text "ceaselessly deconstructs its own narrative authority and overtly thematizes the epistemological difficulties of the American-born Chinese." [1] This epistemological failure also applies to Tan's other female characters who are positioned in between the Chinese and American landscape traditions.

The role that *Qi* plays in fusing spirit and matter in landscape in Chinese philosophy is further deconstructed in Tan's revision of the myth concerning the *Qi* of landscape in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). During the visit to the Chinese-born character Kwan's hometown—a remote village of China named Changmian—Kwan tells a dragon legend about the formation of the caves to American-born Olivia. The revised myth problematizes the ordered, fixed and static understanding of the *Qi* of landscape:

> "Sweep from mind American ideas. Think Chinese. Make you mind like dreaming. Two dragon, one male, one female."
>
> I [Olivia] open my eyes. It's as though I'm viewing the past as the foreground, the present as a faraway dream. "The peaks going up and down," I say, tracing in the air, "those are their two spines, right? And the way the two front peaks taper into those mounds, those are their two heads, with the valley tucked between their two snouts."
>
> Kwan pats my arm, as if I were a student who has recited her geography lessons well. "Some people think, 'Oh, village sit right next to dragon mouth—what bad *fengshui*, no harmony.' But to my way thinking, all depend what type dragon. These two dragon very loyal, good chi—how you say in English, good chi?"

[1] ELLIOTT, Butler-Evans. "Strategies of Self-Fashioning in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*", *Modern Language Association Convention*, 1989, pp. 27-30.

> "Long time ago two black dragon, husband and wife, live below ground near Changmian. Every springtime, wake up, rise from earth like mountain. Outside, these two dragon look like human person, only black skin, also very strong. In one day, two together can dig ditch all around village. Water run down mountain, caught in ditch. That way, no rain come, doesn't matter, plenty for grow plants.
>
> Okay, so people use arrow, kill dragon man and woman, pierce their body all over every place. Before die, crawl back inside earth, turn into dragon. See! Those two backs now look-alike six peaks. And where arrows gone in, make ten thousand cave, all twist together, lead one heart. Now when rain come, water flow through mountain, pour through holes, just like tears, can't stop running down. Reach bottom—flood! Every year do this."[1]

Tan presents a "language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to [her] family talk, the language [she] grew up with"[2] when writing Kwan's talk-stories. Kwan's spoken English preserves the imagery and rhythm of their native language. For Tan, this language is clear and natural; it fashions her own way of understanding and representing the world. Kwan's spoken English exhibits influences from the Chinese language, such as the omission of the verbs or subjects to ensure fluency, as in "These two dragon very loyal" or "Every springtime, wake up, rise from earth like mountain." The pursuit of naturalness in speech derives from the fact that the whole universe is made up of *Qi* and the movement of *yin* and *yang* forces within it.[3] As a result, human activity should return to the most natural state and become one with nature.[4] In her essay collection *The Opposite of Fate* (2003) Tan writes:

> But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 233-234.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 272.
[3] *Dao De Jing* says that "Everything carries yin on its shoulders and yang in its arms; And blends these vital energies (qi) together to make them harmonious (he)" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 171).
[4] *Zhuangzi* says that "To be the same as the very beginning is to be empty; to be empty is to be all-embracing. Human speech is mingled with the singing of birds. Having mingled their speech with the singing of birds, the people are mingled with the heaven and the earth [...] This is called 'divine virtue', in perfect accordance with the natural course of events" (汪榕培，英译；秦旭卿，孙雍长今译。《大中华文库庄子》。湖南人民出版社。外文出版社 1999, 183 页. / Translated into English by Wang Rongpei; Translated into Modern Chinese by Qin Xuqing and Sun Yongchang. *Library of Chinese Classic Zhuangzi*. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999, p. 183).

> imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world.[1]

All the "mistakes" in Kwan's English impart her particular way of seeing, feeling and behaving. Traditionally, Chinese people make sense of the world through myths or folklore that explain the origin of the universe including how the land has come into shape and how it has changed. In Chinese ancient mythology, various elements in the land are transformed from the body parts of supernatural beings or demigods. This trend is based on the fact that the relationship between Heaven, Earth and man is that between macrocosm and microcosm.[2] In the paragraphs cited above, Kwan's talk-stories of the caves and the dragons, express the idea that the dragons are transformed into human form. The Changmian caves are also metamorphosed from the dead body parts of dragons.

However, Tan effectively undercuts the "conceptual collapse of human beings into nature" acclaimed in Chinese mythology. Kwan gives her own interpretation of the dragon myth that formed the caves. Instead of being a threat to the villagers, the dragons possess good *Qi*. Kwan's revision offers a dialogue between the landscape that is intransigent in myths and the one that changes with the change in context. In Kwan's story, the dragons with good *Qi* serve as an emblem of power to revolt against the single and fixed myth. *Qi* here becomes the medium for Tan to assert her own "mythic/imaginary China and [the] re-telling of past Chinese stories,"[3] in the words of Amy Ling. Tan writes in her second collection of essays *Where the Past Begins* (2017) that:

> But its most important trait is this: it [the fictional mind] seeks a story, a narrative that reveals what happened and why it happened…what was fractured.

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2003, p. 273.

[2] According to the book *Huainanzi* (before 139 BC), a compilation of all schools of philosophical thoughts explaining the origin of the universe, the spirit of man (*ren* 人) is created by Heaven (*tian* 天) and the form and body are created by Earth (*di* 地) and the moving patterns of man are in harmony with these of Heaven and Earth: "Heaven has the four seasons, Five Elements, nine divisions, and three hundred and sixty days. Man likewise has four limbs, five viscera, nine orifices, and three hundred and sixty joints […] Thus man forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth, and his mind is the master" (FENG, Youlan. *A History of Chinese Philosophy. Vol. 1*. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 399).

[3] LING, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Millers of Chinese Ancestry*. Pergamon Press, 1990, p. 20.

> It combines those relics with imagination and stumbles across the pattern, and some essential part of the pattern lies in the memory of a true experience.[1]

The dragon myths of good *Qi* are indeed imagined by Tan. But they reveal the blend of Tan's imagination of China and her true emotional experience of the Chinese land. Writing the story, she imagines herself in the scene she is describing—the killings of the two dragons with good *Qi* and the sadness of their tear shedding that transfigures into the caves at the end of the story. Therefore, we can see that the revision of the dragon myth composes Tan's unique way of presenting her own version of China.

Qi, as an in-between-state that connects the matter and spirit of landscape, is displaced in Tan's comic depictions and the myth rewritings. The American fever for *Qi* reflects the phenomenon of the American book market which has championed the *Qi* as a mysterious vital energy from the Orient capable of healing every pain and solving every problem. The interchangeability of Chinese American characters in Asian American literature is ridiculed with the sarcastic depictions of the doctor who knows *Qi* well. Through Tan's humor, the strangeness of both commodified Asian traditions and commercialized Asian American literary works is revealed. Tan's own use of the term "ch'i" instead of *Qi*, on the other hand, displays the complexity of her own understandings of Chineseness. Also, through humor, Tan's rewritings of the myth about the blessing *Qi* from the ancient tree undercuts the communion between man and nature that is inherent in the conception of *Qi*. The dragon myth about the constructive power of *Qi* in shaping landscape is likewise destabilized with the introduction of Kwan's own judgement of the *Qi* of the dragons. Chinese myths, which make up Chinese landscape and are then embodied in the elaboration of *Qi*, are destabilized in Tan's humorous descriptions.

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 21.

1.2.2 Reconstruction of the Humanistic Landscape

The humanistic landscape expresses an interconnection of the matter and spirit of mountains and waters in Chinese landscape theory. The humanistic tendency refers to a particular way that the Chinese poets or painters record landscape: the artists observe changes in mountains and waters such as their "void" and the "full," the "high" and the "low," the "thick" and the "thin," the "dense" and the "sparse," or their "rise" and "fall." Artists convey what they grasp from those changes. Artists, mountains and waters meet in spirit: artists have the landscape at their disposal and the landscape has artists at its disposal. The landscape has artists speak on its behalf. In other words, artists express in their works the tension between their spirit and the landscape's spirit as a reciprocal process. Because of this reciprocity, we can say that poet and painters are not indifferent to what they apprehend. One particular poem by Song poet Xin Qiji (辛弃疾 1140-1207) illuminates this reciprocal relationship between humankind and landscape. In his poem "He Xinlang (贺新郎)," he writes:

> I see green mountain so lovely, charming,
> Expect green mountain see me should be like this.
> Emotion and appearance,
> Somewhat mutual like.[1]

The charming qualities of the "green mountains" please the poet and the poet is enchanting in the eyes of the appealing green mountain. The translation "green mountain" here indicates a special relationship between it and the poet. The poet and the green mountain act as each other's delight.

Tan deconstructs and reconstructs this humanistic landscape in her novels. For example, in her debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Tan portrays the Kweilin mountains as indifferent to the human suffering during the Japanese invasion. She revisits this humanistic landscape to convey compassion and hope by showing a

[1] TANG, Guizhang, ed. *Complete Ci Poetry of the Song. Vol. 3*. Zhonghua shuju, 1965, p. 1915. This is a published translation. Green mountain refers to this green mountain in front of the poet.

contrast between the unchanging Kweilin mountains and that of the increasingly painful experience of the narrative "I."

The humanistic way of representing landscape does not mean that the self is projected into the landscape or that the self becomes a personification of landscape's various elements. Rather, the artist opens him or herself to the conflict, integration and transformation of *yin* and *yang* forces in mountains and waters. As a result, human beings and landscape are made up of the same *Qi* and thus share the same physical tension. Reviewing Chinese landscape painting, the Chinese American historian of East Asian art Wen Fong (方闻 1930-2018) has argued that the human mind is defined as engaged with the nature of being[1] wherein human beings and nature are ontologically blended. For the Chinese-born poet and calligrapher François Cheng (程抱一), this association should be understood as an artistic aim at achieving communion between man and nature where man interiorizes and brings about the spirit residing within the physical world.[2]

Chinese landscape poems illustrate this point well. In the anthology of poetry entitled *Chu Ci* (楚辞) for instance, Qu Yuan (屈原 340–278 BC) attributes subjective qualities to the fragrant plants and makes flower gathering a symbol or metaphor for moral cultivation.[3] In *Hanfu* poems (汉赋) written during the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), the supernatural flights that are intended to transcend

[1] FONG, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, p. 75.
[2] CHENG, François. *Vide et Plein : Le Langage Pictural Chinois*. Éditions du Seuil, 1998, p. 84. My translation of the French text.
[3] The poet compares the virtues of sages to that "香 fragrance" of the orchids. Qu Yuan writes in "Li Sao" (离骚) that
"With lavished innate qualities indued,
by art and skill my talents I renewed;
Angelic herbs and sweet selineas too,
and orchids late that by the water grew."
The original text is
"纷吾既有此内美兮，
又重之以修能。
扈江离与辟芷兮，
纫秋兰以为佩"。

the world, actually serve to foreground the humanistic theme, which is the poet's profound engagement with the human world.[1] Numerous Tang poems also depict an empathetic joining of man and nature. In Du Fu's (杜甫 712-770) poems "The Jiang and Han Rivers By (江汉 *jianghan*)," the river, heaven and earth induce a pathetic and diminutive self-image of a "homeward traveler" and "worthless scholar." The images of "lone cloud" and "long night" intensify the mood of loneliness and melancholic brooding.[2]

Despite the predominance of the humanistic landscape in the Chinese literary canon, there also exists a sense of the indifference of landscape toward humankind. I find it very difficult to find a corresponding Chinese term to denote this "indifference of landscape toward human beings" among the many analyses of Chinese landscape poems. I will instead explain this indifference of landscape with two poems. In his poem "A Cold Garden: On What I See (寒园即目 *hanyuan jimu*)," Yu Xin (庾信 513–581) depicts a wintry landscape that is beset by dangers, murders and deaths, where human beings are the prey of wild animals and victims of the elements. Yu speaks:

> Snowflakes are several feet deep;
> An icy riverbed, over a foot thick.
> The dark hawk looks sideways at a pheasant;
> A white egret observes the fish down below. [3]

The freezing landscapes are hostile and unfriendly to human beings, which are a variation of the indifference of landscape to human feelings and experiences. In "An Outing to the Eastern Field Despondent (游东田诗 *you dongtian shi*)" by Xie Tiao

---

[1] Cai, Zong-Qi, ed. *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 59.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[3] LU, Qinli. *Poetry of the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties*. *Vol. 3.* Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 2377. The original text is
"雪花深数尺，
冰床厚尺余。
苍鹰斜望雉，
白鹭下看鱼。"

(谢朓 464–499), landscape serves as a reminder of the brevity of human life instead of a consolation: it is the alienation between man and nature which is stressed. The poet behaves as an onlooker who is able to appreciate but unable to participate in nature's cycle of renewal.[1] The indifference in Xie's poem then speaks of the unfeeling landscape that would change according to the rotation of seasons despite human sorrows or joys.

In *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the Kweilin mountains, like the landscape in Xie Tiao's poem, are depicted as remaining the same, not exchanging anything with the narrative "I." The narrative "I" is represented as limited and unable to receive anything from the Kweilin mountains. The meeting in spirit between landscape and humankind proposed in the humanistic landscape is then destabilized. The next two paragraphs are narrated by the Chinese-born mother figure Su Yuan who is addressing her American-born daughter June. Su Yuan recalls her experience of the Kweilin mountains during the Japanese invasion in the end of 1930s China:

> "So you can see how quickly Kweilin lost its beauty for me. I no longer climbed the peaks to say, How lovely are these hills! I only wondered which hills the Japanese had reached. I sat in the dark corners of my house with a baby under each arm, waiting with nervous feet. When the sirens cried out to warn us of bombers, my neighbors and I jumped to our feet and scurried to the deep caves to hide like wild animals. But you can't stay in the dark for so long. Something inside of you starts to fade and you become like a starving person, crazy-hungry for light. Outside I could hear the bombing. Boom! Boom! And then the sound of raining rocks. And inside I was no longer hungry for the cabbage or the turnips of the hanging rock garden. I could only see the dripping bowels of an

[1] Xie speaks:
"A mist rises, spreading in billows.
Where fish sport, new lotuses stir;
As birds scatter, remaining flowers fall.
If not facing the fragrant spring ale,
We shall gaze at villages in the blue hills instead."
(LU, Qinli. *Poetry of the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. Vol. 2.* Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 1425). The original text is
"生煙紛漠漠,
魚戲新荷動,
鳥散餘花。
不對芳春酒,
還望青山郭"。

> ancient hill that might collapse on top of me. Can you imagine how it is, to want to be neither inside nor outside, to want to be nowhere and disappear?
>
> "So when the bombing sounds grew farther away, we would come back out like newborn kittens scratching our way back to the city. And always, I would be amazed to find the hills against the burning sky had not been torn apart.[1]

At the beginning of the first paragraph, Tan points out that the Kweilin mountains are lost to the narrative "I". The previously dreamlike and fantastic affections the narrative "I" felt toward the Kweilin landscapes are gone: Suyuan comments that "In China, everybody dreamed about Kweilin. And when I arrived, I realized how shabby my dreams were, how poor my thoughts."[2] In the eyes of Suyuan, the Kweilin mountains are limited precisely to the perceptual aspects. The objective observation of the consecutive movements of the escaping people implies that the narrative "I" is not able to feel any emotion or feeling: she records "my neighbors and I jumped to our feet and scurried to the deep caves to hide like wild animals." We can see that Suyuan is only capable of recording what she perceives and hears automatically like a machine: "Outside I could hear the bombing. Boom! Boom!" The narrative "I" can only sense the Kweilin mountains in a largely restricted way of noting down the physical sensations such as hearing, sight and touch.

Tan's depictions form a clear divide between the outside and the inside of the cave. The outside is blaring with sirens and bombs while the inside is deadly quiet with merely the sounds of the raining rocks. To depict the sounds outside, Tan adopts consecutive punctuation with two exclamation marks and the onomatopoeia of "Boom, Boom." These illustrate the gradual deprivation of the narrative "I"'s capacity to feel, not to mention her capacity to process feelings. Language is lost to the narrative "I." The Kweilin mountains no longer speak to the narrative "I" and the narrative "I" fails to transfer the mountains' spirit into literary text. What is left for the narrative "I" is only her raw sensations of the Kweilin mountains, which are increasingly limited by her worsening sight.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 22.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Tan uses a lot of expressions related to light such as "dark," "fade," "light," and "could only see." The fading of sight, the blinding, and insanity caused by the loss of light are analogous to the Japanese army toward the common Chinese people. The gradual loss of sight is depicted in the sentence "I could only see the dripping bowels of an ancient hill that might collapse on top of me." The use of "only see" and "might collapse on top of me" further denote how the Kweilin mountains, for the narrative "I," change from being restricted to raw perceptions, to sheer disappearance and void. The narrative "I"'s residual ability to passively receive from the Kweilin mountains, is furthermore denied here because Suyuan wants to be "neither inside nor outside, [...] to be nowhere and disappear." In this way, the Kweilin mountains, are indifferent to the narrative "I" and the other escaping people. The narrative "I" loses the connection between her spirit and that of the Kweilin mountains, which breaks the two-way process of reception in the humanistic recording of landscape.

Tan uses synesthesia in the passage—such as "crazy-hungry for light"—to express that the Kweilin mountains remain unfeeling to human pain. In ancient Chinese poetry and essays, synesthesia is actually used to express an intimate connection between man and nature. For example, in *Liji* (礼记), one of the Five Classics of Chinese Confucian literature which is said to be compiled by the ancient sage Confucius (551–479 BC), the visual is used to evoke sound.[1] And sounds are used to depict the visual in Tang poet Bai Juyi's (白居易 772-846) "Night Snow (*Xue Ye* 雪夜)". Bai speaks that:

> Night far gone, I know the snow must be deep
> —from time to time I hear the bamboo cracking.[2]

[1] The essay goes: "In singing, the high notes rise as if they were borne aloft; the low descend as if they were falling to the ground; the turns resemble a thing broken off; and the finale resembles the breaking) of a willow tree; emphatical notes seem made by the square; quavers are like the hook (of a spear); and those prolonged on the same key are like pearls strung together 故歌者，上如抗，下如队，曲如折，止如槁木，倨中矩，句中钩，累累乎端如贯珠。" https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji/ens. Accessed 12 March 2020.

[2] The original text is
"夜深知雪重，
时闻折竹声。" My translation.

Also, in Bai's "Song of a Pipa Player (*Pi Pa Xing* 琵琶行)," touch is used to evoke sound. The poet speaks:

> Now liquid like orioles warbling in flowery land,
> Then sobbing like a stream running along the sand.
> But the stream seemed so cold as to congeal the string.
> And from congealed strings no more sound was heard to ring. [1]

Human emotions and moods are encompassed in the natural scenery and the natural scenery in turn affects human emotions and moods. In contrast, Tan's use of synesthesia discussed above does not reveal the intimacy between human spirit and that of mountains and waters. Rather, it implies a difference between them through the depiction of their contrast instead of their mutual reception and interpretation. Tang essayist and poet Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元 773-819) writes in his essay portraying landscape "My First Visit to the Western Hill (始得西山宴游记):"

> Then I realized that this was no common hill. I felt I was mingling freely with the boundless expanse of heaven, and lost myself in the infinity of nature […] I felt released from my body to blend with the myriad forms of created things.[2]

When wandering within the mountains and waters, the poet realizes the beauty of the natural rhythm of mountains and flowing water, sunrise and moonset, spring flowers and autumn fruits. The poet and the hill mingle without boundaries so that the poet gains a capacity to receive the spirit of the hill. In so doing, the poet is able to convey what he sees and feels from the hill as pleasure, the growth of life, and the cycle of life. But in Tan's writings about the Kweilin mountains in *The Joy Luck Club*, the blending of mountains' and humans' spirit is undermined. Instead, a contrast is established between the mountains' unchangeability and the increasing

---

[1] The original text is
"间关莺语花底滑，
幽咽泉流冰下难。
冰泉冷涩弦凝绝，
凝绝不通声渐歇。" My translation.

[2] Translation is based on the text in https://m.kekenet.com/kouyi/201605/445929.shtml. Accessed on 14 March 2021.

loss of capacity to feel and speak of the narrative "I." Tan's depictions of the indifferent Kweilin landscapes deconstruct the humanistic landscape.

In the Chinese literary canon, there are three types of landscape poems narrated with either a female or male voice or male voice. In the landscape poems written by male poets with a male voice, landscape is depicted as a site of mutual man-nature resonance or even empathy. In the poem "*Ban shan chun wan ji shi* (半山春晚即事 Late Spring, a Poem Improvised at Banshan)," the Song poet Wang Anshi (王安石 1021-1086) portrays a consoling landscape that provides him with reclusion from which the poet gains peace of mind:

> The spring breeze took the flowers away,
> rewarded me with clear shade.
> The shaded pavement is quiet,
> the garden house hidden by grass and trees is seclusive.[1]

The wind and flowers of the spring offer the poet a "clear shade," which is symbolic of his secluded life and a tranquil mind. The quietness of the pavement along the river and the shadowy garden house bestows on the poet serenity and quietude. By discovering the spiritual energy of the spring breeze, the poet experiences the freedom and beauty of life. The spring breeze brings about a tranquility of mind to the poet and in turn, the poet conveys the spring breeze's serenity in his poem. However, Tan's Kweilin landscapes show themselves unfeeling and indifferent to the personal pain of the narrative "I." The mutual offerings between man and nature in humanistic landscape is undercut in the passage selected above: the narrative "I" is restricted within her sight and hearing when hiding in the Kweilin mountains. This limitation within one's raw senses later diminishes into total disappearance and nothingness.

[1] My translation. The Chinese text is
"春风取花去，
酬我以清阴。
翳翳陂路静，
交交园屋深。"

Some Chinese landscape poems are also written by male poets who appropriate the voices of women, which makes the few women writers even more marginalized and almost invisible. Only a few women writers are recorded in the Chinese literary canon: Xue Tao (薛涛 678-831), Li Ye (李冶 730-784), Yu Xuanji (鱼玄机 844-868) and Li Qingzhao (李清照 1084-1151), Tang Wan (唐琬 1128-1156), *etc*. In their poems, landscape is more often insensitive and fails to offer the poet comfort and solace as depicted in many male-voiced poems. The descriptions of landscape then serve to express the poets' political ambition, which is much easier to express in a borrowed female voice. Tang poet Li Bai (李白 744-762) writes in "*Jiyuan* (寄远 Sending from afar)" that:

> I remember from afar the sun of Wushan and the warmth of the strained river.
> I am hesitant to go, and my tears are full of clouds in the south.
> The spring breeze is relentless, blowing my dreams away.
> I don't see the people in my heart, and the days are long and the messages are short.[1]

The poem depicts joyful scenery with a warm river and sunny weather in the first line. However, the cheerful landscape remains insensitive to the pain of the poet whose eyes are filled with tears. The spring wind is not reassuring but rather fierce and sweeps the female persona's wish to meet her beloved ones away. The indifferent spring weather reflects the poet's disappointing political life. For example, the poet was not able to convey his dream of constructing a better society for the sake of more common people because of political conflicts or negligence from the emperor. The unfeeling Kweilin landscape depicted in *The Joy Luck Club* does not express disillusionment regarding one's career but rather conveys human powerlessness to receive the spirit of the Kweilin mountains in a particular historical moment such as war. Tan's paragraph about the narrative "I" hiding in the cave is

[1] My translation. The original text is
"远忆巫山阳，花明渌江暖。
踌躇未得往，泪向南云满。
春风复无情，吹我梦魂断。
不见眼中人，天长音信短。"

narrated in the active voice but actually exhibits human passivity in the face of the inevitability of fate. Unlike the previous dream-like scene in the mind of the narrative "I," where the hanging rocks inside the secret caves are depicted as "so strange and beautiful you can't ever imagine them," where humans gain comfort and happiness from nature, here the irreconcilable difference between man and nature is accentuated, recalling the frailty of human beings. In Tan's portrayal, the humanistic landscape of mutual influence between humankind and nature is therefore reconstructed as human passivity in receiving nature's spirit.

In the female-voiced poems written by female poets, rather than failing to offer comfort, nature's spirit is portrayed as a contrast to human sorrows and sadness. In her poem "*Chunwang ci* (春望词 Spring gazing lyrics)" for example, the Tang poet Xue Tao (薛涛 768-832) portrays vigorous fluorescence and a spring breeze that are unaware of the melancholy of the forlorn lovers:

> Though the flowers may be blooming everywhere,
> that just makes the both of us long;
> in the morning mirror I face, streams of jade tears trickle down.
> O zephyr of spring, do you know, or is my sorrow unknown?[1]

The blossoming of the flowers evokes the sadness and sorrows within the poet. Nature changes according to the rotation of the four seasons despite the cheerfulness or heartbreak of human beings. The indifferent Kweilin mountains in *The Joy Luck Club* are actually narrated in the voice of women and written by a female writer. Tan creates her own voices and offers us a landscape that is narrated by females and translated into the literary text by female writers. She establishes her own way of writing landscapes that not only integrates but also transcends prescribed female affinities with nature, instead of displaying a female sensitivity in expressing

[1] Translated by Bannie Chow and Thomas Cleary. The original text is
"那堪花满枝，
翻作两相思。
玉箸垂朝镜，
春风知不知。" https://www.en84.com/dianji/shi/201006/00002486.html. Accessed on March 14 2021.

personal emotions through the engagement with landscape. The Kweilin mountains remain the same, give nothing to the narrative "I" and, *vice versa*; the narrative "I" loses the capacity to even receive and does .not gain anything from the Kweilin mountains. In the passage selected here, the narrative "I" first loses her ability to connect to the mountains. She is then limited to her raw senses such as hearing and seeing when hiding inside the mountains. Even these restricted senses begin to decline and become a total void where the narrative "I"'s feeble connection with the mountains has faded, as evoked by the formulaic appeal in the quotation "Can you imagine how it is." Finally, the narrative "I" is left in a state of amazement that deprives her of her ability to feel, speak and express herself. The humanistic landscape of mutual influences between landscape and humankind is therefore reconstructed as a contrast between the unchanged Kweilin mountains and that of the deprived narrative "I" in its encounter with the mountains.

In Tan's second novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), just as in *The Joy Luck Club*, the Kunming landscape retains its own beauty in stark contrast with the human sufferings undergone during the Japanese invasion. The following paragraphs narrate Winnie's surprise at the unchangeable natural landscape despite the suffering caused by her abusive husband and the tragic loss of her children:

> And then one of the pilots did shout, "Stop!" and ran down the aisle to give further instructions to the driver, pointing to the side of the road. Sure enough, the bus gave a big groan and stopped. I bit my hand to stop myself from crying out loud. Three pilots rushed out the door. I thought we were being attacked. I stood up and looked out the window. And I let out such a big laugh when I saw what they were really doing—taking pictures with a camera!
>
> One of them was standing in a rather silly pose, proudly pointing to the sky—as if the sky here were different from everywhere else. I wanted to laugh. And then I too looked at that sky. And I remember I had a very strange feeling, the way you feel when you are coming out of a confusing dream. It was as if I had never seen Kunming before. Because what I saw was not just an ordinary sky, ordinary clouds. The color of the sky was shocking to the eye, such a bright blue, like a sapphire. And the clouds three of them, one right after the other—were shaped just so, like gigantic cushions for the gods of the heavens. And then I saw a bird, a large bird, the color of its wings underneath like a rainbow. I saw green hills covered with trees, their arms sweeping down, brushing the ground. And running along the ground were flowers, so many different kinds, bursting wild from the earth. And beyond that I could see the old city itself, the peaceful

> winding streets, the whitewashed walls, now looking clean-bright from a distance.[1]

In the Chinese literary canon, women's writings about the landscape are relatively scarce and tend to deploy landscape as an "affective image" as Stephen Owen terms it, functioning to trigger a feeling, a mood, or a thought.[2] The themes are confined to romantic relationships or family life and the aim of writing the landscape is limited to the speaker's expression of their loneliness and yearnings for love. Tan portrays the natural landscape with its own matter and spirit that remain impervious to human emotions. The Kunming landscape is contextualized in the time of war. Within the scarce amount of literary works about war by female writers, war, blood and violence are generally connected to the metaphorical pursuit of love, either between couples or between sisters.[3] But what is interesting about Tan's renderings of landscapes in time of war is that she foregrounds Winnie's inability to grasp the overwhelming personal and historical traumas ("And I remember I had a very strange feeling, the way you feel when you are coming out of a confusing dream"). In her chapter "Asymmetries: Loss and Forgiveness in the Novels of Amy Tan," Cynthia Wong correctly points out the impossibility of Tan's Chinese-born female characters to comprehend the overwhelming historical forces upon life. For Tan, Chinese landscape, or the full measure of Chinese landscape, is also difficult for her protagonists to grasp.[4] Tan inscribes and reconstructs the humanistic landscape for there seems to be a mutual incomprehension and exchange of absence between Winnie and the Kunming landscape. The humanistic landscape is rewritten through a reciprocal absence between landscape and human beings. But Tan's literary revisiting of the Chinese humanistic landscape tradition creates an imaginative space for her to present the magnitude of historical and personal histories during the Japanese invasion.

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife.* Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 317.
[2] OWEN, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Harvard University Asia Center, 1996, p. 8.
[3] FONG, Grace S., and Ellen WIDMER. *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*. Brill, 2010, pp. 267-271.
[4] LEE, A. Robert. *China Fictions/English Language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story*. Brill, 2008, p. 75.

The displacement of the humanistic landscape is, on the one hand, accentuated in the comic reverse of the pilots who take pictures of the sky instead of attacking or being attacked from the sky. The recurrent "dream" motif in the novel represents potential death as well as the unreality of the war, as in: "you are coming out of a confusing dream." It is also shown in the scene of Winnie's seeing off of her husband's planes, "Rain, steam, and smoke were swirling all around, so the planes looked as if they were moving forward in an uneasy dream."[1] The sentence "It was as if I had never seen Kunming before," intensifies the divergence of the natural landscapes from human affairs. On the other hand, Winnie's suffering is emphasized in the contrast with the luminous and vigorous landscapes, where the sky is compared to a sapphire, the clouds are "cushions for the gods of the heavens" and the colorful bird wings are poeticized as a rainbow. Here we can see a contrast between the spiritual and bodily comfort the cushions offer to us and Winnie's incomprehension of the Kunming landscape during a time of war. Tan's comparison of the clouds to the residing place of God indicates the early Chinese view of nature in which nature is viewed as dangerous and out of human beings' control. People remained powerless in nature and they took in whatever nature had imposed on them.[2] Heaven is where the supernatural resides and people are supposed to offer up sacrifices to show their respect to nature. Recorded in *Zhouli* (周礼 Rites of Zhou), one of the classics of Confucianism around the 12th century B.C., people made sacrifices to various Gods of nature such as God of Heaven, Star, Moon, Wind and Rain, Mountain and Water as well as Land. However, Winnie's comparison of the clouds as the place where the God resides undercuts this primordial respect and awe toward nature. Rather, the comparison expresses an antithesis between one's primitive involvement in nature and that of the interruption of this intimacy in a time of war.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 189.

[2] Xu writes that "From the Middle Paleolithic to the Late Paleolithic, human lifestyle was mainly based on hunting and gathering, and the means of living depended entirely on nature's bounty, which led to the dependence on and fear of nature. People then showed both a dependence on and fear of nature" (XU, Hong. "On the Worship of Nature in Ancient China", *Journal of Jishou University (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2000. P. 38). My translation.

In Tan's fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), Tan portrays a jungle that is encountered by the twelve American visitors who are kidnapped by a primordial tribe in Myanmar. The following paragraph displays an antithesis between the vivid and vibrant jungle that has its own life and that of the American travelers who are deprived of their sight, hearing and comprehensive capacity when confronted with this dynamic jungle:

> They had entered a green-veined new world, a vibrant, single-hued world of wildlife that quivered and breathed. Everywhere the travelers looked, it was choked with creepers, vines, and liana hanging, winding, and snaking their way through, making it seem that the jungle ended only a few feet in front of them. It was disorienting to see so much green. The tree trunks were mossy and bedecked with epiphytes: ferns, bromeliads, and tiny pale orchids took root in the soil-rich nooks and crannies of trees. Birds called warning. Somewhere in the distance, a branch creaked with the weight of an un-known creature, possibly a monkey. With small intakes of breath, my friends registered their astonishment.[1]

The "green-world" is represented with intensive image clusters which are effective in expressing that it has its own life. In their article "On spatial reconstruction of *Saving Fish from Drowning*," Ren and Yan argue that the high-density arrangement of various images enhances the perceived intensity of reading and strengthens the spatial density of discourse and spatial illusion of the text.[2] The images in the paragraph overlap, interact and contradict: the green landscape of "wildlife" is pervasive of signs of life vitality (the landscape breathes) and life-threatening alerts (the landscape also quivers). The verbs of action "quivered and breathed" at the beginning of this paragraph impart vividness to the natural scenery and phenomena in which the tribal people dwell. This vividness constitutes a great antithesis with the travelers whose presence is greatly reduced. The words denoting humankind only appear three times ("they", "the travelers" and "my friends") compared to the numerous references to plants and animals. Even this diminished presence is further outshone by the energetic movements of the plants and animals, as in "creepers, vines, and liana hanging, winding, and snaking their way through"

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. 237-238.
[2] REN, Wei-li, and Yan DONG. "On Spatial Reconstruction of *Saving Fish from Drowning*," *Journal of Hefei University of Technology (Social Sciences)*, issue 6, 2013, p. 86. My translation.

or in “a branch creaked with the weight of an un-known creature.” In contrast, the travelers remain shocked and motionless as if they were deprived of life when encountering this vibrant world that is brand new to them. The lively plants and animals are everywhere so that their pervasiveness is suffocating for the travelers. In addition, the travelers are represented as staying in a limited space and restrained within a passive acceptance of the vigorous activities of the “green world.” The travelers’ space is, in this way, “robbed” by the vivacious creatures of the jungle.

What adds to the travelers’ deprivation is their inability to name the plants and animals which they perceive in this “green world”: the plants and animals are named in general terms instead of in specific ones such as “wildlife,” “creepers, vines and liana,” “the tree,” “birds” or “un-known creature.” What the travelers see in this “green-world” is beyond their capacity of comprehension and realm of knowledge. Besides, even their passive perceiving of the jungle is hindered by the limitation of their range of sight. The travelers are not able to see the creatures from a distance, as conveyed in “Somewhere in the distance, a branch creaked with the weight of an un-known creature, possibly a monkey.” As a result, the travelers are restricted within their hearing, which increases their sense of dispossession. The green in the jungle makes the travelers dizzy and lose control of direction “making it seem that the jungle ended only a few feet in front of them.” The *disorientation* here is very interesting because this jungle scene depicts the experience of the eleven American travelers’ to the “Orient”—Myanmar. Tan then plays with the concept of “Otherness” because the travelers become the Other in this vibrant “Oriental” world. They are depicted as the inactive party who are forced to receive whatever the vivid jungle imposes on them. Toward the end of this paragraph, the travelers are totally lost in the jungle because they have nothing to do but take in small breaths and remain astonished. For the travelers, not only is the mutual receptive path between them and the jungle blocked, but they are also then made silenced and made passive—disoriented—by the Oriental jungle.

Tan’s written landscapes examine and establish her own interpretations of the matter and spirit of landscape in tension between the above-mentioned two

tendencies of depicting landscape. Chineseness, as embodied in the intimate connection between the matter and spirit of landscape is therefore relocated and revisited with new angles of consideration. The humanistic view of landscape has been displaced in the war, sexual abuse and personal tragedies in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The communion between man and nature in the male-voiced works written by male writers has been replaced by a feeling of indifference and alienation, while the strangeness between man and nature in the female-voiced works by male writers have been given new layers of significance because Tan's landscapes are written by a female writer from the point of view of her female characters. In *Saving Fish from Drowning,* the vitality of the oriental "green-world" forms a contrast with the travelers whose lives appear insignificant. The oriental jungle escapes the Western travelers' comprehension. When situated in this chokingly new world, the travelers cannot receive or take in anything from it. They are the silenced, diminished humanistic landscape of mutual reception and understanding between humankind and nature is therefore undercut. Tan has revisited the humanistic landscape of the Chinese literary canon with an emphasis on her characters' loss or even deprivation of capacity to receive or understand anything from landscape. The next subchapter will continue to explore Tan's representation of her characters' inability to grasp the spirit of landscape, focusing on another aspect of the interconnection of matter and spirit—transcendence in landscape.

1.2.3 Transcendence in Tan's Written Landscapes

As we have seen, Chinese philosophy posits the inseparability of matter and spirit in landscape. François Jullien argues that this interconnection leads to what he terms the undifferentiated "haze" state, which is at the foundation of *Dao*, from which the

myriad things come into being.[1] *Qi,* as discussed in the first subchapter, designates this "haze" state whose physical and material side engenders the myriad things. This vague condition also keeps everything in nature including human beings "aloft in their soaring spirit."[2] For instance, in Guo Xi's (郭熙 1000-1090) painting *Old Trees, Level Distance* (树色平远图 *shuse pingyuan tu*) from the Northern Song dynasty, the vagueness of mountains and waters are achieved by the use of thickening-and-thinning brushstrokes that range from blue gray to charcoal black. This particular painting produces a "haze" state that is blurred and wet in atmosphere:

Fig. 3. Old Trees, Level Distance (树色平远图). Guo Xi (郭熙 1000-1090).

Qi, as a transitional state between the physical and the spiritual, is endowed with the potential for unceasing change and mutual transformation. The two-way alternation of *yin* and *yang* forces indicates that the myriad things in nature including the matter and spirit of landscape evolve in a processual way. Thus, the Western notion of transcendence (a transcendent form, the notion of a Beyond) is not part of the Chinese conceptualization of reality. Chinese transcendence does not exist as a Beyond waiting to be reached as posited in its Western counterpart. Rather, Chinese painters and poets seek transcendence through their physical activities in landscape: they stroll in the mountains, rest by the river, and contemplate from one mountain to

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 46.
[2] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*, Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 63.

another, *etc*. In so doing, they gain a "capacity(*de* 德)" to experience transcendence through observing, feeling and understanding the *yin-yang* interplay in nature that is manifested as mountains and waters. In Chinese thought, transcendence is understood as a "capacity" that constitutes a fund from which the whole process such as engendering and conversions spring. "Capacity (*de* 德)" means a productivity to induce the evolution of the myriad things through the play of polarities, which goes on without confronting the situation or exhausting itself.[1] That is to say, the process of all that exists such as mountains and waters continually proceeds from the same reality.

In Western philosophy, earthly reality implies a substantialist bias, the bias of "thing-ness." In landscape painting notably, the painter's purpose is to represent "reality" through grasping something specific and determined. In Chinese landscape painting, on the other hand, the aim is to explore and record the correlation between mountains and waters, which are in an unceasing transition from the physical to the spiritual. Based on the above-mentioned different views on what is called reality, transcendence has different meanings for Chinese and Western people. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines transcendence as "has gone, gone beyond, rising above or crossing over." Platonic thought, which has inspired Western conceptualization, establishes the superiority of Heaven as the embodiment of the transcendental. The earthly counterpart of Heaven is made up of imperfect copies of the transcendental ideal. According to Cosgrove, Daniels and Baker's *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988), most 19th century scientists believed that nature revealed the handiwork of Creation.[2] For example, people looked at flowers "not only as delightful objects, but as prototypes of the divine."[3] In Chapter 1 "The Geography of Mother Nature," Peter Fuller contends that it was English art critic John Ruskin who first articulated the frightening prospect that without religious association, nature would turn out to be

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings.* Yale University Press, 2015, p. 128.
[2] COSGROVE, Denis, Stephen Daniels, and Alan RH Baker, eds. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments.* Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 17.
[3] CLARK, Kenneth, and Frank Taylor. *Landscape into Art*. Beacon Press, 1961.

"actually meaningless, simply mindless matter."[1] The historical crisis in landscape painting at the beginning of the nineteenth century arose from this realization. As a result, the use of landscape as symbol declined. Landscape painters were then inhibited by their inability to represent landscape faithfully based on their understandings of reality because the burgeoning industrial economy had estranged then from nature.[2] The sublime came to replace the religious belief that everything in nature is the manifestation of the spiritual and an episode from the sacred story of Creation.[3] It constitutes another form of the sacred.

In response to this departure of the Godhead from his natural works, during the nineteenth century, American art conversely witnessed a rise of transcendentalism. American Transcendentalists defined nature as "a divinely created work, or the manifestation of God or spirit in visual form."[4] American Transcendentalism believes in the equivalence between "the higher realm of spiritual truth and the lower one of material objects."[5] One of the central figures of the Hudson River school, Frederic Church (1826-1900) is argued by art critics to portray a transcendent Deity in the sky. In his *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860)[6], Church portrays a valley in a

[1] COSGROVE, Denis, Stephen Daniels, and Alan RH Baker, eds. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 21.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[3] CLARK, Kenneth, and Frank Taylor. *Landscape into Art*. Beacon Pres, 1961.
[4] GUARDIANO, Nicholas. *Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting*. Lexington Books, 2016, p. 16.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[6] Wendy argues that people have many different interpretations of the painting "What I find fascinating is that everybody who looked on this magnificent scene and published a reaction seems to have a different interpretation. Some homed in on the eagle, up there on the left, and saw a symbol of American power. Some noticed where the branches cross, and saw a suggestion of Christianity. Others, noting the absence of human beings, claimed the pines as our surrogates –standing tall and strong, as the frontier expects. I must say that the pines most evident are somewhat twisted and scruffy, which gives the landscape a remarkable air of conviction; this is no ideal place, but truly what Church looked down upon. The one interpretation that I find sustainable hinges on the painting's date. In 1860, the menace in the sky would have been all too real. The Civil War would soon break out, and the blood-red tide would spread throughout the land" (Archive. http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/church/twilight_wilderness.jpg.html. Accessed on 02 April 2021).

wild mountain range with a small river running below. The heavens are ablaze where the clouds are delineated in flaming arcs rising toward the zenith:

Fig. 4. *Twilight in the Wilderness* (48 13/16 x 72 13/16 x 5 1/8 in). Frederic Edwin Church, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1860.

The painting shows religious symbols. J. Gray. Sweeney, for example, contends that the tree stump in the left foreground symbolizes a wilderness altar, complete with a cross made of tiny wood splinters.[1] David Huntington suggests that a small gap in the clouds which is found as following the line of the tree stump is a "Dove of the Holy Spirit."[2] The portrayal of a detailed foreground locates us viewers in a position to interact with the valley, the sky and the river. However, the mountain range, especially the parts in contact with the sky, remains untouched and mysterious. By using only one bright color, Church creates a great contrast between the sky ablaze with dramatic lighting and the earthly shadows. The bright sky implies

[1] SWEENEY, J. Gray. "The Nude of Landscape Painting: Emblematic Personification in the Art of the Hudson River School." *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 3, no.4, 1989, p. 57.
[2] WHITMAN, Walt. *Specimen Days in America* (1882). Folio Society, 1979, pp. 90-91.

an unknowable and unapproachable presence for the viewers. The luminous sunset scene is therefore charged with a sense of the stillness and solemnity[1] of undisturbed primeval nature. This means that Church creates a sense that something supernatural prevails in his painting. Though conveying some aspects unknown or untouched by humankind, Creation is revealed in Church's paintings as that expressed in many nineteenth century American landscape paintings.[2]

The American Transcendentalist idea about finding the presence of God in nature harks back to the beliefs of the early settlers in America. For instance, Puritans considered their conquest and transformation of the "wilderness" into a "land of milk and honey" as evidence to support their belief in nature as a demonstration of God's blessings.[3] Thoreau, for instance, saw the "wilderness" as an invisible companion who walked by his side. That companion was defined by Thoreau as "grand, serene, immortal, and infinitely encouraging." [4] In other words, a spiritual gift and awakening are believed to be granted to human beings by the "wilderness," unsullied by human contact and contamination. The American novelist Herman Melville (1819-1891) represents this realization of transcendental experience in his characters' exposure to the unfathomable tides of Creation. In one particular scene from *Moby-Dick* (1851), the protagonist Ishmael feels in the communion of power that is outside one's reach, and yet which is the source blood of maintains the human beings and nature.[5]

---

[1] "Fine Arts." *The Albion*, 1860, p. 273. The quoted term was retrieved from Franklin Kelly's research for "Frederic Edwin Church and the North American Landscape, 1845-4860".

[2] To name just a few: *Sunset on the Coast* (1859) by Charles Temple Dix; *Dawn of Morning, Lake George* (1868) by Jasper Francis Cropsey; *Peaceful Evening* (1850-1860) by Christopher Pearse Cranch and *Storm in the Adirondacks* (1870) by Ernest Parton.

[3] NASH, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind.* Yale University Press, 2014, p. 37.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[5] Melville writes in the episode "The Mast-head" that "[Ishmael] lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some indiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space" (Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (Rev. ed.). Penguin Group, 2002, p. 243).

In Daoism conversely, transcendence comes from the original non-being that goes beyond all distinctions and descriptions. Transcendence in Chinese philosophy evolves into the idea of "travelling beyond the mundane world" to achieve genuine freedom as advocated by the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (庄子).[1] Thinkers in ancient China opposed the subordination of human conduct to the transcendent order, be it religious or ritual.[2] Chinese landscape painting for instance, at once transcends reality while remaining deeply connected with and grounded firmly in that reality. It is not elusive like the transcendental in the West. Chinese aesthetics is a system of experience and transcendence where the world is considered as not a physical existence, but as the truth derived from life experience.[3] Chinese landscape paintings represent the reproduction and transcendence of the reality floating between Heaven (*tian* 天) and Earth (*di* 地). But how can landscape bring us into transcendence? Chinese landscape painter and theorist Zong Bing (宗炳 375-444) sought transcendence following the death of his beloved wife by roaming through landscape, contemplating and listening to the *yin-yang* changes manifested by mountains and waters, and wandering at leisure, as well as being immersed in remote hills and rivers. In essence, Chinese views on transcendence emerge from the correlation of *yin* and *yang* forces which enables a constant correspondence between various pairs. Transcendence is the manifestation of this intimate connection between the matter and spirit of mountains and waters.

Tan's fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) and her sixth novel *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), revisit Chinese and American views on transcendence. In *The Valley of Amazement*, the freedom that is supposed to be gained from one's transcendence from landscape is displaced by Tan's ambiguous renderings of the

[1] Zhuangzi writes that "Alone he [the sage] associates with Heaven and Earth and spirit, without abandoning or despising things of the world [...] Above, he roams with the Creator, and below he makes friends with those who transcend life and death and beginning and end [. . .] In regard to the fundamental, he may be said to have harmonized all things and penetrated the highest level" (*Chuang Tzu, Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*, Translated by Ha Giles. Unwin Hyman, 1961, pp. 318-321).
[2] JULLIEN, François. *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness*. Zone Books, 2007, p. 13.
[3] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 20.

American character Lucia reacts to the valleys portrayed in one particular landscape painting. The elevation connecting the individual to Deity that is achieved from one's transcendence from one's worldly desires is likewise undercut by Tan's allusion to Lucia's yearnings for the exotic from the Chinese author of the painting. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the complexity of transcendence is displayed in the characters' multiple views of the same misty lake. Transcendence obtained from landscape is further complicated with the introduction of the post-humous narrative of a Chinese American socialite and art dealer Bibi Chen.

In *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), the American-born character Lucia is entrapped within her infatuation for the Chinese artist Lu Shing. The following paragraph records their first meeting where Lucia realizes her passionate love for the world, with which she yearns to further connect. Lucia's reactions to the painting displace some American Transcendentalist ideas. Tan renders Lucia's psychological path in a long monologue with great candidness, and intensive emotions:

> [. . .] I felt its atmosphere as real and present, the touch of its cool air, and I had a complete understanding that this was my home, and the solitude was not loneliness but the clarity of who I was. I was that long green valley, unchanged from the beginning of time. The five mountains were part of me as well, my strength and courage to face whatever entered the valley. The sky held dark gray clouds, which cast shadows over part of the valley, and I understood that storms had once buffeted me and I had had to cling to the trees on the mountain. I had once feared that the dark clouds would evaporate and so would I. But look—the undersides of the clouds were pink, pendulous, and erotic. And most wondrous of all: a golden vale lay beyond the opening of the mountains. In that golden place was the painter of this Utopia. I caught Lu Shing watching me with his pleased expression. It was as if he knew exactly what I was thinking.[1]

The paragraph is narrated from Lucia's first-person point of view and depicts the American-born woman's first encounter with Lu Shing's landscape painting *Valley of Amazement*. Lucia was born into a sexually eccentric family with a hypersexual father and an ascetic mother. Lucia is rebellious, secluded and lives in her own small world avoiding any profound or meaningful contact with the outside. She has too many boyfriends and maintains loose relationship with many of her classmates. Lucia's upbringing causes her to detach herself from a connection with the world;

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement.* Ecco, 2013, p. 448.

however, she yearns for attachment and communication. In Tan's passage, Lucia seems to achieve an interconnection with the painted valleys, which recalls American Transcendentalists who also create an intimate connection with nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) establishes a special relationship with landscape by nodding to and receiving the nod from the waving boughs surrounding him. Emerson writes that "I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of boughs in the storm is new to me and old."[1] This special relationship results in an extended affinity between nature, cosmos, humankind, and art.[2] When they are submerged in their gaze upon the landscape without any physical movement, the viewer is led into a dialogue with nature without the need of speaking. This speechless communication then quickly becomes a communion with the transcendental unity.[3] However, Lucia's ensuing confession about her sexual desire undermines this mute man-nature communication: here in Tan's renderings, Lucia's wordless communication with the valleys in the painting actually exhibits her obsession with the exotic and erotic land delineated in the painting and the Chinese author behind the painting. Instead of achieving serenity of mind through a unification with the painted valley, Lucia becomes more passionate with fierce wishes and desires, as evoked in her interpretation of the clouds around the valleys as "pink, pendulous, and erotic." By depicting Lucia's sexual desires for the Chinese landscape painter Lu Shing, Tan ironically points out the stereotypical de-sexualization of Asian American men and the hyper-sexualization of Asian American women so as to address white man's masculinity, virility and superiority.[4] Tan wants to point out this over-sexualization exists in American society as well. From this perspective, Lucia's "transcendence" acts as an obstacle to her

[1] EMERSON, Ralph Waldo. Nature. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29433/29433-h/29433-h.htm. Accessed August 11, 2020.
[2] GUARDIANO, Nicholas. *Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting*. Lexington Books, 2016, p. xvii.
[3] NOVAK, Barbara. *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 24.
[4] KIM, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature, An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context.* Temple University Press, 1982, p. 70.

understanding of the self and others instead of assisting mutual understandings and communication.

Tan's depictions of transcendence are different from the meanings of transcendence conventionalized in American landscape painting and literary works as somewhere extending beyond human reach and comprehension, where one comes close to the Eternal Truth. Lucia's "transcendence" actually stresses the fact that she yearns more than anyone for physical touch and emotional understanding from the world and the worldly. The harder Lucia struggles to gain transcendence from either nature or from intimate relationships, the deeper she is entrapped. Through her depiction of the complex relationship between entrapment and transcendence, Tan emphasizes the ambiguous feelings that have become more and more explicitly definitional of human experience. Tan's written landscapes do not limit themselves to the discussion of the Chinese or American experience of landscape. Rather, *The Valley of Amazement* extends to deal with the problem of human experience and conflicts involving the interconnection between the aesthetic and existential aspects.

Tan's written landscapes displace the indwelling connotations of the Chinese transcendence—forgetting (*zuowang* 坐忘). In the words of Zhuangzi (an influential Daoist philosopher from around the 4th century BC during the Warring States period), by forgetting what year it is and what should or should not be, we get the chance to align ourselves with silent transformation. Forgetting is the path to gaining freedom which is infinite and will nourish human life.[1] Transcendence purifies the human mind and helps us to find detachment from the causal chain that binds our existence. Viewed from this perspective, forgetting and transcendence cease to be opposites but instead become correlated. Tan's portrayal of Lucia's reactions towards the landscape at the beginning of this paragraph blurs the boundaries between Lucia and the painted landscapes, as depicted in Lucia's transposition into

[1] Zhuangzi writes that "The Genuine Human Beings […] neither remember[s] where they came from nor ask[s] where they would go. Receiving it, they delighted in it. Forgetting about it, they gave it back. This is what it means not to use the mind to push away the Way, not to use the Human to try to help the Heavenly" (ZIPORYN, Brook. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries.* Hackett Classics, 2009, p, 40).

the painted landscapes ("I was that long green valley, unchanged from the beginning of time"). The close connection between man and nature seems to emerge in Lucia's ecstasy of her transposition into the valley, as expressed in "I had a complete understanding that this was my home, and the solitude was not loneliness but the clarity of who I was." Here we need to notice that Tan deliberately emphasizes the oneness of Lucia and the painted valleys since their differentiation is removed, and their empathy is established. Lucia seems to achieve ecstasy through her identification with nature. But at the same time, Tan gives an ambiguous depiction of this union: the juxtaposition of the tenses undermines it. The paragraph combines the past perfect tense, "I had lived there" and the mesmeric loss of the senses, "The light of the room behind me disappeared, the voices of the others faded away." In Chinese philosophy, transcendence is brought about by the effacement of the self. In contrast, Lucia's monologue that seemingly cancels the self and merges in landscape, in fact, gives priority to self-value rather than to the oneness of man and nature. The painted valleys become a vehicle to convey the imaginary projections of Lucia's internal phantasies. According to Daoist thoughts, transcendence is anchored in the fundamental source, or in Laozi's word, *Dao*, from which the world and experience spring. Transcendence acquires its depth and richness not from what exists or had existed, from somewhere else, but resides in humankind's physical experience of mountains and waters. But in Tan's rendering, Lucia's transcendence arises from what is in virtuality (before dissipating itself in actualization). What brings about Lucia's transposition into the painted valleys of the place is the parallel between the valleys and that of Lucia's body. This association reflects Lucia's desire for inter-racial intimacy with the Chinese artist Lu Shing. As a result, the supposed liberation from worldly affairs and concerns is undercut.

The novel repeatedly (re)visits landscape painting and describes it from various points of view and voices: from the palpable landscapes represented in the painting, to the semantic description and then to viewers' interpretation of landscape painting a priori eroticization of the exotic. In so doing, with the renewed realities and transformative understandings that emerge from Lucia's complex encounters with the same landscape painting, Tan addresses issues such as multiple reality and the

uncertainty of identity, issues that link the passage to one particular poetic aim that is pursued by Chinese artists: accepting the uncertainty of landscape and of life because *yin* and *yang* forces unceasingly interact with and transform into each other. Transcendence in Daoist thoughts is achieved through one's liberation from the limits of the senses but without giving up the physical. For after all, one attains detachment from the world through a profound engagement within it. Viewed from this light, Lucia's transcendent experience gained from appreciating the valleys in landscape painting indeed engages with Chinese views on transcendence as liberating and philosophical. But it should also be noticed that this involvement is concurrently displaced with Lucia's particular interpretations of the valleys in Lu Shing's painting: the painted valleys are considered as something symbolic of Orientalist understandings of Chinese landscape as mysterious and endowed with healing power. The portrayed valleys are also pervasive of the sexual innuendos of the author as exotic and enigmatic.

The paragraph depicting Lucia's first encounter with the valley painting foregrounds Tan's intention to reveal the female characters' false impression of having gained spiritual transcendence. First of all, the above paragraph is written from the first point of view of Lucia who is pouring out her heart without restraint. A mesmeric and dreamlike impression is created and then undermined as evoked in the comment "I felt its atmosphere as real and present, the touch of its cool air." Lucia's epiphany—her emerging as at one with the painted valleys as her way to exceed her current worries—is likewise undermined in the cool air that breaks the fantastic and drags Lucia back to reality. Secondly, the irony of the reading experience is produced by the conflict between Lucia's spiritual transcendence from her unsatisfactory life and that of Lu Shing's deceiving forgery of the painting *The Valley of Amazement*. Lucia has this false image of Lu Shing as someone who possesses erudition, reticence and talent.[1] But it should be recalled that in the foreword of the novel, Tan clarified that the landscape painting referred to in this novel is actually based on the work named Das Tal der Verwunderung by an obscure

[1] Lucia's sexualization of Lu implies the tendency that the Chinese American men are depicted and interpreted as effeminate exotic Other.

German artist Friedrich Leutemann (1824-1905).[1] Leutemann's artwork features a threshold between opposing forces which remain opposing forces: sun *vs* rain, fear *vs* confidence. But this portrayal of the conflicting elements in landscape does not display an embracing of the constant interplay between mountains and waters, which is a prerequisite of Chinese views on transcendence. On the contrary, Leutemann's paintings highlight and insist on the contradictory and ambivalent aspects of the creative work. Tan's disclosure that Lu Shing's painting is a forgery of Leutemann's then doubly removes Lucia's belief in her obtained spiritual transcendence that is gained from viewing the valley painting. The revelation renders Chinese or American views on transcendence more difficult to grasp.

Lucia's obsession with Lu's talent exuding from the valley painting proves to be as false and uncertain as the painting itself. Tan had ironically foreshadowed Lucia's disillusionment with the transcendence that is immanent to one's self in the epigraph of the novel where she quotes Walt Whitman's poem "Quicksand Years:"

> Quicksand years that whirl me I know not whither,
> Your schemes, politics, fail, lines give way, substances mock and elude me,
> Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd soul, eludes not,
> One's-self, must never give way—that is the final substance— that out of all is sure,
> Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life, what at last finally remains?
> When shows break up what but One's-Self is sure?
> —WALT WHITMAN, "QUICKSAND YEARS"[2]

In the first two lines of the poem, Whitman expresses that the passing of time is like the swirling tides that no one is able to escape, as the metaphor that everything is like quicksand underlines. A turn comes next as the poet expresses a firm belief in the power of one's self: even after the decease of one's body, the voice of one's self

[1] The original painting is recorded in the novel as "The Valley of Amazement. A favorite of his. I bought it in Berlin for pennies. Das Tal der Verwunderung, by an obscure artist who died young. Friedrich Leutemann. It hung in the gallery for years before I sold it. Lu Shing made many versions and added an element of his own. A golden vale in the distance. I have to say, I was not fond of the alteration. The original had a dark beauty, a quavering feeling of uncertainty. He took the uncertainty away. But he was a young artist then, searching for meaning" (TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, p. 495).
[2] *Ibid.*, p. iii.

will supersede the temporal limit ("Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd soul, eludes not"). But this strong belief in the empowering self contrasts markedly with Lucia's epiphany and spiritual awakening. Contrary to Whitman's assertion, Tan's ambiguous portrayal of Lucia's oneness with the valleys in the landscape painting depicts how elusive the character's grasp of herself actually is. In Whitman's poem, the conviction that one's self will accomplish eternity equips people with vigorous armor when confronting the fleeting of time that is like quicksand. In this light, one reaches a state of transcendence surpassing the spatial and temporal limitation which is also born from them. But Tan's writings of Lucia's transposition into the valley painting, in contrast, illuminates that the seeming transcendence actually makes Lucia's quest for self-attainment more distant. In Tan's writings about Lucia's pursuit of spiritual transcendence, the undermined oneness with the valleys, the forgery of the painting and the elusive grasp of the self in Whitman's poem, make any simple understandings of transcendence as something eternal or static problematic.

Tan's fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) reconstructs transcendence in the fragmentation arising from the various interpretative angles offered by the different characters. The following paragraph depicts the various points of view towards the same misty lake among the American tourists:

> THERE IS A FAMOUS Chinese sentiment about finding the outer edges of beauty. My father [Bibi Chen's father] once recited it to me: "Go to the edge of the lake and watch the mist rise." At six-thirty, my friends had been at that edge. At dawn, the mist rose like the lake's breath, and the vaporous mountains behind faded in layers of lighter and lighter gray, mauve, and blue until the farthest reaches merged with the milky sky. The motors of the longboats had been cut. All was quiet. The mountains reflected in the lake waters caused my friends to reflect upon their busy lives. What serenity had eluded them until now?[1]

The above paragraph is narrated from the point view of the post-humous Chinese American character Bibi Chen. It begins with Bibi's father's piece of advice "go to the edge of the lake and watch the mist rise." As discussed above, the mountains with mist connote the indwelling place of the immortals (仙人 *xianren*) that goes beyond the human realm. Then, if one can discover this holy place, one will be able to

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 228.

approach freedom of body and serenity of mind. The edge of the lake in Tan's novel approaches this sacred place. To watch the mist rising from the lake symbolizes the state of elevation beyond bodily restraints wherein one can step into effacement and shading. This gradual blurring of the sky, mountain and lake in Tan's passage reminds us of all those landscape paintings and poems where such blurring enables figures and viewers alike to escape worldly affairs. The lake that was once tangible becomes intangible and indicates a limitless state that eludes the separate, the individual and the contingent that are as often represented in Western landscape narratives. This converging of boundaries and effacement of colors denotes a path opening toward the simple and the natural, which is sought after in Chinese landscape painting and poems.[1]

But the pursuit of the essential and the genuine is undercut in Tan's juxtaposition of two views on transcendence: one is Bibi Chen's recollection of Chinese sayings about transcendence and the other is the American tourists' longing for a peaceful life. A contrast is manifested in Tan's portrayal that the stillness of the lake only mirrors the hectic life of the American tourist group, as we can read at the end of the quote. Daoism considers water as "the highest good" [2] because it nourishes everything without claiming any credit, flows according to a strict system and undauntedly rushes to numerous lofty gorges. The meaning of river expands and evolves into different variations: it stands for the continuous pining for the old country or the beloved; it speaks for chastity, purity of the mind, it means the fading away of time and the loss of affections or people. The calmness of a lake, then, embraces the flux of existence and reabsorbs its tensions: this is the foundation of the quietness of *Dao*.

[1] JULLIEN, François, *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*, Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 143.

[2] In Daoism, water is compared to the virtues of noblemen because water complies to all the characters required of noblemen. Chapter 8 from *Dao De Jing* says that "The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way [*Dao*]" (WALEY, Arthur. *The Way and Its Power: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*. Grove Press, 1994, p. 151).

However, in the following passage from *Saving Fish from Drowning*, this detachment and freedom is undermined by Vera's reaction:

> As she [Vera] grew older, she was aware of her changing position on mortality [. . .] You had to release yourself from vanity, desire, ambition, suffering, and frustration—all the accoutrements of the I, the ego. And if you did, you would disappear, leave no trace, like the mist at dawn over the lake, evaporating into nothingness, into nibbana.[1]

Vera is an African-American female character who is described in the novel as contradictory because she chased freedom but ends up feeling more disappointed than encouraged. She hopes her trip to China and Myanmar will reinvigorate her and help her to revisit the far side of the other end of the earth. Vera gets wiser as she grows older: the older one gets, the more one should release oneself from one's attachment to worldly affairs. In other words, one needs to liberate oneself from the satisfaction of one's ego. This dissolving of one's ego reveals some of the ideas of both Chinese and American views on transcendence. Chinese landscape painters accept this "in-between-state" (*jian* 间) of opposing forces such as *yin* and *yang* and express it in their paintings. The "in-between-state (*jian* 间)" leads to the acceptance of the uncertainty in life and in landscape, which brings about the transcendence of this uncertainty. We also find this between-state in Luminism—an American landscape painting style of the 1850s to 1870s that is characterized by effects of light in landscape, through the use of aerial perspective and the concealment of visible brushstrokes. For instance, *View of the Shrewsbury River* (1859) by John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872) is conspicuous in its application to both "air and crystal, hard and soft, mirror and void"[2] where the egos of the viewers are eliminated in nature's transcendental monologue. Touched by the misty lake, Vera has the revelation that the abandoning of the ego and dematerialization will produce the effect that "you would disappear, leave no trace, like the mist at dawn over the lake, evaporating into nothingness, into nibbana." However, this revelation of the transcendence from one's ego is made more complex later in the novel. After the mysterious kidnapping and

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 229.
[2] NOVAK, Barbara. *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875. Oxford University Press*, 2007, p. 24.

miraculous rescue from the tribal people in Myanmar, Vera changes her mind and reclaims her ego by telling her stories to the world:

> On the plane, she conjugated verbs that would soon have real meaning: Je crie au monde. J'ai crié au monde. Je crierai pour que le monde m'entende. I will shout to the world to hear me. Je crie au monde. J'ai crié au monde. Je crierai pour que le monde m'entende. I will shout to the world to hear me.[1]

Vera's conclusion that she should abandon her ego after viewing the misty lake, is changed when she us kidnapped by the Myanmar tribe.

A separate view on the transcendental misty lake is narrated from the point of view of the post-humous Bibi Chen, the Chinese American art critic who has died in mysterious circumstances:

> I was appalled at the idea. Evaporate? Would that happen to me? I wanted to expand, to fill the void, to reclaim all that I had wasted. I wanted to fill the silence with all the words I had not yet spoken.[2]

Tan displays the ambiguity of the posthumous experience: Bibi transcends the triviality of life like an omniscient goddess. At the same time, she has her own desire for the truth of her death to be known and fears of evaporation as described in the passage as, "I was appalled at the idea. Evaporate? Would that happen to me?" Unlike Vera who realizes transcendental values such as serenity and quietude in the dissolution of the ego, Bibi yearns to enlarge her body to fill the empty space in order to retrieve what she has lost. The important moment of revelation for Bibi Chen happens when she decides to break her previous silence with all that had been restrained or hidden within her. However, this transcendental moment is hindered because Bibi is already dead and has forever lost the capacity to connect and to voice the unvoiced or to fill any bland space, either physically or spiritually. But with Tan's adoption and narration of the misty lake from the point of view of the post-humous Bibi, the narrative perspective exceeds the limitation of life and death, and overcomes any physical restrictions such as evaporation or melting. Vera and Bibi are led to a fundamental revelation of the self on account of the extreme circumstances they have experienced. In Tan's novels, as in Chinese philosophy, this

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 459.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

revelation goes on unceasingly and proceeds without dissolving.[1] From this perspective, in Tan's novels, Chinese and American views on transcendence are constantly changing and expanding as Tan's own conceptions show.

This second chapter "The Matter and Spirit of Landscape" has paid attention to how Tan's novels have reimagined the issues of the relationship between the matter and spirit of landscape expressed in Chinese and American philosophy, landscape painting and literature. The in-between-state of *Qi* is ridiculed and subverted with Tan's humorous depictions. With the lived realities of the female characters, Tan's written landscapes displace and reconstruct the humanistic view of landscape in Chinese landscape poems. Instead, Tan portrays the deprivation of the characters' loss of sight and lack of comprehension of landscape. Transcendence in both Chinese and American philosophy and aesthetics has also been reconstructed in Tan's novels: Tan offers ambiguous depictions of the female character's encounter with the painted valleys, which questions the character's oneness with nature and the consequent freedom from worldly troubles. The changing attitudes towards the same lake that alters along the character's life experiences and circumstances indicate the uncertainty of both Chinese and American views on transcendence.

The tensions in Tan's landscape which we have just seen enable us to see in the next subchapter the transitions and transformations that happen there. The interconnection between the matter and spirit of landscape indeed emerges from the unceasing interplay of *yin* and *yang* forces, which is manifested as low and high, sunny and gloomy, stable and fluid, and solid and formless, *etc*. This *yin* and *yang* interchange constitutes a Beyond, which is already encompassed within the Great Process (*dahua* 大化). Human beings and landscapes therefore find themselves in the process of opposition, combination, conflict and transformation between the correlative pairs. Transition and transformation will be the focus of the next chapter as they reveal the fluidity of Chineseness. Tan's own dilemma as a Chinese American writer will be effectively discussed through analyzing the transition and transformation discerned in her novels.

[1] DENTITH, Simon. *Bakhtinian Thought: Intro Read*. Routledge, 2003, p. 41.

2 Transitions and Transformations

Introduction

Tan's landscapes display tensions between Western and Chinese ways of seeing and conceiving landscape. In the Chinese vision and conception of landscape, correlative forces such as mountains and waters or *yin* and *yang* forces, alternate rising and falling movements reversing their directions. In the rising and falling of *yin* and *yang* forces in the *Qi*, one force will develop in the opposite direction when they reach apex and nadir. The manifestation of these correlated pairs of oppositions is what we examined in the preceding part. But the landscapes in Tan's novels also exhibit a great tendency for transition and transformation in the space opened by these oppositions—and between them. In her third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), the landscapes that are full of signs of life foreshadow the traces of death while the landscapes of death conversely embrace the hope of life. In this chapter, I will argue that Tan leaves a porous space between her lines that, in a quite literal way can be said to resemble the transition between the *yin* and *yang* forces of mountains and waters. "Porous" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* means "(of a rock or other material) having minute spaces or holes through which liquid or air may pass." The term thus already indicates a transitional, boundary-blurring state which is redoubled in expressions such as "porous borders" or "porous categories." In Tan's writings, we can refer to the "porous space" as that which makes identity fluid, status uncertain, and categories porous such as ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction.[1] This porous space enables Tan to portray landscape and her female characters' engagement with landscape in a process of transition and transformation.

[1] The postcolonial project aims to "deconstruct the older language of identity founded upon notions of impermeable entities, such as the nation, culture, and selfhood, and to reconstruct the debate around hybrid and porous formations, such as displacement, dislocation, and migrancy" (CHEW, Shirley, and David Richards, eds. *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature.* John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 19).

This part will continue to explore the opposing and correlating pairs in Tan's written landscapes with an attention to the space and moment of their transition and transformation which may be read as an expression of Tan's complication of Chineseness. The pairs under study are the beautiful and the sublime, life and death, modern & primitive landscape, *yin* and *yang* forces within the human body and *Fengshui* practice, as well as the relationship between silence and sound in Tan's depicted landscapes. Those pairs effectively illuminate Tan's own way of imagining and presenting Chineseness, from which her own particular dilemma as a Chinese American writer also emerges. While the preceding part showed, Tan's Chinese-American characters' struggles with their environment, here, we will focus on the elusiveness, fluidity and uncertainty discerned in Tan's written landscapes. From these landscapes, I can read Tan's dilemma as a writer.

In his monograph *The Silent Transformations* (2009), François Jullien defines transition as "'a passage' permitting the movement from one 'form' to the next—in the between-forms."[1] Jullien uses the rotation of the four seasons as an example to explain the ambivalence of transition. The warmth in summer is pregnant with the cold of autumn and likewise the cold in winter is ready to benefit the warmth of spring. In the Chinese landscape paintings of the Song dynasty (960-1127), instead of depicting the mountains and waters in distinct opposition under rain or under fair weather, the painter attempts to grasp a landscape that exceeds its own specific attributes. In each aspect, be it fair weather or rain, there lie the underlying modifications of the other. Jullien's explanation of "transition" manifests the "both-and" principle in Chinese philosophy. The "both-and" principle derives from the belief that birth, growth and decline of the myriad things (*wanwu*) in nature is a continuous operation. When reaching the limit, one state is reversed and changed into its opposite.[2] The "both-and" principle accepts the between-state (*jian* 间) in landscape and in life. It is this notion which has inspired the concept of a space that breathes. This between-state can be explained by the poets' mixed feelings of

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 17.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

melancholy and exuberance toward spring and autumn in Chinese landscape poems from the Tang and Song dynasties. In the poem "A Poem on Autumn (秋词)" by Liu Yuxi (772-842 刘禹锡) from the Tang Dynasty, the dreary landscapes of the autumn are praised instead of being mourned:

> Ever since old, autumn has made man feel lonely;
> And yet I say that autumn is better than spring.
> A Crane soars through the clouds to the blue autumn sky,
> Which excites my ideal to be equally high. [1]

Melancholy arises in the face of the passing of time, beauty, and youth. But melancholy is not despairing in that it is discovered to be mitigated by the fact of living in the moment and enjoying landscape and life. Tan's represented landscapes show the between-state in two key ways. Firstly, in the variability of the different types of landscape including the natural, the urban and landscapes set on Chinese or American land. But at the same time, the between-state is shown in the female characters' exploration of their relationship with their surroundings. In her third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Tan writes about the confusion felt by the American-born Olivia concerning the Chinese belief in transition: "Because I'm not Chinese like Kwan. To me, yin isn't yang, and yang isn't yin. I can't accept two contradictory stories as the whole truth." [2] The between-state in Tan's written landscape is the trope of Chineseness, which is (dis)/(un)located in Tan's female characters' interaction with their natural surroundings.

Chapter One "Transition" will analyze three correlative pairs of landscape that are effective in exhibiting the transition in Tan's written landscapes: the sublime and the beautiful, the landscapes of life and death, and primitive and modern landscapes. For British philosopher Edmund Burk whose conceptualization of the sublime and the beautiful applies to Tan's conception of landscape, the source of the sublime is what arouses ideas of pain and danger. When we experience danger or pain at a

[1]. The original text is "自古逢秋悲寂寥，我言春日胜春朝。晴空一鹤排云上，便引诗情到碧霄。" Translated by Guo Zhuzhang.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 223.

certain distance, and with certain modifications, they become delightful.[1] The beautiful refers to what gives us a sense of joy and pleasure in the act of beholding. The beautiful inspires tenderness and affection and we are willing to build a relation with it.[2] If we consider the beautiful and the sublime as two opposing poles, Tan's written landscapes can be said to move forward and backward between the two polarities. Moreover, it may be advanced that the transition between the beautiful and the sublime demonstrates that Tan's landscapes enact the identities of her Chinese American female characters. These identities are achieved through their repeated readings of landscapes that emerge from the new life realities they encounter, but also through the "old world" reading-frame of the Burkean sublime.[3] The mutability of landscape recalls the fluidity of Chineseness, which manifests itself in the female characters, both temporally, and affectively, as well as in their bodily engagement with Chinese and American natural landscapes. The shift between the beautiful and the sublime echoes the complex historical and contemporary racial dynamics that mark the realties Chinese Americans encounter on a daily basis. In Tan's latest novel *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), the sceneries in the Chinese village Moon Pond oscillate between the beautiful and the sublime. For Violet, a female character of mixed ancestry with her Chinese father and American mother, sublime feelings are lurking within the pleasantly otherworldly valleys, whereas the expectation of her new life assured by the rosy valleys simmers with an indeterminacy arising from the inexpressible, 'unpresentable'[4] properties of landscape.

Death Burke calls the "King of terrors."[5] As François Jullien reminds us, for Western thought, death is an ending point, where everything converges and a Truth

---

[1] BURKE, Edmund. *Of the Sublime and Beautiful*. P.F. Collier & Son Company, 1757, 1914, pp. 20-21.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
[3] DUNCAN, Nancy, and James DUNCAN. "Doing Landscape Interpretation." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, 2010, p. 234.
[4] LYOTARD, Jean-François. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenbeg. Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 150-153.
[5] Burke writes that "[...] as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more

will be revealed.[1] Conversely, Chinese Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (庄子 late 4th century BC) points out the slippery boundaries between life and death:

> 'Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger (of this connexion between them)? Life is due to the collecting of the breath. When that is collected, there is life; when it is dispersed, there is death. Since death and life thus attend on each other, why should I account (either of) them an evil? Therefore all things go through one and the same experience.[2]

Death, as the myriad things (*wanwu*) in nature, is in a transition where life and death take alternative turns in the unceasing movement of the breath-energy (*Qi*). In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the boundaries of life and death converge during Winnie's *taonan* (escape from the Japanese invasion). The ambiguity between life and death refracts Winnie's own identity search. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), death looms large in the gloomy caves where the American-born character Olivia's husband Simon disappears. However, Olivia discerns glimmers of hope from the birds as symbolic of rebirth and reconciliation between her past and the present: "They are harbingers of hope, as welcome as the dove that brought a leafy twig to Noah." Similarly, in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Tan's landscapes of death revise the fairy-tale plot wherein a weak and vulnerable woman waits to be rescued by a male hero. In the encounter with the landscapes of death, Kwan radiates bravery and calmness: it is she who saves Olivia's life and that of her husband Simon. Kwan's sacrifice of her own life guides Olivia to navigate her oscillation between Chinese and American cultures and to overcome her diffidence in romantic relationships. Landscapes of life and death help Tan display women's mobility in their engagement with landscape. The meanings of landscape become flexible and

---

painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors" (BURKE, Edmund. *Of the Sublime and Beautiful*. P.F. Collier & Son Company, 1757, 1914, pp. 20-21).

[1] Jullien argues that "European philosophy has no less placed death as a gleam on the horizon as a culminating, fascinating and apocalyptic point, towards which everything converges and will be suddenly resolved: the place where, tearing aside the veil, the anticipated Truth is finally to be revealed" (JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 58).

[2] "生也死之徒，死也生之始，孰知其纪！人之生，气之聚也，聚则为生，散则为死。若死生为徒，吾又何患！故万物一也。" ("Knowledge Rambling in the North", *Chinese Text Project*. https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/knowledge-rambling-in-the-north/ens. Accessed on September 04, 2020.

more complex in Tan's juxtaposition of the landscapes of life and death and in her rewritings of the narrative paradigm about men as heroes who actively come to the rescue and women as passive victims waiting to be rescued. For their part, female identities that are open to and dialogic with their environment become more porous. Chineseness, embodied in this intricate process, is multiple, shifting, possibly unbounded.

Primitive and modern landscapes are full of conflicts in Tan's novels, a further indication of the transition residing in her depicted landscapes. When revisiting China, the American-born female characters view the prevalent rural and urban Chinese landscapes as opposites. This opposition marks the dilemma in both the female characters' and Tan's mind as an author. In the eyes of the Westerners as in some Chinese American authors' works, China is represented as an ahistorical space, be it positively as a utopian, poetic, and mysterious land or negatively as a backward, superstitious, and degraded territory. Tan's written landscapes exhibit primitive and modern Chinese landscapes in oscillation. Tan scholar Bella Adams correctly argues that Tan's novels open the porous space between the two opposing sides of Chineseness: construction on the one hand and literary referent on the other. This link opens new possibilities for the interpretations of what may be termed as Chinese.[1] The unidimensional image of China is reverted, causing Chineseness to be unlocated. Tan offers an exaggerated description of postmodern city landscapes in China that feature pollution, simulacra, and a loss of the subject's sense of self. When faced with Chinese landscapes that vacillate between the primitive and the modern, the American-born characters are torn between two conflicting forces. They are influenced by the fixed memories about China they have obtained from the Chinese-born characters' talk-stories. At the same time, however, they cannot resist having voyeuristic expectations toward this enigmatic land, inflected with their resumed task of returning the Western Orientalist gaze. Tan's depictions of "things Chinese,"

[1] ADAMS, Bella, "Becoming Chinese: Racial Ambiguity in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Literature and Racial Ambiguity*, edited by Teresa Hubel and Neil Edward Brooks, Rodopi, 2002. pp. 111-113.

according to critic Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, are indeed the "products of the American-born writer's own heavily mediated understanding of things Chinese."[1]

Jullien explains transformation (化 *hua*) with the image of the hexagram from *Yijing*. The hexagram is made of *yin* and *yang* lines where the dotted line "--" represents the *yin* and the solid line "—" the *yang*. The hexagram symbolizes the eight natural phenomena of sky, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain and waters. I will take the hexagram of Growth and that of Decline as two examples. In the Growth figure, the *yin* lines tend to fall down to earth while the *yang* lines incline to rise to heaven. When the *yang* lines take over the upper part and the *yin* lines dominate the lower part, the hexagram of Growth passes into the hexagram of Decline. We can see that with the unceasing movement of *yin* and *yang* forces, two different types of hexagrams are able to easily pass over into the other's space. This transformation is silent because it operates without attracting our attention just as the process of the snow melting or the process of aging. The changes are too small scale and too pervasive to be even sensed by humankind.

The following chapter will show how transformation is discovered in the human body, the house in the *Fengshui* practice and in landscapes of silence and sound. The human body, composed of movement and the balance of *yin and yang* forces, is a miniature version of the universe. *Huainanzi*, a sophisticated articulation of Han philosophy and statecraft compiled by scholars at the court of Liu An in the second century B.C., compares the structures of the universe to that of humans:

> Heaven has the four seasons, Five Elements, nine divisions, and three hundred and sixty days. Man likewise has four limbs, five viscera, nine orifices, and three hundred and sixty joints [...] Thus man forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth.[2]

The relationship between Heaven and Earth and humans is that of macrocosm and microcosm. Tan's female characters' bodies are depicted as being made up of *yin and yang* forces that modify and transform each other. In this sense, these female

[1] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. ""Sugar Sisterhood": Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 55.
[2] FENG, Youlan. A *History of Chinese Philosophy. Vol. 1*. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 399.

bodies can be regarded as an interplay between mountains and waters. The episode "The Moon Lady" from *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), displays the interaction of *yin* and *yang* forces and how the *yin* forces processually take precedence over the *yang* forces within the Chinese-born character Yingying's body. The *yang* forces first meet their *yin* counterpart when Yingying stands still while irresistibly drawn to the "dark side of [her] that had [her] same restless nature."[1] In the scene where Yingying accidentally falls into the river during her family's reunion on a boat, the *yin* force characterized by the coldness and disillusionment felt by Yingying begins to overshadow the more positive *yang* force. A subversive *yin* power arises from the distressing encounter between Yingying's body and the lake. In another episode, "Waiting between the Trees," from the same novel, Tan foregrounds the *yin* force through her portrayal of "cutting," "blood" and "flesh." Yingying imparts her *yin* strength to her "ghostly" self-effacing daughter Lena as a means to resist their invisibility for example when she declares "[she] will use this sharp pain to penetrate [her] daughter's tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose."[2] The *yin* force within Yingying's body is thus transformed into an active, supple, and resilient form of power. Yingying's "fluid, volatile, messy, leaky bod[y]"[3] articulates the "plurality of differentiated bodies."[4] By portraying the predominance of the *yin* force over the *yang* force within her characters' bodies, Tan endows her female characters with an ability to view themselves as thinking, struggling, and living. If we understand the human body to be a visual and corporeal sign of Chineseness, then Chineseness, like Tan's depictions of the female body, undergoes a complex modification and transformation.

In the Western aesthetic tradition, subjecting authority is represented in arbitrarily figuring the female body as nature and *vice versa*. This specific way of looking at landscape draws on both "transcoding" between woman and nature, and a masculine way of seeing wherein men act in the land as constructers, recorders and

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 72.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 252.
[3] LONGHURST, Robyn. *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries*. Psychology Press, 2001, p. 23.
[4] GARRY, Ann, Serene J. KHADER, and Alison STONE, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Routledge, 2017, p. 280.

interpreters while women equal the land to be inspected, studied and read.[1] However, when orienting our focus on China and its way of seeing, in Confucianism, the human body is the seat of morality gained by cultivation. *Xunzi* (荀子 third century BC), a Chinese Confucian philosopher and writer who lived during the Warring States period, establishes an analogy between the influence of the practice of the practice of the ritual upon one's body, and that of the impact of teachers on their pupils:

> Ritual is that by which to correct your body. The teacher is that by which to correct your practice of ritual. If you are without ritual, then how will you correct your body? If you are without a teacher, how will you know that your practice of ritual is right?[2]

This view of body as morality and culture has evolved into a force to restrict women's freedom to express their own desire and sexuality during and after the Song dynasty. Women are required to value chastity. Their bodies are there for reproduction and to transmit to their offspring the norms and manners of patriarchal society. But in the episode "Waiting Between the Trees" from *The Joy Luck Club*, the *yin-yang* transformation undermines these moral implications of the human body through Tan's empowerment of *yin* virtue. Yingying views her own body as exuding the emotive forces to help herself and her American-born daughter Lena to escape from silence and invisibility. Yingying's body is conceived of as "the conveyer of bodily occurrences, such as rhythm, touch, flows of energy."[3] Tan's writings therefore revert both the Confucian belief in the human body as a site of the social norm, and that of the customary metaphor of female body and landscape in Western thought. Tan's writings of the female body provide an alternative narrative of landscape "without being tied to the choice between masculine distance from and

[1] ROSE, Gillian. *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 94.
[2] *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Translated and with an introduction by Eric L. Hutton. Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 51.
[3] POSTL, Gertrude. "Language, Writing, and Gender Differences." *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Garry, Ann, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone, eds. Routledge, 2017, p. 296.

feminine closeness to nature."[1] In this process, Chineseness itself likewise becomes fluctuating, blurred and fluid.

In addition to the body, the house makes up another form of the minimalist landscape which manifests Chinese views on transformation: the Chinese word for the universe is *Yuzhou* (宇宙). *Yu* is the roof of the house and *Zhou* is the sky. *Yuzhou* encompasses space and time. The term *Fengshui* (风水) was first seen in the *Burial Book* (葬经) written by Guo Pu (郭璞 276-324) of the Jin Dynasty:

> In the burial, the wind (*feng*) makes the *Qi* move and the water (*shui*) delimits it. The ancient people gather *Qi* to make it possible to move but within a certain area. Therefore, it is called *fengshui*.[2]

To readjust and rearrange the structures and positions of items in the house is to change one's dwelling place according to the change in nature. *Fengshui* aims to pursue harmony between interpersonal relationships, human and non-human relationships, as well as relationships between those still living and their ghostly ancestors. *Fengshui* emphasizes that one should "stick closely to the regulatory curve of its evolution and detecting in the existing situation a sign of the beginning of the change that will happen."[3]

However, what is interesting about Tan's writing is that she emphasizes the constructedness of the *Fengshui* operation. Chineseness, embodied in the principles and aims of the *Fengshui* practice, is undermined. *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) points out the constructedness of *Fengshui* practice. In the 1920s Shanghai, the American-born Lucia plans to change a poet's former dwelling into a courtesan house. The poet dies in a strange fire and the house was then deemed as unlucky. Lucia hires an Italian actor to perform as the *Fengshui* master to drive away the poet's ghost. She also takes advantage of the exorcism as a publicity stunt to advertise her newly opened courtesan house. The exorcist activities are transformed

---

[1] NASH, Catherine. "Reclaiming Vision: Looking at Landscape and the Body." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, vol.* 3, no. 2, 1996, p. 157.
[2] https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%91%AC%E4%B9%A6/68851. Accessed on Sep 08 2020. My translation.
[3] JULLIEN, Francois. *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*. University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 192.

into a "play" on stage. The Italian actor's performance as a *Fengshui* master reveals a moment of "mimicry" according to Bhabha's definition of the term. Borrowed from postcolonial theory, "mimicry" is a form of resemblance or imitation that differs from the original presence by a partial exhibition. In Tan's passage, the Italian actor's movements and words mimic the *Fengshui* Masters'. But Tan's renderings aim to drive her readers to reconsider the normative knowledge of Chinese *Fengshui* theory. The Italian actor's make-up and costumes indicate a process of distortion and replacement. The actor's imitation of the mysterious chanting from the *Fengshui* masters seemingly changes the false into the authentic, which precisely illustrates a "final irony of partial representation."[1] In this sense, *Fengshui*, which resides in its constructedness, becomes representative of Chineseness—born of the adjustment of space and individual.

Fengshui as "art of living" is based on the Chinese belief in processual change. The latter emanates from the movements of *yin* and *yang* forces in nature, which interact with each other and come into unceasing movement, producing mutual transition and transformation. This belief in processual change brings about the basic principle in *Fengshui* that the spatial adjustments will lead to an improvement of the residents' well-being and fortune. In Tan's novels, however, this improvement does not happen. Instead, it is twisted several times, with the psychological breakdown and nightmares of the characters, for example. Tan recalls this belief from the *Fengshui* practice in the episode "The Voice from the Wall" in *The Joy Luck Club*. The Chinese-born mother figure Yingying is becoming paranoid about the blocked *Qi* and the imbalance of the house. She frenetically rearranges all the furniture and items. In spite of this, Yingying still feels insecure and soon suffers from psychological breakdown.

The first twist comes when Yingying fails to gain balance from adhering to *Fengshui* teachings; this sense of unease is caused by her maternal anxiety, the experience of displacement in America, and the alienation she feels from her American husband and daughter. The situation undergoes another twist after

[1] BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 126.

Yingying's readjustment of Lena's bed, causing the latter to: "hear voices coming from the wall, from the apartment next door."[1] Instead of achieving harmony by practicing *Fengshui*, Lena starts to suffer acutely from nightmares. Lena's overwhelming fear reaches a climax in her imagination of a murder scene occurring in her neighborhood. Yingying's intention to improve Lena's health by reorganizing Lena's bedroom backfires and gives Lena nightmares. Chinese *Fengshui*, as a way to ameliorate one's wellbeing is undercut. Then a new twist happens again when Lena drags her mother Yingying through the wall. The *Fengshui* practice, as Chinese people's wisdom of living, is reconstructed as an ambivalent site of art and artificiality. The constructedness of *Fengshui* and that of Chineseness is therefore underscored.

Lena's dragging her mother free from the wall where her mother had hidden from pain breaks her mother's silence. Sound and silence form a correlative pair form which I will illustrate the landscapes that are in transition and transformation in Tan's novels. Silence and sound in landscape, as correlative forces like *yin* and *yang*, undergo a process of mutual alternation and transformation, especially when it comes to the relationship between the Chinese American female characters and their surroundings. The study of the relationship between sound and silence in Tan's landscapes will be effective in illustrating Tan's display and displacement of the Chinese views on transformation. The voiceless landscape sets up a contrast with the Chinese American female characters' many struggles including their attempt to access Chinese legacies. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), for instance, the reader learns that the character Ruth accidentally loses her voice during her childhood. When grown up, Ruth chooses to "ma[k]e her voiceless state a decision, a matter of will, and not a disease or a mystery."[2] Ruth's silence, which she practices every year as an annual ritual, marks a contrast with the horns outside what Ruth calls her "cubbyhole," the place where she writes. Ruth depicts the sound of horns as comically tragic. The noisy horns reflect the multiple layers of "sounds" in Ruth's mind—her autonomy as a writer, her self-identity with her partner and her mother

[1] BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 109.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 10.

LuLing. Later in the novel, landscapes of sound turn into silence when Ruth comes across her mother's story written in Chinese. The silence in the cubbyhole denotes Ruth's silence towards the legacies of Chinese language, calligraphy, and the family history.

The stories of the muted Buncake in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) suggest that silence can often be read as Tan's female characters' strategy to confront the deprivation of their voice, a situation of disempowerment that is not dissimilar to the female experience of subalternity under colonization about which post-colonial scholar Gayatri Spivak says that "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."[1] Silence in Buncake's particular story becomes paradoxically highly articulate in that it is a way to express the unspeakable.[2]

According to *Dao De Jing*, silence is the very root of all harmony:

> Things proliferate, and each again returns to its root. Returning to the root is called equilibrium. Now as for equilibrium—this is called returning to the propensity of things.[3]

Sound gradually loses its aural quality and leads us to a threshold of silence. Conversely, silence verges toward expression through an indirect language: a "tacit language"[4] that is produced from silence. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Buncake loses her voice after witnessing her parents' killing. Buncake's silence at this moment is inhibited. Taking inspiration from Cheung's monograph *Articulate Silences* (1993), I will analyze Buncake's changes from inhibitive silence to attentive silence and then finally to provocative silence. Buncake's silence becomes attentive in Tan's comparison of Buncake to a baby bird who talks with gestures and expresses the words from another world. The power of Buncake's muted power is expressed

[1] SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty, and Graham RIACH. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Macat International Limited, 2016. p. 84.
[2] CHEUNG, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa.* Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 4-5.
[3] AMES, R. T., and D. HALL. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p, 70.
[4] SILVERMAN, Hugh J. "Merleau-Ponty and the Interrogation of Language." *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1980, p. 131.

in the alliteration of the quick and energetic movement of "swoop and soar." In the scene where Buncake bursts into laughter along with the thundering of the sky and flood in the river, her silence becomes a provocative means to counter the misjudgment of the villagers. In this way, Buncake's silence is transformed into empowerment. The transience of Chineseness is then naturalized in this transformation from silence to voice.

In Part One, I argued how the complicating of Chineseness was displayed in the tension between the Chinese and American ways of looking at and conceiving landscape, which was, in turn, manifested by the Chinese and American-born characters' different ways of engaging with landscape. Part Two will illustrate how Chineseness becomes complicated through studying the transitions and transformations recognized in Tan's written landscapes whereof the elements of the land are seen as the constantly changing *yin* and *yang* lines as illuminated in the hexagram from *Yijing*. The use of such a concept as transitions and transformations aims to show the fluidity of landscapes, which becomes a trope of the fluidity of Chineseness. To study transition and transformation in Tan's landscapes also offers a chance to revisit the Western concepts such as death, truth and change as well as the body. These concepts are re-conceptualized as in a flowing process of silent transition and transformation just like nature's *yin-yang* interplay. In so doing, concepts like the subject, essence or identity are dissolved because changes are happening within the correlated forces among the myriad things themselves.

The analysis of female characters' struggles between the Chinese and American ways of seeing and conceiving landscape, lays the foundation for the discussion of the silent transitions and transformations discerned in Tan's written landscapes themselves. And the porous space that is opened up by these silent transitions and transformations in turn enables an expansion onto indeterminacy and infinitude which makes up the departing and returning point that is *Dao*. Part Three "Return" will study how Tan's way of imagining and depicting landscape as a writer forms a return to *Dao* that acts as both the means and opportunities for a new reflexibility of both the conception of Chineseness and landscape.

2.1 Transition in Tan's Novels

2.1.1 The Sublime and the Beautiful

2.1.1.a The Cove in The Joy Luck Club*: The Female Characters' Identity Struggle*

From Edmund Burke's *An Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), the terms "beautiful" and "sublime" are often used to designate the feelings evoked from seeing certain landscapes. "Sublime" is used to describe the landscapes that inspire awe and terror, while "beautiful" is used to depict what calms and pleases. The beautiful landscapes of Claude Lorrain's *The Flight into Egypt* (1635) for instance evoke "a sense of a Golden Age, of grazing flocks, unruffled waters and a calm, luminous sky, images of perfect harmony between man and nature."[1] Conversely, sublime landscapes express a delirium of light and the convolutions of the spirit that are twisted and fiery and full of darkness, as in J. M. W. Turner's painting *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812).

Burke's paradigm views the beautiful and the sublime as a pair of oppositions. Any pair of oppositions, according to Plato and Aristotle requires a third term—a subject, substrate or agent who desires, performs and thinks. This third term is what François Jullien calls the "bearer of identity."[2] Jullien points out that the beginning of Western philosophy especially the writings of Plato and Aristotle, lacks the ability to consider the between as "between:" the belief, for instance that melting snow is already on the verge of effacing its quality as snow and emerging as water. Transition in Chinese philosophy is explained by Jullien as being between "dis-identification and re-identification"[3], wherein the question of identity should no longer be considered. In *Yijing*—the Confucian classic that uses hexagrams to discuss cosmic patterns, the relations between humanity and nature, and the complexity of human life—growth, even at the stage of burgeon and development, is already tending

[1] CLARK, Kenneth. *Landscape into Art*. John Murray, 1949, p. 129.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 86.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

towards a decline. Jullien explains this point through the image of melting snow. The cold of the snow already contains the possibility of its own opposite—warmth. In other words, the one is already the other when "one passes by its own nature into its other,"[1] as for example is recorded in Chapter Fourteen of *Dao De Jing*, which inherits and develops the thought of *Yijing*. The laws of nature revealed in both classics become the theoretical foundation of Chinese philosophy:

> Because in sight, sound, and touch it is beyond determination. We construe it as inseparably one. As for this "one"—Its surface is not dazzling. Nor is its underside dark. Ever so tangled, it defies discrimination. And reverts again to indeterminacy. This is what is called the form of the formless. And the image of indeterminacy. This is what is called the vague and the indefinite.[2]

Therefore, the boundaries between opposing pairs disappear and through their indifferentiation, the process of transition gains the chance to develop. In *yin* and *yang* forces, epitomized as mountains and waters, each can pass by its own nature into the other. When a landscape stretches before our eyes, we do not aim to grasp the transition *per se*, but to see the atmosphere, or "a pervasive nature, communicating everywhere without limit."[3] The cove scene from the episode "Half and Half" in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), effectively conveys this "silent" transition as the beach where the Hsu family visits is depicted as wavering between the beautiful and the sublime:

> The wind was whipping the cotton trousers around my legs and I looked for some place where the sand wouldn't kick into my eyes. I saw we were standing in the hollow of a cove. It was like a giant bowl, cracked in half, the other half washed out to sea. My mother walked toward the right, where the beach was clean, and we all followed. On this side, the wall of the cove curved around and protected the beach from both the rough surf and the wind. And along this wall, in its shadow, was a reef ledge that started at the edge of the beach and continued out past the cove where the waters became rough. It seemed as though a person could walk out to sea on this reef, although it looked very rocky and slippery. On the other side of the cove, the wall was more jagged, eaten away by the water.

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 90.
[2] AMES, R. T., and D. HALL. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p, 110.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 51.

> It was pitted with crevices, so when the waves crashed against the wall, the water spewed out of these holes like white gulleys.[1]

Rose first seeks safety from the wind and sand in the cove where "the sand wouldn't kick into [her] eyes." The cove offers shelter and ensures Rose with a sense of the domestic affections that foster love and tenderness. In Burke's words, with the beautiful in landscape "we love what submits to us."[2] We gain a sense of control over the surrounding environment from where the feeling of the beautiful emerges. Rose compares the cove to a "bowl" which makes the cove seems familiar and homely. In fact, Rose follows her mother's step turning right towards the clean side of the cove. In so doing, Rose senses that the cove is a cozy and comfortable place to stay and assimilates it to her mother's embrace ("My mother walked toward the right, where the beach was clean, and we all followed.") The cove is described as safeguarding those who venture there, offering maternal and supportive gestures such as "protected the beach from both the rough surf and the wind." But at the same time, Rose realizes the cove's great dimension—it is "like a *giant* bowl." This great dimension inspires fear, and a sense of awe before infinity and the unknowable such as the ocean, "an object of no small terror, which is the "ruling principle of the sublime."[3] Applying the Burkean paradigm we might argue that the effects of the cove's "rocky and slippery" surface seem to be more inspirational for humankind, including Rose, than where it is smooth and polished. The cove that features threatening and frightening elements appears to be more impressive to the eyes because it produces "a fruitful field of speculation."[4]

The cove is ambivalent in that it provides the illusion of calmness and pleasure, as underscored by the phrase "it seemed as though a person could walk out to sea on this reef." It should be stressed that from Burke's gender-inflected perspective, the

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 122.
[2] BURKE, Edmund. *On Taste: On the Sublime and Beautiful; Reflections on the French Revolution; A Letter to a Noble Lord; with Introduction, Notes and Illustrations* (1757). *Vol. 24*. PF Collier & Son, 1909, p. 99.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

notion of the beautiful also carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection.[1] The beautiful is indeed invested with power, but only with a deceitful and uncertain one.[2] Burke argues that the mode of the beautiful indicates a state where the rigors of identity become "softened, relaxed, enervated, dissolved, melted away by pleasure."[3] But the cove also foreshadows the unknowable with all its potential dangers. Rose is not able to see the whole picture of the other side of the cove which has been eroded by the waters. The obscurity and the loss of visual control over Rose's environment increases the power of the sublime. But the cove may also be said to convey feelings in that it constitutes part of that "class of frightening things that leads us back to what is known and familiar"[4] as Freud puts it. In other words, the uncanny means at once what is homely and what is unhomely—that which is located in a transitional space.

In Tan's paragraph, the sublime cove invokes an ecstatic experience which describes Rose's intermittent relation to nature. The sublime cove is seen and sensed over by Rose, placing her in a transitional position. The sublime cove both frightens and fascinates Rose: she senses the cove's capacity to destroy her; at the same time, she is also fascinated by the intensity of the cove and the way it radiates a compelling force and mastery. Rose's simultaneous enchantment and fear towards the sublime cove, reflects its uncanny quality. The unfamiliar/unhomely happens in the moment when on the one hand, "the factual potentiality-of-being of Dasein has always already been decided upon" [5] while on the other hand, it is pervasive of "indeterminacy and incompleteness."[6] The sublime cove echoes Rose's emotions,

[1] Burke explains that the beautiful indicates an imperfection because beauty in distress is much more touching. For instance, women tend to counterfeit weakness in their walking in order to please men.
[2] SHAW, Philip. *The Sublime.* Routledge, 2006, p. 61.
[3] BURKE, Edmund. *On Taste: On the Sublime and Beautiful; Reflections on the French Revolution; A Letter to a Noble Lord; with Introduction, Notes and Illustrations* (1757). *Vol. 24*. PF Collier & Son, 1909, p. 137.
[4] FREUD, Sigmund, and David Mclintock. *The Uncanny* (1919). Prabhat Prakashan, 1976, P. 219.
[5] HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*. SUNY press, 1996, p. 248.
[6] Al-Saji Alia explains this indeterminacy as every thematization has its own background and vague horizon composed of the implicit habituality and opacity and the unceasing mixture of

intensifying her sense of isolation and defenselessness. The ruggedness, the crevices, the slippery rocks make up the "unpresentable properties of landscape" within which the sublime happens when the "film of familiarity is lifted or pierced."[1] The unfamiliar evoked by Rose's viewing and sensing of the sublime cove, implies the "otherness" of Rose that emerges from her encounter with new surroundings.

Bakhtin's definition of "otherness" includes the notion of one's own otherness —that which hinders the "integrity and closure of self"[2]—as well as the otherness of others. For Rose, it is the wavering between the beautiful and the sublime that composes the otherness of others: the sea is rendered by Tan as paradoxically intimidating and yet soothing, while Rose is perpetually in a struggle to lay claim to it. However, her attempt, more often than not, slips from Rose's grasp and memories as the misgivings felt by Rose when viewing the cove for the first time show as she notes "it looked very rocky and slippery." Tan's ambiguous depictions of the cove scene that oscillate between being delightful, caring and overwhelming and formidable in turn complicate Rose's attempt to mark and claim the cove. Rose's uncertainty and insecurity about her position in the world, including her Chinese American identity struggle, is encapsulated in this apparent contradiction.

The sublime and the beautiful are traditionally gendered aesthetics. The sublime is associated with men and characterized with ruggedness, primitivity, and patriarchal values, while the beautiful is related to the female form. The aesthetic category used to express women's experience is limited within the category of the beautiful.[3] Rose's ambiguous attitudes towards the cove mark her partial exclusion

---

inner and outer horizons of things" (Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young, eds. *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2000, p. 147).

[1] ANDREWS, Malcolm. *Landscape and Western Art. Vol. 10*. Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 149.

[2] PONZIO, Augusto. "The Relation of Otherness in Bakhtin, Blanchot, Levinas." *Recherches Sémiotiques / Semiotic Inquiry*, vol. 7, no, 1, 1987, p. 6.

[3] Shaw writes that "With its ideological stress on sociability and the domestic affections, and its stylistic emphasis on the fleeting, the fanciful, and the pathetic, the beautiful was regarded as secondary to the 'manly' vigour and complexity of the sublime" (SHAW, Philip. *The Sublime.* Routledge, 2006, p. 106).

from the sublime and the "encoded identities that have long marked these two aesthetic categories.[1]

Rose is attempting to lay a claim to the mighty cove despite the fact that the cove slips from both her vision and narration, as evoked in "a person could walk out to sea on this reef." Rose is inspired by the cove to look beyond and carve out her own position in the world. This gesture has the power to summon Rose to her "potentiality-of-being-a-self."[2] Rose's pursuit of her own position in the world drives her to break from what is both granted and denied to her: here, the Chinese way of roaming in landscape and the American way of gazing upon landscape, as termed in the title of Part One. The understandings of Chineseness manifested by Rose's ambivalent feelings towards the sublime cove, open its pores and become creative. Tan's depictions of Chinese American characters' engagement with landscape, as Rose's attempt to lay claim to the cove, is both impeding and encouraging. This ambivalence produces a creative space for Tan to write about her own understanding of Chinese Americans' position, which becomes more complicated when they are situated in a transitional landscape such as the concurrently beautiful and sublime cove.

Between the welcoming and agreeable cove to one full of intimidation and uncertainty there seems an unceasing transition. The pervasive transition expressed in the cove scene reflects the between state of Chineseness, conveyed in the changeability of landscapes themselves. For Rose, the way the cove wavers between the beautiful and the sublime reflects her own struggle to negotiate with her surrounding environment and establish her own identity. The cove already embarks Rose on a journey of transition at the very moment when Rose enters into and begins to enact a relationship with landscape. Tan's cove scene displays the appearance of a landscape that is neither reductive nor idealistic but is seen and experienced here and now by the female characters.

---

[1] DIEHL, Joanne Feit. *Women Poets and the American Sublime*. Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 126.
[2] HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. SUNY press, 1996, p. 249.

We can then posit an association between the transition, or more precisely the reversal, between the beautiful and the sublime and that of the complex existing conditions of Chinese Americans. After the drowning of Rose's little brother Bing in the sea, the beautiful cove turns out to be a dangerous place, as the adult Rose recalls:

> Thinking back, I remember that this beach cove was a terrible place, full of wet shadows that chilled us and invisible specks that flew into our eyes and made it hard for us to see the dangers. We were all blind with the newness of this experience: a Chinese family trying to act like a typical American family at the beach.[1]

From Rose's reminiscence, the cove is a "terrible place" permeated with undetected hazards such as "shadows that chilled us" or "invisible specks that flew into our eyes." However, at first, the Hsu family had the false impression of the cove as beautiful. Tan portrays that the loss of the vision of the sublime cove of the Hsu family is caused by their "newness of this experience: a Chinese family trying to act like a typical American family at the beach." This loss of vision foreshadows the unexpected and tragic loss of Bing. In the eyes of the Hsu family, modifications of the cove began in an invisible way when the beautiful reached its limit and was reversed into its opposite—the sublime cove in this case. Jullien has explained this reversal with the process of ageing in *The Silent Transformations* (2009). Jullien contends that the operation of reversal goes on mutely in us until we shockingly notice that the old self is undone and eludes us.[2] In Tan's paragraph, this reversal becomes more complicated if we consider the complex situation of the Hsu family, under the false impression they are fully assimilated into American society.

This complex process of reversal illustrates to some extent the complicatedness of the Chinese American characters' identification with their Chinese heritage and with their American citizenship. Here, we need to give more thought to concepts such as "identity" and "identification" because the explanation of the transition between *yin* and *yang* forces in *Yijing* have taken apart the very idea of "identity."

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 122.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 3.

According to *Yijing*, a play of polarities such as *yin* and *yang* alone are sufficient to account for the between-state or the silent transition. Transition, as argued by Jullien, is precisely "the state in which, between dis-identification and re-identification, the question of identity can no longer still be 'supposed'."[1] This between-state of dis-identification and re-identification is vividly shown in the juxtaposition between the narrations from the young and adult Rose. In the recollection of the adult Rose, there is a recognition that the sublime features of the cove were actually partially apprehended by her younger self.

This perspective is consistent with a postcolonial reading of identity. Rose's two narrative perspectives oscillate between two different perceptions of the cove as beautiful and sublime. In his monograph *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha argues that "the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. It is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once."[2] Bhabha's conceptualization of identity is a useful tool to understand the complicating of Chineseness through the lens of the transition between the sublime and the beautiful. Bhabha continues to argue that "identification is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."[3] In Tan's paragraph, with the recollection offered from the perspective of the adult Rose, Chinese American characters are located in a changing landscape and are deceived by the "image" of a seemingly beautiful cove. Tan's Chinese American characters are depicted in a "geographical and historical context, enabl[ing] them to experience places as accessible and substantial, mak[ing] them a part of the land through corporeal encounters."[4]

This kind of depiction of Chinese American characters as mobile subjects is rare in Chinese American literature. Various literary works display the injustice that

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 37.
[2] BHABHA, Homi K. "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative." *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2012, p. 64.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[4] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance.* Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 121.

Chinese American characters face, especially when they claim their contribution to the construction of American landscapes. In Maxine Kingston's novel *China Men* (1980), the father figure attempts to claim the right to belong based on his family's history of labor on the land. But Kingston depicts the father figure as being entrapped in the same myths of exclusion that had long barred Asian Americans from American identity, an identity that is intimately associated with narratives of land conquest. Tan's nuanced portrayal of the Hsu family's responses to the cove wavering between the beautiful and the sublime counters to some extent the phenomenon whereby "the writer's preoccupation with mobility often takes the form of images of immobility."[1] Tan's writings about the transition between the beautiful and the sublime also challenge the status of this official history. Rather than being portrayed as fixed and limited within the image of "yellow-peril" or a "model-minority"[2] who are restricted in the image as passive instead of active agents in the landscape, Tan's Chinese American female characters participate in and record the landscapes they encounter on a daily basis such as the cove in the episode of "Half and Half" amply demonstrates.

2.1.1.b The Moonpond of the Village and the Valley from the Painting in The Valley of Amazement*: The Fluidity of Landscape Questioned*

According to *Yijing*, *yin* and *yang* forces are inseparable from each other on account of the continuous communication between the two, which engenders transition and the between-state. Jullien explains this point by introducing a Chinese term—*biantong* (变通 modification and conituation) where modification breaks with the continuation while at the same time producing the condition from which the continuation will arise. It is neither the essence nor the identification that are emphasized but rather the "energy invested in the process of things."[3] In *Yijing*, we

[1] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance.* Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 123.
[2] ADAMS, Bella. *Asian American Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008, p. 8.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 37.

discover a continuum between the concrete reality of the world where humankind and nature bond, as among all the things in the cosmos.[1] The growth and the decline of the myriad things, or sunny and rainy weather as a pair continue to evolve and develop. The transformations of one force influence the other. Is this not the reason why Violet, in *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), who has looked at the painting *The Valley of Amazement* plenty of times when she was at the courtesan house, sees the actual landscape as the *same* when she discovers it "in the flesh." This sameness that she first thinks she sees disturbs her because it connects her with the original state of uncertainty she felt when she first saw the painting. Then she wants to detect difference. And she manages to find some thanks to her careful examination: the actual valleys are longer, more jagged, and are covered with rice paddies and shows no signs of glowing light. Yet, the realization of these differences does not appease her because she is a character of mixed descent (from a Chinese father and an American mother), her appropriation of the Chinese way of interpreting reality is not fully developed at this stage of the novel, and she can't embody this state of transition that enables continuity. She is afraid of this fluidity.

In Tan's latest novel *The Valley of Amazement*, the repetitious depiction of the eponymous landscape painting, wavers between the beautiful and the sublimes as viewed through the eyes of the Chinese American mixed-raced character Violet. The repetitious creation of the utopian (the landscape painting in the poetic dreams of Violet) or dystopian visions (the disillusioned reality and Violet's traumatic memories) of the same landscape painting, converge in Violet's struggling quest for identity, reality, and freedom. This creative repetition indicates Violet's failed attempt to either retrieve her lost self or rebuild the connection with Chinese landscapes and heritage.

The following passage describes Violet's first encounter with the painting entitled *The Valley of Amazement* after she has been sold to a courtesan house by her

[1] SUN, Cecile Chu-chin. *The Poetics of Repetition in English and Chinese Lyric Poetry*. University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 9.

mother's American lover. A sense of uncertainty is intensified in the whole paragraph that shakes the emotions between the beautiful and the sublime:

> I unrolled the smaller painting. The initials "L.S." appeared on the bottom of that one as well. It was a landscape of a valley, viewed from the edge of a cliff, facing the scene below. The mountain ridges on each side were ragged, and their shadow silhouettes lay on the valley floor. The pendulous clouds were the shade of an old bruise. The upper halves were pink, and the clouds receding in the background were haloed in gold, and at the far end of the valley, an opening between two mountains glowed like the entrance to paradise. It looked like dawn. Or was it dusk? I could not tell whether the rain was coming, or the sky was clearing, whether it was about arriving there with joy or leaving it with relief. Was the painting meant to depict a feeling of hope or was it hopelessness? Were you supposed to be standing on the cliff charged with bravery or trembling in dread of what awaited you? Or maybe the painting was about the fool who had chased after a dream and was looking at the devil's pot of gold that lay in that glimmering place just beyond reach. The painting reminded me of those illusions that changed as you turned them upside down or sideways, transforming a bearded man into a tree. You could not see the painting both ways at the same time. You had to choose which one it was originally meant to be. How would you know which was right unless you were the one who had painted it?[1]

The between-state of the beautiful and the sublime is displayed in Tan's juxtaposition of positive and negative terms. For example, the painted valleys are described with the optimistic "pink," "gold," "paradise" and the pessimistic of "edge of a cliff," "pendulous" or "old bruise." The landscapes in the painting are further reproduced and anesthetized in Tan's ambiguous descriptions, which act not as a mimetic "illustration" but as constituent images of the character's shifting realities. This wavering ambivalence of the valley paintings bears Violet's doubt about her new circumstances (a new life in a courtesan house) and about her confusing identity struggle as a character with mixed ancestry. Violet asks a continuous chain of questions such as the time of the day in the valley (was it dusk?); the supposed meanings to be conveyed from the painting (joy or sorrow, hope or hopelessness), and the moral of the subject, if there is one, when facing the painting of the valley (bravery or trembling in front of the cliffs).

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement.* Ecco, 2013, p. 105.

The valley in the landscape painting describes a remote world full of the "alien, wild and spontaneous."[1] The enigmatic painting parallels the anxiety of Violet who is looking for salvation but finds herself circumscribed by the cruel reality. The description of the unfamiliar valleys is repeated in this paragraph as a kind of uncanny, conveying a sense of horror, and helplessness in the face of fate. As we have already seen, Freud argues that the uncanny is something which is "secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it." [2] The "uncanny" is useful to us in analyzing the inaccessibility of Chineseness. Chinese landscapes are deceptively beautiful and portrayed as "pink, haloed in gold, or glowed like the entrance to paradise." However, beneath these beautiful feelings invoked from the painting lie deeper and more complex sublime feelings. The sublime and the uncanny are closely associated in this passage because both are depicted as "unsettling experiences in which the individual human subject, having set out to plot the territory of beautiful forms, encounters, within these forms, the moral labyrinth on which they are constructed."[3] Violet is engulfed by the sublime feelings conveyed by the valleys that bypass the rational mind and transmute into the uncanny, which in turn comes back to haunt her.

The unreachable Chineseness is also named explicitly in the course of her vivid demonstration of the falsity of visual perceptions which she calls "illusions that changed as you turned them upside down or sideways, transforming a bearded man into a tree." The fluidity of reality in turn deepens the unreliability of identity, and makes literary writing an efficient mode of representation. The closer Violet becomes to the landscape painting, the more elusive it seems, paralleling the characters' failed attempt to access Chineseness in this novel.

The acceptance of the transition between the beautiful and the sublime is undermined by the comment "You could not see the painting both ways at the same

---

[1] ANDREWS, Malcolm. *Landscape and Western Art. Vol. 10*. Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 129.
[2] FREUD, Sigmund, and David Mclintock. *The Uncanny* (1919). Prabhat Prakashan, 1976, p. 258.
[3] ELLISON, David. *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 211.

time. You had to choose which one it was originally meant to be." Instead, a strong feeling of uncertainty and impossibility arises when Violet attempts to figure out the original meanings of the ambivalent valleys that are juxtaposed between the sublime and the beautiful and between the hopeful and the hopeless. The misty and imperceptible exit of the landscape evokes the enigma of arrival—of the paths that more often than not, will take Violet to another landscape, or other layers of landscapes without her ever reaching the original one. The effort involved in reaching and connecting with the landscape prove to be in vain—they "lay in that glimmering place just beyond reach." The passage ends on a deconstructive note, where the meanings of the painting have already been deferred and altered in the moment of attempted explanation.

In *The Valley of Amazement*, after the death of her American husband Edward, Violet is tricked by a scholar named Perpetual into living as his wife in a village called Moon Pond. In the next excerpt I will analyze Violet's first impression of Moon Pond, which resembles the valley painting and arouses a sense of apprehension towards the prospects of living with a new man. Because it is difficult for Violet to accept the fluidity of landscape, she is stuck in unpleasant uncertainty. This unpleasant uncertainty is proleptic of the dire moment that she is going to live with her new lover. Here, the mountainous landscape is evoked in terms that bear sublime feelings of disturbance and violence:

> It was beautiful, yet it gave me an ominous feeling. All at once, I knew why. I had seen a valley like this many times, the one in the paintings Lu Shing had given to my mother and to Edward. I was looking at the Valley of Amazement. Had I always been destined to come here? I had secretly examined that painting a dozen times. Edward believed the valley was illuminated at dawn, at the waking hour. And I had said it was dusk, when life closes down. He thought the dark clouds were leaving and that the storm was over. I thought it was about to begin. And so we were both right and wrong. It was dusk, and the storm was leaving.[1]

Violet experiences the uncanny when she recognizes the similarity between the real landscapes and the ones in the painting. The beautiful is transformed into the uncanny and the sublime, "it was beautiful, yet it gave me an ominous feeling." Freud

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement.* Ecco, 2013, pp. 360-361.

argues in his essay that the feelings of the uncanny are aroused in "certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances […] which, furthermore, recall the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states."[1] For Violet, the uncanny lurks in her repetitive encounters with the landscape painting—in the house where Edward and she live and in the transferred form of the painting in Moon Pond village. Violet experiences this same repression of her doubt about the painting because she had "secretly examined that painting a dozen times." Her surrender to fate in the face of the sublime also reveals itself when Violet asks: "Had I always been destined to come here?"

The uncanny reaches a climax when she encounters the five identical mountains in the painting, as described in the next passage from the chapter "Moon Pond Village":

> Four mountains. The painting had five, two on one side of the golden opening, three on the other. The sky shifted and the thundercloud moved slightly, and we saw the fifth, an enormous dark mountain that lay just beyond the other four. The painting had been an omen. I looked for ways it was different and I found them. Here the valley was longer, and the hills were terraced with rice paddies. The mountains in the other were more jagged along the ridge. In fact, other than the five mountains, a river valley, and stormy clouds, it hardly looked the same. In the painting, there was something at the back that glowed. Here there were just the mountains.[2]

The only way to mitigate the uncanniness felt when looking at the actual landscape is to discover the difference between the painted valleys in memories and the real ones before Violet's eyes: "I looked for ways it was different, and I found them." However, the discovery of the difference does not help Violet remove the uncanny feelings. Instead, her uncertainty continues to lurk in the last sentence where there is no gold light in the real landscape. The change from the beautiful gold-lit valleys to the enormous dark sublime mountain foreshadows her miserable life in the new village. Tan's creation of such haunting uncanny feelings strengthens the impression that the more intimate the characters get to know Chinese landscapes and the embodied thinking patterns within, the more uncanniness they experience.

[1] FREUD, Sigmund, and David Mclintock. *The Uncanny* (1919). Prabhat Prakashan, 1976, P. 258.pp. 248-249.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement.* Ecco, 2013, p. 361.

Chinese American writers, to some extent, have to confront this uncanny which reflects their relationship and distance from Chineseness.

Tan's renderings of the valleys in Moon Pond in parallel with these in the paintings lead her readers, into the sublime, which Philip Shaw characterizes as "a world of hidden depths and seemingly infinite space, only to dispel the pleasure of this engagement through the recollection of its underlying deceit."[1] The portrayal of the sublime feelings perceived and conveyed by a female character on the one hand, breaks the gendered association of the beautiful and the sublime, according to which the masculine sublime is supposed to attach to the depth and profundity of the landscape, whereas the feminine beautiful is supposed to relate to the shallow and slight nature of landscape. On the other hand, the ungraspability of Chineseness increases in Violet's struggle to articulate the ineffable experience of the seemingly familiar valleys. This struggle to find the right words reveals itself in the orientation of the writing styles here. In an earlier part of this chapter of the novel that depicts Violet's journey to the Moon Pond, Violet describes the landscape that she sees with metaphors that indicate her personal involvement in it, whereas later, when she arrives at the Moon Pond, her description becomes scientific, neutral, and distanced. For example, Violet uses very domestic and homely metaphors as evoked in "Only moments before, the sky had been filled with cauliflower-headed clouds. Now there was a sea of churning black mushrooms. I had thought we were leaving trouble behind, but maybe we were catching up to it."[2] However, this personal connection with landscape is converted into an objective observation of the valleys. Violet faithfully records her meticulous attention to the details of the valleys in the painting and those in the Moon Pond: "Here the valley was longer, and the hills were terraced with rice paddies. The mountains in the other were more jagged along the ridge."[3] The sublime that Violet apprehends from a landscape that has become rough, difficult, and resistant, impedes her production of a description—which, in its turn, becomes rough, difficult and resistant. Through this, paradoxically, a landscape is

[1] SHAW, Philip. *The Sublime*. Routledge, 2006, p. 7.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, pp. 347-348.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 361.

produced. For there to be landscape, in François Jullien's words, "something inaccessible, a beyond, must subsist."[1] This impossibility—this sense of the sublime remaining other, "a 'something' that can never be 'interfused' through the use of metaphors, symbols, or verbal connectives"[2] I also read as reflecting the difficulty of the "Chineseness" in Tan's portrayal of landscape.

This subchapter has analyzed how Chineseness becomes complicated and written in the transition between the beautiful and the sublime. On the one hand, the beautiful landscapes faced by the Chinese American characters always already contain some sublime within them. This points to the complex realities faced by the Chinese American community whose identity refuses to be restricted to being either a simple "yellow-peril" or a "model-minority." Instead, their identity vacillates between dis-identification and re-identification through their changing attitudes toward fluid landscapes that always contain the beautiful and the sublime. The complexity of the sublime in Tan's novels is deepened by uncanny feelings interlaced with the impossible task for the artists to reach reconciliation between reality and representation. Chineseness, in the interplay between the beautiful, the sublime, the uncanny and post-colonial identity, Chineseness sees its unreachability deepened. The next subchapter "Landscape of Life and Death" will discuss another pair where transition takes place within "landscape of Life and Death." It will highlight the Chinese American characters' difficulty in understanding Chinese landscapes because of their constantly overwhelming desire to seize and control landscape in the Western way they are familiar with.

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 42.

[2] Shaw argues that "If the aim of Romanticism is somehow to incorporate the 'sense sublime', postmodernism, by way of contrast, seeks to retain a sense of the sublime as other, a 'something' that can never be 'interfused' through the use of metaphors, symbols, or verbal connectives" (SHAW, Philip. *The Sublime*. Routledge, 2006, p. 9).

2.1.2 Landscapes of Life and Death

The in-betweenness of life and death can be seen as exemplifying the Chinese notion of transition. In *The Silent Transformations* (2009) however, Jullien enquires as to whether life should be viewed as a transition or a crossing. Taking the ageing process as his starting point, Jullien asks:

> On the other hand, does ageing have a beginning? When and from where did I start to age? No beginning is assignable to it: no matter how far back one goes, one has always started to get old. Cells are already dying as the foetus is being modelled. The ageing has always already started.[1]

From the Chinese perspective, ageing is viewed as a change-movement that has no beginning nor end. On the contrary, it is difficult for Greek philosophy to conceive of the juxtaposition of the two states "young" and "old"—their in-betweenness in other words.[2] The Western perspective on ageing sees death as a "culminating, fascinating and apocalyptic point,"[3] whereas Chinese philosophy, according to Daoist classics such as the *Dao De Jing* or *Zhuangzi*, views life and death as "an ongoing and reciprocal process."[4] Jullien explains this process with the help of the Chinese language: indeed, "life" and "death" in Chinese are often referred to by the same word as "*hua* (化)"—a transition and mutual transformation between the two terms. In fact, Daoism sees no difference between life and death. Instead, life and death are viewed in terms of their changes in movement. Ontologically, life and death embrace within themselves all beings and creatures interwoven with, and connected to, the great path of *Dao*. They come from and will return to the same *Dao*. And as far as the entire universe is concerned, life and death are in a continuous cycle like

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations.* Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, pp. 56-57.
[2] Jullien says that "Because European philosophy has privileged finality, has been preoccupied as a priority with the 'towards what (*eis ti*) and with the destination, concentrating on the result and not on the transition, it has stepped over old age. Has it even noticed it? It has passed over it in silence and kept only the End in sight: that is, common Death" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).
[3] *Ibid*., p. 58.
[4] Jullien argues that "what radical questioning would not already entail no longer speaking in this way of 'death' (Death as detachable, raised up, personified), but in terms of a process as dying (as we speak of 'ageing'), as the Chinese—not being able to distinguish morphologically between the verb and the substantive—are obliged to do? Better still: does it not, in effacing the rupture, usually named as itself as a 'transformation'(*hua*)?" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).

the rotation of the four seasons or the alternation of day and night. The Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (he 4th century B.C.) focuses on the consistency of life and death in terms of their transformation, thus forming a relativistic theory of the cycle of the two. For example, *Zhuangzi* states:

> Life is the succession of death and death is the beginning of life. No one knows exactly the regular patterns for both. The birth of a man is the convergence of the vital energy which in turn forms life. The breaking-up of the vital energy causes death. If life and death are closely related to each other, why then should I worry about death? Therefore, all things in the world are in the same circle of life and death.[1]

Life and death can be read as the rise and decline of the vital breath-energy (*Qi*) that permeates between Heaven and Earth. Life and death are therefore absorbed into the processive nature of things. As a result, *Zhuangzi* proposes that we should "preserve our life." For François Jullien, this implies keeping our life open to the transition and renewal of correlated pairs such as *yin* and *yang*, day and night, young and old, or life and death. And when one remains open to the tension and transition inherent in the moving patterns of the myriad things, one is able to liberate oneself and obtain the full potential of their life vitality.[2] Tan's portrayal of landscape and her renderings of the female characters' engagement with it explores this transient state of life and death. In Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Kwan explains this between-state to her American-born sister Olivia as follows:

> You have to use your secret senses [to see the World of Yin], imagine them when you are full of genuine feelings and memories, both happy and sad. Happy and sad sometimes come from the same thing, did you know this?[3]

In Tan's novels, life and death, just like happy and sad emotions, come from the same origin and will follow the moving pattern of going from one to the other. Tan's Chinese American female characters actively react to the landscapes located in China where danger, death and threat are all-pervasive: they interpret them. *The Hundred Secret Senses* highlights the American-born figure Olivia's self-mockery of her own

---

[1] Zhuangzi. *Library of Chinese Classics: Zhuangzi*. Translated by Wang Rongpei. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999, p. 363. / 庄子。《大中华文库：庄子》汪榕培，英译。湖南人民出版社，外文出版社，1999，363 页.

[2] JULLIEN, François. *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness*. Zone Books, 2007, p. 16.

[3] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 33-34.

madness when she is confronted with the life-threatening Changmian caves. In so doing, the typical gender-inflected association between female darkness and a morbid landscape is undermined. In the same novel, the Chinese-born figure Kwan refuses to play the role of a helpless passive woman waiting to be rescued by a male hero. Kwan even sacrifices her own life to change a landscape of death into a landscape of life.

2.1.2.a Landscape of death in The Hundred Secret Senses*: Life instincts.*

Death is insidious and looms large in the landscapes depicted in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). The landscape of death is figured in Changmian landscapes that are located in two temporalities—one is in the imaginary previous life of the Chinese-born character Kwan; the other is witnessed by the American-born character Olivia during her contemporary visit to China. Changmian landscapes, especially caves, feature images that evoke a doom-ridden feeling of impending violence and death. Tan's female characters are depicted as if they were expecting something degraded in China. In these detailed descriptions that appeal to the senses, Tan's renderings of the Changmian caves reflect a particular image of China. With her landscapes, she undermines the stereotypical views of China as a place that is always Other—one full of mystery that can never be grasped. The following paragraph from *The Hundred Secret Senses* describes a landscape that we can call a *landscape of death* encountered by the American-born Olivia and her husband Simon:

> I [Olivia] hurry over, and when I emerge from the archway and look down, I see a landscape that both chills and mesmerizes me, a fairy-tale place I've seen in nightmares. It is completely unlike the smooth, sunlit valley we just crossed. This is a deep and narrow ravine shaped by violent upheavals, as lumpy as an unmade bed, a scratchy blanket of moss with patches of light and pockets of shadows, the faded hues of a perpetual dusk.[1]

This landscape conveys a sense of uncertainty through the oxymoron "a fairy-tale place I've seen in nightmares." This sense of insecurity marks a contrast with the life-giving "smooth, sunlit valley" that Olivia says she has just crossed. Here,

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 280.

conversely, the "deep and narrow ravine" that bears the traces of "violent upheaval" seems to convey a sense of death. Tan uses many words that indicate the loss of order and light to underscore Olivia's fears in the face of the doom-laden landscape that she struggles to grasp, using homely expressions taken from her own personal experience. For example, the ravine is described as "lumpy" and is compared to an "unmade bed" and "a scratchy blanket of moss." In the end, light gradually fades out "with patches of light and pockets of shadows, the faded hues of a perpetual dusk." Just as the gloomy landscape fades away, so does Olivia's ancestral homeland vanish from her sight.

The next paragraph portrays the American-born Olivia's witnessing of a flock of dark birds after the disappearance of her husband Simon in the deep of the Changmian caves:

> I see dark birds fluttering like moths; they fall suddenly, then flap upward again. They're making shrill, high-pitched noises, the sounds of frightened creatures. Bats—that's what they are! They must have escaped from a cave, now out for a flight at dusk, the hour of insects. I saw bats in Mexico once—mariposas, the waiters called them, butterflies, so as not to scare the tourists. I wasn't afraid of them then, nor am I now. They are harbingers of hope, as welcome as the dove that brought a leafy twig to Noah. Salvation is nearby. Simon is nearby too. Perhaps the bats soared out because he entered their lair and disturbed their upside-down slumber.[1]

Tan offers a series of images that construct this landscape of death. Readers are addressed via the senses, through color and sound. In one particularly striking image, we see many dark birds gathering like moths, abruptly descending and ascending: "I see dark birds fluttering like moths; they fall suddenly, then flap upward again." The simile comparing the dark birds to the moths increases the claustrophobic feelings of suffocation and containment. From the black birds' fluctuating movement, a sense of death is impending, echoed in their piercing voices, in their "shrill, high-pitched noises, the sounds of frightened creatures." Tan uses pathetic fallacy to effect here: the description of the sounds of the birds as being "frightened creatures" seems to echo Olivia's own panic-ridden state. However, a twist comes when the dark birds are turned into a white dove, described as "harbingers of hope" like the Biblical bird

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 277-278.

that brought a "leafy twig to Noah." The references to the Old Testament story of Noah, where the "leafy twig" refers to the end of the flood and the appeasement of God's wrath suggests once again how Olivia is projecting a familiar and positive American cultural reference onto what she senses is a hostile Chinese environment. The ambiguity cultivated by Tan's writings displays itself through the contrast between the caves pervaded with deathly images as well as between their cultural interplays; the prestidigitator-like sleight of hand construct and in her utter transformation of the dark birds, first into bats, then into butterflies and finally into doves, and that of Olivia's optimistic interpretation of them as a sign of life. The ambiguity also reveals itself in Olivia's feelings toward Simon's disappearance that waver between hope and fear.

Olivia's yearning for hope, which arises from the landscape of death, recalls the Chinese aesthetics of life instincts. As has been discussed in the introduction to this subchapter, *yin* and *yang* forces constantly moderate each other in the "Great Process of the myriad things (*Dahua* 大化)." The myriad things come into transition and are discovered in inexhaustible origination, polar-generation, multi-interactive harmony, and recursive but limitless re-generativity and organic totality.[1] Continuous productivity gives rise to the aesthetics of life instincts. Chinese philosopher Fang Dongmei (Thomé H. Fang 方东美 1899-1977) explains that living in nature, human beings are located in the passage from the "Primordial" to the "Consequent stage" that is full of an overflow of Life.[2] This propulsion of life carries with it boundless energy. Human beings are free to swing into motion with the overflowing of life instincts as if in an "elegant dance" that is "full of the sense of joy."[3] This aesthetics of life are also expressed in the works of the contemporary Chinese writer and Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan (莫言 born 1955). Mo Yan offers the reader a picture of an imaginary place named Gaomi (高密) drawing on the techniques of synesthesia as well as those of expressionist drawings in multiple colors, displacing the strange and

[1] MOU, Bo. *The Routledge History of Chinese Philosophy*. Routledge, 2008, pp. 90-93.
[2] Thomé H, FANG. *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony*. Linking Publishing Co., Ltd., 1980, pp. 12-13.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the familiar.[1] In essence then, he expresses life aesthetics by highlighting visual, tactile, and auditory senses. These characteristics of Mo Yan's novels find resonance in Tan's way of portraying: Tan displays the life instincts through constructing a doom-laden landscape where danger and death pervade. To achieve this, Tan focuses on different dimensions of Olivia's sensations that are triggered from her experiencing of the Changmian caves. Tan therefore builds her own vision of the Chinese landscapes that is informed by the aesthetics of life instincts. But more importantly Tan's reconstruction of the Chinese landscapes of life and death displaces and transforms the traditional precept with the American-born characters' personal struggles and confusions.

The following paragraph describes what Olivia sees after the appearance of her husband Simon:

> I look at the clouds. They're streaming along. The wind is definitely blowing up there. And the more I watch, the more unsteady the ground feels, like the bottom of a salad spinner. And now the peaks, the trees, the boulders grow enormous, ten times larger than they were a minute ago. I stand and walk again, this time careful of my footing. Although the ground appears level, it's as if I were climbing a steep incline. A force seems to push me back. Is this one of those places on earth where the normal properties of gravity and density, volume and velocity have gone haywire? I grab on to the cracks of a rocky mound and strain so hard to pull myself up I'm sure a blood vessel in my brain will burst.[2]

Instead of being offered the glimmer of hope gained from the flock of dark birds, the reader is now engulfed in a chain of more menacing images. These images evolve with the focalizer Olivia's changing perspectives, moving from the cloudy sky to the unsteady ground, and then from the peaks of a mountain with giant boulders to its cliffy foot. The formal framing of the landscapes excerpted; Tan addresses the Changmian landscape through Olivia's sensory communication with all the elements within the caves. When we take a detailed look, these altering perspectives are accompanied by the combination of hearing ("The wind is definitely blowing up there"), vision ("And the more I watch, the more unsteady the ground feels, like the

[1] DURAN, Angelica, and Yuhan HUANG, eds. *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller.* Purdue University Press, 2014.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 278.

bottom of a salad spinner"), and Olivia's own kinetic movement ("I stand and walk again, this time careful of my footing").

Olivia's energetic movement combined with her heightened senses may be read as her attempt to control the surroundings and therefore a sign of life instincts. However, almost simultaneously, this illusory sense of control is denied in the loss of gravity and density, and in the volume and velocity that appear to have gone "haywire." Tan scholar Avery Gordon argues that in writing ghost stories, Tan aims to express "a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows."[1] In my reading also, Olivia's inherited memories of China, just as her elusive attempts to control the new surroundings, oscillate between the visible and the invisible. The invisible is first exhibited in the violent change in size of the boulders that grow enormous—ten times larger than they were a minute before. The invisible augments when Olivia walks on the seemingly level ground which gives her a false feeling of "climbing a steep incline." The mysterious force pushing Olivia back further seems to suggest that, for Chinese American writers, China is a site of "violent death and miraculous survival [which] undoubtedly haunts those who escape."[2]

This destabilization of the life instincts hidden from the Changmian caves can be read as a haunting force that both repels and fascinates the characters in Chinese American literature. In Tan's depictions, the Changmian caves guard their own agency and remain independent of all human control. Instead, wavering between life and death, the caves exert their influence over the American-born character Olivia. Her attempts to capture the essence of the landscape in words and the hidden Chineseness beneath are therefore thwarted.

---

[1] GORDON, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and The Sociological Imagination*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 17.

[2] MAXEY, Ruth. "'The East Is Where Things Begin': Writing the Ancestral Homeland in Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston." *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2005, p. 6.

2.1.2.b Morbid landscapes in The Hundred Secret Senses*: Rewriting the female character's darkness and victimization.*

Landscape in the Western tradition is often closely connected to its representation of women. For example, the nurturing characteristic of women can be projected into landscape, which is also considered as nurturing—in landscapes representing smooth luscious hills, for instance, or streams and flourishing fields. But women can also be seen as the Other—the Other according to the male gaze. Then, they are objects of fear and terror and represented in landscape form as "terrifying maternal swamps, mountains, seas, inhabited by sphinxes and gorgons."[1] This association of landscape with female darkness and victimization is displaced in Tan's female characters' reaction to the landscape that features signs of danger and death. For instance, in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan foregrounds Olivia's self-mockery of her own crazy fears:

> I'm straining hard to believe this; I can feel a cord in my brain stretching taut, and then it rips and I'm soaring, free of my body and its mortal fears, growing light and giddy. So this is how people become psychotic, they simply let go. I can see myself in a boring Swedish movie, slow to react to painfully obvious ironies. I howl like a madwoman at how ridiculous I look, how stupid it is to die in a place like this.[2]

This paragraph depicts what Olivia experiences after the disappearance of her American husband Simon. The scene takes place among the group of many faceless statues in the caves which are earlier described as "this strange gathering of rocks [which] resembles more and more the blackened victims of Pompeii, Hiroshima, the Apocalypse."[3] Olivia reveals conflictingly hysterical and liberating feelings when facing an imminent threat of death.

The tension continues with a deliberate contrast between two very different emotions. On the one hand, she sees herself as an impassive agent "in a boring Swedish movie, slow to react to painfully obvious ironies." On the other hand, Olivia howls hysterically like "a madwoman at how ridiculous [she] look[s]." Tan's

[1] ROSE, Gillian. *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 106.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 280.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

writings show this between-state, which denies the association of morbid landscape with the darkness of women. The association between the morbid landscape and the supposed darkness of women reflects the implicit category of women and landscape as the Other. Anne Williams argues that the "otherness" of the female—be it displayed in one specific woman, one particular female character, or metaphorically manifested as "darkness," "materiality" or any equivalent qualities—belongs to "the line of evil."[1] This interpretation of the landscape and women as Other and thus "evil" is useful in understanding the American-born character Olivia's ambivalent attitudes towards Chinese landscapes. In Olivia's eyes, Chinese landscapes belong to this "line of evil," while her positioning as a young Chinese American woman living in contemporary San Francisco renders herself as the "evil" Other in American society. Tan's demonstration of Olivia's self-aware transition between madness and liberation when confronted with the landscape of death, to some extent reaches into and prevents Chinese landscape and women being pigeonholed as the "evil" Other.

By doing this, Tan provides us with a new image of a self-critical Chinese American female character who humorously views a completely new situation. She offers the reader new angles by which to comprehend Chineseness from both the female characters' active response to the danger of death and in their interpretation of the landscape of death itself. Chinese philosophy does not have this association between landscapes of death and the supposed darkness of women (which does not mean that to the Chinese male gaze, women are not also the other!). The Daoist view on life and death is that they are in a process of constant transformation. Hence the landscape of death also necessarily always contains something liberating, announcing renewal and rebirth. Incorporating these Daoist views into her own American characters' vision of landscapes, Tan infuses them with ideas of hope.

In a gloomy morbid landscape, especially in the remote castles or wild moors that feature in the Western gothic tradition, female protagonists typically wait to be

[1] WILLIAMS, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 47.

rescued by their male counterpoints.[1] This common plot of a weak woman who is rescued by a male hero is revisited in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. It is the female Chinese-born character Kwan who acts as a heroine and saves Olivia and Simon from the landscape of death. Kwan's sacrifice enables Olivia to understand both her previous incarnation and present self, as well as to overcome her own diffidence in a romantic relationship. The next paragraph depicts Olivia's review of the significance of Kwan's rescue of her:

> I think Kwan intended to show me the world is not a place but the vastness of the soul. And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless, endless, all that moves us toward knowing what is true. I once thought love was supposed to be nothing but bliss. I now know it is also worry and grief, hope and trust. And believing in ghosts—that's believing that love never dies. If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary senses. If we remember, we can find them anytime with our hundred secret senses. "This a secret," I can still hear Kwan whispering. "Don't tell anyone. Promise, Libby-ah."[2]

The power of Kwan's active engagement with landscape is highlighted in her bravery and her calmness in assisting and guiding Olivia. It can be heard in her soothing words to Olivia: ""Don't worry." Her [Kwan's] voice returns, deep and resonant. "I find Simon, be back soon. You wait for us."[3] We can see from Olivia's reminiscence of Kwan that though Kwan's flesh has disappeared, she is still alive in Olivia's memories: "If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary senses. If we remember, we can find them anytime with our hundred secret senses." Kwan's death renders Olivia aware of what she had never understood before: the between-state by which life is contained within death and *vice versa*. Kwan becomes more alive in Olivia's mind after the death of her body. This exemplifies the Daoist precept that to preserve one's life does not mean that one eschews death: if one's

[1] Williams says that "The Female Gothic heroine experiences a rebirth. She is awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and, most important, a new identity. Indeed, she is often almost literally reborn, rescued at the climax from the life- threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world" (WILLIAMS, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 103-104).
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 320-321.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

death contributes to bettering the life of others, one will sacrifice oneself to live long in the good life of others, that is the way of achieving this long life: through death.

Chapter thirty-three of *Dao De Jing* states:

> To know others is wisdom; To know oneself is acuity (ming). To conquer others is power; To conquer oneself is strength. To know contentment is to have wealth. To act resolutely is to have purpose. To stay one's ground is to be enduring. To die and yet not be forgotten is to be long-lived.[1]

Kwan's rescue of Olivia from the landscape of death causes Olivia to change her views of the world as being an "anchored place"—a place where one is always restricted. In Olivia's eyes the world is now the place of the "vastness of the soul." Olivia experiences life in the presence of death. Tan's depictions of a landscape that is anticipating death enable Olivia's rebirth of the self as well as a reconciliation between her previous life and her present struggles as a Chinese American. Significantly, the paragraph about Kwan's sacrifice of her own life in order to save Olivia's and Simon's comes at the very end of the novel. Besides materializing the Daoist precepts of life in death, this ending shows to us that beauty arises from the experience of death and in the sense of the transience of life.

It is fair to argue that Kwan's rescuing of Olivia seems to be implausible and runs the risk of fueling stereotypical views of Chinese landscape as mysterious and utopian. Indeed, Tan has been critiqued for her depictions of Chinese landscapes that strongly appeal to the senses—for the "remarkable" things[2] happening on this very land. The sensuous details are read as tropes of the "scarred origin" [3] of Asian American cultures that are impossible to recover. Or alternatively, they are read as embodying the impossibility for the daughter figures to connect with their mothers after witnessing their mothers' sufferings in China. However, I would conversely contend that Tan's writings of the landscape of death offer another vision of

---

[1] AMES, R. T., D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 151.

[2] Edward Said defines the Orient as "a European invention, and [...] since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (SAID, Edward S. *Orientalism*. Penguin, 1757, 2007, p. 2).

[3] CHOW, Rey. "Ethnicity, Fantasy, and the Film *The Joy Luck Club*." *Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life*, 1996. p. 205.

Chineseness, where the matrilineal connection is actually rendered possible. Before Kwan offers a possibility of renewal through her rescue, Olivia experiences multiple layers of uncertainty, concerning, for example, her identity as a Chinese American, as well as her marital breakdown with Simon. However, through Kwan's rescue—and hence death—, Olivia is reborn and re-orientates herself. Before, Olivia was not able to believe in the between-state of *yin* and *yang*: for her, *yin* was not *yang* and *yang* was not *yin*. But now Olivia realizes that love does not only mean "bliss" but wavers itself between "worry and grief, hope and trust."[1] That death participates in the cycle of life, as she realizes.

In this subchapter, we have moved from the displacement of the life instincts within the landscape of death to the reproductive forces burgeoning from the landscape of death. We have witnessed Olivia's changing attitudes towards the transition between life and death. After the disappearance of Simon, Olivia attempts to exaggerate the hope for life. However, the ambiguity of Tan's writings destabilizes the life instincts discerned in the Changmian caves. Then with Kwan's rescue of Olivia from the landscape of death, Olivia begins to understand the between-state of love that transitions between bliss and worry. Tan's writings offer us a complex picture of the shimmering hope hidden in the landscape of death and the insidious dangers covered in the landscape of life. This intricate landscape depiction revisits the Daoist views on life and death. Besides this fundamental Daoist tenet inscribed within Tan's landscapes, I read the Changmian caves of life and death as an externalization of Chineseness: Chineseness as categorized as Other, to which are attached images of effeminacy, inscrutability and irrationality. However, through the analysis of Tan's female characters' creative interpretation of the Changmian caves, these Orientalizing—othering—associations are broken, opening up new perspectives for understanding Chineseness.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 320.

2.1.3 "Modern" and "Primitive" Landscapes

Amy Tan has been accused of misrepresenting racial or national realities and in so doing, betraying her status as a representative of the Chinese American community. A "'lack' of artistic [...] presence and an 'abundance' of imposed stereotypes" [1] is discerned in Tan's novels. However, a closer look at Tan's portrayal of Chinese "modern" and "primitive" landscapes in her third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), would seem to challenge these negative impressions that Tan had in some way betrayed her ethnic heritage. One critic who has a more subtle reading of the question is Ma Sheng-mei. In his article "'Chinese and Dogs' in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age," Ma invites us to rethink the term "primitive" within the contemporary context. He explains that New Age "primitivism" expresses a need from the Western self, materialized and reduced by advanced technology, for a spiritual healing so that now the Western self has increasingly recourse to "primitive" third world cultures.[2] The primitive landscape in the aforementioned novel takes the form of Changmian village. Tan's representation that addresses/engages playfully with those one-dimensional descriptions of Chinese landscapes imbued with mysticism and superstition then appear backward and blighted. The modern landscape refers to the landscape that denotes the development of a free-market economy which counters the impression of Chinese landscape as "primitive." The modern landscapes (re)visited by Olivia and Kwan are negatively described as uniform, indistinguishable and full of pollution.

[1] ZHU, Aijun. *Feminism and Global Chineseness: The Cultural Production of Controversial Women Authors*. Cambria Press, 2007, p. 15.

[2] Ma says that "Reified and atomized in economies of advanced technology, the Western self feels drained, in need of recharging or healing in a spiritual sense, for which purpose the 'primitive' third-world cultures are deployed. Simultaneously marked by its bestial savagery and spiritual transcendence, the primitive other is made to coalesce the physical with the metaphysical" (MA, Sheng-mei. ""Chinese and Dogs" in Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses": Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age." *Melus*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001, p. 29).

Critic Sau-ling Wong establishes a distinction between the doubting, questioning "interrogative modality" to be observed in Kingston's [1] novels and the flat, descriptive "declarative modality" of Tan's fiction.[2] I will argue however that Tan both records and calls into question what constitutes primitive and modern landscapes. Instead of accepting and reproducing—copying and pasting-like—the stereotypical version of Chinese landscapes, Amy Tan displaces those second-hand landscapes received from the mother figures' talk-stories. Here, Tan scholar Bella Adams' argument will be useful in examining the question of the writer's complication of Chineseness. By analyzing what I have called primitive and modern landscapes, Adams contends that the American-born daughter figures' visit to China is "at best naive and at worst ethnocentric."[3] She points out that Tan's novel portrays a mismatch between the expectations toward Chinese landscape and the reality of seeing it stretching before the characters' eyes. That is to say, Tan's novel breaks links between Chinese land and some imagined category, and that between Chinese land and some literal, stable referent.[4] This inconsistency between preconceptions and the actuality of the Chinese land enables new interpretations of Chineseness.

When evoking primitive and modern Chinese landscapes, Tan foregrounds the American-born character Olivia's dilemma as a tourist, photographer and a contemporary Chinese American citizen. In Olivia's first visit to Guilin (Kweilin 桂林), she expects to see the primitive and spiritual side of Chinese landscape. But in reality, she is shocked by the industrial buildings and free market atmosphere which

[1] Maxine Hong Kingston (born in 1940) is one of the most renowned Chinese American writers. She is well known for her novels *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980) and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) which are widely accepted as classics of Chinese American literary.

[2] Wong argues that the "interrogative modality" is narrated in the deconstructing authority and thematizing the epistemological difficulties of the American-born Chinese. While the "declarative modality" means the narration where the mother figures' (re)telling of the Chinese traditions are valorized as correctives to the daughters' unenlightened or biased outlook" (WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. ""Sugar Sisterhood": Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 50).

[3] ADAMS, Bella. "Becoming Chinese: Racial Ambiguity in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Literature and Racial Ambiguity*. Edited by Teresa Hubel and Neil Edward Brooks, Rodopi, 2002, p. 109.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 111-113.

are almost identical to those she left behind in the United States. Tan's descriptions of the modern Chinese landscape contradict the Orientalizing preconception of Chinese land as underdeveloped and retrograde. In her visit to her Chinese-born half-sister Kwan's hometown Changmian village (长眠), Olivia is excited about the possibility of checking out the primitive landscape that Kwan has recounted in the talk-stories for real. Olivia expresses a complex feeling of *déjà vu* which is accompanied by her artistic dilemma emerging from the way she chooses to represent China to a Western audience. By analyzing Olivia's position in witnessing Chinese land, this subchapter will study the authenticity of representation as well as the boundaries between imagination and reality. In so doing, the complication of Chineseness in Tan's novels will assume new dimensions.

2.1.3.a The excessive representation of the juxtaposition of primitive and contemporary world

Tan critic Ma Sheng-mei contends that the novelist portrays the "animalistic and divine" sides of the Chinese in a way which "reenact[s] the Orientalist fantasies of her massive 'mainstream' following."[1] But Marc Singer argues that the modern landscape in *The Hundred Secret Senses* transforms China into a site of dialogic interaction between different modes of cultures and times by introducing a Western, notably capitalist, commodified temporality.[2] This chapter will explore how Tan offers exaggerated depictions of the primitive and modern landscape in Guilin (桂林) and Changmian village (长眠). For instance, the next paragraph recounts Olivia's expectation that she will "breathe in the air of her ancestral land" as illustrated in the guidebook:

> I inhale deeply and imagine that I'm filling my lungs with the very air that inspired my ancestors, whoever they might have been. Because we arrived late the night before, we haven't yet seen the Guilin landscapes, its fabled karst

[1] MA, Sheng-mei. ""Chinese and Dogs" in Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses": Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age." *Melus*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001, p. 43.
[2] SINGER, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, p. 349.

> peaks, its magical limestone caves, and all the other sites listed in our guidebook as the reasons this is known in China as "the most beautiful place on earth." I have discounted much of the hype and am prepared to focus my lens on the more prosaic and monochromatic aspects of communist life.[1]

Tan gives an exaggerated representation of the tourists' fantasy about the Guilin landscapes, which is made up of separate images all enumerated in succession: the "fabled karst peaks, its magical limestone caves, and all the other sites listed in our guidebook." But at the same time, Olivia confesses that she anticipates facing "prosaic and monochromatic aspects of communist life." The Guilin landscapes as described in the guidebook correspond to how Western visitors view the Orient today—what Edward Said termed "a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate."[2] The lexical spheres as "fabled," "magical," the quotation marks in the phrase "the most beautiful place on earth," and the lens as a medium to observe the landscape instead of through one's senses in the above passage all indicate textuality here. Olivia's preconceptions about Guilin landscapes as a place full of monotony reflects a singularization of cultural differences. In Homi Bhabha's words, Olivia shows a tendency to vacillate "between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference."[3] That is to say, Olivia attempts to orient herself in the totally strange Guilin landscapes with the familiar knowledge obtained from the guidebook. But at the same time, Olivia strives to reveal an authentic version of the land that is exotic to her, by seeking out the "prosaic and monochromatic aspects of communist life." We can clearly detect a contrast between the fantastic poetic and the realist prosaic from Tan's descriptions. Olivia thinks that the monotonous communist life appears to be the more "truthful" and "authentic" version of the Chinese land. However, she is nevertheless moving from one cliché of viewing Chinese landscape as utopian and mysterious as if in a fabled dream, to another cliché of considering Chinese landscape as monotonous communist regime. Indeed, Tan's portrayal of Chinese landscape as going from one

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 171.
[2] SAID, Edward S. *Orientalism*. Penguin, 2007, p. 1.
[3] BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 107.

hackneyed version to another corresponds to Marc Singer's comment that her landscapes offer a conversation between different modes of culture and time.

What comes into sight, however, imposes on Olivia an impression of walking in the street of contemporary San Francisco after a Super Bowl game:

> No matter which way we go, the streets are chock-full of brightly dressed locals and bloated Westerners in jogging suits, as many people as one might see in San Francisco after a 49ers Super Bowl victory. And all around us is the hubbub of a free-market economy. There they are, in abundance: the barterers of knickknacks; the hawkers of lucky lottery tickets, stock market coupons, T-shirts, watches, and purses with bootlegged designer logos. And there are the requisite souvenirs for tourists—Mao buttons, the Eighteen Lohan carved on a walnut, plastic Buddhas in both Tibetan-thin and roly-poly models. It's as though China has traded its culture and traditions for the worst attributes of capitalism: rip-offs, disposable goods, and the mass-market frenzy to buy what everyone in the world has and doesn't need.[1]

Chinese land is fragmented into two very different landscapes: one is envisioned in Olivia's mind and the other is exhibited in front of her eyes. All the elements of the street are commodified including vendors, consumers, visitors, goods, and souvenirs. These commercialized icons remind Olivia of an enormous number of Westerners in jogging suits who flood the street after a Super Bowl game. The abundance of trades and the "hubbub of a free-market economy" counter her impression of Chinese landscapes as utopian, poetic, monochrome and communist. Olivia claims that Guilin has traded in its culture and traditions for Western capitalism. Olivia's declaration recalls the criticisms leveled at Tan by certain scholars: the accusation that Tan sacrifices ethnic reality for the benefit of her Western readers, who hope to re-affirm their superiority through reading the stories of minority groups. Asian American literary critic David Leiwei Li, for instance, contends that Tan's writings are "regressively feudal and antidemocratic" in a way that forces Asian American subjectivity into a "historical standstill."[2] Olivia's statement that China trades off its traditions and culture reverses this criticism. Rather, Tan's renderings of the contrast between communist China and capitalist

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 171-172.
[2] LI, David Leiwei. *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent.* Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 124.

China, contradict Li's view that Tan decontextualizes an overgeneralized version of China.[1]

The following paragraph describes an in-between state between primitive and modern landscapes that is witnessed by Olivia on her journey from Guilin to Changmian village. This paragraph once again addresses a contrast between the exotic and poetic China and that of the monochrome communist China:

> Looking up toward cloud level, we can still see the amazing peaks, which resemble prehistoric shark's teeth, the clichéd subject of every Chinese calendar and scroll painting. But tucked in the gums of these ancient stone formations is the blight of high-rises, their stucco exteriors grimy with industrial pollution, their signboards splashed with garish red and gilt characters. Between these are lower buildings from an earlier era, all of them painted a proletarian toothpaste-green. And here and there is the rubble of prewar houses and impromptu garbage dumps. The whole scene gives Guilin the look and stench of a pretty face marred by tawdry lipstick, gapped teeth, and an advanced case of periodontal disease.[2]

Tan constructs an interspace between the primitive and modern landscapes by introducing contiguity between "the amazing peaks" which "resemble prehistoric shark's teeth" and "horrible-looking high-rises." According to Jullien, land is promoted to landscape within that interspace where polarities arise and become more marked, and more diverse.[3] Tan's paragraph can be said to figure an interspace, in that it describes primitive and modern landscapes as a pair of polarities. It is in the interspace between these contrasted views that a more complex and truthful Chinese landscape can be constructed. In this instance however, they do not interact with each other. On the contrary, they clash with each other and moreover, it seems to be the modern landscape—occupying so many more lines than the "amazing peaks"—, that really dominates.

---

[1] Wong argues that Tan offers "the cultural tidbits Orientalist readers enjoy—decontextualized, overgeneralized, speculative, and confirmative of essential difference" (WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. ""Sugar Sisterhood": Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 71).

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 172.

[3] JULLIEN, François. L*iving off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 35.

Tan presents Chinese landscape as seemingly damaged and corrupted by economic development. The modern Chinese landscape is described as not very different from its Western counterpart. Tan adopts a chain of derogative words such as "blight," "grimy," "garish," and "gilt," whereby the readers sense the shift from "a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste."[1] The commodified and blighted Chinese landscape prevents Olivia from getting these exotic sceneries which the guidebook led her to expect. The ensuing paragraph shows Olivia's enthusiasm, almost in spite of herself, as she witnesses certain scenes of unexpected beauty:

> As I look through the viewfinder, I feel as though we've stumbled on a fabled misty land, half memory, half illusion. Are we in Chinese Nirvana? Changmian looks like the carefully cropped photos found in travel brochures advertising "a charmed world of the distant past, where visitors can step back in time." It conveys all the sentimental quaintness that tourists crave but never actually see. There must be something wrong, I keep warning myself. Around the corner we'll stumble on reality: the fast-food market, the tire junkyard, the signs indicating this village is really a Chinese fantasyland for tourists: Buy your tickets here! See the China of your dreams! Unspoiled by progress, mired in the past![2]

In the following part, through Olivia's eyes, Tan opens another in-between space for some other China, a less simplistic one, to take place. It will have to emerge in-between two mystifying fables: that of "Chinese Nirvana" and that of "Chinese consumerism." Chinese land, in the eyes of Olivia, is only, for the moment, "half memory, half illusion." It is not whole, one whole. Despite her denial or reluctance to admit it, Olivia's version of Chinese landscape has been etched in her mind and shapes part of her way of seeing the world. While the total disappearance of the typical sceneries that recur in the guidebooks also disquiets Olivia because, as in the above paragraph, she expects to see backward, fantasy landscapes to be there in her range of sight, or, on the contrary, contemporary market-economy landscapes. Chinese landscape, either the communist version or the poetic one, are second-hand knowledge for Olivia. Through the narrative shifts, Tan intends to show that Olivia struggles to find some kind of reality from her own visit—the one not influenced by

[1] GLOTFELTY, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. 196.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 185.

Kwan's talk-stories, the tourist guidebooks or preconceptions from other sources. But this endeavor to establish one's own version of a certain landscape is as elusive as the constructed nature of any identity or national reality.

Towards the end of the paragraph, Olivia's fantasy about Chinese landscape as a "fabled misty land" is once again verified with a highly prejudiced and conservative exclamation that "miraculously, Changmian has avoided the detritus of modernization." But almost immediately, Olivia's confirmation of the landscape in her imagination and dreams is undermined by her misgivings that some commodified aspects will pop up and "around the corner we'll stumble on reality." Olivia then comes back to the amusing advertising catchwords with mocking and satirical effect, as written in the last three short, choppy sentences with three prominent exclamations marks, "Buy your tickets here! See the China of your dreams! Unspoiled by progress, mired in the past!"

The impressions of the Changmian landscape as both primitive and modern go back-and-forth in Olivia's mind. This movement indeed echoes the in-between state of the Chinese land in Tan's novels. On the one hand, Chinese landscape is continuously constructed as an image, a memory and even a story through Tan's depictions of the primitive landscape. This image of the primitive landscape reassures what Olivia has fantasized about China in her imagination as well as in her mental map of Changmian village drawn from Kwan's talk-stories. On the other hand, Tan's portrayal of the modern landscape influenced by the market economy represents Chinese landscape as physical and material instead of being merely imaginary and ideal. The modern landscape contradicts the illusion that it will be easier for Chinese American characters to get a privileged, immediate access to Chinese landscapes. China is not a fixed ready-made waiting for the visitor. Rather, Chinese American writers, like their Chinese American characters, face the impossibility of finding an available or authentic position without participating fully in its configuration.

2.1.3.b Tan's Dilemma as a Chinese American Writer

Asian American literature, according to Asian American critic Elain Kim, is expected to give a privileged access to "real" Asian lives.[1] Deborah Madsen adds that this assumption is based on the correspondence "between the texts themselves and a set of Orientalist images that readers expect to find in the 'authentic' Chinese American literature."[2] Tan has been surrounded by preconceptions, questions, and doubts that have emerged from her identity as a second-generation Chinese American immigrant. Tan's in-between position has long fascinated and disturbed both Tan's literary creation and her critics.[3] For example, Ruth Maxey argues that Tan sets China in an "ahistorical vacuum" which reveals that the melodramatic and horrific country in her novels is the "essential, transcendent China."[4] Through the study of one particular passage from *The Secret Hundred Senses*, I want to show now how Olivia's dilemma as a photographer and a second-generation Chinese American reflects Tan's own dilemma as a Chinese American writer.

Edward Said elaborates on many of the issues that writers will face when depicting the Orient:

> Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf.[5]

For Said, the Western depiction of the Orient exists as "a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, and made supererogatory any such real

---

[1] KIM, Elaine H. "Defining Asian American Realities through Literature." *Cultural Critique* 6, 1987, pp. 87-111.
[2] MADSEN, Deborah L. "Chinese American Writers of the Real and the Fake: Authenticity and the Twin Traditions of Life Writing." *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 36, vol. 3, 2006, p. 259.
[3] The most frequently asked questions in Tan's interviews are: How does her family history impact her literary career? How authentic is the China that is portrayed in her novels compared to the real one? How much has her writing and creative process been influenced by her Chinese heritages? To what extent has her mother's Chinese language influenced her artistic creation?
[4] MAXEY, Ruth. "'The East Is Where Things Begin': Writing the Ancestral Homeland in Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston." *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2005, p.11, p. 6.
[5] SAID, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books. 1978, p. 21.

thing as "the Orient."[1] For Tan, however, the Chinese landscape is not merely a construction in the way the Orient may stand for Western writers. The Chinese landscape is also those mountains and waters which Tan revisited with her mother in the late 1980s, and several times in the company of her friends in the following decades. But Said's conclusion that writers who intend to depict the Orient confront a number of issues remains useful as regards the analysis of Tan's portrayal of Chinese landscape. As Yuan Yuan argues, to read Tan, we need to be attentive to the displacement of the narrative subject with reference to her particular literary representation.[2] We should always be aware of aspects such as narrative voice, the type of structure, the images and motifs. This section will analyze the complicated nature of Olivia's narratives of her experiences of the primitive Changmian landscape.

The next paragraph conveys Olivia's ambivalent observation of the courtyard in Changmian village, which both attracts and repels her. Her identity as Chinese American produces this ambivalence:

> In the courtyard, I take out a numbered roll and load it. After the heavy rain, the sky has drained itself to a soft gouache blue, splotches of powder-puff clouds swimming behind the peaks. I inhale deeply and smell the woody kitchen smoke of Changmian's fifty-three households. And beneath that bouquet wafts the ripe odor of manure.[3]

Olivia experiences Changmian landscape in the courtyard from her observation of the sky, clouds, peaks and the scent of the kitchen smoke. Readers are led by Olivia's shifting angles of observation in the manner of a tour guide who offers the visitor a thorough tour of the courtyard. The sky color is metaphorically depicted as "soft gouache blue" as if she were appreciating an oil painting. The "splotches of powder-puff clouds swimming behind the peaks" remind us of the clichéd photos of misty mountains from travel magazines or in documentaries. But it is also clear that Olivia shows her fondness for primitive landscape with simple lifestyles such as cooking in the house equipped with chimneys and livestock. In that respect, Tan even

[1] SAID, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books. 1978, p. 22.
[2] YUAN, Yuan. "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan," edited by Harold Bloom, *Amy Tan*. Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 109.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 236.

uses the word "bouquet" usually attached to the context of high cuisine and prestigious wines to evoke the smoke from the kitchens. To show her admiration for the whole scene, Tan, through Olivia, presents us with a personified landscape. The majority of the landscape descriptions adopt an active voice as if the clouds, the kitchen smoke, and the smells of manure had a life of their own. The primitive landscape here aims not to intensify the image of China as a very different land. Instead, Olivia presents an idyllic landscape painting with softness, which is repeatedly conveyed through words such as "soft," "swimming," and "waft." The ripe smell of the manure is moving through the air. With the term "ripe" attached to manure we reach an apogee and will then suddenly fall down from a completely idealized scene to a pit of repulsion. This bathos prepares us for its in-between space that will be opened soon afterwards.

The paragraph that follows takes a U-turn from the lovely proleptical scene. When the eyes move to the ground, Olivia finds more signs of disorder and degradation:

> I scope out the elements of the scene. The mud-brick walls of the courtyard will serve well as overall backdrop. I like the orange tinge, the rough texture. The tree in the middle has anemic-looking leaves—avoid that. The pigpen has definite foreground potential—nicely positioned on the right side of the courtyard under an eave of thatched twigs. It's rustically simple, like a manger in a kids' Christmas play. But instead of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, there are three pigs rooting in muck. And a half-dozen chickens, one lacking a foot, another with part of its beak missing. I dance in an expanding then shrinking arc around my subject. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a slop bucket full of grayish rice gruel and flies. And a pit with a terrible stench, a dark watery hole. I lean over and glimpse a gray- furred creature, along with clumps of puffy rice that writhe—maggots, that's what they are.[1]

Olivia performs her duty as a photographer working for an American travel magazine. Precisely responding to Western picturesque mores, her aim of the careful examination of the courtyard is to frame the light beforehand. The tone changes from the personal to that of a nonchalant and aloof onlooker. Every element in the scene is defined by its visual promise—to serve as the proper object or background in a photo, as "the mud-brick walls will serve well as overall backdrop" or in the "pigpen

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 236.

has definite foreground potential—nicely positioned on the right side." The components that are deemed as inappropriate will be edited out, as described in the sentence "The tree in the middle has anemic-looking leaves—avoid that." Suddenly, from merely aesthetic, detached, formatted, considerations, the tone and the scope of the criticism change radically when another Western myth is evoked in the form of one of the most-revered biblical episodes—the Nativity—as a point of satirical comparison. Olivia verges toward the mischievous, even sacrilegious, when she turns a rustically simple Chinese courtyard into the décor of the most well-loved Christian scenes. The typically cute images and sweet versions are then ridiculed. Olivia replaces Jesus, Mary, and Joseph with "three pigs rooting in muck" that are surrounded by "a half-dozen chickens, one lacking a foot, another with part of its beak missing." By replacing the three holy figures from the Christmas scene by pigs and chickens with physical defects, Tan reveals a terrible unbalance within her. Tan's father and elder brother both died from brain cancer when she was a teenager. Tan lived with a strong sense of fear that her family was cursed by this lethal disease, and she too would die soon. What made the situation worse was that Tan's mother Daisy Tan suffered severely from a psychological break-down leading to threaten to kill Tan and her younger brother before the God of death found them. Both her father's and brother's deaths and her mother's "crazy" behavior and words went beyond Tan's comprehension. All these tragedies caused Tan to give up her religious beliefs that had been built on her father's duty call as a pastor and the biblical stories recounted to Tan as a child. Tan's life experiences help us understand her striking use of the biblical stories here in the passage.

From the merely repulsive to the physically disgusting, another twist is brought to the courtyard scene, when, in the last few sentences, the courtyard dramatically alters once more from being an idyllic painting to a hideous scene with a "terrible stench" and "gray-furred maggots that writhe in the rice." By moving gradually from a pastoral landscape to a landscape of horror, the courtyard of China is depicted neither as merely poetic and mysterious nor as merely blighted by the market-economy, but rather diseased. Viewing Tan's portrayal of China in a chronological order, we can see that, in her own way, Tan has been trying to enrich her descriptions

of China. Thus, critic Ma Sheng-mei's comment seems to be only part of the story when she says that "Tan's ethnicizing of the primitive contributes significantly to her success among white, middle-class, 'mainstream' readers." [1] Instead, *The Hundred Secret Senses* achieves an effect of undermining the limited image of China precisely through Tan's unrelenting depiction of what Olivia witnesses in the countryside. The Chinese landscape for Tan as a writer, and for Olivia as a photographer, appears to be in transition between attraction and repulsion.

To understand the complex nature of the representation of the Chinese landscape, especially the countryside, we can consider Olivia's dilemma as a photographer, which is analogous to Tan's predicament as a Chinese American writer. The next paragraph portrays this quandary:

> Life in Changmian now seems futile. I should be "previsualizing" the moment I want, willing spontaneity to coincide with what's given. But all I see in my head are well-heeled readers flipping through a chic travel magazine that specializes in bucolic images of third world countries. I know what people want to see. That's why my work usually feels unsatisfying, pre-edited into safe dullness. It isn't that I want to take photos that are deliberately unflattering. What's the point in that? There's no market for them, and even if there were, hard realism would give people the wrong impression, that all of China is this way, backward, unsanitary, miserably poor. I hate myself for being American enough to make these judgments. Why do I always edit the real world? For whose sake?[2]

As a photographer, Olivia has to cater to the expectations of her magazine readership that expects to see an unsurprising version of China that will coincide with the image of China as an exotic land with all its inscrutable mysteries and blights. China as an exotic land will be represented in artworks—be they photos or literary works—, as satisfyingly predictable as regards the mainstream consumers' preconceptions as essentially a different place. In other words, the descriptions of the Chinese landscapes have to be the ones that have always already been constructed as part of their conception of the East, without any space for spontaneity, multiplicity, fluidity—or complexity. But from the standpoint of Olivia as a Chinese American photographer, a contrast arises between this anticipated and simple reproduction of

[1] MA, Sheng-mei. ""Chinese and Dogs" in Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses": Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age." *Melus*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001, p. 30.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 236.

China, and that of her artistic desire to transfer the reality of the world to her readers in her own way. However, what indeed makes the "primitive" landscapes in Tan's novel surprising is that she introduces within it one of the most well-loved and renowned biblical scenes to turn it into a pit of repulsion with dirty, physical defects and repulsive smells. Tan has very ambivalent attitudes toward religious beliefs: on the one hand, she has been influenced by the Bible's storytelling from the bedtime stories of her father who served as a pastor back then; on the other hand, she shows great skepticism toward biblical stories especially after the deaths of her father and elder brother as well as her mother's psychological breakdown during her teenage years. Therefore, we discern in this passage a striking rewriting of one of the most admired biblical scenes as a site pervasive of signs that are contrary to purity, neatness, and blessedness.

Olivia's artistic dilemma is manifested in her reluctance to "pre-edit[…] into safe dullness" to cater for her white readers. Olivia's discontent reflects Tan's own unease at the fact that, like most Asian American writers, she is confined in the "coevalness" of an absolute "other time" that divests them of their agency, voice, and specificity.[1] Tan explicitly expresses her desire to escape from the "literary ghetto" in which the "works of fiction by minority writers are read mainly for the study of class, gender, and race."[2] But Tan, like Olivia, often finds herself in a quandary when it comes to rendering the traditional Chinese landscapes that are expected of her: she knows that her renderings of these "primitive" landscapes will consolidate the stereotypical image of China. At the same time as her character, through her qualms, Tan strives to create a more imaginary space for multiple and diversified versions of China: that is, for something surprising to arise. Olivia's quandary actually lies in her doubt about the natural and the constructed in her photos. Tan shows the constructedness of both Olivia's interpretation and representation of the Chinese countryside.

[1] According to Wong, the works by Asian American writers are read with "respect and voyeurism, admiration and condescension, humility and self-congratulation." These writers are essentially assessed from the standpoint of ideology instead of from the standpoint of aesthetics (WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 59)."

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 307.

Chinese landscape as rendered by Tan alludes to and comments upon the "real world." Actually, Olivia wavers between choosing to show a diseased and filthy landscape—and fantasy—which will make her embellish the filthy landscape and highlight its utopian and "poetic" sides. Refusing to take up any one position, Olivia breaks the deadlock by focusing on the possibility of capturing one moment as things happen, as recorded in the beginning of the following paragraph, "I'll just do my best to capture a moment, the sense of it as it happens." We can see in this ambivalent wavering an echo of what Tan says in *The Opposite of Fate* (2001) about her "distrust [of] absolute truths" and "clichés." Far from spreading them, her fictions aim to "dismiss clichés […] to see the world freshly from closer up or farther away […] while remembering that there are so many possibilities."[1]

Tan has been criticized for her novels' clichéd representation that contrasts prehistorical China and contemporary modern America. The introduction of the polluted Chinese landscape that is strewn with commercialized icons as in its own way helps displace this binary reception. The portrayal of the Guilin landscapes greatly influenced by the market economy, subverts the fixed images of China as idyllic or backward, as if time has stood still. Tan gives nuanced depictions of the American-born character Olivia's changing attitudes towards the Changmian countryside landscape. Tan, like Olivia, struggles between what seems true to her and what she knows is constructed. Actually, China, in transition between primitive and the modern landscapes, also exhibits somehow "schizophrenic" feature, being both traditional and metropolitan. And it is precisely in the transition between primitive and the modern landscapes, that Chineseness becomes more complicated.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 354.

2.2 Transformation in Tan's Novels

2.2.1 *Yin-Yang* forces in Tan's female characters' bodies: instituting the body of *yin*

Chapter "Jingshen Xun (精神训)" from *Huainanzi*, a sophisticated articulation of Han philosophy and statecraft compiled by scholars at the court of Liu An (刘安) in the second century B.C. clearly elaborates on the interconnection/interchangeability between the rotation of the four seasons, the natural elements in the land and changes in the weather and the human body:

> Heaven has four seasons, five phases, nine regions, and 366 days. Humans have four limbs, five orbs, nine apertures, and 366 joints. Heaven has wind, rain, cold, and heat; humans have taking, giving, joy, and anger. Therefore, the choleric orb parallels the clouds; the pulmonary orb parallels the air; the hepatic orb parallels the wind; the renal orb parallels the rain; and the splenic orb parallels the thunder.[1]

The body, composed of *yin* and *yang* forces, is considered as a universe in miniature; the different body parts correspond to various natural phenomena. As one component of the natural world, humans adapt the rhythm of their own bodies in order to follow the movement of *yin* and *yang* forces in nature. In so doing, humankind gains the capacity to live harmoniously with nature.

The Book of Changes (*Yijing*) likewise sets its trigram according to the intimate correspondence between Heaven, Earth and Humankind:

> Anciently when the sages made the *Yi*, it was with the design that its figures should be in conformity with the principles underlying the natures (of men and things), and the ordinances appointed (for them by Heaven). With this view they exhibited in them the way of heaven, calling (the lines) *yin* and *yang*; the way of earth, calling them the strong (or hard) and the weak (or soft); and the way of man, under the names of benevolence and righteousness. Each [trigram] embraced those three Powers, and being.[2]

[1] LIU, An, and John S. Major. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China.* Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 294.
[2] LEGGE, JAMES. *The I Ching: The Book of Changes*. Sacred Books of the East Vol XVI, 1899, p. 43. (italics absent from the original text)

Human beings and nature are regulated and nurtured by the same movements between *yin* and *yang* forces and encounter oppositions and conflicts, transitions and transformations. *Yin* and *yang* forces, characterized as softness and hardness, conform to Earth and Heaven, which in turn, agree with the law of man. *Yin* and *yang* forces unceasingly modify, alter, and renew each other. In the episode "The Moon Lady" in *The Joy Luck Club*, the power of *yin* and *yang* forces alternating in the Chinese-born character Yingying's body undergo a transformation. However, this transformation does not lead to an ideal realm of man-nature cohabitation as it should have: one force does not hinder the other force such that Yingying becomes more adapted to her surroundings by accommodating the transformations of *yin* and *yang* within her body.[1] Rather, the *yin-yang* transformations in Yingying's body make her more disoriented in her surroundings, initially leading to increased confusion rather than greater comprehension and enlightenment. Through this confusion, Tan undercuts the cohabitation of man and nature which is supposed to be achieved when one is well aware of these alternations of *yin* and *yang* forces within one's body; since the human body is seen as a miniature of landscape in Chinese philosophy, the understanding of *yin-yang* alternations within it are one path to understanding the *yin-yang* alternation within the macrocosm. Failure to apprehend these alternations within the microcosm of the body hinders the broader comprehension of the macrocosm.

As just seen, in Chinese philosophy, the body is seen as an equal to nature. In the *Yijing*, they have the same trigramatic representation. But in addition to this, the body is also the bearer of moral resonances, as we can read from *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学), a Confucian classic dating back to the ancient time of 551–479 B.C. The human body is viewed then as a site of repetition and consolidation of social norms. *The Great Learning* states:

> The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first

[1] This man-nature concomitance composes one aspect of "to feed one's life" (*yang sheng* 养生). *Yang sheng* is termed by François Jullien in his monograph *Vital Nourishment Departing from Happiness Glossary of Chinese Terms* (2007).

> regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts.[1]

Wang Yangming (王阳明 1472-1529), a Neo-Confucian thinker, argues that the act to rectifying one's heart is inseparable from cultivating one's body.[2] Cultivating one's body is therefore associated with moral implications such as learning, ritual, integrity, honesty and righteousness. *Xunzi* (荀子), a collection of Confucian philosophical writings dating back to the third-century B.C. records that humankind should cultivate their bodies properly and it is this which enables their minds to decode various principles inherent in their own nature and the nature of the myriad things (*wanwu*).[3] To put it more simply, it is by cultivating the body that one strives to foster other, higher, virtues and abilities.[4] In the episode "Waiting Between the Trees" in *The Joy Luck Club*, for instance, the *yin-yang* transformation in Yingying's body subverts the moral connotations of the body. Instead, Tan portrays the *yin* force as empowering and liberating which reverses the dominance of the *yang* force. Likewise, the representation of the *yin* force as creative, freeing and reproductive, also undercuts the *yin-yang* balance that is much revered in Chinese philosophy. Tan

---

[1] Confucius. *The Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of The Mean*. Translated by JAMES Legge. Cosimo, Inc., 2009, p. 224.

[2] Wang says that "What is the body? It is the use of the mind. What is the mind? It is the mastery of the body's spirit. What is body cultivation? It is the term for the removal of evil for the sake of good. Can my body do good and remove evil? It is only when its spiritual master wants to do good and remove evil that its physical master can do good and remove evil. Therefore, if you want to cultivate your body, you must first correct your mind" (WANG Yangming. *Da Xue Wen*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1992, p. 97. / 王阳明：《大学问》，上海古籍出版社，1992 年，第 97 页). My translation.

[3] Xunzi says "The learning of the gentleman enters through his ears, fastens to his heart, spreads through his four limbs, and manifests itself in his actions. His slightest word, his most subtle movement, all can serve as a model for others [...] Thus the learning of the gentleman is used to improve his own person" (HUTTON, Eric L. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 40).

[4] Contemporary Chinese scholar Ge Hongbing points out two meanings inherent in the Chinese concept of "body" from readings of Chinese twentieth century literature. The body denotes the flesh, it also denotes the entity empowered by intentions, mind and affect whose status is influenced by the morality and cultivation" (GE, Hongbing. *Politics of Body: Interpretation of the Chinese Literature of the 20th Century*. Joint Publishing Company, 2005, p. 30. / 葛红兵，《身体政治：解读 20 世纪的中国文学》， 上海三联书，2005，第 30 页).

gives a feminist and Chinese American spin to the *yin-yang* balance within one's body, the microcosm, and the *yin-yang* balance within the macrocosm.

2.2.1.a The interplay of yin *and* yang *forces within the characters' bodies*

The interplay of *yin* and *yang* is explored in "The Moon Lady," another chapter from *The Joy Luck Club*. Narrated in the first person, it recounts one of Yingying's childhood experiences. In fact, the narrative "I" falls into a lake during a mid-autumn family reunion. Rescued by a fisherman and left on the shore of the lake, Yingying finds herself drawn to a Chinese opera being performed on the lakeside to celebrate the mid-autumn festival. It tells the story of Chang E (嫦娥), a Chinese Moon goddess who resides on the moon, and is generally believed to be the symbol of the *yin* force.

The growth and decline of Yingying's own shadow constitute an important recurring trope in the story. Asian American literary critic Wong Sau-ling argues in her monograph *From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993) that in Chinese American literature, the shadow reflects the status of Chinese Americans as Other. Their otherness is projected onto the motif of the shadow, symbolic of the socially unacceptable or unconventional Asian American status.[1] But instead of being the protagonist's double, I will read the shadow in "The Moon Lady" as something that emanates from, combats and transforms the *yin* and *yang* forces inside the narrative "I"'s body. Yingying's convoluted *yin-yang* transformation is depicted by Tan as a loss of the self in the "same way carvings on stone are worn down by waters."[2] The shadow continues to reside within Yingying's body. Looking back as an adult Chinese American at the beginning of this episode, she declares her status in American society to be that of a shadow, which transforms into a mode of resistance:

[1] Wong argues that "Being of Chinese descent, she will always be Other. The protagonist must be repressing and projecting onto the double. The quiet girl represents that residue of racial difference which dooms Chinese Americans to a position of inferiority in a racist society" (WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*. Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 89).
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 67.

Yingying claims that "[she] kept [her] true nature hidden, running along like a small shadow so nobody could catch [her]."[1]

It is when she stands still in the middle of the courtyard before the Mid-autumn ceremony that Yingying becomes aware of her shadow—the *yin* force within her body—for the first time. The ensuing paragraph depicts this scene of Yingying's enlightenment:

> Standing perfectly still like that, I discovered my shadow. At first it was just a dark spot on the bamboo mats that covered the courtyard bricks. It had short legs and long arms, a dark coiled braid just like mine. When I shook my head, it shook its head. We flapped our arms. We raised one leg. I turned to walk away and it followed me. I turned back around quickly and it faced me. I lifted the bamboo mat to see if I could peel off my shadow, but it was under the mat, on the brick. I shrieked with delight at my shadow's own cleverness. I ran to the shade under the tree, watching my shadow chase me. It disappeared. I loved my shadow, this dark side of me that had my same restless nature.[2]

At the beginning, the *yin* force within Yingying's body, at the beginning, is a small "dark spot" that has "short legs and long arms." Yingying feels the congruence of herself and the *yin* force within her body through the uniformity of her bodily movements and her shadow, "When I shook my head, it shook its head." This congruence grows in Tan's use of "we" instead of "it" in "We raised one leg." Yingying experiments with her body to test her shadow's own cleverness. In so doing, Tan also hints at the contradictory features of the shadow: on the one hand, it depends on the movement of Yingying; on the other hand, the shadow is independent and becomes its own subject and acts on its own behalf. These conflicting characteristics call to mind Zhuangzi's comments on the complexity of the shadow in chapter *Qiwu lun* (*The Equality of Things* 齐物论). Zhuangzi explains shadow's meanings through a dialogue between the shadow and the penumbra[3]:

> The penumbra asked the shadow, "A little while ago you were moving when the man walked, and now you are standing still when the man stops […] How is it that you lack independent actions?"

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 67.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[3] Penumbra refers to the partially shaded outer region of the shadow cast by an opaque object.

> The shadow answered, "Don't I have to depend on the man to be what I am? Doesn't the man have to depend on something else in turn to be what he is? Don't I have to depend on the snake's scales or the cicada's wings?"[1]

Here the shadow depends on the bodily form of a man and in turn a man must depend on something other than himself. The myriad things (*wanwu*) are dependent on each other. Zhuangzi points out a mutual origin and interdependence between the shadow and the human beings: the shadow has to rely on "the scales of the snake" or the "wings of the cicadas." However, in Tan's novels, it is not the interdependence of things that is highlighted. Rather it is Yingying's awakening, her nascent self-awareness, that is emphasized. Yingying is captivated by the *yin* force inhabiting, or rather, hibernating, in her body because the restless nature has long been there. The *yin* force within the narrative "I"'s body gains its own agency: Tan uses personification and adopts an active voice to describe the active state of the shadow. Yingying clearly declares her love for, and recognition of, this new-found *yin* force because "this dark side of [her] had [her] same restless nature." The discovery of her unsettledness foreshadows Yingying's upcoming accidental fall into the lake as a girl and her later disquiet in American society as an adult.

The next paragraph depicts a scene where Yingying is sitting on the side of the boat during the mid-autumn family ceremony. It is then that Yingying accidentally falls:

> I listened to their banquet while dangling my legs over the back. And although it was night, it was bright outside. I could see my reflection, my legs, my hands leaning on the edge, and my face. And above my head, I saw why it was so bright. In the dark water, I could see the full moon, a moon so warm and big it looked like the sun. And I turned around so I could find the Moon Lady and tell her my secret wish. But right at that moment, everybody else must have seen her too. Because firecrackers exploded, and I fell into the water not even hearing my own splash.[2]

Tan renders the scene in an almost rhythmic and regular pattern by alternately describing the narrative voice passively listening and observing ("listened to their banquet", "see the bright moon and my reflection", "see the full moon") and then

---

[1] Zhuangzi. *Library of Chinese Classics: Zhuangzi.* Translated by Wang Rongpei. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999, p. 39. / 《大中华文库：庄子》汪榕培，英译。湖南人民出版社，外文出版社，1999，39 页。

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 77-78.

taking a more active role in the scene ("dangling my legs," "my legs and hands leaning on the edge"). She creates a familiar scene from daily life, but this relatively commonplace activity gains a fantastic color with Yingying's wish to talk with the Moon Lady, as evoked in "I could find the Moon Lady and tell her my secret wish." The repetitious sentence structures produce structures a chant that has an almost hypnotic effect which functions to foreshadows Yingying's accidental falling into the lake.

A sharp contrast is drawn between the serenity of the lake and the noises of the firecrackers which are exaggeratedly depicted as so loud that Yingying does not hear her own splash as she falls. I read these noises as corresponding to the burning desires inside Yingying: she wants to see her *yin* force clearly and uses this power to tell her secret wish. The moon that is symbolic of the *yin* force is described by Tan as bright as the sun: it is defamiliarized to "look like the sun." The boundaries between the sun (*yang*/male) and the moon (*yin*/female) almost disappear but not to such an extent as to become interchangeable. Tan just reminds us that the bright moon "*looked like* the sun." The *yin* force within Yingying's body begins to rise in but does not replace the domineering status of the *yang* force. The balance between *yin* and *yang* has been broken when *yang* evolves into a domineering force in patriarchal society. The *yang* force comes to represent the social conventions that stress strength, aspiration, access to power and knowledge and so forth. As a result, the *yin* force will have been weakened and reduced to a subordinate status that features softness, conservation, submissiveness, gentleness and so on.

The *yin* and *yang* forces within Yingying's body do not begin to fight with each other until the moment of her accidental falling into the lake. The ensuing paragraph describes the moment just after her fall:

> I was surprised by the cool comfort of the water, so that at first I was not frightened. It was like weightless sleep. And I expected Amah to come immediately and pick me up. But in the instant that I began to choke, I knew she would not come. I thrashed my arms and legs under the water. The sharp water had swum up my nose, into my throat and eyes, and this made me thrash even harder. "Amah!" I tried to cry and I was so angry at her for abandoning

> me, for making me wait and suffer unnecessarily. And then a dark shape brushed by me and I knew it was one of the Five Evils, a swimming snake.[1]

Can Yingying's falling into the water simply be explained by the noise of the firecracker explosion? The text remains ambiguous on this point. The fact that the fall occurs just after Yingying's precise observation of the moon that is as bright as the sun seems to suggest that Yingying falls into the lake because she is attracted by the reflection of the bright moon. She is curious about the moon that is so bright that it reminds her of the sun. "Reflection" also alludes to one of the connotations of Yingying's name, which literally means a clear reflection on the lake, and her pursuit of self-discovery by seeking her secret wish for life.[2] Yingying's simultaneous desire for and attraction to the moon's reflection are initially soothing: she feels buoyed up in the water as if in a "weightless sleep."

Dream, as portrayed with the story of Zhuang Zhou's dreaming of a butterfly in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*, is not an illusion but as another dimension of one's self:

> Zhuang Zhou [Zhuangzi], once dreamed that I was a butterfly, a butterfly fluttering happily here and there. I was so pleased that I forgot I was Zhuang Zhou. When I suddenly woke up, I was astonished to find that I was a matter-of-fact Zhuang Zhou. Did Zhuang Zhou dream of the butterfly or did the butterfly dream of Zhuang Zhou? Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there must be some distinctions. This is called "the transformation of things.[3]

The boundaries between one's self and that of a butterfly are effaced because Zhuang Zhou cannot distinguish whether he is dreaming of the butterfly, or the butterfly is dreaming of him. In this light, I intend to read the moon's reflection in the lake, as equivalent to the butterfly in Zhuang Zhou's dream—as a dimension of the expanding *yin* force in Yingying's body. But the weightless sleep in the consoling water has another layer of meaning because the cool water reminds her of the womb. Lastly, this imagery is clearly related to *yin* forces that are also associated with the coldness and disillusionment of the water. The womb (the maternal space) has both

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 78.

[2] In comparison, her daughter Lena is like "a bottomless pond. You throw stones in and they sink into the darkness and dissolve. Her eyes looking back do not reflect anything" (*Ibid.*, p. 242).

[3] Zhuangzi. *Library of Chinese Classics: Zhuangzi.* Translated by Wang Rongpei. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999, pp. 39-41. / 《大中华文库：庄子》汪榕培，英译。湖南人民出版社，外文出版社，1999，39-41 页。

reproductive and destructive powers. It is "reproductive" because Yingying expects Amah (her babysitter) to pick her up. The maternal space is also destructive because she is overwhelmed by fear and panic and begins to choke. The *yin* force inside Yingying's body gradually gains power: it is first discovered as very tiny when she stands in a courtyard. This weak *yin* force transforms into *yang* force in the scene of where Yingying observes that the moon is as bright as a sun. Yingying's deepest yearnings for the *yang* forces (as embodied in the reflection of the bright moon) drive her to fall into the water. Falling into the lake, the *yin* force that is externalized as "a dark shape" of a swimming snake begins to overshadow the *yang* force. This growth of the *yin* force in Yingying's body, to some extent, prevents her from gaining knowledge of herself and her surrounding environment, in other words, prevents her from connecting with the *yang* force.

When Yingying is rescued by a fisherman and returns to the shore of the lake, she watches a Chinese opera which recounts the story of Chang E who regrets stealing her husband's magical peach for long life and flying into the moon alone. The narrative of the opera echoes what Yingying has just experienced. Yingying feels the same regret and loneliness as Chang E when she claims that "In one small moment, we had both lost the world, and there was no way to get it back."[1] At the end of the opera, Yingying falsely considers the actor as the Moon Lady, runs to tell her secret wish and finds out that the actor playing the "Moon Lady" is actually a man:

> "I have a wish," I said in a whisper, and still she did not hear me. So I walked closer yet, until I could see the face of the Moon Lady: shrunken cheeks, a broad oily nose, large glaring teeth, and red-stained eyes. A face so tired that she wearily pulled off her hair, her long gown fell from her shoulders. And as the secret wish fell from my lips, the Moon Lady looked at me and became a man.[2]

The ugliness of the actor's face is read by critic Xu Wenying as revealing the Asian American women's victimization and subjugation that are consolidated by the gender-inflected binary oppositions where *yang* stands for masculinity and *yin*

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 81.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

represents femininity.[1] If viewing the *yin-yang* transformation within Yingying's body as a process of her understanding of herself and the world, then the discovery of the maleness of the Moon Lady composes one step of this process.

After her fall, the *yin* force starts to surpass the *yang* force within Yingying's body. Yingying whispers her secret wish to the Moon Lady, which shows her reverence for the *yin* force when the actor sings that "For woman is yin […] the darkness within, where untampered passions lie." But Yingying's respect of the *yin* force is dramatically interrupted by her discovery that the Moon Lady is actually played by an ugly man. Tan amplifies Yingying's sense of shock by deferring the moment when the actor's gender is revealed. The description starts with a wide shot of an elegant and beautiful woman who is "ablaze with the light from a dozen kerosene lamps" and only moves to a close-up shot of an ugly greasy male face with "shrunken cheeks, a broad oily nose, large glaring teeth, and red-stained eyes." The transformation is almost too seamless to be detected, the graceful lady changes into a man with a simple pulling off of hair and a taking off of a gown. This undiscerned transfiguration recalls the cyclical and uniform transformation in Daoist philosophy between *yin* and *yang* forces from which the development of the myriad things is motivated.[2] Yingying's shock in witnessing the seamless transformation of the elegant Moon Lady into an unpleasant male actor, in fact, implies that Yingying fails to accept the transformation between *yin* and *yang* forces. Through Tan's depiction of the theatrical change of the opera singer's face, Yingying's effort to understand both the self and the world is hindered rather than facilitated. The traditional path in Daoist and Confucian thought which proposes exploring one's self and the surroundings through accepting changes in one's body, is therefore displaced because it has to be conscious and felt.

---

[1] XU, Wenying. "A Womanist Production of Truths: The Use of Myths in Amy Tan." *Paintbrush: A Journal of Multicultural Literature*, vol. 12, 1995, pp. 60-61.

[2] Chan explains the cyclical and uniform features of the transformation as "The succession of decline, growth, fullness, and emptiness go in a cycle, each end becoming a new beginning. This is the way to talk about the workings of the great principle and to discuss the principle of all things" (CHAN, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 206).

The close-up view of the actor's face with the magnified "shrunken cheeks," "broad oily nose," "large glaring teeth," and "red-stained eyes" can be read as engaging with a certain ambivalence in the representation of Asian American characters in Asian American literature in general. In Yoon Sun Lee's words, the "Asian Americans don't appear to have faces, or at least individuated ones."[1] And even when they are given a human face, the face is a "blurry, featureless one, a faceless face."[2] The face in Tan's passage, however, is not "faceless or featureless."[3] Through the depictions of Yingying's chasing the shadow in the courtyard, appreciating the moon on the boat, falling into the lake and watching the opera on the lakeshore, Tan's portrayal of her character's body immediately removes moral colors, social conventions and discursive burdens from the body as one entity within which the *yin-yang* interplay takes place. The Asian American's body is then represented as possessing a diverse nature, capabilities and possibilities that endow it with adaptability to the various social changes.[4] Chineseness, as embodied in the fluid bodies of Asian American characters, thus gains new potential for writers like Tan to establish their own literary reservoir—a literary reservoir that is partly present in daily Asian American experience, as displayed in Yingying's comment in the end of the episode that "[she] remember[ed] everything that happened that day because it ha[d] happened many times in [her] life."[5]

[1] LEE, Yoon Sun. "Racialized Bodies and Asian American Literature." *American Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2018, p. 175.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[3] Ian Burkitt comments on Butler's writing about the performance of body as "Butler's writings submerge the bodily and the material beneath the text and autonomize language as the precondition of all being, and, in Butler's case, of the material body itself. The body in her works is only so far as the body—or its parts, gestures and movements - signify through their performances, caught as they are, reiterating in a chain of signifiers" (BURKITT, Ian. *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*. Sage, 1999, p. 95).
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 108.
[5] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 83.

2.2.1.b Celebration of the yin *virtue within characters' body*

In an ideal state of body and nature, *yin* and *yang* forces are balanced. This equilibrium is believed to help achieve harmony in society. When this balance is broken, for example when *yang* evolves to become the domineering force in patriarchal society, emphasizing activity, movement, speed, expansion and power (as it does in East and West alike), this harmony is changed. Tan's writings re-conceptualize *yin* as reproductive,[1] positive and creative[2] and can therefore be said to undermine this overriding *yang* force. After being abandoned by her first husband back in China, Yingying learns to turn the conventionally negative *yin* force to her advantage by secretly manipulating St. Clair to marry her. Located in the estranged American landscape, Yingying is first devoured by the *yin* force that turns her into a ghost who remains invisible, displaced and silenced. However, the *yin* force later changes into a reproductive power. The *yin* and *yang* forces interplay with and transform into each other when Yingying deals with her two marriages and when she handles the relationship with her American-born daughter Lena.

The ensuing paragraph depicts what happens to Yingying after she is abandoned by her first husband, and finally begins to realize the power of the *yin* force that had hibernated inside her body:

> Then she [Yingying's mother] told me why a tiger is gold and black. It has two ways. The gold side leaps with its fierce heart. The black side stands still with cunning, hiding its gold between trees, seeing and not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come. I did not learn to use my black side until after the bad man left me.[3]

---

[1] The *yin* force is associated with the life-force of the valleys that never dies. As recorded in Chapter 6 of *Dao De Jing*, the *yin* force is reproductive as recorded as "The life-force of the valley never dies—This is called the dark female. The gateway of the dark female—This is called the root of the world. Wispy and delicate, it only seems to be there, Yet its productivity is bottomless" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 95).

[2] The *yin* force also symbolizes a creative power of rebirth, as written in Chapter 28 of *Dao De Jing*, that "Know[s] the male Yet safeguard[s] the female And [is] a river gorge to the world. As a river gorge to the world, You will not lose your real potency (*de*), And not losing your real potency, You return to the state of the newborn babe (*Ibid.*, p. 141). (italics absent from the original text).

[3] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 248.

Yingying compares herself to a tiger that possesses both *yin* and *yang* forces. The *yang* force is the tiger's gold side that "leaps with its fierce heart." The tiger's gold side recalls the bright moon that seems almost like a sun. The *yin* force is the black side that "stands still with cunning." The *yin* and *yang* forces are inseparable for it is only with a fierce heart that Yingying is headstrong enough to wait patiently by, keeping her true nature to herself which is "seeing and not being seen."

Through giving up her own *Qi*, Yingying uses her *yin* force to manipulate her American lover to marry her:

> So I decided. I decided to let Saint marry me. So easy for me. I was the daughter of my father's wife. I spoke in a trembly voice. I became pale, ill, and more thin. I let myself become a wounded animal. I let the hunter come to me and turn me into a tiger ghost. I willingly gave up my chi, the spirit that caused me so much pain.
>
> Now I was a tiger that neither pounced nor lay waiting between the trees. I became an unseen spirit.[1]

As discussed in previous chapters, the human body in Chinese philosophical thought is composed of *Qi*. The life and death of human beings are merely a process of *Qi* gathering and dissolving.[2] Yingying's giving up of her *Qi* implies that she has decided to act as a ghost. At this moment, the *yin* force transforms into something negative that deprives Yingying of her voice and spirit, as depicted in the sentence "I was a tiger that neither pounced nor lay waiting between the trees. I became an unseen spirit." In Chinese traditions, being an "unseen spirit," a ghost, is not considered positively. The proposal for humankind to follow the rhythm of *yin* and *yang* alternation does not equal the state of one's invisibility and silence. Instead, Chinese thought emphasizes a harmony that is achieved in the balance between *yin* and *yang* forces in one's body, in society and in the whole universe. Tan adopts animalization to present Yingying's strategies for luring St Clair to marry her:

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 251.

[2] Chapter "Knowledge Rambling in the North (*zhibeiyou* 知北游)" from *Zhuangzi* records that "Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger (of this connexion between them)? life is due to the collecting of the breath. When that is collected, there is life; when it is dispersed, there is death" ("Knowledge Rambling in the North", *Chinese Text Project*, https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/knowledge-rambling-in-the-north/ens. Accessed on Dec 10 2020).

Yingying is compared to a wounded animal and St Clair is compared to a hunter. The animalization of Yingying's body reflects on the objectification of women as animals and monsters. But unlike other women's unconscious or forced acceptance of this objectification, Yingying actively takes advantage of this animalization and behaves like a wounded animal. In fact, she performs femininity to show her vulnerability by becoming pale, ill, and thinner and by speaking in a tremble voice. It is interesting to notice a parallel between the opera actor who pretends to be woman by wearing women's clothes and thick make-up, and that of Yingying who shows her fragility and weakness by behaving like a "wounded animal." The subversive potential of the *yin* force within Yingying's body later enables a transfiguration of the negative *yin* force into an active and creative *yin* virtue: Yingying starts to love her American husband with an equal stance and reconnects with her estranged American-born daughter. In this way, Tan's adoption of animalization offers a new possibility to celebrate the *yin* force within the female body.

The next two paragraphs convey Yingying's intention to awaken her American-born daughter Lena by penetrating Lena's skin to transmit the *yin* virtue obtained in her own body. In this particular context, the empowered *yin* virtue for both Yingying and Lena is manifested as material bodily pain, "hard and shiny, more clear":

> And now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved.[1]
>
> So this is what I will do. I will gather together my past and look. I will see a thing that has already happened. The pain that cut my spirit loose. I will hold that pain in my hand until it becomes hard and shiny, more clear. And then my fierceness can come back, my golden side, my black side. I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter's tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her my spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter.[2]

Yingying squarely confronts the dark side of her *yin* force and changes it into a *yin* virtue to save herself and her daughter from oblivion. As several critics have noted, Tan plays with the conception of the "abject"[3] when rendering this *yin*-force

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 242.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 252.
[3] Zhang Jiachen discusses in her doctoral dissertation how the abjection of Asian American food offers Asian American literature a chance to displace stable racial categories and challenge clichés about ethnic food. ZHANG, Jiachen. *Representations of Food and Abjection in Asian*

transformation in Yingying's body. The "abject" is explained in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2018):

> that which disturbs the self, by provoking either disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion. [It] is the excessive dimension of either a subject or an object that cannot be assimilated. As such, it is simultaneously outside or beyond the subject and inside and of the subject.[1]

The repetitive use of "sharp pain," "cut," and "penetrate" displays the impact of the dark *yin* force inside Yingying's body which cannot be easily assimilated. Besides, Tan describes the *yin* force with a specific term, "penetrate," that is associated in both Eastern and Western cultures with the masculine. This particular use accurately indicates that the *yin* force has become so strong in Yingying's body that it resembles male power.

The imagery suggested by words such as "cut," "penetrate" and "sharp pain" are censored by Tan's critics as quasi-cannibalistic images catering for the exotic taste and voyeuristic desire of Western readers. In her 2001 doctoral dissertation, Ancy Eapen argues that "in cultural terms it translates to reifying perceived cultural differences and exaggerating one's Otherness in or to gain a foothold in a white dominated social system."[2] However, I will read Tan's images as transgressing defining borders, in their representation of the inaccessibility of Chineseness and of the difficulty of matrilineal connection. In America, Yingying is forced to be the Other who is constructed as filthy, negative, dark and inferior compared to the pure, positive, bright and superior white self. Tan's appropriation of the "abject" delimits

---

American Fictions. Diss. University of Leeds, 2018. Hsiao does not use the word "abject" to describe Tan's depictions *per se*. But the cited example in *The Joy Luck Club* denotes the "abject" because Suyuan compares the ancient hills in Kweilin as "dripping bowels". HSIAO, Pi-Li. "Food Imagery in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *Feng Chia Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences,* 2012, p. 208. Likewise, Sau-ling Wong's cited passages from *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Hundred Secret Senses* also hint that Tan addresses the abject in her fictions such as the unsentimental killing for food. WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*. Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 34.

[1] BUCHANAN, Ian. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory.* Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 45.

[2] EAPEN, Ancy. *Ethnicity and Literary Aesthetics in the Novels of Amy Tan and Bharathi Mukherjee.* 2001. Mahatma Gandhi U, PhD dissertation, p. 259.

the view of Chineseness as "inassimilable non-sense, and radical alterity."[1] Through the deliberate abjection of the *yin* force, Tan's writings endow the dark *yin* force with a subversive power. This subversive power is invigorated by Yingying's active perception of her own body with black (*yin*) and golden sides (*yang*). With her strategic adoption of abjection, Tan recreates a language that "bear[s] the burden of one's own cultural experience."[2] Chineseness is renegotiated in this process as Tan recreates Chinese American female characters that escape from the Western models of "angel woman" and "monster woman"[3] or the Chinese model of a morally virtuous woman.[4] Tan's engagement with the abject also counters the contradictory models of womanhood that Asian American women are confronted with: the demonization, oversexualization of Asian American female characters, or their reduction to the "feminized model for a dominant and conservative nationalist notion of family values."[5]

In the course of history and across the planet, writing and speech have gradually become the prime modes used to express the embodied self. The subject has become an author in discourse and the body has sunk beneath the discursivity of the subject.[6]

---

[1] GRAEBER, David. "Radical Alterity is Just Another Way of Saying "Reality" — A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 5, no. 2. 2015, p. 28.
[2] ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* Routledge, 2003, pp. 37-38.
[3] "The Angle in the House (1891)" is a poem written by Coventry Patmore. The line goes as: "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself" (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4099/4099-h/4099-h.htm. Accessed on 06 April 2021). Thackeray implies that a monster may reside within every "angel in the house": women may hide their "diabolically hideous and slimy" sides and pretend that they are "proper, agreeable, and decorous" (THACKERAY, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair: A Novel without A Hero*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1963, p. 617).
[4] The body, especially the female body, is considered as the site of social norms in Confucian thoughts. Hiroko Sekiguchi argues that "In China, from the Han dynasty reign of Emperor Wu (141-87 B.C.) onward, canonical texts articulating rites and ethics of virtuous propriety based on these hierarchies were promulgated by successive dynasties. To the extent that the father-husband was the head of both family and state, we may refer to this system of ethical values and priorities as the 'patriarchal family paradigm'" (KO, Dorothy, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan Piggott, eds. *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*. University of California Press, 2003, p. 27).
[5] HO, Wendy. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing. Vol. 5*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 81.
[6] BARKER, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*. University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 57.

The body has become the object rather than the subject of discourse. In contrast, Tan's appropriation of the "abject", then, can be seen as heightening "fluid, volatile, messy, leaky bodies."[1] In addition, the deconstruction and re-empowering of the dark *yin* force as a virtue breaches the overbearing *yang* force in both contemporary Chinese and American society alike. Instead, the empowered *yin* virtue recaptures the essential status of *yin* proposed in Daoism as the Cosmic mother and female body, as a way to know *Dao*, and as the ultimate power and strategy for living.[2]

As discussed earlier in this subchapter, the human body in Chinese philosophy is considered as a miniature universe that embodies the *yin-yang* alternation just as the myriad things do in nature. It can therefore be posited that the human body constitutes one form of landscape. In Yingying's case, she "cuts" her past pain as an abandoned woman and a ghost living in an estranged land into her skin. The traces left by her pain on her body then construct a landscape that makes her own spirit free. In this light, Yingying's flesh transforms itself into a landscape. Here we need to notice that the Chinese view of the human body as a miniature universe actually removes the difference between self and non-self. In other words, the relationship between the human body and that of the whole universe is the one between the microcosm and the macrocosm because both share the same compositions and moving patterns. However, according to English scholar Douglas Porteous, the body is regarded as a personal landscape.[3] By exploring the way that the landscape and the human body come to be intertwined in terms of analogy and metaphor, the idea of "the flesh as the landscape" helps reformulate the distinction between self and non-self. From this perspective, Tan's descriptions of Yingying's body with *yin-yang* alternations as the landscape, enriches the Western reading paradigm.

Yingying attempts to pass this pain onto her American-born daughter Lena. Though her effort is in vain, the passing already shows that the body is "an act of

[1] LONGHURST, Robyn. *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries*. Routledge, 2004, p. 23.
[2] WANG, Robin R. "Dao Becomes Female: A Gendered Reality, Knowledge, and Strategy for Living." *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Routledge, 2017, pp. 35-48.
[3] PORTEOUS, J. Douglas. *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor.* Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 71.

self-definition, albeit a disturbing one."[1] Yingying cuts her daughter's body as a way of conveying her own spirit. The *yin* force thus transforms into *yin* virtue which does not equal the *yang* force because it is characterized with traits that are more often associated with women such as suppleness and vulnerability. The Western concept of the abject also tends to be associated more with the feminine (*yin*) than with the masculine (*yang*). According to Julia Kristeva, the abject occurs when we leave the womb, an act that is contradictorily "bloody, painful, traumatizing, liberating and beautiful." [2] Here in the passage, Yingying's act of "penetrating [her] daughter's tough skin and cut her [daughter's] tiger spirit free", like the moment when the abject occurs, is both painful and liberating.

Despite Yingying's desperate effort to convey her spirit to her daughter Lena, Lena still cannot see things as her mother does. As depicted in the episode "The Rice Husband" of *The Joy Luck Club*, Lena rushes into the guest room where Yingying is staying to pick up the fallen vases. Lena sees her mother sitting by the window but cannot see Yingying's face. If we view Yingying's body as a sign of Chineseness for her daughter Lena, then the transformation from the dark *yin* force to the *yin* virtue displays the elusiveness of Chineseness itself. Lena's failure to see her mother reflects the fact that this altering Chineseness is inaccessible to the second-generation Chinese American even with the first-generation's considerable effort.

The human body, as composed of transformations between *yin* and *yang* forces, is viewed as a miniature landscape in the Daoist classic *Yijing* and the Confucian classic *Huainanzi*. As a notable motif in "The Moon Lady" from *The Joy Luck Club*, the *yin-yang* interplay within Yingying's body has composed more of an obstacle than assistance for Yingying as she tries to orient herself in her complex surroundings. The grasp of Chineseness, embodied within Yingying's understanding and acceptance of the *yin-yang* transformation that goes on unceasingly within her body, has likewise been hindered. In "Waiting between the Trees" from the same novel, the American-born daughter figure Lena fails to accept and learn from the

[1] RUSSELL, Danielle. *Between the Angle and the Curve: Mapping Gender, Race, Space, and Identity in Willa Cather and Toni Morrison*. Routledge, 2006, p. 86.
[2] BUCHANAN, Ian. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 45.

transformation of the dark *yin* force into the empowered *yin* virtue in her mother Yingying's body. Lena's refusal increases the elusiveness of Chineseness, which resides not only in the mother-daughter disconnection, but more essentially in the unceasing alteration of *yin* and *yang* inherent in Yingying's body.

My readings of Yingying's flesh as the landscape from the perspective of *yin-yang* alternations in the Chinese American female characters' bodies helps contribute to the study of reading the flesh as landscape in Western literary study. My analysis offers an alternative that, to some extent, has undercut the distinctions between the self and the non-self which is otherwise re-affirmed in the Western counterpart. Tan's renderings of the Chinese American female characters' flesh as an equal part of the landscape empowers the *yin* force and turns it into a virtue that is liberating, reproductive, and creative. Tan's institution of the power of *yin*, at the same time, has also promoted a reconceptualization of the human body as active being: one that is capable of *yin-yang* alternation and transformation instead of being an object to be passively viewed and represented. This establishment of the *yin* power offers us an opportunity to reconsider the contradiction that exists between oversexualization and an absence of sexualization in the Asian American body. Rather, the Asian American characters' bodies are rendered with accounts of their various positions, dispositions and potentialities.

As the human body that shares the same trigramatic representation with the myriad things in nature, one's house is considered as another miniature universe in Chinese philosophy. Chinese people practice *Fengshui* with an aim to live in harmony with the rhythmic changes in nature. The next subchapter will analyze how Tan plays with the *Fengshui* practice: she points out the constructedness of the *Fengshui* practice; and she displaces and rewrites it and adds onto it a feminist spin. China, as in Tan's descriptions and representations of the *Fengshui* practice, is always already constructed.

2.2.2 *Fengshui*: Living environment as landscape

The term "Fengshui (风水)" was first recorded in the *Burial Book* (*zangjing* 葬经) written by Guo Pu (郭璞 276-324) from the Jin Dynasty. He writes in the *Burial Book* that:

> In the burial, the wind (*feng*) makes *Qi* move and the water (*shui*) delimits it. The ancient people gather *Qi* to make it possible to move but within a certain area. Therefore, it is called fengshui.[1]

The theory of *Fengshui* involves a rich knowledge of nature, and an awareness of one as a living organism and traditional aesthetics. *Fengshui* reflects how Chinese people relate to the world; this includes interpersonal relationships and human and non-human relationships, as well as relationships between the living and their ghostly ancestors. *Fengshui* practice strives to achieve a balance between *yin* and *yang* movement, which in turn offers humankind a proper dwelling place in the universe. The Chinese word for the universe is *Yuzhou* (宇宙): *Yu* (宇) refers to the roof of the house and *Zhou* (宙) denotes the sky. When combined together, *Yuzhou* means the pillars and eaves of the house, and this extends to mean Earth and Heaven. The domestic landscape and the specific configuration of one's house constitute another universe in miniature just like the human body. The harmony between humankind and the universe is believed to be achieved by transforming the unfitting structures of one's house into felicitous ones, which will be beneficial to the residents' health. The adjustments made to the house are based on the teachings from *Fengshui* theory that instruct people to conduct careful investigations into their living environment including the way the house is constructed, and the arrangements of rooms, plants, and furniture within the house.

Tan's fictions engage with *Fengshui* practice, offering the reader a glimpse of her way of interpreting and representing this traditional Chinese wisdom. In her latest essay collection *Where the Past Begins* (2017), Tan mentions her personal encounter with *Fengshui* in the course of a three-week stay in Guilin when she was working on

[1] GUO, Pu. *Zangjing, Neipian (The Book of Burial, The Inner Volume)*. Hubei Chongwen Shuju, 1875, p. 11. My translation.

an essay for the *National Geographic*. Tan recounts how she "ate the magic food with the *Fengshui* Masters to help those who had been possessed by ghosts."[1] Here, things related to *Fengshui,* including the *Fengshui* Master or *Fengshui* practice, are depicted as one of many iconic elements in Chinese culture and customs that pander to the tastes of curious Western readers. But later in the same collection, with Tan's increasing knowledge of Chinese cultures and customs gained from her frequent contact with her half-sister in China, she gains a deeper and more complex understanding of the concept. Tan explains the meanings of *Fengshui* as "spirit of harmony on wind and war:"

> The spirit of harmony flows on wind and water; I suppose that is the sentiment. The right alignment of elements can align you with the right forces, and the wrong alignment can affect your health, finances, and peace of mind. The best orientation for a home is one that faces mountains and water […] You can easily imagine the possible meanings [of mountain]: hardship to overcome, a pile of opportunities, lofty thoughts, or the pinnacle as the ideal station in life. Chinese meanings sometimes oversaturate my writing brain and I just want to see nature, the physical appearance of a mountain as a beautiful view, and not as a symbolic opportunity or an obstacle.[2]

Somewhat grudgingly ("I suppose"), Tan states that the *Fengshui* practice offers a path to harmony and the best *Fengshui* of one's house is facing mountains and waters. At the same time, she resists the symbolic meanings that are bestowed on mountain or water in Chinese cultures, shunning too great a Chinese influence on her writing, be it a "symbolic opportunity" or a "symbolic obstacle." Instead, she wants to appreciate landscape (mountains and waters) for their physical forms, just as Tan's grasp of Chinese philosophies, geography, language, landscape and cultures are increasingly nourished by her own observation and personal experience. According to Tan's own account in *Where the Past Begins*, her attitudes toward the *Fengshui* practice change: when she was a teenager facing the impending deaths of her father and elder brother, she distrusted her mother's hiring of a *Fengshui* master to improve the *Qi* of her house to regain health. But as an adult, Tan began to accept the influence of her mother's belief in *Fengshui*. Tan has never been one hundred percent receptive to the philosophical ideas or teachings of *Fengshui*. For instance,

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, pp. 261-262.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

when she took her first writers' workshop, even though she did not believe in the *Fengshui* practice back then, Tan observed that her room for this short stay was oddly arranged, which gave her uncomfortable feelings. Tan's descriptions of *Fengshui* reject "oversaturated Chinese meanings." Tan plays with *Fengshui* theory which aims to balance *yin* and *yang* forces inside one's house. By using humor and highlighting its frightening consequences, *Fengshui* becomes a site for Tan to construct and negotiate her (mis)understandings and (re)imaginations of China. In Tan's portrayal of her female characters' creative and subversive engagement with *Fengshui* practice, the conceptions of change in Daoist and Confucian thoughts are also displaced and rewritten.

2.2.2.a Constructedness: fake and strategic operations of Fengshui

Tan's fifth novel *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) tells the life stories of an American character Lucia and a Chinese American mixed-raced character Violet. The daughter of parents who offer contradictory models of sexuality—a promiscuous father and a mother given to abstinence—Lucia becomes infatuated with the Chinese painter Lu Shing, with whom she elopes to Shanghai. Once in China, and abandoned by her irresponsible Chinese lover, Lucia is forced to open a courtesan house in early twentieth-century Shanghai as a source of income to raise their daughter Violet. To save money, she decides to rent the cursed house of a poet. Rumor has it that the house is cursed because the descendants of the dead poet have neglected the fallen stele inside it that was erected in reverence to the poet. It is said that after the poet's great grandson sold the house, he was immediately seized by an unpredictable pain and died for no reason. But Lucia successfully assuages any misgivings about the cursed house her potential customers may have by hiring an Italian opera singer to act as a *Fengshui* Master. The next paragraph depicts the scene where the Italian actor enacts *Fengshui* rituals for the audience:

> So, gentlemen, what would you do? Give up and count your losses? I hired an Italian actor—a disgraced Jesuit with the dark looks of an Asiatic, which became more pronounced when he pulled back his hair at the temples, the way Chinese opera singers do to give the eyes a dramatic slant. He donned the robes

> of a *fengshui* master, and we hired some boys to pass out leaflets to announce that a fair would be held on the grounds just outside of the haunted villa. We had stalls of food, acrobats, contortionists, and musicians, rare fruits and a candy machine that pulled saltwater taffy. By the time the *fengshui* master arrived on a palanquin, along with his Chinese assistant, he had a waiting audience of hundreds—children and amahs, servants and rickshaw men, courtesans and madams, tailors and other purveyors of gossip.[1]

The paragraph is narrated from the first-person point of view of Lucia who recounts the story addressing the reader directly. The tone of this paragraph is joking and flippant ("So, gentleman, what would you do? Give up and count your losses?"). Violet describes her mother as an enticing, seductive woman, whose smiles, voice and bodily movements are extremely alluring.[2] Tan renders the *Fengshui* practice with humor, depicting it as superstitious at best. Commenting on the humor used in Asian American literature, Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas argues that humor becomes a mechanism of self-defense and a means of distancing oneself from pain.[3] Tan's use of humor points out the fakery of some *Fengshui* practices: it is further intensified with the introduction of an Italian actor who is not even an honorable man but a "disgraced Jesuit." Highlighting the actor's "dark looks of an Asiatic," Tan unpacks the fetishistic images through which mainstream cultures view Chinese Americans. In his monograph *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha argues that fetishism is "the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy—the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division."[4] Tan mocks the fetishistic nature of these images by underlying the fact that the Italian actor's fake Asiatic face becomes "more pronounced when he pulled back his hair at the temples, the way Chinese opera singers do." Illusion is added to illusion.

A sense of anxiety is generated in the viewers when they look at images that figure signs of difference, more particularly when a woman is the subject of

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, p. 7.

[2] Violet recalls about her mother, "It was everything about her—the smile, the husky and melodious voice, the provocative and languorous movement of her body. She sparkled. She glowed' (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

[3] Wass' introduction of *China Boy*. LEE, Gus. *China Boy*. Yilin Press, 2003. p. 45. / 李健孙。《支那崽》。译林出版社，2003 年，45 页。My translation.

[4] BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 106.

representation.[1] Feminist visual studies scholars have noted how we often find fragmentary part(s) of the body or fetish-like images of the female form in artworks. In Tan's paragraph, however, Lucia, as a cunning businesswoman, perceives the Italian male actor with the same fetishistic look and dwells on the actor's bodily parts from his dark looks to his dramatically slant eyes. Lucia's subversive way of looking at the Italian actor's face thus reverses the preconception that considers woman as a sign—the male actor is made up into a sign by a shrewd female gaze. Lucia instructs the Italian actor to put on certain costumes and makeup to feign an Asiatic look. The audience's interpretation of the *Fengshui* practice is therefore influenced or oriented by things constructed. Lucia's fetishization of the Italian actor also reflects the constructedness of the operation of *Fengshui* practice.

The constructedness of *Fengshui* practice is highlighted in other parts of the novel too. For instance, Tan's depictions of the place where the Italian actor's performance takes place is described as a play on a stage with meticulous settings. Tan's domestic scenarios, it has been argued, have "the ring of authenticity"[2] about them because she draws material from her mother Daisy Tan's retelling of the anecdotes and events. But here Tan ridicules the Chinese rituals rather than appreciating them. With typical capitalist publicity, the *Fengshui* practice is transfigured into a pure performance. Lucia even arranges for the acrobats, contortionists, and musicians to entertain the audience. Besides, the *Fengshui* practice serves as an opening ceremony for the new courtesan house. We can no longer discern respect for this ancient Chinese belief in the harmony that will be brought about by facilitating the free flow of the *yin-yang* movements within one's house.

The ensuing two paragraphs depict the Italian actor's mock exorcism. Tan points out the fakeness of the *Fengshui* practice with her description of the dramatic gestures and lines of the *Fengshui* "master":

---

[1] Pollock argues that "At the same time, the face and sometimes part of a body are severed from the whole. Fetish-like they signify an underlying degree of anxiety generated by looking at this sign of difference, woman" (POLLOCK, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. Routledge, 2015, p. 170).

[2] SNODGRASS, Mary Ellen. *Amy Tan: A Literary Companion. Vol. 3*. McFarland, 2004, p. 3.

> The *fengshui* master demanded that a pan of fire be brought to him. He pulled out a scroll and threw it into the flames, then chanted a concoction of Tibetan gibberish while sprinkling rice wine over the fire to make the flames leap higher.
>
> "I shall now go into the cursed mansion," the actor told the crowd, "and persuade Pan the Poet Ghost to leave. If I don't return, please remember me as a good man who served his people at the cost of his own life." Forecasts of mortal danger are always useful to make people believe your fabrications. The audience watched him enter where no man dared to go. After five minutes he returned, and the audience murmured excitedly. He announced he had found the Poet Ghost in an inkwell in his painting studio. They had a most enjoyable conversation about his poetry and his past renown. This led to the poet's laments that his descendants had cast him into early obscurity. His monument had become a mossy slab where wild dogs peed. The *fengshui* master assured the Poet Ghost he would erect a fine stele even better than the last. The Poet Ghost thanked him and immediately left the once-haunted mansion to rejoin his murdered wife.[1]

The fakery of the *Fengshui* practice progressively increases in the actor's extravagant gestures (he pulls out a scroll, throws it into the flames and sprinkles rice wine over the fire). The fire that leaps higher and higher recalls the performance given at traditional Chinese markets in ancient times, as shown in the *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming Shanghe Tu* 清明上河图) by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan (张择端 1085–1145). Tan then portrays the actor as denigrating *Fengshui* because he chants a "concoction of Tibetan gibberish." Tan's use of words gives the impression that for the American character Lucia, *Fengshui* is not living wisdom, but it is rather something artificial and debased that has the potential to lure "believers" like some kind of sectarian cult. The actor then delivers some melodramatic lines that stress to the audience the risk he is taking in going and confronting the haunting poet's ghost that haunts him. As an outsider, Lucia comments aloofly that the warning against mortal danger is effective in persuading people to believe the "fabrications,"—another derogatory term.

The actor's dramatic gestures and theatrical lines satisfy the audience who seek the mysterious and exotic from watching the "rite." Lucia manipulates the psychology of the audience and instructs the actor to produce what the audience expects the most: a happy ending with the haunted ghost's exorcism, leaving them in peace and joy. Tan presents *Fengshui* as a fake practice that is used to manipulate

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, pp. 7-8.

people's minds. In so doing, Tan resists the "oversaturated" Chinese meaning and points out the fraudulence of *Fengshui* practice: the costumes, the lines and the gestures of the Italian actor have already been designed and rehearsed in a resisting American woman's mind. With the introduction of Lucia's narratives about the *Fengshui* practice, Tan leads us to see *Fengshui* practice and the philosophical ideas behind it from a new angle from the perspective of a modern American-born businesswoman who aspires to achieve fame and fortune in early twentieth-century Shanghai.

In short, in *The Valley of Amazement*, *Fengshui* becomes something constructed and performed rather than an authentic cultural heritage or delivery, whereas traditionally, the natural is both the philosophical basis and quest of *Fengshui* theory. In Daoist thought, the *yin* and *yang* forces undergo a constant process of conflict, combination, transition and transformation. The unceasing process of change makes up the natural rhythms of the universe. When humankind follows the natural rhythms of the *yin* and *yang* forces, they will achieve a proper place within their living environment and within the whole universe. This is called *Dao fa Ziran* (道法自然 to be so of itself). We discern this principle in Chinese landscape painting wherein the fundamental step toward artistic creation is to observe, discover and grasp the beauty of relaying nature into the artwork: "being natural." The creative motivation and method of landscape painting should comply with the principle of "being natural or be so of itself." The chapter "The Floods of Autumn" (*Qiu Shui* 秋水) from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* records this connectedness of the state to "be so of itself:"

> The life of things is like the hurrying and galloping along of a horse. With every movement there is a change; with every moment there is an alteration. What should you be doing? what should you not be doing? You have only to be allowing this course of natural transformation to be going on.[1]

The life and death of the myriad things including heaven, earth and human beings, are in constant change all the time, like the movements of a galloping horse. Humankind, it is suggested, follows the course of the unceasing changes in nature in

[1] "The Floods of Autumn", *Chinese Text Project*. https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/floods-of-autumn/ens. Accessed on 07 April 2021.

order to pursue a state of being natural. However, the *Fengshui* practice in Tan's fiction turns out to be as constructed as any other custom or ritual. It is no longer a simple matter of religious ritual or practice. So how authentic can *Fengshui* practice be, in manifesting Chineseness? *Fengshui* theory's aim of "being natural or to be itself" is displaced in Tan's writings—mocked and ridiculed even.

2.2.2.b Fengshui *Practice: a change with twists*

"The Voice from the Wall" in *The Joy Luck Club* tells the story of the Saint family moving into a new house from the point of view of the American-born daughter figure Lena as a young girl. At the beginning of the episode, the Chinese-born mother figure Yingying claims that the room has a bad *Fengshui* and frenetically keeps rearranging the furniture from the day they move in. After Yingying's rearrangement of the bed in Lena's room, Lena begins to hear the terrible sound of their neighbor being murdered. The nightmare ends when Lena "pulls out" her unstable mother from the other side of the wall. Asian American critic Patricia Hamilton correctly argues that the *Fengshui* practice chronicles Yingying's "gradual psychological breakdown and withdrawal from life" where the "distance between the Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters" is emphasized. [1] I contend that Tan's writings about the *Fengshui* practice also destabilize the concept of change in both the Daoist and Confucian schools of thought.

Laozi says that the change of the myriad things in nature is processual, a change that is encompassed in the interactions and mutual transformations of *yin* and *yang* forces. Chapter thirty-six from *Dao De Jing* explains the idea that when the evolution of either *yin* or *yang* forces reaches its climax, one force will tend to transform and become its opposite. Chapter thirty-six states:

[1] HAMILTON, Patricia L. "*Fengshui*, Astrology, and the Five Elements: Traditional Chinese Belief in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Melus*, vol. 24, no. 2, p, 136; p. 143.

> Whatever is gathered in must first be stretched out; Whatever is weakened must first be made strong; Whatever is abandoned must first be joined; Whatever is taken away must first be given.[1]

When the conditions become ripe, the disadvantageous will change into its opposite the advantageous, or *vice versa*. Therefore, what happens is not a sudden springing up of disparate events. But rather it is the result of a continuous advent. Like the *yin-yang* interplay in the myriad things, the happening of any event does not lead to another entirely new thing or possibility. Rather it is interpreted as the consequence of a subtle maturation, like the inconspicuous melting of the snow, the imperceptible turning-green of leaves or the unnoticeable process of ageing. So human beings need not act or move to make things happen but rather change happens of its own accord, just as the transformation of *yin* and *yang* in the universe does. Human beings instead should allow the effect of transformation to take shape and come into effect through a progressive process.[2] Reality or change in reality is influenced but not forced, and people's patient waiting for the change to arrive thus prompts no resistance. In contrast, as François Jullien argues in his monograph *The Silent Transformations* (2011), European culture is a culture of event, which lays the emphasis more on the "appealing and captivating vertigo of the event."[3]

Based on the idea that change is as continuous, ubiquitous and subtle as the incessant interchange between *yin* and *yang*, *Fengshui* theory suggests we should adapt our own living environment to the unceasing changes of various elements in the universe. In other words, a renewal of the structures or of the arrangements in the house enables the human being's synchronization with the *yin-yang* movements in nature. If this principle is not respected, people will be pinned down by negative forces and suffer because they reside in an ill-structured house. What is interesting about Tan's depictions is that she destabilizes the idea that change can bring about benefits to human wellbeing with multiple twists. In Yingying's case, the belief that

---

[1] AMES, R. T., D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 157.
[2] JULLIEN, Francois. *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking.* University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 57.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations.* Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 122.

a change in *Fengshui* will reverse the unfavorable to the favorable is undercut by the twist of her psychological breakdown. By portraying her frenetic reorganization of the furniture, Tan highlights Yingying's displacement and fragmentation in America. The benefit that change will accomplish is further destabilized in Lena's hallucination of the murder of her neighbor's daughter: Yingying's rearrangement of Lena's bed, well-intentioned as it may have been, conversely exacerbates her daughter's wellbeing and in turn accounts for Lena's nightmares.

The next paragraph records how Yingying views her new house as cursed with bad *Fengshui*:

> This house was built too steep, and a bad wind from the top blows all your strength back down the hill. So you can never get ahead. You are always rolling backward."
>
> And then she started pointing to the walls and doors of the apartment. "See how narrow this doorway is, like a neck that has been strangled. And the kitchen faces this toilet room, so all your worth is flushed away."[1]

However, the validity of *Fengshui* as an art of living is re-orientated as the artificiality of living. Though adhering to *Fengshui* teachings as she reorganizes the furniture, Yingying still fails to regain balance within her body and life. This failure makes up the first twist of *Fengshui* as an art of living. It is the combination of the complex forces of maternal anxiety, geographical displacement and psychological alienation that leads to Yingying's frenetic action of rearranging of the furniture. Yingying's "crazy" gestures do not spring from the teachings of primitive and archaic *Fengshui* practice or the principle of harmony.

Yingying's enigmatic murmuring of the unbalance of the house, the block of the fortunate *Qi* as well as her frenetic rearrangements of all the furniture and items, simultaneously repel and captivate Lena into succumbing to this art of living. But Yingying's practice of *Fengshui* encounters another twist: her readjustment of Lena's bed exerts an opposite influence on Lena, causing great sufferings instead of ameliorating her wellbeing. The validity of *Fengshui* as an art of living is here once more undercut in Lena's torment—the witnessing of her silenced and estranged mother and the invisibility of her own emotional needs to her parents. As illustrated

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 108-109.

in one particular scene after Yingying's readjustment of Lena's bed, Lena's formerly safe and lovely bedroom becomes a stifling, suffocating space:

> With my bed against the wall, the nighttime life of my imagination changed. Instead of street sounds, I began to hear voices coming from the wall, from the apartment next door.[1]

The horror and fear reach a climax when Lena repeatedly hears the murder scene every night:

> Then I heard scraping sounds, slamming, pushing and shouts and then whack! whack! whack! Someone was killing. Someone was being killed. Screams and shouts, a mother had a sword high above a girl's head and was starting to slice her life away, first a braid, then her scalp, an eyebrow, a toe, a thumb, the point of her cheek, the slant of her nose, until there was nothing left, no sounds.[2]

The descriptions, a seemingly unstoppable cutting up of various body parts, composes a horrifying "soundscape" for Lena ("scraping sounds, slamming, pushing and shouts and then whack! whack! whack!"). Lena's uncontrollable dread is reflected in the commotion of a series of verbs in the continuous present tense, which dramatically deepens a sense of agitation and suspension. Lena travels virtually into the murder scene where she can experience the threats to her life directly. This crossing of narrative borders is termed as "metalepsis" by Gérard Genette and defined as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe."[3] Metalepsis crosses over from the world of the narrating Lena and Lena in the narrated world.[4] The use of metalepsis enacts a narrative "I" that is split in "repetitive, self-undermining, and even violent aspects."[5] Lena's insecurity is effectively accomplished in the macabre soundscape of the murder scene that is only a construction in her head. The benevolent change for the better in Yingying's obsession that is supposed to be achieved by practicing *Fengshui* is therefore twisted.

---

[1]. TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club.* Vintage, 1989, p. 109.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[3] GENETTE, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 234-235.
[4] In Genette's book, metalepsis is described as the "shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (*Ibid.*, p. 236).
[5] MALINA, Debra. *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject*. Ohio State University Press, 2002, p. 2.

Instead, the reorganization of Lena's bedroom triggers her feelings of fear, horror and insecurity, and makes her cross a fearful border.

This scene in which auditory hallucinations pervade greatly increases the protagonist's agony and torture. The repetition of the onomatopoetic "whack" adds to the hysterical and stifling atmosphere. This loud sound, which also combines high speed and frequency, marks a sharp contrast with Yingying and Lena's silence. The seemingly monotonous sentence rhythmed by alternating active and passive structures "Someone was killing. Someone was being killed," echoes Lena's overwhelming fear: she is only able to come up with the most simple and blunt words and finds herself with no time to think about the plausibility of the horrible scene.

What is interesting about Tan's depictions of the "murder scene" is that it is the fetishized female body which is a source of fear for Lena ("first a braid, then her scalp, an eyebrow, a toe, a thumb, the point of her cheek, the slant of her nose"). However, for a male viewer, the female body is fetishized with an aim to reduce the sense of anxiety from which the representation of difference emerges. Through this unexpected turn of plot development, Yingying's practice of *Fengshui* is undermined by Tan and given with a feminist spin.

The next excerpts record a dialogue between a mother figure and a daughter figure. Tan deliberately shies away from mentioning the names of Yingying and Lena. The reader is not able to distinguish whether the dialogue is between Yingying and Lena or rather represents a mother-daughter dialogue in a more universal way. But the dialogue echoes the psychological dragging of Yingying from the incarcerating wall by Lena:

> The girl said, "Do you see now?"
>
> The mother nodded: "Now I have perfect understanding. I have already experienced the worst. After this, there is no worst possible thing."
>
> And the daughter said, "Now you must come back, to the other side. Then you can see why you were wrong."
>
> And the girl grabbed her mother's hand and pulled her through the wall.[1]

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 115.

The "murder" of a young girl by her mother in Lena's nightmare parallels Lena's slow "murder" by Yingying's ghostly life. Lena finally breaks the "wall" and pulls Yingying out of the unseen and the unspoken. Women have been increasingly restricted within domestic landscapes.[1] Tan's depiction of the pulling through the wall offers a nuanced presentation of the complex relationships not only between the first-generation immigrant female character Yingying and her daughter Lena, but also between aspects of Chinese heritages such as *Fengshui* practice and the belief in processual change as beneficial forces that her Chinese American characters negotiate with. Of course, it should also be recalled that Tan's domestic spheres of kitchen and mah jong tables reverse the patriarchal confinement of women within the private space. Rather, Tan highlights the unrecognized talent of her female characters to pass on "a public space which gave rise to a cultural and literary heritage."[2] In this sense, the private space is given a far greater value and significance than is often the case: it is more than a place nurturing traditionally female qualities such as emotion, being represented as the source and repository of the characters' Chinese identity.

The disturbing end to this episode seems to echo the disquieting end of the classic American feminist short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In this case, the protagonist is unable to escape through the wall:

> I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.
>
> "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

[1] Duncan argues that "The public-private distinction is gendered. This binary opposition is employed to legitimate oppression and dependence on the basis of gender; it has also been used to regulate sexuality. The private as an ideal type has traditionally been associated and conflated with: the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the 'shadowy interior of the household', personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, 'the good life', care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence. The public as an ideal type has traditionally been the domain of the disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, the market place, waged labour, production, the polis, the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence" (DUNCAN, Nancy, ed. *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality.* Psychology Press, 1996, p. 128).

[2] CHEN, Xiaomei. "Reading Mother's Tale-Reconstructing Women's Space in Amy Tan and Zhang Jie." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, issue 16, p. 118.

> Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time![1]

The dragging plot revisits the disturbing end of *The Yellow Wallpaper* with women's bravery shown by Yingying and Lena in returning to their cultural heritage: the filial bond between mother and daughter. Yingying and Lena are enabled by the breaking of the wall to view themselves as thinking and dynamic subjects. Lena's dragging Yingying out of the wall can be read as another twist because the breaking of the wall is emancipatory and positive. Benefits replace the damages which have been caused by Yingying's practicing of *Fengshui* such as Yingying's failure to gain balance and Lena's nightmares. Pulled outside the wall, Yingying is able to reconcile with her true nature as a hyper-sensitive person which later transforms into an empowering *yin* virtue as analyzed in the previous subchapter "*Yin-Yang* forces in Tan's female characters' body." Lena's freeing of her mother also constructs a new image of Chinese American woman as courageous, tough, powerful and resistant. The breaking of the wall reclaims Yingying and Lena's agency in the vision, interpretation and representation of their house.

Tan has been criticized for simply applying Chinese culture and customs to her fiction. This subchapter instead has shown that Tan does not repeat the stereotypical impression by simply introducing the *Fengshui* practice as some iconic Chinese element. Rather Tan has revisited this Chinese wisdom of living and displaces it between the ambivalence of an art and artificiality. Instead, the constructedness of *Fengshui* is highlighted. The ambivalence of the status of the private space is also pointed out in Tan's *Fengshui* depictions: it is described as a prison but also a source of culture and heritage whose dissemination is exclusive to patriarchy. Tan has given *Fengshui* practice many twists. In *The Valley of Amazement*, Lucia hires an Italian actor as the *Fengshui* master to exorcise the ghost of a dead poet. The constructedness of the *Fengshui* practice is here highlighted in Tan's humorous depictions. The *Fengshui* rite is transformed into a play or performance on stage that is prepared for the publicity of Lucia's newly established courtesan house rather than a way of showing respect to the underlying moving patterns of *yin* and *yang* forces

[1] GILMAN, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Project Gutenberg, 1892, p. 10.

in nature or a reverence for one's ancestor. Chineseness, embodied in these displaced customs and rituals, shares the same constructedness in the eyes of the American character Lucia. The belief in a beneficial change that would be brought about by reorganizing one's house is displaced with multiple twists in the episode of "The Voice from the Wall" in *The Joy Luck Club*. Tan revisits the familiar plot of the displaced Asian American female character, adding the visceral pain, horror and mystery of Lena's nightmares. Lena's act of pulling her ghostly mother Yingying out of the wall adds another twist because the Chinese American female characters are rendered as strong, intelligent and brave—a move which reverses the Orientalist vision of them as timid, gentle and submissive.

With all these unexpected turns, Tan adds a feminist spin to *Fengshui* practice where the *yin* force (the feminine) emerges as a liberating power. In the next subchapter, I will read how Tan's renderings of silence revisit the revered and valued qualities of silence in Chinese philosophy. The *yin* force is traditionally associated with silence in Chinese culture wherein women are supposed to be reticent and reserved. I will read the transformation between sound and silence in her Chinese American female characters' environment as reflecting the characters' oscillating distance to and from Chinese landscape and heritage. In addition, facing silence in landscapes, the female characters exhibit resistance for they strategically change the inhibitive silence into an articulate one such as attentive silence and provocative silence. Therefore, as one in the human body and in *Fengshui* practice, *yin* helps breaks the silence among women, especially Chinese American women.

2.2.3 The Silenced Landscapes in Tan's Novels

Silence in Asian American literature has been widely discussed. Patti Duncan argues that silence is used as a "counternarrative" for Asian American writers, especially Asian American women writers. This is especially the case for those writers who deploy silence in their retelling of stories of "nation, gender, race, and sexuality."[1] For instance, in Maxine Hong Kingston's debut novel *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Kingston uses strategies of reticence such as irony, indirection, and understatement to combat patriarchal and monocultural oppression. Silence also plays an important part in Tan's novels. Scholar Lisa Dunick has highlighted the twin significance of the written word and woman's authorship in Tan's fiction: diverging from the broader discussion of oral forms and talk-stories in Asian American literary criticism, she argues that it is precisely the manifestation of the Chinese-born mother figures' literacy and literary ability that enables them not only to break their silence, but also to re-appropriate silence not as oppression but rather as a means of self-empowerment.[2] In Tan's fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), various forms of silence have been analyzed through the critical interpretation of the shooting stars. These shooting stars symbolize the muteness accompanying the life of the three generations of female characters, and writing is a way to "break away from the silenced position [and] breaking away from the silenced position resulted in the act of writing."[3] Cynthia Wong argues that the American-born daughter figure Ruth's "self-ordained invisibility and silence" begins from her pretending to lose her voice after an accident. Ruth realizes that through "fictionalizing her condition [she is] able to gain the compassionate regard she desires from her mother."[4] Ruth broke her arm and became mute after falling down a slide. On account of this accident, her mother

[1] DUNCAN, Patti. *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and The Politics of Speech*. University of Iowa Press, 2009, p. 127.
[2] DUNICK, Lisa MS. "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and The Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels." *Melus*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2006, pp. 3-20.
[3] LIMPÁR, Ildikó. "'Speaking the Language of Shooting Stars': Silence in Amy Tan's The Bonesetter's Daughter." *Reverberations of Silence: Silenced Texts, Sub-Texts and Authors in Literature, Language and Translation*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, p. 151.
[4] WONG, Cynthia F. "Asymmetries: Loss and Forgiveness in the Novels of Amy Tan." *China Fictions/English Language*. Brill Rodopi, 2008, pp. 73-74.

LuLing stopped being strict with her and satisfied Ruth's requirements. Ruth could feel so much gentleness, warmth and love from her mother that she decided to take advantage of her muteness. Muteness then becomes Ruth's strategy to gain a good mother-daughter relationship.

In *Landscape and Power* (1994), Mitchell argues that despite the fact that it is often represented in paintings, engravings, photographs, films and other media, it should not be forgotten that landscape—earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness and so forth—is also a "physical and multisensory medium."[1] In this section of the thesis I will be exploring the notion of silence in landscape as a "physical and multisensory medium." Clarence King (1842-1901), the first director of the US Geological Survey, defines silence in landscape as the "sea stillness […] of sleep; the desert, of death—this silence is like the waveless calm of space."[2] In the first half of this subchapter, we will focus on the transformation between sound and silence in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. This transformation reflects the American-born character Ruth's struggles: her effort to access family history, to retrieve a matrilineal connection and to explore her own identity as a Chinese American writer. Chineseness is depicted as difficult to grasp: indeed, the oscillation between sound and silence can be viewed as a representation of the elusiveness of Chineseness.

In addition to being one component of landscape's "physical and multi-sensory" medium, silence may also refer to that which is unspoken in landscape, an aspect that demands our particular attention when that silence is "about values that are assumed to be unquestionable."[3] That is to say, certain social realities, power relationships and ideologies are naturalized and silenced in landscapes in a subtle way. However, when analyzing a landscape, it is important to "keep moving in the sense of attending to the silences and absences."[4] This is particularly the case of Asian American

[1] MITCHELL, William John Thomas, "Imperial Landscape." *Landscape and Power*. University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 14.
[2] KING, Clarence. *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*. W. W. Norton & Co., 1935, p. 99
[3] DUNCAN, Nancy, and James Duncan. "Doing Landscape Interpretation." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, 2010, p. 237.
[4] DELUE, Rachel, and JAMES Elkins, eds. *Landscape Theory. Vol. 6*. Routledge, 2010, p. 184.

literature, where the characters' voicelessness is "induced not only by gender but also by culture and race."[1] In her monograph *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston* (1993) King-Kok Cheung a Chinese American literary critic specializing in Asian American literature, argues that for Chinese characters, "silence" is antonymous less with "speech" than with other non-verbal forms of communication: "noise," "motion," and "commotion." [2] This argument gains in significance when it is recalled that the Daoist classics consider it a virtue to say little and rely on nonlinguistic means to express oneself and communicate. In Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) the notion of silence relates to the nonlinguistic means that are adopted by the Chinese character Buncake when she engages with landscape. [3] In the second half of this subchapter, by studying Buncake's story, we will focus on how the nonlinguistic means transform oppressive and inhibitive silences into provocative one, creating "strategies of reticence" [4] to express the forbidden and name the unspeakable.

[1] Cheung says that "Asian tradition […] trains the young (and especially the female) to be quiet, submissive, and obedient and American racism […] threatens members of minority groups with harm unless they stay in their place" (CHEUNG, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa.* Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 6).
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[3] Critics have studied the healing power of the breaking of silence between the American-born Olivia and her American husband; and between Olivia and her Chinese-born half-sister Kwan. Hurst argues that the "cold silences and bitter arguments" almost have destroyed Olivia's marriage which is ameliorated by "the power of narrative to heal or help heal individual and community injuries (HURST, Mary Jane. "Balancing Self and Other through Speech and Silence in Chang-rae Lee's Native Speaker and Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*." *Language, Gender, and Community in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 101).
[4] The term was first coined by Janis Stout who argues that each of her writers under study turns that traditional limitation of silencing into a weapon of mockery or assault against masculine society. STOUT, Janis P. *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion.* Johnny Belinda, 1990.

2.2.3.a Sound and silence in Ruth's engagement with landscape in The Bonesetter's Daughter

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Ruth describes herself as a "ghost writer" who writes texts anonymously for self-help books ranging from biology and psychology to astrology. She attempts to change her status as a "word doctor" (in her boyfriend Art's words) and instead recounts her own story in order to establish her own literary world and voice. In addition to her dilemmas caused by her occupation as a ghost writer, Ruth also has to face complexity in her personal life: she has a distant and problematic relationship with her mother LuLing who has recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, while her American boyfriend Art who has lived with her for many years refuses to marry her and still has contact with his ex-wife; Art's two daughters from his earlier marriage are deeply prejudiced against and ignorant about Chinese American people, including Ruth and her mother LuLing.

The following paragraphs portray a sharp contrast between the silence in the Cubbyhole, a converted pantry that is Ruth's place of writing and working, and the noises from the Golden Gate Bridge outside the window:

> It was now nearly midnight, and in another few hours, Ruth would be able to talk. She stood in the Cubbyhole, a former pantry that served as her home office. She stepped onto a footstool and pushed open a tiny window. There it was, a sliver of a million-dollar view: the red towers of the Golden Gate Bridge that bifurcated the waters, marking bay from ocean. The air was moist and antiseptically cold against her face […] Foghorns started to blare. And after another minute, Ruth saw the billows, like an ethereal down comforter covering the ocean and edging toward the bridge.
>
> […] The fog was sweeping over the ramparts of the bridge, devouring the headlamps of cars. Nine out of ten drivers were drunk at this hour — Ruth had read that somewhere. Or maybe she had written that for a client. She stepped down, but left the window open.
>
> The foghorns continued to wail. They sounded like tubas in a Shostakovich opera, comedically tragic. But was tragedy ever funny? Or was it only the audience who laughed knowingly as the victims walked into trapdoors and trick mirrors?[1]

The reader is firstly guided into the Cubbyhole, Ruth's tiny creative sanctuary. Tan conveys the protective properties of this space of silence and solitude, an

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, pp. 11-12.

atmosphere that will inspire Ruth to greater contemplation and artistic creation.[1] The beautiful view of the bridge is described by Ruth as "a sliver of a million-dollar view" where the moist air blows softly on her face. The calmness of the Cubbyhole provides Ruth with a space of repose and meditation.

Ruth has reached the end of her annual "ritual" week of silence, an element of the narrative that has distinct autobiographical echoes. In a 2003 *Guardian* interview, Tan recounted one episode of her life that caused her own yearly muteness: one of her college roommates was murdered during Tan's doctoral studies at Berkley. The day her roommate's body was identified happened to be that of Tan's birthday, and the writer lost her voice on her birthday for ten years afterwards.[2] This tragedy has greatly influenced Tan's writing, and has led muteness to play an important part in Tan's fiction. For instance, in her debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the Chinese-born mother figure Yingying becomes invisible and silenced in both her family and in contemporary American society. She later learns to use her muteness as a weapon to "penetrate" through her daughter's skin to prevent her American-born daughter from being silenced.

On reading that "in another few hours, Ruth would be able to talk," the reader understands that Ruth is ready to continue her creative writing after this annual ritual of psychological restoration. However, the outburst of the foghorns breaks this regained stillness. The image of "billow" as something rising and moving as a large mass denotes the opposite side of a "comforter." The reader is located in a landscape wherein sound and silence clash with one another. The sound-silence conflict undercuts the healing power of Ruth's annual ritual of silence.

Tan's portrayal of the conflict of sound and silence in landscape contrasts with the high praise of silence we find in the *Dao De Jing*. Silence, as in the correlated

[1] Ruth comments that her annual ritual of verbal silence offers her a chance "to sharpen [her] consciousness about words and their necessity" (*Ibid.*, p. 10).

[2] JAGGI, Maya. "Ghosts at my shoulder." *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features. Accessed on 14 April 2021.

pair (*dui* 对)[1] with sound, is most valued in Daoist philosophy. For example, Chapter 12 from *Dao De Jing* states:

> And the five notes impair the ear. It is for this reason that in the proper governing by the sages: They exert their efforts on behalf of the abdomen rather than the eye.[2]

The sage attunes his ears to silence and by doing this, he perceives the *Dao*. In his monograph *In Praise of Blandness* (2004), François Jullien argues that when sound gradually sheds its aural materiality we are led to the threshold of silence that "we experience as plenitude, at the very root of all harmony."[3] Indeed, it is silence that strikes Ruth the most, including her own annual ritual of silence, the silence in her compressed office and the silence of the ocean and bay outside. Yet sounds from the bridge, on the contrary, are also liberating for Ruth: when the billows blow out and continue to wail, Ruth gets the chance to face the multiple struggles in life beneath its ordered and neat surface, such as her problematic relationship with her boyfriend Art, his two rebellious teenage daughters and his parents, as well as with her own mother LuLing and her distanced Chinese legacy. The various elements embedded in the bridgescape on the bridge release Ruth's mind. The creative and empowering silence that is revered in Daoist thought is undermined as an impeding force that limits Ruth in her multiple troubled personal relationships. The sounds from the bridge, which are detrimental in the *Dao De Jing*, turn into a liberating force.

The liberating power of sound is displayed in the following three aspects: firstly, Tan's descriptions suddenly change from the delightful view of the ocean and bay to Ruth's free associations of the cars on the bridge and the percentage of drunk drivers at midnight. The change is so abrupt that it even produces an effect of humor and

[1] Jullien argues that the term "pair" indicates that "one forms a couple with the other; the one finds a partner, and thus also its 'justification,' in the other" (JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 20).
[2] AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 105.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 79.

surprise for the reader. Secondly, the foghorns remind Ruth of the tubas in a Shostakovich opera that is "comically tragic." Ruth continues to ask of the opera whether "tragedy [is] ever funny" for the audience. We will re-formulate Ruth's question a little bit here—does the silence of landscape ever conceal its sound? This uncertainty itself is liberating. Finally, the dramatic irony enables the audience of the opera to view the victims' tragic circumstances as tragicomic. Ruth's question can be once again reconfigured: is a distance necessary for someone to view their own entrapment and struggles safely and cheerfully? For Ruth, her distance from the noisy bridges composes a space for her to re-view her distance from Chinese heritage—calligraphy, the Chinese language, oracle bones, secret family history and her estranged mother. The closeness and remoteness of Ruth's distance to and from Chineseness change in the transformation between sound and silence of her environment, which echoes the changing tones between the tragic and the comic of the Shostakovich opera.

The next paragraphs depict the scene where Ruth seeks recourse from walking on the beach after her mother Lu Ling's diagnosis of Alzheimer's:

> Ruth recalled the first day she had walked by herself along this stretch of beach. It had been nearly empty, and the sand in front of her had been clean, untrampled. She had escaped and reached this place. She had felt the waves, cold and shocking, grab at her ankles, wanting to pull her in. She remembered how she had cried with relief as the waves roared around her.
>
> Now, thirty-five years later, she was that eleven-year-old child again. She had chosen to live. Why? As she now kept walking, she felt comforted by the water, its constancy, its predictability. Each time it withdrew, it carried with it whatever had marked the shore. She recalled that when her younger self stood on this same beach for the first time, she had thought the sand looked like a gigantic writing surface. The slate was clean, inviting, open to possibilities.
>
> And at that moment of her life, she had a new determination, a fierce hope. She didn't have to make up the answers anymore. She could ask.[1]

When walking along the beach, Ruth recalls her first encounter with the "empty, clean, and untrampled sand" where "she had escaped" to. Back then, Ruth was tortured by her own suicidal tendencies caused by her estranged relationship with her hyper-sensitive mother. Viewing the vast empty beach, sensing the cold waves that

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 127.

want to pull her in and drown her, Ruth's wish to survive is triggered by the harsh confrontation with the waves. The deep-sensory experience of the roaring waves emerges because it takes place in a landscape full of rich or unfamiliar "affordances."[1] Here the "affordance" refers to real, objective, physical features such as the texture, weight and temperature of the waves and the sand, when the walking takes place. Ruth's act of apprehending the waves is not a process of perceiving a value-free physical object to which meaning is added. Rather it is a process of grasping an already value-rich object.[2] Affordance requires that the specificities of the environment be accompanied by information to specify the observers themselves: their body, legs, hands, and mouth in their engagement with certain places. The particular landscape of sound consisting of the thundering and destructive waves in Tan's passages influences Ruth's body and senses as the "cold" waves "grab" and "pull [her] in," and the howling wave sounds float around her ears.

On the one hand, then, the waves in Tan's passage as discussed above are directly felt by Ruth. On the other hand, however, the sound also reaches Ruth gently and imperceptibly. The monograph *Twenty-four Poetic Modes* (二十四诗品 *Ershisi Shipin*) which discusses the aesthetics and theory of ancient poetry, explores twenty-four different concepts in twenty-four quatrains. Tang poet Sikong Tu (837-908 司空图), the author of the *Twenty-four Poetic Modes*, indicates in one of the twenty-four quatrain-poems. "Blandness (Chongdan 冲淡)", that sound does not reach the ear directly, but rather it is sent as if through a veil of bamboo:

> Like the spring breeze
> That lightly brushes his robes:
> Sound—sensed through the bamboo,
> The beauty that one then takes away as it returns.[3]

[1] Gibson makes up the term "affordance" which refers to the complementarity of the animal and the environment. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer (GIBSON, James, J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception.* Psychology Press, 2015, p. 127).
[2] GIBSON, James, J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Psychology Press, 2015, p. 132.
[3] TU, Sikong. "Chongdan,". *Shipin jijie*. Guo Shaoyu, ed. Renmin Wenxue, 1981, pp. 5-7.

In this particular beach scene, the wave sounds are conveyed through the life vitalities of all things including the waves, the beach, the wind and that of Ruth herself. Ruth not only hears the waves, but she also senses them from within. That explains why the sounds awaken Ruth to her "involvement in the great process of things."[1] Ruth experiences the landscape of sound which depends on the landscape's entirety. The landscape of roaring waves in Tan's passage then composes a porous space[2] that covers the beach as both a value-rich object that can be felt by Ruth's senses, and a network that incorporates all the elements that come into a field of tension. Symbolized by the porous beach, Chineseness is not only an entity that is rich in meanings and values waiting to be explored, it is also a network of tensions that invites/welcomes all the correlated forces into its formation and transformation.

The landscape of sound consisting of deafening waves sets up a contrast with Ruth's silence as she walks along the beach. In the introduction to their study *Lines: A Brief History* (2016), Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst draw an analogy between writing and walking. Both walking and writing rely on material forms that give an external sensory shape to a mental creative pulse of life. They contend that on paper, "written words are separated by space, as are footprints on the ground."[3] They argue that writing is bound up with walking because both activities follow footsteps: writing involves reading the authors who wrote before, and walking concerns following the previous impressions that footsteps leave. The narrative trail or foot traces are displayed as discontinuous marks but the movement that either the author or the walker creates is continuous.[4]

Ruth compares her own walking on the beach to writing on a gigantic surface like a clean slate that is "inviting, open to possibilities." However, Ingold and Vergunst point out that the verbal account of the observations, more often than not, fails to

---

[1] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 97.
[2] This porous space connects Ruth's girlhood as a helpless eleven-year-old girl and her adulthood as a confusing woman.
[3] INGOLD, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot.* Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008, p. 8.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

convey the complete experience of walking because just as "there is more to walking than the iteration of footsteps, so there is more to narration than the concatenation of words."[1] Ruth's walking in silence on the beach, on the other hand, bespeaks her complete experience of landscape. Ruth's breathing while walking silently on the beach is voiced as words where Ruth leaves a portion of herself on the beach.[2] Ruth's walking on the beach in silence therefore composes a more encouraging site for expression. The hidden meanings in the intervals between words are analogous to the gaps that fall through the walking steps. The gaps opened by Ruth's steps on the beach show her attempt to understand the new adversity in her life. They open up spaces. Ruth tries to solve this new life crisis by asking questions instead of making up the answers. These newly created spaces are the site of the new life that opens to and by her. The silence of writing in the sand is then transformed into a medium for Ruth to express her own voice, an action which recalls Ruth's practice of calligraphy in a sand tray after she lost her voice following an accident when she fell at her kindergarten.

Ruth's way of engaging with the beach changes from the silent and passive waiting for answers to an active and creative search and even invention of the answer. From the perspective of this unstable dependence on writing in the sand for enlivening questions, the female characters' pursuit for an ethnic essence of Chineseness in Tan's fictions is problematized. The aspiration to find some authentic or persistent Chinese identity is often found in flux, thereby resisting any attempted readings of landscape or Chinese American female characters' engagement with landscape as literal or natural.

[1] Ingold argues that "In practice, the storyteller harnesses the power of the voice and lungs to deliver a performance no less visceral and muscular than that of walking. Nor should our familiarity with words as they appear on the printed page or the computer screen lead[s] us to forget the, the sheer physical effort involved, and the expressivity of the inscribed lines themselves, quite apart from the words written in them" (INGOLD, Tim. *Lines: A Brief History*. Routledge, 2016, p. 146).

[2] LEGAT, Allice. "Walking Stories; Leaving Footprints." *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. INGOLD, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds. 2008, p. 43.

2.2.3.b Articulate silences—Transformative changes in Buncake's story in The Hundred Secret Senses

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Buncake is Kwan's childhood playmate in her previous life as Nunumu. Buncake is mute as a result of witnessing her parents murder before her eyes. She is then adopted by a village woman Dulili. The villagers judge the mute Buncake as a strange loner who is later blamed for causing the misfortune of a drought and famine in the village. But in her past life identity as Nunumu, Kwan describes how Buncake possesses her own unique system of communicating with the world. In the face of the unsubstantiated accusations lodged against her, Buncake bursts into laughter and breaks her silence when the rain finally comes to her village. The next paragraph, narrated from the point of view of Nunumu, recounts how Buncake acts like a baby bird who communicates with the world in silence from the point of view of Nunumu:

> She watched the world like a baby bird, her eyes round and black, looking for danger. Why she was like this nobody knew except me, because she never talked, not with words at least. But in the evening, when lamplight danced on the ceiling and walls, her little white hands spoke. They would glide and swoop with the shadows, soar and float, those pale birds through clouds...Only I understood Buncake's shadow talk. I knew her hands were not of this world. You see, I also was a child, still close to the time before this life. And so I too remembered I had once been a spirit who left this earth in the body of a bird.[1]

In a manner reminiscent of magical realism,[2] Tan portrays the muted Buncake's story with literary twists such as a previous life, resurrection, metamorphosis and insanity. The magical realism of *The Hundred Secret Senses* has been studied by some of Tan's critics. Zhang Benzi, a specialist of Asian diaspora poetry in America analyzes the function of magical realism in enhancing Olivia's exploration of the "deeper dimensions of her life."[3] Ma Sheng-mei claims that magical realism enables

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 224.

[2] According to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Magic realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic merges with the unexpected and the inexplicable and in which elements of dreams, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence.

[3] ZHANG, Benzi. "Reading Amy Tan's Hologram: *The Hundred Secret Senses*." *International Fiction Review*, issue 31, 2004, p. 15.

Tan to increase her New Age appeal.[1] Here I will focus on the process by which magical realism colors the female character's transformation from inhibitive silence to articulate silence. The reality that is produced by bringing together two types of silences is already in and of itself fantastic and magical. Chineseness, in the novel as a whole is in this way portrayed as provisional.

The muted Buncake is compared to a baby bird that talks with gestures and uses a language from another world: "I knew her hands were not of this world. You see, I also was a child, still close to the time before this life." Buncake's gestures/words are compared to the movements of pale birds that "glide and swoop with the shadows, soar and float." Nunumu naturalizes marvelous gestures which surprisingly, create, a fantastic atmosphere that is simply presented as natural. Tan's combination of the fantastic and the natural produces a sense of uncertainty in the reader's mind, which also creates suspense, greater reader participation and acceptance of the contradictions in the text.[2] The portrayal of Buncake's talking hands and the personification of the dancing lamplights borrows from the narrative style of fairy tales. This particular way of using the language of fairy tales is Tan's way to offer a "visualization of the world as it could be."[3] This language keeps meaning open. For instance, the adoption of fairy-tale language decries the brute reality of Buncake's forced silence. But the naturalized language more essentially denotes a strategy of survival among Tan's silenced female characters through landscape. Tan presents the transformation of Buncake's muteness, initially an expression of her oppression, into a language that "trans-forms" itself and becomes articulate when her expressions are manifested in nonlinguistic gestures—swift, energetic movements which are mimicked in the narrative by the alliteration of "swoop and soar." "An "articulate silence," according to King-Kok Cheung, refers to an ability to render the voiceless audible. The power of Buncake's "articulate

[1] MA, Sheng-mei. ""Chinese and Dogs" in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age." *Melus*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001, p. 35.
[2] CHANADY, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magic Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy*. Garland, 1985, p. 160.
[3] DUPLESSIS, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Indiana University Press, p. 179.

silence" is enacted in the rising, lifting and releasing image of the "many pale birds through clouds."

King-Kok Cheung identifies three types of "articulate silences" based on the fictions of three Asian American writers: Maxine Hong Kingston, Hisaye Yamamoto, and Joy Kogawa. Provocative silence refers to the parental and historical silence that spurs creativity. Rhetorical silence applies to the scenario when positions of the narrator and the author are incongruent and the reader discerns different contradictions within the text.[1] Attentive silence means that the reader needs to try hard to establish links "between dreams, fairy tales, and events, and between 'fragments of memories.'"[2] Buncake's "articulate silence" changes from being what I would term an inhibited one into an attentive one. This inhibited silence is imposed on Buncake, as a result of witnessing her parents being killed before her eyes but it is also in keeping with a promise made to her mother.[3] However, communicating with the gestures of a bird, Buncake's inhibited silence is transformed into a call to attention because we have to make a connection between reality, fairy tale and Nunumu's fragmented memories. Nunumu understands Buncake's "shadow talk"—her unique method for interacting with her surroundings.

The bird, as a recurring motif, symbolizes the power of purity without the "contamination" of worldly language because "her hands were not of this world." Nunumu's (mis)use of language, specifically the misapplication of grammatical rules, accounts for the naturalization of the supernatural.[4] Tan renders the fantastic through the use of a language that is exclusive to the child who is believed to be close to the domain of the presymbolic, that which is least influenced by the social world of ideological conventions, law and history. This "language"—Buncake's hand

[1] CHEUNG, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa.* Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 25.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[3] Tan records Buncake's witnessing as "That this tearing of skin from flesh was how her mother and father had died. That she had watched this happen from a leafy limb, hidden high in a tree where her father had put her. That in the tree an oriole called, warning Buncake away from her nest. But Buncake would not make a sound, not a cry or even a whimper, because she had promised her mother to be quiet. That's why Buncake never talked. She had promised her mother" (TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 226).
[4] ADAMS, Bella. *Amy Tan*. Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 120.

gestures—is not a "descriptive, entitative, reifying language."[1] Instead it is something outside language, another form of "language" that blurs boundaries between silence and speech. It is a spontaneous "language" that does not aim to define, delimit or determine anything, and which recalls the vagueness of the *Dao* that engenders the *yin-yang* interplay. The language finds its counterpart—a "haziness" of mountains and waters in the landscape paintings from the Song dynasty. This language that is constantly flowing between two opposing poles of speech and silence, or better, moving beyond and therefore detaching itself from both speech and silence, makes up the "great words" (*dayan* 大言) or language of the *Dao*.[2] This speaking of *Dao* is transformative in itself since it denies differentiation and categorization. The transformative nature of the language of Dao reveals itself in Tan's female characters' flexible manner of interacting with their surroundings. The metamorphosis of the bird in the end of this paragraph when Nunumu says that she had once been "a spirit who left this earth in the body of a bird" in turn reflects this adaptable way of engaging with one's environment. The giant bird called Peng embodies a pursuit of spiritual freedom in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (庄子 in the middle of Warring States period 476–221 B.C.). Tan adopts this fantastically colorful bird image from the Chinese classics and uses it as a figure of liberation. She re-contextualizes the bird image in Buncake's traumatic loss of her parents and her subsequent quest for a voice.

The following paragraph depicts the drought in Nunumu's and Buncake's village. The silence in the landscape echoes the silence of Buncake and reaches a climax along with the intensification of the fantastic:

> The following year, there was no rain. In all the villages surrounding ours, rain fell as usual, big rain, small rain, long rain, short rain. Yet in our village, none.

[1] WANG, Youru. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking*. Routledge, 2003, p. 106.

[2] Jullien argues that "'Great' means that which is open to both one and the other, that which does not exclude. This term interminably expresses the coexistence up- stream from what, in coming into actuality, undergoes differentiation and comes to stand opposed to itself. 'Great,' in short, expresses the plenitude of com possibility. It is when the 'great way' is 'lost' that one begins to separate and specify, begins to differentiate virtues, to separate 'humaneness' from 'justice,' and so on" (JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 199).

> No rain for the spring tilling. No rain for the summer harvest. No rain for the fall planting. No rain, no crops. No water to cook the rice that no longer grew, no chaff to feed the pigs. The rice fields cooked hard as porridge crust, and the frogs lay on top, dry as twigs. The insects climbed out of the cracked ground, waving their feelers toward the sky. The ducks withered and we ate them, skin on bones. When we stared too long at the mountain peaks, our hungry eyes saw roasted sweet potatoes with their skins broken open. Such a terrible year, so terrible that people in our village said Buncake, that crazy girl, she must be the reason.[1]

The paragraph imitates the folkloric style of tales told to children by their elders. The language is simple and repetitive, and the sentences are short. This concise unembellished style of writing is analogous to a landscape without sound. The pared-down sentences all start with the same phrase "No rain for…," composing the shocking picture of an arid landscape whose lively sounds of both human beings, crops and animals have been silenced. A fantastic picture is created: "When we stared too long at the mountain peaks, our hungry eyes saw roasted sweet potatoes with their skins broken open." These fantastic images suggest the degree to which Tan's writing is imbued with Chinese culture and narrative strategies, images that evolve with Tan's deeper investigation into Chinese history, her more frequent visits to China, and her continued communication with her Chinese relatives and friends. The "so…that" structure "so terrible that people in our village said Buncake, that crazy girl, she must be the reason" marks a sharp contrast with the groundless attribution of the cause of the drought to Buncake. Tan adopts *xing* (兴) to depict the parallel between the silenced landscape and that of the silenced Buncake. *Xing* employs the concrete imagery observed in natural landscapes as a lead-in for the real subject of a poems. The silenced landscape aims to bring in the real subject: the condemnation of the marginalization of the muted Buncake who talks with her hands.

The next paragraph portrays Buncake's bursting into laughter when the rain finally comes to the village. With it, I will illustrate how *bi* in Tan's novels is enriched in Buncake's strong life instincts, subversion and perseverance in the face of hardship:

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 227.

> One hot day, Buncake and I were sitting in the hull of a dusty ditch that ran alongside our house. We were waiting for our imaginary boat to take us to the land of fairy queens. Suddenly we heard a groan from the sky, then another groan, then a big crack—kwahhh!—and hard rain fell like pellets of rice. I was so happy and scared! More lightning came, more thunder. At last our boat is going, I shouted. And Buncake laughed. For the first time, I heard her laugh. I saw her reach her hands toward the flashes in the sky. [1]

Buncake's empowerment is reflected through water-related images such as rain, drought, thunder, and drowning. Buncake's attentive silence transforms itself into a provocative silence that encourages creativity. The human characteristics are transposed onto scenery and natural phenomena. The liveliness obtained from Buncake's breaking of silence is imparted to the lifeless things. With the personification of the rain as "a groan from the sky, then another groan, then a big crack," the fierce rain symbolizes the rebellious power of Buncake who breaks her silence and voices her pain. The power of Buncake's provocative silence increases with the adoption of the comparative degree, "More lightning came, more thunder." The onomatopoeia "kwahhh!" further intensifies the power of Buncake's newly gained provocative silence, as if it were the thunder that was speaking for her. The image of "the pellets of rice" in the metaphor displays the characteristics of *bi* that uses verbal expressions and natural associations. *Bi* likens the abstract ideas and feelings to the images (xiang 象) gained from participating in agricultural activities. *Bi* and *xing* are based on the belief of that there is no ontological difference between poets and landscapes. *Bi* and *xing* refuse to separate themselves from daily activities as recorded in the poem collection *Shijing*. Tan's metaphors are inspired from Buncake's surrounding environment and daily activities. Her metaphor turns the attachment to homeland and reverence for the land into Buncake's overt defense of her own innocence in the face of the villagers' accusations. Once again, Tan adopts and revisits the traditional literary device *bi* to express Buncake's forced silence toward her unjust treatment.

Toward the end of the passage above, Buncake's inhibitive silence transforms itself into provocative silence. This provocative silence is manifested in her laugh.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 227.

The villagers' intolerable denunciation imposed on Buncake provokes a narrative that amplifies their prejudiced views. Buncake's provocative silence is associated with the luminosity: "I saw her reach her hands toward the flashes in the sky."[1] The light from the sky is traditionally associated with creative power in Daoist ideas because the *Dao* of Heaven (*tian* 天) is respected as the primordial force that produces the myriad of things. From this perspective, Buncake's reach for the flashes of the sky conforms to Cheung's explanation of the provocative silence that promotes creativity. The fantastical plot of Buncake's "magical" restoration of voice exhibits Tan's own vison of China, which is incorporated in her reimagination of the features of local and national cultures.

The first half of this subchapter has discussed the parallel between Ruth's inner struggles and its contrast with the silence in her Cubbyhole and that of the beach. Silence, highly praised—the origin of the harmony of the myriad things as written in Tang poems—, is undercut by Tan's portrayal of the noises from the bridge that free Ruth. By examining the analogy between walking on the beach and writing in the sand, the silence of the sand writing then transforms itself into a medium for Ruth to express her own voice. The transience of Chineseness is then naturalized in the transforming medium of sand writing. The second half of this subchapter has analyzed Buncake's transformation: first from inhibitive silence to attentive silence and then to provocative silence. The magical realism adopted in Tan's renderings of Buncake's transformation composes a hybrid form by which Tan's own identity as a Chinese American writer is given expression. With the adoption and recontextualization of *bi* and *xing*, Tan has attempted to construct her own language to proximate the experience of her female characters when facing a particular landscape. Like the silence of Buncake, Chineseness is in constant flux, changing

[1] Wisker says that "Mythic and magical traditions, Alexis argued, far from being alienated from the people, or mere mystifications, were the distinctive feature of their local and national cultures, and were the collective forms by which they gave expression to their identity and articulated their difference from the dominant colonial and racial oppressors" (WISKER, Gina. *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 118-119).

from an inhibitive form of silence, to a more attentive one before finally transforming itself into a provocative one.

3 Return

Introduction

As we have seen in the first two parts, both Chineseness and landscape are complex matters, further complicated in their entwinement. Chineseness embodies both the broad and culturally flexible notion of identity and that of "spatiality" in geographical and territorial terms. Part One "Tension-setting Networks of Opposition and Correlation" has located Tan's landscapes in tension between Chinese and American ways of seeing and conceiving landscape, from which Tan's own imagination of China arises. Part Two "Transition and Transformation" has continued to analyze the correlative pairs discerned in Tan's written landscapes such as the beautiful and the sublime, life and death, the modern and the primitive landscape, *yin* and *yang*, the natural and the constructed, and sound and silence. There, the fluidity of landscape has been displayed, and the constant transition-and-transformation processes of Tan's landscapes exposed. The focus was then on the modification, continuation, and transformation of these correlative pairs. Chineseness shows itself in the female characters' temporal, affective, and bodily engagement with landscapes.

The term "China" has been used here to refer to the geographical territory of China. But we also refer to the culturally constructed idea of China that is invoked by a specific set of interrelated ideas, images, and values. These twin axes jointly create what national identity always already is: not pure. Tan draws from these images, ideas, and myths of nationhood which this dissertation finds repeated, adapted, and reworked throughout her (re)writings of landscape. This part observes that after repeating, transforming, and recreating the cultural axes of Chineseness, Tan's particular rendering of landscapes, displays certain characteristics that perform a return to the origin.

Chapter 25 of the Daoist classic *Dao De Jing* states that in the way-making, the myriad things (*wanwu* 万物) go through a continuous process of passing, distancing

and finally returning. François Jullien terms this "distancing" in his monograph *Living off Landscape* (2018) as [at a] "remove"—*lointain* in the original French. He defines a landscape's "remove" as "feed[ing] our reveries and lull[ing] us into 'dreaminess'."[1] As a result, the materiality of things in nature becomes elusive and disperses toward an infinite realm.[2] Thanks to its capacity to make things vague and to open itself from within, the remove prepares for us the path to the original confusion of the myriad things. This "original confusion" in the context of landscape, in Jullien's words, "contributes to landscape's aura […] and opens them up beyond their limited character, rendering them evasive."[3]

For Tan's Chinese American female characters, Chineseness is evasive because it constitutes an unceasing transition and transformation. This constant change is caused by the disjunction between the landscapes that are metaphorically and mythically preconceived in the female characters' minds, and the ones that are ontologically experienced in their direct, first-hand contact with the country when they visit it. This disjunction already contains a "distancing" within itself. It is this "remove" that opens up the possibility for the characters to understand Chineseness as they attempt to grasp the meaning of the landscape through returning to the country of their ancestors, both physically and spiritually. This process is redolent of the Daoist return to the origin from which the process of things flows. Escaping from the particular, the individual and the contingent, this "remove" brings us back to our starting point of the undifferentiated where no demarcations or differentiation have been made among things. This original confusion is "what makes landscape the natural point of departure, and the medium, for mediation."[4] For Tan's Chinese American female characters, the mediation of Chineseness accompanies the mediation of Americanness. In this way, Chinese and American landscapes inspire Tan's characters to both see from a distance and revisit and reinterpret Chineseness and Americanness from the inside. Just as the concept of return in the *Dao De Jing*

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. ix.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. ix.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

guarantees a return to the undifferentiated, so too in the experience of sameness do Chineseness and Americanness appear to shed their distinctive traits for Tan's characters: differences seem to be integrated, offering the illusion of fusion and reconciliation between them. This lack of differentiation does not last long in Tan's novels however, as Tan undercuts the promise of *Dao*. Instead, sameness is rendered as problematic in the blurring boundaries of different landscapes, where one version of landscape ironically displaces the other.

Tang Junyi (唐君毅 1909-1978), one of the leading philosophers of New Confucianism states that:

> […] cosmology is not simply a linear zerosum victory of order over chaos driven by some external cause, but rather is the endless alternation between rising and falling, emerging and collapsing, moving and attaining equilibrium that is occasioned by its own internal energy of transformation. This cosmic unfolding is not 'cyclical' in the sense of reversibility and replication but is rather a continuing spiral that is always coming back upon itself and yet is ever new.[1]

Returning is to engage in the process of becoming and growth, which also leads to a distance and separation. The following figure clearly shows this spiral development:

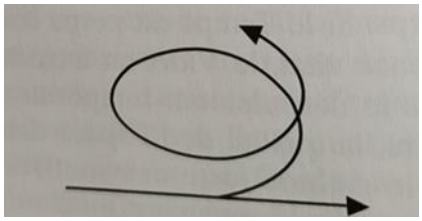

Fig. 5 The Spiral of Return

We can see that the process of return is denoted by the time and space dimension. The linear development of time accompanies the circular movement which links the moving "subject" to the original space. Part Three of this thesis sets out to study how Tan's writings of landscape contribute to the cultural construction of a certain version of Chineseness specific to time and space in Tan's novels. Tan's Chinese

[1] TANG, Junyi. "The Distinctive Features of Natural Cosmology in Chinese Philosophy." *Collected Essays on the Comparison between Chinese and Western Philosophical Thought*. Xuesheng Shuju, 1988, p. 13.

American female characters, geographically displaced from China, are removed from Chineseness—and hence, closed to it. They display their own (mis)/(re)understanding or lack of understanding of China. But due to their displacement from the geographical, mythical and linguistic China, Tan's female characters, on the other hand, possess increasing mobility and show more freedom to explore and explain what China and Chineseness mean to them. Following the movement of the spiral, there is an endless repetitive process: distanciation is comprised within return and returning implies distanciation, repeatedly.

The first chapter of Part Three, "*Dao*—Against Subject and Beyond Being" will analyze the posthumous landscapes and the landscapes in dreams, myths and previous lives that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination, and between life and death. From reading Tan, Chineseness appears as a combination of the essential that comes from a specific geographical territory and the natural environment, and the constructed, that is the culturally constructed idea of China. "Returning," according to the *Dao De Jing*, means making one's way back home to the natural. However, this returning is always complicated by the fact that the essential and the constructed in Tan's landscapes reflect and destabilize each other, whereas the variability of Chineseness is demonstrated in the unsettledness between vision/representation and reality. Communicating with one's ancestors is considered in China as a path to "returning." In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Ruth's communication with her ancestors through calligraphic practice is actually acted out by Ruth. This makes her returning to the origins both problematic, and yet also a means by which the origins are being questioned.

Chapter 25 of the *Dao De Jing* elaborates what returning is, and has inspired, my two subchapters "The Undifferentiated *Dao*" and "The Empty and the Bland" in Chapter One. It states that:

> There was some process that formed spontaneously. Emerging before the heavens and the earth. Silent and empty; Standing alone as all that is, it does not suffer alteration. All pervading, it does not pause. It can be thought of as the mother of the heavens and the earth. I do not yet know its name (*ming*). If I were to style it, I would call it way-making (*dao*). And if forced to give it a name, I would call it grand. being grand, it is called passing, Passing, it is called distancing. Distancing, it is called returning. Way-making is grand, the heavens

> (*tian*) are grand, the earth is grand, And the king is also grand. Within our territories, There are four "grandees." And the king occupies one of them. Human beings emulate the earth, the earth emulates the heavens. The heavens emulate way-making, and way-making emulates what is spontaneously so (*ziran*).[1]

"Way-making"/*Dao* is "grand" and "far-away." What is "far-away" enables the *Dao*'s "coming back." Among the many commentaries that have been offered on this chapter, I find François Jullien's comparison between way-making and that of the Creation in the Bible particularly clear. Jullien contends that unlike the separation and individuation to which Creation tends, way-making is the "resorption of differences and the return of the undifferentiated."[2] The return of the *Dao* is not from Elsewhere or from Outside but "refers back to the natural: that undifferentiated Fund, from which everything proceeds and to which everything returns."[3]

In *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), when facing the same landscape, this "undifferentiated Fund" is sensed among the white American, the African American and the Chinese American characters. These characters, despite their various backgrounds, experience *Dao* that hides and re-emerges as part of landscape. In the drum-beating scene, *Dao* is externalized as the ultimate power of love flowing from interconnectedness ("connivance" in Jullien's term) between nature and human souls.[4] Chinese culture is thus not essentialized as an element of Chineseness that is exclusive to people with Chinese lineage. Rather, Tan displaces this undifferentiated *Dao* and renders at once accessible to all, but also debatable. Through her deliberate summoning of characters from diverse backgrounds into the same Chinese landscape and her humorous renderings of their identification with it, Tan's narrative strategies

---

[1] AMES, R. T., D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, pp. 134-135. The Chinese terms in the quotation are italicized by me.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 90.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[4] Jullien argues that through the interconnectedness (connivance) between me and the landscape, one can reach the world at a more primordial level. He explains this interconnectedness as: "By embracing the singular individuation that sets the world in tension and promotes it into landscape I find myself coming closer to the root of my own individuation. I find myself more securely anchored, grafted, in my relation to the world" (JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 108).

concurrently represent the undifferentiated *Dao* and open up a space that at once enriches and undercuts the "essence" of Chineseness.

As Chapter 25 of the *Dao De Jing* explains, *Dao* is silent and empty with "simplicity, spontaneity, tranquility."[1] Because of its emptiness, *Dao* is able to embrace fullness:

> Way-making being empty; you make use of it but do not fill it up. So abysmally deep—It seems the predecessor of everything that is happening (*wanwu*). It blunts the sharp edges; and untangles the knots; It softens (*he*) the glare; And brings things together on the same track.[2]

In his monograph *In Praise of Blandness* (2004), Jullien elaborates the conception of the empty and the bland from Daoist teachings, Confucian ideas, Chinese aesthetics, arts and literature. Jullien distinguishes the Chinese concepts of the full and the empty as:

> [The full] overwhelms us, clouds our minds, reduces us to a state of dependence; [the empty] liberates us from the pressure of the external world, from the excitement of sensations, from all false and short- lived intensities […] And with this act, our interiority, inseparable from the apprehension of the world's blandness, re- covers its quietude and serenity.[3]

The empty is privileged in Chinese thinking patterns. The empty and the bland lead to the forgetting of worldly worries and the regaining of inner peace. Both Tan's calligraphic and the posthumous landscapes undermine this serenity and quietude that is supposed to be achieved out of the empty and the bland. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), during the calligraphic practice, the Chinese-born mother figure LuLing is supposed to enter the space of the empty, where knowledge, language and history are abandoned. But instead, LuLing recalls in her mind the scars on her mother Bao Bomu's face and bloody animal hearts:

> I once saw the heart of a fresh-killed pig. It was red and glistening. And I had already seen plenty of chicken hearts in a bowl, waiting to be cooked. They looked like tiny lips and were the same color as Precious Auntie's scars. But

[1] CHAN, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 136.
[2] AMES, R. T., D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 91.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, pp. 43-44.

> what did a woman heart look like? "Why do we have to know whose heart it was?" I asked as I wrote the character.[1]

The images evoked in Lu Ling's mind during the calligraphic practice are not a landscape of calmness and serenity. The principle of the empty and the bland that is pursued in Daoist and Confucian thought are therefore displaced by the characters' traumatic memory, pain and disease. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, Tan renders Bibi Chen's post-humous "being"[2] disturbing. Bibi's post-humous being destabilizes what the Daoist representative Zhuangzi (庄子 late 4th century B.C.) advocated as the satisfaction with one's lot.[3] Tan displays the ambiguity of the posthumous experience: on the one hand, Bibi is depicted as gaining access to an effusion of emotions lost to her before death, while on the other hand, she has her own desire to reach the truth of her death and she also fears she might dissolve. Bibi resides in a limbo space where all the oppositions meet and merge. The landscape in that limbo space invites the reader to reconsider what the meaning of being alive is, or whether, without a concrete body, we can still be considered as human. However, these metaphysical reflections are soon to be interrupted by the narrative when Bibi's post-humous body becomes the source of entertainment and party time for the American doctors examining her corpse:

> For days, they slid me in, they slid me out, and said brutish things about the contents of my stomach, the integrity of the vessels in my brain, my personal habits […] among strangers eating their sack lunches.[4]

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2005, p. 147.

[2] We should understand the posthumous in two ways, one being "beyond human" and the other, "more-than-human"—Bibi Chen's experiential body, action, emotions and affects after death. Actually, "being" is dissolved in the life beyond death where the boundaries between human and non-human or the humans and nature become blurry.

[3] After the death of his wife, Zhuangzi finds that life or death are merely one of the many transformations in the operation of the *Dao*. His wife returns to the beginning point of life after a chain of transformations. Chapter "Qiushui" in the *Zhuangzi* explains the relationship between life and death as "With a clear understanding of the smooth passage of life and death, they neither take life as a pleasure nor take death as a disaster, for they know that there is no fixed point for beginning and ending" (Zhuangzi. *Library of Chinese Classics: Zhuangzi*. Translated by Wang Rongpei. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999, p. 265. / 《大中华文库：庄子》汪榕培，英译。湖南人民出版社，外文出版社，1999，265 页).

[4] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 4.

Tan's focus on the fragmented body parts of Bibi Chen not only undermines the notion that we attain serenity in death, but also underscores the status of humans who are not considered fully human in Western mainstream culture, because limited by race, gender and other differences as well as by death. Chineseness, in the mutability and reproduction of the post-humous existence of Bibi, turns out to be situational and constructed rather than essential.

In the *Dao De Jing*, to flow and return to the depths of life is a way of transcending the limit of time and space:

> Things proliferate; And each again returns to its root. Returning to the root is called equilibrium (静 *jing*). Now as for equilibrium—this is called returning to the propensity of things; And returning to the propensity of things is common sense.[1]

The beginning of time cannot be understood as a single moment, but it is already at work in all activation. Beginning or ending are in continuous transition and therefore every end is also a beginning.[2] Ancient time, representing another aspect of "returning," it has been highly valued in Chinese aesthetics. For instance, the painter from Qing dynasty Hui Nantian (恽南田 1633—1690) says that:

> What I saw or what I heard, are not belonged to me; But when my body becomes dried-up wood, alone in the wind; All mountains and waters are a single glance and the present and the past overlap. I cannot tell if I am in the Qin and Han dynasties, or the Wei and Jin dynasties. In the stillness of the heavenly travel, there is eternity.[3]

[1] AMES, R. T., D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 114.

[2] Jullien writes that "It does not even say "beginning and end," but "end- beginning" (which translators often wrongly correct): this beginning is not inscribed in a single moment in time but is at work in all activation, and likewise there is no final end, neither a raising nor a lowering of the curtain. Thus every end is also a be- ginning; what is completed gives birth again as well. We have only continuous transitions to deal with" (JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 36).

[3] ZHU, Liangzhi. *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Aesthetics*. Peking University Press, 2006, p. 203. / 朱良志。《中国美学十五讲》。北京大学出版社，2006，203 页。My translation is based on the Chinese reference by Prof. Zhu.

We can see that through the reverence for the dried-up wood, symbolic of the ancient world, there is no difference between the ancient and the modern, and we can shift our focus from the mundane to the original root.

The corresponding Chinese word for time is "*shi* (时)" whose primary meaning is the sequence or rules of the movement of Heaven. Greatly influenced by plowing culture, Chinese philosophy does not have an abstract conception of time but conceives of it concretely as the cycle of the perceptible rotation of the four seasons. Time hence escapes the absolute category and is approached as living, forming a scene, destined for use, and perceived in activity. Mountains and waters are thrown into the progression of time, where the landscape is temporized, rhythmized, and fluid. The world is processual. In Tan's landscapes, as the *Yijing* clearly shows, ending (regression) already contains a beginning (progression); and beginning also indicates a journey toward the end. Past and present converge and blur in Tan's landscapes of the primordial. Tan's characters return to the past to retrieve their personal and familial histories. However, returning to the original point results in more ambivalence and confusion, which denotes the characters' difficulty in accessing both the Chinese past and Chinese landscapes. But this confusion also inaugurates newness, in a move that echoes Homi Bhabha's words concerning "the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which 'newness comes into the world.'"[1] For example, in Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the American-born character June travels into the scene where her two half-sisters as babies back in China were abandoned by their mother figure Suyuan:

> And now I feel as if I were in Kweilin amidst the bombing and I can see these babies lying on the side of the road, their red thumbs popped out of their mouths, screaming to be reclaimed.[2]

This scene occurs as a result of June's lapse of mind. This happens when she is having a discussion with her "aunt." The time described in the landscape by Tan aims to enact June's ambivalent attitudes toward her mother Suyuan. She is grieving while

[1] BHABHA, Homi K. "How Newness Enters the World." *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 326.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 59.

at the same time having a grudge against Suyuan on account of her mother's love for her other two daughters in China. June is orphaned by the death of her mother. She feels abandoned. Everything ends at that moment. All connections are cut. The daughter figures' understanding of the personal histories of the mother figures is depicted as difficult, a difficulty illustrated by the time shift, whereas the difficulty to grasp the Chinese past is depicted as oscillating between reality and imagination. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the past, present and future converge in the scene where the American-born character Ruth's hands are guided by her deceased grandmother Bao Bomu. Ruth writes their stories together so that the past reaches the present and then extends to the future. Tan makes an analogy between storytelling and the calligraphic practice. Ruth writes on the laptop as if she were writing on the sand tray when she was six years old again. The convergence of the fixity of words on paper[1] and the fluidity of time residing within the calligraphic practice and literary creation displays the interplay between *xu* (non-being) and *shi* (being) in Chinese landscape painting and Chinese landscape gardens. This *xu-shi* interplay is also enriched in Ruth's deepening understanding of the matrilineal connection with Bao Bomu through their collaborative literary creation.

Tan's reflections on Chinese landscapes are inseparable from the traumatic experiences of war and disaster. Tan's renderings of Chinese landscapes are frequently denigrated by critics on account of their mystifying features that are read as reducing Western impressions of China to the poetic ossification of ancient times, or the dystopian demonization of national suffering such as the Japanese invasion of China. But my readings of Tan's landscape writings echo Judith Caesar's contention that Tan renders all official facts questionable.[2] In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), people who are escaping from the Japanese air raid are compared to ripe wheat lowering its head in the field. Historicized under the circumstances of the extremity of war, Tan's characters are compared to crops that have been divested of life,

[1] Words are not fixed. In fact, they are not fixed at all. Here I refer to the black signs on the paper.
[2] CAESAR, Judith. "Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *Amy Tan*, Harold Bloom, ed. 2014, p. 42.

respect, and a voice. The dependence on plowing to survive in Chinese history produces an intimate dependence on, respect for, and worship of land and life. However, this attachment to land, figurative of time immemorial, is in turn undermined in Tan's rendering through her introduction of an antithesis between the respect and worship of land as a symbol of the time of eternity, and that of the violence of war.

In the *Dao De Jing*, returning means a resorption of differences and an embracing of the myriad things under the undifferentiated *Dao*. In his monograph *The Book of Beginnings* (2015), Jullien presents translation as a means and opportunity for a new reflexivity. To translate, one needs to be "open equally to both sides and maintaining the encounter between them until the possibility of one is equally recognized by the other."[1] In Tan's novels, the female characters engage in the translation of two or more landscapes. This translation, more often than not, enacts Jullien's definition in that it is "belated in its own time but, in a sense, also out of time, out of place."[2] The figurative use of the idea of translation aims to illuminate the place-lessness/displacement/not-at-homeness of Tan's characters, who are geographically displaced or psychologically estranged from Chinese landscapes. [3] Translation in my readings also refers to the characters' misuse of language such as the mistranslation and misapplication of terms or grammatical rules, untranslated words as well as the allusion to and appropriation of landscape myths. In other words, Tan presents the characters' inability to translate. For the Chinese-born mother figures, this misuse of language involves a transportation of language from "its place of origin and its imposed and imposing relationship on and with the new environment."[4] For the American-born daughter figures, the misuse of language is also caused by their remove from the Chinese language. Chinese landscapes that are constructed by the

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 112.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[3] Bassnett says that "Translation involves an implicit spatial relationship because translation is a "textual journey from one context into another" (BASSNETT, Susan. "Postcolonial Translations". *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*. Chew, Shirley, and David Richards, eds. John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 84).
[4] ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* Routledge, 2003, p. 28.

Chinese language are triply removed from the daughter figures who are distanced from the geographical China, confused by their mother figures' unstable memories and reproductions about Chinese landscapes, and further detached by their own (mis)translation of the oral story narrated in Chinese to the text narrated in English.

These multiple types of language become a tool with which Tan's own version of Chineseness can be textually constructed. Tan's landscapes construct difference, separation, and absence from both the Chinese and American landscape traditions, which enables an openness and new possibility. Tan aims not to produce and represent Chinese landscapes *per se*. There is no fixed and pregiven center or margin and no unmediated reality in her works, be it Chinese or American landscapes or the English or the untranslated Chinese words. I will analyze the difficulty, impossibility, and productivity of translation in Tan's female characters' engagement with both Chinese and American landscapes. Landscapes in Chapter Three "Translation" include the mountains and waters in China and America, the house of the American-born daughter figures, and the landscapes from folklore and myths told by the Chinese-born mother figures.

Subchapter One "The Difficulty of Translation" will analyze the gap of language and knowledge about landscape that has caused the difficulty of translation between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures. For example, in the episode "Half and Half" in Tan's debut novel, Rose has difficulty in understanding the Chinese written on the book cover of *The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates* that warns children about potential dangers. Rose's impossibility to translate the book cover demonstrates the difficulty of accessing Chinese language, cultures and belief systems. Rose seeks recourse to the landscape painted on the cover. The dependence on the painted landscapes intensifies the unreliability between referent and meaning as well as the complex interplay of language, translation and identity. This plot heightens the mistranslation caused by a lack of knowledge of the language. Yet freed from the limitation of language, it opens the possibility of understanding through the landscape image with multiple potentials and transformative meanings, which corresponds to the dilemma of identity for both the mother and daughter figures. But in addition to the language gaps, the Chinese-born mother figures and

the American-born daughter figures also mistranslate each other's landscapes, because their respective readings are based on their own knowledge about landscape — indeed, we conceive of place "not only as we ourselves see them but also as we have heard and read about them."[1] In the episode "Rice Husband" in the same novel, the Chinese-born Yingying offers a sarcastic comment about a table made by Lena's American husband Harold:

> Look at this end table. It is heavy white marble on skinny black legs […] The only thing that can sit on the table is a tall black vase. The vase is like a spider leg, so thin only one flower can be put in. If you shake the table, the vase and flower will fall down.[2]

Yingying points out the vanity of American life styles exhibited in the useless-yet-costly table in the guestroom. Yingying returns the Orientalist gaze by actively evaluating and rendering the American styles of house decoration as ridiculously useless. Yingying's comparison of the table to a spider's leg that has no capacity to hold anything denotes her misunderstandings, or refusal to understand, the décor in her daughter's home. Yingying's interpretation can be read as an enactment of what Bhabha calls "reinscription or redescription; an iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent."[3]

Subchapter two "Impossibility of Translation" will examine the transformations of the Changmian village that reflect the unreliability of memory and the fluidity of landscape itself. This unreliability and elusiveness result in an impossibility of translation, whose trope, Chineseness, becomes hard to grasp. For the American-born Olivia from *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Olivia's translation of the Changmian landscapes is portrayed as deferred by her associations with the landscape that appears in the Western literary paradigm of reading and describing landscape. For instance, Olivia's attempt to integrate the stone walls into the Western landscape frame is hindered three times. Olivia vacillates between repulsion from and attraction to the talk-stories of her Chinese-born sister Kwan. Olivia's attempt to

[1] LOWENTHAL, David. "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory." *Geographical review*, 1975, p. 6.
[2] TAN, Amy, *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, 163.
[3] BHABHA, Homi K. "How Newness Enters the World," *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 324.

understand the cairns as a metaphorical journey to find a balancing point is hindered because she associates them with of the Biblical myth of Lot's salty wife. Chineseness, embodied in multiple interpretations or hinderances in interpretation of the same Changmian landscape, is likewise in a process of continuous "retranslation" with the American-born characters' accumulating knowledge about China (re)visited.[1]

In the first two subchapters, Tan's written landscape emerges as an ambiguous and unstable construction, produced by (mis)/(re)translation between Chinese and American landscape myths and aesthetics. Subchapter Three "Openness of Translation" will examine the untranslated in Tan's landscapes that makes Chineseness more open to new reflexibility. China is portrayed as a lost land to both the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures especially in their translating gestures including their misreadings, re-readings and over-interpretations. China as a lost land in *The Joy Luck Club*, for instance, is manifested in the bodily changes of the American-born character June when landing in China. The focus on this bodily transformation expands the idea of China from an imaginary entity to a place that is physically experienced. However, China as a lost land is complicated in Tan's immediate deconstruction of China as a place that can be bodily experienced with her introduction of the unreliable visual aspects of the photograph.

Tan's portrayal of the unaccountable incident and her revision of the myths about landscape formation in *The Hundred Secret Senses* resists narrativization: there is always something unwritten about China. When she represents the chicken killing scene in the Changmian village to both her American husband and her American readers, the Chinese American photographer Olivia vacillates between a "readerly" translation and a "writerly" translation. She oscillates from simply embellishing the scene so as to prevent stereotypical judgments, to combining this scene with her complex cultural heritage. For instance, Tan operates a link between the immediate scene in the Chinese courtyard with a scene in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*: the

[1] In *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Olivia's visit of China is both her first trip and her tracing of the sites in Kwan's talk-stories. So here I use the term "(re)visit."

chicken blood that "stirs […] into the stew […and] in the red swirls" in a Chinese courtyard is redolent of the "hell-broth boil and bubble" prepared by the witches from *Macbeth*, with which Olivia makes an intertextual connection. This active intertextual connection offers Olivia an opportunity to approach the Chinese customs that would remain otherwise unknown to her, as it enables her to link the unfamiliar chicken-killing scene from unknown contemporary China with a familiar scene from the Western cannon.

Tan's rewriting of myths manifests that, in her literary world, there exists no actual Chinese or American landscape but there are mythical locations of Chinese American characters in an always already mythical landscape. For instance, the Chinese-born character Kwan's telling of the mountain myth undercuts the fixity and constraint of women within landscape. Rather, Tan focuses on the liberating force of the three birds raised by Kwan as a girl. This interplay between emplacement and liberation probes into the complex nature of identity that is in a process unceasing renewal. The unwritten stories thus possess more potential because they imply the attempt to break the limitation of the resistance of representation that is inherent in the depictions of both China, Chineseness and Chinese American female characters' translation of Chinese land. The Chinese past and Chinese landscapes, if seen as embodied in folklore and myths, are lost and unspeakable in this light. How can we say that this lost land and unwritten story have the potential of opening more possibility? Are we not likely to learn more from something that is burgeoning and alive?

3.1 *Dao* – Against Subject and Beyond Being

3.1.1 The Undifferentiated *Dao*

Dao is one of the most essential and also one of the most confusing concepts in the Daoist classic *Dao De Jing*. Chapter 14 describes what *Dao* is as follows:

> Looking and yet not seeing it; we thus call it "elusive." Listening and yet not hearing it; we thus call it "inaudible." Groping and yet not getting it; we thus call it "intangible." Because in sight, sound, and touch it is beyond determination; we construe it as inseparably one. As for this "one"— Its surface is not dazzling; Nor is its underside dark. Ever so tangled, it defies discrimination; And reverts again to indeterminacy. This is what is called the form of the formless; And the image of indeterminacy. This is what is called the vague and the indefinite. [1]

We can see from the whole *Dao De Jing* that it remains difficult to find concrete, tangible elements or denotive language to delineate the appearance and moving patterns of *Dao*. Laozi (老子 571-471 B.C) the founder of Daoism describes *Dao* in terms of vagueness and opacity, as exemplified by the action of looking without seeing or the motion of listening without hearing in the above quotation. The characteristics of *Dao* are thus presented as elusive, inaudible, unnamable and intangible—in sum, that which is beyond determination. Laozi continues to describe *Dao* in Chapter 42 focusing on its engendering power, omnipresence, and pervasive influence on nature:

> Way-making (*dao*) gives rise to continuity; Continuity gives rise to difference; Difference gives rise to plurality; And plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (*wanwu*). Everything carries *yin* on its shoulders and *yang* in its arms. And blends these vital energies (*qi*) together to make them harmonious (*he*).[2]

Humankind and nature are both given birth to by *Dao*; they are governed by the same law, share the same structure, and aim at the same returning point. *Dao*'s moving pattern is called *fan*. Chen Guying (陈鼓应 1935-now), one of the most renowned Daoist scholars in China today, argues in his interpretation of the Daoist

[1] AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 110. I have changed certain texts from uppercase to lowercase for the sake of reading.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 171. The italics are added by me.

classic *Dao De Jing: Translation and Annotations* (2003) that *Fan* has two meanings, opposition (反) and returning (返). The former focuses on the fact that through the movements and transformations between *yin* and *yang* forces, everything develops in its opposite direction; the latter underscores the fact that everything has the tendency to return to its originating point where all the differences are embraced and (ab)/(re)sorbed. [1] This return to the undifferentiated is considered by Laozi as a path towards the simple and the natural which is inexhaustive in providing the sources of life vitality to the myriad things in the universe.

This poetic realm of the natural has been pursued by Chinese landscape painters from the 6th century to the present day.[2] In his monograph *The Great Image has No Form* (2009) François Jullien argues that the Chinese landscape painter Dong Yuan (董源 934-962) embraces this realm of "naturalness and truth (天真 *tianzhen*)" by capturing things that "emerg[e] from their primordial indifferentiation or sink back into it."[3] In this way, Dong Yuan's landscape painting displays the fundamental nature of things. As a result, it is not mountains and waters on paper that we see but rather it is the undifferentiated *Dao* of nature itself simply relayed by the painter at its primordial stage that does not "tak[e] form and com[e] into actuality."[4]

Mountains and waters, as the manifestation of the tensions and correlations between *yin* and *yang* forces, serve as an appropriate starting point to discuss Tan's display and displacement of natural and undifferentiated *Dao*. An analysis of the narrative of presence of the narrative of *Dao* in Tan's novels offers us a chance to examine how Tan, as a writer in an in-between position, interprets "Other." For no matter what, returning to *Dao* in the *Dao De Jing* denotes a denial of determination or restriction and a dissolving of specificity.[5] In her fifth novel *Saving Fish from*

---

[1] CHEN, Guying. *Dao De Jing: Translation and Annotations*. Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 2003, p. 36. / 陈鼓应。《老子今注今译》。商务印书馆，2003 年，第三十六页。.

[2] To see more examples by following the link: https://www.comuseum.com/painting/landscape-painting/.

[3] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting.* The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 3.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[5] In spirit of this indeterminate process of the *Dao*, it would not be correct to say that the *Dao* denies the possibility of the Other. Indeed, the myriad things are melted in the Great Process of

Drowning (2005), Tan locates miscellaneous characters from different racial backgrounds within the same disturbing oriental landscape—they are all kidnapped and are forced to live in a Myanmar tribe. In a drum-beating scene towards the end of the novel, the American tourists overcome their fears of being killed and instead, they fully immerse their bodies and minds in the beating rhythms of the drum. As a result, the tourists abandon their separate bodies and become one with each other, a process which evolves into an interconnection with the movement and the life vitality of the universe. But this apparent resorption of the characters' racial differences, as guaranteed by returning to *Dao* as an origin, turns out to be an illusion, as manifested in Tan's humorous and ironic tones. Similarly, in her fourth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Tan deploys dramatic irony to depict the American-born character Ruth's failed attempt to communicate with her ancestors via her calligraphic practice: in other words, the process of returning to the primordial phase of the undifferentiated is presented as elusive. The idea that Chineseness is something authentic and "out there" waiting to be accessed or that there is a genuine origin of Chineseness to which one may return—figured by the undifferentiated *Dao* to both Tan's American and Chinese American female characters—is therefore called into question. The return to the undifferentiated in Tan's novels displays her continuously deepening and yet contradictory understanding of both China and Chinese heritage.

3.1.1.a Displacement of the undifferentiated Dao*: The introduction of various literary genres as an experiment and the drumbeating scene* in Saving Fish from Drowning

In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the Chinese American art collector Bibi Chen plans a trip to China and Myanmar for her wealthy American friends before her mysterious death. The group is made up of people from all walks of life: The characters include Wendy, a die-hard political activist, and her boyfriend Wyatt;

---

the *Dao* ("Da Hua 大化"), where they co-habit. There is oneness within the myriad things *because* of their differences.

Marlena, a Chinese American art patron; Bennie, a gay man; a high-conflict couple made up of Roxanne, an evolutionary biologist, and her husband Dwight, a behavioral psychologist whose great-great-grandfather had been killed in Myanmar; Vera, an African American writer who is writing a book about bravery and leadership; Moff, a British businessman and his son Rupert; and finally Moff's wife Heidi who is an over-packing worrier. These tourists are eventually kidnapped by a Myanmar tribal group and are then forced to live in a place called "No Name Place," which could be an avatar of the *Dao* "place" because it is also not possible to name *Dao*. The narrative of these characters' different reactions to this unknown territory illuminates Tan's understanding of how people perceive the "Other." The term "other" here refers to the "exotic" tribal customs such as the ritual of the drum beating as a way to commune with Heaven. "Other" also alludes to Tan's experiment with different discourses such as the ones in the news report and those in the psychological records. Through the introduction of these two writing styles, Tan distances herself from her Chinese heritage present in her fiction. We can think for example of the returning to the undifferentiated of the *Dao* whose characterization of oneness, and embracing of difference and vagueness are manifest in the drum-beating scene of *Saving Fish from Drowning*. As mentioned in the preface to the novel, the accident of the eleven American travelers is based on the report bearing the title "Tourists Flee Burma, Fears over 11 Missing Americans" published on the Nov. 10, 2013 in the *San Francisco Chronicle.*[1] The posthumous[2] character Bibi Chen for her part is inspired by Tan's serendipitous discovery of the fantastical anecdotes in the archives of the American Society for Psychical Research, where Tan took shelter from an unexpected summer downpour.[3] The archives include a report about a certain Bibi Chen, who, as a spirit, recounts her story to a psychic, Karen

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. xvi-xviii.
[2] I adopt its original meaning of what occurs after death.
[3] Tan states in the prologue that "THE IDEA FOR THIS BOOK began with a bolt of lightning and a clap of thunder. I was walking on the Upper West Side in Manhattan when I was caught without an umbrella in a fierce summer downpour. I spotted a possible shelter: a handsome brownstone building with gleaming black double doors. A brass plaque read: "American Society for Psychical Research." Lured by the possibilities within, I rang the bell, and spent the rest of the day perusing the Society's archives" (*Ibid.*, p. xi).

Lundegaard, who is able to communicate with the spirit. A description of their "meeting" is recorded in the prologue to the novel:

> Karen had transcribed Bibi's voice in pencil on yellow legal pads. This began as spastic marks and jerky false starts, then gave way to pages of frantic squiggles and drunken scrawls, and gradually loped into the smooth shape of handwriting. It was as if I were seeing the electroencephalogram of the brain-dead being resuscitated, a marionette whose strings had been yanked into animation.[1]

The transcribed pages—which transform from "spastic marks and jerky false starts" to "frantic squiggles and drunken scrawls" and then finally to the "smooth shape of handwriting"—become a special landscape for Tan to re-enact and re-trace Bibi's words. Bibi's act of telling is re-animated in Tan's literary imagination. By introducing the posthumous Bibi Chen as the novel's narrator, Tan plays with the idea of how storytelling will suspend readers' disbelief regarding the possibility of communicating with a dead spirit. This desire to be in contact with the past symbolizes a wish to access an origin that the act of returning to *Dao* strives to achieve. But this returning to the origin is immediately undercut by the unreliability that lies under both the spirit's rambling and the listener's recording.

In this prologue, Tan also explicitly points out that her introduction of the posthumous character Bibi Chen aims to show that the world we live in is apprehended through the "portals"[2] of others. Tan's belief in one's grasp of the world through the perspectives of others is indeed redolent of the returning to *Dao* which contains and embraces various possibilities and angles of vision. Tan offers her Western readers a different perspective from which to understand their relationship with their environment.

I discern a spiral development in Tan's recordings of Chinese landscapes and their inherent values when considered in view of her characters' returning to the undifferentiated *Dao*: Tan's narrative of the undifferentiated *Dao* oscillates between

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. xiii.
[2] Tan uses the term "portal" in her narrative to describe the changes happening in the bodies of the American tourists in the tribe's drum-beating scene. In this particular scene, the American tourists become one with each other: "They were open portals to many minds, and the minds flew into the soul, and the soul was contained in the minds of everyone" (*Ibid.*, p. 417).

closeness and remoteness from the "center of Chineseness." Here, I use the term "center of Chineseness" not to indicate that there actually exists any essentialized or authentic conception of Chineseness, but rather to present an image helpful in the understanding of this spiral development in Tan's novels. As discussed above, the introduction of the news report, psychological records, and a posthumous character, Bibi Chen, enable Tan to keep a distance from the "center of Chineseness." It must also be noted that this distance also enables a detour that offers Tan the possibility of entering a space—albeit a confusing and unstable one—that enables her to explore what Chineseness might mean to her, to her characters and to her novel writing. Tan's coming back to the "center of Chineseness" does not mean a tour back to the starting point. On the contrary, Tan's writings of landscape gain a new dimension, just as new dimensions are also shown in Chinese landscape painting:

> At the junction between the two [the original "there is," the Without-form of the undifferentiated Fount; and the diversity of forms and the continual renewal of the concrete], it is both the stroke of emergence and of ascent, at the starting point of every variation of later lines, and of submersion and return, with all previous lines culminating in it, becoming confused and losing their individuality. In that respect, it returns to the stage of the elementary or "simple," to which Taoists, who advocated a "return" to the natural, were so attentive.[1]

Returning to the original point is never the same because the successive movements of the brush will pick up from and also modify what the previous ones have left. For example, the following image is Northern Song painter Guo Xi's (郭熙 1020-1090) painting *Early Spring* (早春图 1072). When painting the rocks on the mountain, his use of the brush pen and the movements of the wrist alternate between "going along" and "going athwart," between "starting" and "going back" and between left and right:

[1] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 24.

Figure 6. Partial view of *Early Spring* (Hanging scroll, ink and light color on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei)

Chinese landscape painting is an art of lines and dots and the brush work of a stroke going along is called "draw," and going athwart is called "carve," a single stroke is "draw," and a back stroke is "carve," a stroke from left to right is "draw," while a stroke from right to left is "carve." Each stroke of draw continues with the previous one and adds on something new and different with the shared *Qi* of the universe. So Chinese landscapes painting's brushwork is indeed "one in many" because of the various changes and transformations but also, it is "many in one" because it comes from and will return to the same *Qi* of the world.

I will discuss how Tan's narratives of both Bibi Chen's and the American tourists' remarkable experiences in the tribe help illustrate this spiral development. In this process, Tan plays with the Chinese conception of returning to *Dao* as a tour back to the undifferentiated, which "specifies the least, restricts the least, closes off the least."[1] In the following paragraph we will witness the tribe's drum-beating ceremony from the point of view of Bibi Chen. There Tan depicts there, a miraculous scene where the American travelers and the tribal members return to an undifferentiated fount and become one, despite their linguistic and cultural differences:

> They felt bigger and lighter […] Now that they were outside their bodies, they could hear without the distortions of ears, speak without the tangle of tongues, see without the blinders of experience. They were open portals to many minds, and the minds flew into the soul, and the soul was contained in the minds of everyone. They knew this was not normal, and yet it was natural. They struggled for words to describe what they felt, that they were every thought they had ever

[1] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 51.

> had and those of others, an open repository containing bright particles and endless strands, microscopic stars and infinite trajectories, endless constellations that were holograms within holograms within themselves, the invisible as visible, the impossible as obvious, the greatest knowledge now effortlessly known, and the greatest knowledge was love. Just love. And I knew this, too.[1]

The miraculous changes that occur in the tourists' bodies ("they could hear without the distortions of ears, speak without the tangle of tongues, see without the blinders of experience") are evocative of what Laozi describes as *Dao*: something that is not seen through looking, not heard through listening, or not obtained through groping.[2] The tourists' heartbeats vibrate with the drum-beating tempos, as they metamorphose into the "open portals to many minds." Tan's comparison of the tourists' bodies to an open portal is suggestive of the description offered by the classical Chinese scholar Wang Bi (王弼 226–249)[3] of a return to the undifferentiatedness of *Dao*:

> [Returning to the undifferentiated] has neither predilections nor outer signs [so] that one can perfectly embrace the myriad folk, leaving out absolutely no one.[4]

A return to the undifferentiated fount of *Dao* means an embracing and dissolving of all differences of the myriad things including people from all walks of life and backgrounds. In Tan's passage, the tourists from varied backgrounds all feel their connection with the movements of the universe: they have this feeling for the very first time that the world is boundless and their capacity to grasp the limitless world, is evoked in the words concerning microscopic and infinite stars and galaxies. The infinite universes and "endless constellations" to which the American travelers are compared is reminiscent of those evoked in one of the earliest collections of Chinese poems *Shijing* (诗经 *Book of Songs*) dating from the 11th to 7th centuries B.C. in China. The use of the image of the constellation aims at externalizing the poet's innermost invisible feelings. Besides, the adoption of images from nature aspires to

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. 416-417.
[2] AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation.* Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 113.
[3] Wang Bi is one of the most important interpreters of the classical Chinese texts known as the *Dao De Jing* and *Yijing*.
[4] WANG, Bi. *The Classic of The Way and Virtue: A New Translation of The Tao-Te Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 76.

externalize the coherence of the world's ever-renewing process as manifested by the changes in natural phenomena including rain, wind, storm, and the stars as they are transcribed into tangible marks on paper.[1] This comparison with the natural phenomena indicates an "oneness of man and nature (*tianren heyi* 天人合一)" as outlined in Chapter 25 of the *Dao De Jing*:

> Human beings emulate the earth, The earth emulates the heavens, The heavens emulate way-making, And way-making [*Dao*] emulates what is spontaneously so (*ziran*).[2]

The emulations between humans, heaven and earth are made possible by the fact that they all come from and will return to *Dao*. The constitutive sameness between humankind and nature makes it possible for the poets to experience fully and then write down the invisible moving patterns and transformative tendencies of the *Dao* through recording the changes in nature. Thanks to this sameness/oneness, the tourists in Tan's text come close to the undifferentiated *Dao* when they are becoming "bigger and lighter" at the very beginning of the quoted passage. The tourists go beyond their temporal, spatial and bodily limits.[3] The passage ends with the characters' newly gained capacity to see the invisible as visible, to change the impossible into the obvious and to obtain the greatest knowledge effortlessly. What is "effortless (*wuwei*)," [4] in Daoist precepts, refers to an idealistic realm of the

[1] The wind from the south is the filial son's eulogy for his mother, as written "When a gentle wind from the south; Blows to the heart of those thorn-bushes; The heart of the thorn-bushes is freshened; But our mother had only grief and care" (WALEY, Arthur. *The Book of Songs*. Grove Press, 1996, p. 78).

[2] AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 134.

[3] This "going beyond" is depicted by the contemporary Chinese scholar Zhu Liangzhi as a state where people sweep away knowledge (beauty beyond description); go beyond the limitations of space (beauty of emptiness); and surpass time (beauty of eternity)" (朱良志，《中国美学十五讲》，北京大学出版社，2006。 / ZHU, Liangzhi. *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Aesthetics.* Peking University Press, 2006. My translation).

[4] "Effortless" in Confucianism indicates a lack of exertion through forgetting (*wang* 忘), not knowing (*bu zhi* 不知) and cultivating (*yang* 养) the virtue to reach the state of "at ease (*an* 安)", spontaneous joy (*le* 乐) and flood-like *Qi* (*hao-ran zhi-qi* 浩然之气). SLINGERLAND, Edward. *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early Chin*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 43.

simple/the natural which is gained through one's returning to the primordial Mother/the origin or root of the *Dao*.

Whatever philosophical and literary background Tan has regarding *Dao* and its varied precepts, in the drum-beating scene, she is able to create a picture of what coming back to the root of *Dao* really feels like. It has not been possible for me to ascertain whether Tan is necessarily familiar with the sayings from the *Dao De Jing* or the poems in *Shijing*.[1] What I do discern however in the narrative of the drum-beating scene are the traces of the influence of the inexhaustive *Dao* that removes all differences. However, Tan's "return" to undifferentiated *Dao*, as established in the paragraph I just discussed, goes on to be undercut in what follows in the novel. The oneness among the characters from various backgrounds arises under an exceedingly extraordinary circumstance when they are kidnapped and kept as prisoners by the ancient tribe in Myanmar. The following paragraph records that when the drum-beating ceremony is over, the sameness among them where the differences are all embraced, also stops—and even reverts to an increased sensation of separateness:

> With another jolt, my friends instantly returned to their separate bodies, separate minds, separate hearts, leaving them one among many and no longer many in one. They looked around, at one another, at Loot and Bootie, waiting to see if the sensation would burst through again. But the experience began to fade as dreams do, despite their trying to resurrect it or grasp at it as if at motes of dust. They had their senses back, yet never had they felt less sensible.[2]

The American tourists find themselves located once again in their separate entities. Their sense of oneness with each other and their interconnection with the universe begins to "fade as dreams do." It is impossible to retrieve that sense of sameness: the American tourists only manage to gain a fleeting sense of oneness. The futility of their attempt is doubly underscored in the simile "as if at motes of dust" as dust itself symbolizes death and evanescence. The integration between the tourists and that of the engendering force of the universe—that is, the undifferentiated *Dao*—is therefore denied. The "jolt" at the beginning of the paragraph and the repetitive uses of "separate bodies," "separate minds," and

[1] I wrote to Amy Tan in August 2020 to inquire about this question, but she did not reply until this date (July 15, 2021).
[2] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 417.

"separate hearts" all bespeak a separateness instead of oneness. The following chiasmus "one among many and no longer many in one" also indicates that the process of becoming one in the bodies and minds among the American tourists has ceased. And the "bright articles" that the tourists metamorphosed into now become "motes of dusts" denying the "illuminating state (*ming* 名)"—a state of brightness where the *Dao* emerges and manifests itself. The polyptoton of "sense" and "sensible" in the last sentence of this paragraph also implies a not-so-close relationship, which further undermines the idea of oneness that returning to the undifferentiated *Dao* guarantees.

The next paragraph turns to Bibi Chen's comments about her American friends whom she views as still once again ensnared in their accustomed Western interpretation of the world's reality when they return to the US. Bibi's comment further undermines the possibility of attaining that sameness supposed to free the self and enable it to reach an unlimited idealistic realm:

> Immersion, however, into their American lives soon restored them to a more rational view. The more they looked into it, the more they saw that simple causal forces had led from one thing to another. It was this and this and this—a cascade of events combined with a good wallop of sidespin.[1]

The travelers return to their old and familiar "more rational view[d]," to seeing the world in terms of cause and effect rather than according to the Daoist way of viewing it as a processual, starting from the root or origin of the birth of things and returning to it in a circle. The sameness or lack of difference that is experienced in the drum-beating scene is at best provisional: it tends to change and vary under different life circumstances. The next paragraph further destabilizes this sameness through a humorous portrayal of the drum which was bought by Dwight in a Mandalay shop:

> He found it in a shop in Mandalay that promised "genuine antiquities and rarities." The yellowed tag described it as: "Circa 1890, from the bankrupt estate of Lord Phineas Andrews, human skull drum, produces a sound like no other." The shop owner believed it was a holy instrument brought to Burma by a visiting Tibetan priest. Although one tribe in Burma was famous for having been headhunters, they were not very musical [. . .] The shop offered other odd items:

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 434.

> fans made from the feathers of now extinct birds, a tiger-skin carpet, elephant-leg stools, and the like.[1]

The drum here is not depicted as a path to the inexhaustible source of *Dao* that embraces all distinctions. Listening to the drum does not, finally, equal a listening to constantly flowing time and unceasing life vitality. Instead, for the tourists, the drum is delineated as an emblem of savagery and oriental otherness. The human skull drum, as an object in this shop, symbolizes the reprovable primitive customs of under-developed tribes. The goods on the shelf are typical clichés which reflect the Westerners' orientalist preconception, interpretation and representation of the East. The selected goods are therefore not emblems of the oneness among the East and the West's aesthetic tastes that would be achieved with an embracing of their cultural, linguistic, customary differences. Rather the goods on the shelf, by being desacralized and made to correspond to invented traditions, as well as Dwight's purchase of the drum, all insists on the cultural or racial differences. Buying the exotic artefacts caters to the Western desire to maintain and strengthen their privilege in front of the East. In so doing, the narrative displaces the precept of oneness. Instead, the narrative replaces it with this sarcastic observation contesting the Western singularizing of the cultural difference of the East, and also, in so doing, continuing to exacerbate that difference.

The unreal situation of the drum-beating scene enables Tan to explore the boundaries between truth—the real event of the missing travelers—and the art of story-telling—that Tan herself offers as a mise en abyme of Bibi Chen's posthumous narrative. We see a contrast between the oneness obtained from the drum beating and that of the return to their former Western sense. Dwight's purchase of a drum in a Myanmar shop deepens this contrast and proves that the embrace of differences is, at best, temporary and never free from projection. Through the analysis of Tan's deflections of the undifferentiated *Dao*, we can better understand Tan's comment in her essay collection *The Opposite of Fate* (2001): writing provides her "the sort of

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 434.

freedom and danger, satisfaction and discomfort, truth and contradiction that I can't find anywhere else in life."[1]

3.1.1.b Displacement of the undifferentiated Dao*: Calligraphic practice as a communication with ancestors in* The Bonesetter's Daughter

Calligraphy, as discussed in previous chapters, is considered as a miniature landscape in Chinese philosophy. As an art form of representing characters, calligraphy owes its origin to the observation and inspiration of nature. As recorded in "Jiangsheng Tie (江声帖)," a copybook of calligraphy, the composition of perfect strokes dawns on Lei Jianfu (雷简夫 1001-1067), a calligrapher from the Song dynasty when he is listening to the billows of the river. The tools and techniques of calligraphy also trace their inspiration from nature. The calligrapher uses the brush pen (*maobi* 毛笔) to seek the harmony between various components within one character, or between different characters on the xuan paper (*xuanzhi* 宣纸). As a result, the myriads things (the brush pen, ink and xuan paper) in calligraphy, find their "physical equilibrium and spiritual repose."[2]

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Ruth's writing on a sand-tray refers to an unusual form of calligraphic practice. Among the many forms of practicing calligraphy, the most common is to do it on the ground. Writing on the sand-tray or on the ground allows the practitioner's communication with the ancients. The sand or the ground is termed as Earth (*tu* 土) in Chinese. "Earth (*tu* 土)" originally refers to the mud from which the Chinese goddess Nǚwā (女娲) picked up to mould the body of the very first human being. Earth then represents the origin/mother of the human being. For example, in Confucian classic *Zhouyi* (周易), *Kun* (坤) or earth is described as the mother of nature:

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 354.
[2] FONG, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, p. 129.

> *Kun* (represents) what is great and originating […] Complete is the \great and originating (capacity)' indicated by *Kun*! All things owe to it their birth; - it receives obediently the influences of Heaven. *Kun*, in its largeness, supports and contains all things.[1]

Earth/*Kun* gives birth to all things. In other words, the earth is the mother of all things. This inaugurating force, as the origin of the myriad things in nature, resides in the undifferentiated *Dao*. In Chinese philosophy, one way to approach this origin is through the communication with one's ancestors. In ancient China, to communicate with ancestors, the witches chanted and danced to waken their ancestors who would then guide the witches' hands to write various characters on the ground as a way to replay their message.[2] Practicing calligraphy on a sand-tray then becomes a form of connection with one's ancestors, which is also considered as representative of the originating power of nature. This heaven-man or ancestor-descendant "talk" through practicing calligraphy displays the trinity of life, death and ghostliness. As the result of the gatherings or dissolvings of the *Qi*, life, death and ghostliness are all embraced by the undifferentiated *Dao*.

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, when practicing calligraphy, Ruth's body is believed by her mother Lu Ling to be a "portal" opening to the "End of the World." By the expression the "End of the World," Tan refers to an unlucky space where unwanted babies, suicide maidens, and beggar ghosts reside. However, Tan's renderings of Ruth's calligraphic practice on a sand-tray with the spirit of her grandmother Bao Bomu undercuts this method of communicating with the undifferentiated *Dao*. By focusing on Ruth and her mother Lu Ling's conflicting understandings of the ghost's capabilities and what they mean, Tan shows the ambiguity of Ruth's calligraphic practice as a form of visual representation. This ambiguity, on the other hand, indicates the unreliability of her Chinese American

---

[1] "Kun", *Chinese Text Project*, https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/kun/ens. Accessed on 09 August 2021. Italics by me.

[2] The witches, according to the myths and records, etch the will of the gods into a surface of sand or flour. Höllmann argues that "For this ritual, two people in trance guide a writing instrument, oftentimes forked like a dowsing rod, while assistants try to make out individual characters in their scrawls, which will serve as a starting point for the divination" (HÖLLMANN, Thomas O. *Chinese Script: History, Characters, Calligraphy*. Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 98).

female characters' memory about Chinese landscape as a residing place of their origin that is waiting to be retrieved. On the contrary, the so-called origin is in a continuous process of fragmentation which is impossible for the Chinese American characters to (re)approach.

In Chinese American literature, the ghost figure typically symbolizes unidentified ancestors—the early Chinese immigrants in America.[1] In her 2004 chapter "Ghostly China: Amy Tan's Narrative of Transnational Haunting," scholar Pin-chia Feng argues that Ruth is forced by her mother Lu Ling to act as a spiritual medium to communicate with Bao Bomu. This writing is seen as serving as a "a trope for (trans)cultural negotiations in which Ruth serves as a cultural translator."[2] Tan's renderings of the ghost figure embody her own understandings of Chineseness. If we view Tan's novels in chronological order, the stories of the ghost have been narrated via a spiral movement. Tan explicitly writes in *The Opposite of Fate* that she tries to add to the richness and depth of her writing:

> Each of my books, I determined, would outdo its predecessor, increasing in scope, depth, precision of language, intelligence of form, and thus critical acceptance and perhaps even readership.[3]

The ghost stories depart from the starting point where the ghost is considered as the Chinese Americans' haunted memories which they attempt to get rid of by discarding or leaving China as their homeland. For example, in her debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Lena's great-grandfather is devoured by a grotesque ghost who pulls him to the other side of the wall. The ghost represents Yingying's painful past in China that still haunts her in America. In *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), the ghost represents the past in China that the immigrants attempt to forget.[4] In her third

[1] SATO, Gayle K. Fujita. "Ghosts as Chinese American Constructs in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior." *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*. University of Tennessee Press, 1991, p. 193.
[2] FENG, Pin-chia. "Ghostly China: Amy Tan's Narrative of Transnational Haunting in *The Hundred Secret Senses, The Bonesetter's Daughter,* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*." *Modern China and the West*. Brill, 2014, p. 328.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, pp. 324-325.
[4] The Chinese-born character Winnie says that "But then China turned off the light, closed the door, told everyone to be quiet. All those people there became like ghosts" (TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 72).

novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Tan portrays ghosts—*yin* persons in Tan's own words—to show the complexity of humanity. Tan does not limit her ghost stories to the Chinese American community. In the words of the Chinese-born character Kwan "'Living people bother you because angry. Ghost make trouble only because sad, lost, confused.'"[1] In her fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), Tan's representation of Bibi's post-humous existence as a ghost aims to explore the meanings of being a human in post-post era of pan-entertainment and commercialization. Tan's ghost stories indicate her accumulating understanding and misunderstanding of Chinese culture and Chinse landscape. The undifferentiated *Dao* is indeed undermined among these various versions of ghost stories. But it is precisely because of these flowing ghost stories that continues to gain in scope and death that the all-embracing *Dao* is manifested time after time. Therefore, my reading of Tan's ghost stories as developing in a spiral order demonstrates her path to Chineseness as oscillating between departure and return. This spiral movement offers her a more porous space from which to imagine and create.

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the Chinese-born mother figure Lu Ling thinks that her American-born daughter Ruth is guided by Bao Bomu through sand writing to talk to her. However, the communication between Ruth and Bao Bomu, which is supposed to be a symbol of the dissolving of difference, is rendered with irony:

> She scratched in the sand: Doggie...But then her mother began to whimper, "Doggie, doggie," in Chinese. She jumped up and her chest heaved. "Precious Auntie," LuLing cried, "you've come back. This is your Doggie. Do you forgive me?"...
>
> "Please let me know you are not mad at me," her mother went on. "Give me a sign. I have tried to tell you how sorry I am, but I don't know if you've heard. Can you hear me? When did you come to America?"…
>
> Ruth sat still, unable to move. She wanted to go back to talking about food and clothes.
>
> Her mother put the chopstick in Ruth's hand. "Here, do this. Close your eyes, turn your face to heaven, and speak to her. Wait for her answer, then write it down. Hurry, close your eyes." Ruth squeezed her eyes shut. She saw the lady with hair to her toes.[2]

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 108.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo. 2001, p. 72.

The incident happens when Ruth falls accidentally in the playground and where she loses her voice for the first time. Ruth and LuLing talk through sand writing as a solution to get round her mutism. Even when Ruth gains her voice back, she insists on remaining mute because she secretly manipulates her mother to fulfil her desires. LuLing undoubtedly sees Ruth as the reincarnation of the dead Bao Bomu on the strength of the word "Doggie" that Ruth writes down. But it turns out merely to be a coincidence: through the sand writing Ruth was simply formulating her secret wish for a pet dog and this wish accidentally coheres with the intimate nickname that only LuLing and Bao Bomu know about. LuLing instructs Ruth to look up toward Heaven. In the *Dao De Jing*, Heaven has become synonymous with the universe in a broad sense and with nature as the outside natural world in a narrower sense.[1] Ruth's action of contemplating Heaven seems to indicate her approaching the undifferentiated *Dao* which makes the myriad things clear. The term "clear" itself refers to the "capacity to be in process, which renews itself by itself, from phase to phase, and does not deviate."[2] However, Ruth's approaching the *Dao*, either through her communicating with her ancestor—Bao Bomu's spirit here; or through her communion with Heaven in the above scene is deconstructed through Tan's use of dramatic irony. From the start, readers know that instead of being guided and becoming one with the mind of Bao Bomu, Ruth accidentally happens upon the traumatic memories that her mother LuLing has kept hidden. And instead of opening her eyes toward Heaven, Ruth squeezes her eyes shut because she sees a lady with hair to her toes—the ghost of Bao Bomu. Tan continues to undermine this pursuit of undifferentiated *Dao* by highlighting Ruth's trepidation:

> What curse? Ruth now stared at the sand, half believing the dead woman's face would appear in a pool of blood. What answer did her mother want? Did Yes mean the curse was gone? Or that it was still there? She put the chopstick in the sand, and not knowing what to write, she drew a line and another below that. She drew two more lines and made a square.

[1] Chapter 39 from *Dao De Jing* writes that "Of old there were certain things that realized oneness: The heavens in realizing oneness became clear [...] Following this line of thinking, We could say that if the heavens had not become clear, they may well have fallen to pieces" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 164).
[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 99.

> "Mouth!" her mother cried, tracing over the square. "That's the character for 'mouth'!" She stared at Ruth. "You wrote that and you don't even know how to write Chinese! Did you feel Precious Auntie guiding your hand? What did it feel like? Tell me."[1]

From Ruth's point of view, Bao Bomu is a ghost who is stuck at the "End of the World" and wanders with her hair down to her toes, wet and bloody. The sand tray becomes a "pool of blood." Ruth does not gain freedom from her realization of the undifferentiated Dao. But rather, she is more haunted by the image of her grandmother as a ghost. Out of panic and disorientation to answer her mother Lu Ling's question concerning her grandmother Bao Bomu's curse, Ruth draws some lines freely, forming a square. Ruth's "drawing" on the sand tray is then misrecognized by Lu Ling as the Chinese character "mouth (*kou* 口)." But Ruth's "drawing" of the image of "mouth" precisely highlights the fact that she cannot write this particular Chinese character, contrary to what her mother Lu Ling believed.

Chinese calligraphic writing is not an act of "drawing" or "depicting" in the way the practice of Western painters is. It is rather to be understood as a search for a balance between the artist's heart, wrist and mind, to be conveyed as their harmonized *Qi* inside the body. Then the *Qi* in an artist's body will answer to nature's *Qi*—constantly moving and transforming. This "relaying" of *Qi* will successfully lead to a primordial point wherefrom the coherence of the world's realities emerges as embodying all possible forms. This realm of encompassing of all possible forms manifests the undifferentiated *Dao*. But Ruth's improvised drawing of a line and another and then adding two more lines to make up a square in the sand, turns out to be adventitious rather than something that is achieved out of intentional efforts to relay the *Qi* in the universe to that in the artist's body and then onto the paper, as pursued in Chinese calligraphic practice. The highly valued *Dao* as source of creation in both calligraphic practice and landscape painting is here undermined here. Ruth grasps neither the meanings of the Chinese characters' components nor the skills to practice calligraphy on paper. Tan's text also portrays Ruth's inability to understand Chinese characters in a proleptical paragraph that describes an antithesis between

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo. 2001, p. 73.

LuLing's profound explanation of the lines and radicals of the Chinese characters and that of Ruth's impeded and comic perception of them.

Ruth's communication with Bao Bomu as her way to return back to the undifferentiated *Dao* turns out to be more about LuLing's obsession with her traumatic past. The "mouth" in the sand, for LuLing, is redolent of a place named the "Mouth of the Mountain" where she was led by Bao Bomu in her childhood to discover their family history and curses as bonesetters. However, her reminiscence of the place of origin does not lead to her liberation or tranquility of mind as promised in the action of returning to the undifferentiated *Dao*. Instead, LuLing's experience becomes more painful because of her inability to understand her experience of this particular place. The following paragraph here describes LuLing's memories of the journey which will be helpful in understanding the displacement of the undifferentiated *Dao*:

> I still remember the directions to our cave. It was between the Mouth of the Mountain and Immortal Heart, far from the other caves in the foothills, where everyone else went to dig up dragon bones. Precious Auntie took me there several times, always in the spring or the autumn, never summer or winter. To get there, we went down into the End of the World and walked along the middle of the ravine, away from the walls, where the grown-ups said there were things that were too bad to see. Sometimes we passed by a skein of weeds, shards of a bowl, a quagmire of twigs. In my childish mind, those sights became parched flesh, a baby's skullcap, a soup of maiden bones. And maybe they were, because sometimes Precious Auntie put her hands over my eyes.[1]

The passage provides us with ambiguous information about the time and the place. For example, the name of the place is "Mouth of the Mountain" or "Immortal Heart." The time is "always in the spring or the autumn, never summer or winter." These ambiguities, a mixture of two narrative modes, contribute to the narrative's unreliability: one is depicted through the eyes of LuLing as an objective camera to record the journey through different landscapes; the other one is the hyper-sensitive subjective world of a little girl. The undifferentiated is manifested here. There is Oneness indeed, but no tranquility of mind.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo. 2001, p. 156.

Lu Ling's obsession with her memories of the "Mouth of the Mountain" place is supposed to help her come closer to her cultural and ancestral origin. However, the ambiguous information about time and place as well as the juxtaposition of two narrative modes of depicting the "Mouth of Mountain" destabilize her attempt to approach the undifferentiated *Dao* by returning to the place of her family's origin. It is LuLing who refuses to release her traumatic memories about her suicidal mother Bao Bomu. The fact that Lu Ling chooses to grasp more tightly to Ruth's false sign of "mouth" in the sand effectively illuminates the fact that Lu Ling's fascination with her past and history in China is much more slippery and elusive than she had previously imagined.

Tan's narration of the American travelers' experience of the drum-beating scene in *Saving Fish from Drowning* destabilizes the perpetual moving pattern of the law of the universe—a return to the undifferentiated *Dao* where all the differences dissolve. The oneness between the tribal people and the travelers is contingent. Inspired from the news report and the recorded talks of the posthumous Bibi Chen, Tan explores the "Other" in the boundaries between news reports, psychological records and that of narratives in the novel. China, in Tan's novel, is this "Other" that is discovered to be in a process of misreading and misrepresentation. With irony and humor, the communication with an ancestor-descendant through sand writing in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* further displaces the undifferentiated *Dao*. The return to the undifferentiated *Dao* is ridiculed and destabilized through humor, uncanny coincidence, unreliable memory, and mother-daughter misunderstandings.

Tan's stories are thus not to be understood as autobiographical documentation of herself or her family. Instead, they are Tan's re-inscription of the Chinese history and landscapes that have formed her family and their past, viewed by her from a distance. This distance for its part has guided Tan to a fertile site where China entails "some degree of embellishment, exaggeration, and the bias of opinion."[1] Tan

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. xiv.

clarifies her passion for the past in her second collection of essays *Where the Past Begins* (2017):

> But in a deeper sense, the story itself *is* me, because its circular narrative drive, historical themes, and mythical imagery embody my patterns of thought and *my obsessions with the past*.[1]

Tan's way of writing about her version of ghostliness—in the most exceptional scene of the ancestor-descendent talk through sand writing—already gives the measure of the complexity of her exploration of what China and the Chinese heritage mean for her literary creation. Chinese identity, especially in Tan's narratives, is contingent. It moves back and forth between the Chinese American female characters' sense of who they are, that is in a process of re-inscription and relocation, and the re-description and reiteration of Amy Tan herself as a Chinese American author who seeks her spiritual origin through returning to and then departing anew from her Chinese heritage.

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p.186.

3.1.2 Return to the Root: The Bland

Chapter 14 of *Dao De Jing* describes *Dao* as "vague semblances" or "forms without form" that are already on the way back to where there is Non-being.[1] As discussed in the previous subchapter, no matter how things transform and flourish in their departing from the origin, they will return to the root of *Dao*—the undifferentiated, the formless, and the boundless. Chapter 40 of *Dao De Jing* develops this argument further: "though all creatures under heaven are the products of Being, Being itself is the product of Non-being."[2] Chen Guying (陈鼓应) contends that *Dao* is Non-being because it is a vague semblance which is shapeless and eludes sight, hearing and touch. But at the same time, as Chen rightly remarks, *Dao* is also Being because it gives birth to the myriad things in the universe and cannot do so without concrete forms. In this sense, Non-being and Being are not opposite but are correlated. In Chinese landscape painting for example, the images depend on concrete forms (Being) for the landscape to exist. But for the images to convey the universe's *Qi*—one of the highly valued objectives of Chinese landscape painting—they do not allow themselves to be taken over by that concrete form.[3] For example, in the painting *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Mountains* by Xia Gui from the Song dynasty (1195–1224), Being refers to the obvious parts that are rendered by Xia Gui with the brush strokes with black outlining and pointing on the right-hand side of the picture (the trees, rocks and pavilions on the right side of the picture), and Non-being or the hidden are manifested with the washed ink that deliver a sense of "remove" or *lointain* in the original French[4] on the left-hand side of the picture (the mountains with plants in the mist that shows us its far-away location):

---

[1] Laozi says that "Endless the series of things without name / On the way back to where there is nothing. They are called shapeless shapes; Forms without form; Are called vague semblances" (WALEY Arthur. *The Way and Its Power: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*. Grove Press, 1994, p. 159).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

[3] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 92.

[4] François Jullien explains this concept as "feed[ing] our reveries and lull[ing] us into 'dreaminess'" (JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. ix).

Part of *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Mountains*. The full scroll measures 46.5 × 889.1 centimeters (18.309 × 350.04 inches) and is on display in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan.

According to Daoist precepts, Non-being does not mean nothing or zero but rather refers to the fact that *Dao* has great potential that is still hidden and therefore beyond human ability to discern and describe. Non-being signifies the very initial phase that is not yet explicit and thus embraces all possibilities. Being (有 *you*) and Non-being (无 *wu*) together denote the process by which *Dao* comes from Non-being to Being and then returns to Non-being.[1] For instance, in Chinese landscape painting from the Song to the Qing dynasties (960-1911), to paint is to express the transitional process between painters' "taking form" from their contemplation and participation within mountains and waters, that is the birth of Being; and their "giving back" those forms to the undifferentiated *Dao*, that is Non-being.[2] Only by accomplishing this twofold movement of transition—reaching and expressing—can painters be considered as true artists with a capacity to record the "very movement of that respiration [of mountains and waters, which expands that of the whole universe] leading to renewal."[3]

[1] CHEN, Guying. *Dao De Jing: Translation and Annotations.* Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 2003, p. 6. / 陈鼓应。《老子今注今译》。商务印书馆，2003 年，第六页。My translation.
[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 180.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 180.

The between-state of Being and Non-being opens an interspace where the poetic realm of *Xu-Jing* (quietness 虚静) comes into being. Chapter 16 of *Dao De Jing* expresses the idea that in order to achieve this *Xu-Jing*, one needs go back to the root/origin of *Dao*. *Xu-Jing* is defined as quietness that endows humankind with a capacity to embrace the constant changes and transformations of both the human fate and that of the universe.[1] Laozi, who founded Daoism in the 4th century BC appeals to the senses (sound and taste) in his paradoxically vivid description of *Xu-Jing* as insipid and bland:

> Seize the great image and the world will flock to you. Flocking to you they come to no harm, and peace and security prevails. Passing travelers will interrupt their journey for [good] music and fine fare. But were way-making (*dao*) to be put into words: It could be said to be so bland and insipid that it has no taste.[2]

The term "great image" refers to the ever-elusive, formless image of *Dao* which is a source of serenity and well-being. Those who choose to grasp the great image are endowed with its force, attracting others who, in turn, come under its sway, just as they would be enchanted by good music and fine food. But the very fading of this good music and fine food opens the gate from the audible to the inaudible and thus enables us to experience continuous movements from one force to the other (*yin* and *yang* forces for example). *Xu-Jing*, which denotes this fading of sound or flavor, is termed as "the bland" by François Jullien in his monograph *In Praise of Blandness* (2004). The bland (*Xu-Jing*) will liberate us from the pressure of the external world and make us recover the quietude and serenity of our interiority.[3] Jullien explains the benefit of this quietude and serenity with reference to the Song landscape painter Guo Xi (郭熙 1020-1090) who explains how he achieves inner contemplation and detachment by reading Jin and Tang poems:

---

[1] Laozi says that "See, all things howsoever they flourish Return to the root from which they grew. This return to the root is called Quietness; Quietness is called submission to Fate; What has submitted to Fate has become part of the always-so" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 162).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[3] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, pp. 43-44.

> Often on my days of leisure, I [Guo Xi] read poems from the Jin and Tang Dynasties, ancient or modern, finding beautiful verses that fully express the things that a man holds deep within and which completely bring forth the scenes he has before his eyes. But if I do not remain peaceful and quiet, calmly seated in front of a bright window, facing a clean table, if I do not burn a stick of incense and allow all cares to dissipate, the appealing meaning of these beautiful verses no longer comes, and their concealed feelings, along with their noble aspirations, are no longer imaginable.[1]

A sense of tranquility and serenity is gained from Guo's careful arrangement of sitting postures and positions as well as the environment in which he is seated. Only through this quietness can the landscape be brought forth into Guo's eyes, making him receptive to the "world's incitement, which is the disposition required for taking up the brush."[2]

For Tan, the process is rather different. Instead of leading to a liberation and detachment, the appreciation of landscape painting and calligraphic practice disturbs her female characters. Traumatic memories, violence, and disease are evoked, which leads to the destabilization of *Xu-Jing*, the bland. With the introduction of a posthumous character, Tan displaces *Xu-Jing* with humor, self-mockery and sarcasm.

Xu-Jing comes into being through the interspace that is opened up between the interaction of Being and Non-being. The relationship between Being and Non-being in turn reveals Daoism's fundamental understanding of the movement and change of the myriad things including nature and human beings. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that the ideas of Being and Non-being represent the relationship between humans and nature in Chinese philosophy. Therefore, an analysis of Tan's play with *Xu-Jing* will be effective in illuminating her evolving views of the relationship between man and nature as a writer with her deepening (mis)/(re)understandings of China and Chinese heritage.

---

[1] YU, Anlan, ed. Hualun Congkan. Vol. 1. Zhonggua shuju, 1977, p. 264. / 于安澜，《画论丛刊》第一辑。中华书局，1997，第 264 页。

[2] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 215.

3.1.2.a Landscape painting and calligraphic landscape: displacement of Xu-jing

In his monograph *The Great Image has No Form* (2009) Jullien argues that Chinese painting tends to block things from view as a way of showing them. They pursue an ideal realm where "an atmosphere of 'indetermination' and 'infinity' emanates from that which is 'profoundly concealed,' covered over to the point of being 'unfathomable'."[1] The term "unfathomable" refers to the undifferentiated Fount from which "forms and beings continually proceed and to which they return to be resorbed."[2] The landscape paintings of the ancients record this "unfathomable" within their painted forms that are full of breath-resonance, in other words life and vitality. When facing (*dui* 对) these landscape paintings, one gains a sense of the "serenity of painting." According to Fang Xun (方熏 1736-1799), a calligrapher and painter from the Qing dynasty, the "serenity of painting" means that one remains pensive-silent as a response to the painting when no anxious thought arises any longer.[3]

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, however, Tan displaces this "serenity of painting" and instead portrays the sense of sadness, and unease that is aroused in Winnie when she contemplates the only remaining landscape painting in a set of paintings of the four seasons:

> The painting showed the springtime, pink flowers blossoming on trees, the trees growing on a mountain, the mountain rising up out of a misty lake. At the bottom was a black lacquer rod, weighing it down. You could tell the scroll had once been part of a set, the four seasons. But now the three other seasons were gone, sold by Wen Fu, and only their empty spots hung on the wall, like ghost paintings. And you could also tell why this scroll had been left behind—the big tea stain at the center, as if the painted lake had flooded itself.
>
> "Isn't that strange," I said to my father, "that someone would want only three seasons? Like a life that will never be completed."… "My life has been like that

[1] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting.* The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 12.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[3] FANG, Xun. *Shanjingju hualun*. Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962, p. 41/ 方熏。《山静居画论》人民美术出版社，1962，第 41 页。This translation of Fang Xun is based on Jane Marie Todd's English translation of Jullien's own translation of the original Chinese into French, in *The Great Image Has No Form* on page 176.

painting nobody wants, the same season, every day the same misery, no hope of changing."[1]

The first paragraph exhibits the idea of "melancholy towards spring and autumn" (Shangchun-Beiqiu 伤春悲秋). In Chinese landscape poems, this idea flourishes when the poet confronts the contradiction between the infinity of nature and the finiteness of man's creativity, thought and language. The momentary experience of the palpable landscape is emphasized with the description of the decaying flowers and falling leaves in numerous poems and essays. For example, the poem "Night Crow Calling" (乌夜啼) by Li Yu (李煜) from the Tang Dynasty, laments the passing of the springtime as:

The flowered woods have dropped their springtime rose festoon,
So soon, so soon,
But night-blowing winds and the cold dawn rain were bound to be.[2]

We can see that the poet expresses feelings of loss and regret towards the passing of time and youth. But in the poem "Up on a Higher Ground (登高)" by Du Fu (杜甫) also from the Tang Dynasty, the dreary landscapes of autumn are actually described in more hopeful terms than spring:

Immensity of leaves rustling fell,
The never-ending Yangtze river rolling on.
Only desolation autumn has been known to arouse,
I would say autumn day is much better than spring morning.[3]

The poem reflects the poet's treasuring of life by showing his respect and admiration towards the ceaselessly modifying and transforming universe. Both happiness and sadness are evoked in the Yangtze river, as the myriad things in the universe are already on their way to returning to the undifferentiated *Dao*. The poets therefore gain a sense of liberation from the obstacles of delimiting emotions. Indeed,

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, 361.
[2] The original text is "林花谢了春红，太匆匆，无奈朝来寒雨晚来风。" My translation.
[3] The original text is "无边落木萧萧下，不尽长江滚滚来。万里悲秋常作客，百年多病独登台。" My translation.

these Tang dynasty poets are able to enjoy landscape with an acceptance of its unceasing changes.

Tan however imposes a sharp contrast between the optimistic and hopeful spring scenery and Winnie's pessimistic feelings. The spring scenery is written in the present continuous tense, as "pink flowers blossoming on trees, the trees growing on a mountain, the mountain rising up out of a misty lake," which locates the readers directly in the spring-time landscape. The following metaphor of the "ghost paintings," on the other hand, reorients the reader's expectation of cheerful moods toward Winnie's lament about her entrapment within an unhappy marriage and her estrangement from her father because of her mother's mysterious disappearance. Winnie's "ghostly" status in front of both her husband and her father finds its parallel in this comparison. In her stagnant life, as in the abandoned painting, Winnie repeatedly (re)lives the miseries that seem to define her life. The unchanging seasons in the painting deny the transformation of landscape, reflecting the absence of vitality in Winnie's life. The dynamism of landscape is understood by the Chinese poets as being the prerequisite of "melancholy towards spring and autumn" (*Shangchun-Beiqiu* 伤春悲秋). Winnie's lament about the passing of spring does not lead to philosophical views on the ephemerality of life, as entailed in *Shangchun-Beiqiu*. This destabilization, in turn, undermines the "serenity of painting."

In addition to the parallel between the ghost paintings and the ghostly status of Winnie in her family and marital life, I also read the term "ghost paintings" from the perspective of Being and Non-being of landscape painting. The other three landscape paintings have been sold by Winnie's husband Wen Fu with "only their empty spots hung on the wall, like ghost paintings." We can read Tan's depictions of the traces of the three paintings as a fruitful site to discuss the interplay between Being and Non-being. As argued above, in Chinese landscape painting, Being and Non-being represent different stages in the generation of the process of the myriad things (*wanwu*). To paint is to grasp the undifferentiated fount (Non-being) on empty paper or silk. The painter waits for the gradual differentiation of mountains and waters until they manifest themselves in traces (Being). The painter should pay attention to things

at the stage before they emerge from the invisible-undifferentiated fount (Non-Being) and show their forms, here the traces of the brush (Being). The painter then pursues an absence of trace (Non-being) to express the spontaneity of the lively, free, and the natural, which is embodied in the return to the bland.[1]

Zhang Yanyuan (张彦远 815-877), a calligrapher and painter of the Tang Dynasty, defines the traces of the landscape painting thus: "In classical antiquity, traces were simple […] concise and restrained, on the order of the limited sound, and sense-intentionality was simultaneously calm and detached."[2] Zhang's trace endows the painter with calm and detachment. The traces of the three sold paintings do not invest Winnie with a tranquility of heart, as embodied in *Xu-Jing* (the bland). However, Tan's evocation of the traces offers infinite potentiality because things at first unnoticed become more and more engaging.[3] The empty spots remind Winnie of her stationary life and stimulate her to finally escape for a change. The traces on the wall also correspond to writing itself, which is unable to capture the wholeness of either the landscape or of the characters' experience of it. Tan's descriptions of the traces take a detour from the "serenity of painting" that is supposed to make those who contemplate it calm. Instead, the traces of the three landscape paintings display one essential aspect of the return to the bland in Daoist thought, that is the opening up of possibilities that go beyond what is visible and representable.

When practicing calligraphy, the practitioners are supposed to become empty, which is to be open and receptive to the myriad things (*wanwu*). By doing this, they are able to forget about the gains and losses of life and attain an equilibrium of heart

[1] The painter Shi Tao (石涛 1642–1707) from the Qing dynasty says that "When the painting reaches the stage where there are no brush traces, it is as if that painting should naturally be there on the paper or as if the painting came about naturally on the paper" (RYCKMANS, Pierre. *Les propos sur la peinture de moine Citrouille-Amère.* Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Editions Hermann, 1984, p. 198.)

[2] ZHANG, Yanyuan. *Lidai minghua ji*. Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963, p. 130. / 张彦远。《历代名画记》。上海人民美术出版社。1963。第 130 页。

[3] There is a common agreement among Chinese artists and critics that "that which is remarkable and close by is easy to know, whereas it is difficult to recognize that which is bland and far away" (LI, Dongyang. *Tangshi sanbaishou jishi*. Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977, p. 410. / 李东垣。唐诗三百首及事。艺文印书馆，1977，第 410 页)．

where "none among the myriad things is able to agitate our hearts and we are best able to promote their flourishing."[1] Chapter 16 of *Dao De Jing* offers calligraphers the following advice:

> Extend your utmost emptiness as far as you can and do your best to preserve your equilibrium (*Xu-Jing*). In the process of all things emerging together (*wanwu*); We can witness their reversion. Things proliferate and each again returns to its root. Returning to the root is called equilibrium (*Xu-Jing*).[2]

When she practices calligraphy, Lu Ling reaches *Xu-Jing*, which means knowing freely, spontaneously and without attachment. The next paragraph depicts this process of *Xu-Jing*:

> "She [Bao Bomu] taught me how to think. When you write, she said, you must gather the free-flowing of your heart." To demonstrate, LuLing wrote the character for "heart." "See? Each stroke has its own rhythm, its balance, its proper place. Bao Bomu said everything in life should be the same way."[3]

The myriad things including Lu Ling's body and heart and the ink, brush and the calligraphic landscape on paper, like the mirror, become open to each other and receptive to the transformations and free flowing of *Qi* in the universe. We can categorize the ink traces that are fixed on paper as Being for the viewers' appreciation and imitation. The flowing *Qi* of both the calligraphers and their surroundings exist in oneness. This vague and confused semblance then goes into a chain of *yin* and *yang* production and transformation. Therefore, in the calligraphic landscape it is also Non-being that has the greatest potential. Wen C. Fong, a Chinese American historian of East Asian art, summarizes this combination of Being and Non-being thus:

> The blank paper surface represents the universe, which in the beginning existed in undifferentiated oneness, the first stroke, born of the union of brush and ink, establishes on paper the primary relationship between *yin* and *yang*; and each new stroke, combining with the old, creates new *yin-yang* relationships, until the whole is reconciled and again united into the harmonious ones that is the Tao of the universe.[4]

---

[1] Roger T. AMES, and David L. Hall, *Dao De Jing, Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine, 2004, p. 114.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 113. The translation of "Xu-Jing" as equilibrium is not able to express its complex meanings. So here I add its original term in italics.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 50.
[4] FONG, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, p. 122. Italics by me.

Chinese calligraphic theory contends that the calligrapher's heart should be vacuous and calm so that he/she returns back to the undifferentiated *Dao* and becomes receptive to all the changes in nature. By doing this, the calligrapher is able to manifest the *yin-yang* movement. Calligraphy is an art form that balances the forces between the free-flowing strokes in time (Non-being) and non-reversibility within space (Being). Tan engages with this artistic heritage through the multivocal image of the heart, which is depicted in different scenes from the novel relating to calligraphic practice. Tan's revisits this complex interplay of Being and Nonbeing through her descriptions of calligraphic practice. For example, when joined with the concept of disease, trauma and death, the character "heart (*xin* 心)" generates new meanings and invites new interpretations:

> Watch now, Doggie, she ordered, and drew the character for "heart": See this curving stroke? That's the bottom of the heart, where blood gathers and flows. And the dots, those are the two veins and the artery that carry the blood in and out. As I traced over the character, she asked: Whose dead heart gave shape to this word? How did it begin, Doggie? Did it belong to a woman? Was it drawn in sadness?

In the novel, 'heart (*xin* 心)' first appears as a sign written on paper with the "curving stroke." Then in its very signs of Bao Bomu's metaphor, it becomes living and breathing human body parts (blood, veins and artery) that resemble the structure of the character on paper. In the four interrogative sentences that follow, "heart (*xin* 心)" immediately changes into a symbol of the tragic life story of Bao Bomu, characterized by unspeakable pains and suffering. Heart (*xin* 心) gains a richer meaning when perceived from the point of view of the life story conveyed from Bao Bomu to LuLing. But just when the reader is least expecting it, Tan gives an all-too vivid description of the heart as being that of a dead animal. This depiction completely annihilates the serenity and calmness of the heart that is supposed to be achieved in calligraphic practice:

> I once saw the heart of a fresh-killed pig. It was red and glistening. And I had already seen plenty of chicken hearts in a bowl, waiting to be cooked. They looked like tiny lips and were the same color as Precious Auntie's scars. But

> what did a woman heart look like? "Why do we have to know whose heart it was?" I asked as I wrote the character.[1]

The paragraph privileges Lu Ling's direct experience with the detailed depiction of the messy, leaky, liquid pig's heart. When writing the character "heart" in her daily calligraphic practice, Lu Ling is disturbed by the image of the killed animal hearts that she compares to the scars burnt on Bao Bomu's face. If bloody hearts and scars are considered as Being, then the pain and sadness of the characters that wait to be figured out resembles the Daoist concept of Non-being, which is concealed behind the hearts and scars. By foregrounding Being, Tan's writings open up Non-being, or the spiritual fount, enabling Lu Ling to live as a thinking, struggling and creative being who remains righteous in the extreme circumstance of life (Lu Ling sells the family bones in her hardest time in Hong Kong before immigrating to America). In this sense, the calligraphic practice of the character "heart (*xin* 心)" is indeed a return to Non-being, though a distorted return. The return in Tan's portrayals of the calligraphic practice is not characterized by *Xu-Jing*: detachment and serenity. On the contrary, Tan "de-forms" the vacuity of heart to express a wide range of losses experienced by her female characters, just as the stains of Winnie's wall also figure loss. In Bao Bomu's case, loss can be read as loss of beauty, voice, power and life. For Lu Ling and her daughter Ruth, loss means their distance from their Chinese past, landscapes and heritage. Loss more generally can also be interpreted as the loss that occurs in Tan's translation of the complicated emotions of herself and her characters to the written words on paper. *Xu-Jing* hence is de/(re)-formed because Bao Bomu experiences corporeal transcendence so that she is able to perceive herself as a fluid and dynamic body carrying her personal pains and traumatic memories.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Flamingo, 2001, p. 147.

3.1.2.b The posthumous bodyscapes in Saving Fish from Drowning*: enrichment of* Xu-jing

In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the protagonist Bibi Chen dies in mysterious circumstances. The existence of the dead body and the wandering soul of Bibi Chen reside in the limbo space where life and death meet and merge. That limbo space enables us to reconsider the concept of the human: where are the boundaries between life and death? Does the posthumous body go beyond to reach *Xu-Jing* (the bland) where human beings are satisfied with their lot and free from worldly affairs? In the novel, instead of reaching the realm of *Xu-Jing*, the narrative displays the ambiguity of Bibi's posthumous experience. Bibi obtains the Celestial Eye and Ear like an omniscient goddess. She is also preoccupied with her own desire for the truth about how she died as well as being haunted by fears of evaporation.

Tan gives a humorous depiction of Bibi Chen's corpse, as narrated from the perspective of the deceased Bibi:

> The autopsy concluded that I was not strangled but had drowned in my own blood.
>
> There I lay for several days, and then samples of me were removed—a swab of this, a sliver of that, hair follicles, blood, and gastric juices.
>
> They [medical examiners] dropped by on their lunch hour to make ghoulish guesses as to what had happened to cause my premature demise. For days, they slid me in, they slid me out, and said brutish things about the contents of my stomach, the integrity of the vessels in my brain, my personal habits, and past records of my health, some being rather indelicate matters one would rather not hear discussed so openly among strangers eating their sack lunches.[1]

Bibi's autopsy unfolds as a bizarre scene of uncertainty, horror, and humor.

The gothic novel, the detective story, and social irony are just some of the genres and tones that it taps into and which may be discerned here by the reader. Tan's mixing of literary genres parallels the blurred nature of Bibi Chen's as yet unexplained death and the posthumous limbo she now occupies. The second paragraph gives a suggestive description of her fragmented body parts ("a swab of this, a sliver of that, hair follicles, blood, and gastric juices)." The third paragraph

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. 3-4.

bitterly comments on the fact that Bibi's mysterious death, and her body may become a source of entertainment for the medical examiners. With the association of serious topics such as health, death, and life experience with glib, light-hearted gossip, reported with a casualness unexpected from a deceased body, the passage seems to embody the way contemporary society objectifies the human body, particularly the non-white female body, and gains vicarious pleasure and entertainment from another's pain and loss.

Through the humorous and grotesque depictions of the scene, Tan offers her own version of the limbo where the dead person is aware of everything happening around them and is capable of uttering sarcastic comments. Here, Bibi pithily expresses her criticism of the fetishizing remarks made by the forensic doctor in a manner that is opposite to the bland which embraces difference and possibility so that one is able to achieve freedom and serenity of mind. The fetish, according to Bhabha, is "always a 'play' or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference." [1] Bibi's Chinese American posthumous body represents a threat to the wholeness and similarity of the energetic white male body. The doctors' fetishizing remarks about the reasons for Bibi's death seem to be based on rational observation and deduction, which actually indicate their doomed attempt to reduce the lack or difference that is produced in Bibi's posthumous body. In other words, Bhabha's theory of the fetish effectively deconstructs the doctors' desire to pinpoint the "pure origin" of Bibi's death that is always already on the way to being divided as an unceasing wavering between sameness and difference.[2] This oscillation between wholeness and lack, in turn, underscores the objectification of the female figures, especially the ones of Asian

[1] BHABHA, Homi K. "Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," 1994, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004, p. 107.

[2] Sigmund Freud defines the fetish as "the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and - for reasons familiar to us - does not want to give up" (FREUD, Sigmund. "Fetishism," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol.* 21. Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 152-153). Fanon comments on the fetish in his monograph Black Skin, White Masks that his presence under the white men's eyes are "nothing more than an amputation, excision, haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood" (FANON, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto, 1986, pp. 110-112).

American ascent: the fragmentary part(s) of a body and the fetish-like images signify the viewers' anxiety that is generated by looking at women as the sign of difference.[1] In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, it is precisely Bibi's witnessing and reporting of her murder and of the intrusive examination of her corpse that unpacks this objectification. Similarly, when depicting her own funeral as the floating ghost, Bibi mocks her face that looks like "an old mango that had shrunk and shriveled:"[2] this self-objectification provides an alternative for being looked at. The posthumous female character acts on her own, and derides the domination of the male gaze at the same time: the dead is alive, the whole is fragmented, and the female subject can act. It is through Tan's highlighting of the fetish in this scene that the bland as a realm of serenity after the embracing of all possibilities in the Daoist school of thought gets undercut.

For Bibi, death is not what Western philosophy has made it: a "culminating, fascinating and apocalyptic point, towards which everything converges and will be suddenly resolved: the place where, tearing aside the veil, the anticipated Truth is finally to be revealed."[3] Death is not the end for Bibi. On the contrary, many mysteries and questions about life do not unravel. At the end of the novel, Bibi says that:

> That is the nature of endings, it seems. They never end. When all the missing pieces of your life are found, put together with the glue of memory and reason, there are more pieces to be found.[4]

The next paragraph describes Bibi's posthumous epiphany thus:

> I was stuck in these thoughts, unable to leave my breathless body, until I realized that my breath was not gone but surrounding me, buoying me upward. It was quite amazing, really—every single breath, the sustenance I took and expelled out of both habit and effort over sixty-three years had accumulated like a savings account. The air I had breathed, I now knew, was composed not of gases but of the density and perfume of emotions. The body had been merely a filter, a

[1] Pollock writes that "At the same time, the face and sometimes part of a body are severed from the whole. Fetish-like they signify an underlying degree of anxiety generated by looking at this sign of difference, woman" (POLLOCK, Griselda. *Vision and difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art.* Psychology Press, 2003, p. 170).
[2] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 12.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations.* Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 58.
[4] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 472.

> censor. I knew this at once, without question, and I found myself released, free to feel and do whatever I please. That was the advantage of being dead: no fear of future consequences. Or so I thought.[1]

Bibi's posthumous body is rendered by Tan as a vessel for the accumulation and dissolutions of *Qi* that open it to all her neglected feelings and senses. In Bibi's posthumous afterlife, *Qi* is the breath of her body where life, death and ghostliness are three existing modes that co-exist in a process of unceasing modification and transformation. At that moment, when for the first time she feels free to feel her body, Bibi feels that her breathless body, concentrating as it does intense feelings, has become a repository of *Qi*. This enriches the image of the Asian American female characters whose bodies are too often portrayed as passive and docile. Here Tan's writing shows how open they are to (re)construction.

According to Daoism, life and death are the same because they are the gathering and dissolving of *Qi*.[2] Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200), a philosopher of the Song dynasty, believes that the ghost (*gui* 鬼) and god (*shen* 神) are composed of the movement of the *yin* and *yang* forces of *Qi* within the omnipresent process of cosmological becoming.[3] The death and life of human beings, like the coming and going of the myriad things (*wanwu*) in nature are called transformation (*hua* 化). The death of one particular body is the beginning of the sublimation and transformation of the same being but only in the form of another entity. *Qi*, the chaotic entity that permeates Heaven and Earth, embraces both Non-being and Being and gives birth to *yin* and *yang* forces which are later displayed in various forms. In the passage cited

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. 4-5.

[2] The chapter "Knowledge Rambling in the North (*zhibeiyou* 知北游)" from *Zhuangzi* records that "Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger (of this connexion between them)? The life is due to the collecting of the breath. When that is collected, there is life; when it is dispersed, there is death" ("Knowledge Rambling in the North", Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/knowledge-rambling-in-the-north/ens. Accessed on 07 Feb. 2019).

[3] Zhu Xi writes that "God is composed of the "yang" forces and ghost is made up of the "yin" force[s]. Ghost is the essence of "yin" and god is the essence of "yang". The division between the two belongs to the same movement of Qi. The accumulation of Qi to extend shapes God and the dissolving of Qi to succumb forms Ghost" (My translation is based on the text in "Zhuzi Yulei (朱子语类)", Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/zhs. Accessed on 07 Feb. 2019).

above, Bibi's posthumous body becomes a bridge where *Qi* reaches her and then withdraws from her. Her posthumous body becomes a tensional field just as mountains and waters are, as François Jullien explains in *Living off Landscape* (2018). Bibi realizes that the air she breathes undergoes a process of transformation in her posthumous body from Being (the breathed air, ["gases"]) to Non-being ("the density and perfume of emotions"). Then Bibi appears to have achieved the peace and the serenity of the bland, as the expression "perfume of emotion" can be seen to delineate the undifferentiated *Dao*: it has an allure of plenitude, that of a totality not yet divided and not yet dissipating itself in actualization.[1] The indefiniteness and indeterminacy of Bibi's newly found medium of existence—the "density and perfume of emotion"—open up an endless chain of changing possibilities. Bibi feels for the first time that she is free to act and to please herself as she wishes, this is the advantage of being dead, or so Bibi claims. The limbo space that she occupies turns out to be not so dangerous, threatening, or fragmented as she once imagined. She even playfully comments that because she is dead, there is no consequence or whatsoever for her: she won't be responsible for anything. But this freedom and release offered by the "perfume of emotions" is immediately undercut in the very last phrase "Or so I thought." Indeed, even as a corpse, she is plagued by thoughts: we are told that Bibi is stuck in "Tragedies," "mortal embarrassments," and "unhappy endings."[2] *Qi* has the same encompassing and vague characteristic as *Dao* which is supposed to lead to the bland where a sense of serenity and acceptance of uncertainty are meant to be achieved. But here in Bibi's posthumous body, when *Qi* is manifested as one of the miniature landscapes in Daoist thought, the presumed freedom and fluidity attached to it are destabilized. The changes that take place in her posthumous body lead to Bibi's transformed understanding of her relationship with her surroundings. The Daoist bland—characterized by serenity, freedom and the acceptance of the uncertainty of life—is undercut and re-contextualized in Tan's descriptions of Bibi's posthumous body as the place where complex changes of *Qi*

[1] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 141.
[2] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 4.

occur. At the very same time, the supposed fixity of a predestined role of passivity and of a monotonous acceptance of what is here-and-now, for the bodies of Asian American women, is debunked.

Bibi's newly released freedom is undercut in Tan's humorous parallel with the Buddha's supreme endowments:

> Whereas I had lacked dimension of feeling my entire life, now, through others, there was width, volume, and density ever growing. Could it be that I was sprouting more of the six supernatural talents that Sakyamuni received before he became the Buddha? Did I have the Celestial Eye, the Celestial Ear, along with the Mind of Others? But what good did it do me to have them? I was terribly frustrated that whenever I spoke, no one could hear me.[1]

At the end of Bibi's funeral, when she is ready to say goodbye to her dead body, her friends ask her to come with them in spirit to China. Tan humorously writes from Bibi's point of view of "So that was how it came about. They hoped that I would go. How could I not?"[2] We see that on the travelers' road to China and Myanmar, Bibi also embarks on a journey, that of seeking her body's capability after death. Through the careful observation of the twelve travelers, Bibi's former absence of emotion is "magically" altered and gains breadth, volume and density. Bibi's posthumous body reaches the realm of the bland, providing her with an access to the undifferentiated *Dao* which manifests its inherent potential.[3] For instance, in the above quotation, Bibi's lost dimensions of feelings are not retrieved through the others' bodies and minds. Rather, the seemingly bland is disintegrated in her sense of frustration that even with her newly obtained omniscient power that enables her to know everyone's inner thoughts, nobody will hear her and recognize her anymore. The next paragraph continues to undermine the infinite potential of Bibi's Celestial powers with self-mockery:

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 42.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[3] Jullien defined the bland as "that phase when different flavors no longer stand in opposition to each other but, rather, abide within plenitude. It provides access to the undifferentiated foundation of all things and so is valuable to us; its neutrality manifests the potential inherent in the Center. At this stage, the real is no longer blocked in partial and too obvious manifestations; the concrete becomes discrete, open to transformation" (JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 24).

> Let me add here that I am most emphatically *not* in the habit of watching or talking about people's private business. I also abhor scatological humor and salacious gossip. But these are things I knew with these Buddha-like talents I now possessed, the Celestial Eye, the Celestial Ear, the Mind of Others. Furthermore, I report these intimate details that are salient only so that you might better judge later what occurred and why.[1]

Bibi's confession comes after a detailed record of the travelers' experiences in the primitive restrooms of an open-air pavilion. For example, the British dog-trainer Harry exposes his embarrassing urinary problem. Through the triviality of the travelers, the bland is deliberately degraded by Tan with "scatological humor and salacious gossip." Tan uses italics in the word "not" to emphasize that Bibi is not interested in people's intimacy. However, the text itself indicates otherwise. The emphasis on "not" is an example of Bibi's self-mockery for her acerbic comments about her friends along the trip are actually very detailed. Bibi engages directly with her readers justifying that her observations are purely there in the reader's interest, for them to have a complete grasp of the story and to foreshadow the later kidnap. The highly-valued bland of Daoist thought, that offers one a potential to go beyond the limit of death and life, is humorously exploited in this scenario.

Through the posthumous body of Bibi, Tan explores the possibility that the dead may continue to communicate with the living. In her first essay collection *The Opposite of Fate*, for instance, Tan recounts one particularly uncanny incident in her life. Facing a lot of medical bills. Tan was reassured by the voice of her murdered roommate Pete. Pete told Tan that the money would take care of itself. She was then knocked over by a car crossing the road and in damages received the precise amount of insurance to cover the medical bills she owed. The storyline in *Saving Fish from Drowning*, narrated with humor and sarcasm by a posthumous character, challenges the idea that by returning to the bland, people will gain serenity and calmness. But viewed from another perspective, it also offers us a new potential reading of the story. Tan broadens the scope of Chinese American literature with a successful portrayal of the posthumous character—Bibi Chen as an eccentric lady who has a plain complexion, lukewarm personality, aloof romantic relationships and excessive

[1] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, pp. 81-82.

affection for the dead art objects. Tan goes beyond the boundaries of life and death in her characterization. In this light, Tan presents the bland as a refusal of fixedness and limitation in either conceptual or visual definitions.[1]

This subchapter has analyzed Tan's writings of the complex interplay between Being and Non-being in three unusual forms of landscape: Winnie's interpretation of a landscape painting, Bao Bomu's and Lu Ling's calligraphic practice, and finally the landscapes seen by the posthumous body of Bibi Chen. The interplay between Being and Non-being opens new potential for our understanding of landscape and of Tan's story writing. In the three unusual forms of landscape, the return to the bland that is proposed in Daoism is fractured by the female characters' pain, loss, disease and traumatic memories. The return to the bland is also undercut by humor, sarcasm, experimental writing and self-mockery. But despite these displacements, Tan also reconstructs the bland through the ambiguity of the posthumous experience of a Chinese American female character. *Xu-jing* or the bland, as illuminated in *Dao De Jing*, liberates us from the worries of the external world, from fleeting infatuations, as well as from troubles and clamors of desire. With all differences embraced and dissolved within *Xu-jing*, the difference between the ancient and the present also disappear. The following chapter will discuss how time in Tan's landscapes goes under a spiral of departing and returning to the ancient from which Tan's own imagination of China arises and develops.

[1] Paula M. Varsano, in a translator's note writes that "Far from lacking anything, the blandness discovered here grows naturally out of a philosophical and aesthetic striving for what Jullien describes as "plenitude." Refusing the fixedness and consequent limitations of either conceptual or visual definitions, it retains in their place an infinite potentiality—and potency—most consonant with the moral and spiritual visions expressed in the earliest Chinese philosophical texts" (JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 15).

3.2 Progression and Regression—Time in Tan's Landscapes

Chapter 14 of *Dao De Jing* explains that *Dao* is characterized by elusiveness, indeterminacy, and infinity. *Dao* is manifested in the formless form that is termed the "great image" in both Daoist thoughts and Chinese landscape painting aesthetics. For instance, in Chinese landscape painting, the "great image" refers to the one that is not confined to any particular, specific or concrete form. The image is great because it is open to "both one and the other, that which does not exclude."[1] At its core, the "great image" of *Dao* dissolves the difference between past and present. *Dao* is a vague semblance that conceals itself where the myriad things (*wanwu*) merge with it without past or present. The undifferentiated *Dao* shares this vagueness, openness, and fluidity.

The conception of time expressed in *Dao De Jing* is totally different from Western time. The word corresponding to "time" is Chinese is "*shi* (时)". Like the myriad things in nature, *Shi* is composed of the *yin* and *yang* forces that rhythmically modify and transform each other. Because theirs is a civilization rooted in agriculture, the Chinese people say "*sishi* (四时 four seasons)" whereof the four seasons compose successive cyclical phases: this is "time" to the Chinese, the unfolding of the four seasons.

It is still the case today: peasants are still invited to participate in this unfolding by following the orderly and continuous changes of seasons, this being considered as a way to follow the *Dao* of time. Mountains and waters then evolve into various scenes of life where one labors for survival, wanders for leisure, or lies down to rest and so forth. The concepts of time and space are not separable in Chinese, as the term "*yuzhou* (宇宙)" indicates. As François Jullien argues in his monograph *Du Temps* (2001) the term, "yuzhou," which originally designated parts of the roof, is now used

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 199.

to convey "the world as it lasts."[1] The anthropologist and archaeologist Barbara Bender also points out a kind of interconnection between time and landscape—the landscape as solid geology, as in "a granitic landscape," "a karst landscape."[2] Bender defines landscape as "time materializing: landscape, like time, never stand[s] still."[3] She argues that landscape serves to bridge the distance between us and another time.[4]

However, in Tan's novels, landscape is elided, denied, or exaggerated in her female characters' interpretations, reactions, and reminiscences. Time in Tan's landscapes is inflected through the lens of her accounts which combine the historical and the mythical. Tan's China re-emerges belatedly and in elusive and fragmented form in the talk-stories. The interplay between time, events, memory, and landscape, in turn, complicates the images of China that are constructed within the scope of the landscapes that Tan portrays.

Because the Chinese concept of time is so closely linked to the cyclical unfolding of seasons, the Chinese do not say "beginning and end," but "end-beginning." Daoism scholar Hans-Georg Moeller explains this "end-beginning" with the help of the Daoist image of its root:

> That it is possible to return to the beginning implies that time is understood as a circle, as a circle of becoming and passing. One might illustrate this notion with the Daoist image of the root. In autumn when it withers away, the plant "returns" to its mother—the root. And in this way the root is preserved. In the spring a new plant will continue the permanent circle of becoming and passing.

---

[1] My translation is based on the French version of *Du «Temps»*. The original text reads "Un couplage notionnel serait pourtant censé dire, en chinois, l'espace et le temps (yu-zhou (m)). Mais, comme l'a fort bien noté Graham, ces deux notions n'ont pas été conçues comme un temps et un espace abstrait, détachés du monde physique ; les deux termes, désignant tous deux originellement des parties du toit, ne sont pas séparés l'un de l'autre ni non plus affranchis de leur support, ils signifieraient donc plutôt : « le monde en tant qu'il s'étend » et « le monde en tant qu'il dure »" (Jullien, François. *Du «Temps»*. Grasset, 2001, p. 28).

[2] BENDER, Barbara. "Time and Landscape." *Current anthropology*, 43, S4, 2002, p. S103.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. S103.

[4] Jullien writes that "Landscapes are created out of people's understanding and engagement with the world around them. They are always in process of being shaped and reshaped. Being of the moment and in process, they are always temporal. They are not a record but a recording, and this recording is much more than a reflection of human agency and action; it is creative of them. Landscapes provoke memory, facilitate (or impede) action" (JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 37).

> The chain of time is a chain of continuous beginnings and endings. Every beginning becomes an ending, every ending becomes a beginning."[1]

The decline of the withering plant signifies the end of its own life. But this end also encompasses a beginning, for the root will nourish another root's life. Similarly, the growth from this new root always already contains a tendency to wilt, wither and die, which is the end. Returning to *Dao* means to follow this end-beginning course of time.[2] By following this course, one will approach the *Dao* of time. As the root of a plant, the *Dao* of time is defined as "always-so (*chang* 常)":

> Following behind you will not see its rear; Encountering it you will not see its head. Hold tightly onto way-making in the present To manage what is happening right now And to understand where it began in the distant past. This is what is called the drawstring of way-making.[3]

This "always-so" does not refer to the always-so of the same but rather of process—the seamless change from one stage to the next. The "always-so" refers to the natural processes or cycles of production and reproduction of the myriad things (*wanwu*). Because of the vagueness of *Dao*, time is hidden so that one is not able to see its head or rear. So how do we comprehend hidden time and the vague *Dao*? Through an exploration of the distant past. But the reverence for the ancient or the *Dao* of time, on the other hand, breaks the order of time, meaning that the "always-so" emanates from the vividness of here and now. Therefore, the reverence towards the ancient and an attachment to the present do not contradict each other. The past and the present, as only two different phases of the cycle of *shi*, are dissolved in the vagueness of *Dao*.

Time in Tan's landscapes demonstrates the same tendency towards past and present, progression and regression. Her written landscapes are both historicized as specific historical events such as the Japanese invasion of China, but also blur the

[1] MOELLER, Hans-Georg. *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*. Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 116.
[2] Chapter 14 of *Dao De Jing* says that "This return to the root is called Quietness [Xu-Jing]; Quietness is called submission to Fate; What has submitted to Fate has become part of the always-so. To know the always-so is to be Illumined" (WALEY, Arthur. *The Way and Its Power: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*. Grove Press, 1994, p. 162).
[3] MOELLER, Hans-Georg. *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*. Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 110.

boundaries between the past and the present and in so doing show no sense of time. Critic Marc Singer contends that the tales of the mothers' youths recounted in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) are mythical and "timeless fables [that are] filled with supernatural wonders."[1] Like a number of scholars, he criticizes Tan for presenting a China made up of Western clichés rather than being drawn from authentic Chinese history. I, on the other hand, find that this temporal distancing offers Tan a more imaginative space to construct her vision of Chinese landscapes as a writer. Contrary to Singer I believe that Tan's construction of time is imbued with her understanding of her Chinese heritage, and her knowledge of Chinese language and Chinese literary and aesthetic traditions. Critic Sau-ling Wong produces the concept of "typological time" to read *The Joy Luck Club* which means a divided time: divided between "the static, ritual-permeated, mythical Time of a China [...] and the unfolding, enlightened, rational, secular Time of contemporary America."[2] However, I will argue that time in Tan's landscapes, as the Daoist term "end-beginning" suggests, is not split into distinct fragments. Rather the time in landscape composes a circular trajectory of departing and returning with which Tan's own imagination of China engages and expands.

3.2.1 The Historicized Landscapes in Tan's Talk-stories

I use the term "historicized landscapes" to refer to the landscapes that are described in the particular historical time period of the Japanese invasion of China (1930s-1940s China) in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991). These historicized landscapes are central to the Chinese-born female characters' retelling of their experience of the Japanese invasion to their American-

[1] SINGER, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, p. 324.
[2] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon". *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 60.

born daughter figures. When historicizing landscapes, Tan does not cater for Western readers' expectations by consolidating the clichéd, primitive image of China as superstitious, regressive and degraded.[1] Instead, she transforms China from a geographical location to a semiotic space of recollection that is configured into talk-stories in her first two novels. In Tan's talk-stories, the belatedness of her characters' memories makes plain the unreliability of narration of both the Chinese past and Chinese landscape. The fluidity of Chineseness is also evoked in this process.

In *Dao De Jing*, returning to the time of *Dao* is achieved either through an attachment to the present or through a path to the ancient. I will analyze Tan's historicized landscapes in her talk-stories because they effectively display and reconstruct the workings of a return to the time of *Dao*. Talk-stories are an important narrative form in Asian American literature. They transpose the oral activity of "talking" into the literary activity of "writing." The term "talk-story" originally refers to the social exchanges conducted in pidgin English during Asian American friend and family gatherings. The oral "talk" is then borrowed and transferred into the written texts of Asian American literature, though it is not unique to that literature.[2] Talk-stories serve to transmit the ancestral heritage and cultural traditions and enable the retelling of traditional stories. Talk-stories first appeared in Asian American

[1] Not all critics hold this view. Bella Adams counters this argument by writing that "The fact that *The Kitchen God's Wife* makes explicit reference to the conduct of both the British and the Americans during the Sino-Japanese War does implicate the West in China's historical catastrophes." The implication of the West does, on the contrary, offend some of Tan's Western readers (ADAMS, Bella, "Representing History in Amy Tan's "The Kitchen God's Wife"." *Melus*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2003, p. 13).

[2] In African American writer Toni Morrison's novels, her language reflects the oral tradition of Black English. For example, in her debut novel The Bluest Eye (1970), Morrison shows the "inflection, tone, and non-verbal gestures" of the oral tradition of her female characters' conversation (Conner, Marc C., ed. *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010, p. 14). Alice Walker writes in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" that "Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories-like her life-must be recorded. It is probably for this reason that so much of what I have written is about characters whose counterparts in real life are so much older than I am" (WALKER, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to The Present*. Mitchell, Angelyn, ed. Duke University Press, 1994, p. 407).

literature in the work of the novelist Maxine Hong Kingston such as *Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980). They have been further popularized and perpetuated by Amy Tan in her signature dreamy, surreal stories. The transference from oral talk to written text in the talk-stories preserves the immediacy and temporality of the oral tradition.[1] The time in Tan's landscapes that appears in her talk-stories is not strictly chronological or linear. Rather it is characterized by thematic recurrences and allusions and miscellaneous images patched together out of concrete situations.[2] Tan's talk-stories therefore display a juxtaposed version of Chinese landscapes that conveys inner contradictions and multiple realities, which in turn correspond to the flexibility and fluidity of the relationship between time and landscape and of the image of Chineseness. In a 1990 interview, Tan explained that she inserts some incongruities and inconsistencies into her talk-stories to mirror the constructedness of the story form and its multiple realities:

> And then I like that the reader comes to see that behind the story are actually many versions of how that story actually happened. Plus, I think often at the end of my stories, there's an additional part of that frame that takes you back to the present.[3]

Tan sets her talk-stories in the historical landscape of the Japanese invasion. This gesture indicates that landscape is always of the moment and in the process of historical change. To do this Tan adopts and reworks some of the oldest writing devices and principles used in the recording[4] of landscape. *Bi* (比) and *xing* (兴) are two traditional writing devices that have been used to conjure up landscape since

---

[1] AMES, Roger. "Language and Interpretive Contexts," Edited by DALE, Corinne H. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*. SUNY Press, 2004, p. 23.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[3] DAVIS, Emory. "An Interview with Amy Tan: Fiction—The Best that Roams." *Writing on the* Edge, vol. 1, no. 2, 1990, p. 101.
[4] In Daoist thought, the correlation between *yin* and *yang* gives birth to both landscape and human beings. We find no demarcation between landscape and human beings. In *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), man can experience the dynamics and vitality of the correlation of *yin* and *yang* forces. The observation of the scenes or phenomena from the landscapes interplay between mountains and waters, help the poet find an analogue of the self with the world. The ancient Chinese literary works are not as mimetic as their Western counterparts. It is the final stage in "the process of manifestation; and the writer, instead of representing the outer world, is in fact only the medium for this last phase of the words coming-to-be" (OWEN, Stephen. "Omen of the World: Meaning in the Chinese Lyric," Edited by DALE, Corinne H. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader.* SUNY Press, 2004, p. 73).

Shijing (dating back to the 11th to 7th centuries BC).[1] In *Shijing*, people are compared to animals in landscape or to landscapes themselves. Contrary to Western tradition, animals are positively connoted here. They co-exist with nature—just as that humankind is considered nature's company. Both animals and humankind are at one with their landscape, where there is a kind of synergy. The aim is to vividly record the joys and sorrows of the human world. However, Tan's representations of the Kweilin and Hangchow landscapes in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* highlight the fact that under the extreme conditions of violent warfare, humankind is deprived of its body, voice and dignity. The vitality of life shared by humankind and nature that should be conveyed by using *bi*, is here transformed into a form of textual violence. By doing this, Tan highlights what is made invisible and what falsehoods have been disguised as natural by official Chinese discourse.

As discussed earlier, the predominant meaning of "*shi* (时)" is the four seasons. The rhythmic changes of the seasons should be followed as a way to return to *Dao*. This reverence for nature gives rise to the "attachment to land" principle (乡土情结) through the associations between crops, land and place of birth. Through the depiction of concrete life and labor scenes, poems representing this principle express both abstract nostalgia for the speaker's homeland and awe for the land itself. Tan pays homage to this tradition in the metaphors she uses which are indeed inspired by the characters' daily activities. But in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), crops no longer awaken the affection and worship for the land. Instead, they foreshadow the traumatic memories of her female characters during pre-communist China, from the 1920s to 1940s.

[1] *Bi* likens abstract ideas and feelings to imageries (*xiang* 象) gained from participating in agricultural activities. *Xing* employs concrete observed in natural landscapes as a lead-in for the real subject of a poem. *Bi* and *xing* are based on the belief that there is no ontological difference between poets and landscapes. *Bi* and *xing* refuse to separate from the daily activities as recorded in the poem collection *Shijing*.

3.2.1.a Tan's historicized landscapes in The Joy Luck Club *and in* The Kitchen God's Wife*: Reconstruction of the transference of liveliness to objects/scenes*

In Chinese ideography, *bi* is represented as two people walking side by side and in the *Yijing*, *bi* means to complement.[1] *Bi* is considered as the trope of analogy and metaphor in the Chinese poetic tradition. It is widely used as a writing device to describe landscape. Chinese philosophy and aesthetics find no ontological difference between the poet and the landscape where "the poet […] becomes Phenomenon itself and can allow the things in it to emerge as they are without being contaminated by intellectuality."[2] The nature of landscape is believed to behave in accordance with the nature of man. In *bi*, a transference of qualities occurs from one unstated object to another. This transference is not simply that the poet humanizes or poeticizes landscape by metaphorically ascribing to it human faculties. On the contrary, the poet captures the various modes of intensity of mountains and waters with a view to showing that they have many contrasting and interlinked "form-actualizations (*xing* 形)."[3] For example, in Du Fu's (杜甫 701-770) poem "Writers of what he feels, traveling by night (旅夜书怀)," *bi* appears in the last two lines:

> Slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore,
> Here, the looming mast, the lone night boat.
> Stars hang down on the breadth of the plain,
> The moon gushes in the great river's current,
> My name shall not be known for my writing;
> Sick, growing old, I must yield up my post.
> Wind-tossed, fluttering—what is my likeness?

[1] YEH, Michelle. "Metaphor and *Bi*: Western and Chinese Poetics." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1987, p. 246.
[2] Yip, a Chinese poet, translator, and professor of Chinese and comparative literature, says that "The poet has become, even before the act of composition, Phenomenon itself and can allow the things in it to emerge as they are without being contaminated by intellectuality. The poet does not step in; he views things as things view them-selves" (YIP, Wai-lim. *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres.* University of California Press, 1976, pp. 22-23).
[3] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 30.

In Heaven and Earth, a single gull of the sands.[1]

The slender grasses, the faint breeze, the looming mast, the lone night boat and the hanging stars are what the poet records that attracts his attention among many elements within mountains and waters in front of his eyes. It is in the last couplet where the poet compares himself to "a single gull of the sands" that the poet's regret about his old age and his inability to change his failed career, as well as the fate of his country, reaches a climax. *Bi* evokes what has been residing in the poet's mind for a long time through his particular selection and description of the elements from the river landscape at that particular moment (the night) and in this particular situation (his failed career and unstoppably impending old age). The poet transfers his feeling of desolation, his helplessness and lack of achievement ("Wind-tossed, fluttering") onto the landscape by seeing himself as that "single gull of the sands."

The aim of adopting *bi* to describe landscape is to convey the liveliness or the *qiyun* (气韵)[2] of both the landscape and human beings. But when portraying the historicized landscapes in her first two novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Tan undermines the traditional and conventional use of *bi* as a process of imparting liveliness to lifeless things in ancient Chinese poems. Tan's landscapes are historicized under the circumstances of war, sexual abuse, patriarchal repression, and disturbing immigrant experiences. Her female characters are compared to dead animals who are divested of life, respect and voice. In the paragraph below, the people who have been killed in the Japanese air raid are compared to dead fish from the butcher's:

> But later that day, the streets of Kweilin were strewn with newspapers reporting great Kuomintang victories, and on top of these papers, like fresh fish from a butcher, lay rows of people—men, women, and children who had never lost hope, but had lost their lives instead. When I heard this news, I walked faster and faster, asking myself at each step, Were they foolish? Were they brave?[3]

[1] OWEN, Stephen. "Omen of the World: Meaning in the Chinese Lyric." Edited by DALE, Corinne H. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*. SUNY Press, 2004, p. 73

[2] Jullien writes that "'breath-energy' and 'internal resonance,' [form] the polarity known as *qi yun* (气韵): from which proceed 'life and movement,' *sheng dong* (生动)" (*Ibid.*, p. 29).

[3] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 26.

The paragraph brings to life two contrasts. The first contrast is manifested on the newspaper pages that juxtapose words about victories and photos of numerous dead bodies. This contrast reveals one of many interstices of official history books as it presents a singular point of view: the landscapes witnessed and reproduced in the memories of the Chinese-born character Su Yuan. It is built on sarcastic parallelism grimly playing on loss. The fresh fish from a butcher and the scattering of dead bodies on the street compose the second contrast. Tan's historicized Kweilin landscapes parallel what is concealed by official Chinese discourse—the hypocrisy of the Chinese military, who claim to protect ordinary citizens, and the cruelty of the Japanese invaders.[1] The textual violence of these two contrasting examples reflects the very real violence the female characters have experienced and witnessed. Bella Adams has argued in her article "Representing History in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*" that textual violence helps give voice to the 'othered' text, silenced by official narratives in history.[2] The textual violence in the passage gains its power from the comparison between the Kweilin people whose lives are under threat from the Japanese occupation to the dead fish in the hands of a butcher. The trope of the fresh fish reflects a rupture that cannot be suppressed and embellished by an official narrative. The flat, objective tone of "lay rows of people—men, women, and children" works to prolong and heighten the uncomfortable feelings stirred within the reader.

The streetscapes of Kweilin form a landscape of violence. The comparison with the butcher's fish deprives people of their liveliness, breaking the vital connection between land and life. These streetscapes are not a reversion of the transference of liveliness in *bi*. They are rather a reconstruction of *bi* against a backdrop of historical violence. If we view Tan's adoption of *bi* in depicting these streetscapes as a way to

[1] Romagnolo adds on feminist readings about time and history in Tan's novel and argues that Tan's novel "combines what is traditionally seen as the "personal" history of women with the typically male-centered "public" history of war, destabilizing the hierarchical relationship between these seemingly opposing narratives" (ROMAGNOLO, Catherine. "Narrative Beginnings in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*": A Feminist Study." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2003, p. 99).

[2] ADAMS, Bella, "Representing History in Amy Tan's "The Kitchen God's Wife"." *Melus*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2003, pp. 9-30.

approach the past and the ancient (*gu* 古), then the reconstruction of *bi* by historicizing Chinese landscape constitutes an alternative route to return to the *Dao* of time.

Tan's historicized landscapes as experienced by her female characters are based on the transference of the liveliness in *bi*, to new circumstances: here the Japanese invasion. Tan discloses "a new and contemporary, if necessarily transient, correlation between her characters' condition and the stock of metaphors which she has inherited from those in *Shijing*."[1] *Bi*, as the traditional device of recording landscape, is revisited under different historical and cultural circumstances. The ancient turns out to be not an atemporal or regressive force but rather gains new life when viewed from this new perspective, as the four seasons compose an unceasing cycle along with the "Great Process of Nature (*dahua* 大化)." Chinese views on time are enriched in Tan's historicized landscape, which is itself a translation from the talk-stories of her own family.

The next paragraph from *The Kitchen God's Wife* describes a scene where the transference of the liveliness in *bi* is imparted to cold-blooded jetfighters. The jetfighters are depicted as about to stumble into a contradictory state, half dream, half abyss of death. This attribution of life to lifeless objects reflects the fragmentary experience of war and the futility of one's craving for life. The next paragraph describes Hulan's seeing-off of her pilot husband to the war zones:

> But as the planes moved away from us slowly, Hulan began to wave. Rain, steam, and smoke were swirling all around, so the planes looked as if they were moving forward in an uneasy dream. Hulan waved harder and harder, tears streaming. The planes raced down the runway. And then she was waving furiously, crazily, like a wounded bird, as if his effort and all her wishes and hopes could lift them up safely, one after the other, and send them to victory.[2]

[1] Chapter two of *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, about "Eastern and Western Metaphor" writes that "It is designed rather to disclose a new and contemporary, if necessarily transient, correlation between the poet's condition and the stock of metaphors which he has inherited" (Gibbs, Jr, Raymond W., ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 39-40).
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 189.

From a third-person point view with Hulan as focalizer, the paragraph gives a vivid and disturbing depiction of Hulan and her friend Winnie's seeing off of their husbands who are pilots serving the Kuomintang army. The swirling rain, steam and smoke that obscure their view reflect Winnie and Hulan's uncertainty about the future: their hope for victories and anxiety about their husbands' fates. The alliteration of steam, smoke and swirl also increase the power of the visual and aural aspects of landscape. Adding to the emotional weight of the words, the alliteration supporting the imagery that foreshadows Winnie's husband's loss of sanity in the war touches the reader's mind. The personification of the planes as disorientated men who have fallen into a dream suggests how war eludes rational explanation. And while the planes are compared to humans, Hulan's waving arms are compared to the wings of a wounded bird. The choice of the bird simile is no coincidence. The imagery of the bird in Chinese literature, in both ancient and modern time, stands for the spiritual freedom that transcends secular concerns and expresses a deep love for one's home.[1] Here the bird's wings resembling the shape of a plane imply the devastating influence of the war that touches everything. The futility of Hulan's dream of victory is displayed in the metaphor comparing the concrete (the power needed for the lift off of the planes) with the abstract (wishes and hopes). The futility reaches an apogee towards the end of the passage when the lift-off of the plane suddenly transforms itself to merely being an imaginary victory, in Tan's use of "as if" and the subjunctive mood.

Tan's depictions of the Kweilin and Hangchow landscapes during the illegal Japanese occupation of the 1930-1940s belie some critics' views that Tan's first two

[1] "In the first poem of *The Book of Songs* (*shijing* 诗经), the earliest collection of poems from 1000 B.C. to 5000 B.C.,125, the imagery of the dove is adopted as an indication of love and marriage. In "Enjoyment in Untroubled Ease," the first chapter of *Zhuangzi*, the image of a giant bird called peng(鹏) embodies Zhuangzi's Daoist philosophy of transcending secular concerns for spiritual freedom. In modern poet Ai Qing's (艾青 1910-1996) well-known poem "If I were a Bird" Jiaru woshi yizhi niao 假如我是一只鸟) (italics by me), the poet is compared to a bird singing till its death a deep love for the land as its home. (HE, Jing. *Seeking a Spiritual Home for Women — A Comparative Study of Chen Ran's and Amy Tan's Fictions*. Diss. University of Louisville, 2010, pp. 262-263)." The Chinese text and the information about the Chinese poets are added on by me to offer a sense of orientation.

novels can be viewed as the expression of what really happened at that time. For instance, Sau-ling Wong points out that Tan's first two novels are built as memoirs that involve a multigenerational family saga with violent historical events.[1] Rather, Tan's talk-stories are the "counter-memory" [2] of China during the Japanese invasion. Tan's written streetscapes in Kweilin (*Guilin*) and the skyscapes in Hangchow (*Hangzhou*) are her way of reconstructing her mother's and grandmother's talk-stories about China in the past.[3] In this light, views on *shi* (时) found in Dao De Jing as cyclical are synthesized in Tan's historicized landscape. Following the Daoist pattern of the cyclical decay and growth of the root, Tan inherits the talk-stories from her family. She also inherits the liveliness inherent in *bi* to portray landscape. But at the same time, Tan also re-contextualizes this principle to convey the liveliness of the myriad things in *bi* under the extremity of war, suffering, and the traumatic memories of her female characters. The singularized version of official history that suppressed the common people's experience during war is also undercut: the masses are not treated as full of life vitality but instead they are divested of their life, expressed as no more alive than the butcher's dead fish.

3.2.1.b Tan's historicized landscapes in The Kitchen God's Wife *and* The Valley of Amazement*: Displacement of the "attachment to land" principle*

Chinese plowing culture produces an intimate dependence on and worship of land and pain at losing one's country. This dependence on nature to bestow life, guarantee

[1] WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. ""Sugar Sisterhood: Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon", *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 73.

[2] Foucault's use of the term "memory," is in the service of traditional history of knowledge as transmitted, inscribed, sanctioned and possessing the unmerited status of "truth." "Counter-memory," according to Cheung, means the "'effective history' that resists official versions of historical continuity and unmasks 'knowledge as perspective'" (CHEUNG, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa.* Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 15).

[3] Tan's novels are nevertheless not autobiographical as many critics have argued. They are the literary creation that is inspired from Tan's life stories and her family history. Tan plays with her memory as the dreamy part of herself that lived in another world, her life both real and imaginary, the way girls play with their Barbies and boys with their penises. See TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 322.

harvests and bless the local people is called “attachment to the land” (乡土情结). The poems in the earliest collection of *Shijing* are closely connected with daily life such as ploughing the soil, harvesting the crops, and gathering the fruits and so on. These poems promote the importance of following the changes of *sishi* (four seasons). *Shijing* teaches the readers how to determine the right time to furrow and also warns them against violating the right moment of *sishi* (four seasons). The *Shijing* poems that record agricultural activities reflect a wide range of emotions toward one’s homeland. For example, in one poem called “Dong Feng (东风),” their witnessing of the fields reminds the soldiers that they are far away from their hometowns:

> The fruit of the heavenly gourd,
> Would be hanging about our eaves;
> […] Our paddocks would be deer-fields;
> The fitful light of the glow-worms would be all about.
> These thoughts made us apprehensive,
> And they occupied our breasts.[1]

The soldiers’ complex feelings are therefore depicted: their regrets about the arduous battles, their sadness regarding the ruined courtyard, their worries about the barrenness of the countryside and their yearnings for the newlyweds and the long-lost wife.

In another poem “Crossing the Han River (渡汉江)” by the Song poet Zhiwen (宋之问 656-712) from the Tang dynasty, the poet contrasts his unfading love for homeland and his loss of ability to speak the dialect:

> Separated by mountain ranges, I was deprived of words from home,
> Winter passed and spring came, over and again.
> As I cross the Han River, the impending homecoming unnerves me so,
> So much so I shy away from asking about the locals of my homeland.[2]

[1] Chinese Text Project, *Dong Feng*. https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/dong-shan/zhs Accessed on 22 January 2021.
[2] My translation of “Crossing the Han River.”

The poet's separation from his hometown mountains parallels his loss of ability to speak the dialect. His pining for coming home is paradoxically paralleled by his increasing worries when coming closer to his hometown. This idea of the "attachment to land" is still very present nowadays.[1] The "attachment to land" feeling marks an adherence to the movements and changes of *sishi* (four seasons). An analysis of the "attachment to land" principle in Tan's landscapes therefore entails an examination of Tan's understanding of the relationship between time and landscape. The pain of losing one's hometown/country, as one aspect of the attachment principle, also covers what the "loss" of Chinese land and heritage means to Tan's writings. It is therefore an appropriate point to study the complication of Chineseness in Tan's landscapes.

Tan's reworkings of the "attachment to land" principle reflects the image of China in her mind like the change in the four seasons, the Chinese in her mind—and here the Chineseness it defines—goes under a rhythmic and cyclical change. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the writings about the crops and the characters' engagement with the crops represent the characters' irresistible fate toward the patriarchal suppression of the female characters. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, crops no longer elicit affection and worship for the land. Instead, they foreshadow the cruelty of the Japanese invasion during the 1930-1940s in China. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the crops yet again symbolize the patriarchal suppression but with a break of silence signifying empowerment among the female characters. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the love of homeland, or, better, the forlornness born of losing one's homeland, metamorphosizes into the characters' search for their cultural roots and the rediscovery of the ancestors of Chinese men. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the stalks of sugarcane in the field transfigure into the ghosts of the Japanese army. Tan adds on a grotesque twist: the peasants toiling in the field are depicted as "scavenging

[1] The contemporary Chinese writer Ke Ling (柯灵) writes in his essay "Attachment to Land 乡土情结 (*Xiangtu Qingjie*)" that "In everyone's heart, there is a land that haunts the soul. Think of it when you are satisfied, think of it when you are disappointed. The land will come to your mind anytime anywhere especially when the festival approaches. KE, Ling. "Xiangtu Qingjie". My translation. http://www.wenming.cn/book/szjy/201409/t20140929_2209166.shtml Accessed on 13 January 2021.

for bones and skulls as mementos."[1] In *The Valley of Amazement*, the attachment principle is re-contextualized in the protagonist's identity crisis, but with a focus on the entrapment within romantic relationships from Tan's female character of mixed ancestry.

Tan continuously comes back the "attachment to land" principle in her novel writing, but each time she adds on some new dimensions, like the spiraling movement of the running track of the return in *Dao De Jing*.[2] Viewing Tan's novels chronologically will enable us to discover how Tan deals with the relationship between the past and the present in writing the Chinese landscapes as a Chinese American writer. Tan has commented on the relationship between the past and the present in her second essay collection *Where the Past Begins* (2017):

> Even though the story may not ostensibly be mine, it contains knowledge based on my personal history. It is my experiences that have coalesced into a situation that holds sad irony or horrific clarity. I want to bring forth what I cannot see, what is not there, or is there but nearly indiscernible because the million pieces that make up its whole are scattered all over the place, and extend from past into present.[3]

Fusing the past into the present in her novel writing enables Tan to reveal what she "cannot see," or in other words, what she needed to dig out: "what [was] not there" for her. The spiral path of Tan's portrayal of both the crops as motif and the inherent "attachment to land," indicates the fact that Chineseness, like Tan's metaphor of the scattered pieces, is something indiscernible that stretches from the past into the present.

The next paragraph depicts the scene where Winnie and Hulan are fleeing from the air raid in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The lowering of their heads towards the ripe wheat when the Japanese planes invade the sky relocates Chinese people's reverence to land:

---

[1] Amy TAN. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 130.

[2] Chapter 6 of *Dao De Jing* says that: "The gateway of the dark female—This is called the root of the world. Wispy and delicate, it only seems to be there; Yet its productivity is bottomless" (AMES, R. T., and D. Hall. *Dao De Jing: Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books, 2001, p, 95). The root of the world, as the returning and starting point of the myriad things (*wanwu*), has bottomless productivity.

[3] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 25.

> All those people, all those vendors—they began to push and run. The basket of chestnuts tipped over. Chickens were squawking, beating against their cages. Hulan grabbed my hand and we were running too, as if we could go faster than those planes could fly. The airplane noise became louder, until they were over our backs, roaring like elephants. And we knew the bullets and bombs were coming. Then everyone around us began to fall at the same time, just like wheat in a field blown down by the same wind. I was falling too. Hulan was pushing me down.
>
> [...] We lowered our heads, and I thought that those curses would be my last memory. The planes flew back and forth, back and forth, and people's heads were going up and down, up and down, as if we were bowing to those Japanese planes.[1]

The analogy between man and wheat does not exhibit the interdependence between man and land in the attachment principle. Rather, the humans are deprived of their humanity and become stronger forces deflected in nature, like the wheat in the wind. The loss of power increases in Tan's simile: the up-and-down heads of people are like slaves bowing to the Japanese planes, but can also hint at those who survive for a few moments still in their doomed blind race.

Tan uses the past continuous tense to portray the escaping scene to emphasize the fact that the fears of people continue over a relatively long time. The -ing form also offers the reader a sense of being at the site to witness the event. Tan uses a series of chopped sentences to increase the sense of urgency that danger is impending. They also reveal a sense of doom because the running humans will never win over the flying machines. The chopped sentences also indicate the fragmentary experiences of people confronting the roaring planes and the high-density bombing. The chopped sentences and the past continuous underscore the temporal and spatial disorientation endured by the humans during the bombings. The characters' disorientation and the repetitions of the same action over and over again, repeatedly the same instant, not letting time flow, destabilize the "attachment to land" principle. They also disclose Tan's own version of the presence of time in her portrayal of Chinese landscape during the Japanese invasion.

In the paragraph below we will see Winnie's second encounter with the bombings. Tan gives the "attachment to land" principle another temporal twist here:

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, pp. 213-214.

> Suddenly machine-gun bullets hit a whitewashed building in front of me—and a long line of holes instantly appeared, just like stitches when the thread is yanked out fast. The piece of the wall underneath those empty stitches crumbled away, and then the rest of the wall on top fell down, like a big pile of flour that had lost its sack. And in that small moment—it was that quick—all my smart thoughts flew out of my brain. I screamed, and dust instantly filled my mouth and burned my eyes.[1]

The sentence structure in this paragraph gives us a chain of movements logically following each other but kept distinct by punctuation: the bullets hit a building, the holes appear, the wall crumbles and Winnie screams with her mouth and eyes filled with debris from the wall. This is heightened by a sense of surprise and panic created by Tan's list of words indicating very short temporal intervals such as "suddenly," "instantly," "and then," and "in that small moment." Winnie records and reacts to everything happening around her passively. She is not able to think and can only behave instinctively.

Winnie's second encounter with the bombings is narrated through Tan in various snapshots. Her experience of time at the very moment of the Japanese plane's gun shootings is fragmented: time unfolds in a series of snapshots: that is cut into short, separate phrases. Tan has always been interested in focusing on one particular moment for one particular character, not in sweeping generalization. She mentions this point concerning her own life in *Where the Past Begins*. It is truly a clue to her novel writing as well as to her conception of time and of character-marking:

> I wrote that my life was "like a series of Polaroid snapshots, those stopped-time, one-dimensional images on chemically altered paper that served as the stand-in for tragic and trivial moments alike."[2]

In other words, time in this particular scene is not portrayed in fluid continuity. It does not correspond, then, to the seamless continuity of time which *Dao De Jing* and *Yijing* see time as cyclical, seamlessly following the unceasing alternations of the four seasons or the interminable cycles of growth and death. It is by following this Daoist time strictly that peasants achieve and practice the "attachment to land" principle. This Daoist conception of the continuity of time is undercut in Tan's highlighting of the snapshots when describing Winnie's experience of the bombings

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p.295.
[2] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 25.

and during which Winnie's eyes and mouths are injured and filled up with dust all of a sudden. In the "attachment to land" principle, one's sense of the continuity of time will endow one with feelings of security, that is to say, one will have the feeling of being embraced and becoming one with the solid land that changes, based on the stable moving patterns of time. However, Winnie's eyes and mouth are burnt instead of being protected: the "attachment to land" cannot prevail over these historicized landscapes.

The next paragraph from *The Valley of Amazement* continues to relocate the "attachment to land" principle. It depicts a landscape that is witnessed by the American-Chinese character Violet on her way to her new lover's hometown—Moon Pond. The rainy landscape is described thus:

> The wind blew my hair loose and across my face, and raindrops the size of leaves fell on our heads. Before we could jump down to take shelter under the cart, lightning cracked the yellow-green fields of rice. The thick grass swayed in one direction and then the other, as if the field were a living creature, heaving deep breaths as it changed yellow to green. With another bright crack, rain poured all at once, and washed my dirty face and soaked my clothes. In minutes, the downpour softened the ruts and deepened them, so that when we tried to move, we sank and were stuck.[1]

Through the evocation of Violet's different trips to meet first her first and then her second lover, Tan speaks of her characters' engagement, or even entrapment, in her romantic relationships. In both trips, Violet engages equally tactilely with the landscape. But in the adventures in the bamboo forests with her first American lover Edward, also her first husband, she feels the pleasure of sensing the landscape with her foot. The bamboo landscape changes from a distant object, a spectacle to be visually perceived, to an "up-close, intimate and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice."[2] The trek in the forest parallels Violet's awakening including her yearnings:

> I was filled with longing for him [Edward]. It was not sexual. I wanted the physical comfort of being held. I wanted to feel protected and safe.[3]

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, pp. 347-348.
[2] WYLIE, John. *Landscape: Key Ideas in Geography*. Routledge, 2007. p. 167.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. Ecco, 2013, p. 239.

But in the above trip to her second lover's hometown, the supposedly tactile expedition becomes a mere disaster. The first lightening "cracks" the rice field, highlighting a sense of fragmentation, separation and distinctiveness. This division between characters and their surrounding environment undercuts the "attachment" principle, which is based on the moving pattern of *Dao* that departs from and returns to its undifferentiated fount that embraces all possibilities including the past and the present. But here in Tan's text, the once "yellow-green fields of rice" change from yellow to green and then stay green. This fixation in one particular state displays something quite contrary to what is offered by the undifferentiated *Dao* that remains vague and open to the process of modification and transformation in nature. In other words, the porous space, or the potential of the rice fields to return to their yellow-green in-betweenness, is denied in Violet's observation of rice fields as fixed in one particular color. The metaphor that compares the rice fields to "a living creature that is heaving deep breaths" demonstrates the fact that what Violet observes is beyond her scope of comprehension. According to François Jullien's *In Praise of Blandness* (2004), the beyond or *lointain*—embodied in the undifferentiated *Dao* which manifests itself in Chinese mountains and waters—does not add to the uncertainty or alienation of human beings from landscape. On the contrary, the beyond is what guarantees the inexhaustibility of *Dao*. But here the heaving creature becomes a source of threat and doubt for Violet. Towards the end of the quoted paragraph, a second lightening crack leads to heavier rain, which prevents Violet from moving forward or going backward. She is "stuck"—which is quite different from being attached. One essential connotation of the "attachment" principle is that human beings are invited to adjust their behavior in order to actively react to and interact with their surroundings. However, life vitality is disavowed when Violet is stuck in the mud. Time is prevented from flowing. The life vitality and flowing time in the "attachment" principle are undermined in this passage because of an impossibility of comprehension. The Daoist conception of time as cyclical and encompassing the possible transformation of past, present and future is therefore denied access in Tan's representation of the rice fields stretching before Violet's eyes as unreachable and incomprehensible to her.

This subchapter has analyzed Tan's historicized landscapes. Tan's novels are criticized as debasing Chinese people and as degrading Chinese historical events to cater for Western audiences. But an analysis of Tan's adoption and reconstruction of *bi* and the "attachment to land" principle indicates another story. *Bi* and the attachment principle epitomize particular views on time as seasonal changes. Tan's Chinese landscapes, in the three novels I have discussed in this subchapter not only display, but more importantly re-contextualize, this cyclical view of time. Tan's representation of the characters' fragmentary experience of time in landscape belies the reduction and embellishments present in official history books which ignore individual pains and struggles. It provides a multiplicity of viewpoints, accounts and time perceptions.[1] The discussion of the interplay between Tan's talk-stories and the Chinese literary tradition *bi* has also added new perspectives to the study of the aesthetic value of Tan's novels. This discussion will help with the question of how Chineseness—the way the characters variously engage with the landscape—displays Tan's own understanding of the concept. By analyzing the notions of transformation and evolution in Tan's landscape descriptions, this doctoral dissertation contributes to the reflection on Chineseness as always already culturally and textually destabilized. It will also open new directions in the discussion of both Tan's novels and Chinese American literature.

[1] The textbooks used in the mainland China mainly focuses on three aspects: firstly, they account the struggle between the Communist party and that of the Kuomintang during the Japanese invasion of China; secondly, they tell the stories of heroes from these two parties; thirdly, they narrate the international aid from other countries such as the Soviet Union during the Japanese invasion.

3.2.2 Landscape beyond Time:

3.2.2.a Metalepsis and myth in The Joy Luck's Club*: lack of sense of time*

In her talk-stories and rewritten myths, Tan portrays Chinese landscapes as both historicized and as lacking a sense of time. Asian American literature critic E.D. Huntley argues that Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) disturbs linear narratives with the introduction of myth and fable, talk-story, dreams, and visionary tales.[1] More negatively perhaps, critic Marc Singer contends that the mythical and timeless fables in Tan's first novel present readers with an image of China that seems to be "drawn as much from occidental cliché as from authentic Chinese history."[2] However, to analyze the authenticity of Tan's representation of China simply through her mythical stories runs the risk of limiting our discussion within the scope of an essentialist realm of biology and geography. Cultural studies scholar Ien Ang nuances the essentialist approach, highlighting the mutual and complex relationship an individual may have between their origin and their local and temporal contexts. Based on this, I will therefore focus on the way metalepsis functions in the title episode of "The Joy Luck Club" in the novel of the same name, and the myth recounting the stories between peasants and birds in "Magpies," another episode I the same novel. The former narrative is located within the context of the Japanese invasion of China with a focus on the blurring of boundaries between the past and present of the Chinese landscape. The latter conveys a sense of time that is stuck in the ancient (古) with Tan's revisiting of a traditional Chinese writing device *xing* (兴) from the earliest poetry collection *Shijing* (诗经). The analysis of both narratives discloses a destabilization of the cyclical time in Tan's written landscapes. This undercutting of cyclical time in Tan's narratives of Chinese landscapes in turn reflects that which cannot be easily or fully comprehended by Tan's Chinese American female characters. But those vacillations also constitute a porous space for

[1] HUNTLEY, E. D. "Amy Tan and Asian American Literature." Edited by Harold Bloom. *Asian-American Writers*. Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 54.
[2] SINGER, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, p. 324.).

they open up an in-between space (*jian* 间) for Tan to show her own conception and representation of time through her imagination and narration of landscape as in a complex returning movement: either time is stuck in one particular moment without the possibility of going forward and backward, or else time is shortened or prolonged in her use of snapshots and in her revisiting of *xing*, a typical writing device to evoke landscape in Chinese landscape poems. In other words, Tan's landscapes figure this fluidity of time, through which she is able to show the fluidity of Chinese landscapes: Chinese landscapes become more complicated at various stages as her female characters' interpretations and engagement with Chinese mountains and waters themselves evolve, either through the characters' direct visits or from their second-hand knowledge.

The paragraph below, from *The Joy Luck Club*, describes how the American-born character June travels to the location where her two half-sisters were abandoned as babies by her mother Suyuan during *Taonan* (逃难 fleeing from wars and other disasters). The flight in this novel is subsequent to the Japanese invasion of China in the 1940s. This is how she envisions the scene:

> The babies in Kweilin, I think. I was not those babies. The babies in a sling on her shoulder. Her other daughters. And now I feel as if I were in Kweilin amidst the bombing and I can see these babies lying on the side of the road, their red thumbs popped out of their mouths, screaming to be reclaimed. Somebody took them away. They're safe. And now my mother's left me forever, gone back to China to get these babies. I can barely hear Auntie Ying's voice.[1]

June has been in conversation with the three "aunts," the three remaining members of her deceased mother's joy luck club and close friends. But all of a sudden, she steps into the scene of her two abandoned half-sisters back in the 1940s China. This paragraph represents a metaleptic landscape that changes between the past and the present tense. The short, choppy sentences in the past tense at the beginning remind the narrative "I," June, that she is an outsider who views aloofly and distantly from a totally different time and space in the contemporary United States. However, the passage immediately transitions to complex sentences in the present tense. The narrative "I" no longer keeps a distance from the bombing scene.

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 39.

Rather, Tan's detailed, zoomed-in descriptions give the reader the impression that June is actually part of the scene staring at the babies whose "red thumbs popped out of their mouths, screaming to be reclaimed." Toward the end, the passage comes back to the contemporary America where the narrative "I" finds herself surrounded by her "aunts." The passage thus goes from contemporary America to 1940s China and then back to the US. This transition from the present to the past and then back to the present seems to reproduce the returning movement of *Dao*. But June's aunts' voices do not "pull" the narrative "I" back to reality. In addition, it is impossible for June's deceased mother Suyuan to go back to China to retrieve her abandoned daughters. Thus, this returning movement discovered in the time shift in the bombing scene does not anchor the narrative "I" in the world. Rather, June becomes more disoriented. We gain this impression that June is "forever" "stuck" in the bombing scene back in 1940s China: despite her incapacity to process and understand her mother Suyuan's experience during the Japanese invasion of China, the traumatic memories about China continue to haunt June even though she has not yet gone back to China at this moment in the development of the novel.[1] In this light, what seems like a time shift manifesting a returning to *Dao*, turns out to disorient the second-generation Chinese American female characters: it signifies no returning but loss. In other words, China has been and will always be lost. June's temporal and spatial shifts mirror Tan's own path as a writer who returns to contradiction and displacement. The meanings of China and the Chinese in Tan's writings, as June's disorientation in this bombing scene, are "blurred, transitory and dependent on temporal and spatial contingencies."[2]

Critic Marc Singer contends that Tan's debut novel taps into many oriental clichés. Singer offers one example from the episode "Magpies" and argues that the explicitly historical events such as the Communist revolution are transformed by Tan into "heavily allegorical parables such as An-mei Hsu's tale of the angry peasants

[1] Towards the end of the novel (the last chapter "A Pair of Tickets"), June goes back to China with her father to fulfil the dream that her mother could never fulfil herself.
[2] HUM, Sue. "Articulating authentic Chineseness: The Politics of Reading Race and Ethnicity Aesthetically." *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers*. Urbana Free Library, 2006, p. 467.

rising up against tyrannical magpies."[1] Tan's myths in her talk-stories are indeed expressions of personal mythology that are used by the mother figures to "share wisdom, folk knowledge (and this includes superstitions and the supernatural), and ideology with their daughters."[2] However, my understanding is that the function of Tan's myths is not limited to a generational transmission of family history and nationalist values. They also bear the features of *xing* (兴), one of the most widely used devices to evoke landscape in the earliest extant Chinese poetry collection *Shijing* (诗经 840–620 BC.). Xu Fu-guan (1904-1982 徐复观), a modern Chinese intellectual and historian, points out that in *xing*, the emotions of the poets are evoked accidentally by an object (or scene) which merges into the event that is directly associated with the emotions or the topic of the poem.[3] The poet's emotions are thereby aroused through an association with objects or scenes in nature. The natural—which is manifested through seemingly plain writing—is approached. Ever since *Shijing* this feature has become one of the most valued methods among poets and critics alike. *Xing* employs the concrete imageries observed in natural landscapes as a lead-in for the real subject of a poem. In *Wenxin diaolong* (文心雕龙), a work on Chinese literary aesthetics dating from the 5th century, Liu Xie (刘协 181-234) explains *xing*:

> Spring and autumn roll around, succeeding one another, and the *yin* and *yang* [italicized by me] principles alternatively darken and brighten. When objects in the physical world change, our minds are also affected […] One responds with varying emotions to these varying phases, and the form of language used depend[s] on the emotion. One single leaf may suggest something significant.[4]

Xing occurs in the seasonal change of natural scenery and evokes the corresponding changes in human feelings. The transforming emotions are considered as humankind's response to the unceasing movements and changes of nature. *Xing*

[1] SINGER, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tans *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, p. 324.
[2] CONARD, Tammy S. *Creating an Asian-American Mythology: Storytelling in Amy Tan's Fiction.* Diss. Texas Tech University, 1998, pp. 7-8.
[3] . DAI, Wei-qun. "Xing Again: A Formal Re-investigation." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR),* issue 13, 1991, p. 5.
[4] LIU, Hsieh. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. New York Review of Books, 2015, pp. 277-278

can be understood as a kind of association that is elicited from one's various activities such as contemplating, strolling, resting and engaging in artistic creation with mountains and waters. These diversified activities bring about humankind's interconnection and communication with nature which is conceived as a tension network of correlated pairs such as *yin* and *yang*, darkness and brightness, or rain or sun. In the poem "Taoyao" (桃夭) of *Shijing,* the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, dating from the 11th to 7th centuries B.C., *Xing* is clearly shown:

> The peach tree is young and elegant;
> Brilliant are its flowers.
> This young lady is going to her future home,
> And will order well her chamber and house.
>
> The peach tree is young and elegant;
> Abundant will be its fruits.
> This young lady is going to her future home,
> And will order well her house and chamber.
>
> The peach tree is young and elegant;
> Luxuriant are its leaves.
> This young lady is going to her future home,
> And will order well her family.[1]

The happiness of a newly married lady is associated with blossoming peach flowers. A chain of association is built between the growth and maturity of the flowers, fruits and leaves of the peach tree, and that of the initiation into and the gradual maturity of womanhood. This is read as an effect of the correlative cosmology or the organic Chinese worldview as recorded in *Yijing* and *Xici*.[2] By building a connection with peach flowers, one of the most commonly found elements in both orchards and in poetry, the poet is able to show the confluence of human vitality and nature. In so doing, the poet becomes the co-creator of the universe and

[1] Taoyao, *Chinese Text Project*, https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/tao-yao/ens. Accessed on 19 May 2020.
[2] KAO, Karl. "Recent Studies of Chinese Rhetoric." *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles*, Reviews 15, 1993, p. 153.

pursues the creative spirit of *Dao*.[1] When associating the growth and decline of plants or the celestial changes with those of human emotions, the poet is able to express a specific time, a psychological time or an uncertain time. Time in *xing* serves as the chronological narrative order of the events that the young female protagonist experiences in the poem "Tao Yao." The fulfilment of the female protagonist's hopes and aspirations is proleptically pronounced in the luxuriance of the branches and leaves of the peach tree, and in its fruitfulness—as a metaphor for a happy and fulfilling married life. I will suggest in the following paragraphs that Tan's adoption and reconstruction of *xing* exhibits a contemporary correlation between her literary and linguistic heritage and her re-imagination and representation of Chinese landscapes.

The paragraph below from *The Joy Luck Club* depicts the rebellion of the helpless peasants as they confront the greedy birds. The repetitive reappearance of the birds reformulates *xing*. But this use of *xing* does not display the seasonal and cyclical time that is respected and described in Chinese philosophy and literature. Instead, time is described as distorted as if the peasants were stuck in one moment forever, or it is chopped and prolonged in Tan's adoption and enrichment of *xing*. In either case, the cyclical time of Daoist thought is undermined:

> It said that for thousands of years birds had been tormenting the peasants. They flocked to watch peasants bent over in the fields, digging the hard dirt, crying into the furrows to water the seeds. And when the people stood up, the birds would fly down and drink the tears and eat the seeds. So children starved.
>
> But one day, all these tired peasants—from all over China—they gathered in fields everywhere. They watched the birds eating and drinking. And they said, "Enough of this suffering and silence!" They began to clap their hands, and bang sticks on pots and pans and shout, "Sz! Sz! Sz!"—Die! Die! Die! And all these birds rose in the air, alarmed and confused by this new anger, beating their black wings, flying just above, waiting for the noise to stop. But the people's shouts only grew stronger, angrier. The birds became more exhausted, unable to land, unable to eat. And this continued for many hours, for many days, until all those birds—hundreds, thousands, and then millions!—fluttered to the ground, dead and still, until not one bird remained in the sky.[2]

[1] FANG, Thomé H. "A Philosophical Glimpse of Man and Nature in Chinese Culture." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1973, pp. 23-24.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 234.

The peasants' toiling in the fields reveals a temporality that spans over "thousands of years." The specific temporality of Tan's landscape above is not shown in the peasants' performance unfolding in time: the peasants do not perform their duties according to the seasonal changes. Instead, time is displayed in a series of snapshots and salient details: the day-to-day work in the field with a list of simply kinetic movements such as bending over, digging, crying and watering.

Tan uses many words to indicate time such as "for thousands of years," "one day," "for many hours" and "for many days" and yet time remains ambiguous. This ambiguity contributes to giving her readers the impression that her figures are situated in a landscape where time is not flowing and transforming according to the changes of the four seasons as the Daoist classics indicate. This lack of the sense of time flowing is also established by Tan's adoption of the "coarse-grained narrative." The term "coarse-grained narrative," coined by Catherine Emmott, refers to the description that offers less quantity and precision of detail and thus gives lesser sense of involvement and vividness.[1] The less grained narrative in the passage weakens the sense of the characters' embodiment in a specific contextual frame. Tan's description of the peasants toiling in the fields expresses a sense of being trapped in one particular starting point from time immemorial with no possibility of progression.

The descriptions of the birds and their fantastic actions add to the mythical color of the story: the peasants' watering the crops with their own tears and the birds drinking the peasant' tears for instance. Mythical landscape in China is described by Tan as disconnected from the cyclical conception of Daoist time. But Tan's narrative of landscape as separated from the alternation of the four seasons in nature, on the other hand, conforms to the characteristics of the mythical landscape that loses its temporal as well as spatial determination: what is presented before our eyes are the "omnitemporal," "non-temporal" fields that are "outside of time."[2] This temporal

[1] EMMOTT, Catherine. "Immersed in imagined landscapes Contextual frames and metalepsis in representing virtual travel in Elspeth Davie's *A Map of the World*.". *Vol. 28*. DOUTHWAITE, John, Daniela Francesca Virdis, and Elisabetta Zurru, eds. *The Stylistics of Landscapes, the Landscapes of Stylistics.* John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017, p. 20.
[2] MAJNARIĆ, Ivan. "The Uses of the Past – the Case of Maksimir Park Mogila," *Sacralization of Landscape and Sacred Places*. Institute of Archaeology Zagreb, Croatia, 2016, p. 393.

and spatial indeterminacy links the description of the transcendental and the otherworldly. This reflects an ongoing sense of helplessness in the face of nature, an archetypal human feeling. Whereas this loss of specific and circumscribed dimensions of time and space is reminiscent of *Dao*'s characteristics (the vague, the formless, soundless, indeterminate and unlimited), Chineseness, as displayed by Tan's conception and representation of time in this mythical landscape, surprisingly gains its universal meaning precisely in this disassociation.

We see that in the first paragraph, it is the birds that are the actors of the scene and the focalization of the narrative. In the second paragraph, there is a shift in perspective as the peasants begin to rebel. This is a typical mode of expression of *xing* in traditional Chinese literature where the natural landscape functions as a lead-in to the real subject or emotions to be explored. This particular mode of writing indirectly corresponds to the high value attached in China to subtleness and indirectness in both literary creations and in humans.[1] By recording the movements of the birds first, Tan's passage aims to highlight the peasants' refusal to accept their fate as subjugated and powerless. Adopting the discreet and reserved way of writing in *xing,* Tan expresses the peasants' strong resilience. The description of the fields serves as a lead-in to focus on that strong resilience.

Tan's description of the fields is also redolent of the realm of "beyond words" to which the ancient Chinese landscape poems attach great importance. The poets are expected to implicitly and indirectly express subtle emotions so that the mind remains open to both *yin* and *yang* and to enjoy the one through the possibility of the other.[2] The "beyond word" is expressed by the Tang poet Li Bai (701-762) with his descriptions of the lingering music:

> A light breeze carries the songs into emptiness:
> The melody entwines itself with the passing clouds and flies off.
> […]

[1] When handing in their advice to the emperor, the Chinese literati scholars who hold position in the court did not state problems directly. Instead they took a non-direct approach, which is acceptable to both sides.

[2] JULLIEN, François. "Flavor-Beyond-the-Flavorful, Landscape-Beyond-Landscapes." *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 107.

The words are inexhaustible, and the feelings are inaccessible. [1]

The breeze carries the songs into the clouds which fade out from one's earshot. But thanks to this fading or this *remove* of the sound from people, the songs open up space to embrace more possibilities, not being limited to one particular tone and rhythm. They gain the capacity to linger as a rich piece of music in people's minds for a relatively long period of time. The subtle way of writing in *xing* that is adopted by Tan reflects this power of lingering music. The indirectness and subtlety also enable Tan to dream, imagine and create her own version of the Chinese landscape: outside-of-time, equivocal and mythical.

In the second passage quoted, Tan describes the human-bird combat using reiterated structures and words, which is characteristic of *xing*. In the poem "Tao Yao," the three stanzas open with the repeated phrase "The peach tree is young and elegant." The poet returns to it in each of the three stanzas, before bringing in variations: "Brilliant are its flowers," "Abundant will be its fruits," and "Luxuriant are its leaves." There, the newly aroused peasants' anger and the relentless movements of the birds can be considered as the point to which Tan repeatedly returns, similarly to the repeated starting line in each of the three stanzas from "Tao Yao." Through the repeating and varying parts portraying the bird-human combat in the fields, Tan displays the Daoist time's returning movement: it departs from and returns to the undifferentiated *Dao* (continuous human powerlessness confronting nature from time immemorial) but with the birds' ever-growing force of resilience: a resilience that is displayed in the resistance to the natural flowing of time. Time, in the two quoted passages, is either fragmented in snapshots that indicate the discontinuous movements of the peasants or extended in the birds' flying for hours, days, and years. Time in this field scene is opposite to the natural development of the four seasons as suggested in *Dao De Jing* and *Yijing*. Like the peasants fighting the birds in this field scene, on the one hand, Tan tries to resist Chinese influences, but at the same time, she cannot resist them.

[1] LI, Bai. "Sent to Prefect Yuan of Jiao, Recalling a Past Outing." My translation.

Building on the symbolic meaning of the bird based on Chinese myths and folklore, I will shift attention to focus on how Tan's use of *xing* creates a contradictory sense of both one's struggle within, and one's fleeing from, the restrictions of time without. *Xing* used by Tan expresses the unceasing changes in life and in landscape alike.[1] This uncertainty in turn is displayed in the correlation of a sense of experience being enshrined in time, and of a sense of time fleeting before one's eyes.

In the peasant and bird story, Chinese landscapes take the form of a mythical landscape that is imagined in the Chinese American characters' minds rather than the actual one they see and visit. As often, Tan plays with the generic boundaries of myth, story and essay here. But when recounting the story, even the Chinese-born character Anmei states that her source of knowledge comes from a Chinese magazine rather than direct experience.[2] Of course, this information does little to indicate the authenticity and verifiability of the story. On the contrary, this introduction of its source of knowledge rather points to the constructedness and fictionality of this tale, and more generally of Tan's myths. Tan's engagement with the mythical landscape reveals an uncertain, ruptured or mythic Chinese past that remains fragmented. These fragmentations are what Tan has been attempting to bring into her novels. In her second essay collection *Where the Past Begins* (2017) Tan writes that she brings about the "fairy-tale qualities of the fiction" because they carry one important aspect of her literary creation: the mythical past. The mythical past has both formed her view of her surroundings and offers her a more creative space as a writer:

> I added two other pieces that reflect fairy-tale qualities of the fiction I loved to read as a child. It captures the mythic past I grew up with and broke from before returning to it as a writer.[3]

We can see that Tan's stories are not myths in the traditional sense, but rather they originate from the same desire and intention that is dormant in one's deepest

[1] GU, Ming Dong. ""Fu-Bi-Xing": A Metatheory of Poetry-Making." *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles, Reviews* 19, 1997, pp. 11-20.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 234.
[3] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 25.

self. American philosopher and literary theorist Philip Wright defines this correlation between man and myth as:

> Ingredients of myth: ritual practices, curiosity about nature, a vague but powerful sense of presence lurking within or amidst or behind everyday objects, a developing moral sensitivity that seeks outward justification, and together with all these a readiness to believe that what is seen and enacted here in earthly presence is somehow copied after a nobler model or is following out some original divine command.[1]

The mythical past embodied in Tan's landscapes in her myths illuminates the "vague but powerful sense of presence" that has long accompanied humankind. Tan's pages manifest this pervasive presence in her destabilization of *xing*. Her representation of the bombing scene and the peasant-bird combat scene in *The Joy Luck Club* are located in a time that is distorted. In the former metaleptic landscape, time flows between the past and the present and does not lead to a Daoist time that embraces all possibilities of time in landscape. Rather the time rendered by Tan disorients the narrative "I" who confronts her loss of origin. In the latter mythical landscape, time is stuck in one unspecified moment, concurrently being prolongated and chopped, which runs against the cyclical views on time in *xing*. Tan's revisiting of *xing* to describe time in landscape shows both her intimacy with and distance from, Chinese heritage. In the next subchapter, I will continue to discuss how time in the landscapes created by Tan revisits the Daoist conception of time. I will continue to analyze how time in Tan's rendering of landscape shows this returning movement as her narrative moves between different forms of time in landscape—time in cinematic and calligraphic storytelling.

3.2.2.b Landscapes in Saving Fish from Drowning *and* The Bonesetter's Daughter*: blurred boundaries between forms of time*

The fluidity of time is, the most characteristic feature of Tan's landscapes as it also is in the dialogue between her mother and daughter figures, as most critics remarked. In this section, I will continue to analyze this fluidity of time in Tan's

[1] WHEELWRIGHT, Philip. *Metaphor & Reality*. Indiana University Press, 1962, pp. 129-130.

written landscapes because it will illuminate Tan's ambivalence towards the past: both her resistance and her resilience towards it. Haunted by the Chinese past, she continually strives to get rid of it. Whereas in the receding pages, the historicized landscapes in her novels will were considered—enabling us to catch a glimpse on Tan's process of historical revision in the way she writes her landscapes—the following pages will show Tan's way of translating the relationship between past and present in her landscapes.

Tan displays the fluidity of time in the scene where the tribal people escape from the Myanmar troops in *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005). Tan adopts both a cinematic storytelling technique to show the juxtaposition of the past and the present through montage; and a mode of narrating time that melts times in space. This particular mode appears in the middle and late Tang landscape poems (762-907). The narrative "I"'s inability to grasp the fluidity of time in the flight scene parallels her incomprehension of the painful memories of the escape. In this light, a "truthful" or "authentic" return to one's origin—Tan's return to the method of narrating time in landscape in Chinese landscape poems re-contextualized in specific local and temporal conditions.

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Ruth is guided by her grandmother Bao Bomu to write novels. This co-writing in the narrow place of the Cubbyhole illuminates a complex play between space and time: an infinite passage of time occurs in the very limited space of the Cubbyhole. From the pages that Ruth and Bao Bomu write together, changes happen in the orders of the past, the present and the future, and also in the events associated with them. These changes are governed by some kind of coherence, not the effect of confusion, they are governed by *changli* principle (coherence 常理), this interplay between changes or coherence (*changli*) can also be seen at work in Chinese landscape paintings and gardens. The past, the present and the future that mingle in Ruth's and Bao Bomu's co-writing reflects Tan's own understanding of time: the past is always already embodied in the present. Attaching great importance to the present, the co-writers (be they grandmother and granddaughter fictional figures or author and maternal grandmother's ghost) can

alter the past. Tan keeps returning to the Chinese past despite her attempt to break from it. Her departing from and returning to the Chinese past does not contradict each other but rather make up Tan's identity as a Chinese American writer. This departing and returning from the past opens up space for Tan to create her own stories of China.

The following paragraph from *Saving Fish from Drowning* describes a scene where the tribal people are escaping from the Myanmar troops. The posthumous character Bibi Chen's ability to enter others' minds[1] in this particular episode, enables her to access the old lady's mind. Tan makes use of a cinematic storytelling technique that highlights the visual aspects of the scene. Time flows between the past and the present seamlessly:

> I saw our whole village moving down the river as one, and I had a vision—or maybe it was a memory—it was everyone in the threshing field on the first day of harvest, which wasn't so long ago and was also coming up soon. In that field, we thrashed as well, moving through waves of ripened grass. We moved as one, for we were the field, we were the grass, that's how I remembered it.[2]

This cinematic storytelling shows the fluidity of time in this flight scene. Cinematic storytelling means that one will use non-verbal means and techniques to represent characters and plot.[3] It is narrative combining fiction and imagination with cinematic techniques. In order to narrate stories cinematically, one should be at once a storyteller and a "stroyvisualizer." Scriptwriter Jennifer Van Sijll argues in her monograph *Cinematic Storytelling* (2005) that the gaps between the technical side of filmmaking (camera, lighting, screen direction and music, *etc*.) and the story side should be bridged together to narrate stories cinematically. I discern cinematic techniques such as the alternation of point-of-view movement and montage in tan's passage. Tan's portrayal of the tribe's fleeing renders the past event with a sense of immediacy. The villagers thrashing in the river echoes their thrashing together in the

[1] This is strangely not without reminding one of Tan's own angle from which she wishes to see the world. As her "avatar" character Bibi Chen says: "I had found more and more often, with the proper attitude, the Mind of Others — and a bit of eavesdropping on private conversations — many truths are knowable (TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 270)."
[2] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 279.
[3] VAN SIJLL, Jennifer. *Cinematic Storytelling*. Michael Wiese Productions, 2005.

field. As if in a film montage, Tan combines the events that happened at different times and presents them side by side.[1] The old lady serves as the camera through which the readers get a glimpse of the tribe's past fleeing. The old lady is portrayed as not able to tell the difference between a vision and a memory at the very beginning of this quoted passage—an impossibility she shares with cameras. This confusion increases the disorder of time and space. The montage of the past and the present thrashings of the villagers in the field and in the river together add to the overall instability of the account, while the mixture of vision and memory hinder the readers' accessibility to the story. The fleeing scene is therefore four times removed from the readers. Bibi claims to enter into the mind of the old lady, though there is no way this can be proved. The camera shots move from a long shot ("the whole village moving down the river as one") to a close up ("we thrashed as well, moving through waves of ripened grass"). The alteration from the long shot to the close-up drives the reader from acting as an isolated on-looker to one immersed in the narrative.

In the seamless transformation from old lady to young maiden, time exists in a timeless fluidity. Indeed, the old lady continues to recount the fleeing scene where her old sisters become young again:

> With these bright veils, my old sisters wore young faces again, like the first time we wore our singing shawls. It was for an old-old elder's funeral. We walked 'round and 'round the body, pretending to mourn, and shook the shawl fringes to sound the bells. And the young men went 'round and 'round the other way, to catch our smiles and count how many they caught. How glad we were that the old-old elder finally had the good sense to die.
>
> And quick as that, the years swam by, and there we were in the crazy water, over fifty years old, the age of our dead elder. And the young men were now running along the banks in their ugly green uniforms. We saw them tip the noses of their rifles at us. Why were they doing that? And each nose made a little sneeze, like this, up and down, up and down, but no sounds. No crack, no hiss, just one watery veil turning red, then the other, and me wondering, Why no sounds? No boof-boof.[2]

The changes in the old sisters' faces are conveyed in a close-up shot with their detailed facial features, expressions and bodily movements. Time is compressed in a

[1] In comparing her fictional writing and film shooting, Tan writes that "In fiction, I can revise ad nauseam, tossing out countless pages at a time, as well as the expensive locations that come with them" (TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir. Ecco*, 2017, p. 178).
[2] Amy TAN. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 280.

contrast between the energetic young girls and boys and the lying dead of the "old-old elder." In the second passage, the narrative pulls us back to the scene where the young maidens transform into old ladies who swim for their life. The young men at the funeral turn into the soldiers who shoot at the old ladies. This abrupt change from the past to the present is redolent of one mode of narrating time in the middle and late Tang Chinese landscape poems (762-907): synchronic time, the multiple temporal orders converging in one scene, is displayed, instead of the linear and progressive diachronic time. In the poem "The Pavilion of the Prince of Teng (滕王阁子)" by the Tang poet Du Fu (杜甫 712-770), we see that the time in the written landscape shifts from the present sceneries that are stretching before the poet's eyes to the past sceneries that were remembered by the poets:

> A melancholy stillness, road through spring mountains,
> The prince travels here no more.
> Old walls still in bamboo's colors,
> In the empty tower there is naturally the sound of pines.
> Sparrows, twilight in a tumbledown village,
> Clouds and colored wisps, mood of the passer-by.
> I still think on how he came with songs and piping,
> A thousand riders, rainbow banners in hand.[1]

The first line describes what the poet sees from the present scenery with its still and melancholy spring mountains. The second line narrates the past event where the prince once dropped by the pavilion. The third and fourth lines reproduce the realm of the empty and the bland that seems to transcend the past and the present. The fifth and sixth lines drive us back to the present scenery with sparrows and twilight. The seventh and eighth lines go back to the past when the prince came with music and was followed by a large number of people. The aim of these middle and late Tang Chinese landscape poems is to understand and accept the uncertainty in time, space

[1] The original Chinese text is "寂寞春山路，君王不复行。古墙犹竹色，虚阁自松声。 鸟雀荒村暮，云霞过客情。尚思歌吹入，千骑把霓旌。" Translated by Stephen Owen (also known as 宇文所安 *yuwen suoan*) who is an American sinologist specializing in Chinese literature, particularly Tang dynasty poetry and comparative poetics.

and life.[1] The record of the flow between the past and the present helps endow the poets' philosophical attitudes toward the change of the fate of their country as well as the infinity of the landscape and the universe.

In Tan's fleeing scene, time is described as tumultuous as in a polyphonic structure, with a rapid rhythm that melts times in space. The old ladies' veils that turn red one by one, form a great contrast with the bright veils that the young boys strove to catch. The time in the fleeing scene indeed echoes the mode of narrating time from the middle and late Tang landscape poems. But Tan focuses more on the painful memories of the narrative "I." The narrative in a hyperactive and ceaseless way. In the same way, the painful memories of the flight continue to haunt the narrative "I." The narrative "I" is not able to retell the flight from the army as an adult, which reflects an excessive pain that cannot be comprehended. Tan recontextualizes here the mode of recording time as melting in the middle and late Tang landscape poems within her female characters' painful experience. Tan's return to this past of her Chinese heritage—her borrowing of the technique of rendering time from Chinese landscape poems—is hindered by the incomprehensible that cannot be done away with. But it is this incomprehension that drives Tan to discover "more intersections with the different points of [her] life." Those constitute "a map to meaning, taking [her] to origins and back again."[2]

With her cinematic storytelling, Tan expresses the fluidity of time in her characters' engagement with landscape. This fluidity of time is also presented in the mode by which Chinese landscape painting scrolls (*shanshui huajuan* 山水画卷) are viewed: the landscape is gradually unrolled before the viewer in a manner which itself echoes the passage of time. The scrolls follow the flow of time and the storytelling process instead of being restricted by temporal and spatial constraint. The Cubbyhole, Ruth's creative space, likes constitutes a meeting point where past,

[1] The An Lushan Rebellion (安史之乱 from 755 to 763 of the middle Tang Dynasty) caused a large number of deaths, famine, and dispossessions. The literati scholars who held key positions in the court were not able to fulfil their wish of constructing the nation. This change of fate of the country bestowed sad and forlorn feelings on the poets.

[2] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 33.

present and future are unfolded by writing. The Cubbyhole is rendered as a creative space that Bao Bomu and Ruth co-occupy.[1] The paragraph below describes how Ruth is guided by her grandmother Bao Bomu to write their stories together:

> In the Cubbyhole, Ruth returns to the past. The laptop becomes a sand tray. Ruth is six years old again, the same child, her broken arm healed, her other hand holding a chopstick, ready to divine the words. Bao Bomu comes, as always, and sits next to her. Her face is smooth, as beautiful as it is in the photo. She grinds an inkstick into an inkstone of duan [...] And side by side, Ruth and her grandmother begin. Words flow. They have become the same person, six years old, sixteen, fortysix, eighty-two. 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. After all, Bao Bomu says, what is the past but what we choose to remember? They can choose not to hide it, to take what's broken, to feel the pain and know that it will heal. They know where happiness lies, not in a cave or a country, but in love and the freedom to give and take what has been there all along.[2]

The past and the present merge because Ruth and Bao Bomu "have become the same person" who travel between the past and the present without restraint. Ruth returns to become six years old again and "ready to divine the words." Bao Bomu's burnt and traumatized face mysteriously turns into a young and intact one. At that moment, Ruth's laptop changes into a sand tray waiting to be written on with a chopstick. Tan emphasizes with the phrase "as always," that when Ruth starts her literary creation, Bao Bomu would come and sit next to her, and write together with her.[3] In her 2018 interview with Jeffrey Brown's interview, Tan says that "the past then was always present in our lives."[4] Tan's novels deal with the past of herself, the

---

[1] The cubbyhole with its womb-like structures is protective. This space reminds me of Alice Walker's "our mothers' gardens" where the African American women "waited for a day when the unknow thing that was in them would be made known" (WALKER, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to The Present.* Mitchell, Angelyn, ed. Duke University Press, 1994, p. 402).

[2] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Harper Perennial, 2001, p. 338.

[3] Tan recounts this matrilineal connection with her own grandmother too: "But the truth is, there had been many times when I wondered if my grandmother was in the room. The writing changed. The stories came out effortlessly. I could see the scene clearly. My imagination was fuller. I understood more" (TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir.* Ecco, 2017, p. 139).

[4] BROWN, Jeffrey. "How Amy Tan's Family Stories Made Her A Storyteller." *PBS News Hour*, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-amy-tans-family-stories-made-her-a-storyteller. Accessed on August 28 2021.

past of her family and the past of China. Tan says in the same interview that "all these things from the past, they somehow rise up when you let go and say it's fiction."[1] The process of "letting go" defines how Tan's writer's mind work. Tan's writer's mind "[keeps] reverting to what had happened to [her] in childhood."[2] Tan writes in *Where the Past Begins* (2017) that what strives to capture the "mythic past [she] grew up with and broke from before returning to it as a writer."[3] For Tan, returning to the past is her way of connecting to what has made her as her today's self:

> When I'm writing, what often happens is—are strange coincidences [sic] and then I think, these are the clues. It's like a little thing I have to follow, and I keep following more coincidences. I'm on the right track.[4]

When writing novels, Tan, like Ruth, is guided by the ghosts, they together produce "stories […] that are but should not have been," "[stories] about what could have been, what still might be," and "[stories of] a past that can be changed."[5] Ruth can be interpreted as an "author surrogate." Indeed, to me, Ruth can be interpreted as representative of Tan's literary intentions and philosophical understandings because on the one hand, Ruth is Tan's middle name; but more importantly, here, Ruth's views on the intermingling of the past and the present bespeaks that of Tan's own understandings of time. In her writings, Tan accepts the Confucian view on the interrelationship between the past and the present, which is still very relevant to the Chinese nowadays.

Tan's various version(s) of the Chinese landscapes juxtapose, shift and alternate as the time flows between the past, the present and the future that is experienced by Ruth and Bao Bomu in their co-writing. For Tan as a writer, Chinese landscapes can be categorized as the realm of *xu* (absent, empty, the unreal, or non-being 虚) for

---

[1] BROWN, Jeffrey. "How Amy Tan's Family Stories Made Her A Storyteller." *PBS News Hour,* https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-amy-tans-family-stories-made-her-a-storyteller. Accessed on August 28, 2021.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 21.
[4] BROWN, Jeffrey. "How Amy Tan's Family Stories Made Her A Storyteller." *PBS News Hour,* https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-amy-tans-family-stories-made-her-a-storyteller. Accessed on August 28, 2021.
[5] TAN, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Harper Perennial, 2001, p. 338.

they have lost their concrete forms because of geographical distance. But the absent and unreal Chinese landscapes become present and real and thus belong to *shi* (present, full, the real or being 实) in Tan's imagination and representation when the words that flow are recorded on paper. These concrete words, in turn, become empty and open to both readers' interpretations and Tan, the writer's accumulating (mis)/(re)understandings of China and the Chinese past. In other words, Tan's writings denote a returning movement that departs from *xu* and comes back to *xu*. The same interplay between *xu* and *shi* [1] resides in Ruth's and Bao Bomu's calligraphic/literary creation: an interplay between the unceasing transition of time and readers'/viewers' changing interpretations of the same signs on paper as *xu;* and the fixed signs/words on paper as *shi* that are produced by Bao Bomu's ink on the sand tray that is metamorphosed from Ruth's laptop.

However, the many versions of Tan's China, like the flowing time in Ruth's and Bao Bomu's co-writing scene, also converge on the xuan-paper (*xuanzhi* 宣纸) or the printed books (or the laptop screen). However, all those unaccountable changes are regulated by the internal coherence of *changli* (an internal coherence 常理). Song philosopher Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200) defines *changli* as the pre-set, eternal order of the universe that is unchanging and prior to beings. The multiplicity of the myriad things in nature is the manifestation of the same *changli*.[2] Tan's many versions of China likewise converge in her constant returning to the past. The past draws her and confuses her. She struggles with the past but it all comes to good order when her novels are written, in her novel writing, when the many versions of China appears,

[1] The etymological meaning of Chinese landscape painting (painting of the mountain and water 山水画 or painting of wind and view 风景画) indicates the interdependence between *xu* (water or wind that are flowing) and *shi* (mountain or view that is relative fixed). *Xu* gives rise to *shi* and *shi* transforms into *xu*. If we take Chinese landscape gardens (中国园林) as an example, the small paths, windows, pavilions with their twists and turns, transform the spatiality into temporality and integrate *xu* and *shi*.

[2] Tang Junyi, a representative scholar in neo-Confucianism (唐君毅 1909-1978), summarizes this idea as "the inseparability of the one and the many, of continuity and (*yiduo bufen* 一多不分)" and elaborates it as a view unifying opposite forces into the cyclical movement of the myriad things that return to the undifferentiated *Dao* such as being/non-being, activity/non-activity; life/death.

manifesting her understanding of the Confucian teachings that attach great importance to the present as well as her adoption of Neo-Confucian belief in *changli* that integrates and governs contradictory forces. As an irresistible force in her work, the returning to the past does not limit Tan's writerly creation. On the contrary, this returning to the past, opens more possibilities just as the limited space of the Cubbyhole enables the witnessing of the infinite passage of time. As Ruth better understands Bao Bomu's past, those gain emotional resonance through their co-writing in the present; and they also gain the capacity to change the future through this writing together.

The analysis of Tan's representation of time in her Chinese landscapes offers us an effective perspective to understand her contradictory feelings towards China and the Chinese past. China and the Chinese past have always been complicated presence for Tan: she resists their influence, but they continue to impact her identity as a Chinese American writer. A sense of disorientation is highlighted in Tan's metaleptic landscape that denotes the impossibility of one's returning to the origin. With the help of a cinematic storytelling mode, Tan re-contextualizes the synchronic time of the middle and later Tang landscape poems by focusing on the narrative "I"'s incomprehension. In her mythical landscape recounting the allegorical fight between the peasants and the birds, Tan offers us an image of time that is either stuck in one particular moment or being shortened and prolonged. In so doing, she undermines the idea of the cyclical time that is manifested in *xing*, a writing device to evoke landscape in Chinese landscape poems.

The play between time, landscape and the Chinese past makes up a site for Tan's rebellion. But undeniably, the Chinese past is what has shaped Tan and cannot but remain part of who she is. Just as *xu* and *shi* (the empty that remains open to the viewers'/readers' interpretations and the signs/words fixed on paper in Tan's calligraphic/literary landscape) converge in calligraphic and literary landscapes, Tan's many versions of China and the Chinese past will converge in "emotions, personal idiosyncrasies, or memories that appear when the flood subsides."[1]Tan's

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 26.

interpretations and representations of the time in landscape derive from, detour from and return to the Chinese philosophical understanding and literary recording of time: time as cyclical in *xing* and Daoism, attachment to the present in Confucianism, synchronic times in middle and later Tang poems, interplay between *xu* (虚) and *shi* (实) in landscape paintings. Tan's representation of time in her landscapes involves not only the pastness of the past, the long-cherished Chinese views on time, but also involves the presentness of the past, her undermining and revisiting of these views. I discern this very same trajectory diachronically in the translation of Chinese landscapes in Tan's novels: her landscapes depart from the difficulty of translation because of the differences between Chinese and American landscape traditions as well as generational differences; they go far away from any essential origin due to the fluidity of both landscape and memory; and finally, they come back to the departing point because after all, despite the differences and distances, the common language for us is emotion.

3.3 Translation in Tan's Landscapes

As seen in the previous chapter, *Dao De Jing* points out that the points that the cyclical development of the four seasons (*sishi* 四时) gives rise to the new birth of life. Modifications occur from winter to spring when the cold is reversed and tends towards the warm. The blossoming of flowers and trees in springtime is not entirely a new birth; rather it is the sign of consistent continuation and reproduction. Chapter 5 of *Dao De Jing* states that the empty space between Heaven and Earth guarantees the inexhaustibility of *Dao*.[1] What is empty has the potential to embrace all space just as silence has the capacity to encompass all kinds of sound. In other words, what is empty cannot be emptied. Chinese landscape paintings consistently attempt to capture this emptiness, which is believed to effectively show the "spirit consonance engendering a sense of life (气韵生动 *Qiyun shengdong*)."

Returning to *Dao* is a means of achieving this empty space of limitless potential. Laozi states in *Dao De Jing*:

> The change of the empty is never ending, which is called the mysterious motherhood that originates the myriad things in heaven and earth. The door of the mysterious motherhood is the root of heaven and earth. It is continuous and everlasting, and its effects are endless.[2]

Translation, according to Jullien's interpretation of the *Yijing*, means that one develops and deploys "a threshold between the outside and the inside that effectively allows entry."[3] Moreover, when one leaves the familiar behind, one gains the

[1] Chapter 6 of *Dao De Jing* writes the chain of reproduction as inexhaustible: "The space between heaven and earth, Isn't it just like the bellow box! Even though empty but not exhausted. The more you pump the more will come out" (This is my translation for the lack of what I deem an appropriate translation.)

[2] This is my translation for the lack of what I deem an appropriate translation.

[3] Jullien writes that "in order to translate, it is necessary to help another possibility get through, and not to hurry this transition; not to step over the difficulty, not to mask it, but, on the contrary, to unfold it. Because to translate is not to land flatly from one side or the other any more than it is to dream of a metalanguage, beyond the two, that would integrate and reconcile them; it is, rather, to develop and deploy a threshold between the outside and the inside that effectively allows entry" (JULLIEN, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 112).

capacity to view the familiar in a fresh light, just as for Jullien, a knowledge of Chinese philosophy offers the possibility of re-reading the Western philosophical tradition in new and inspiring ways. If we read Tan's writing of the landscapes as an act of "translation," then Tan inevitably returns to the original foundation from which new possibility will emanate. This "translation" refers to a translation from the Chinese landscapes in the mother figures' memories into the ones in their talk-stories, which are then translated into written text by the daughter figures. It also refers to the mother figures' translation of American landscapes from the Chinese philosophical, artistic, and literary paradigm; and *vice versa*, the daughter figures' translation of Chinese landscapes from the Western artistic and literary paradigm. Due to her characters' multiple layers of remove from both the Chinese land and the values and beliefs inherent in Chinese land, Tan's translation of Chinese landscapes is, more often than not, a mistranslation. Tan produces these misinterpretations by commenting on, exaggerating, and rewriting the Chinese landscapes in either her female characters' (re)visiting of China; or in their imagination or revision of Chinese landscapes in the talk-stories, myths and folklores. Chinese landscapes in Tan's novels are always already in a process of under-and-over statement, embellishment and paraphrase. However, this (mis)translation is not a loss but becomes a re-translation, an opportunity for new reflexivity, just like the creativity that the return to *Dao* generates. Chineseness, in Tan's translations, opens up a new space to be reflected upon.

China, for Tan, is a "lost land." The fact that it is "lost" means that this land is "lacking ontological stability and lost in constant recollection." [1] Her "China experiences"—in the words of critic Yuan Yuan—are presented as narratives in the forms of talk-stories, myths and folklores that are in tension with American values and beliefs. Tan's "China narratives" entail an absence of origin, which creates a space for Chinese landscapes to be "translated into a cultural repository for reproduction."[2] Tan enacts the presence of China by translating many Chinas, which

[1] YUAN, Yuan. "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan." *Critique: studies in contemporary fiction*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1999, p. 295.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

are manifested in her characters' short trips to China, in their dreams of China; in the reincarnation of another life time, in the interpretation of *shanshui hua* (landscape painting) and *shanshui shi* (landscape poems), as well as in their practice of calligraphy. These many Chinas are translated from knowledge obtained by Tan from her mother's retelling of her own recollected versions of Chinas in memory, which are equally subjective, unreliable, personal and polysemic. The difficulty and impossibility of translation is clearly summarized by the American-born character June when she explains "We translated each other's meanings and I [Jingmei] seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother [Suyuan] heard more."[1] Therefore, Tan's translation of China as a "lost land" composes a space of the empty that is pregnant with new life. In her misreading, rewriting and destabilizing, China is represented as an invigorating presence. I will focus on the untranslated and mutual misunderstanding of landscape between the mother and daughter figures from *The Joy Luck Club*. This untranslated and mutual misunderstanding denote her characters' hindered access to the entirety of the cultures in which they are involved. This hindered access in turn bespeaks the ungraspable in Tan's female characters' access to Chineseness as well as Americanness. Her female characters show their complex attachment to China as their spiritual home because of its illusory nature. It is an illusory home that keeps haunting them.

3.3.1 Difficulty of Translation—Tensions

3.3.1.a The untranslated between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures

In her first essay collection *The Opposite of Fate* (2001), Tan writes that the "Englishes" in her story writing are greatly influenced by her mother's use of the language:

> I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 37.

> "simple"; the English she used with me […] what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests could never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.[1]

In Tan's novels, the Chinese-born mother figures' "Englishes" make up an individualistic landscape with particular punctuation, lumpiness, omissions and something untranslatable. There, for clarity's sake, we can nevertheless translate this "untranslatable" as the mother figures' attachment to homeland and the daughter figures' misunderstanding due to their incapacity to grasp the mothers' language. Here I term their "Englishes" as their "individualistic landscape" because it preserves the imagery and rhythm of the Chinese-born characters' native language, Chinese in our case. The representation of the mother figures' "Englishes" also imparts their own way of seeing, sensing and engaging with their surroundings. In Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club*, the untranslated recurs in the mother figures' "Englishes." For example, when the mother figure Anmei comments on her daughter Rose's life as *hulihudu*, Rose is unable to find an appropriate word in English to replace it. Rose "suppose[s] the closest in meaning would be 'confused' and 'dark fog' [which] mean much more than that."[2] Following the definition offered of the term in *The Empire Writes Back* (1995), "the untranslated"[3] indicates a gap that opens between the English-speaking readership and the Chinese American female characters. More importantly, the gap also shows the complex relationship between Tan's interpretation of the Chinese language as a Chinese American writer; and that of Chineseness as both manifested and deflected in this linguistic dimension. Even though "the untranslated" as a concept will be used here because it is interesting in many ways that we will see, it is nevertheless problematic as a term. Indeed, since Tan's text is there, on the pages, indubitably written, we cannot really claim it as

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 279.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 188.
[3] The "untranslated" refers to "untranslated words, the sounds and the textures of the language [that] can be held to have the power and presence of the culture they signify—to be metaphoric in their 'inference of identity and totality'" (ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003, p. 51).

"untranslated." Yet I have chosen this term because I have discovered something ungraspable in Tan's landscapes: the "untranslated" that continues to reside in Tan's text shows itself in the gaps between Tan's description and representation of the landscapes and that of her female characters' cultural experience of them. The "untranslated" is part of the process of reading and translation themselves. The untranslated translated into this dissertation, refers to Tan's presentation of the Chinese-born mother figures' transposition from Chinese, which is not a direct transcription but denotes a rhythmic fidelity with her the mother figures' native dialects. The untranslated will also refer to the American-born daughter figures' "illiteracy" regarding the Chinese language, especially in its written form. Through this untranslated which she nevertheless attempts to translate, Tan displays the fact that access to both the Chinese language and Chinese land is indefinitely deferred and displaced. The untranslated—where the elements in her characters' language landscape "crumble, shift, dissolve and coalesce in strange combinations"[1]—is liberating for Tan's literary creation.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the Chinese-born mother figure Suyuan's talk-stories of the Kweilin landscapes are re-accounted in Chinese and then translated into English by her daughter. This is how the Kweilin landscapes appear in Suyuan's dreams before her visit of the city:

> I dreamed about Kweilin before I ever saw it," my mother began, speaking Chinese. "I dreamed of jagged peaks lining a curving river, with magic moss greening the banks. At the tops of these peaks were white mists. And if you could float down this river and eat the moss for food, you would be strong enough to climb the peak. If you slipped, you would only fall into a bed of soft moss and laugh
>
> […] "Can you see this? And at the root of the hill were secret caves. Inside grew hanging rock gardens in the shapes and colors of cabbage, winter melons, turnips, and onions. These were things so strange and beautiful you can't ever imagine them.[2]

Suyuan's pidgin English with its grammatical mistakes is (un)translated into correct and fluent English in her talk-stories about the Kweilin landscapes. It is

[1] ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003, p. 49.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 21.

translated in a literal sense from pidgin English into impeccable English. It is also untranslated conceptually because there always remains something incomprehensible in the text. The "untranslated" here is manifested by the unreal that is pervasive in the passage: the Kweilin landscapes are visions imagined in Suyuan's dreams, which are then narrated by Tan in the subjunctive mood. Suyuan's descriptions of her vision in the dreams are beyond the wildest imagination of June, which adds to the "untranslated." Instead of exhibiting the communicative inability of Chinese mothers, the translated English of Tan's writing demonstrates the artistic complexity of herself as a daughter. The translated English renders a utopian, poetic and mythical Chinese landscape that is triply removed from June: June is firstly distanced from geographical China; secondly, she is confused by Suyuan's unstable memories and unceasing revisions of Chinese landscapes; and thirdly, her understandings of her mother's China stories are impeded by her own (mis)translation of the oral story narrated in Chinese. Critic Yuan Yuan contends that the mother figures' evoked Chinese language aims to claim authority over the daughters' lives and to shape their identity.[1] With the untranslated in the text, Tan also revises her own way of seeing and making sense of the Chinese language. Cutter points out that Tan's second-generation female characters face "irresolvable translation dilemmas": Chinese culture and language appear to be "foreign" and "other," a space where the untranslatable always resides.[2] The evoked Chinese of the mother figures loses ground and authority as Tan's English develops itself, chosen and impeccable. I rather think that the American-born daughter figures translation dilemmas open up a space, a possibility or a potential for Chinese culture and language to be retranslated. Chineseness gets complicated in the linguistic aspects of this open-ended space.

In the preceding excerpt, it is not the elements of the Kweilin land and river but a mysterious and fantastic atmosphere that is being described. In order to do so, Tan

[1] YUAN, Yuan. "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1999, p. 295.
[2] CUTTER, Martha J. "An Impossible Necessity: Translation and the Recreation of Linguistic and Cultural Identities in Contemporary Chinese American Literature." *Criticism*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1997, p. 582.

adopts language that is rich in visual description referring to "jagged peaks," "curving river," "white mists," and "green mossed bank." In *The Opposite of Fate*, Tan defines this kind of language as "vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery."[1] The Chinese language indeed is ideographic, its "peculiar material" passing from the seen to the unseen as diagrammatical images suggest "immaterial relations."[2] In Tan's texts, it is difficult to see this point, but nevertheless, I do see it manifested in her novels. The jagged peaks (山) and their surrounding white mists (雾), the curving river (河), and the green banks (岸) with their magic moss (苔藓) show us a paradigmatic Chinese landscape scroll from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644):

Kuang Lu Tu (匡庐图) by the Ming painter Tang Yin's (唐寅 1470-1524)

The painting is composed of the earthly (rocks and a few staggered branches of ancient pine trees) in the foreground; the supernatural in the middleground (white clouds along the mountain with a blue water rippling at the foot of the mountain);

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 273.
[2] Fenollosa asks: "how could the Chinese have built up a great intellectual fabric from mere picture writing? To the ordinary western mind, which believes that thought is concerned with logical categories and which rather condemns the faculty of direct imagination, this feat seems quite impossible. Yet the Chinese language with its peculiar material has passed over from the seen to the unseen by exactly the same process which all ancient races employed. The process is metaphor, the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations" (FENOLLOSA, Ernest. "From The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry", *Symposium of the Whole*. University of California Press, 2016, p. 30).

and the cosmic in the background (a row of precipitous peaks). The landscape captured in Tang Yin's painting reappears in the Kweilin landscape of Suyuan's dreams. In her dreams, the earthly emerges from the "magic moss greening the banks," the supernatural arises from the "curving rivers," and the cosmic comes forth from the peaks with white mists. These elements convey a sense that mountains and waters progress by and of themselves. That is to say, they evolve according to their own rhythms, disregarding Suyuan's imagination of them or June's incapacity to envision them. A distance comes into being from this spontaneous development of landscape, which in turn causes the untranslated as well as the untranslatable. Despite Suyuan's use of various colors and shapes to form a strong impressionistic picture of the Kweilin landscapes in June's mind, June is unable summon up a clear picture of Kweilin, as Suyuan's insistent question "Can you see this?" underlines. The untranslated is also present in Tan's ambiguous use of the narrative "you." "You" in the passage may refer to an older version of Suyuan back in China who is talking to another version of herself in contemporary America; or Suyuan may be addressing June, or else communicating directly with Tan's readers.

What adds to the impact of the untranslated in Tan's text is that the Kweilin landscapes in Suyuan's dreams or memories are continuously depicted with the use of exaggeration: the Kweilin landscapes are constructed as a sorrow-free and magical world. At the end of the passage, Suyuan comments that her stories about the Kweilin landscape in her dreams are "so strange and beautiful" that June cannot even reproduce them in her brain. Even as Tan preserves the emotional core, imageries, sounds and rhythms of the mother figures' Chinese in her translations of the mother figures' talk-stories into English, it is the untranslated which continues to haunt. China, embedded in the untranslated elements of the mother figures' Chinese language, resists the grasp of the American-born daughter figures, just as it is likewise removed from Tan in multiple ways. However, viewed from the other side of the story, for Chinese American writers such as Tan, it is difficult to find any aspects of Chineseness that have not already been displaced in their readings, interpretations and representations of China. Translation, then, is one way to formulate a sense of "home," just as Salman Rushdie says of his activity as a writer

that it [was] his own land.[1] The untranslated indicates that Tan's unceasing search for a mode of translation as a medium to approach China as her "lost land" will always be deferred.

Narrated from the perspective of the young American-born figure Rose, the next two paragraphs also from *The Joy Luck Club* describe a little Chinese book that warns against the twenty-six dangers that children are confronted with. Rose is confused by her mother Anmei's obsession with preventing dangers because she is unable to read the Chinese characters on the book cover:

> My mother had a superstition, in fact, that children were predisposed to certain dangers on certain days, all depending on their Chinese birthdate. It was explained in a little Chinese book called The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates. There, on each page, was an illustration of some terrible danger that awaited young innocent children. In the corners was a description written in Chinese, and since I couldn't read the characters, I could only see what the picture meant.
>
> The same little boy appeared in each picture: climbing a broken tree limb, standing by a falling gate, slipping in a wooden tub, being carried away by a snapping dog, fleeing from a bolt of lightning. And in each of these pictures stood a man who looked as if he were wearing a lizard costume. He had a big crease in his forehead, or maybe it was actually that he had two round horns. In one picture, the lizard man was standing on a curved bridge, laughing as he watched the little boy falling forward over the bridge rail, his slippered feet already in the air.[2]

For Rose then, the little book written in Chinese is the untranslated. Rose tries to understand the various meanings conveyed in the book by "reading" the image on the book cover. But even images are ungraspable because they are open to interpretation. Rose has no access to knowledge that is delivered in written Chinese. But she gains no more knowledge from the image on the cover. This hindered access indeed reflects the difficulty of second-generation Chinese Americans to connect directly with Chineseness. However, I will read this hinderance as a porous space for Rose. Rose interprets the untranslated written Chinese with the help of the image on the cover and it is this image that in turn becomes the basis for Tan's literary re-creation. The cover of the little book which features a wicked man silently witnessing the fall of an innocent boy off a cliff forms a parallel with the scene where Rose

[1] RUSHDIE, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Random House, 2012, p. 49.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 124.

witnesses Bing's drowning but is unable to move and take any action to try and save him. For Rose, the wicked man reflects her own psychological darkness: she is, to some extent, fascinated by Bing's drowning. The repetitious appearances of the same little boy and the evil man in the little book haunt Rose. This recurrence is evocative of the second-generation Chinese American characters' daily struggles with the untranslated, which is manifested as the untranslated in Chinese words, one example of the many layers of the untranslated encountered by her characters.

In addition, the untranslated in the written Chinese words of the little book also reveals Tan's intention to fashion a complex voice from the Chinese mother figures. Ruptures occur between Rose's inability to read the written Chinese words on the book cover; and her mother's paranoid hypersensitivity to the dangers that are warned of. The mother figures' oversensitive, somewhat frenetic use of written Chinese indicate their displacement in America and the difficulty of cultural translation. The attachment to the written Chinese is Anmei's way to maintain her conceptualizations of China as "home," albeit an illusionary and lost home. The following paragraph describes the confusion that haunts Anmei:

> It would have been enough to think that even one of these dangers could befall a child. And even though the birthdates corresponded to only one danger, my mother worried about them all. This was because she couldn't figure out how the Chinese dates, based on the lunar calendar, translated into American dates. So by taking them all into account, she had absolute faith she could prevent every one of them.[1]

Chinese culture, manifested here in the lunar calendars remains strange to Anmei because unconnected with the American world. She cannot translate—and it is this which will lead to disaster. Anmei's misread and misplaced excessive worries about Rose's security seal the tragic fate of her son Bing who drowns, dying of mistranslation. Tan's rewritings of her grandmother's and mother's stories into English reveal the linguistic and cultural traces of the Chinese. At the same time, her rewritings inevitably resist their mother tongues and neglect some emotional truths. Tan's translation of traditional oral talk-stories into the written texts deepens the

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 124.

complexity of Asian American experiences. In its turn, this complexity also helps enrich the narrative modes of Asian American literature.

3.3.1.b Mutual mistranslation between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures

Mistranslation in Tan's novels will be considered here as mutual misunderstandings in the ways of seeing and conceiving landscape between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures. Tan's mistranslations illuminate the position of the Chinese American characters who are located in a kind of split: they are geographically removed from China while they are likewise psychologically alienated from America. Critic Sau-ling Wong argues that Tan's cultural mistranslation "enables Orientalism to emerge in a form palatable to middle-class American readers of the 1980s."[1] Tan's landscapes indeed reproduce what middle-class American readers of the 1980s imagined as China, its reiterated clichés. So the readers found there something at once familiar and exotic. We can think, for example of the filthy courtyard in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. I will compare the mother and daughter figures' mutual misreadings of the same landscape in Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Whereas from the fourth novel on (*The Bonesetter's Daughter* 2001) something has changed in the image given of China, the mistranslations in *The Joy Luck Club* fix the stereotypical images of an Orientalist China while catering to the middle-class readers. However, for me, mistranslation is not as a medium to represent the otherness of the Chinese American community or to demonstrate the rupture of communication between Chinese and American cultures. Rather, Chineseness is fragmented due to the American-born female characters' difficulty of interpretation of the sings they see. This misapprehension in embodied in their way of apprehending landscape as they look at it directly. Mistranslation occurs then in the American-born daughter figures' construction of

[1] The misuse of "sugar sister" for "cousin" in The Joy Luck Club stands as one prominent example of mistranslation. WONG, Sau-ling Cynthia. ""Sugar Sisterhood": Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *Amy Tan*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 55.

the Chinese landscapes as familiarly exotic and different. The mistranslation going on in some of Tan's novels is a three-fold process wherein the Chinese-born mother figures also misconceive American landscapes and Chinese landscapes too.

The following paragraphs are excerpts from the Chinese-born mother figure Yingying's interior monologue in *The Joy Luck Club*. She judges the structure and decoration of her daughter's house:

> What good does it do to draw fancy buildings and then live in one that is useless? My daughter has money, but everything in her house is for looking, not even for good-looking. Look at this end table. It is heavy white marble on skinny black legs. A person must always think not to put a heavy bag on this table or it will break. The only thing that can sit on the table is a tall black vase. The vase is like a spider leg, so thin only one flower can be put in. If you shake the table, the vase and flower will fall down.
>
> All around this house I see the signs. My daughter looks but does not see. This is a house that will break into pieces. How do I know? I have always known a thing before it happens.[1]

Yingying underlines the vanity of the American lifestyle as epitomized in the useless yet costly table in the guestroom. Yingying judges that the thin legs of the table can only bear the weight of a very tiny vase with only one flower in it. Her sarcastic tone intensifies when she compares the legs of the vase to spiders' legs. The scathing comparison of the table reveals the difficulty for Yingying to understand the motivation behind building a flimsy and useless table like this. In stark contrast, back in China, Yingying lived in a very big house with very heavy, stable tables in it: "We had many rooms, each filled with big, heavy tables. On each table was a jade jar sealed airtight with a jade lid." [2]

Yingying's *mistranslation* of the décor of her daughter's house cannot be simply viewed as evidence of cultural difference. When digging deeper, this misreading is caused by a complicated attachment to home for Yingying: Yingying has lost all physical contact with China as her homeland. She deals with her displacement in America by unquestioningly clinging to traditional Chinese beliefs—the aesthetic ones in the aesthetics that see beauty in effectiveness of house building and

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 243.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

decoration for instance. The house, as discussed in Part Two of this dissertation, is a miniature universe that is translated as *yuzhou* (宇宙) in Chinese. The four directions and the top and bottom of the universe are *yu* (宇). That which goes away from us as the past and that which comes to us as the present are *zhou* (宙). *Dao* is pervasive in *yuzhou* and nobody knows its exact position, limitation or border.[1] Therefore, on the one hand, the construction of one's house, as a temporal and spatial combination, should allow *Qi* to flow, as the path should be open for free movement of the past and the present. On the other hand, correlatively, the construction of the house should be stable and steady. The correlation of the fixity and the flexibility within one's house as a miniature universe would therefore be respected. But in Tan's rendering, Lena's house lacks the stable elements that are indispensable. Because of this, Yingying is not able to understand what surrounds her. For Yingying, her daughter's house is not home. However, her mistranslation also becomes a fruitful site to understand Chineseness in the tension between the Chinese-born characters' fidelity to the Chinese conception of the house as a miniature universe (*yuzhou* 宇宙) and their daily confusion regarding the American house and the lifestyle it fosters. Misreadings and mistranslations can be seen as fruitful since they un-fix a monolithic idea of home. It reminds us that Chineseness should always be conceived in the tension between the one and the other. Something entirely new, beyond the one and the other, will then emerge in this creative split.

The misinterpretation or misunderstanding of landscapes also occurs among the American-born daughter figures. In the episode "Rules of the Game' from *The Joy Luck Club*, the American-born Waverley has been taught by her mother Lindo to take advantage of the invisible power of the wind, and to take advantage of the auspicious southerly wind. Waverley uses her mother's teachings to beat her opponents and win the national chess championship. In the following paragraphs, Waverley recounts how she evolves into becoming a chess champion:

[1] The original text in French is "« Ce qui s'en va comme passé - ce qui s'en vient comme présent (ou : « le passé qui s'en va » - « le présent qui s'en vient ») est ce qu'on appelle zhou (n) ; les quatre directions et le haut et le bas sont ce qu'on appelle yu . Le tao se trouve au travers, mais personne ne sait où »" (JULLIEN, François. *Du «Temps»*. Grasset, 2001, p. 47). My translation.

> As I began to play, the boy disappeared, the color ran out of the room, and I saw only my white pieces and his black ones waiting on the other side. A light wind began blowing past my ears. It whispered secrets only I could hear.
>
> "Blow from the South," it murmured. "The wind leaves no trail." I saw a clear path, the traps to avoid. The crowd rustled. "Shhh! Shhh!" said the corners of the room. The wind blew stronger. "Throw sand from the East to distract him." The knight came forward ready for the sacrifice. The wind hissed, louder and louder. "Blow, blow, blow. He cannot see. He is blind now. Make him lean away from the wind so he is easier to knock down."
>
> "Check," I said, as the wind roared with laughter. The wind died down to little puffs, my own breath.[1]

Lindo teaches Waverley "the art of invisible strength"[2] where one is invited to follow the movement and transformation of the invisible power of the wind. When playing chess, Waverley's body and mind become one with the movement of the wind. The elements in her surroundings including the audience, her mother and her opponent all disappear. Waverley is able to let the natural flow of the wind go through her body. When Waverley respects the moving patterns of this invisible strength, she is able to swing the situation silently to her advantage and remains undefeated.[3] The power of the wind, or invisible power, instructs Waverley to have foresight to see the endgame before the game even starts, that is to grasp the whole picture of the weaknesses and strengths of her opponents.

For Ronald Emerick, the wind represents Lindo's manipulation of Waverley's thinking and behavior.[4] I will instead read this wind as one half of the correlative pair translated as "wind and light" (*fengguang* 风光) in Chinese language. In his monograph *Living off Landscape* (2018), Jullien understands landscape as an interplay of "wind" and "light" where the wind denotes the invisibility of passage

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 96-97.
[2] Tan makes Waverley explain: "Wise guy, he not go against wind. In Chinese we say, Come from South, blow with wind—poom!—North will follow. Strongest wind cannot be seen" (*Ibid.*, p. 89).
[3] Jullien explains this silent transformation as "The strategist transforms the relation of forces in such a way as to cause it to swing silently to his advantage within duration: combat will then no sooner have begun than the adversary will fall of his own accord, unable to resist and already defeated" (JULLIEN, François. *The Silent Transformations*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. Seagull Books, 2011, p. 8).
[4] EMERICK, Ronald. "The Role of Mah Jong in Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club"." *CEA Critic*, vol. 61, no. 3, 1999, pp. 41-42.

and penetration, and the light of the sun signifies the diffusion of visibility.[1] We can only feel the wind without seeing it. The wind conveys "indefinitely in its course, but we observe only its effects."[2] Chinese beliefs in the power of the wind have a great influence on Waverley. These influences are externalized as her victory which is gained from her proper handling of the wind. Chineseness, to Waverley is, like the wind, is ambient and pervasive but remains unnoticed by her until she observes its effects—the victory in the chess games.

Jullien continues to explain the relationship between "wind and light" and landscape. He argues that landscape indicates "wind-light" either as vibrant, mild, and harmonious which preserves its previous ambient tonality.[3] Chapter "Yan Yu (言语)" of *Shishuo Xinyu* (*A New Account of the Tales of the World* 世说新语), compiled and edited by Liu Yiqing (刘义庆 403–444)) describes this contradictory moment wherein wind and light remain the same while the mountains and waters have changed:

> Every lovely day' gentlemen gather in the countryside, stretch out on the grass, and feast. One of them suddenly sighs: 'The wind-light is no different [from when we were up north] but if we raise our eyes, the mountains and the waters are other.' 'And all looked at one another and let their tears flow."[4]

The countryside displays the same scenery to the eyes of the group of gentlemen. But with the development and evolving of society and replacements of dynasties, the landscape (mountains and waters) has entirely altered. Jullien explains that, to these gentlemen, "landscape […] had the same intensity, but its physical and even political consistency had shifted."[5] In Waverley's increasing desire for and fear of victory, the power of the wind, as the transforming physical and political background in the term "wind and light (*fengguang* 风光)," transmutes as a burden to be got rid of. It is her "Chineseness" that she wants to get rid of. Waverley's attitude toward the

[1] JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 46.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 48. The original text is "过江诸人，每至美日，辄相邀新亭，藉卉饮宴。周侯坐而叹曰：“风景不殊，正自有山河之异！”皆相视流泪。"
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

tactical use of the wind is not a mistranslation of her mother's teachings of the traditional Chinese beliefs and values at the beginning. They are a translation, a carrying over of values of beliefs from another place. The mistranslation starts from Waverley's own awakening. The following paragraph depicts Waverley's flight thus:

> I fled down an alley, past dark curtained shops and merchants washing the grime off their windows. I sped into the sunlight, into a large street crowded with tourists examining trinkets and souvenirs. I ducked into another dark alley, down another street, up another alley. I ran until it hurt and I realized I had nowhere to go, that I was not running from anything. The alleys contained no escape routes.[1]

Sau-ling Wong contends that despite the fact that some of Tan's narrative strategies in *The Joy Luck Club* excessively exhibit the drawbacks of unreserved assimilationism, Chinatown in her literary representation prominently shows a picture of a Chinatown thriving as spectacle.[2] I instead read Waverley's escape at the end of this episode as a gesture that undercuts the imagery of Chinatown as spectacle. On the contrary, Tan gives a picture of Chinatown as a landscape full of life and vitality. The series of verbs (flee, speed, duck, run) that indicate quick motion, construe an intimate Chinatown. It is described with an air of homeliness: it is where Waverley was born and raised, and she is perfectly familiar with its labyrinthine space. Through the depiction of Waverley's evolutions in Chinatown's alleys, with the passing of time from sunlight to total darkness (as in the rotation of the four seasons in the Chinese construction of the time), the streetscape of Chinatown becomes relevant to the character's life, strategy and project. Waverley's unceasing running conveys Chinatown as a presence that is full of the overabundance of life.[3]

The result of the escape, though, is perplexing because it turns out that Waverley has no place to go and the alleys in Chinatown have no escape routes. This sense of the combination of one's attempt to flee and the futility of escape, to me, represents the ongoing process of the mistranslation of Chinese values and beliefs in Tan's novels. Tan chooses to render Waverley's running in Chinatown, which is not fully

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 99-100.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 253.
[3] ROSE, Mitch. "Landscape and Labyrinths", *Geoforum*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2002, p. 460.

Chinese yet is still judged by Chinese standards, as a lens to illustrate what the Chinese heritage means to her. This gesture reveals that Tan's writings about Chinese landscape, values and beliefs, just like the animated Chinatown landscape which serves as a perception-with-the world and a prison, too, for Tan's characters,[1] are a continuous mistranslation. This mistranslation, in its part, allows the horizons of Tan's literary construction of China to be extended, offering the possibility of burgeoning imagination.[2]

China, as a lost country to both Tan and her Chinese American female characters, is removed in the untranslated and in the process of mistranslation. The untranslated and mistranslation have been read by other critics as a cultural barrier between the Chinese-born mother figures and the American-born daughter figures. However, by analyzing several episodes from Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club*, I read that it is the untranslated and mistranslation that enable Tan to expand the horizons of her literary construction. Tan's translation of the Chinese language and values into English bespeaks a textual journey from one context into another. Her (mis)translation means an opportunity for writers to narrate "what cannot be transferred across linguistic boundaries," of "what is missed out, or altered, or distorted." [3] Chineseness becomes enriched with what is missed out, altered, distorted. The next subchapter will discuss how this complication of Chineseness gets deepened in Tan's characters' impossibility of retrieving Chinese landscapes from memories. Chineseness equally becomes more complex in the characters' impossibility of interpreting Chinese landscapes through their (re)imagination and (re)creation. But it is precisely due to this impossibility of translation that various versions of China emerge from her characters' fragmented perspectives and varied narratives.

---

[1] WYLIE, John. *Landscape: Key Ideas in Geography*. Routledge, 2007. p. 176.

[2] I am inspired by the text "Worlds exist by means of languages, their horizons extending as far as the processes of neologism, innovation, tropes, and imaginative usage generally will allow the horizons of the language itself to be extended" (Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003, p. 43).

[3] BASSNETT, Susan. "Postcolonial Translations." Chew, Shirley, and David Richards, eds. *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 79.

3.3.2 Impossibility of Translation — Transformation

The tensions between the mother and daughter figures' understandings of Chinese landscape, beliefs and values bring about the untranslated and mistranslation in Tan's novels. Chinese landscapes compose a contested site for her Chinese-born female characters: this contested site is their spiritual belonging and fragmented nostalgia,[1] their affinity with heritage and the perpetual re-inscription of their identity. A certain Chineseness is reproduced, revised and recreated by the Chinese mother figures due to the geo-cultural gap which is both ossified and made volatile in their elusive memories of China. As for the American-born female characters, Chineseness, epitomized by their interpretations of landscapes, customs, objects, rituals and thinking patterns, is doubly removed from the so-called origin. They find their origin always already deformed by their physical distance and by talk-stories. The female characters' narratives of Chinese landscapes in Tan's novels are not only a translation of the Chinese land but also a translation of them through Western codes, be it in the Chinese-born characters' memory or their talk-stories. The Chinese land remains distanced from Tan's Chinese American characters, which is what promotes the land to the status of landscape.[2] This inherent distance engenders an impossibility of translation that is provoked not only by the characters' multiple displacements but also by the fluidity of the Chinese landscapes themselves.

Memory is an important motif in Tan's novels. In her second essay collection *Where the Past Begins* (2017) Tan writes that she attempts to represent the "sensation of truth steeped in memory" that is constantly "slipping away while being retrieved

[1] Walder writes that "Nostalgia is usually thought of in terms of longing and desire—for a lost home, place, and/or time. But it is also more than that: it is a longing for an experience—subjective in the first place, and yet, far from limited to the individual" (WALDER, Dennis. *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*. Routledge, 2010, p. 4).

[2] Jullien writes that "We cannot on principle permit ourselves the slightest acquaintance with it [landscape] or even hope to bring the perceptual near, for there must be some remove; there must be some distance between us and it. For there to be landscape something inaccessible, a beyond, must subsist" (JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 42).

by the similarly elusive language."[1] Memory and landscape mutually influence each other in Tan's novels. The past is externalized in landscape as a site of memory while this site of memory becomes internalized through individual engagement and encounter.[2] Lasting memory needs vivid imagination and unconscious stimuli, which are enhanced by the materiality of landscape as sites of memory. In other words, material landscapes promote the memory to be experienced in "practical, sensual, and unconscious ways."[3] Lacking physical contact with the Chinese land, the female characters in Tan's novels engage in repetitious reconstruction of the same landscapes. Over the years that span *The Joy Luck Club*, Suyuan keeps telling her daughter June "the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine."[4] These different endings, as Romagnolo argues, exhibit "a compulsion to recover the defining moment of one's identity at the same time her tale refutes the possibility of such a recovery."[5] The characters' failed attempt to retrieve the lost self or to rebuild a connection with Chinese landscapes and traditions in turn illustrates the unreliability of memory and the elusiveness of reality.

3.3.2.a Unreliability of memory and landscape

In Tan's second novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the motif of the pavilion recurs several times. The open-sided pavilion is important in Chinese landscape gardens. Pavilions are supported by a few pillars which broaden the horizons in four directions, as illustrated in the photo below:

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 40.
[2] BENDER, Barbara, and Margot Winer, eds. *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place.* Berg, 2001, p. 340.
[3] DUNCAN, Nancy, and JAMES Duncan. "Doing Landscape Interpretation." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, 2010, p. 242.
[4] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 21.
[5] ROMAGNOLO, Catherine. "Narrative Beginnings in Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club": A Feminist Study." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2003, p. 101.

"Wuzhu Secluded Pavilion (梧竹幽居亭)" in Hangzhou, China. Baidu Baike.[1]

We can see from the photo that the pavilion is transitional in both spatial and temporal senses: when one sits in the pavilion for a relatively long duration, one witnesses the flowing/passage of time that is manifested by the changes of the surrounding landscapes. The pavilion therefore constitutes an interspace between the outside and the inside and between time and space. Jullien explains the term "interspace" as that which "opens between the high (of the mountain) and the low (of the water)—between the immobile and the shifting, the opaque and the transparent, the manifest and the rustling—that landscape deploys." [2] By sitting quietly and motionlessly in the pavilion, one becomes familiar with and begins to grasp one's surroundings. This comprehension of the world outside in turn mirrors the vicissitudes of the history of the universe. For example, the Song poet Su Shi (苏轼 1037-1101) writes in the poem "Thirty Songs from the Garden Pond of the Yangchuan River with Wen Hanxu Pavilion (和文与可洋川园池三十首涵虚亭)" that:

> The pavilion beside water and that beside flower compete for beauty, and the autumn moon and the spring breeze are each on their own.
>
> Only this pavilion has nothing, but by sitting and watching, all the scenery comes into eyes. [3]

[1] https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%A2%A7%E7%AB%B9%E5%B9%BD%E5%B1%85%E4%BA%AD/6808889. Accessed on Feb 19, 2021.

[2] JULLIEN, François. *Living Off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 89.

[3] My translation based on the original Chinese text: 水轩花榭两争妍，秋月春风各自偏。惟有此亭无一物，坐观万景得天全。

There is something like an exchange of energy between what/who is inside the pavilion and what/who is outside it. The pavilion is the site of this exchange. The time and space converge as one there. This convergence rewinds back to the principle of the "world without the self (*wuwo* 无我)" as one of the most essential precepts dealing with the between man and nature in Chinese philosophy, discussed in Part One.[1] For the Chinese-born character Winnie, the pavilion becomes a site to remember her mother who went mysteriously missing during her girlhood when she first moved to live with her uncle on a small island. The pavilion encountered in her early womanhood reminds her of the memories of her girlhood. The memory of the past (time) and surroundings (space) meet in the pavilion.

However, Tan renders the landscape in the Chinese-born character's memory unreliable. The following paragraphs are Winnie's talk-stories to her American-born daughter Pearl. They describe a scene where Winnie and Hulan sit in the pavilion in the early period of her marriage. Winnie feels nostalgia and melancholy for the fleeting of her girlhood. Tan highlights this longing and a sense of regret by focusing on the vague and hazy sky that impedes Winnie's vision of the hills in the distance. The pavilion from which Winnie and Hulan view the faraway hills and city through the blurry boundaries of inside and outside, composes an interspace—a spot where the flowing of time, figured by the rain, encapsulates Winnie's complex emotions toward the landscape and the loss of her carefree girlhood:

> We would walk quickly up the pathway behind the monastery, up three terraces of steps, until we had reached the little outdoor pavilion sitting atop a mound; with the wet green hills in back, the lake below, and the festering city beyond that. And in that tiny heaven we would watch the world being washed down, until we could no longer see the city or the hills, only the soft gray curtain of rain surrounding us completely.
>
> This pavilion reminded me of the greenhouse on the island. It made me homesick—although not for the house where Uncle, Old Aunt, and New Aunt lived. I was longing to be back at that place where I had hidden myself, where I pretended to be lost, where I imagined somebody would find me.[2]

[1] The "world without the self" in the notion of "world (*Jingjie* 境界)," is proposed by the Chinese poet Wang Guowei (王国维 1877–1927). It means an ideal realm where the objects and surroundings of the world and the subject/the self disappear and melt as one.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, p. 181.

Winnie's narrative invites readers to imagine walking up to the pavilion, past the monastery, the terraces, the green hills and the lake beneath. She is silently doing needlework with Hulan in the pavilion as she observes and listens to the transformations of her surroundings. Here, Tan reproduces the classical surroundings of the Chinese pavilion through which the Chinese poet is able to reach a bigger picture of a profound sense of history and life. In his monograph *Outline of the History of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics*, Ye Lang (叶朗), a contemporary Chinese scholar specializing in art and aesthetics, summarizes the aesthetic value of the pavilion thus:

> As the aesthetic value of the pavilion, platform, building, the pavilion is to expand the space, the composition of the poetic realm [*jingjie* 境界], so that visitors break through the finite, leading to infinity. And this in turn will invite visitors to enter the evolving circle of universe, history, and life. [Therefore, the pavilion possesses complex and deep] philosophical feeling and understanding [in Chinese philosophy and aesthetics].[1]

However, what is interesting about Tan's descriptions is that the sense of history and life do not lead to a sense of the infinite but are rather diminished, reduced to Winnie's lament of the imperceptible and irreversible passage of time as well as to her regret of the loss of her girlhood. Winnie holds ambivalent feelings toward the greenhouse: on the one hand, the greenhouse denotes her estrangement from the world because this is where she hides and pretends to be lost. On the other hand, she longs to connect with the world because she imagines that somebody might find her. The pavilion and the greenhouse in Winnie's memory therefore become impossible to translate for both herself and her American-born daughter figure Pearl. Chineseness, as embodied in this interspace of the pavilion in turn becomes impossible to access on account of Winnie's ambivalent attitudes toward it. Winnie finds it impossible to fully retrieve the memories associated with the greenhouse, neither the literal greenhouse of her girlhood nor the moment in her early marriage when she visits the pavilion which reminds her of her former "secret sanctuary," nor

[1] YE, Lang. *Outline of the History of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics*. Shanghai People's Press, 1985, p. 445 / 叶朗。《中国美学史大纲》，上海人民出版社，1985 年，第 445 页。 My translation.

in her talk-stories told to her daughter Pearl when she is geographically and temporally severed from her childhood home back in China.

With humor, Tan traces the history of the greenhouse. It reveals, ironically, the greenhouse stemmed from her uncle's intention to imitate the English gentleman rather than to achieve a profound connection with Chinese history and aesthetics is interspace between self and surroundings:

> When he first came to the island, Uncle had added the greenhouse to the south side of New West, the side facing the sun. It looked like a drawer pulled out, left out. He used to boast that this was what English gentlemen did for a "hobby"—grow roses, grow orchids, grow luxuries that had no lasting value. He always called it "hobby," just like the English, no Chinese word for doing something only to waste time, waste money. I don't know why he thought this was good, to imitate what foreigners did, as if everything Western were good, everything Chinese not so good. Every year, Uncle found a new hobby.[1]

As we have just seen, in Chinese aesthetics and landscape gardens, the pavilion transforms a kind of spatial consciousness into a temporal awareness. With its broadened horizontal dimensions, visitors are able to walk at their leisure through an uninterrupted procession of varied and intricate terraces and pavilions that epitomize the ease and comfort of life.[2] But for Winnie's uncle, the greenhouse aims to imitate the lifestyle of an English gentleman. A sarcastic effect is achieved when Winnie points out that her uncle's hobby would change every year. Tan uses the same strategy to give a fuller picture of Eastern culture including the Buddhist idea of suffering and detachment as well as the more negative aspects of their full and blind acceptance and encompassing of the Western culture. In her fifth novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), Tan offers us a picture of a frenzied desire to learn English as a language and the pride one Myanmar family takes in watching cricket as English gentlemen do. This uncritical embracing of Western culture reaches a climax when it is said of the grand father figure that "By the evidence of his last words, he died of English joy."[3]

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Harper and Collins, 1991, pp. 115-116.
[2] LI, Zehou. *Mei de Licheng*. Wenwu chubanshe, 1981, p. 63. / 李泽厚，《美的历程》。文物出版社，1981 年，第 63 页。The translation is from *The Path of Beauty : A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*. Translated by Gong Lizeng. Morning Glory Publisher, 1988, p. 63.
[3] TAN, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, p. 173.

Likewise, in the above passage which gives us Winnie's account of the history of her uncle's love for hobbies, Tan does not only emphasize an East-West distinction in Winnie's critical observation that "everything Western were good, everything Chinese not so good." More importantly, the aim is to display further aspects of China and the Chinese which would counter the Orientalist image of China as retrogressive and immune to outside development. In addition to showing a more complex and fuller image of China, I also read Winnie's inability to find a Chinese word for her uncle's hobby, which Winnie views as a squandering imitation, as a reflection of the obstacles that her translation inevitably encounters. The hindrance of translation happens when the barriers that separate/distance English cultures and customs from people like Winnie herself and her uncle who have had a Chinese upbringing appear and then can be opened.[1]

Likewise, for Winnie, as a Chinese American living in contemporary America, the access to Chineseness, epitomized by the interspace in the pavilion (or the greenhouse as its variant) is blocked as we can see in her attempt to translate it, not to mention to integrate it, with her new living environment in the United States. In his article "Memory and the Ethnic Self," critic Xu Ben elaborates the need and what seems to me, also the impossibility of translation for the Chinese person who is uprooted from the land of their birth:

> Only when a Chinese person is uprooted from his or her own culture and transplanted into an alien one does he or she become aware of the fluidity, proteanness, and insecurity of his or her self. It is not until then that he or she feels the need to define himself or herself by a reference group, or even deliberately manages a certain image or presentation of self using the symbolism of survival.[2]

The need of a "reference group" or of a "certain image or presentation of one's self" precisely indicates a lack of stable elements for people like Tan's Chinese

[1] This hindrance of translation is indeed an obstacle. Still, it is also an authorization of inclusion, just as Edward Said interprets authority and its molestations inherent in the fictional process for both novelists and their characters are always already exposed to illusion and disillusionment in comparison to reality. However, this is the "enabling relationship that most fiction itself renders" (SAID, Edward. "Beginnings: Intention and Method." *The Novel as Beginning Intention*. Columbia University Press, [1975] 1985, p. 83).

[2] XU, Ben. "Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Melus*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1994, p. 9.

American female characters to hold on to, be it a constructed new language, image, narrative or symbolism. The indeterminacy of the meanings of the pavilion and its variant greenhouse gives rise to the impossibility of Winnie's attempt to translate Chinese landscapes. But viewed from another perspective, this mixture of duration, memory, and Winnie's consciousness of its transformative nature brings the possibility of a new actualization. Indeed, something virtual, an expansiveness and an opening[1] are inherent in Winnie's translation. In Tan's fiction, then, the different interpretations of both the pavilion and the greenhouse are caused by an enabling lack of stability in the landscape's meaning as well as of an absence of integrity of the Chinese landscapes in the Chinese-born mother figures' memories.

The polysemic meanings of the greenhouse reflect the unreliability of Chineseness, especially the ones that are imagined and fabricated when Tan's characters lose their physical contact with the homeland. It is only after reading all her novels, essay collections, interviews, public speeches and even the texts in social media such as on Twitter and Facebook that a full understanding of the polyvocality of Tan's portrayed Chinese landscapes can be achieved. My readings of Tan's novels have revealed a gradual progression from a merely political apprehension of ethnicity in her novels into a broader appreciation of its literary value as a reflection on the elusive quest for Chinese identity. My understanding of the impossibility for Chinese-born mother figures' to translate their Chinese landscapes in their memory into their American living environment adds to the gradual unveiling of Amy Tan as a writer of the complexity of (American) Chineseness.

3.3.2.b Flux of identity and the changing landscape

As discussed above, for the Chinese-born mother figures, an impossibility of translation emerges from the interspace that is opened up in their memory of the

[1] Andrew Parker writes that "Time is a mode of stretching, protraction, which provides the very conditions of becoming, however haltering they may be. Time is the hiccoughing that expands itself, encompassing past and present into a kind of simultaneity" (PARKER, Andrew, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Performativity and Performance*. Routledge, 2013, p. 48).

pavilion and the greenhouse. It comes from both from the unreliability of memory on the characters' part and is expressed by the distance Tan imposes by her humor and sarcasm. We will now direct our attention to Tan's American-born characters who encounter Chinese landscapes as palpable rather than as the constructed ones in the talk-stories. The same unreliability of memory and narration can be discerned in these characters' actual encounters with Chinese landscapes. The same landscapes seen by such-and-such a character change with time—for example in *The Joy Luck Club* the Kweilin landscape changes from a dream place to a place of atrocity during the bombings of the Japanese army—and for this reason they will be called fluid. These fluid landscapes make up an unfixed space that reflects their fluid belonging. When visiting China for the first time, the American-born character Olivia from *The Hundred Secret Senses* is caught up in situations of profound cultural and historical disjuncture. Olivia's experience of the Chinese landscape in Changmian is fragmentary, nuanced, and elusive.

The Chinese-born characters in Tan's fiction seem to be haunted by a sense of loss and a desire to reclaim China as their homeland. They have been obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost.[1] China for the Chinese-born characters in Tan's novels has the same status as the broken mirrors which are evoked in Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*. For the characters, China is irretrievably lost as a whole, just like India is for him. The American-born characters face a much more "fragmented mirror" than their mothers do—an inadequacy to capture what China or Chinese land is and means to them. The difficulty that the American-born characters experience is compounded by both their increased familiarity with the Chinese-born characters' talk-stories and by their own knowledge of Western literature that has informed their views of the world. They encounter a moment of fragmentation of identity as they get increasingly aware of the constructedness, temporality, and hence, the fragility of their sense of self.[2] For the American-born characters, this uncertain moment, figured by the in-betweenness

[1] RUSHDIE, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. Granta Books, 1991, pp. 9–11.
[2] WALDER, Dennis. *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*. Routledge, 2010, p. 34.

of landscape, increases the impossibility of their translation of the Chinese land they have visited—an impossibility which is also full of new possibilities.

The following paragraphs from *The Hundred Secret Senses* display the American-born character Olivia's encounter with the stone walls in Changmian village. Olivia's attempt to integrate the stone walls into the Western landscape paradigm is hindered three times:

> I'm looking at the walls along the ridge. Unlike the mud-brick ones in the village, these are made out of huge blocks of cut stone. I imagine the laborers from long ago hauling them into place. How many died of exhaustion? Were their bodies used as mortar, the way workers' bodies were when the Great Wall was built? In fact, this looks like a miniature version of the Great Wall. But why is it here? Was it also built as a barrier during the days of warlords and Mongolian invaders? As I step through the archway, the pulse in my neck pounds. My head begins to float. I stop in the middle of the tunnel and put my hand on the wall. The tunnel is about five feet long and five feet high, tomblike. I imagine ghostly warring troops waiting for us on the other side.
>
> What I see instead is a small, flat valley, a rain-soaked pasture on one side, a sectioned field on the other, with the pathway we are on continuing straight down the middle like a flat brown ribbon. Flanking both sides of the valley are dozens of loaf-shaped mountains much smaller than the two peaks ahead of us. It would be the perfect setting for a pastoral romance, if not for the fact that I can't get the faces of those scared children out of my mind. Simon is already walking down the hill.[1]

In her first essay collection *The Opposite of Fate* (2001), Tan states that she is obsessed with the morbid imagination which has been gleaned from her childhood of terrors.[2] Olivia, who can be read as Tan's fictional double,[3] also hypothesizes that the tunnel is the gateway to death. But Olivia's supposition that the stone walls are morbid with "ghostly troops waiting on the other side" falls to pieces upon her ensuing entry into a pleasant valley. Olivia's interpretation of the landscape as frightening is destabilized by her readings of the valley as a "perfect setting for a

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 261.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, p. 261.
[3] What I have read out of Olivia's experience of Chinese landscapes reflects what Tan as a Chinese American writer will face in her attempt to translate what she sees, understands and experiences of the Chinese land into her fiction. For instance, Tan shares the same artistic dilemma with Olivia, who as a photographer, often finds herself in a situation that on the one hand she fears that she might intensify the Orientalist image of China in her Western readership; while on the other hand, her efforts to grasp the Chinese landscapes are always already delayed and deferred.

pastoral romance." Tan depicts the valley as gentle in color and shape ("flat brown ribbon") which gives readers an impression of stumbling into a fairy-tale land. The blurring boundaries between fairy-tale and reality are manifested by the vague and rain-soaked pasture. The loaf-shaped mountains convey to us feelings of the beautiful instead of the sublime which is manifested in the two peaks ahead. The color, shape, height, and blurry boundaries together create an atmosphere of a romantic valley. However, this interpretation comes across another turn: Olivia cannot get out of her mind the shock and fear on the faces of a group of children who they encountered at the entrance of the tunnel.[1]

In the same essay collection, *The Opposite of Fate*, Tan writes about the inspirations for her writing: one is the encouragement she received from her grandmother to find her own voice; the other is her trip to Guilin in March 1993 at her own expense with an actor and her photographer friend.[2] In the next excerpts from *The Hundred Secret Senses*, certain elements of the landscape come from Tan's trip such as the stone walls, the valley and the archway.[3] The novel does not record Tan's own trip, though. Instead, Tan gives us a story as seen through a distorted lens with multiple perspectives. The renderings of the Changmian landscape can be seen

[1] Tan writes that "They [the group of children] don't budge, only shake their heads solemnly. "We'll go together." I extend my hand to the smaller girl. She backs away and stands behind the boy, who says, "We can't." The bigger girl adds, "We're scared." The three of them huddle together even more closely, their huge eyes fixed on the archway" (TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 261).

[2] Tan records the trip as "One day, with the actor Russell Wong and my photographer friend Robert, I hired a driver and headed south. We had no charted destination, and took only impulse and lark as our directional guide" (TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life.* Penguin, 2001, p. 251).

[3] Tan records their unpremeditated trips as thus, "At the top of one hill, we found a ten-foot-high stone wall running the length of the ridge. It appeared to be some sort of medieval defense against invaders […] Stepping through an archway, we found another valley, verdant and crisscrossed by stone hedges [On the other side of the valley] The atmosphere changed immediately, to one of foreboding. Before us were rocky ruins and mountainsides pocked with caves. The skies seemed darker, and indeed, dark clouds had appeared, although we had not noticed them in the other two valleys. The land looked as if it had never been cultivated, with terrain as uneven as an unmade bed, and mossy boulders bursting from the earth. A collapsed hut of rocks in the center of the valley seemed to have been abandoned for hundreds of years. This was a wild place" (*Ibid.*, p. 253).

as a translation of what Tan as a person and a writer have witnessed, walked through and experienced during her visit to Guilin.

The experiences of the Guilin landscapes evoke more confusion than understanding and knowledge for Tan and Olivia alike. But at the same time, these puzzles call forth the obsessive nature of writing, which arises "when sens[ing] a subtle shift, a nudge to move over, and everything cracks open, the writing is freed, the language is full, resources are plentiful, ideas pour forth."[1] In this light, the impossibility of the one, not the many, breaking the possibility of getting to one true image of China releases the possibility of seeing the many.

The following paragraphs depict Olivia and her American husband Simon's experience on their way to find the mysterious caves, which are metamorphosed from the bodies of two dragons in her half-sister Kwan's talk-stories. Olivia and Simon come across a strange archway outside the Changmian village:

> I hurry over, and when I emerge from the archway and look down, I see a landscape that both chills and mesmerizes me, a fairy-tale place I've seen in nightmares. It is completely unlike the smooth, sunlit valley we just crossed. This is a deep and narrow ravine shaped by violent upheavals, as ry as an unmade bed, a scratchy blanket of moss with patches of light and pockets of shadows, the faded hues of a perpetual dusk.
>
> Simon's eyes are glazed with excitement. "Isn't this great?"
>
> Sprouting here and there are mounds of rocks, stacked high as men. They look like monuments, cairns, an army of petrified soldiers. Or perhaps they are the Chinese version of Lot's salty wife, pillars of human weakness, the fossilized remains of those who entered this forbidden place and dared to look back.

Olivia holds ambivalent feelings of admirations and fear toward the archway that "both chills and mesmerizes" her. In the subchapter "Landscape of Life and Death" from Part Two, I discussed how Tan renders Olivia's fears toward the doomed landscape with a lexical field that expresses the loss of order and light. Olivia's fear is interrupted by Simon's "glazing excitement" for more discoveries and adventures. In Tan's trip to Guilin, she successfully convinced her friends to leave behind a forbidden land with the same strange archways.[2] However, in the novel, Olivia and

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life.* Penguin, 2001, p. 250.
[2] Tan writes: "Russell and Robert wanted to dash down and take photos. But I begged them not to. I said I had the distinct sense that we had trespassed into a forbidden realm and that

Simon go straight to the forbidden land with its strange formations of cairns. In a simile, Olivia compares the cairns to "an army of petrified soldiers." This image strangely calls to mind a dream Tan writes she had, working on the novel.[1] One day, a puzzling image had come to her mind for no apparent reason: a dark valley filled with hundreds of spires, rocks stacked on end and at oblique angles, in ways that defied the laws of gravity. A long-haired Asian man who was stacking rocks into cairns offered an explanation: the reason why the cairns did not topple over was that with everything in the universe there was always a point of balance. You just had to find it. Tan here transplants the image that appeared in her dream into her novel. The cairns reflect the inner struggles of Olivia who has been trying to find the balance in both her personal life and in her complex attitudes toward her Chinese heritage: Olivia vacillates between a feeling of repulsion and attraction towards the talk-stories of her Chinese-born sister Kwan. Olivia's attempt to understand the cairns can be read as her metaphorical journey to find a balancing point in life and in her identity.

However, in the passage above, Olivia's attempts are hindered by her association of the group of statues in the Changmian cave with the biblical story of Lot's wife, who becomes a pillar of salt because she cannot help but look back during her family's flight. Why did Tan choose this particular episode and figure from the Old Testament? Should we say that, like Lot's wife, Tan also cannot resist the seduction of turning back? But what does she turn back to, a Chinese past or a past China? The rejection of an irresistible attraction, or both? What does Tan disobey, or rather betray, in her biblical reference here? In this sense, the grandiose, sublime, and larger-than-life statues in the cave may monumentalize Tan's guilt of betraying a Chinese past or a past China. I do not have the answers for all the questions here because Tan has been exploring these questions in her novel writing. But indeed, the statues as some solid existence reveal an undeniable call by China. The unanswerable

---

something terrible had happened in the very spot where we were standing. Words had an inhibiting effect. I emphasized the unknown consequences of trespassing. I reminded them of a news story we had read recently: A couple of tourists had been killed by bandits in a remote area of China. We turned back and twenty minutes later arrived at Bei Sa Po, just as it began to rain" (TAN, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. Penguin, 2001, pp. 253-254).

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

questions offer Tan a space to read and represent China otherwise, by going to someplace and moment that refuses her, and likewise refuses our attempts at understanding.

The Changmian landscapes in Tan's renderings, as critic E.D. Huntley argues, is "connected with, yet different from, ancestral locations in a distant homeland."[1] The impossibility of translating a unique, monolithic and unfragmented landscape is manifested in Tan's own writerly negotiations of the interspace between the Guilin landscape she actually visited for several weeks in the 1990s and the Guilin landscape she produces in her novel. The multiplicity of the one landscape shows China always in the process of remembrance, repetition, and revision.

Even for the Chinese-born character Winnie from *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Chinese landscapes, such as those represented by the pavilion and the greenhouse, are unceasingly fragmented in their memories. The talk-stories recounted by Winnie exhibit her attempt at translating and integrating the Chinese landscapes from her memories into her contemporary life in America. However, this retrieval of a homeland displays the transformative nature of the Chinese land as a place of origin. Winnie's translation of the Chinese landscape in her memories generates continuous rewritings—that is to say, various versions of the Chinese land emerge from different perspectives and within different narratives. For the American-born character Olivia from The *Hundred Secret Senses*, her visit to Changmian reveals an even more difficult task of translation. The Chinese land, for her, is fragmented in both her Chinese-born sister Kwan's talk-stories and in her own (re)imagination and (re)creation. Olivia's translation of the Changmian landscape is delivered as not unresolved and deferred but rather shown in a certain way. It is referred to rather than deferred. It is twisted by a rich cultural past of diverse fabrics and formats like those "bodies used as martyrs" used to erect the Great Wall—strange and horrible like them—but constructing something admired and solid. By her associations of Western literature, Tan visited the Guilin landscapes in the 1990s herself and recorded its caves, valleys, archways, and various mountains. These particular

[1] HUNTLEY, E. D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood Press, 1998, pp. 59-60

elements from the Guilin landscapes, form a complex relationship with the ones that are portrayed in her novel. Olivia's translation of the Changmian landscape appears as an experience in flux that is impossible to stop. This space of fluidity and flexibility composes a space from which more possibilities will be opened up for Tan's own versions of the Chinese land and stories of China. The next subchapter will discuss how Tan's characters' (mis)/(re)translation of the lost land and unwritten stories of China constitutes a transitional moment between absence and presence, which leads to new possibilities and creativity.

3.3.3 Openness of Translation — Return and New Reflectivity

Chinese landscape theory proposes to view mountains and waters as a physical manifestation of the tension-setting network between opposition and correlation. In order to record landscape, painters or the poets are supposed to be receptive to the oppositions and combinations, transitions and transformations that occur in nature. Landscape is processual: it is always already linked it to changes in time and space. *Shanshui shi* (Chinese landscape poetry 山水诗) expresses a sense of the flowing of time through descriptions of changes in space recorded through the lens of the cyclical movement from day to dusk or the rotations of the four seasons. The interface of time and space thus bespeaks the boundlessness of space and the endlessness of time. Chapter 5 of *Dao De Jing* says that the infinity of time and space guarantees the inexhaustibility of *Dao* and reveals the ultimate reality of the myriad things (*wanwu* 万物) epitomized by mountains and waters. [1] In "Li Sao (离骚)" his

[1] Laozi writes that "The change of the empty is never ending, which is called the mysterious motherhood that originates the myriad things in heaven and earth. The door of the mysterious motherhood is the root of heaven and earth. It is continuous and everlasting, and its effects are endless." I present my translation for the lack of an appropriate version of this text.

anthology *Chuci*, Qu Yuan, a Chinese poet from the Warring States Period (屈原 340-278 BC) writes:

> At dawn I loosed wheel block there by Cangwu, and by twilight I reached the Gardens of Air.
>
> I wished to bide a while by the windows of gods, but swift was the sun and it soon would be dusk.
>
> I bade sun driver Xihe to pause in her pace.[1]

The poet is traveling beyond time and space because in only one day's time, he is able to travel from two locations that are far apart: one is Cangwu, a village in the Guangxi province; the other one is the Gardens of Air, which is said to be the dwelling place of the gods, on the top of the Kunlun Mountain. As discussed before, Chinese language and philosophy depend on the concept of correlation to interpret mountains and waters which, in their turn, figure contradictory yet interacting forces such as *yin* and *yang*. I discern an absence-presence dyad in Tan's writings on Chinese landscapes. Tan attempts to conjure up the presence of the Chinese past and the Chinese land through her Chinese American female characters' engagement with various types of landscape.[2] But her descriptions of these different types of landscape paradoxically underscore the absence of China among her female characters whose severance from the Chinese language and landscape generates a feeling of dispossession, impoverishment and incompletion. More often than not, Tan's characters strive to compensate this lack through a process of imagination and (re)construction.[3] In a move that parallels the lost Chinese land, so too do Chinese stories find themselves unwritten and rewritten in Tan's fiction.

However, as Chapter 45 of *Dao De Jing* has it, the myriad things in nature tend to transform and become their opposite in the process of reversal:

> What is most perfect seems to have something missing; Yet its use is unimpaired. What is most full seems empty; Yet its use will never fail. What is most straight

[1] CUI Fuzhang and Li Daming, eds. *Collected Collations and Commentaries on the Chuci*. Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003, p. 411.

[2] These landscapes include landscapes in talk-stories, revised myths and folklores, dreams, calligraphy, landscape paintings, the Yin World (Tan's own term that means the landscape in the place where the ghost resides), landscapes in a previous re-incarnation, *etc*.

[3] BENDER, Barbara, and Margot Winer, eds. *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place.* Berg, 2001, p. 10.

> seems crooked; The greatest skill seems like clumsiness, The greatest eloquence like stuttering.[1]

For instance, the defective side within the perfect will develop and evolve to replace the perfect. Reversal (*fan* 反) is considered as the essential moving pattern of everything in the universe. This reversal also applies to the relationship between presence and absence, that is to say, absence also contains a potential to revert to the state of presence. Jullien cites the Tang poet and painter Wang Wei's (王维 699–759) argument of the painting principle in *shanshui hua* (山水画 Chinese landscape painting) as an example to illustrate this relationship between presence and absence. Wang Wei places the two terms on an equal footing in the vague "as if" mode that seems at once to embrace and exclude both. In his essay "Shanshui Jue (山水决)," Wang Wei gives a summary of his own understanding of landscape and the art of landscape painting which underscores the vital interplay of absence and presence:

> Of the pagodas whose rooftops vanish into the sky, one need not have the rooms at the base appear: it's as if there were-as if there were not; either high or low.[2]

According to Wang Wei, painters should not represent their subject in its entirety; it is what is hidden (behind the clouds for example) which actually makes the subject's presence emerge. This depiction of presence through absence enables the expression of resonance and vitality that painters strive to capture in their work, which takes reality into another, deeper dimension and gives access to the profundity of things.[3] Likewise, an absence remains at the very heart of Tan's narratives: the Chinese land appears to be enigmatic and under/misrepresented despite the American-born characters' attempt to grasp it. Indeed, in Tan's novels, the physicality of the Chinese land becomes something rhetorical that unfolds in the American-born characters' identification with it, which, more often than not, reveals itself to be just another illusion.

---

[1] WALEY, Arthur. *The Way and Its Power: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*. Grove Press, 1994, p. 198.
[2] WANG, Wei. "Shanshui Jue." Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo Hualun Leibian*. Zhonghua Shuju, 1957, p. 592.
[3] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 8-9.

However, just as Wang Wei underlines the vital role played by absence in painting, so too do I read that a rich creativity arises from Tan's characters' (mis)/(re)translation of the lost land and unwritten stories; that is to say, this gesture of translation itself already composes a transitional movement from absence to presence. Thus, Tan's descriptions of landscape also help reconstruct the Chinese land through her female characters' active and creative engagement with it. In this light, various forms of the Chinese land, be they landscapes or cityscapes, take on full presence along with the emergence of the multiple and polysemic metaphoric depictions of landscape in Tan's fiction.

The above reading of Tan's descriptions of Chinese landscape as a creative movement helps counter the criticism that Tan has betrayed her status as a Chinese American writer. For instance, Frank Chin has argued that Tan's work not only misrepresents China but also resurrects racist images of Chinese people.[1] I however would read Tan's unwritten stories about the Chinese land as undermining an ordered, fixed and static understanding of Chineseness and Chinese landscape. It is precisely because Chineseness becomes unstable in Tan's writings that it is therefore endowed with the capacity to expand in an interplay of presence of absence. As a result, the Chinese land functions as a "fragmented mirror" through which multiple and refracted realities are displayed in Tan's novels. We read an uncertain, ruptured or mythic past of China which would otherwise have remained invisible or indiscernible emerging in Tan's written landscapes.

3.3.3.a Lost land — multiple translations in the characters' revisits of China

In the episode "A Pair of Tickets" from Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the American-born daughter figure June visits China for the first time with her father. At the customs office, June's appearance, especially her outfit and her

[1] CHIN, Frank. "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of The Real and the Fake." *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, edited by Kent A. Ono, Wiley-Blackwell, 2005, pp. 133-156.

height, causes her to stand out from the crowd. This sudden isolation causes June in a moment of analepsis to think back to a previous conversation she had had with her deceased mother Suyuan where Suyuan explained how June's grandparents and her uncles had all died from a bomb attack during the Japanese invasion of China. In the paragraph below, June translates Suyuan's earlier talk-stories from their original Chinese into fluent English:

> "[The hope that her family had escaped] Cannot be," said my mother, this time almost angrily. And then her frown was washed over by a puzzled blank look, and she began to talk as if she were trying to remember where she had misplaced something. "I went back to that house. I kept looking up to where the house used to be. And it wasn't a house, just the sky. And below, underneath my feet, were four stories of burnt bricks and wood, all the life of our house. Then off to the side I saw things blown into the yard, nothing valuable. There was a bed someone used to sleep in, really just a metal frame twisted up at one corner. And a book, I don't know what kind, because every page had turned black. And I saw a teacup which was unbroken but filled with ashes. And then I found my doll, with her hands and legs broken, her hair burned off.… […] And when I married and left my family home, I gave the doll to my youngest niece, because she was like me. She cried if that doll was not with her always. Do you see? If she was in the house with that doll, her parents were there, and so everybody was there, waiting together, because that's how our family was."[1]

Tan gives a particularly "thick" depiction of the burnt house. The "thick" depiction is defined by the British archaeologist Christopher Tilley as a rich description of the human experience of landscape which makes it possible for the reader to understand the landscapes in their "nuanced diversity and complexity and enter into these experiences though their metaphorical textual mediation."[2] In the above passage, Suyuan's narrative invites June to envision the whole range of the destroyed landscape from top to bottom, from the all-encompassing whole to the single part—those smaller yet highly significant objects within the picture. First of all, the crumbled walls lying underneath Suyuan's feet are the debris of the four-storied house, a presence-in-absence which reminds Suyuan of the family life that is missing. Suyuan's narrative then takes June and Tan's readers alike around to another side of the house: here further elements and signs that indicate a loss of life are described, such as the twisted metal frame of a bed, the charred pages of books,

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 273.
[2] TILLEY, Christopher. "Phenomenological Approaches to Landscape Archaeology." *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*. 2008, p. 271.

an ash-filled teacup and a burnt doll. Tan depicts the lifeless house from various angles in its changing color, collapsing structures and missing walls. In its wrecked state, Tan renders this scene as a landscape of living, covering every possibility of that landscape's change and intensity, as discussed in Part One. This landscape of living makes Suyuan's response to the deprivation of life all the more striking.[1] What adds to the sense of loss and grief is the overwhelming presence of the color black which imbues the narrative I, thereby haunting Suyuan, her daughter June and the reader.

The graphic depiction of the burnt house draws the reader directly into the scene. However, beneath the presence emanating from the overwhelming details of the ruined house, an absence lurks. Later it is implied that the descriptions of the wrecked house are merely Suyuan's imagination, which is supported by the fact that June notices Suyuan's frown and the puzzled blank look she has when she begins to talk, "as if she were trying to remember where she had misplaced something."[2] June's father also proves this point when he remembers the last few years of his stay with Suyuan in China before immigrating to the United States:

> Of course, when she [Suyuan] found the place at 9 Weichang Lu, in the old French Concession, it was something completely different. It was the site of a factory building, recently constructed, and none of the workers knew what had become of the family whose house had burned down on that spot.[3]

We can see from June's father's reminiscence that Suyuan never gets the chance to see her ruined childhood house. When Suyuan comes back with her husband to check on it towards the end of the war, a factory has already been constructed on its site. However, the American doll at the end of the excerpt, which is a crucial clue for Suyuan to deduce her family's death in the bombing, is further removed in June's father's recollection. In this double slippage, first from the doll to the family's death, and then from the family's death to the reconstructed site as a factory, the ruined

[1] Before these descriptions of the debris of her former home, Suyuan's re-account of the family's disaster is so matter-of-factly that June almost believes that her mother goes over the grief. However, it turns out that Suyuan cannot even look at the ruined house that was filled with so much life and vitality directly.
[2] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 275.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

landscape becomes a metaphor of an elusive Chinese land that is always out of the reach of Tan's female characters' grasp.

But here the ruined landscape does not stand for the irretrievable. It does not belong to the category of loss. American historian Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between the conception of loss and that of absence in his article "Trauma, Absence and Loss." He argues that loss can be narrated and has the potential to be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future.[1] While in terms of absence, one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had.[2] For Suyuan, the ruined landscape does compose not a site of loss but of fleeting presence: it is reconfigured in her talk-stories, though with some betrayals of the truth in her account to her daughter.

Compared to the Chinese land which is translated from Suyuan's imagination into her talk-stories, the Chinese land for the American-born June, is even more complex to interpret. The following paragraphs record June's feelings when she sets foot in China for the very first time after her mother Suyuan's death. June describes her physical feelings at seeing the Chinese landscape thus:

> The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, My mother was right. I am becoming Chinese.
>
> […] And when she said this, I saw myself transforming like a werewolf, a mutant tag of DNA suddenly triggered, replicating itself insidiously into a syndrome, a cluster of telltale Chinese behaviors […][3]

For Chinese Americans living in contemporary America, Chinese land denotes both a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" and "the lived experience of a locality."[4] For June, the Chinese land is not merely experienced mythically or linguistically in Suyuan's talk-stories and myth-retellings. It is also experienced bodily during her first visit to China with her father. The beginning of the excerpt

---

[1] LACAPRA, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1999. P. 700.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 701.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, p. 267.
[4] BRAH, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Psychology Press, 1996, p. 192.

portrays June's bodily sensations upon her arrival in China: the "familiar old pain" in her bones as well as the "mutant tag of DNA" that "transforms" June into a werewolf. With hyperbole and biological metaphors, Tan emphasizes the irresistible call of China. June's physical return to the country demonstrates a Chinese expression as "*luoye guigen* (one yearns to return to home when approaching the end of life 叶落归根)." [1] As critic Helena Grice argues, China may still remain more or less a fiction, but through June's imaginative license, China obtains "unique geographical coordinates." [2] June's physical visit and the exaggerated depiction of her bodily sensations and changes expand and add on the physical, material and geographical aspects of the conception of the Chinese land as only "provisional, imagined (or remembered) worlds."[3]

The depiction of June's bodily changes extends the idea of China that is transforming itself from something that requires one's physical experience into an imaginary place. However, this expansion is immediately deconstructed in Tan's focus on the oscillation between her half-sisters' resemblance to and difference from their mother, Suyuan. In the following paragraphs towards the end of the novel, June meets her half-sisters:

> And now I see her [Suyuan] again, two of her, waving, and in one hand there is a photo, the Polaroid I sent them. As soon as I get beyond the gate, we run toward each other, all three of us embracing, all hesitations and expectations forgotten.
>
> […] I look at their faces again and I see no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go.

[1] Wang argues that "the genesis and maintenance of life [and it] is used to designate one's birth place, ancestral village, or nativity, and the source from which one derives one's personal identity…[which is] unique, sacred, and eternal" (WANG, Ling-chi. "Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States." *Daedalus*, vol. 120, no. 2, 1991, p. 182).
[2] Grice argues that China in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is a "familiarly-mediated imaginary entity which seemed to represent an unseen, unknown code of acceptable and prohibited behaviour and mysterious cultural ritual and, an at times, alien language" (GRICE, Helena. ""The Beginning is Hers": The Political and Literary Legacies of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan." *China Fictions/English Language*. Brill Rodopi, 2008, p. 45).
[3] LEE, A. Robert. *China Fictions/English Language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story*. Brill, 2008, p. 315.

> […] The flash of the Polaroid goes off and my father hands me the snapshot. My sisters and I watch quietly together, eager to see what develops.
>
> The gray-green surface changes to the bright colors of our three images, sharpening and deepening all at once. And although we don't speak, I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish.[1]

Tan critic Bella Adams argues that in this transition from blood to the photograph's formal dimension, the notion of Chineseness as some kind of ethnic essence in one's blood and bones is being questioned.[2] The fluctuation between June's biological and cultural experiences of the Chinese land continuously interrogates the issue of Chineseness. Through the description's insistence on the formal dimension (the Polaroid snapshot, images changing from gray-green to bright colors), Tan points out the inadequacy of these images as forever fixed in representing China. Tan underscores the fact the Chinese land for her Chinese American female characters will always embody a *myth* of origin, something that cannot *be*. Therefore, the originating moment or some repetition of an originating moment can only ever be discursively constructed and changing processually.[3]

The corresponding Chinese word for "origin" is "gen (roots 根)," as evoked in the expression of "luoye guigen (叶落归根)." "Luoye guigen" in *Dao De Jing*, as discussed in the first chapter of Part Three, indicates a return to the undifferentiated *Dao* that transcends spatial and temporal limits. In his monograph *The Great Image Has No Form* (2009), François Jullien explains the Chinese conception of "root" with the help of the "roots of clouds" from Chinese landscape painting. He explains how the *Qi* emanating from the valleys assembles and becomes countless forms of clouds. These various forms of clouds share the same origin: they all come from and will return to the same point of *Dao* where the *yin-yang* interplay arises and where all form-actualizations communicate with one another and associate from within.[4] June's identification with her half-sisters' resemblance to and difference from their

---

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1989, pp. 287-288.
[2] ADAMS, Bella. *Amy Tan*. Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 69.
[3] ROMAGNOLO, Catherine. "Narrative Beginnings in Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club": A Feminist Study." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2003, p. 95.
[4] JULLIEN, Francois. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 136.

mother, like the countless changes of the clouds, denotes both the fleeting moments of change as well as a shared destination to which they will return.

Admittedly, the Chinese land, for Tan herself and for her Chinese American female characters alike, is fluid and changeable. But we should not ignore the nuanced aspects of this Chinese land that also embody a relatively stable returning point where Tan's characters will return to despite their cultural and linguistic differences, as exemplified by June and her two half-sisters. Therefore, what this dissertation has termed a *lost* Chinese land does not mean a total denial of the stable and solid in Tan's female characters' attempt to grasp Chineseness. It is only that the transformative facets of Chinese landscape exist and will remain on the path of Tan's female character' departures, journeys, and detours or their losses of orientation when they approach Chineseness. For instance, the simple correlation of the characters' facial features as the "natural" mode of translation of their character is called into question, affecting our understanding of the nature of Chineseness and making any "essentialist assumptions about language in its relation to identity" problematic.[1]

3.3.3.b Unwritten stories — multiple translations in Tan's depiction of Chinese landscape

Tan's translation of the Chinese land in both the Chinese-born characters' imagination and in the American-born characters' visits to China becomes more open to irony and contradiction over time. The Chinese land becomes increasingly elusive to depict and difficult to grasp in Tan's China stories, especially the ones that are characterized with unaccountable incidents as well as myths about landscape formation in constant re-imagination and re-writing. The following paragraphs from Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) describe the American-born character Olivia's translation of a chicken-killing scene. Olivia's rendition is inflected at once by her status as a Chinese American photographer, by her inability

[1] ADAMS, Bella. *Amy Tan*. Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 147.

to fully understand Du Lili's expressions in the Chinese language, and lastly by the fear of the stereotypical opinions on China and the Chinese held by her husband, whose job is to write notes on their trip to China; but it also conveys the Chinese girl's own caricature of her culture—her self-Orientalization:

> Through the viewfinder, I see her pressing the blade against the bird's neck. She slowly saws. A thin ribbon of blood springs up. I'm as stunned as the chicken. She dangles the bird so that its neck is extended downward, and blood starts to trickle into the white bowl.
>
> […] I turn to Du Lili and ask her in Chinese [if her action is for the sake of sanitation].
>
> "Bu-bu," she replies, shaking her head with a laugh. "After I have enough blood, I usually cut off the head right away. But this time I let the chicken dance a bit."
>
> "Why?"
>
> "For you!" she says happily. "For your photos! More exciting that way, don't you agree?" Her eyebrows flick up as she waits for my thanks. I fake a smile.
>
> […] And then I can't help it, seeing that smug look on his [Simon's] face. "Not kosher in a Jewish sense," I add. "It's more of an ancient Chinese ritual, a spiritual cleansing . . . for the chicken." I return my attention to the viewfinder.
>
> […] Du Lili is now bringing in the bowl of chicken blood. It has congealed to the color and consistency of strawberry gelatin. She cuts the blood into cubes, then stirs them into the stew. As I watch the red swirls, I think of the witches of Macbeth, their faces lit by fire, with steam rising from the caldron. How did the line go? "For a charm of powerful trouble," I recite, "like a hell-broth boil and bubble."[1]

Du's killing takes shape through vision and motion, her actions are characterized by smell, touch, and taste—that is to say, Tan conveys multiple senses for her (presumably) Western readers to imagine this particular scene. Olivia seeks relief from the overwhelming scene through an act of translation: she asks Du Lili questions in Chinese. That is, in a language not her own, at a remove from her, and asking questions that concern an abstraction: "sanitation." I read Olivia's reactions to Du Lili as moving between a readerly translation and a writerly one. While readerly translation is passive, literal, and constrained, presenting translation as a reduction, rather than an expression of her experience, writerly translation is creative and imaginative, involving "active participation with the source text, an active

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, pp. 238-239.

attempt to understand its complexities."[1] Olivia firstly removes Du's act from the personal as a guarantee of the sanitary conditions and the eaters' health. But what makes her translation more complex is Du's return of this readerly translation with the explanation that she aims to conduct the killing scene with more exciting effects for the sake of Olivia's photograph by prolonging the bird's agony and introducing a gratuitous form of violence. The constructedness of photography is revealed and Olivia's own reductionist visions of Chineseness (with an embellishment or an omission of the negative aspects) are therefore ridiculed, at the same time as the myth of the purity of a Chinese essence is sarcastically debunked through Dulili's self-Orientalization.

Olivia continues to give Du Lili's actions a readerly translation in her conversation with Simon, evoking a vague expression "an ancient Chinese ritual, a spiritual cleansing." Olivia attempts to reverse Simon's stereotypical judgements about Chinese customs of eating through her deliberate adoption of nebulous words. But immediately afterwards, Olivia strives to apply the killing scene to her own life in which her readerly translation now transforms itself into a writerly one: Olivia allows her fears to be alleviated and instead she actively participates in the understanding of her Chinese heritage. However, this writerly translation is immediately destabilized in Olivia's allusions: the congealed blood of the chicken reminds her of the evil faces and actions of the witches in Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*. The congealed blood is compared to the fire-lit faces of the witches. Tan ceaselessly transitions between the image of the bowl of congealed blood to that of the stage setting where mystery is produced with steam rising from the caldron. Du's ordinary killing of chicken scene then changes into one of the most renowned scenes from a Western play. Tan has made use of many such intertextual references in a number of scenarios in *The Hundred Secret Senses* to express the complexity of Olivia's feelings toward her Chinese heritage.[2]

---

[1] BARNSTONE, Willis. *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice*. Yale University Press, 1993, p. 230.

[2] Tan also changes the most beloved scene of the Christmas play into a striking scene where the three pure and kind-hearted angels metamorphose into pigs and handicapped chickens in a courtyard.

Olivia surrenders to what cannot be transplanted or transported. She feels shocked and defenseless against what happens before her eyes despite their attempts to shield herself through writerly translation. In her own writings, Tan also faces a compromise between languages that bespeaks conflicting ways of seeing the world.[1] However, despite its difficulty and even impossibility, translation is important to Chinese American writers like Tan because translation also involves "a new work of art, something that both voices and exceeds the original text."[2]

Tan's translation of the Chinese land continues in her rewritings of myths about landscape. I read Tan's translation through myth revision, as the Chinese-born character Kwan's re-account the myth of the Changmian caves as formed by the bodies of two auspicious dragons instead of the ominous ones in the same novel, as an act of "thick translation." Kwame Anthony Appiah proposes the term "thick translation" to extend the American imagination beyond the narrow scope of the United States. The method is to seek the "annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context."[3] Tan's rewriting of myths manifests both epistemological complexity and cultural implications. In her fiction, we find no actual Chinese or American landscapes but mythical locations of the Chinese American characters in mythical landscapes. In between Chinese and American landscape systems, Tan's myth-rewritings engender a double dislocation: American values are probed through Chinese beliefs of her relationship with nature. At the same time, however, Western values are wrenched out of their familiar form to accommodate to an emerging alterity, in our case, a changing history, reality and landscape and the corresponding representation of them in Tan's fiction.[4]

---

[1] GRESS, Elsa. "The Art of Translation." *The World of Translation*. PEN American Center, 1987, p. 55.

[2] CUTTER, Martha J. "An Impossible Necessity: Translation and the Recreation of Linguistic and Cultural Identities in Contemporary Chinese American literature." *Criticism*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1997, p. 582.

[3] APPIAH, Kwame Anthony. "Thick Translation." *Callaloo*, vol. 16, no. 4, p. 817.

[4] Conard argues that Tan re-mythologized the Asian-American experience by drawing upon the old tradition and rewriting the folktales to make them more realistic and more applicable. See CONARD, Tammy S. *Creating an Asian-American Mythology: Storytelling in Amy Tan's Fiction*. Diss. Texas Tech University, 1998, pp. 46-51.

I read a gynocentric twist in her myth rewritings that aims to point to the falsity of a single version of both myth and landscape in current Western or Chinese patriarchal discourse. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the futile retrieval of Bing from Rose and Anmei reminds us of the Chinese myth where one resurrected, and a human-transformed-into-bird figure named Jingwei strives to fill up the murdering sea revengefully. In Tan's narration, the Chinese-born mother figure Anmei becomes the active heroine who exerts agency, perseverance, flexibility, and accommodation in confronting the relentless sea. After the failure of the American way of praying to God and the Chinese way of ritually sacrificing treasure to please the Dragon King, Anmei sought recourse to her perseverance and firm belief in the survival of Bing. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the abandoned wife who turns into a goddess called the Kitchen God's Wife becomes a power of resilience for the Chinese-born figure who decides to leave a painful past in China and continues to live her contemporary life in the United States optimistically and hopefully. Tan's re-mythologizing of landscape presents the vitality and creativity of storytelling and the dynamics of the past and present, which opens the possibility and scope of translation.

The following paragraphs depict Tan's revision of the myth of a mountain named "Young Girl's Wish" which is located near the Changmian village in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. The conflicting views between Kwan's and Big Ma's understandings of the myth help deflate the notion of an authentic cultural origin:

> "See that?" I hear Kwan say. "Over there." She's pointing to a cone-shaped peak off in the distance. "Just outside my village stands a sharp-headed mountain, taller than that one even. We call it Young Girl's Wish, after a slave girl who ran away to the top of it, then flew off with a phoenix who was her lover. Later, she turned into a phoenix, and together, she and her lover went to live in an immortal white pine forest."
>
> Kwan continues: "Yet all the girls in our village believed in that tale, not because they were stupid but because they wanted to hope for a better life. We thought that if we climbed to the top and made a wish, it might come true. So we raised little hatchlings and put them in cages we had woven ourselves. When the birds were ready to fly, we climbed to the top of Young Girl's Wish and let them go. The birds would then fly to where the phoenixes lived and tell them our wishes."
>
> Kwan sniffs. "Big Ma told me the peak was named Young Girl's Wish because a crazy girl climbed to the top. But when she tried to fly, she fell all the way down and lodged herself so firmly into the earth she became a boulder. Big Ma

> said that's why you can see so many boulders at the bottom of that peak—they're all the stupid girls who followed her kind of crazy thinking, wishing for hopeless things."
>
> I laugh. Kwan stares at me fiercely, as if I were Big Ma. "You can't stop young girls from wishing. No! Everyone must dream. We dream to give ourselves hope. To stop dreaming—well, that's like saying you can never change your fate. Isn't that true?"[1]

As many recent studies have argued, myth often serves an ideological function: to consolidate strict moral "standards" that reinforce and legitimate women's submissiveness. For instance, within the *Odyssey*, woman's silence is continually stressed because it is recorded in the epic that morally dubious female characters such as the sirens use their voice and feminine wiles to thwart Odysseus' journey, such as the sirens. The young girls' climbing the mountain to make a wish is fiercely denigrated by Big Ma as rebellious. Their behavior is likely to have fatal consequences as Big Ma warns. The aspiring and hopeful girls who dared overstep their prescribed limit of gender roles are criticized by Big Ma as stupid and crazy for daring to wish for something as hopeless as "fly[ing] to where the phoenixes lived and tell them our wishes." Kwan, on the other hand, re-interprets it as an emblem of female power to revolt against objectification and underestimation. This gynocentric revision reflects multiple awakenings and affiliations between the female characters. Big Ma's and Kwan's different views on the myth form a dialogue: one landscape that is intransigent in its inherence to cultural traditions and one that is localized and transformative. Tan's revision of myths concerning landscapes reconnects her characters and her readers alike with landscape and facilitates a re-discovery of the matrilineal roots among the female characters.

Kwan's telling of the mountain myth embodies some Chinese people's archaic aesthetic feelings toward certain imageries such as the phoenix and pine trees—or some Westerners caricatured ideas about the Chinese as the case may be. The imagery here reveals a primitive awe and worship of nature. Nature and animals are commonly mythologized in Chinese nativist narratives; and metamorphosis is a motif in Chinese myths that breaks the man-nature hierarchy and subject-object

[1] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 175.

boundaries.[1] The dead young girls who metamorphose into boulders at the foot of the mountain reflect the Daoist idea that man and nature share the same structure. Various body parts are capable of metamorphosing into diverse elements in the land, as demonstrated in the story of Pan Gu (盘古).[2] But in Tan's writings, an irony arises from this oneness with nature principle. For Big Ma, women turned into boulders are static and passive rather than being beings with a vibrating force to be reckoned with in their alterity, adjustment and assimilation to the Chinese land. Tan undermines this fixation, limitation, and restriction of women within landscape by reorienting our attention to the liberating force suggested in Kwan's counter-interpretations. This emancipatory power is demonstrated by the adoption of parallel stories and bird imagery—in this case, the three birds that have been raised by Kwan as a girl, and the newly released cat-eagle purchased from the bird market during Kwan's last visit to China:

> […] "Before I left for America, I raised three birds, not just one, so I could make three wishes at the top of the peak. I told myself, If these three wishes come true, my life is complete, I can die happy.
>
> She holds up the cage with the owl. "But now I have a beautiful cat-eagle that can carry with him my new wish. When he flies away, all my old sadnesses will go with him. Then both of us will be free."[3]

Images of liberation recur throughout Tan's novels. In her debut novel, Yingying's liberation comes when she transforms herself into a ghost with penetrating power to awaken her daughter Lena and to foresee things in the future. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the rising smoke of the sticks in reverence of the Kitchen God's Wife is symbolic of Winnie's liberation from her entrapment in her past

[1] Recorded in *The Huainanzi* (淮南子) by Liu An (刘安 179~-122 BC) that tells the myth of an ancient goddess Nvwa (女娲) who is said to create the humans from moulding the earth and to save people from the natural disasters by patching up the sky with the stones with five colors.
[2] The legend of Pangu (盘古) tells the story of Pangu, the first human who emerged from an enormous egg that rested in the split of the universe. Each day, Pangu's body grows and makes the universe grow. After his death, Pangu's head opens up to form the sun and the moon, his blood fills the rivers and seas, his hair becomes the fields and forests, his breath the wind, his perspiration the rain, his voice the thunder, and his fleas become our ancestors. My translation is based on the text from MA, Su. Chapter One "Wuyun Linian Ji," Yishi. / 马骕。第一章五运历年纪《绎史》。https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=626216&remap=gb. Accessed on Feb 15, 2021.
[3] TAN, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Harper Perennial, 1996, p. 175.

history in China. In the above excerpts, the release of the bird parallels Kwan's quest for freedom. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, liberation arises from the laptop/sand tray as a converging point of Bao Bomu and Ruth's calligraphic/literary collaboration. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, Bibi's emancipation is depicted through her formless posthumous body which gains the capacity to feel the others' complex human emotions despite having lost connection with her family back in China and her Chinese heritage, and remaining ignorant about the circumstances of her death. In *The Valley of Amazement*, the liberation comes from the montage moment oscillating between Violet's imaginary life in San Francisco with her mother Lucia and her actual life with her beloved ones in 1920s Shanghai.

The interplay between emplacement and liberation probes into the complex nature of identity that is always breaking its "homogenous shell"[1] with its perpetual renewal in being and becoming. The simultaneous multiplicity of translations of Chinese myths about landscape proposes to "loosen its negative strangleholds, sew new variations into its weave, and jettison those myths that cannot be satisfactorily altered."[2] Tan's myth revision opens up the established meanings of the archetypes of Chinese landscape myths. They also reconfigure the human-nature relationship and the role that gender plays in forming and representing myths concerning landscape.[3] Tan's rewritings of myths compose a site of translation that bespeaks China as a myth with unidentifiable origin, or of multiple origins. The rewriting denotes Tan's idea of China that remains to be constructed, story after story.[4]

---

[1] The term "homogeneous shell" is borrowed from Kristeva's argument that "[T]he drives that extract the body from its homogeneous shell and turn it into a space linked to the outside, they are the forces which mark out the chora in process" (KRISTEVA, Julia. "The Subject in Process," *Lack, The Tel Quel Reader*. Routledge, 1998, p. 143).

[2] SELLERS, Susan. *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2001, p. 7.

[3] Lowe writes that "As the narrator of The Woman Warrior suggests, perhaps one of the more important stories of Asian American experience is about the process of receiving, refiguring, and rewriting cultural traditions" (Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *Asian American Studies*, issue 1, 1991, p. 257).

[4] Yvonne Volkart says in the introductory talk to the next Cyberfeminist International that "Myth is a story of unidentifiable origin, or of different origins. A myth is based on one central A myth is a story of unidentifiable origin, respectively different origins. A myth is based on a central story which is being retold over and over in different variations" (SOLLFRANK,

China is lost to both the Chinese-born and the American-born female characters in Tan's debut novel. The lost land serves as obstacle to one's pursuit of origin. The idea of an essentialist origin becomes destabilized in Tan's renderings of the characters' imagination of the ruined landscapes. The origin becomes more fragmented in Tan's double focus on both the biological/bodily reactions of June and on the formal dimension of the photograph. But like the various form-actualizations of the cloud, translation of China as a lost land offers Tan more creative space from which irony emerges. Tan has argued in *Where the Past Begins* (2017) that she attaches great importance to story-telling's power to indicate her physical presence in certain settings—it is the way she enters the world. The unwritten stories of China then refer not to the characters' inability to translate what they perceive from Chinese land, but quite the opposite: the absence of physical presence provides Tan with a much more imaginative space to improvise like a Jazz musician who strays from the original tune. The space between turns out to be her creative template. She recovers the truth about herself and the way she views her Chinese heritages through an oscillation between writerly and readerly translations of the Chinese land and myth revision. Chinese myths concerning landscape are revisited in Tan's translations through the practice of retrospection where Tan is able to see China and its landscapes with fresh eyes. Tan's China stories may relate an event that has never happened but in terms of their emotional genuineness and veracity, they do happen "in the deepest of ways."[1] For after all, despite the obstacles between English and Chinese language, customs, landscape theory, myths and folklores, our primary language was, and will always be, emotion.

Cornelia. "The truth about cyberfeminism." http://archive.constantvzw.org/events/e12/nl/corsolnl.html. Accessed on Feb 15, 2021).

[1] Tan writes that "Those are the genuine emotions. The fictional mind wandered and found them. The writer can put them into a story that never happened, and yet did in the deepest of ways" (TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 101).

Conclusion

In her essay collection *Where the Past Begins* (2017) Tan writes:

> I knew what the fox knew: to see the illusion, you must become the illusion.[1]
>
> […] Fifteen years ago, I read these words: When leaving a place, don't look back. If you do, you are back to where you started. I took it as warning. But when the fox appeared, it became a choice, and since then, I have looked back every night.
>
> Tonight I go to a spot in my mind where the foot of the mountain and a river connect, senggin, a meeting place. I wait until I feel the sound pulsing in my veins. And it comes—*Pes-pas! Pes-pas!*—the sound of horses galloping softly over grass. The second vowel tightens. *Pes-pis! Pes-pis!* The hooves are hitting the hard-baked earth of the steppes. Soon we will arrive at that place where the past begins.[2]

For Tan, the past, China and the Chinese, are where the "illusion" is located. Tan constructs China and the Chinese as an *illusion* in her female characters' oscillation between their distance from, and intimacy with, Chinese landscapes. For her Chinese-born mother figures, the Chinese past becomes a specter that never stops haunting them. In their repetitious accounts of talk-stories, dreams, and revisitings, China becomes this absence-in-presence. The (re)imagined or (re)constructed Chinese landscapes in Tan's novels leave us traces for interpretation or re-creation that is an opened-up space between the presence and absence of Chinese landscapes. Following on from Jullien's definition of the Daoist idea of the bland in *In Praise of Blandness* (2004), I have come to see this absence-in-presence as offering boundless potential—the very opposite of a fixed presence that would constitute a "limitation."[3] The all-embracing porousness of absence or blandness allows for the endless play of possibility and correlation between opposing forces in these contemporary American novels which re-discover the gist of traditional Chinese philosophy.

Many different versions of Chinese landscapes, be they distorted, expanded, diminished, or de(en)coded arises from Tan's novels. Her characters' readings, or

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 325.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 326.
[3] JULLIEN, François. *In Praise of Blandness*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano, Zone Books, 2004, p. 42.

rather, misreadings or re-readings, of Chinese landscapes, make up this empty space with which to examine the interplay between the world and the self and between matter and spirit. Just as the formless clouds transform into countless shapes and patterns, which are difficult for the landscape painters to grasp, so too Chineseness becomes evasive for Tan's Chinese American female characters. Their access to Chineseness is hindered or veiled in Tan's multiple interpretations and renderings of China, the Chinese past, and Chinese landscapes.

Despite the lingering influence of China and the Chinese past on Tan's representations of China, or because of them, Tan's Chinese stories are disparaged as not authentic by some critics. It is true that some "mess[es]"[1]—the elusive and ungraspable—have and will always remain in Tan's novels. For example, Suyuan's descriptions of her ruined home in China present a "mess" of traces: there are burnt books, a damaged doll, burnt kitchen items and beds. But in spirt of all these visible/expressed traces, the presence of the home—as a synecdoche for China—is not proved. This is so because these traces only belong to Suyuan's imagination: they have no actuality, thus cannot constitute a lively site of traces. However, surprising as it may seem, a fragment of the Chinese heritage appears here. Traces (*ji* 迹), in Chinese landscape paintings, figure the space between "there is" (Being) and "there is not" (Non-being). *Watching Tides at Moonlight* (月夜观潮图) by the Song landscape painter Li Song (李嵩 1166-1243) vividly show us this space between "there is" and "there is not:"

[1] Tan says that her female characters serve as a mirror through which she can reflect upon herself, that is, on the experiences and memories that have made her what she is today. Tan writes, "My characters are witness to what I went through. In each story, we are untangling a knot in a huge matted mess. The work of undoing them one at a time is the most gratifying part of writing, but the mess will always be there" (TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 138).

Watching Tides at Moonlight. From Gallery of Chinese Treasures, a website of Chinese art works of various dynasties.

The pavilion near us is this "there is" while the haziness of the moonlight, the nebulousness of the rolling and glowing waves, as well as the diluted mountains that blur the distance between near and far makes up this "there is not." Moonlight, waves, and the distant mountains are the "traces (*ji* 迹)" of nature connected by a distant sail like a dot between the foreground and the background. A *trace* (*ji* 迹) in Chinese landscape representations denotes the opposite of the "rut-traces" that "get bogged down or stuck in their own presence."[1] The trace is at once concretely formed and elusive, like the waves and the distant mountains in the painting. China and the Chinese past, for Tan, is this tangible yet escaping force. The Chinese landscapes appearing in Tan's representations of the mother and daughter figures' conflicting ways of engagement make up that "passage" or "crossing" where her own (mis)understandings and (mis)representations of China can emerge. Tan—like the Chinese landscape painters—draws inspiration from the Chinese landscapes, which she sees in her own visits to China and gets acquainted with in second-hand sources such as books, documentaries, artworks, the talk-stories recounted during friends' and family reunions, and her communication with her half-sisters by letters or on the phone before their immigration to the United States, and only then, afterwards, she expressed them. At the same time, Tan gives back what she learns about China by

[1] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 84.

leaving her narratives evasive and ambiguous. This interplay between taking and giving back form, in both Tan's literary writing and the Chinese landscape painters' artistic creation, leave on the pages/paper *xuan* (宣纸) the "authentic trace (*zhenji* 真迹)." Shitao (石涛 1642-1707), a Chinese landscape painter and theorist, defines the "authentic trace" as the ideal state without brush trace that naturally appears on paper.[1] Tan's narratives of China are where she dwells and where she makes and claims her literary world, the place where China appears and disappears: becomes a trace.

In Chinese landscape painting, "authentic traces" record the play of opposing forces in continuous interactions.[2] Tan's focus on the mother and daughter figures' distinctive manners of looking at and interpreting landscape reproduces the Chinese landscape painters' pursuit of this authentic trace. The interconnection between "there is" and "there is not" denotes the idea of correlation—one cannot exist or develop without the other. Correlation gives us access to the movement of life vitality flowing between mountains and waters on paper *xuan*. This accession to life is achieved by the painters' capacity to record the landscape with all its possible changes—to borrow Jullien's term: "compossibility," which means entertaining all the possible forms of mountains and waters.[3] One way of painting this compossibility is to paint the process that "brings about and at the same time covers over."[4] This mode is called "effacement." Effacement refers to the painters' effort to grasp that which is "on the edge of [mountains' and waters'] invisibility," a "threshold of their emergence and resorption."[5] Tan shows her Chinese American female characters'

[1] Shitao writes, "when the painting reaches the stage where there are no brush traces, it is as if that painting should naturally be there on the paper [or] as if the painting came about naturally on paper" (Yu, Anlan, ed. *Hualun Congkan. Vol. 1*. Zhonggua shuju, 1977, p. 498. / 于安澜，《画论从刊》第一辑。中华书局，1997，498 页).

[2] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting.* Translated by Jane Marie Todd. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 108.

[3] JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 31.

[4] JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting.* Translated by Jane Marie Todd. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 108.

[5] *Ibid,*, p. 108.

incapability to comprehend what is stretched in front of their eyes, their access to China and Chineseness hindered or veiled. Chinese landscape paradigms are thus narrated as that which is on the edge of appearing and disappearing. Tan's landscape writings efface the Chinese philosophies of comprehending nature and ways of recording landscape through her revisiting of these traditions. This is how Tan deconstructs and reconstructs them. Her novels' written landscapes efface the Chinese paradigms of conceiving and recording landscape, or shall we better say, make them unstable. However, this unstable space makes room for changes that unceasingly occur in landscape and likewise in the conception of Chineseness itself.

The unstable space for changes to take place is also where the *traces* in Chinese landscape paintings become authentic. These authentic traces also produce a meeting of the "world"—mountains and waters—and the "I"—the painter's—in spirit. The painter relays what he observes from nature's various changes into his work. This meeting can happen when the painter is able to record the mountains and waters in their transition and transformation. The mountains' and waters' transformations then entangle with the painter's, and both share the same physical tension. Therefore, instead of creating a new world, Chinese landscape painters are seen as joining with the movements of the correlative forces in nature, which is termed "meeting in spirit (*shenjiao* 神交)."

However, in Tan's written landscapes, this "meeting in spirit" goes beyond the ideal place where painters join with the correlations that occur in nature. Various correlative forces in Tan's novels undergo a process of modification and continuation, which creates a porousness from which contradictory versions of China and the Chinese past emerge. Chineseness is effaced here in the fluidity of these correlative forces. For instance, the Changmian caves in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), oscillate between landscape of life and landscape of death. Tan has indeed inherited from the Chinese views on life and death as merely two stages of the *Great Process of Transformation* (*dahua* 大化), as her will to inherit in continuation indicates. However, she also destabilizes this cyclical view on life and death by emphasizing

the American-born character Olivia's powerlessness, when this character fails to get any control of the new environment. Tan's undermining bespeaks of modification, synonymous with innovation. Landscapes of life (landscapes which feature growth and reproduction) and landscapes of death (landscapes heavy with signs of death) alternate in Tan's novels to show this continuity. But all this stable process is beyond the grasp of her characters who cannot see the cycle but only one at a time and cannot tell the difference between life and death. They panic and cannot see the whole picture. This fearsome fragmentation is Tan's way of destabilizing the cyclical view on life and death. Viewed from this perspective, Tan's female characters' failure to take control of the new environment on Chinese ground becomes a force of proliferation rather than impediment. The American-born daughter figure Olivia, read by me as Tan's "author surrogate," displays complex feelings toward the Chinese landscape when she visits China with her American husband and Chinese-born sister. Likewise, Tan's attachment to and distance from her Chinese heritage manifest that Chineseness, too, undergoes a never-ending movement of changes. Tan's grasp of the Chinese landscape process as a whole, in its modification and continuation, is where the "I" of Tan as a Chinese American writer and the "world"—Chinese landscapes, be they the ones that are experienced in Tan's visit to China or the ones represented in her novels—meet in spirit.

I believe that a novelist's particular writing style may offer clues about their own perspective of seeing the world. When rendering Chinese landscapes, Tan is "continuously wonder[ing] over what [she is] seeing and remove[s] the usual assumptions." [1] "Wondering" is Tan's habit of writing. As a result, we find juxtaposed, intertwined, or contrasted landscapes in her fiction. Tan distrusts what she sees for the first time. She tends to observe the same landscape multiple times with wonderment each time. In her latest novel, *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), the same valleys emerge as different mountains and waters, which the Chinese-American character Violet appreciates, visits, dwells in, or escapes from. This elusiveness expresses Tan's way of being in the world, one of whose essential

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 20.

aspects is its being fashioned by her severance from China. Tan's text also manifests this hindered access in the descriptions of a remote village courtyard in China as both beautiful and sublime, as well as being filthy and diseased.

For me, Tan's descriptions of Chinese landscape can be categorized within the genre of "travel writing." Tan views her own writings about China, the Chinese past, or the landscapes as a reformulation and reinforcement of her not belonging. She repetitively fills in the cracks of loss with the multiplicity of her accounts, thereby creating more cracks. Tan, always alienated from China, presents her own written versions of China in time and space from afar. The more she learns about China, talks about it, writes about it, the remoter she seems, and the remoter China seems. China appears as in the multiplicity of her texts that cannot be grasped when one stands too close to it. From this alienation, Tan creates her own reality.

Chinese landscapes, either the ones visited by the Chinese American female characters, or those represented in her novels, indeed meet in spirit with Tan, as a Chinese American writer. However, this "meeting in spirt" blurring the presence-absence boundaries, once again denotes an effacement, one that is achieved in Tan's (mis)translation of China and Chineseness. Tan's (mis)translations, the ambiguity and unreliability of Tan's narration of Chinese landscapes, reflects a nuanced and contradictory understanding of China. Tan's female characters' visions of China deny any one determination of China or delimitation. Chinese landscapes for Tan and her female characters are de-orienting (deconstructed), dis-orienting (denied and negated), and re-orienting (reconstructed). Many principles concerning the human-nature relationship are undermined and deconstructed at the same time as Tan represents them. Tan's self-effacing landscapes convey to readers the message that neither China nor the constructed image of China is stable. China, for Tan, is, on the one hand, a ghost coming from the ancient past which lingers in her artistic creation and, on the other hand, a physical and material presence of the here and now, in the evolution and correlation of the myriad things in nature. The material and the constructed aspects are not delimited strictly as borderlines but are unceasingly

juxtaposed, blurred, and alternated. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Tan uses her Chinese character Dulili's self-Orientalization to reflect back Western misunderstandings of China as mysterious, degraded, standing still in time. So, what Tan has been doing in her novels is creating multiple fragments of China. Tan's characters attempt to find a threshold between the Chinese and American landscapes. But more often than not, they find themselves hindered or even rejected access to China and Chineseness.[1] However, those broken mirrors, or rather, the missing pieces of the mirrors, offer Tan unlimited space and potential to exert her own imagination and creations of China. The undetermined or unlimited versions of China escape from the actualization of things: this shows *Dao*'s capacity of spreading in every direction and of letting new possibilities pass.[2]

Returning, as recorded in the Daoist classic *Dao De Jing*, is *Dao*'s moving pattern in which everything departs from and comes back to *Dao*. Chinese landscape painters and poets attempt to catch a glimpse of *Dao*'s vague semblance, which is also their way of reaching Oneness—that is the undifferentiated where mountains and waters serve as the image of the other despite their distinctive external features.[3] However, Tan's Chinese American female characters' coming back to China undermines the notion of returning as what fills in loss with oneness. On the contrary, I read these characters' returns as indicating a lack of origin, or rather opening a site of various

[1] Successful and complete access to Americanness is also impeded for both Tan's Chinese-born mother and American-born daughter figures. In *The Joy Luck Club*, for example, the American seascape oscillates between the sublime and the beautiful. This fluidity prevents the American-born Rose from comprehending the seascape and understanding her Chinese American belonging. We can also think of all those misreadings and mistranslations that occur in the Chinese-born mother's judging of her daughter Lena's house decorations as excessive and useless.

[2] Chinese landscape painters pursue the boundlessness of *Dao* by showing the effacement of mountains and waters in their paintings.

[3] To borrow Shitao's word, the mountain "occupies" what constitutes the ocean, or the ocean equals the mountain. Shitao writes, "[the mountain's] chain of overlapping peaks, its ridges upon ridges, its secret valleys and deep precipices, its sheer cliffs, its mist, fog, and dew, its smoke and clouds, is like the ocean and its breaking waves. Like the ocean, the mountain engulfs and disgorges" (JULLIEN, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 51).

origins that become always more fragmentary and heterogeneous. In *Where the Past Begins* (2017), Tan says that writing is a "painful recovery of things that are lost:"

> As I struggle to capture what I mean, the right word I know so well is on the tip of my tongue, and so is the right idea, but as soon as I remember that word, phrase, or idea, another elusive set takes its place. I must do this repeatedly until I find enough of them to fill a novel. The process of writing is the painful recovery of things that are lost. [1]

Chinese stories are "on the tip of [her] tongue," and as soon as she translates the Chinese land and transposes it into her stories, something has already gone missing. Tan rightly fears that her writings will only create an invisible or "imaginary"—to borrow Rushdie's term—China, or fictions of China rather than give access to actual cities or villages, despite her effort to reproduce what the characters experience and feel at that particular moment in time and space. Indeed, the issues of the traces of the past, memory, heritage, and home are intimately connected. China makes up the site of an "enigma of arrival." In V. S. Naipaul's novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), the "enigma of arrival" refers to that sense of detachment and alienation that will always remain even if one gets to soothe their sense of disillusionment and self-fragmentation.[2] Tan's characters' (re)visiting of China does not guarantee them a path to their origin, obviously, there is no origin. Rather, their search for an origin is delayed or deferred in the oscillation between the Chinese landscapes as a triggering force of their biological connection with their homeland, and those of the Chinese landscapes as a site of re-negotiation and re-creation of their sense of home.

Tan has discovered "more intersections with the different points of [her] life" [3] when writing China and Chinese stories. China constitutes a map of meaning, taking [her] to origins and back again."[4] Yet in one scene in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), for the American-born character Olivia, the stone pillars in a remote Chinese village are redolent of the biblical story of Lot's Wife, who cannot resist turning round and thus becomes a pillar of salt. So, what is this that Tan fears but still cannot

[1] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 34.
[2] NAIPAUL, V.S. *The Enigma of Arrival*. Picador. 2002 [1987]. P. 93.
[3] TAN, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. Ecco, 2017, p. 33.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

resist looking back at? I have read Tan's novels with the same wondering Tan displays, without limitations and preconceived ideas even though fully taking part personally in this experience of reading. As she writes from afar, I also write from afar. She has set an example for me. As a lost land, China becomes "at once more interiorized and more diffused."[1] Just as the bland sign bespeaks a process of emptying in Chinese landscape painting and aesthetics, so in Tan's novels, does a lack or the fragmentation of an origin reconnect us with the Chinese landscape in its totality, not a particular place or moment.[2] This totality of absence and presence attracts us into the tensional field of a landscape we have been linked to since time immemorial. We are now ready to dig further into how biblical stories and other Western cultural referents weigh in Tan's novels. We are standing here at the threshold where the Chinese and Western literary worlds merge and open. The interconnection between departure and returning, between the inside and the outside, between the Chinese and the Western, will offer us all new places to go, and fortunately, never reach—leaving room for creation and desire. And, in turn, this path of going inside from the outside and *vice versa* will also provide us with all possible converging points, and we can meet in the emotional traits that we share as we interpret the world.

[1] COOPPAN, Vilashini. *Worlds Within*. Stanford University Press, 2009, p. xx.

[2] Jullien writes: "I no longer relate to the world at a particular place (finding myself on mere "land") but reconnect with the world in itself (with its totality). In landscape I reconnect with what gives rise to world-ness. What gives rise to "landscape" is my going from a local dependence (the place where I am; I am always somewhere) to global belonging, such that my passage into the latter becomes sensible" (JULLIEN, François. *Living off Landscape: or the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, p. 108).

Bibliography

I. Primary sources
1. Novels
2. Memoirs
3. Interviews

II. Secondary sources
1. Tan criticism
    a. Books
    b. Articles
    c. Dissertations
2. Works on Chineseness
    a. Books
    b. Articles
3. Works on Asian American literature
    a. Books
    b. Articles
4. Chinese references
    a. Chinese philosophy
    b. Chinese art of landscape
    c. Chinese literature
    d. Chinese arts and aesthetics
5. Western references
    a. Western art of landscape
    b. Western literary theories
        i. The sublime
        ii. Gender studies
        iii. Post-colonialism
        iv. Other theoretical works
6. Other references

I. Primary sources

1. Amy Tan's Novels

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Tan, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. New York: Harper and Collins, 1991.

Tan, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses.* New York: Harper and Collins, 1996.

Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.

Tan, Amy. *Saving Fish from Drowning*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005.

Tan, Amy. *The Valley of Amazement*. New York: Ecco, 2014.

2. Amy Tan's Memoirs

Tan, Amy. *The Opposite of Fate*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2003.

Tan, Amy. *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir*. New York: Ecco, 2017.

3. Amy Tan's Interviews

"Tan, Amy. Q&A: China Then and Now, and How to Bridge the Gap." The Wallstreet Journal, 2011. https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/11/15/amy-tan-qa-china-then-and-now-and-how-to-bridge-the-gap/.

Alter, Alexandra, "Tan, Amy. The Reluctant Memoirist." The New York Times, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/16/books/amy-tan-memoir.html.

Brown, Jeffery, "How Amy Tan's Family Stories Made Her a Storyteller." PBS News Hour video tape, 2017. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-amy-tans-family-stories-made-her-a-storyteller.

Christiansen, Kenan, "Amy Tan's Evolving Sense of China." The New York Times, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/travel/amy-tans-evolving-sense-of-china.html. Gee, Alison Singh, "Where the Past Begins: an interview with Tan, Amy." Poets & Writers, 2017. https://www.pw.org/content/where_the_past_begins_an_interview_with_amy_tan.

Guest, Katy, "Book Review: The Valley of Amazement, By Tan, Amy." The Independent, Nov. 2013. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/book-review-the-valley-of-amazement-by-amy-tan-8942245.html.

Hilton, Isabel, "The Valley of Amazement by Tan, Amy – Review." The Guardian, Nov. 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/09/valley-of-amazement-amy-tan-review.

Jaggi, Maya, "Ghosts at My Shoulder." The Guardian, 2001. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/03/fiction.features.

Tan, Amy, "Where Does Creativity Hide." TED, 2008. https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_tan_on_creativity.

I. Secondary sources

1. Tan criticism

a. Books

Adams, Bella. *Amy Tan.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Amy Tan*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Amy Tan*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2014.

Huntley, E. D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998.

b. Articles

Adams, Bella. "Identity-in-Difference: Re-Generating Debate about Intergenerational Relationships in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 39.2, (2006): 79-93.

—, "Representing History in Amy Tan's "The Kitchen God's Wife"." *Melus* 28.2 (2003): 9-30.

Blinde, Patricia Lin. “The Icicle in the Desert: Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers.” *Melus* 6.3 (1979): 51-71.

Caesar, Judith. “Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*.” *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views*, 2014: 37-48.

Chang, Zhuanwa. “The Irony in Amy Tan’s *Saving Fish from Drowning*.” *Journal of Changchun University of Technology* 25.5, 2013.

Chow, Rey. “Women in the Holocene: Ethnicity, Fantasy, and the Film *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Feminisms and pedagogies of everyday life* (1996): 204-221.

Dunick, Lisa MS. “The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and the Written Word in Amy Tan’s Novels.” *Melus* 31.2 (2006): 3-20.

Elliott, Butler-Evans. “Strategies of Self-Fashioning in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club.*” Modern Language Association Convention (1989): 27-30.

Hamilton, Patricia L. “Feng Shui, Astrology, and the Five Elements: Traditional Chinese Belief in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Melus* 24.2 (1999): 125-145.

He, Jing. “Sisterhood across Cultures—With Reference to Chen Ran’s and Amy Tan’s Fiction.” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 21.2 (2012): 201-218.

Hsiao, Pi-Li. “Food Imagery in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife*.” *Feng Chia Journal* (2000): 205-227.

Lee, Ken-fang. “Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston’s and Tan’s “Ghost Stories”.” *Melus* 29.2 (2004): 105-127.

Michael, Magali Cornier. “Choosing Hope and Remaking Kinship: Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club,* 2009: 139-163.

McAlister, Melanie. “(Mis)Reading *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Asian America: Journal of Culture and the Arts* 1 (1992): 102-118.

Ren, Wei-li, and Dong Yan. “On Spatial Reconstruction of *Saving Fish from Drowning*.” *Journal of Hefei University of Technology (Social Sciences)* (2013): 06.

Singer, Marc. “Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31.3 (2001): 324-352.

Walsh, Katie. “Storytelling in Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*: Belonging and he Transnationality of Home in Older Age.” *Identities* 24.5 (3017): 606-624.

c. Dissertations

Conard, Tammy S. *Creating an Asian-American Mythology: Storytelling in Amy Tan’s Fiction*. Diss. Texas Tech University, 1998.

Pu, Xiumei. “Spirituality: A Womanist Reading of Amy Tan’s The Bonesetter’s Daughter.” Diss. Georgia State University, 2006.

Wong, Hiu Wing. “*Talk-stories” in the Fictions of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan*. Diss. University of Warwick, 2006.

Zhang, Yanyan Carrie. ““Airing Dirty Laundry”: Chinese and Chinese-American responses to Amy Tan.” Diss. University of Canterbury, 2011.

2. Works on Chineseness

a. Books

Ang, Ien. *On not speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Blum, Susan D. and Lionel M. Jensen, eds. *China off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Chun, Allen. *Forget Chineseness: On the Geopolitics of Cultural Identification*. New York: SUNY Press, 2017.

Fairbank, John King. *The United States and China.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Hamilton, Gary G., ed. *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the Twentieth Century.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001.

Louie, Andrea. *Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Jennifer Cushman and Gungwu Wang, eds. *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988.

Shih, Shu-mei, ed. *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Zhu, Aijun. *Feminism and Global Chineseness: The Cultural Production of Controversial Women Authors*. Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2007.

王明珂。《华夏边缘：历史记忆与族群认同》。社会科学文献出版社，2006。/ Wang, Mingke. *The Edge of Huaxia: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2006.

b. Articles

Chow, Rey. "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem." *Boundary* 25.3 (1998): 1-24.

Chun, Allen. "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity." *Boundary* 2.23 (1996): 111-138.

He, Chengzhou. "The Ambiguities of Chineseness and the Dispute over the 'Homecoming' of *Turandot*." *Comparative literature studies* 49.4 (2012): 547-564.

Longxi, Zhang. "Re-conceptualizing China in Our time: From a Chinese Perspective." *European Review* 23.2 (2015): 193-209.

—, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West." *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (1988): 108-131.

Lu, Sheldon. "Re-Visioning Global Modernity through the Prism of China." *European Review 23.2* (2015): 210-226.

Lucas, Klein. "Alors, la Chinoiserie? The Figure of China in Theorizations of World Literature." *Literature Compass* 12.8 (2015): 414-427.

Rao, Pengzi. "The Overseas Chinese Language Literature in a Global Context." *Revue de littérature comparée* 1 (2011): 106-112.

Reid, Anthony. "Chineseness Unbound." *Asian Ethnicity* 10.3 (2009): 197-200.

Tsui, Chiann Karen, and Russell A. Berman. “The Dialectic of Recognition and the Rediscovery of China: After Orientalism.” *European Review* 23.2 (2015): 180-192.

Tu, Wei-Ming. “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center.” *Daedalus* (1991): 1-32.

Wang, Ning. “Comparative Literature and Globalism: A Chinese Cultural and Literary Strategy.” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.4 (2004): 584-602.

Wickberg, Edgar. “Global Chinese Migrants and Performing Chineseness.” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 3.2 (2007): 177-193.

Yao, Souchou. “Being Essentially Chinese.” *Asian Ethnicity* 10.3 (2009): 251-262.

Zhang, Longxi. “Re-conceptualizing China in Our Time: From a Chinese Perspective.” *European Review* 23.2 (2015): 193-209.

3. Works on Asian American literature

a. Books

Adams, Bella. *Asian American Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

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

Cheung, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Feng, Pin-chia. *Diasporic Representations: Reading Chinese American Women’s Fiction.* Vol. 6. Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2010.

Ho, Wendy. *In Her Mother’s House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing.* Vol. 5. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Hubel, Teresa, and Neil Edward Brooks, eds. *Literature and Racial Ambiguity.* Vol. 27. New York: Rodopi, 2002.

Kathleen, Brogan. *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature*. Charlottesville: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Kim, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.

Li, David Leiwei. *Imagining the Nation: Asian American literature and Cultural Consent*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergamon, 1990.

Lee, Rachel, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Ling, Jinqi. *Narrating Nationalisms: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Ma, Sheng-mei. *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Ng, Andrew Hock Soon, ed. *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2008.

Pellérdi, Márta, and Gabriella Reuss, eds. *Reverberations of Silence: Silenced Texts, Sub-Texts and Authors in Literature, Language and Translation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Zhou, Xiaojing, and Samina Najmi, eds. *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011.

b. Articles

Kim, Elaine H. "Defining Asian American Realities through Literature." *Cultural Critique* 6, (1987): 87-111.

Lee, Yoon Sun. "Racialized Bodies and Asian American Literature." *American literary history* 30.1 (2018): 166-176.

Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *Asian American Studies* 1 (1991): 254-275.

Madsen, Deborah L. “Chinese American Writers of the Real and the Fake: Authenticity and the Twin Traditions of Life Writing.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 36.3 (2006): 257-272.

Wong, Sau-ling C., J. Jeffrey, and Santa Ana. “Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature.” *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 25.1 (1991): 171-226.

4. Chinese references

a. Chinese philosophy:

i. François Jullien’s studies on Chinese philosophy

Jullien, François. *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*. University of Hawaii Press, 2004. Translated by Janet Lloyd.

Jullien, François. *Living Off Landscape or the Unthought-of in Reason.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018. Translated by Pedro Rodriguez.

Jullien, François. *The Book of Beginnings*. London: Yale University Press, 2015. Translated by Jody Gladding.

Jullien, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. Translated by Jane Marie Todd.

Jullien, François. *The Silent Transformations*. London: Seagull Books, 2011. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson.

Jullien, François. *The Vital Nourishment.* New York: Zone Books, 2007. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer.

ii. Books

An, Xiaolan, ed. *Xunzi.* Chung Hwa Book Company, 2007. / 安小兰编辑。《荀子》。中华书局，2007。

Brooks, E. Bruce, and A. Taeko Brooks. *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Chen, Guying. *Contemporary Interpretation and Commentary of the Laozi*. Shangwu yinshu guan, 2006. / 陈鼓应。《老子今注今译》。商务印书馆，2006。

Chuang Tzu. *Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*. Translated by Giles Ha. Crows Nest: Unwin Hyman, 1961.

Commented by Wan Lihua and Lan Xu. *Mencius.* Chung Hwa Book Company, 2007. / 万丽华、蓝旭译注。《孟子》。中华书局，2007。

Edited and annotated by Zhang Yanying. *The Analects （Lunyu）*. Chung Hwa Book Company, 2006. / 张燕婴编辑。《论语》。中华书局，2006。

Fang, Thomé H. *The Chinese View of Life*. London: The Union Press, 1957

Fei, Xiaotong. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. University of California Press, 1992. / 费孝通。《乡土中国》。北京大学出版社，1998。

Feng, Youlan. *A History of Chinese Philosophy.* Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Gu, Qian. *Chinese Classics: The Huainanzi.* Chung Hwa Book Company, 2009. / 顾迁译注。《中华经典藏书：淮南子》。中华书局，2009。

Guo, Pu. *The Book of Burial, The Inner Volume.* Hubei Chongwen Shuju, 1875. / 郭璞。《藏经，内篇》。湖北中文书局，1857。

Hutton, Eric L. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Ko, Dorothy, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan Piggott, eds. *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*. London: University of California Press, 2003.

Laozi, Roger T. Ames, and David L. Hall. *Dao de Jing: Making this Life Significant: Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Dao de Jing.* New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

Legge, James. *The I Ching: The Book of Changes, Sacred Books of the East Vol XVI*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899.

Legge, James, transl. *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

Legge, James, transl. *The Sacred Books of China: The I Ching*. New York: Dover Publications, 1963.

Legge, James, transl. *The Texts of Taoism*. New York: Courier Corporation, 2012.

Liu, An. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Maspero, Henri. *Taoism and Chinese Religion*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.

Moore, Charles Alexander. *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967.

Mou, Bo. *Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Seth V. *Three Chinese Poets: Translations of Poems by Wang Wei, Li Bai, and Du Fu*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.

Slingerland, Edward. *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Translated into English by Wang Rongpei; Translated into Modern Chinese by Qin Xuqing and Sun Yongchang. Library of Chinese Classic: *Zhuangzi*. Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999. / 汪榕培，英译；秦旭卿，孙雍长今译。《大中华文库：庄子》。湖南人民出版社，外文出版社，1999。

Waley, Arthur, transl. *The Book of Songs (Shijing)*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Wang, Guoxuan, ed. *Daxue. Zhongyong*. Chung Hwa Book Company, 2006. / 王国轩编。《大学·中庸》。中华书局。2006。

Wang, Yangming. Da Xue Wen. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1992. / 王阳明。《大学问》。上海古籍出版社，1992。

Ware, James, transl. *The Sayings of Mencius*. New York: New American Library, 1960.

Yang Rubin. *Theory and Conceptions of the Body in Ancient Chinese Thoughts*. Taipei Institute of Chinese Literature, History and Philosophy, 1993. / 杨儒宾。《中国古代思想中的气论及身体观》。台北中央研究院中国文史哲研究所，1993.

Yü, Ying-shih. "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25 (1964): 80-122.

Ziporyn, Brook. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett Classics, 2009

iii. Internet sources

"Human Being/ Humanity." Key concepts in Chinese thoughts and culture. URL: https://www.chinesethought.cn/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=4115.

"Ingrained Ideas." Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/ingrained-ideas/ens.

Ivanhoe, Philip J., ed. *Mencius*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. "Jishi" of The Analects, Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/analects/ji-shi.

"Knowledge Rambling in the North." Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/knowledge-rambling-in-the-north/ens.

Literati, Encyclopedia Britannica. URL: https://www.britannica.com/topic/literati.

"Natural, Leisurely, Simple yet Profound." Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture. URL: https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=4046.

"Perfect Happiness." Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/perfect-enjoyment/ens.

b. Chinese art of landscape

i. Books

Baker, Jennifer Helen. *The Eight Views: From its Origin in the Xiao and Xiang Rivers to Hiroshige.* Upper Riccarton University of Canterbury.

Elvin, Mark. *Concepts of Nature: a Chinese-European Cross-cultural Perspective*. New York: Brill, 2010.

Guo, Xi. *Lin Ch'üan Kao Chih*. Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 2018. / 郭熙。《林泉高致》。江苏凤凰文艺出版社。2018。

Selin, Helaine, ed. *Nature Across Cultures: Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures*. Vol. 4. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013.

Shi, Tao. *Hua Pu*. Sichun Meishu Chunbanshe, 1987. / 石涛。《画谱》。四川美术出版社, 1987。

Sullivan, Micheal. *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1979.

——, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China.* Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

W, Kubin. *Nature Perspectives in Chinese Literature*. Shanghai People Press, 1990. / 顾彬。《中国文人的自然观》。上海人民出版社，1990。

Yu, Anlan, ed. *Hualun Congkan.* Vol. 1. Chung Hwa Book Company, 1977. / 于安澜，《画论从刊》第一辑。中华书局，1997。

ii. Articles

Diep, Van Thi. "The Landscape of the Void: Truth and Magic in Chinese Landscape Painting." *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 16.1 (2017): 77-86.

Duan, Lian. "Paradigm Shift in Chinese Landscape Representation." *Comparative Literature: East & West* 1.1 (2017): 96-113.

Pan, Da'an. "Decoding Sharawadgi: Taoist Influence on the Chinese Landscape Garden." *Landscape Research* 20.1 (1995): 11-18.

Soper, Alexander C. "Early Chinese Landscape Painting." *The Art Bulletin* 23.2 (1941): 141-164.

Turner, Matthew. “Classical Chinese Landscape Painting and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43.1 (2009): 106-121.

Zhang, Longxi. “Nature and Landscape in the Chinese Tradition.” *New perspectives on the research of Chinese culture*, 2013, 1-15.

c. Chinese literature

i. Books

1. Primary sources

Edited and annotated by Dai Hongsen. Wang, Fuzhi. *Jiangzhai Shihua*. The People’s Literature Publishing House, 1981. / 戴鸿森注释。王夫之。《姜斋诗话笺注》。人民文学出版社，1981。

Edited by Lu Qinli. *Poems in Pre-Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties*. Chung Hwa Book Company, 1983. / 逯钦立辑校。《先秦汉魏晋南北朝詩》。中华书局，1983。

Introduction by Huang Lin. Liu, Xie. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008. / 黄霖导读。刘勰。《文心雕龙》。上海古籍出版社，2008。

Introduction by Wang Lin. Wang, Guowei. *Poetic Remarks in the Human World*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1998. / 黄霖导读。王国维。《人间词话》。上海古籍出版社，1998。

Qu Yuan. Translated by Lin Jiali. *Chu Ci*. Chung Hwa Book Company, 2009. / 屈原。《屈原》。林家骊译注。楚辞。中华书局，2009。

Quan Tang shi (Complete Shi Poetry of the Tang). 25 vols. Chung Hwa Book Company, 1960. /《全唐詩》。中华书局，1960。

Tang, Guizhang, ed. *Complete Ci Poetry of the Song.* Vol. 3. Chung Hwa Book Company, 1965. / 唐圭璋。《全宋詞》。中华书局，1965，第三辑。

Wang, Zhihuan. *Selected Lyrics on Themes of Patriotism and Moral Integrity: From Ancient to Modern Chinese Classic Poetry*. China Translation & Publishing

Corporation, 1995. / 王知还。《古今爱国抒情诗词选》。中国对外翻译出版公司，1995。

Yuan, Ke. *Myths of Ancient China: An Anthology with Annotations*. People's Literature Publishing House, 1979. / 袁柯。《古代神选释》。人民文学出版社，1979。

Yuanzhong, YZ Xu, Loh Beiyei, and Wu Juntao. *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2000.

2. Secondary sources

Cai, Zong-qi. *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity and Rhetoric in Wenxin Diaolong*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Cheng, François. *Vide et Plein : Le Langage Pictural Chinois*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998, p. 84.

Dale, Corinne H., ed. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.

Fong, Grace S., and Ellen Widmer. *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*. Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 267-271.

GE, Hongbing. *Politics of Body: Interpretation of the Chinese Literature of the 20th century*. Shanghai Joint Publishing Company, 2005. / 葛红兵。《身体政治：解读20 世纪的中国文学》。上海三联书，2005.

Lee, A. Robert. *China Fictions/English Language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story.* Leiden: BRILL, 2008.

Liu, James JY. *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese literary thought.* Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1996.

Owen, Stephen, and Kang-I. Sun Chang. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Sikong, Tu. *Ershisi Shipin*. Renmin Wenxue, 1981. / 司空图。《二十四诗品》。人民文学，1981。

Sun, Cecile Chu-chin. *The Poetics of Repetition in English and Chinese Lyric Poetry*. London: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Tang, Yanfang, "Translating across Cultures: *Yi Jing* and Understanding Chinese Poetry." *Intercultural Communication Studies* 23.1 (2014):187-202.

Wang, Youru. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking.* London: Routledge, 2003.

Yip, Wai-lim. *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

ii. Articles

Gu, Ming Dong. ""Fu-Bi-Xing": A Metatheory of Poetry-Making." *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 19 (1997): 1-22.

Kao, Yu-kung, and Tsu-lin Mei. "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38.2 (1978): 281-356.

Yu, Pauline. "Metaphor and Chinese Poetry." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3.2 (1981): 205-224.

d. Chinese arts and aesthetics

i. Books

Bush, Susan and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Cang, Jie. *The Genealogy of Thousands of Names,* Vol. 52. / 仓颉。《万姓统谱 • 卷五十二》。

Coleman, Earle J. *Philosophy of Painting by Shih-T'ao: A Translation and Exposition of his Hua-P'u*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012.

Fong, Wen. *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

Hisamatsu, Shin'ichi. *Zen and the Fine Arts*. New York: Kodansha America, Inc, 1971.

Hodge, Bob, and Kam Louie. P*olitics of Chinese Language and Culture: The Art of Reading Dragons*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Höllmann, Thomas O. *Chinese Script: History, Characters, Calligraphy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

KUO, Jason C. *Transforming Traditions in Modern Chinese Painting: Huang Pin-hung's Late Work*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

Leong, Chong Hin. *A Talk on Chinese Calligraphy and Art*. Iowa: Iowa Arts Council, 1969.

Schomp, Virginia. *The Ancient Chinese*. Marshall Cavendish, 2010.

Sirén, Osvald. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting; Translations and Comments*. Berlin: Schocken Books, 1963.

Wang, Zhenyuan. *The History of Chinese Calligraphy Theories*. Huangshan Publishing House, 1998. / 王镇远。《中国书法理论》。黄山出版社，1998。

Wiseman, Mary, and Liu Yuedi, eds. *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art.* London: Brill, 2011.

Yang, Lihui, Deming An, and Jessica Anderson Turner. *Handbook of Chinese Mythology*. Abc-clio, 2005.

Zhang, Huaiguan. *Judgments on Calligraphers*. The Art China, 1979. / 张怀瓘。《六体书论》。艺术中国网，1979。

Zhu, Liangzhi. *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Aesthetics*. Peking University Press, 2006. / 朱良志。《中国美学十五讲》。北京大学出版社，2006。

ii. Articles

Chao, G. J., H. B. Yin, and Qubumo Bamo. “Living Oral Epic Traditions in China: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Ethos.” *Global Chinese Version of Museum International* 245 (2010): 5-27.

Hsu, Cho-Yun. “Chinese Encounters with Other Civilizations.” *International sociology* 16.3 (2001): 438-454.

Hu, Xiaoyan. “The Notion of ‘Qi Yun’ (Spirit Consonance) in Chinese Painting.” Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics 8 (2016): 247-268.

Hua, Ling Su. “On the Relation between Chinese Painting and Calligraphy.” *East and West* 4.4 (1954): 269-277.

Law, Sophia Suk-mun. “Being in Traditional Chinese Landscape Painting.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32.4 (2011): 369-382.

Li, Xiaodong. “The Aesthetic of the Absent the Chinese Conception of Space.” *Journal of Architecture* 7.1 (2002): 87-101.

Liu, Chengji. “The Body and its Image in Classical Chinese Aesthetics.” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 3.4 (2008): 577-594.

Loehr, Max. “Chinese Landscape Painting and Its Real Content.” *Rice Institute Pamphlet-Rice University Studies* 59.4 (1973): 67-96.

Shi, Xiongbo. “Zhang Yinlin: A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism (1931).” *Journal of Art Historiography* 13 (2015): 1.

Ying, Li-hua. “Negotiating with the Past: The Art of Calligraphy in Post-Mao China.” *ASIA Network Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19.2 (2012): 32-41.

Zhang, Jeanne Hong. “Gender in Post-Mao China.” *European Review* 11.2 (2003): 209-224.

iii. Internet sources

“Cao-shu.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. URL: https://www.britannica.com/topic/caoshu.

5. Western references

a. Western art of landscape

i. Books

Andrews, Malcolm. *Landscape and Western Art.* Vol. 10. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

Barrell, John. *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Clark, Kenneth. *Landscape into Art*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956.

Cosgrove, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

Cosgrove, Denis, and Stephen Daniels, eds. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Vol. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

David, Bruno, and Julian Thomas, eds. *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology.* New York: Routledge, 2016.

DeLange, Attie, et al., eds. *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. New York: Springer, 2008.

Douthwaite, John, Daniela Francesca Virdis, and Elisabetta Zurru, eds. *The Stylistics of Landscapes, the Landscapes of Stylistics.* Vol. 28. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017.

Elkins, James, and Rachel Ziady DeLue, eds. *Landscape Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836.

Gilpin, William. *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty: On Picturesque Travel: And on Sketching Landscape: To which is Added a Poem on Landscape Painting*. London: Printed for R. Blamire, 1792.

Guardiano, Nicholas. *Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-century American Landscape Painting*. London: Lexington Books, 2016.

Guibert, Pascale, ed. *Reflective Landscapes of the Anglophone Countries.* Vol. 11. New York: Rodopi, 2011.

Hirsch, Eric, and Michael O'Hanlon, eds. *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Horigan, Stephen. *Nature and Culture in Western Discourses*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Ingold, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot.* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.

James S. Duncan. *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Ley, David. *A Social Geography of the City*. New York: Harpercollins College Division, 1983.

Mianowski, Marie, ed. *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. New York: Springer, 2011.

Mitchell, William John Thomas, and William John Thomas Mitchell, eds. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Myers, Kenneth. *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820-1895.* New York: Hudson River Museum, 1987.

Nash, Roderick Frazier. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Yale University Press. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.

Novak, Barbara. *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Payne, Daniel G. *Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics.* Hanover and New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1996.

Pike, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Porteous, J. Douglas. *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor.* Toronto: Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Schweninger, Lee. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

Tilley, Christopher. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Vol. 10. Oxford, Providence: Berg, 1994.

——, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg publishers, 2004.

Wylie, John. *Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

ii. Articles

Bell, Duncan. "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity." *British Journal of Sociology* 54.1 (2003): 63–81.

Bondi, Liz. 1992. "Gender Symbols and Urban Landscapes." *Progress in Human Geography* 16.2 (1992): 157-170.

Crouch, David. "Flirting with Space: Thinking Landscape Relationally." *Cultural Geographies* 17.1 (2010.): 5–18.

——, "Spacing, Performing, and Becoming: Tangles in the Mundane." *Environment and Planning A* 35 (2003): 1945–1960.

Duncan, Nancy, and James Duncan. "Doing Landscape Interpretation." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (2010): 225–47.

Duncan, James, and Nancy Duncan. "(Re) Reading the Landscape." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 6* (1983): 117–26.

Glacken, Clarence J. "Reflections on the History of Western Attitudes to Nature." *GeoJournal* 26.2 (1992): 106-110.

Ingold, Tim. "Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in An Open World." *Environment and planning* A 40.8 (2008): 1796-1810.

Ingold, Tim. "The Temporality of the Landscape." *World archaeology* 25.2 (1993): 152-174.

Liu, Chengji. "The Body and Its Image in Classical Chinese Aesthetics." *Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science* 3.4 (2008): 577–94.

Lorimer, Hayden. “Cultural Geography: The Busyness of Being More-Than-Representational’.” *Progress in human geography* 29.1 (2005): 83-94.

May, Rachel. “Narrating Landscape, Landscaping Narrative.” *Russian Studies in Literature* 39.3 (2003): 65-87.

Meinig, Donald W. “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene.” *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes: Geographical essays* (1979): 33-48.

Monk, Janice. “Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape.” *Environmental Review:* ER 8.1 (1984): 23-33.

Nash, Catherine. “Performativity in Practice: Some Recent Work in Cultural Geography.” *Progress in human geography* 24.4 (2000): 653-664.

Rose, Mitch. “Dwelling as Marking and Claiming.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30 (2012): 757–71.

Rose, Mitch. “Landscape and Labyrinths.” *Geoforum* 33.4 (2002): 455-467.

Wylie, John. “A Single Day’s Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path.” *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers* 30.2 (2005): 234-247.

Wylie, John. “Depths and Folds: On Landscape and the Gazing Subject.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24.4 (2006): 519-535.

b. Western literary theories:

i. The sublime

Burke, Edmund. *On Taste: On the Sublime and Beautiful; Reflections on the French Revolution; A Letter to a Noble Lord; with Introduction, Notes and Illustrations (1757)*. Vol. 24. New York: PF Collier & Son, 1909.

Diehl, Joanne Feit. *Women Poets and the American Sublime*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant’s Critique of Judgment, [sections] 23-29*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Shaw, Philip. *The Sublime*. London: Routledge, 2006.

ii. Gender studies

1. Books

Barker, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Dowler, Lorraine, Josephine Carubia, and Bonj Szczygiel, eds. *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Moral Landscape.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

Douglas A. Vakoch. *Women and Nature?: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Duplessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, eds. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Garry, Ann, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy.* Routledge, 2017.

Heidi J.Nast and Steve Pile, eds. *Places through the Body*. London: Routledge. 1998.

Hurley, Kelly. The *Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Hurst, M. *Language, Gender, and Community in Late Twentieth-century Fiction: American Voices and American Identities.* New York: Springer, 2011.

Jaggar, Alison M., and Iris Young. *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. New Jersey: Blackwell, 1998.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Longhurst, Robyn. *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries*. London: Routledge, 2001,

Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Rose, Gillian. *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Russell, Danielle. 2006. *Between the Angle and the Curve. Mapping Gender, Race, Space and Identity in Willa Cather and Toni Morrison*. New York: Routledge.

Showalter, Elaine, Lea Baechler, and A. Walton Litz, eds. *Modern American Women Writers*. New York: Charles Scribner Son's, 1993.

Squires, Judith, and Sandra Kemp, eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Uteng Tanu and Time Cresswell, eds. *Gendered Mobilities*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008.

Wolstenholme, Susan. *Gothic (Re) Visions: Writing Women as Readers*. New York: SUNY Press, 1993.

2. Articles

Cixous, Hélène, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 1.4 (1976): 875-893.

Kristeva, Julia, and Ellen Conroy Kennedy. "On the Women of China." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.1 (1975): 57-81.

Nash, Catherine. "Reclaiming Vision: Looking at Landscape and the Body." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 3.2 (1996): 149-170.

Radner, Joan N., and Susan S. Lanser. "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature." *Journal of American Folklore* (1987): 412-425.

Rajan, Gita. "Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1.2 (2007): 358-360.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, and Graham Riach. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Die Philosophin* 14.27 (2003): 42-58.

iii. Post-colonialism

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003.

Barker, Francis, Peter Hulme, and Margeret Iverson, eds. *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1996.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* 1994. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Chew, Shirley, and David Richards, eds. *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature.* Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Minh-ha, Trinh T., ed. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Warnes, Christopher. *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*. London: Springer, 2009

Wisker, Gina. *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

iv. Other theoretical works

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* Vol. 1. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Brooklyn: Zone, 1991.

Bevillr, Maria. *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity.* Vol. 43. New York: Rodopi, 2009.

Buchanan, Ian. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Burkitt, Ian. *Bodies of Thought*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy.* London: Routledge, 2019.

Currie, Mark. *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Duran, Angelica, and Yuhan Huang, eds. *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller.* West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014.

Ellison, David. *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Empsons, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1949

Farner, Geir. *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Vol. 3. New York: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Gibbs Jr, Raymond W., ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Gibson, James J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition*. New York: Psychology Press, 2014.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Heidegger, Martin. *Identity and Difference*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

James, David. *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception.* London: A&C Black, 2008.

Krystyna, Mazur. *Poetry and Repetition: Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday.* Vol. 2. London: Verso, 1991.

Lodge, David, and Nigel Wood, eds. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. London: Pearson Education, 2008.

Lorraine, Tamsin. *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2018.

Mcmiller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Mitchell, WJ Thomas. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Muecke, D.C. *Irony and Ironic*. New York: Routledge, 1986.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 1957, 2007.

Simner, Julia, and Edward M. Hubbard, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Wheelwright, Philip. *Metaphor & Reality.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962.

Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995

Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

6. Other references

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Project Gutenberg, 1892, p. 10.

Lee, Gus. *China Boy.* Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2003. / 李健孙。《支那崽》。南京，译林出版社，2003 年。

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Group, 2002,

Whitman, Walt. *Specimen Days in America.* Vol. 22. London: Folio Society, 1979.

Index of Names, Works, and Concepts

A

Adams, Bella 20, 136, 162, 183, 243, 308, 313, 385, 387, 399
Ambiguity 11, 25, 32, 41, 42, 51, 138, 140, 144, 174, 181, 183, 255, 277, 296, 303, 331, 402
Ambivalence 140, 141, 159, 164, 191, 207, 229, 257, 336
Andrews Malcolm 158, 165
Appiah, Kwame Anthony 390
Articulate silence 152, 233, 241, 242, 243. 316
Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin 212, 259, 349, 350, 362

B

Bakhtin, Mikhail 67, 102, 139, 158
Barnstone, Willis 388
Bassnett, Susan 259, 362
Being and Non-Being (有/无) 128. 258, 285, 286, 287, 288, 294, 295, 299, 300, 303, 342, 343, 397
Bhabha, Homi 9, 141, 142, 150, 152, 161, 176, 185, 210, 249, 253, 261, 289, 297
Bi (比) 15, 301,
Biblical stories 2, 4, 12, 164, 184, 186, 254, 367, 396
Body 197, 198, 199, 200, 208, 209, 213, 273
Brown, Jeffrey 333, 334
Burke, Edmund 133, 134, 135, 147, 148
Burkitt, Ian 77, 198

C

Caesar, Judity 78, 250
Cai, Zongqi 62, 63
Chan, Wing-Tsit 25, 197, 246
Changli (常理 coherence) 328, 335, 336
Chen, Guying 256, 257, 278
Chen, Xiaomei 219
Cheng, François 22, 23, 97
Cheung, King-Kok 143, 224, 233, 234, 308
Chinese American literature 19, 29, 152, 167, 181, 191, 200, 270,294, 316, 343, 381
Chinese calligraphy 8, 10, 22, 32, 33, 34, 47, 48, 50, 51, 65, 97, 152, 237, 240, 276, 277, 292, 293, 294, 348,
Chinese female landscape poets 105
Chinese landscape painting 22, 37, 70, 71, 82, 83, 97, 113, 117, 123, 125, 132, 213, 250, 261, 262, 277, 278, 283, 296, 328, 332, 338, 371, 377, 388, 390, 391, 396
Chinese male landscape poets 58, 95, 108, 109, 110, 112, 113, 114, 115, 290, 311, 332, 339
Chow, Rey…18
Chun, Allen 19
Clark, Kenneth 125, 154
Compossibility 82, 83, 399
Conard, Tammy S 328, 390
Confucianism 11, 46, 119, 148, 251, 272, 343, 345
Confucius 112, 199
Correlation 11, 12, 22, 23, 26, 30, 33, 64, 96, 117, 257, 306, 322, 326, 327, 350, 370, 378, 387, 390, 391, 393

Cosgrove, Denis E 11, 81, 124, 125,
Cutter, Martha J 351, 390
D
Dahua (大化 Great Process) 40, 139, 174, 314, 401
Dale, Corinne H 6, 309, 312
Daoism 11, 23, 46, 128, 136, 170, 213, 264, 287, 288, 303, 305, 345,
Death 144, 170,
Difference 13, 63, 99, 109, 113, 163, 185, 211, 253, 264, 297, 345, 386
Displacement 32, 38, 47, 86, 119, 150, 151, 181, 191, 225, 252, 259
Divergence 22, 108
Duncan, Patti 231
Dunick, Lisa MS 89, 231
E
Emerick, Ronald 359
Emerson, Ralph Waldo 40, 130
Empson, William 32
End-beginning 297, 298, 299
Exotic 99, 129, 132, 133, 185, 194, 221, 275, 357
F
Fang, Thomé H 83, 174, 330
Feng, Pin-chia 278
Feng, Youlan 105, 146
Fengshui (风水) 28, 103, 141, 146, 216-230
Fenollosa, Ernest 352
Folklore 80, 96, 325, 346, 378
Fong, Wen 22
Freud, Sigmund 157, 165, 157, 297
Fusion of sceneries and emotions (情景交融 *Qingjing Jiaorong*) 58
G
Gazing 17, 21, 26, 33, 34, 35, 37, 43, 44, 45, 53, 159
Ge, Hongbing 199
Gender studies 156, 157, 168, 172, 195, 228, 231, 233, 256,
Genette, Gérard 226
Ghost, ghostliness 277
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins 228, 229
Gress, Elsa 389
Gu, Ming Dong 334
Guo, Pu 216
Guo, Xi 83, 123, 269, 287
H
Hamilton, Patricia L 223
Heidegger, Martin 157, 159
Ho, Wendy 125, 212, 266,
Höllmann, Thomas O 102, 277
Hui, Nantian 256
Huntley, E. D. 325, 376
I
In-betweenness 23, 26, 161, 315, 363
Ingold, Tim 87, 88, 239, 240

Interspace 178, 279, 280, 357-362, 368
J
James, Duncan, and Nancy Duncan 66, 143, 232, 364
James, Legge 197, 199
Jullien, François 21, 30, 31, 46, 170, 198, 224, 236, 265, 285, 311, 332, 363, 379
K
Kim, Elain H 130, 190
Kingston, Maxine Hong 162, 176, 183, 231, 278, 308, 347, 351, 385
L
LaCapra, Dominick 383
Landscape as living 36, 37, 75, 79
Landscape as view 36, 38, 68, 73, 75, 78, 79
Landscape of death 163, 164, 165, 169, 170, 171, 172, 391
Landscape of life 172, 181
Laozi 11, 24, 223, 264, 265, 285, 287, 346, 378
Li, David Leiwei 186
Li, Zehou 368
Life vitality 12, 65, 72, 83, 86, 109, 162, 257, 258, 267, 308, 315, 390
Li, Yiqing 360
Liu, Yuxi 162
Longhurst, Robyn 147, 213
Lowe, Lisa 394
M
Ma, Shengmei 50, 182, 184, 194, 241, 242
Maxey, Ruth 176, 190
Metalepsis 217, 317, 323
Mistranslation 251, 252, 339, 347, 348-351, 353-355, 394
Mitchell, WJ Thomas 67, 232
Mo, Yan 91, 174, 175
Modern and primitive landscapes 133, 136, 173-175, 178, 180, 187
Modification(s) and continuation 153, 241, 338, 391, 392
Moeller, Hans-Georg 305
Mother-daughter relationship 18, 48, 75, 203, 206
Mountains and waters 12, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 57, 58, 71, 81-85, 96, 97, 102, 112, 113, 117, 121, 123, 131, 132, 138, 146, 182, 208, 235, 248, 249, 252, 257, 278, 283, 292, 296, 301, 303, 304, 315, 318, 321, 345, 352, 269, 370, 390, 391, 392, 394
Myth rewriting 9, 17, 29, 94, 95, 153, 197, 241, 244, 251, 252, 254, 255, 320, 326, 327, 339, 370, 378, 381, 383, 385, 386,
N
Nash, Roderick 127, 149
American Indian: 24
Novak, Barbara 130, 137
O
Orientalism 5, 26, 79, 171, 176, 181, 182, 348
Origin 266, 268, 269, 323, 386, 391, 394, 395
Other 155, 165
Owen, Stephen 97, 118, 124, 125, 309, 312, 339
P
Parker, Andrew 370

Porous space 27, 124, 131, 136, 144, 230, 271, 315, 317, 346, 387, 391
Porteous, J. Dougla1s 213
Post-colonialism 143, 160, 203, 251, 341, 342, 354
Post-humous 118, 124, 127, 247, 248, 271
Process 20, 21, 24, 26, 30, 31, 92, 93, 107, 206, 222, 224, 228, 238, 239, 242, 249, 250, 251, 252, 257, 262, 263, 266, 270, 272, 274, 280, 283, 284, 293, 299, 300, 305, 306, 308, 309, 314, 323, 327, 336, 340, 342, 350, 352, 357, 361, 362, 368, 376, 378, 379, 386, 394, 399, 400, 401, 404, 405

Q

Qi (气) 47, 48, 92-106, 108, 109, 123, 209, 216, 217, 221, 222, 225, 264, 285, 286, 358, 386
Qu, Yuan 62, 108, 378

R

Readerly translation 388, 389
Remove 13, 242, 244, 251, 252, 265, 277, 288, 325, 330, 339, 343, 345, 348, 354, 355, 374, 379, 380, 392
Return 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 255, 256, 257, 258, 260, 264-275, 285, 305, 308, 327, 386
Reversal 25, 151, 370, 371
Roaming 26, 34, 36, 38, 42, 44, 45, 46, 53, 55, 56, 117, 150
Romagnolo, Catherine 313, 364
Rose, Gillian 148, 177,
Rose, Mitch 232
Rushdie, Salman 353, 354, 371
Russell, Danielle 214

S

Said Edward 26, 27, 48, 180, 190, 369
Sanyuan (三远) 71
Schweninger, Lee 24
Shaw, Philip 157, 158, 168, 169
Shi (时 time) 249, 296, 302, 308, 338
Shi, Tao 30, 292
Shijing (诗经) 37, 82, 246, 271, 273, 309, 314, 317, 325, 328
Shin, Shu-mei 19, 20
Sikong, Tu 238
Silence 47, 110, 121, 122, 138, 141, 143, 146, 148, 151, 152, 153, 170, 208, 209, 216, 222, 223, 223, 224, 226, 227, 232-234, 236, 240-249, 305, 313, 316, 318, 346, 392,
Singer, Marc 6, 184, 186, 206, 218, 219, 307, 308, 325, 327, 328
Spiral development 6, 10, 24, 25, 243, 244, 260, 261, 262, 270, 271, 295, 311
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 152
Su, Shi 365

T

Talk-stories 9, 11, 19, 36, 59, 74, 93, 94, 136, 145, 174, 175, 180, 222, 253, 254, 297, 300, 301, 306, 308, 317, 320, 339, 345, 355, 360, 363, 366. 367, 368, 370, 373, 375, 387, 389
Tan, Amy 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 29, 45, 89. 90. 99, 100, 103, 118, 145.46. 176, 182. 183, 184, 187, 190, 191, 194, 195, 206, 211, 220, 223, 228, 231, 233, 241, 242, 243, 258, 278, 284, 307, 308, 309, 311, 313, 315, 316, 318, 325, 328, 338, 341, 342, 356, 359, 364, 369, 370, 376, 385, 386, 387, 390
Tang, Guizhang 62, 107
Tang, Junyi 251, 343

Tension 10, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27. 28, 30, 31-38, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 54, 56, 67, 82. 92, 95, 96, 107, 108, 121, 136, 139, 140, 153, 161, 171, 177, 239, 249, 253. 265, 300, 329, 347, 348, 358. 363, 378, 400, 405
The affectual 36, 37, 57, 58, 60-66
The beautiful 62, 141, 142, 143, 154-169, 235, 249, 373, 403
The perceptual 36, 37, 57-68, 100, 355
The sublime 134, 145-160
The uncanny 64, 65, 148, 156-160, 275, 294
The world without the self 35, 47, 48, 51, 52, 55, 56
Tianren Heyi (天人合一 oneness between man and nature) 10, 264
Tilley, Christopher 81, 83, 88, 382
Trace 10, 36, 49, 55, 65, 82, 97, 137, 140, 173, 213, 239, 268, 273, 276, 291, 292, 293, 294, 355, 368, 385, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 404
Transcendentalism 125, 130
Transformation 6, 12, 13, 18, 22, 23-28, 31, 35, 36, 50, 64, 108, 123, 127, 131, 139, 140, 141, 144, 146-151, 153, 154, 155, 160, 161, 162, 163, 170, 171, 174, 178, 197, 198, 199, 200, 204, 206, 211, 214, 215, 222-224, 230, 232, 237, 239, 242, 247, 249, 250, 251, 255, 261, 262, 266, 270. 287, 291, 298, 299, 300, 301, 323, 324, 338, 359, 363, 367, 378, 400
Transition 12, 13, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 92, 94, 97, 103, 123, 124, 139,-145, 150-157, 159-163, 165, 169, 170, 171, 174, 178, 181, 194, 196, 198, 222, 249, 250, 256, 286, 326, 327, 343, 346, 365, 377, 378. 380, 385, 389, 400
Translation 28, 29, 31, 259-265, 314, 317, 333, 345-348, 350, 351, 353-358. 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 367-370, 372, 374, 376, 377. 378, 380, 381, 387-391, 393, 394, 395, 402, 403
U
Undifferentiated *Dao* 48, 242-246, 251, 257-269, 271-275, 277, 278, 281-286, 292, 293, 296, 315, 325, 335, 377, 394
Unreliability of memory 61, 253, 356, 362, 363, 393
Unwritten stories 29, 254, 255, 369, 370, 372, 386
V
Van sijll, Jennifer 337
W
Walder, Dennis 363, 367
Waley, Arthur 136. 272, 285, 306, 379
Walker, Alice 84, 239, 308, 341
Wang, Bi 271
Wang, Fuzhi 34, 35
Wang, Guowei 34, 46, 55, 56, 366
Wang, Yangming 199
Wanwu (万物 the myriad things) 24, 25, 40, 41, 91, 132, 135, 190, 193, 241, 246, 256, 283, 284, 285, 291, 296, 298, 369
Wen, Tianxiang 59
Wheel Wright, Philip 102, 355
Whitman, Whit 136, 134, 135
Wong, Cynthia F 146, 161, 162, 183, 187, 195, 200, 211, 231, 307, 316, 356
Woyou (卧游) 45
Writerly translation 379, 380, 381, 386
Writerly dilemma 128, 132, 136, 174, 175, 181, 185, 186, 225, 252, 343, 364
Wylie, John 81, 84, 85, 322, 362,
X

Xiangtu Qingjie (乡土情结 The attachment to land) 10, 24, 70, 82, 89, 259, 310, 316, 318-322, 324,
Xin, Qiji 62
Xing (兴) 15, 236, 301, 317, 320
Xing (形) 23, 40, 303
Xu, Ben 369
Xu-Jing (虚静) 279-281, 284, 285, 287, 288, 295
Y
Ye, Lang 367
Yeh, Michelle 311
Yin-yang (阴阳) 23, 28, 47, 48, 85, 113, 117, 139, 144, 189-191, 197, 198, 204-206, 211, 215, 220, 235, 285, 286, 377
Yip, Wai-lim 311
Yuan, Ke 17
Yuan, Yuan 11, 191, 347, 351
Yuzhou (宇宙 the universe) 140, 207, 296, 350
Z
Zhang, Longxi 15, 18, 47
Zhu, Aijun 98, 182
Zhu, Liangzhi 93, 256, 272
Zhuangzi 128, 131
Zong, Bing 43, 96, 168
Zuowang (坐忘) 120

Abstract

This dissertation examines the works of Chinese American writer Amy Tan. It focuses on the complication of Chineseness through analyzing Tan's way of writing landscape. It argues that there is no fixed, limited Chineseness. Instead, Chineseness is always in a process of being and becoming. It is precisely from this absence of one single version of Chineseness that various versions of Chineseness arise. The fluidity of landscape, the unreliability of narration, and that of memory also emerge. In Tan's novels, landscape makes up a fruitful space for her to negotiate with her Chinese heritage. For her, China is a lost land and Chinese landscapes are unwritten stories. This dissertation puts Chinese philosophy, landscape paintings, and landscape poems in dialogue with Tan's revisiting of Chinese philosophies concerning the relationship between humans and nature. It equally brings Chinese American female characters' active and creative engagement with landscape into the understanding of Chineseness into play. Tan's views on Chineseness spirally evolve in the representation of landscape in her novels that go through a process of tension, transition-and-transformation, and return. Part 1 discerns an opposition-correlation between the tension field of Chinese-born and American-born female characters' perception and interpretation of landscape. Chineseness is inaccessible to Tan's female characters in this tension field. Part 2 analyzes the elusiveness, fluidity, and uncertainty in Tan's written landscapes, which are in unceasing transition and transformation. I read this fluidity as Tan's way of complicating Chineseness as well as an expression of her writerly dilemma. Part 3 displays Tan's Chinese American female characters' own (mis)/(re)understanding of China, which offers Tan more freedom to explore what China and Chineseness mean to her. In analyzing the (missed)/(mis) readings of China, concepts such as the past, home, and origin also gain the opportunity to be reconsidered.

Keywords: Chineseness, landscape, Amy Tan, revision, Chinese American female characters, novels, gender

Résumé

Cette thèse explore la façon dont l'écriture des paysages de l'autrice chinoise américaine Amy Tan complexifie la notion de sinéité. Cette dernière va y apparaître peu à peu comme non fixe et non figée : toujours en devenir. C'est de cette absence même de sinéité que se dessine la sinéité, portée par la fluidité des paysages, les flottements de la mémoire et de la narration. Là, dans les paysages de ses romans, Tan ouvre un site de négociation de son héritage. La Chine y apparaît comme la Terre Perdue, ses paysages des pages non écrites. Cette thèse fait dialoguer ensemble d'une part la philosophie et les traditions paysagères chinoises, tant picturales que poétiques, et d'autre part, leurs révisions à l'œuvre chez Tan. Elle met parallèlement en avant cette sinéité qui se (dé)construit à travers la façon dont les personnages féminins interagissent avec les paysages. Ce que la Chine et être chinoise représentent pour Tan évolue en spirale diachroniquement tout au long de ses romans, et se déploie dans leurs paysages, qui passent, au fil des œuvres, d'une construction en tension à un processus de transition-transformation pour arriver à un retour. La Première Partie distingue une corrélation dans l'opposition entre les perceptions et interprétations paysagères des personnages féminins nés en Chine et de ceux nés aux États-Unis. Ce dont la Chine est le nom est inaccessible aux personnages féminins d'où qu'ils soient, dans un tel champ de tension. La Deuxième Partie analyse le caractère fuyant, fluide et incertain des paysages de Tan pris dans les mouvements d'une incessante transition-et-transformation. Ces caractéristiques spécifiques sont lues ici comme ce qui permet à Tan de complexifier la sinéité, mais aussi comme l'expression des dilemmes qui la traversent, en tant qu'autrice. La Troisième Partie expose ces façons qu'ont les personnages féminins de Tan de mal/bien comprendre ce qu'est "la Chine" — par quoi Tan se donne alors toute liberté d'explorer ce que "la Chine" et la sinéité veulent dire pour elle. Avec l'analyse de ces errances, ce sont les affirmations qui touchent Histoire, Patrie et Origines qui commencent à bouger.

Mots-clefs : sinéité, paysage, Amy Tan, révision, personnages de romans féminins chinois américains, roman, genre