Representations of Memory and Identity in Chinese-Australian English-language Novels from 1990 to 2010

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This thesis argues that one of the main characteristics of contemporary Chinese Australian literature in English language is its heavy focus on memory and identity. In order to prove this claim, the thesis analyses five English-language novels written by Chinese Australian writers from the period 1990-2010. These works are Lillian Ng's Silver Sister, Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing*, Ouyang Yu's *The English Class*, Lau Siew Mei's *Playing Madame Mao* and Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon*.

All of the five novels engage with notions of memory and identity in terms of textual structure, characterization, generic features and central themes. This thesis analyses how the selected texts view identity formation as a contested progress influenced by the modes through which fictionalized memory works. In each text, the categories of memory modes are identified and discussed, along with the textual representations. These travelling modes of memory demonstrate that identity can transcend collective belonging, ethnic differences, national borders, political frameworks and generational space. Such modes include 'cosmopolitan memory', which refers to the phenomena that collective memories transcend national and ethnical boundaries. A character who observes his or her past as a cosmopolitan experience acquires a cosmopolitan way of living, thus he or she does not need to be identified with any ethnic group or nationality. Cultural memory is also strongly attached to different languages in diaspora and, when memory is translated from one language to another, cultural translation plays a role in judging whether the past is correctly transferred and previous identities are sustained in a new environment. 'Political memory' refers to memory embedded in political incidents, usually traumatic and contested, through which individual identity is in a dynamic relation with national identity. 'Transgenerational memory' refers to memory that is difficult to be passed on across generations. In all of these modes, identity as a notion is contested and deconstructed.

These literary works not only challenge essentialist formations of identity, but also experiment with new ways of establishing it by building new modes of memory. The thesis, in this way, examines the creation of new memory modes that allow new formation of identities in Chinese Australian literary contexts.

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Contents

Introduction

As cultural globalisation develops, dramatic changes are happening in the discipline of literary studies. Anglophone literature is no longer confined to the label of 'English literature produced by local writers' and it now experiences dramatic transformations in terms of the identities of writers and the works produced by them. Migrant writers, as a more recently expanding group of writers, have entered the vision of literary scholars and critics because of the distinctive features of their works in representing diaspora, memory and identity transnationally. Anglophone literature is now gradually being replaced by a broader concept: transnational literature under the effects of decolonisation, migration, and globalisation. This calls for a new mode of viewing Anglophone literature. It is not necessarily produced within English-speaking countries by local people whose mother tongue is English; it may be written by migrants speaking English as a second language who cross at least two countries, know two cultures, and write in English about their 'double experience'. Chinese-Australian literature in English, as one of the newly emerging literatures, is now under quite a lot of scholarly discussion on its nature, topics, and contents.

Inspired by the 'transnational turn' in global literature, this thesis analyses representations of memory and identity in Chinese-Australian novels written in English published from 1990 to 2010. There are considerable numbers of writers of Chinese background in Australia who write in English on issues of relocation, memories of the past and experiences of living between the two vastly different countries. In these novels, trauma in the homelands, confusion about identity and belonging, as well as irresistible memories are highlighted as

indicators that mark the distinctive features of Chinese-Australian literature. This thesis seeks to analyse the diverse approaches within this particular literature in representing memory and identity.

The reasons why memory and identity are of great prominence in Chinese-Australian literature are not only because it is based on thoughts about the authors' real or imagined pasts, but also because conceptually the issues of identity and belonging are closely associated with memory. 'Memory' refers to any remembering of remote and/or recent pasts, and based on theories of memory studies, memory can be divided into different categories depending on contexts. 'Identity' is a word derived generally from psychology, indicating a person's feeling about that person's self, character, goals and origins. According to cultural studies, diasporic identity cannot be understood without contextual understanding of the historical background of diaspora and personal diasporic experience. Locating Asian-Australian cultures in literature needs deep understanding of the characters' and the authors' cultural backgrounds, which in the novels can refer to the histories they have witnessed and memories they have kept. By attending to representations of memories in these novels, I will observe how memory exerts influence on deciding or helping to decide one's identity in these texts. In these texts, authors probe into how the Chinese diaspora influences the way memory works and identity is challenged in the way that various memories function as decisive factors of belonging and identity.

Before going into scholarly discussion on the thematic topics in this thesis, primary accounts of Chinese-Australian settlement are needed as background knowledge of Chinese-Australian

literary creation. Though China and Australia established mutual diplomatic relations in 1972, these two countries had been in frequent contact since the early colonial period, before

Australia became a federated nation independent of Britain. As Williams suggests, contacts between the two countries can be dated back to the nineteenth century when the first Chinese immigrants arrived in Australia in 1818. The later 'gold rush' triggered the arrival of another considerable number of Chinese labourers in Australia. Under heavy workloads and with a lack of higher education, these Chinese labourers left little literary writing, especially in English. What they wrote were mainly diaries and letters, which are not usually regarded as literary creations. According to Shen Yuanfang, Asian-Australian autobiographical writing started in the 1920s (8, cf. Ommundsen "Transnational Imaginaries"), and creative writers published their earliest works in the 1950s (Ommundsen, "Transnational Imaginaries," 1). In the 1970s, Ee Tiang Hong and Brian Castro began to be noticed as Asian Australian writers through their novels.[1] In the1980s, about forty thousand Chinese migrated to Australia and this became a 'Chinese rush'. Many Chinese-Australian writers emerged in this period, and Australian readerships also became interested in reading literary works written by Chinese migrants. Chinese-Australian literature began to march into the sphere of Asian-Australian literature as an active literary grouping and, thanks to the more relaxed cultural atmosphere in Australia after the abolishing of the White Australia policy in the 1970s, there are now more and more writers with Chinese heritage publishing their novels in both Chinese and English.

1 Refer to the AustLit database for newly revealed numbers of Asian-Australian literary works previously unknown to literary scholars.

To discuss the specific divisions, a definition of Asian-Australian literature is introduced in the following.

1. Definition and Scope of Asian-Australian Literature

There are some critics who have attempted to determine the definition of Asian-Australian literature, such as Deborah L. Madsen and Olivia Khoo. According to Madsen, 'Asian Australian literature' is difficult to define in strictly nationalistic terms, where 'Australian literature' is the controlling noun and 'Asian' functions as an adjective" ("Asian -Australian Literature," 105). She treats 'Asian-Australian literature' as "works written by Anglophone Asian Australian writers" (Madsen, "Asian -Australian Literature," 106). Madsen gives the definition based on the speaking language of the writers, while Olivia Khoo writes about her opinion with a comparison to Asian-American literature. In her critical essay "Marketing Asian-Australianness: Introduction", first delivered as the chair of a panel discussion at the second Asian-Australian Identities conference in Melbourne (2007), Khoo says:

> Compared to the field of Asian-American literature, Asian-Australian literature is still very new. As a literary category, Asian-Australian writing is slowly beginning to establish itself although it remains far less institutionalised (both in publishing and in academia) than its U.S. counterpart. In many ways, the category 'Asian-Australian literature' is still in the process of being defined. It both straddles, and seeks to differentiate itself from, the sometimes conflicting constellations of diasporic Asian literature and Australian literature. Nevertheless, there is a strong and ever-growing

> body of works and writings that we might call ‘Asian-Australian literature’ (literature by or about Asian-Australians) in its own right. (n.p.)

Khoo’s ‘Asian-Australian literature’ is a recently coined definition that still needs more time to develop. Similarly, Ommundsen shares her view that, though earlier Asian-Australian literary works have been discovered and recorded by the *AustLit* database, “as a *category* of writing, Asian-Australian writing did not emerge until the 1990s, and its currency within literary scholarship dates back not much more than a decade” (“Transnational Imaginaries,” 1). Following in the steps of Asian-American literature, Asian-Australian literature is regarded as a similar category of literature which, compared to the former, is still underdeveloped. In this thesis, Asian-Australian literature is defined as the literature created by Asian-Australian writers who have Asian descent, as either first generation or Australian born. Based on this definition of Asian-Australian literature, this thesis develops a definition of Chinese-Australian literature.

2. Chinese-Australian Literature

Similar to Asian-Australian literature, Chinese-Australian literature is also a new category that is under the process of definition. In this thesis, I define Chinese-Australian literature as literary works created either in English or in Chinese by authors with Chinese heritage. Based on the languages in which the works are written, there are two categories within this. One refers to literary works written by Chinese-Australian writers in the English language and the other refers to literary works by Chinese-Australian writers in Chinese languages. However, in the research scope of Australian literature, the latter is rarely noticed owing to

the language barrier. According to Ommundsen, Chinese-Australian writing, as a whole, "has been recognized as an important and growing category within Australian literature since the 1990s" ("Transnational (Il)literacies," 85), and there has already been a considerable amount of literary criticism published (see works by Ommundsen, Khoo, Broinowski, Morris, Wang and others).

Changing policies in the cultural environment are significant elements for Chinese-Australian literature to seize the chance and develop itself. However, multiculturalism is a double-edged sword, which brings both chances and challenges. Under multiculturalism, the Australian government aims to enable everyone in Australia to freely maintain the culture of their country of origin, to practice their own religion and with equal opportunities to be employed and treated equally. All of these aims added positive force to the development of Asian-Australian literature and especially Chinese-Australian literature written in English. Many migrant writers, including Chinese-Australian writers, see the chance to label their writings as multicultural in order to obtain broader readerships. But in reality multiculturalism is usually not realised:

> Multiculturalism does not stand for separatism, for separate development of different ethnic groups in Australia. It does not stand for different ethnic groups living in their own suburbs or, in European terms, it does not involve a "ghetto mentality". It does not stand for ethnic communities making their ethnic origin and background more important than their membership of Australian society.

> Multiculturalism does not condone old frictions or enmities being imported into Australia. Foreign languages remain foreign languages. Proficiency in English is an absolute prerequisite to full participation in Australian society and to success in Australian life. Multi-culturalism accepts English as the official and pre-eminent common language. (Fraser 1)

The quotation is from the inaugural speech given by former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser to the Congress of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, on 30 November 1988. It indicates that while multiculturalism brings more frequent contact between immigrants and mainstream Australian society, and encourages people to bring their cultures into this society, it does not aim to change Australia into a small 'United Nations'.

Therefore, the writing environment has not completely changed. At the earlier stage, Chinese-Australian literature as a whole, dwarfed by the urge to protect the dominant White Australian literature, was still misread and neglected. And Chinese-Australian writing still meets challenges from dominant Australian society.

As a comparison, Chinese-Australian literature in Chinese languages provides a refracting mirror to help critics consider Chinese writers' works written in English. Ommundsen provides an estimate that "around 200 writers of Chinese descent live in Australia, most of them writing in Chinese" ("Birds of Passage," 94). This category of literature blossomed when contemporary Chinese-Australian immigrants came from China in the 1980s for the sake of education, together with Southeast Asian refugees and refugees from Hong Kong of

Chinese background. The boom in this literature has special economic and political reasons. From the 1980s, Chinese students began to start literary journals in Chinese languages such as *Otherland* and *The Great World*. *Otherland*, for instance, was initiated by Ouyang Yu, Ding Xiaoqi and Sun Haoliang in 1995 and published its first issue in 1996 under the only editor Ouyang Yu. *Otherland* was changed into a bilingual literary journal in 2000 and is still active now. It mainly publishes works by Chinese writers in Australia and works by Chinese writers from China sometimes also appear. The development of Chinese-Australian literature in Chinese languages is also supported by Australian Chinese Writers Associations in different states of Australia. The first one was established in 1992 in Melbourne and two more branches were founded in Sydney and Brisbane. These journals and literary associations demonstrate a boom in Chinese writing in Australia, and this boom encourages more Chinese writers to write and publish their works.

Economically, more and more Chinese students, at that time, chose Australia as their first priority country to complete overseas study because of the promotion by the Australian government of English-taught courses and the development of international trade between China and Australia. Mabel Lee, the critic and researcher of Chinese literature and cross-boundary literature, as well as translator of the Nobel-Prize winner Gao Xingjian, points out that, "the event of 4 June 1989 in Tiananmen left a group of Chinese students stranded in Australia, psychologically and emotionally traumatized by the media coverage of events" (579). This group of Chinese students desperately needed an outlet to respond to the trauma and difficulty of settling into their new life. This was the time when "Chinese-language newspapers in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, all with literature sections, increased

significantly and at the same time began to develop national distribution outlets" (Lee 579). Based on the above information, generally acknowledged, the boom in Chinese-Australian literature in Chinese in Australia was stimulated by the political event in 1989 in China, while Chinese newspapers expanded in major Australian cities, which also helped expose these works to a larger readership within the Chinese community in Australia and readers in China as well. In this category of literature, according to Ommundsen, a number of writers have lived or stayed in Australia, but write in Chinese, including: Sang Ye, Tian Di, Bi Xiyan, Liu Xirang, Shen Zhimin, Huang Yuye (Xin Shui, Laurence Wong), Da Lu, Xian Qianbo, Xu Jiazheng (C.C. Hsu).[2] It should be noted that many of these writers are not regarded as 'literary' enough to be the targets of literary criticism (Ommundsen, "Transnational (Il)literacies," 86).

Because of the dominance of English language and culture, lack of accurate translation and being regarded as not interesting enough, Chinese-Australian literature in the Chinese language still cannot attract a broad readership in Australia. Comparatively, Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Hsu-Ming Teo, Tom Cho and Beth Yahp have received attention based on their English-language texts and their involvements with Australian contexts. Thus, this thesis chooses Chinese-Australian English-language literature as its research subject. Chinese-Australian writers like Brian Castro, Lillian Ng, Lau Siew Mei, Ouyang Yu and Hsu-Ming Teo are selected because they write cross-boundary fictions in English, have received more

[2] Please refer to Ommundsen' s article "Transnational (Il)literacies: Reading the "New Chinese Literature in Australia" in China" for a complete lists of the writers mentioned here.

attention in the Australian literature context and are considered as part of Australian literature and, more specifically, Asian-Australian literature.

This category of literature plays a significant role in spreading Chinese cultures and engaging with cultural comparisons between China and Australia. Before 1983, the year when Brian Castro published his first novel *Birds of Passage*, there were few Chinese-Australian works in English that attracted large readerships in Australia. *Birds of Passage* exerted much influence upon Australian and international readers. Brian Castro was born on a boat from Hong Kong to Macau and immigrated to Australia when he was twelve years old. He has contributed eight novels to Australian literature and many commentaries as well as literary critical essays. Yin Rui, a Chinese scholar, argues that "Chinese-Australian English-Language literature boomed after Brian Castro, who dominated the beginning period with his novels" (105). Therefore, to some extent, he is the most successful writer among several pioneers in this field. Castro's works cover many genres including fiction, autobiography, crime, biography, drama, novella, short stories and prose. Castro's writing is characterized by elegant and sophisticated language, involvement in several cultures, and theoretical reflections mingling with narration. Though labelled as Chinese-Australian writer in this thesis, Castro's writing extends our understanding of Chineseness as a flexible term rather than fixed. His view of China and family memory in China is quite different from other writers of Chinese descent due to his cosmopolitan backgrounds. Since the 1990s, contemporary Chinese-Australian writings began to gain notice in Australian literary circle in the genres of poetry, fiction, memoir and short stories.

In terms of poetry, there are several notable poem collections, of which *Moon over Melbourne and Other Poems* (1995) by Ouyang Yu has received sizable interest from Australian literary circles. His poetry collections also include *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet* (1997) and *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-Coloured Eyes* (2002). Ouyang Yu is a prominent poet, critic and novelist writing extensively on the understanding of diasporic Chinese identity, racism in Australia, cultural identification with China and cultural differences between China and Australia.

In terms of fiction, many Chinese-Australian writers have contributed their works to the literary cannon, including *Birds of Passage* (1993) by Brian Castro, *The Crocodile Fury* (1992) by Beth Yahp, *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* (2002) by Ouyang Yu, and *Love and Vertigo* (2000) by Hsu-Ming Teo. These fictions touch many aspects of life in Australia such as early Chinese settlement, migration experience, cultural identity and diasporic memories.

Tom Cho is a short-story writer with Chinese descent and his first known short story collection is *Look Who's Morphing* (2009). Besides this, *Unpolished Gem* (2006) as a memoir by Alice Pung has received many literary awards including winner of Australian Newcomer of the Year in the 2007 Australian Book Industry Awards and was shortlisted for Australian Biography of the Year and Australian Book of the Year. It offers biographical life stories of Alice Pung and her Chinese-Cambodian family and how they pursue their Australian dream. Lillian Ng, on the other hand, writes memoir-style fiction based on her nanny in China. She writes about how Silver as a "comb-up" was forced to leave her hometown and to survive in the diaspora.

The development of Asian-Australian literature, including Chinese-Australian literature, has received considerable attention from both cultural studies and literary research. In cultural studies, for example, Ien Ang's *On Not Speaking Chinese* (2001) engages with critical questions of identity politics in a globalised age and issues of Chineseness and Chinese diaspora. Ang not only critiques the tendency to construct a global Chineseness, but also offers challenging questions towards the Western misunderstanding of equating Chinese with Asian identity. Based on her insights into these above matters, Ang theorises the 'in-between' space in which she further promotes her idea of forming 'togetherness' rather than 'difference'. Moreover, Ang's other contribution is to challenge the essentialist interpretation of 'diaspora' and to define it as "transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original 'homeland'"

(25). Like Homi Bhabha, Ang also offers her critical thinking on the notion of a "third space", which she views as a space with unlimited possibilities and potential, and also in which "diasporic imagination is steeped in continuous ambivalence" (4). In this thesis, I draw on Ang's notion of diaspora and will also utilize her thoughts on identity in order to view identity as fluid and changeable.

Many criticisms have opened discussions on canonizing Chinese-Australian literature. There are scholarly works dedicated to promoting it as part of Australian literature, such as critical works by Wenche Ommundsen from the University of Wollongong. Ommundsen is a prominent literary critic who has written more than forty-one critical articles with particular

interest in the areas of Asian-Australian writing. Ommundsen summarizes and canonizes Chinese-Australian literature as an independent category in her edited work *Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing* (2001), which introduces a variety of creative works by Chinese-Australian writers including journalism, autobiography, petitions, films, mixed-media performance, poetry and fictions.

In addition, Ommundsen analyses the phenomenon of cultural citizenship in the Chinese diaspora and argues against cultural essentialism, claiming that "the literatures of diaspora deserve to be read as documents of unique and complex cultural experiences rather than mere illustrations of archetypes" ("Floating Lives," 101). In essays like "Transnational Literacies: Reading the 'New Chinese Literature in Australia' in China" (2011) and "This story does not begin on a boat: What is Australian about Asian Australian writing?" (2011), Ommundsen argues for the need to consider Chinese-Australian literature as part of Australian literature and examines how Chinese-Australian literature is read and criticized by both Chinese scholars and Australian scholars. Her critical works pave the way for Chinese-Australian literature to play a part under the transnational turn in Australian literature.

Works by Shirley Tucker, Tseen Khoo, Olivia Khoo and Huang Zhong mainly observe gendered representations in Chinese-Australian novels and autobiographies. Both Tucker and Olivia Khoo observe representations of Chinese femininity in Chinese-Australian women's writing while Huang is interested in the representations of masculinity in Chinese-Australian literature and has completed his Ph.D thesis on this topic. Issues of cultural identity, racial identity and citizenship are also the focus of current criticism on Chinese-Australian writing,

such as Peta Stephenson's critical essay "Where are you from? New Imaginings of Identity in Chinese-Australian Writing" (2005), in which Stephenson links the Chinese diaspora with the indigenous community and claims that "Chinese (and all other) migration occurs within the history of colonisation, *within* rather than after the history of relations between Indigenous and non-indigenous people" (Stephenson 172). Regina Lee's "Flexible Citizenship: Strategic Chinese Identities in Asian Australian literature" (2006) argues that "Asian Australian cultural production [reveals] not only deep ambivalences surrounding cultural and political citizenship, but that it is also subject to constant re-negotiation with historical and prevailing attitudes about race and culture" (213). There are also two books published in China concerning cultural identity in this category of literature: *Being and Becoming: On Cultural Identity of Diasporic Chinese Writers in America and Australi*a (2004) by Wang Guanglin and *'Death' of the 'Poet': A Metaphor of an Era - The Anxiety of Identity in Australian 'New Chinese' Literature 1988 to 1998* (2000) by Qian Chaoying.[3] Both Wang and Qian express interest in the representation of identity in Chinese-Australian literature. Especially, Wang compares this category with Chinese-American literature and argues that both of these two categories represent identity disorientation and seek a stable sense of belonging in multicultural societies. Last but not least, representations of masculinity have also attracted attention from scholars such as Huang Zhong, who completed his doctoral degree at the University of Wollongong, and Ouyang Yu, the renowned "Angry Poet". (Ommundsen, "Not for the faint-hearted," 595) Huang's 2012 Ph.D thesis conducted research on how Chinese

[3] Borrowing Dr. Huang Zhong's translation of the original Chinese title "诗人" 之"死"：一个时代的隐喻-1988-1998 年间新华人文学中的身份焦虑.

masculinity is constructed in fiction and autobiography and further explores the theoretical and historical underpinnings behind these constructions. Ouyang Yu's focus, slightly different from Huang, is representing how Chinese masculinity encounters Australian femininity in his creative works, rather than scholarly research. There are also other researchers like Alison Broinowski putting their efforts into how Asian Australian literature represents Australians and Australia. The lists go on but cannot be fully covered here.

However, current criticism does not put much emphasis on the representation of memory and identity in Chinese-Australian literature, which means that current readings of this category are incomplete. I argue that as a category of diasporic literature, Chinese-Australian literature is characterized by its focus on representing memory and identity, thus it needs more criticism on how they represent themselves in memory and how diasporic memory shapes the characters' understanding of identity.

3. The Reception of Chinese-Australian literatures in China

As early as 1980, the Chinese literary critic Wang Zuoliang pointed out that "Australian literature is an ideal research subject for a literary critic" (qtd. in Peng Qinglong 1). During the intervening thirty years, Australian literature has fought its way into China's academic world. According to a survey of "The Thirty-year Development of Australian literature in China " written by Peng Qinglong, published in *Yi Lin* in 2009, the study of Australian literature in China can be divided into three stages: the starting period (1979-1988), the development period (1989-1998) and the booming period (1990-2008) (185).

During the first period, Australian literature criticism began to develop in China with twenty-one academic articles and eighty-three translations published. However, Huang Yuanshen and Hu Wenzhong contributed the majority and others made up only seven of the twenty-one articles. The second period is marked by the development of Australian Research Centres and ongoing senior seminars. Australian Research Centres have been established in Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1993, East China Normal University, Xia Men University, Nan Kai University, Su Zhou University and Peking University. These research centres not only study Australian literature but also extend their concerns to Chinese-Australian politics and economics, and cultural exchanges. Chinese-Australian literature began to gain its prominence in the third period when cultural exchanges between China and Australia were extended and more prominently marked.

Though many research centres have been established and a great number of scholars are committed to Australian literature research, Australian literature, as a whole, is still in a disadvantaged position because of several complex cultural, political and social causes. Wenche Ommundsen points out several prominent reasons in her article "Transnational (Il) literacies: Reading the 'New Chinese Literature in Australia' in China" (2011). Ommundsen holds that Australian literature has been ignored for a considerable time, dwarfed by the US

and the UK, because scholars have an incorrect perception of Australia as a second-rate country, which is only attractive for its beaches, clean air and comfortable life. This image tainted and degraded Australian literature, especially the works of Chinese-Australian writers, which are considered "too dull, different, and culturally unpalatable to rank highly with

publishers and translators or on the syllabi of university courses" (Ommundsen, "Transnational (Il)literacies," 85).

The situations in China and Australia are not very positive but still there are scholars sustaining hope in Australian literature's future. In China, according to Peng Qinglong's calculation, until 2008, Chinese scholars have successfully applied for three national Humanities and Social Science funding projects, and one funded by the Department of Education. There are eighty-three critical articles published on Australian literary studies and seven scholarly books. There are now twenty-three Australian studies centres established across China. From Australia, the Australia-China Council has been funding these centres with stable financial and technological support.

In 2011, a China-Australia literature forum was held at the University of Western Sydney and a great number of recognized writers, critics, publishers from China and Australia, such as Mo Yan (real name Guan Moye, 2012 Nobel Prize Winner in Literature) and Ouyang Yu gathered together discussing issues related to Australian literature, Asian-Australian literature, the publishing climate in both countries, and so on. The exchanges will hopefully bring a new energy to further study of Australian literature in China.

4. Thesis Research Scope: Time, Topics and Genres

This thesis examines representations of memory and identity in Chinese-Australian English novels by Lillian Ng, Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Lau Siew Mei and Hsu-Ming Teo, published from 1990-2010.

In terms of time, Chinese-Australian English-language novels have boomed and gained distinctive notice in Australian literature since the 1990s. After 2010, there have been fewer novels written by Chinese-Australian writers but more autobiographies, essays and short stories. Since there has already been much criticism discussing Asian-Australian literature of the 1980s, this thesis will deal with novels written in English by Chinese-Australian writers from 1990 – the moment when Chinese-Australian writers' novels began to speak with a noticeable voice in Australian literature (Ommundsen, "Transnational (Il)literacies," 85) – to 2010.

In terms of topics, up to now, much research has been conducted on Chinese-Australian writing and its related areas including topics as following: canonizing Asian-Australian writing; comparative studies between Chinese-Canadian, Chinese-American and Chinese-Australian narratives; representations of Chinese people in Australian literature; representations of Chinese femininity and masculinity. (Olivia Khoo 2001; Regina Lee 2006; Huang Zhong 2012; Peta Stephenson 2005; Tseen Khoo 2003; Wenche Ommundsen 2011; Wang Liping 2003).[4] These are all important issues when considering Chinese-Australian writing but the current research does not theorise the feature of Chinese-Australian literature. Chinese-Australian literature writes extensively and vividly on Chinese diasporic memory, and lots of texts concentrate on contesting clichéd understanding of identity formation. Memory plays a very significant role in deciding one's identity, be it cultural identity or diasporic identity. Currently, when critics talk about representations of identity in Chinese-

[4] Please refer to 1.2 of this introduction to see more criticisms listed.

Australian writing, the most cited theories are Said's Orientalism and diasporic theories of cultural citizenship. Critics focus on the establishment of identity and its characteristics. However, identity's existence cannot be isolated from memory and by connecting the two concepts this thesis suggests a new research vantage point to review the issue of identity and its representations in Chinese-Australian writing. By reading representations in Chinese-Australian novels, this thesis also engages with other issues in relation to memory, such as the role of language in forming memory, family history and its relations with diasporic memory, as well as how politics connects with the issue of memory and identity. These questions are represented in the selected novels and are central indicators for each novel, representing a diversified variety of diasporic memories and their historical, familial and social underpinnings.

In terms of genres, previous research usually combines different literary forms like fictions, short stories, novellas and autobiographies, such as the treatment in Regina Lee's thesis "Theorising the Chinese Diaspora: Chinese Canadian and Chinese Australian Narrative." (Lee, 2005).This thesis focuses on only selected novels, about their engagements in memory and identity. There are several well-grounded reasons for this: first, novels as a genre of longer and more complicated narratives reflect broader understandings of aspects of the Chinese diaspora; second, the role of memory in fiction is different from that in autobiographical works or memoirs. Novels not only represent memory and identity, they contest and challenge clichéd notions of them.

This thesis will examine five novels written by Chinese-Australian writers which represent contesting relationships between memory and identity in Chinese diasporic writing. In these novels, writers either bring their own memories to the works or use the memories of characters to transfer stories and histories into an unfamiliar country where those characters decide to settle down. These works loosely cover history in the characters' home country and examine how history shapes memory and identity, how identity reflects memory and history, and how memory exerts influence on the representations of history and identity.

Based on time frame, generic preference and topic rationale, I have selected the most relevant novels. These novels are *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) by Brian Castro, *The English Class* (2010) by Ouyang Yu, *Silver Sister* (1994) by Lillian Ng, *Playing Madame Mao* (2000) by Lau Siew Mei and *Behind the Moon* (2007) by Hsu-Ming Teo. The plots of the selected novels are set both in China and Australia. Some of them are set in a third or fourth country including Singapore, Malaysia, and colonial Hong Kong. The novels include stories, histories and memories of homeland, war, immigration and, they reveal considerations of turbulent and chaotic periods of Chinese history like the Cultural Revolution, the Japanese invasion and the wars between the communist party and the Kuomintang. In these works, Australia is set as an adopted country and plays the role of a country of settlement, trauma and survival.

Chapter One is a theoretical discussion that introduces the methodologies I use in this thesis. I will use theories of memory studies such as Halbawachs' theories of collective memory and individual memory, Assman's cultural memory, Clifford's definition of diaspora, Paul Gilroy's theory of understanding identity as well as Stuart Hall's approach to cultural identity.

After this theoretical discussion, Chapter Two starts with discussion of *Silver Sister* (1994) by Lillian Ng. As an explicit example of women's writing, the work is selected for this thesis due to its interplay with Chinese history and the diasporic memory of Chinese people, and its memoir-style narrative. This Chapter observes how diasporic personal memory engages with collective memory in Ng's novel and how diasporic identity is formed based on these engagements.

Chapter Three focuses on Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* (2003). It is selected because of its interest in reflecting how memory engages with both family history and national history. Due to its efforts in mixing autobiographical features with fictional accounts of family history, *Shanghai Dancing* is a novel from which the notion of 'cosmopolitan memory' is generated and reflected on. It is a unique and sophisticated example of how fiction reflects on memory and identity. By analysing how Castro's writing style differs from other Chinese-Australian fiction, this chapter explores how Castro understands memory in a cosmopolitan family.

Chapter Four discusses Ouyang Yu's *The English Class* (2010). This novel is selected based on its intriguing representations of the role of language in the protagonist Jing's diasporic life and cultural memory. Jing is an educated youth who becomes a truck driver after the Cultural Revolution. He has a desire to learn English and believes that English may finally change his fate. Bilingual issues for migrants in Australia are represented through the story of a Chinese man who marries an Australian woman and struggles between mother tongue and adopted tongue. Jing's struggles between two languages represent his confusions in relying on his

cultural memory in China or establishing ‘new’ cultural memory in Australia. It is a good example for examining how languages relate to cultural memory in Ouyang’s writing.

Chapter Five engages with Lau Siew Mei’s *Playing Madame Mao* (2000). *Playing Madame Mao*, as a novel with political elements, is chosen based on its special interests in how political memory plays a role in deciding or influencing identity in diaspora. This chapter pays much attention to how memory is contextualized in postcolonial Singapore and Australia. Politics influences the way characters, especially women, in Singapore think and act. The story of Chiang Ching engages a remote historical figure, Jiang Qing, the last wife of Mao Zedong. Historical imagination constitutes most of the political memory in this novel, and it is worth exploring how political memory works as a challenge to the notion of a fixed identity.

Chapter Six is about Hsu-Ming Teo’s *Behind the Moon* (2006). It is selected based on its interesting engagement with the contemporary life of second-generation migrants with Chinese background in an Australian context. Hsu-Ming Teo was born in Malaysia in 1970 and migrated with her parents to Sydney in 1977. *Behind the Moon* is a novel standing out from the rest of the selected novels in this thesis. It is a novel telling the stories of second-generation migrants in Australia, and the role of memory is thus differentiated from the rest.

Through my study and research on the five selected novels, I argue that memory and identity are highly significant central features of Chinese-Australian fiction. These novels, by creating new modes of memory, generate new understandings of identity formations and deconstruct identity based on nation, ethnicity, gender, and language.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

1. Overview

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on the "global turn" in memory studies. Recent work contributing to this newly developed research area includes that of Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad in *Memory in a Global Age* (2010), and *Memory and Migration* (2011) by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann. These books notice that memory studies are in a transformation period with the view that memory is now transnationally acknowledged and understood. Instead of understanding the notion of nation as a "closed" boundary of memory, Assmann and Conrad hold that the nation is not a "natural container of memory debates" any more. Creet asserts the idea by arguing that "migration rather than location is the condition of memory" (9).

This global turn of memory studies is also linked with the studies on newly developed transnationalism. Steven Vertovec's *Transnationalism* (2009) clarifies what it means to be transnational by comparisons drawn with being international. International issues are questions about government-to-government interactions while transnational issues are those dealing with non-governmental interactions across national boundaries. Diasporic literary studies focus on representations of trajectories of people who live in-between multiple cultures, languages and memories. With the boom of Asian diasporic literature in Australia, scholars are starting to observe how transnationalism works in terms of Australian-Asian

interactions. As part of Asian-Australian literature, Chinese-Australian literature is also experiencing such a shifting turn from early research on representations of characters to a transnational diaspora framework of reading and understanding these works. Previously, researchers conducted research within Australian or Chinese national borders. Australian researchers paid more attention to how these works understood or interpreted Australian cultural norms and scholars in China took another path to view the representations of early Chinese people's struggles in terms of cultural barriers and discrimination. Recently, with the transnational turn in cultural studies and literary studies, scholars begin to realise what they have neglected in their previous research (Ommundsen 2011; Huang 2012). Chinese-Australian literature still has undiscovered areas for further research, such as representing memory and identity in migration.

In the selected texts, traditional memory and identity norms are challenged not only because these books are interested in how people in diaspora carry or transform their memories when living transnationally, but also because all of the selected texts approach the question of identity in diaspora. Their understanding of diasporic identity – in line with Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity, Ulrich Beck's notion of "inclusive distinction", and Paul Gilroy's approach to identity politics –is dynamic and creative rather than static and clichéd. These texts not only observe how the migration of memory across borders influences the way characters define their identities but also imagine different modes of memory and create new formations of transnational identities.

2. Memory Matters

In the introduction to *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz write: "The idea of memory runs through contemporary public life at a high voltage, generating polemic and passionate debate in the media, in the spheres of politics and in the academy" (Radstone and Schwarz 1). This concisely summarizes the status of memory studies at present and echoes with the statements of memory scholar Astrid Erll: "remembering and forgetting are major themes in contemporary literature and art." (*Memory in Culture* 1) Many may wonder why "memory" has become one of the most frequently referenced terms in recent discourse about culture, and why memory studies has become one of the most frequently mentioned topics when discussing history, identity and diaspora in literary works. Others may want to ask why so many historians, literary critics and sociologists participate in researching memory's role in their respective disciplines (Huyssen, 1995; Nora, 1996-98; Kansteiner, 2002; Carrier, 2000; Radstone and Schwarz, 2010; Erll, 2011; Delisle, 2012). To put it simply, why does memory matter?

To answer the above questions is not easy, and the first issue under discussion should be our understanding of the nature of memory. Memory, often understood as relating to the past, is closely related to the present. As Erll states, "Individual and collective memories are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present" (8). Remembering matters in that it helps to offer "the possibility to reconstitute the selfhood and fashion a public, political language, in which experiences of trauma and others like them can be communicated to

others" (Radstone and Schwarz 3). In other words, memory relates itself to the making of identity. In literature, the fragments of memory symbolise the characters' identity formations. Chinese-Australian English-language fictions provide a textual "Site of Memory" for such narratives, and these narratives, it is argued in this thesis, deserve a closer reading for their engagements with homeland memories and identity formation in the host land.

In addition, memory has an undeniable connection with the past, through present contexts that often look back to historical records, written or spoken memorable stories passed down for generations, or memorial architectures that have stood for longer than the history of civilisations. Issues like these are quite interesting and worth exploring for both historical studies and literary studies. Works of history, memoir and auto/biographical fiction all engage with memory in different ways, and this in turn raises the issue of fidelity to the facts of historical events. How is the past represented through memory, history or both? What is the most reliable angle through which to view what happened in the past, even several generations ago? To what extent does memory play the role of recording and reflecting on the past? These issues are far more than complex and will be in discussion for a long time.

To engage with these questions is to enquire as to how we come to know our own past and to try to answer these is to try to understand what we should do for the future. In this thesis, I am interested in how memory can function as a broken mirror of history in literature and how memory theory and diaspora theory can be put to work together to illuminate the formation of identity.

2.1. Memory Studies as an Interdisciplinary Field

Memory studies constitute a wide-ranging and complex field, focusing on how memory plays its socio-cultural role in public discourse, media, and academic fields, and bringing together several different disciplines. The "preoccupation" with memory studies is "by no means restricted to any one country, but is an international phenomenon" (Erll, *Memory in Culture* 2). To demonstrate this internationalism, Erll gives examples of the popularity of the concept of a "Site of Memory" to prove the "memory boom" (Huyssen 5), which has penetrated into the academies of the United States, Israel, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Great Britain and elsewhere (Erll, *Memory in Culture* 2).

Soon after the concept of a "Site of Memory" ("Les Lieux de Mémoire" was coined by French theorist Pierre Nora and has been quickly adopted in research circles in different countries). The so-called "memory boom" began to be evident in different areas such as history, sociology, anthropology, literature and art (Huyssen 5). The example of 9/11 provides an important "Site of Memory"; we can also list many other cases. In terms of literature, the two World Wars and the Holocaust are typically regarded as having generated crucial "Sites of Memory" (Nora "Between Memory and History," 7). Another example is that under multiculturalism the Australia government claims to welcome various forms of cultural remembrance, such as festivals for both locals and immigrants from various ethnicities, nations and religions. The festivals are designed to remind people that Australia is a society with colourful cultures and multiple ethnicities and also demonstrate the multiplicity of diverse ethnical identities owned by many Australian citizens. For example, a multicultural festival is held in Canberra every year through which migrants celebrate both their homeland

cultures and host land lifestyles. It suggests a transition of memory under globalisation and migration. Memory is understood not only as national memory or individual memory but as transnational and transcultural. Erll suggests in *Memory in Culture* that "religion, ideology, ethnicity and gender are increasingly the central coordinates of cultural remembering" (2), reinforcing the idea that memory touches on multiple aspects of society and culture.

The boom in memory studies is generally considered as one of the effects of multiculturalism and the migration boom. According to Michael Kammen, there are at least nine reasons for the memory boom in the US, including historical transformation, changes in media technology, and developments within academia (Kammen, 247-51). Migrant groups live between different countries or hemispheres. They sustain their connections with the homelands and host lands through an imagined community (Anderson 1). They have mixed and ambivalent feelings towards their host lands which provide them with food, employment, but also loneliness, homesickness, cultural shocks and sometimes discrimination. As migration and multiculturalism develop, the interests of marginalized groups become visible, and the voices of these people are growing within a multicultural nation with diverse ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds and traditions. These voices have brought multiple perspectives to the history and traditions of both the home country and the host country.

In addition to the immigration boom and the promotion of multiculturalism, global media developments have also contributed to the memory boom. War films, memoirs, and holocaust documentaries, for example, are frequently seen by more people. The popularity of war television series and war films in China can be seen as part of this media expansion; their

social effects of bringing people back to war memories and collective belonging as Chinese. Moreover, more advanced technologies of communication have helped build a stronger relationship between a homeland like China and host countries like Australia, since migrants have more chances to go back to visit their relatives and talk to their families in China. Thus for some of them, migration is inseparable from collective memory and migration can be like living 'here' and having a real life 'there'. The fictions discussed in this thesis either embody how the complicated migration experience exerts influence on diasporic identity, or shows how memory functions as the "broken mirror" of history. In these textual analyses, memory is treated as the key factor in the identity-formation process, through interpretations of the places the migrant characters create in space, the life they experience in an imagined community and the time that changes their way of living.

There are a considerable number of terms coined and used in memory studies and I list some of the most frequently applied here, most of which help to build a closer connection between diaspora and memory. In the context of diaspora, several memory concepts are of more significance than others. A "Site of Memory" may refer to an "imagined site" in one's a remembered or perhaps fantastical homeland, while "individual memory" and "collective memory" may have built connections between one's past and one's present, since it takes longer for "collective memory" to come into being and that may explain why immigrants feel closer to their homeland rather than their host land, in a general sense.

The concept of "Site of Memory*"* is introduced first as it is the most significant concept when mentioning memory studies. As one enters the migration process, one may begin the process of establishing one's own "Site of Memory", a term used to describe a place, a building or a

piece of art that represents remembrance. According to Erll, the term was coined by French historian Pierre Nora, and refers to "geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of arts as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts or symbolic actions" (*Memory in Culture* 23). It soon spread and was applied in books and papers discussing memory studies.

To Nora, "there are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory" (Nora, "Between Memory and History" 7). This suggests that the phrase "Site of Memory" is coined to refer to any cultural phenomenon through which a society connects its past with the present. It can be a place, a piece of art, or symbols of remembrance such as letters, wills and pictures.

While Nora has given a specific standard definition of "Site of Memory", Wulf Kansteiner focuses on why specific "Sites of Memory" are created, who can create them, as well as how this concept works as a way of commemorating the past and securing the future. He explains that:

> As old traditions and affiliations lost their meaning, the relation between people and their past was reconstructed through first-order simulations of natural memory. Elites produced sites of memory in language, monuments, and archives which had one common referent, the nation-state, and which strove to secure the future of the nation-state through compelling inventions of traditions. (183)

Kansteiner also shares his post-modernist view regarding "Sites of Memory" in the twentieth century. He argues that, "The media culture of the late twentieth century spews out identities and representations of the past which have little relation to any shared traditions, life worlds, or political institutions other than the frantic pace of media consumption itself" (183).

In summary, "Site of Memory" is one of the crucial and initial concepts of memory studies. However, connecting this term with literary works is still under theorised. In this thesis, I will borrow this term and apply it in the discussion of Chinese-Australian fictions, attempting to decode the representations of "Sites of Memory" in them, and probe into the memory world of the Chinese diaspora in Australia.

Another of the major concepts of memory studies is "collective memory" and this concept is frequently raised in related discussion of diaspora discourses, with individual memory as the opposite. Middleton and Edwards claim that "a community is constituted by its "own" past as people tend not to forget the past (at least the past they choose not to forget); as they remember together and share memories of events and objects that are social in origin" (3). Here, "shared memories" are an alternative way of saying collective memories, which are often depicted in migration literature.

This concept of "collective memory" was first used systematically by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. To him, memory is based on social structures rather than on individual experiences. He denies the individual dimension of memory and defines "collective memory" as an umbrella concept of memory functioning in the social environment (*On Collective Memory 53*). To Halbwachs, communications and interactions between members in a society

construct “collective memory”, thus as Kansteiner summarizes, Halbwachs put his emphasis on “the function of everyday communication for the development of collective memory” (181). By giving examples of family memory and community memory, Halbwachs attempts to discuss various forms of collective memory and summarizes that family memory, as one form of intergenerational memory is the result of repeated retelling of the family’s past (On Collective Memory 59) and as Astrid Erll claims, “in this way, an exchange of living memory takes place between eyewitness and descendants” (*Memory in Culture* 17). In the fictions discussed in this thesis, some of them have elaborated on family memories passed down generation after generation, such as *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) and some have represented or contested community or collective memories such as *The English Class* (2010) and *Silver Sister* (1994). These memories depicted in Chinese-Australian fictions are contexualized in the history of the Chinese diaspora, thus touch upon relations between memory, diaspora and diasporic identity.

Regarding the relations between “collective memory” and “individual memory”, Halbwachs’ overall view is that there is no such thing such as pure “individual memory”, since individuals cannot make their memories without the functions of social frameworks. More than that, he also expands the dimension of memory to cultural transmission and the creation of tradition. Halbwachs not only defines collective memory as a social product but also triggers other scholars to establish new terms and expand memory studies to further cultural dimensions (*On Collective Memory* 24). However, according to Kansteiner, Halbwachs’ idea that individual memory is socially decided is attacked by many historians because they object to the exclusion of individual memory in the development of collective memory (181).

Kansteiner, unlike the historians who emphasize the importance of individual memory in history, or the sociologists who firmly deny the role of individual memory, has attempted balancing the relations of the two. He denies the absolute distinction between individual memory and social memory since it is broadly claimed that any making of individual memory is derived from the interactions and communications within the social environment. However, the relation cannot be simply understood as vice versa. That is, "collective memory can only be imagined and accessed through its manifestation in individuals" (185). He understands this concept not only through the comparison to individual memory, but also through its relation to history:

> Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it often privileges the interests of the contemporary. It is as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated. And it can only be observed in roundabout ways, more through its effects than its characteristics. (180)

As collective memory triggers the coinage of and research into "cultural memory", scholars also relate history to cultural memory. Thus, questions such as "is history cultural memory?" Or "what are the relationships between history and memory?" remain theoretical challenges in the field (Kansteiner 179-197).

In the debate on collective memory and individual memory, psychologists and neurological experts have worked more on proving the scientific nature of collective remembering

(Schacter; Coman, Brown, and Hirst), while historians pursue their interests in the individual's function in making history. The relation between collective memory and individual memory is also one of the central discussions in memory studies regarding its relations to literature. Literary criticism on collective memory in literature is centred on the topic of representations of collective memories in literary works. For example, critiques of Jewish literary works talk about the representations of Jewish racial memories and discussions of war literature work particularly on the collective memories of survivors. Moreover, considerable research has been done on the questions of *how* literary narratives represent collective memory.

As well as all these discussions, work on collective memory studies actually has led to another important term -"cultural memory". In his essay "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", Jan Assmann holds that Halbwachs has "shift(ed) the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework into a cultural one" (125). This shift indicates the transition of memory from a psychological term to a cultural one.

The German Egyptologist Jan Assmann and the literary scholar Aleida Assmann extended the definition of "collective memory" given by Halbwachs, and built a new definition of "cultural memory", connecting culture with memory. Based on the previous work done by Halbwachs and Warburg, Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (126). He also called "cultural memory" the solution to the problem addressed by Nietzsche that, "while in the world of animals genetic programs guarantee the survival of the species,

humans must find a means by which to maintain their nature consistently through generations" (125).

As Jan Assmann suggests, the definition of "cultural memory" is based on its differentiation from "communicative memory" or "everyday memory" which "includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications" (126). Cultural memory is characterized by "its distance from the everyday", while "communicative memory" is characterized by "the proximity to the everyday" (Assmann 129). Plus, these everyday communications are temporally limited up to eighty to one hundred years while cultural memory exist in books such as fictions, memoirs and other literary creations, images, rituals and texts, specifically determined by each society. As memory records and reconstructs the past, and it also relates to the present, Assmann argues that cultural memory works by reconstructing and always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation (130).

Thus, cultural memory can be treated as a kind of memory connecting past culture to the present, and by building such a connection, cultural memory, manifested in texts, images, or rules of conduct, is useful when thinking of the functions of memory in culture and the relations of memory and texts, including for instance, literary texts.

As an example of cultural productions, literature can be considered to have close relations with cultural memory, as suggested above by Assmann. The relations between cultural memory and literature will be discussed in the following. In general, cultural memory is represented in literature in different genres such as biography, fiction, poetry and prose, but not all these genres solely write on cultural memory and many other forms of memory are

also significantly represented such as collective memory, individual memory, political memory, etc.

2.2. Memory and Literature

The relations between memory and literature are concisely summarized by Erll and Rigney in a 2006 article from three aspects:

1. Literature as a medium of remembrance;
2. Literature as an object of remembrance;
3. And literature as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory. (Erll and Rigney 112)

I will not explain all three aspects in this theoretical chapter in detail but would like to focus on the first and the third, in addition to an overall discussion of the interests of sociologists, historians and literary critics in the relations of memory and literature.

Memory, as a remembrance of the past, has been depicted and represented in various forms and ways, among which literature is one that exerts its influence through narrative, just as Erll and Rigney indicate (112), Literature, as a medium of remembrance, provides distinctive ways of writing the traumatic past. From “the boat people” to the “Stolen Generations”, from “the Cultural Revolution Generation” to the “Holocaust”: all of these remembrances are enhanced and elaborated by the narratives of literary works. In terms of literature, memory is represented in short stories, poetry, memoirs, fictions, and auto/biographies, all of which have

an interest in the past and in how to pass on collective memory to the next generations through writing.

Besides functioning as the medium of remembrance, literature is also "a medium for observing the production of cultural memory", as Erll and Rigney suggest (112). Cultural memory is constructed by things like pieces of art, or old photos of the past. For example, most of the Chinese who were born after the 1980s do not have memories of the establishment of the "New China" or the war between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, but cultural memory of these events passes from generation to generation through a variety of images, television programs as well as other media products, or what Erll and Rigney call "a common reservoir of products including photographs and documents, museums, personal accounts, histories, and novels" (111). For them, imaginative representation in literary works "makes remembrance observable" (111). On this point, literature works as a "mimesis of memory" and engages with fields such as history and sociology to form a broader picture of how memory is observed and related.

In her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (2003) Jenny Edkins connects literary studies with trauma and memory, arguing that research on the representations of traumatic memories helps to challenge the political systems that cause those issues. These topics are still relevant in current discussions. In a recent paper, "Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural memory: New Directions of Literary and Media Memory Studies", Erll mentions three much-discussed topics regarding memory in literature. One of the topics is "The representation of 'traumatic pasts' in media such as literature and film with a focus on "the logic of individual and cultural trauma" ("Traumatic Pasts", n.p.). The second one is

called “The ‘afterlives’ of literature”. According to Erll, “Stories appear, disappear, and re-appear. Intertextuality, re-writing, intermediality and remediation are the key concepts which describe the “social life” of texts and other media in mnemohistorical perspective” (“Traumatic Pasts”, n.p.). Then she points out that most recent memory studies now become interested in “remembering across nations and cultures”, and she notes:

> A similar development can be observed in comparative literature and media studies, namely an increased interest in global media cultures, transcultural writing, world literature, and in the negotiation of colonialism and decolonization, migration, cultural globalization, and cosmopolitanism in literature and other media. (“Traumatic Pasts”, n.p.)

Transnational memory, according to Erll, is now more noticed than before in memory studies. This shift happens in comparative reading of “transcultural writing, world literature and cosmopolitanism in literature and other media.” (“Traumatic Pasts”, n.p.) For example, Chinese-Australian literature can be viewed as a repository of this trend, and representations of transnational memory will help understand how the recently developed trend engages with transnational literatures.

These three aspects of memory studies in the literary field summarize current interests and approaches. However, compared to Western interests, Chinese scholars focus more on how memory helps create literary works, as the source of its material, and how literature represent collective memories. Topics such as trauma and the chaotic past are sensitive and have to pass government censorship before any publications on these topics go to the public. In

traditional Marxist theory, literature is a tool used to serve the "revolution" and today, there are still similar thoughts going on in the Chinese academy. Simply put, the Chinese academy is now more inclined to avoid serving political goals when doing literary research.

In a "literature and memory" conference held in 2009 at Jinan University, there were three main topics discussed regarding memory and literature: the nature of memory and literature; literary creation and the personal memory of authors; literary creation and collective memory. Lin Gang from Zhongshan University summarized literary traditions when depicting memory, gave his opinion on prose writing in China, and indicated that prose writing in China relies largely on personal memory of family, life and educational experiences. Author Su Tong indicated that different authors rely on different memories. Some are more sensitive about time and some like to use geographical locations to manipulate memory (Hong 223). Wang Jianliang from Zhejiang University gave opinions on what kinds of memory can be used as the materials of literary creation, listing Lu Xun's works as cases in point. It is not sensible to summarize the situation of research in China only by examination of this conference, however. Marxist influence in China does play a role when literature encounters memory and the memories of Chinese people are largely influenced by the powerful institutions. As the sociologist Guo Yuhua says, "China is a vast historical country with rich history and memory; but we find out we are the most forgetful nation in the world. The reason is that someone wants us to forget and become forgetful" (n.p.).

Literature is powerful and significant in representing the contents and elements of cultural memory because literary works, especially fiction, can manipulate different genres and techniques to serve writing about the past and by repeated writing, collective memories are

produced and consolidated. Another point is that literary works are not just texts concerned about representing the past because they are not historical texts; rather, the authors of literary works can write about representations of the past and recollect earlier writings and rewrite them with a new angle. Through generations of writing, collective memory is formed, and culture is transmitted.

It is recognized that memory needs a process of re-organizing and re-collecting its materials through the act of narrative, because the primary shape of events is chaotic and messy. The act of remembering is partly the act of "creating a narrative" based on the remembered "past", no matter how fragmentary or out of order, or sometimes misinformed.

The common nature of cultural memory and literature requires interpretation and reception in the process of writing, and, given the fact that literature deploys a vast number of forms, genres and narratives to convert various cultural memories into meaningful stories, the condensation of cultural memory needs the assistance of literary narrative and genres. Therefore, as Erll contributes, "cultural memory rests upon narrative processes. To be more precise, every conscious remembering of past events and experience - individual and collective - is accompanied by strategies which are also fundamental for literary narrative" **(***Memory in Culture* 146**)**. To understand this, firstly we should be aware of how collective memory and individual memory work in order to comprehensively represent the past. Both of these two forms of memory are not omnipotent, by which I mean they have limited capacity to record the past. Memories are fragmentary, abundant with chaotic dates, impressions, facts and feelings. How to sort out memories? How to tell the important from the less important? Erll has provided a way out, which is to go through the process of combination. When

cultural memory needs to configure itself into causal and temporal order, it is necessary to use narrative as a useful tool of combining diverse memories into organized ones.

At the level individual memory, autobiographical memory is a kind of narrative to record life events, significant stories, and to sort out disparate experiences. Autobiographical memory is, according to Harbus, "the recollection of one's own prior experiences, a reconstructive act that is always culturally situated, context sensitive and susceptible to narrative configuration" (131). Life stories such as the narratives of the boat people in Vietnamese Australian literary works and the Stolen Generations in Aboriginal literary works are examples of *how* autobiographical memory functions as a way of recording personal remembrance of particular historical moments or traumatic life experience during chaotic times.

Beside narrative, the study of genre is another approach to look at the way that literature and cultural memory are inter-related and interactive. There are lots of cases to prove this. For example, in both literature and cultural memory, the issue of identities is at the core of discussion. The genres of memoir and historical fiction are both frequently applied in literary works to talk about identity, which bears testimony to different memories in narrative forms. To give a specific idea of this, diasporic Chinese memoirs like *The Chinese Factor* by Pamela Tan and historical novels like *Shanghai Dancing* by Brian Castro richly represent Chinese diasporic identities.

Through the reading of various literary forms such as historical novels, comedies, tragedies, life stories, and cultural memorials, readers are led to the world of memory, to cultural memory. Examples of holocaust writing and war literature are provided by Erll to illustrate

how literature functions as a mirror of traumatic memories and how literary works exert influence on the societal reflection on past stories and events.

2.3. Memory and History

Studies of memory are always concomitant with discussions about the relationships between memory and history. The recent boom of "memory studies" is also involved with an interest in the relations between memory and history.

For Rigney, the boom in memory is caused by the shortage of terms to describe what she calls "improper history". She comments in her article "Portable Monuments: Literature, Culture, Memory and the Case of Jeanie Deans", that "a society's dealings with the past can no longer be happily divided into 'history proper' identified with the work of professional historians and 'nonhistory' or 'improper history' identified with all the rest" (363). This point is backed up by Rigney's claim that "it is in the light of the need to find terms to describe the ubiquitous "improper history" that the popularity of the concept of "memory" in recent years can be understood" (363). "Improper history" here refers to those blank areas of the past that historians have not yet explored or have no interest in exploring, but these are historical in nature and can be viewed as part of the human experience. The above comments provide a basic understanding of the memory boom after a long-standing interest in the subject of history.

Maurice Halbwachs has an interest in distinguishing between history and memory. Theoretically, history and memory are set apart by sharp distinctions and to some extent, they are always in conflict. Halbwachs distinguishes between history and *la mémoire collective*

by pointing out that "General history begins only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up" (*The Collective Memory* 78). Erll interprets this as meaning that history is "universal"; "it is characterized by a neutral coordination of all past events". Collective memory, "in contrast, is particular; its carriers are groups which are restricted both chronologically and spatially, whose memory is strongly evaluative and hierarchical" (*Memory in Culture* 17). For Halbwachs, then, history is objective while memory is subjective; history focuses on the overall picture of the past while memory is individually limited. Erll argues that collective memory, based on Halbwachs' theories, is involved in the process of identity formation since it is from its subjective remembrance that the group derives a sense of belonging. Unlike history, memory is therefore unfaithful to past reality because it is "oriented towards the needs and interests of the group in the present, and thus proceeds in an extremely selective and reconstructive manner" (Erll, *Memory in Culture* 17).

Halbwachs is not alone in arguing that memory and history are in fundamental opposition. Pierre Nora also proposes, in his "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" that memory is "life" and history is "the reconstruction". By "life" Nora indicates that memory is dynamic, always in evolution and easily manipulated. By "reconstruction" he indicates the "representational" nature of history as an incomplete representation of the past. Like Halbwachs, Nora argues that memory is subjective, that it only "accommodates those facts that suit it", while history is "an intellectual and secular production" ("Between Memory," 8-9). Indeed, Nora acknowledges Halbwachs when he further elaborates about the subjectivity of memory, writing:

> Memory is blind to all but the group it binds-which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority ("Between Memory and History," 9).

But more than distinguishing memory and history, Nora further thinks about the conflicting relations between the two. History is suspicious of memory and Nora thinks that the mission of history is to destroy memory. Nora's distinction between history and memory is clear-cut and has an obvious inclination to highlight history rather than memory.

Unlike Halbwachs and Nora, other historians and literary critics have attempted to connect history with memory. Hayden White, the renowned poststructuralist historian, argues that historical writing is similar to literary writing in various ways, and points out that historical meaning strongly relies on narrativity. For American historian Henry S. Commager, "History is organized memory" (3). To him, history and memory are not completely separated from each other but he thinks that history is different from memory because history "is a story of what happened in the past, or what the historian is able to recover and reconstruct of what actually happened" (3). Chinese historian Wang Rongzu combines these opinions and further proposes that history is actually a dispassionate art (3). To Wang, memory is passionate while history is cool and rational. However, although Wang doesn't give a very clear distinction between the two concepts, he does not agree with Nora's notion that the mission of history is to destroy memory, claiming that if historians want to make memory more like history, they

must adopt rational thinking to distinguish different materials, to tell the true from the false and try to make them look like facts instead of stories. To Wang, both memory and history are human made, but while memory is leftover from the past events, history is organized "truth" and more reliable than memory (3).

There are countless debates on the relations between memory and history. Basically, there are two trends in these debates. One group blurs the boundaries between memory and history, holding that memory may be the raw materials of history, or connect with history in diversified forms. Another group may completely deny this thinking and split history from memory.

Why should we elaborate on the relations of memory and history at such length here and why do these issues matter to the research in this thesis? The relations between memory and history are also represented in the sphere of literature. As a reservoir of cultural memory, literature can be responsible for representing memory and history. Memory and history are not only the focus of historians and sociologists; under the influence of the interdisciplinary trend, more and more literary critics and writers mingle memory and history with issues of identity, representations of family pasts, and even diasporic experiences.

> In the fictional world, as Melosh suggests, "we can read the afterimage of history, its imprints on the writer's consciousness and way of seeing the world. In this sense, novels are themselves primary sources, historical evidence of ideology" (65).

She continues to explain that: “Of course novels are not documents or memoirs, and we cannot read them as reportage or biography” (65). One example in her case is the emergence of “Cultural Revolution literature” in America. As a diasporic writer, Ha Jin, the author of several novels regarding this topic, has gained international fame based on writing about the past in China, history and memory, applying various narrative tools. In his novel *Waiting* (1999), personal memory encounters official history and, by exploring memories, the author reflects on the relations between humanity and ideology. In the official history textbooks, Chinese students have no opportunity to access the authentic materials about the real “Cultural Revolution” and the history is, to some extent, not as true and reliable as what is offered by this author based on his personal memory. In this case, there is a quite interesting question at stake: is history manipulated by the highest power institutions within one society? If this author applies his own memory to complete his writing, is this memory more reliable than history? To what extent should individuals believe in official history?

Questions like these not only exist in the diasporic novels of Ha Jin, but also find representation in Chinese-Australian novels. The interplay of memory and history in the formation of identity is significant to Chinese-Australian writing. These novels manifest history and memory in a fictional way, but they are full of representations of the shaping effects of memory on one’s diasporic identity, and they also play a role in re-thinking history within the diaspora framework.

2.4 Memory and Identity

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built upon the two key concepts of memory and identity, drawing from new tendencies in reading Chinese-Australian literature. As is suggested by Shen and Edward, Chinese-Australian literature as the "textual production of Chinese-Australian communities" can contribute towards "destabilizing traditional, white versions of history" and inserts "new, intra-ethnic histories into the national narrative" (5).

However, for a long period of time, literary works within this category have been read only as diasporic narratives largely addressing, as Stephenson says, the "'ancient' Chinese past, exotic customs and 'traditional' Chinese cultural practices" (112).This tendency reflects a Western audience's presumptions on this kind of literature. To them, Chinese-Australian literature plays a role of educating them about China (Stephenson 112). Literary works such as many memoirs and essays published earlier, especially by Chinese-Australian writers who write in Chinese language mainly construct "China" as a traumatic homeland and Australia is presented as the destiny of happiness, while homelands such as China, Singapore and Vietnam are represented as "mysterious, oriental, poor, culturally conservative". By reading the writing of Chinese-Australian writers, Western audiences learn the different cultural customs and what China looks like in these writers' eyes. This may be a truth for common Western readers, but as Stephenson claims, Chinese-Australian writing not only tells us about China, but also is "increasing re-imagining various aspects of Australian society" (112). In addition, Stephenson also comments:

> disrupting the notion that they remain the 'authentic' informants of stories about abandoned homelands, Chinese-Australian authors are actively resisting the imposition of a singular ethnic identity and are consciously avoiding simplistic and stereotypical notions of Chinese migrants. (112)

So, in contrast to previous misunderstandings of Chinese-Australian literature, this thesis seeks to investigate the genres of fiction to view how Chinese-Australian literature contributes to the understanding of memory and identity. By digging into narrations of various diasporic memories produced by Chinese migrants in Australia, this thesis discusses

how Chinese-Australian fiction writers write about belonging and identity that is not decided simply by stereotypes, but by complicated interpretation and reflections of their diasporic life experience, especially memories created when crossing borders. By reading Chinese-Australian literature from this new perspective, this thesis also discovers more value in memory, including its contribution to re-imagining and re-thinking present Australian society. Both memory and identity concern the present and the past, and the homeland and the host country, so by analysing the selected texts, this thesis enlarges readers' horizons by responding to the expressed despair, loss, and estrangement of Chinese-Australian migrants within Australia, filling a gap in the existing criticism which places its emphasis heavily on "problems" beyond Australia (Stephenson 115).

Why is representing memory and identity the focal feature of Chinese-Australian writing? How do these frameworks work as tools to support these major enquiries? As Chinese-Australian literature is mostly diasporic, it is natural to link diaspora with memory because

diaspora by definition is a journey from one place to another place, which involves abandoning an old home and looking for new ones. During the process, new modes of memory are generated. Rather than being abandoned when people leave their home countries, memory is also made in the process of migration and plays a part in many aspects. According to Julia Creet:

> Memory, in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural, and familial, plays a crucial role within the contexts of migration, immigration, resettlement, and diasporas, for memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity. (3)

Creet argues, "Memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left" (6). And she further confirms that "what's forgotten is not an absence, but a moment of disintegration that produces an object or origin" (6). Memory, though always bonded with a specific place, is not necessarily confined to one place only. Memory travels as diaspora happens and travels across borders, playing multiple roles in identity formation. Rosinska asserts that:

> Memory plays a triple role: it is identity - forming by maintaining the original identifications; it is therapeutic because it helps bear the hardships of transplantation onto a foreign culture; and it is also community-forming, by creating a bond among those recollecting together. (39)

Because of the diasporic character of Chinese-Australian literature, the relations of memory and identity are of great concern, and questions like "who are we?" and "who can speak in this country?" are often brought up in these texts. This thesis looks at different modes of

memory represented in the selected texts and also observes how these texts address the issue of identity formation.

Identity is a significant term in media, sociological studies, cultural studies and literature. Scholars are concerned about issues related to identity in global, national, local and personal spheres. Diaspora may cause the breaking-up of old communities, and this break-up is the reason that diasporic literatures frequently narrate the problematics of "returning home" or "searching for identity". Re-settlements may produce difficulties in language and culture, thus bringing an identity crisis and culture shocks. In the course of diaspora, identity is re-made, and re-imagined in the process of migration. Identity is not a simple issue and there is no simple definition, because it is influenced by many factors such as nationality, ethnicity, language, community, gender, sexuality, and so on. These elements may contradict each other and cause identity confusion or even an identity crisis.

As some sociologists and theoretical critics argue, crises in identity are characteristics of modern society which is full of fluidity and uncertainty:

> Just now everybody wants to talk about 'identity'… identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. (Mercer 4)

This suggests the necessity of talking about identity in diasporic literature such as Chinese-Australian literature. This category of literature is especially interested in representing

displacement and uncertainty, especially in the process of re-settling in a new country. But what is identity exactly?

Paul Gilroy has suggested that "identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed" ("Diaspora and the Detours," 301). To Gilroy, identity is always in an on-going process of change and thus it is wrong to view it as static and stable. Similarly to Gilroy, Hall argues:

> cultural identity is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make final and absolute Return … The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as simple, factual 'Past', since our relation to it, like the child's relations to the mother, is always already 'after the break'" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 226)

Based on the intriguing relations between memory, diaspora and identity, and connecting with what Ommundsen argues, Chinese-Australian literature writes about stories of two poles of the diaspora. It not only focuses on 'where are you from', but also observes and reflects 'where you are at' (Stephenson, 124). And possibly it also deals with 'where you are going'. Memory and identity, as the two key concepts which this literature attempts to represent, show that Chinese-Australian literature can stand on the world literary stage and be appreciated as equal to other featured literatures. As the globe becomes more cosmopolitan, different levels of identities are deconstructed (national, ethnical, familial and personal).

Chinese-Australian literature is a reservoir for scholars to observe how an essentialist approach to identity is not possible or justifiable.

Memory influences identity in either its formation, or its crisis. Chinese-Australian literature reflects this relation and takes it further to contest essentialist understandings of both memory and identity. They are fluid, dynamic and not confined by borders or markers. In this thesis, I argue that Chinese-Australian literature showcases different dimensions of memory in a globalized diasporic society. For example, *Shanghai Dancing* challenges the geographical range of memory while *Behind the Moon* challenges the chronological length of memory. *The English Class* asks questions about how identity is related to cultural memory and how cultural memory is distorted in another language. *Playing Madame Mao* and *Silver Sister* deal with the relations of personal identity to national identity and collective memory. When memory is disrupted, or distorted, or fragmented, identity also is problematic. My thesis

argues that Chinese-Australian literature, as a literature featuring the question of memory and identity, deserves more close reading and research, and it is a category of literature containing meaningful and diverse content, instead of dull, secondary or meaningless content.

3. Tracking Diasporas

3.1 Definition of Diaspora

The original notion of diaspora refers exclusively to traumatic experiences of dispersal from the homeland to the host land, identified by Robin Cohen in his *Global Diasporas: An*

Introduction. "Diaspora", according to sociologist Cohen, is derived from "the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over)". He further explains that:

> When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. By contrast, for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians the expression acquired a more sinister and brutal meaning. Disapora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. (ix)

This, of course, demonstrates that part of the connotation of diaspora implies traumatic movement from one country to another as a group, either in exile or by choice. And Cohen's concept has been echoed by Brah who observes that diaspora often evokes "the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation" (180). As Brah aruges:

> Diasporas are places of long-term, if not permanent, community formations, even if some households or members move on elsewhere. The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure. (193)

As is said above, the traumatic features of diaspora were once the focal point of diasporic studies and still enjoy a place in recent related studies. However, as Cohen further argues, theorizing diaspora is not that simple and even people abroad who have kept strong sense of collective identities have claimed themselves as people in diaspora, though they were

"neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution" (ix). This can be exemplified by the fact that the Jews in diaspora have experienced a comparatively more brutal history than the Chinese in diaspora, while the latter are diversified because the diasporic experiences not only include trauma but also distinctive experiences based on the hybrid cultural experiences and various collective memories owned by Chinese people in diaspora.

Though human dispersions and displacements have been happening globally since the Babylonian conquest in 538 BCE, in the year 1991 William Safran proposed that "most scholarly discussions of ethnicity and immigration paid little if any attention…to diasporas" ("Diasporas in Modern Societies," 83). Concentrated focus on diaspora study began from the late 1980s. Since the late 1980s, as Rogers Brubaker claims, "there has been a veritable explosion of interest in diasporas" (1). The phrase "'Diaspora' diaspora" coined by Brubaker may well explain the scattering definitions of diaspora in "semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space" (1).

The "diaspora" diaspora is further interpreted by William Safran and James Clifford, who have identified the main features of diaspora. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the study of diasporas "became an academic growth industry, not only in political science, but also in anthropology, psychology, religious studies, history and even literature" (Safran, "Deconstructing," 9). According to Safran's discussion, the denotation of this term has been stretched to "cover almost every ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed physically from its homeland" ("Deconstructing," 9).

In Clifford's essay "Diasporas", he points out that diaspora relates to terms such as "nations" , "cultures" and "regions"; also, it is often compared and contrasted to the terms of "border, travel, creolization, transculturation, hybridity". He argues that contemporary diasporic practices cannot be "reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism" (303). Moreover, he distinguishes between borderlands and diasporas, to make the latter's definition and scope more apparent. To Clifford, borderlands are:

> distinct in that they presuppose a territory defined by a geopolitical line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication. Diaspora usually presupposes longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. ("Diasporas" 304)

Through distinctions and comparisons, Clifford attempts to define diaspora in a utopian way, highlighting the main features of diaspora centring on "homeland". As indicated by Clifford, the features are: "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, and alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" ("Diasporas" 305).

Both Rey Chow (1993) and Ien Ang (2001) have also engaged in this discussion about diaspora. As a fairly complex term with changeable meanings, diaspora is involved with post-colonialism, globalization, ethnicity and cultural identity. For these critics, defining diaspora calls for more attention to the large structures in which diaspora develops and evolves.

Discussions defining diaspora will not come to an end soon, since the definition of diaspora will continue to change as the contexts change. The situation changes as this globalized world changes, where every minute labour, capital and resources are fluidly passed from one country to another, along with cultures merging with each other. In this dissertation, I will borrow James Clifford's definition of diaspora as the base and framework for talking about representations of Chinese people's diasporic experience in Chinese-Australian fictions. Some of the diaspora manifestations may not fall perfectly into the paradigm constructed by these features, but I assume that it is understandable, since as Clifford says in his article quoted above, "large segments of Jewish historical experience do not meet the test of Safran's last three criteria: a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland" (*Routes* 248).

3.2. Diaspora and Identity

Diasporas have been assessed to be closely associated with some of the key features of postcolonialism. Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Rey Chow have all addressed the ideas of "cultural hybridity", "ethnicity" or "cultural identity" in postcolonialist contexts in relation to diaspora.

In his book *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy argues that "the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture" leads straight to "the tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures" (7), which in contrast, emphasizes the role of cultural diasporas in acknowledging "cultural hybridity and social plurality and inclusiveness" (Chariandy 1). This is further elaborated in his other book *Against Race: Imagining Political*

Culture Beyond the Color Line, in which Gilroy suggests that the idea of diaspora "offers a ready alternative to the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging…" (123) and it helps "to reassess the idea of essential and absolute identity precisely because it is incompatible with that type of nationalist and raciological thinking" (123). These articulations of diasporas in postcolonial contexts assist many to realize the relations between diaspora, nation and globalisation.

Rey Chow's influential work *Writing Diaspora* echoes the above opinions on diaspora. Chow is particularly interested in representation of the "native" and the Chinese Diaspora. The "native", or "the silent object" depicted by the colonizer, is one of her key concepts referring to the production of identity: "The 'native' is turned into an absolute entity in the form of an image…whose silence becomes the occasion for our speech." (34)

Chow also discusses the "gaze" of the "native" and expresses her views that "it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native's gaze" (51). For the colonizer, their intention to consume the "native" culture is like grasping sand in one's hands, which is depicted with a better metaphor by Chow, that "the 'authentic' native, like the aura in a kind of *mis-en-abyme*, keeps receding from our grasp" (46). The colonizer thus is actually gazed at by the "native", which leads them to imagine a passive, silent object instead of the original image of "native". The gaze of the colonizer in this thesis, refers to hegemony, exclusion and hostility from mainstream societies and the gaze by the "native" is the power to resist exclusion and hostility. In the thesis, the gaze from the native is demonstrated by different protagonists' efforts to merge a minority voice into a mainstream voice.

The dialogue proposed by Chow between the native and the colonizer is challenged by Homi Bhabha, who adopts the concept of "hybridity". Bhabha views hybridity as a form of in-between space, which he terms the "third space". He argues: "For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" ("The Third Space," 211). Hybridity, in this sense, is useful to explain the state of migrants living in-between two worlds and two cultures. Therefore, diaspora and hybridity can be connected to explain the fluidity of diasporic identities. On cultural identity, Stuart Hall claims that "it is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the 'Other' of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm" ("Cultural identity," 226). In this sense, identity is not "once-and-for-all" (Hall, "Cultural identity," 226). Hall's research on cultural identity is echoed by theorists like Rey Chow's and Ien Ang's thinking on the notion of diasporic identity, especially identities of Chinese diasporic communities.

This thesis acknowledges these theorists' research on diaspora and identity, and, instead of defining identity, deconstructs the clichéd understanding of identity as stable, fixed and accurately defined. These theorists suggest that identity in diaspora is more complex than that experienced within national boundaries and social frameworks, and this thesis aims to analyse the complexities of diasporic identity formation represented in the selected texts by observing the relations between memory and identity. Theorising the Chinese diaspora is

equally significant because all these selected novels set their plots in the Chinese diaspora or Asian diaspora.

3.3 Theorising the Chinese Diaspora

As a country with vast territory and diverse ethnicities, "China" is a complex concept and thus "Chineseness" is difficult to define. Whether within China or outside China, how to understand "Chineseness" has obviously become one of the key issues in understanding narratives of "Chinese diaspora" and representations of "Chinese identity" in Chinese-Australian fictions. In this part, I intend to theorise Chinese diaspora and attempt to distinguish Chinese diaspora from any other diasporas, since the Chinese diasporic community has enjoyed a unique history and memory from any other diasporas.

For a long time, the "homeland" has been central to understanding diaspora, and, as one group of the world's diasporic communities, Chinese people overseas have been "stereotyped" as migrant communities that are patriotic and loyal to their homeland. However, the emphasis on "Homeland" is challenged by James Clifford, who perceives diaspora as far more complex than a simplistic understanding of the centring "homeland". As he puts it:

> I worried about the extent to which diaspora, defined as dispersal, presupposed a center. If this center becomes associated with an actual 'national' territory – rather than with a reinvented 'tradition,' a 'book,' a portable eschatology – it may devalue what I call the lateral axes of diaspora. These decentered, partially overlapping networks of communication, travel, trade, and kinship connect the several

> communities of a transnational 'people'. The centering of diasporas around an axis of origin and return overrides the specific local interactions (identifications and ruptures, both constructive and defensive) necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social forms. The empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidary and connection *there*. But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation. (*Routes* 269)

In this sense, diasporic subjects embody a multiple and hybrid subjectivity rather than a straightforward *here* and *there* logical connection between homeland and host land. Thus, we should be aware of the fact that much of the attention to the writing and the theoretical work on Chinese diaspora has been to how overseas Chinese diasporic groups long to go back to their homeland actually simplifies the Chinese diaspora and overlooks the hybrid representations in many Chinese diasporic literary works considering the multiple movements and complicated historical affiliations.

For some Western scholars, it is not easy to fully understand the "complexity" of China and Chineseness, given the different political systems, languages, social environments and ethnicities. However, I will elaborate on "geographical discrimination" to give readers some thoughts on why "Chineseness" is a term that even Chinese people themselves cannot define properly. China has thirty-four administrative provinces and almost each of the provinces has its own food cultures; some of these have their own different ethnic groups, traditions of celebrations and even languages. The so-called "geographical discrimination" is generated based on these differences and enhanced by the unbalanced developments in coastal cities

closer to Japan, Korea, Russia and South Asian countries. The people living in coastal cities have grown proud of their hometowns and superiority over other cities. Not only do the pride and prejudice separate Chinese people but also different ways of life and different food, and costumes tell different stories of Chineseness. On this point, I agree with Lee's argument that "the Chinese community itself is inherently diverse, whether in the homeland or outside of it" (Lee, "Theorising the Chinese Diaspora," 97). In her thesis, she also quotes from Lynn Pan's *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: The Story of the Overseas Chinese*, about how people from Shanghai assert superiority over Chinese people from other regions to prove the point. She and I agree that, to some extent, "internal differentiations, even levels of discrimination" operate within Chinese communities, whether "inside or outside China" (Lee, "Theorising the Chinese Diaspora," 97) It is surely acknowledged that there are several ways of grouping Chinese people according to different categories. As Pan indicates, "there are at least five ways to categorize Chineseness: by administrative divisions, by geographical boundaries, by differentiating between China proper as the "inner territories" and the periphery as the areas "beyond the borders", by differentiating each other in terms of cultural transformations and linguistic differences, such as dialects (23). In this sense, the heterogeneousness of the Chinese community foregrounds the degrees and levels of diversity and differences in Chinese people overseas or in diaspora.

Ien Ang also lists some facts about Chinese people in diaspora to show the indefinite concept of "Chineseness", and this further evidences the fact that Chinese community in diaspora is one of the most diversified diasporic communities. As Ang lists, the Chinese diasporic community in Sydney consists of people from "the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia,

Indonesia, Vietnam, or East Timor, as well as those born in Australia". (91). Thus, Ang continues, "It should not come as a surprise that these disparate groups have been hardly recognized as belonging to a singular Chinese community, even if the predominant mode of categorizing would insist on it" (91). For what has been discussed here, it is not justified to think of the Australian-Chinese community as an intact community, using the metaphor of the broken mirror, the Chinese community is broken inside and it is difficult to fill in the gaps between each separated group within the larger groups. This further leads to complications of Chinese diasporic identity.

Ien Ang's influential book *On Not Speaking Chinese* addresses the above discussion on Chineseness and Chinese community overseas theoretically. As a cultural theorist, she has fully discussed key concepts such as "ambivalence" and "hybridity" when addressing the heterogeneousness of the Chinese diaspora. As a person of Chinese background, with diasporic experiences from Indonesia to the Netherlands, she has been through the process of assimilating to the dominant society. Ang agrees with Clifford and Zygmunt Bauman that diasporic identity is a never-finished and half-done process. As Clifford argues, "One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes" (*Routes* 182). This is exactly why migrants are referred to as people "living in translation" (Niranjana 46). In this thesis, representations of people "living in translation" will be one of my attentions, for it is useful and strong evidence of migration experience from one country to another. For example, Ouyang Yu's *The English Class* uses the metaphor of translation to analyse and express his views on migration, and the novel creates a translation process for

one Chinese young man, who has fulfilled his dream to come to Australia but eventually has to face more problems including language difficulties, marital problems and culture shock.

Ien Ang's interpretation of "Chineseness" has been acknowledged as one of the powerful theories when it comes to issues of Chinese diasporic identity. The first feature of "Chineseness" is "ambivalence", and she frequently applies this noun to talk about the awkward situation faced by Chinese in diaspora. To Ang, to be Chinese is an ambivalent feeling and ambivalence exists along with diasporic identity. In *On Not Speaking Chinese, w*hen Ang is about to go on a trip to Shenzhen and Guangzhou, she expresses her ambivalent feeling about going back to her imagined homeland for the first time: "I didn't have the courage to go on my own since I don't speak any Chinese, not even one of the dialects. But I had to go, I had no choice. It was like a pilgrimage." (21)

Ang also discusses the tourist guide's ambivalent feelings about being Chinese, writing that "voicing criticism of the system through a discourse she knew would appeal to Western interlocutors, seemed only to strengthen her sense of Chinese identity" (22), indicating that being a Chinese is a complex issue. This is also applicable when we talk about the diasporic identity politics within the Chinese diasporic community. Homeland is not always an obsession of Chinese people in diaspora, and neither is the host land in this case. Ang constantly deconstructs the obsession with homeland in Chinese diaspora by discussing the work of Chinese-American Leo Lee and Chinese-Australian poet and critic in English Ouyang Yu (46). Neither Leo Lee nor Ouyang Yu recognize themselves as pure Chinese or pure Australian/American. Lee's cosmopolitanism and Ouyang's idea of "not just a Chinese" suggest a new way out: hybridity.

4. Theoretical Framework and the Texts

Each text in this thesis is interpreted based on a transnational approach to memory and identity. According to the characteristics of specific texts, this chapter introduces all the related concepts and definitions involved in the texts. Before digging into the definitions and discussions, a general rationale of how and why the texts need the support of these terminologies is necessary.

Textual discussion begins with *Silver Sister*, a memoir-style novel by Lillian Ng. This book has been translated into Chinese but unfortunately it is not well noticed either in Australia or China. [5]I think that is probably because both Australian and Chinese readers find its contents relates to a remote past, rather than a present. However, it is a book from which one can observe how wars and other traumatic national events in one country become transnational experiences, through links to diaspora and memory studies. In the discussion of *Silver Sister*, I focus on the dynamics of collective memory and individual memory, with the former traditionally happening within national boarders and the latter usually crosses the antipodes. This text allows us to view how traditional norms such as collective memory and sites of memory become contested concepts. By discussing the working of individual diasporic memory, this chapter challenges the closed boundaries and opens intriguing debates on how diasporic memory transforms identity labels.

[5] *Silver Sister* was translated by Wu Meiying, and the translated version was published by Zhi Ku Wen Hua Publishing (智库文化出版社) in 1998.

Shanghai Dancing fictionalises family memory from a transnational perspective. In this way, it forms what can be read as theoretical engagements with cosmopolitan memory, as proposed by Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider. By depicting a cosmopolitan family, Brian Castro triggers discussions on how characters living with cosmopolitan memory change the way they define themselves. Rather than being constructed, identity is deconstructed and in this context, Castro calls for ripping off any identity labels on individuals. This book is of particular importance in understanding the adaptation of collective memory to a cosmopolitan cultural context and it also helps understand how identity labelled by ethnicity or class in a society with hegemony is problematic.

The English Class is a text taking a closer look at the role of language in the dynamics of cultural memory. In the global turn of memory, cultural memory is also going through a dynamic transformation for migrants in Australia. Because he is living apart from institutional culture or memory, the protagonist Jing is unable to relate to his homeland memory for a sense of belonging, at the same time as he is unable to define himself as an authentic Australian because he is trapped in his language games and self-conscious bilingualness. This is a significant book observing the state of migrants in Australia. They are always being translated and also intend to translate what they remember from the past. Like the protagonist in the novel, migrants search for a sense of existence in the host country by orally or literally keeping cultural memories from homelands. The novel, by depicting a wander in two cultures and two languages, suggests the difficulty of keeping Chinese cultural memory in vastly different cultural contexts in Australia.

The role of political memory has a prominent presence in *Playing Madame Mao*. Instead of writing on the transnational dynamics of family memory, individual memory, or cultural memory, Lau Siew Mei chooses to see the way political events connect with memories crossing borders. China, Singapore and Australia are linked by the migration of political memory. The novel shows us that not only cultural memory migrates; political memory also does the same. Political memory is a useful term for examining how memory works in political incidents and how political memory influences one's identity.

Unlike any of the above, the last text in this thesis, Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon*, is a novel representing tests on the functioning of transgenerational memory in affecting the identity or sense of belonging of second-generation migrants in Australia. Transgenerational memory is a term coined to interpret the vertical migration of memory among people who live in diaspora, or used to live in diaspora. It is a term used to understand how second-generation teenager migrants struggle to plant roots in Australia, whose parents either insert inherited cultural memory into their brains or ignore the roots that the second-generation could look for in order to achieve a sense of belonging. Characters in this text face challenges in terms of transnational friendships in a multi-cultural society, diasporic haunting pasts, and fears of not being "Aussie" enough. Their search for a sense of belonging by assimilation is represented as a failure. They finally realize how "stupid" they are when attempting to be a real Australian while the notion of "Australianness" is not fixed at all.

In the following chapters, I will fully apply theories of diaspora memory and identity to analyse each of these texts from the above perspectives individually.

Chapter Two: Memory, Trauma and Identity in Lillian Ng's *Silver Sister*

Memory studies have confirmed that individual memory and collective memory are always contested, compromised and conflicted. Moreover, memory that is related to trauma and traumatic experience of the past can play a significant part in identity formation. Identity is shaped and reshaped by memory's ability to link the present with the past in order to restage and heal psychological wounds. Chinese-Australian diaspora literature is a reservoir for examining dynamic relations among memory, trauma and identity due to the particular interests of Chinese-Australian authors in depicting or recollecting significant historical events in their works.

This chapter explores several intriguing aspects of the 1994 novel *Silver Sister* by Lillian Ng, from significant interdisciplinary perspectives. The novel underscores three features of Chinese diasporic literature: trauma, memory and flexible identity. Through representation of these features, *Silver Sister* provides a space for considering how memory and trauma reflect the history and routes of Chinese women's diasporic experience. Literary critics such as Nicholas Jose, Christine Sun and Deborah L. Madsen have commented on *Silver Sister*'s depictions of "double" identity, "Chineseness" and "personal and historical narratives". However, there is not a comprehensive analysis of this book at present; *Silver Sister* has been a trivial part of scholarly discussion of broader topics such as Chinese-Australian literature or Asian Australian literature. Mary Besemeres is the only critic to have elaborated on it and she offers a unique perspective in analysing the linguistic features of *Silver Sister*. Besides this,

six reviews of *Silver Sister* have appeared in important review journals and papers such as *Australian Book Review* and *The Weekend Australian*. Published in 1994, *Silver Sister* is biographical fiction, written about the diasporic experience of Chinese "comb-ups" [6]. Authored by a Chinese-Australian writer, this book was written in English and published in Australia. It includes five parts following the migration routes of the main character Silver Sister: "Village", "Canton", "Hong Kong", "Singapore" and "Australia". Each part is related to the others through the memories of the central characters, and within each part there is an independent section of selective dialogue between the central characters Kim and Silver Sister or recollections of Silver Sister on her life experience outside Australia. The story starts from around the year 1912 when Silver is born, and continues to the year 1992 when Silver moves into her new apartment in Sydney and celebrates the Year of the Monkey. Rich in representations of individual memories, this novel offers a traumatic personal perspective on Chinese diasporic experience, testing the temporal and geographical range of the Chinese diaspora and examining how trauma and memory influence the so-called "diasporic self". In *Silver Sister*, traumatic memory challenges a sense of belonging to Chinese ethnicity or "Chineseness", and contests the collective memory of China's national past, though this is a novel full of Chinese cultural memory. Memories of traumatic pasts have influenced and re-formed the identity of Chinese women through generations, by passing memories to the next generation and by adding new memories to the established knowledge system of the older ones as in the interactive memorial worlds of Kim and Silver. Unlike Christine Sun, who

[6] A "comb-up" refers to a woman belonging to a group of women in China who vow in front of the Goddess of Mercy that they will not marry for their whole life, which is a symbol of rebellion against the patriarchy. Please refer to the introduction "自梳女" on the website <http://baike.baidu.com/subview/40904/6228052.htm.>

claims *Silver Sister* has an "essentialist approach to representing 'Chineseness'" (300), I argue that this novel is more precisely about how traumatic memory transforms Chinese diasporic identity in a global context, and not just in a journey from China to Australia.

1. Memory, Narrative and Diasporic Literature

Theoretically, there is a trend to link memory and narrative together, to generate multiple views on treating diaspora literature as a reservoir for storing memories and examining contested interactions between individual memory and collective memory. In addition, their roles in forming diasporic identity are one of the focal points under discussion.

Memory studies have expanded beyond the psychological field to any field considering forgetting and remembering. Among all these fields, literature stands out for its distinctive narrative characters, since this is as a way of explaining and manifesting memory, especially collective memories. As Sarah Katherine Foust Vinson explains in her doctoral thesis on "Storied Memories: Memory as Resistance in Contemporary Women's Literature" (2010):

> The stories that we share and the various iterations of the past that we personally and collectively tell become who we are as individuals and as remembering communities, be they relatively accurate historical reconstructions or wholly fictional accounts of our lives and the past. (8)

Vinson's conception of "storied memories" helps show how memories are converted into narratives. In this sense, *Silver Sister* as a biographical fiction can apply memory to the discussion of identity.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, collective memory has been widely accepted as a way of viewing social identity, nation building, ideology as well as citizenship. However, collective memory is not always opposed to individual memory. Rather, these two interact and intertwine with each other in the process of identity formation. In literary interpretations, the act of remembering usually includes both, and neither collective memory nor individual memory is completely responsible for determining identity. This intertwining has occasioned a unique way to express their influence on people's identity within so-called "narrative" and, through examination of the relation between memory and narrative, readers will perceive a more accurate sense of how the past is captured and depicted in the present. I argue that, in this sense, memory is essentially narrative and narrative also relies on memory, whether from a sociological perspective or a literary one. The relation between memory and narrative has been explored by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists as well as literary critics. Philosophically, according to Babara A. Misztal, the thinkers Alasdair McIntyre, Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur all agree that "normal human beings are naturally Narrative and narrativity is crucial to a good life" (87). Misztal also quotes from Charles Taylor that "a basic condition of making sense of ourselves is that we grasp our lives as narrative and have an understanding of our lives as 'an unfolding story'" (87). That is, narrative is a basic way of synthesizing our past and narrative makes us what we are today.

Sociologists also offer similar viewpoints on narrative and social memory. As Halbwachs argues, "One cannot in fact think about the events of one's past without discoursing upon them" (*On Collective Memory* 53). In this sense, social memory is narrated by individuals

based on their connections with others and memory is meaningless if there is no narrative supporting linear recollections of the past.

For literary critics, the representation of social memory in literary works (no matter if these are poetry or fiction treating any form of remembering) has to take narrative form too. To literature, what is lost should be recovered since lost memory or history embodies new meanings for current discourse. The well-known autobiography critic James Olney summarizes: “Memory enables and vitalizes narrative; in return, narrative provides form for memory, supplements it, and sometimes displaces it” (417).

One of the conspicuous examples of this function is the manifestation of autobiographical memory in literary works. The stories constructed by personal memory are conceived as “personal myth” in the renowned psychologist Dan McAdams’ definition. A personal myth is:

> a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole … A personal myth is an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present and anticipated future. (12)

Using “personal myth”, Adams intends to give credit to the remembered past that contributes to the formation of who we are today, whether the past is constructed by “real” autobiographical memory or by fictional accounts of the past. This is exemplified in the literary genre called the Bildungsroman, which emphasizes the growing-up process, usually that of a young man, with a focus on achieving maturity. A Bildungsroman can be defined in

many ways: according to the *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, a Bildungsroman is a "novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity" so that the main character "recognizes his or her place and role in the world" (Murfin and Supryia 31). Synonyms for this genre include the apprenticeship novel and the novel of formation. Bildungsromans are often autobiographical, based on the lives of authors. *Silver Sister* is a typical Bildungsroman because it is based on the life experience of the author Lillian Ng and her Nanny, Wong (Ah) Ngan. A more concise definition is given by *The Literary Encyclopaedia,* which defines this genre as "the novel of personal development or of education" (Rau, n.p.). Observing these two definitions, here I conclude that this kind of novel has two basic features: it concerns a person's self-development; and it covers at least that development from childhood to maturity. This genre usually narrates the life story of a young man who may have emotional loss at an early age and sets out on a life journey to search for maturity. Both of the definitions emphasize the process of growing up and manifest the play of autobiographical memory and the significance of narrative in utilizing individual remembering to contest collective memory. In both cases, narrative plays a vital role in converting personal memory into a life story and structuring life stories in order to fill gaps in collective remembrance of national history or to challenge the way people remember the past collectively.

Not only autobiographies illustrate "storied" memory; biographical fictions like Ng's novel also undertake a similar mission. Biographical fiction offers broader spatial and temporal imagination of different people's pasts within one book. Diaspora literature, thus, (as a category of literary writing on homeland nostalgia, cultural differences between the home

country and host country, as well as identity issues) is connected to memory studies in representing collective memory about homeland history, diasporic experiences, and its relation to individual remembrance and to transnational cultural memory in host countries.

In *Diaspora and Memory*, a book edited by social scientist Vijay Agnew, contributor Anh Hua claims that:

> Memory analysis is significant to diaspora and feminist theorizing because it can reveal both the inner psychic states of postcolonial diaspora women and men - such as desire, fantasy, repression, denial, fear, trauma, identification, repulsion, and abjection as well as the social state of diasporic communities. (199)

She also adds that memory can trigger "identity formation, the rewriting of home and belonging, nostalgia, mourning and a sense of loss frequently found in diaspora, exile and immigrant narratives" (200). Inspired by Hua's comments, the fact that diasporic literature touches upon memory and belonging is evidenced by the subjects it writes about: stories about migrants –diasporic routes and identity crises. Novels like *Silver Sister* are good examples of showing how memory works in narratives to represent traumatic pasts and a confused present.

2. The Hybrid Genres of *Silver Sister*

2.1 A Biographical Feminist Bildungsroman

In this thesis, there are two novels exemplifying the features of Bildungsroman: *Silver Sister* and *Behind the Moon*. Both of them concern self-development and identity crisis. The advantage of treating these two novels as Bildungromane is that it allows readers to see how the protagonists experience identity transformation during diaspora more clearly. Traditionally Bildungsromane usually have a male protagonist, such as Wilhelm Meister, the young male hero of German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novels (Brändström 4). Esther Kleinbord Labovitz's book *The Myth of the Heroine: The Feminist Bildungsromanin the Twentieth Century* responds to the missing female protagonist in this genre. According to her understanding, only if social and cultural environments are suitable for women to become independent can the feminist Bildungsroman be established as a genre by itself (6-7). Following such discussions on the notion of the "female Bildungsroman", feminist critic Rita Felski has noticed a division between the male and feminist Bildungsroman regarding the issue of marriage. As she observes, for a nineteenth-century female protagonist, her "... trajectory remains limited to the journey from the parental to the married home and ... (her) destiny remains permanently linked to that of her male companion" (125). Brändström borrows Felski's understanding of the "feminist Bildungsroman" and claims that a "feminist Bildungsroman" usually creates a female protagonist who has to "struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing herself from marital subordination and dependence" (Brändström, 8).

Silver Sister demonstrates conspicuous features of a feminist Bildungsroman as defined by Felski and Brändström. First, it presents a female protagonist's life story from birth to eighty years old. It centres mostly on Silver as an independent woman because she is a "comb-up" and does not marry during her diasporic journeys. A "comb-up", according to the novel, is an member of a "sisterhood", which requires Silver to vow in front of the goddess of mercy, "to swear that you will not get married, and that you'll accept Ah Han, Ah Yin and Ah Fong as your adopted 'sisters'…" (34). The "comb-ups" should "grow their hair long, plait it in pigtails or chignon, wear white tunics and black pants as a mark of modesty, not making themselves fashionable to attract men…" (34). Metaphorically, this sisterhood is not only a significant symbol of women's communal power in diaspora but also a way of identifying Silver's ethnicity and very existence.

Second, the protagonist, Silver, one of the suppressed and unfortunate Chinese women born into poverty and living in upheaval in chaotic historical times, leaves her hometown as an teenage girl for basic survival and a better life. Lastly her travel routes are also a journey of self-development and self-realisation. As a peasant girl living in extreme poverty, Silver has to succumb to poverty and vow to be a "comb-up", in the only chance she has to go out to work as an independent woman. Her travels start from a remote Chinese village and end up in Australia, a very different country. She finishes her transformation from a domestic nanny to an Australian citizen, whose story is regarded as a successful migration story, similar to those depicted in several other Chinese-Australian literary works.

As a feminist Bildungsroman, *Silver Sister* embodies gendered representations of identity and self-development. As the key character and as a "comb-up", Silver offers readers rich memories about gendered pasts. During her self-development, she participates in and witnesses women's enslavement by men, or by women with higher social status. As a child, she witnesses the enslavement of her sisters and herself by the men in her family. She recalls her father's comments on the female children in the family: "And he pointed at my sisters and me. 'Good for nothing slaves, can't help in the field or fight in the war'. He stamped his feet in frustration and sighed" (Ng, 5).The poverty of her family makes her father live in despair and he resents his wife for giving birth to so many 'slaves' (5). Given such priorities, girls live an inferior life compared to men:

> For breakfast the men had a thick gruel or boiled rice with salted fish and salted eggs. We females had to dilute our gruel to a watery consistency and ate it with pickled olives and salted vegetables. Meat and rice were reserved for the males, the superior beings capable of manual work, the income-earners of the family. (7)

These depictions of "patriarchy" are realistic since at that time, Chinese men were the main support of the family, while women were meant to stay at home and be responsible for domestic chores. The difference between *Silver Sister* and other feminist fiction is that the aim of depicting patriarchy in the family is not to criticize male-dominance but to remember and criticize the pasts of China, from a different time and space in Australia, with ambivalent feelings towards the suppression of women imposed by the men in her family. To elaborate this point, the unfair treatment of the girls in Silver's family are mentioned several times in

the text, and each time the tone of the narrative is slightly different. A case in point is the differences between memory about the men in family in her childhood memory and in her comparison of the Australian way of farming to the Chinese way. In Silver's childhood memory, the narrator uses an obviously critical tone to depict the ill-treatment of her sisters by their brothers and Papa. Nevertheless, the tone changes later in the novel when Silver, as an Australian citizen, begins to recall her past. When the narrator mentions Silver's fascination with the Australian way of farming, she thinks of:

> (her) poor Papa and brothers labouring away with bent backs all day planting, plucking, beating the yoked buffalo to till the fields, and carrying buckets of human excreta as manure to fertilise the land, their efforts often coming to nought in adverse weather and conditions. (12)

Combined with the Bildungsroman conventions, this change in tone is well explained, because after Silver became an Australian citizen, she has grown this "humanistic" point of view not only to resist her past as a suppressed girl, but to establish herself as a successful immigrant living in a rich country concerned with people's human rights.

2.2 A Trauma Fiction

Silver Sister, with its fragmentary narrative structure, featuring the interweaving of present and past in every chapter, also demonstrates the generic characteristics of trauma fiction with varied traumatic memories and trauma narration as well as healing through constant recalling of the past and relating the past to the present. Resick, in her book *Stress and Trauma*

interprets trauma stress as something "caused by life-threatening or self-threatening events that are accompanied by fear, helplessness, or horror" (28). The literary theorist Anne Whitehead offers a literary lens for traumatic events: as she says, "in novels, traumatic events stem from collective experiences, such as the Holocaust, war, or slavery, or from personal ones, such as rape or bereavement" (161). *Silver Sister* depicts scenarios from the Japanese War in mainland China and Singapore as well as the enslavement of Chinese women in both old China and Australia. Also, it includes personal bereavement for the protagonist: Silver loses her parents and most of her siblings as a teenager and she also experiences loss of her best "sister" Ah Yin while Ah Yin is enslaved by a Chinese family in Australia.

According to Whitehead, a trauma fiction should represent trauma "by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection" (3). Recently, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Chinese diasporic fictions concerning traumatic memories, with disordered temporal and chronology collapse, are believed to fall into such a category. In this light, *Silver Sister* strongly evidences characteristics of trauma fiction. Besides its plot about a woman's traumatic life experience, the narrative structure is also disordered temporally and repetition of the traumatic past appears many years later. The text mimics the way trauma works and highlights trauma thematically in the form of memory and also in its relation to the present diasporic identity of the protagonist. This novel employs fragmentary narrating of the past and the present in each chapter. Silver's repetitive accounts of how she buried her father and how her mother killed girl babies, as well as how she became a "comb-up" as a result of becoming an orphan, all show to the reader that *Silver Sister* is from trauma and about trauma.

In summary, analysis of *Silver Sister* shows that it is a hybrid generic literary text and this hybridity leads to the highlighting of three features of this diasporic fiction: identity, trauma and memory. As a Chinese diasporic fiction, *Silver Sister* demonstrates a way of narrating trauma transnationally and utilizes traumatic memories to represent a hybrid identity. Moreover, it includes intriguing representations of the diversified ways of understanding "Chineseness" in the global sense of the Chinese diaspora.

3. The Interaction of Individual Memory and Collective Memory in *Silver Sister*

As a biographical feminist Bildungsroman written by a Chinese-Australian author, *Silver Sister*, rewriting the real life story of Wong Ah Ma from China, attempts to market itself in the category of "Asian women's literature". Similarly to Chinese-American women's writing, *Silver Sister* does this by demonstrating how individual memory disagrees with the collective memory of homeland history, and this exerts influence on Chinese women's identity. The visibility of Chinese-American women's writing dwarfs Chinese-Australian counterparts in international literary circles. Chinese-American authors Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, and Chinese-British author Jung Chang are the most renowned women authors writing in English and have written extensively on Chinese cultural memory, collective memory and cultural differences between China and America. However, Chinese-Australian literary works like *Silver Sister* share the same function as Chinese-American literary works and even as Asian women's literature, in the need to "recover… social and political history,

boosting representation from writers of Asian descent on the literary scene, and enhancing community awareness of literary and cultural politics" (Khoo 164).

The most conspicuous examples among Asian women's writing concerning memory and history are Cultural Revolution stories; as Khoo indicates, these stories reflect a typical stereotype of "confessional" narratives (164). Through confession, the characters attempt to establish their identity in a new country emotionally, if not socially, and by criticizing the country that they left behind, they push their "oriental" way into the national literary circles in the adopted country. In America, Maxine Hong Kingston is acknowledged as a Chinese-American woman writer who never experienced that history, but expresses doubts about the letters from relatives in China about the Cultural Revolution. There are also male authors such as Ha Jin, who portrays detailed personal stories about marriage in the period of the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, in Australia, there is Ouyang Yu who lived through the same period, and who writes about the life of a young man called Jing in his novel *The English Class*.

Lillian Ng, from the same position as Hong Kingston, attempts to contest homeland national history, such as the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Cultural Revolution, by narrating her Ah Ma's life stories in a fictionalized way. Yet, different from Hong Kingston, Ng is telling a growing-up story of poorly educated Silver from a village who has been forced to migrate and struggle to make a living in diaspora. Ng's perspective is micro rather than macro. Silver's stories cover a great length of time: from the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution to

the Tiananmen Square "Incident". These topics have already been narrated in various genres by Chinese mainland authors, Chinese-American writers and Chinese-Australian writers such as those mentioned above. Uniquely, Lillian Ng is the first Chinese-Australian writer to focus on an illiterate Chinese women's cross-boundary life stories. Silver is one of many illiterate women migrants from China in Australia. Her motive of leaving China for a non-patriarchal and well-off world has been a common reason for many Chinese women to leave their hometown and come to new countries, where they soon question their new identities by re-remembering the past and comparing it to the satisfying new life in Australia. Ng complicates the character of Silver by playing between memory and reality, past and present. It is never easy to come to any fixed identity and during the route from "home" to "heaven"; identity crises happen along with the establishing of a new sense of belonging.

In *Silver Sister*, memory is gendered, traumatized and individualized. Ng is interested in writing about the individual memory of Silver about her diasporic story, rather than using Silver's story to represent global history. As is discussed in the theoretical framework, and through borrowed light from Halbwachs' work, individual memory sometimes contests collective memory, thus impeding the formation of nationalism. As is known to all Chinese, memory of the Second Sino-Japanese war started by Japan has a huge influence on China-Japan relations, and the slaughter as well as torture of Chinese people has already become part of the collective memory. However, for people like Silver, who is rootless even within her own country, this knowledge does not construct a collective memory imprinted with clear nationalism; rather, her memory of the war is personal, painful, and presents an indifferent

attitude toward nationalism. This indifference towards nationalism also indicates how diaspora transforms individual identity.

In *Silver Sister*, the "micro" perspective for viewing the national history of China primarily demonstrates this transformation. Different from the conventional approach of telling national history in the tone of a grand narrative, this book perceives Chinese history, especially war history from a diasporic viewpoint. History is vague and inaccurate, and it serves as the background for viewing how remembering the past constructs Silver's present identity. Somehow, unlike other diasporic novels, this book does not perceive China as the entity of a homeland, but only a point where diaspora begins. Silver does not want to enhance her identity as a Chinese person, and she is keener on reinforcing her status as a woman in diaspora. Nationalism is silenced before the power of individualized memory more involved with life limited to family units, rather than collective remembering of more diverse groups. Together with her other "sisters", Silver is pushed to go to Singapore for more job opportunities, though this means the sacrifice of leaving the Chinese family she is working for and her only living brother. Silver's diasporic experience begins when she decides to go overseas for survival. Ng picks up the daily life of diversified Chinese families living during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore to manifest the diversity of "Chineseness" and how the Chinese diaspora has been shaped by war. These elements act as preparation for further plot progression and form a space for growing personal memory.

The power of memory is delicate, but long-lasting. In *Gender and Memory*, Leydesorff, Passerini and Thompson explain the dialectic between memory and power:

> the intertwining of power and memory is very subtle, and it reflects … the particular area of power … and the various levels of public discourses. Memories supportive of subordinating groups can also show striking resilience, and they can be transmitted … from the interstices of society, from the boundaries between the public and the private". (8)

In this light, as Akhtar Rizwan suggests:

> the connection between individual (personal) and collective (public) memory persists for its respective ends and objectives, and as individuals and groups straddle upon each other's memory, they create a variegated tapestry of the dialectic of power. (65)

Between the collective and individual, there is power to resist, reverse, and reinvent. One of the conspicuous examples showing the dynamics of collective memory and individual memory is Silver's memory of different wars in different periods. Ng's narratives of war focus on how war influences Silver's diasporic routes, rather than how Silver's sufferings criticize the cruelty of war. As significant historical events in each country–namely, China, Singapore, and Australia, wars are understated in this novel to highlight Silver's individuality.

The war begins at the same time Silver begins to menstruate, as she remembers: "But the year I started to menstruate, a different kind of disaster struck – war. It was a new threat to us in secluded Lung Sun, where news from other parts of China filtered through by word of mouth as gossip, announcement, propaganda or hearsay." (16) The juxtaposition of the start of her menstruation and the start of the war symbolizes the fatal destiny of Silver and her future

diaspora. In *Silver Sister*, two major wars are depicted: the Second Sino-Japanese War in China and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, covering 1931 to 1945, lasting for almost fifteen years. The beginning of war is the beginning of bereavement, insecurity, dispersal, isolation, and melancholy. Each wartime experience provokes Silver's growing up to another stage of life. During her stay in Singapore, she encounters her second war: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Silver's memories of the wars are feminine and subjective. National history of war is closely related to men, fighting and death, but Silver's memory elaborates on how women hide from possible rape and torture and how they manage to support each other, thus making war history a mirror of how Silver as a woman manages to turn into a well-off migrant in Australia:

> We worried about the violation of our bodies by the enemy. Time eluded us, we creatures of the night, of darkness, leading a clandestine life. Many months slipped by before we women were gradually persuaded to come out of hiding. (205)

> We women came out in our loose clothes, rubbed the soot from our faces, and started to compare our tales of woe. The old inched their way out on their walking sticks smiling toothlessly. Grandmothers with small bound feet hobbled unsteadily, leaning on their grandchildren for support. The barber appeared with his harmonica and I joined his wife and daughters, dancing in the street and singing a local song. (213)

The use of "we" indicates the clear inclination to make this novel a feminist Bildungsroman. Silver together with her women counterparts survive different wars. She becomes a person

with a mature mind and stable financial status. From a village to Singapore, Silver utilizes war memory to resist the concept of "homeland". To Silver, there is no place called "home"; though she tries very hard to settle down, unavoidable forces such as the breaking out of war constantly change her plans. The word "China" appears no more than twice in this book, suggesting resistance to "nationalism" and the influence of collective memory on individuals.

This resistance towards "nationalism" and the concept of "home", as well as to stability itself, is contrasted with frequent depictions of diasporic life. For Silver, life in diaspora has two major concerns: to support herself and support the one she loves. In the first two chapters, she feels relief at escaping from her past, which was filled with poverty, war, and bereavement, while in the third and fourth chapters, the past haunts her and makes a constant appearance in her present life, delicately transforming memory and identity. There are several points in the novel where Silver expresses her feelings about leaving, journeys and "new life":

> The prospect of having a place to stay, a meal and money, filled me with happiness and relief. I was so excited, I didn't even bother to ask Lee Sao what a 'sisterhood' involved. Instead, I burst out with many other questions: when do we leave? How do we get there? Do we go on foot (like the refugees) and how long does it take? Do I meet the girls today? Do we start our journey tonight? Or tomorrow? (23)

> I was glad I had left Canton. I felt liberated from the barriers of high walls and hedges. My world had expanded to include sea, sky, hills. A new land and city for me to explore. (131)

> I was sorry to leave Singapore, Dawn and Wah, my sisters and our friends. Singapore has been my home for thirty-two years; I'd lived here through war and peace, experienced the changes as it moved from a colony to an independent republic. (251)

And she begins to be aware that she has been in diaspora and her past is a solid past now. She reflects while visiting her ancestral home in Lung Sun:

> My home was just a shell, filled in by other people from another time, another kind of smell prevailed; of earth, manure, and antiseptic. The family Wong Lao and Wong Ma belonged to a past, which only I knew because I had lived in it, shared the sufferings and the giggles of my sisters - real blood sisters. They were all ghosts now, invisible, perhaps they came to haunt this hut at night, their birth place, their birth right. (234)

The above quotations indicate that Silver, after a long-time departed from her ancestral home, has gradually lost the sense of home and belonging to a fixed place.

Silver remembers China from the 1910s to about the 1970s, covering dramatic social changes and moving between Chinese village, Canton, Hong Kong and Singapore. Ng, though not directly addressing the perception of a collective memory of nationalism and national history in these places, by elaborating on how Silver's diasporic memory fills in the gaps of connecting these places and histories. In China, Silver lives with a poor family with thirteen children and has no soap to wash her body. Instead, they "used the fine sand to rub the dirt and grime off the clothes, and the grease off [their] bodies" (8). In Canton, she becomes a

domestic nanny, and is quite content with her life. She recalls “in those days in Canton, as long as one was willing and not fussy, jobs were readily available” (55) In Hong Kong, her world starts to “include sea, sky, hills” and she claims “a new land and city for me to explore” (131). In addition, in Australia, she lives in a comfortable apartment and is financially well off. Her survival during war and success as a woman migrant are highlighted all through the book. The way Ng presents Silver’s success is conventional because of her emphasis on individual memory of diaspora, and her special concern with how feminist memory works in transforming a woman’s life.

Compared with other diasporic literary works that focus on the construction of collective memory of the national past by establishing an “imagined community”, *Silver Sister* contrasts collective memory of China’s national histories with unique individual diasporic memory and attempts to deconstruct identities based on nationalism or a unified definition of Chineseness. While nationalistic formulations of Chineseness often underpin the exiled migrant’s double identity, *Silver Sister* as a diasporic novel and a feminist bildungsroman offers more than one possible way to be Chinese. It deconstructs conventional identity politics based on the consensus on national history and demonstrates the “doubleness” of belonging during diaspora.

4. How Memory makes Identity in *Silver Sister*

Theoretically, the relations between memory and identity have been vigorously discussed. Additionally, many literary scholars of diasporic literature contribute to this question by responding to miscellaneous literary works, such as *Silver Sister*. This novel is engaged in

issues of identity by mixing historical narrative with personal narrative. Questions related to "who I am" or "where I am from" are consciously discussed in this novel by repetitively remembering the same scenes which happened in the significant places once regarded as "home". Unlike the next novel to be discussed in this thesis (*Shanghai Dancing* by Brian Castro), *Silver Sister* has a more straight-forward approach to contesting the conventional definition of identity. In *Silver Sister,* Ng utilizes the representation of diasporic routes to signpost each transformation Silver experiences. By presenting these transformations to readers, Ng also contests the notion of Chinese cultural identity. In this book, being Chinese does not mean loving China as your home country, and Chinese cultural identities have diverse meanings rather than a singular definition.

In *Silver Sister*, haunted, repetitive past memories play a significant role in reframing the identity of Silver and exemplifying the dynamic nature of diasporic identity. In her childhood, Silver is a powerless, poor, and plain-faced girl, but after she migrates to Australia, living in an apartment with plenty of financial support and a materially-improved life, she remembers her past by comparing it to the present, realizing her father and brothers are also victims of poverty and patriarchy.

The diaspora enables Silver to experience different landscapes, cultures, and forms of masculinity too. As a novel narrating diaspora experience, *Silver Sister* has lots of aspects that mediate collective memory of the past, through which "the scattered individuals band together to create real or imagined relationships with one another" (36). In diaspora, people are involved in travelling, dispersals, and even trauma, through which their identity is not

fixed, or even real. Klein cites James Clifford: "travellers on diasporic journeys are setting down elsewhere and creating their sense of identity in a homeland that exists mainly in memory" (18). *Silver Sister* brings in at least two ways of understanding identity of Chinese women in diaspora: the identity of individuals in relation to memory of the past and the identity of Silver as a member of Chinese diasporic community.

In this novel, two individuals' identity issues are mainly addressed: Silver Sister's and Kim's. Kim's identity is blurred because of her relation to Silver and Silver's identity is decided on the dynamics of present and past. Silver narrates her past by engaging with the present, and every section of the four parts has a separate dialogue between Silver and Kim, indicating a clear division between what happened before and what is going on now. In the meantime, these discourses with Kim link the two women's identity, indicating the indispensable relations between Silver, who carries both personal memory and collective memory of her homeland, and Kim, who was brought up with a Western education and imprinted with Western culture, and has interests and doubts about the "imagined homeland". When Silver mentions Kuan Yin with respect, Kim "dismisses it with cynicism" (Ng, 253): "just a gimmick, a camera trick to con people who are superstitious…" (253) However, for Silver, it is "good, to give alms to the poor, to do good deeds, not to kill and so on…" (253) Kuan Yin, to Silver, is the Godness who brings her a new direction when she vows to Kuan Yin to become a "comb-up". However, to Kim, this belongs to Asian superstition.

Besides the dialogues incorporated in each chapter, Ng formulates the "doubleness" of Chinese diasporic identities. Silver represents the connection to the past, and her identity is

determined by the constant dynamic reference to her pasts during forced diaspora, while Kim's identity is determined by the community or family bonds to Silver, who reminds Kim of her family history as well as bringing her rich memories of Chinese culture and history. Chinese diasporic identities are interwoven within community and generational memories, thus, Silver's identity complicates Kim's identity while Kim's identity reinforces Silver's diasporic identity.

As is mentioned earlier, *Silver Sister* is a feminist Bildungsroman, therefore, the way it narrates Silver's growing-up story is also a process of identity formation. In relation with memory, Silver's identity forming process is aligned with her constant re-visiting and revising her pasts. Memory is the repository of Silver's trauma and diaspora, and it also underpins Silver's reflections on her identity as an inferior Chinese woman.

In "Village", several examples demonstrate this identity development by comparing the attitude of Silver at a certain point in the present towards Chinese culture in the past. Talking about names, Silver recalls: "I could not keep count of my brothers and sisters, nor did I know their names…I was number eight and hence my name was Ah Pah, meaning eight" (5). She continues, "But now I'm known as Silver Sister, a name given to me when I started work at the House of Tang in Canton, when I was fifteen or sixteen." (5) This suggests a further development of Silver's identity for, in the next part of the book, Silver Sister for the first time has a sense of belonging. When the war strikes, Silver has to leave her home for a place to support herself. The experiences of dispersal give her the chance to meet more people, have a greater income, and reckon on her own identity as an independent woman.

In “Canton”, contrasts between memory and reality are made again to suggest a fluid and dynamic identity. By recalling how Uncle Fatty Lee slaughtered a fish to make fish soup, Silver Sister criticizes Chinese people as a “cruel race” because “we prefer live animals to slaughter for fresh meat, we would never, if given a choice, purchase frozen or thawed meat” (Ng, 101). Ng’s conscious insertion of Chinese cultural customs and food culture helps to frame Silver’s “doubled” identity. On one hand, she believes in Chinese medicine and Kuan Yin, on the other hand, she disdains many cultural customs she used to take for granted such as eating fresh fish. As Silver gains financial independence, she starts to notice the political environment of China. Concerning the Tiananmen Square incident, she observes, Chinese are “a cruel race, who killed the young unarmed students in cold blood” (102). The tone of criticism of China suggests Silver’s identity has become inclined to that of a Westernized and liberal woman after coming to Australia. Silver represents those who live in-between two cultures and two modes of memories. Silver’s constant revising of her past suggests how memory makes identity in a new environment. Memory is revised and identity is revised alongside. Traumatic memory may bring homesickness or resentment, but the fact that memory is in change suggests identity in diaspora is changeable, complicated, and dynamic.

The parts entitled “Hong Kong” and “Singapore” further describe Silver Sister’s life in diaspora, but it is in the “Singapore” section that her identity is associated with Kim’s family history. In Singapore, Silver has to meet lots of challenges including different cultures and languages. Her friend Kam has to interpret everything for her to get a job; even Mandarin sounds “just like a foreign language” (241). Silver finds a job as a domestic servant for Dawn’s family, the mother of Kim. There is a considerable amount of description of the

family life of Dawn, Nonya and Baba, which constitutes very vague memories for Kim. Both Silver and Kim understand the feeling of dispersal and loneliness, so that when Kim is pregnant, alone in a foreign country, Silver decides to help Kim by flying to Australia. Unlike Silver who is trying to criticize the negative aspects of Chinese culture and recollect painful memory, Kim's identity goes through a different process. Her Chinese identity is constructed by bits and pieces of stories about China and Chinese culture. She constantly compares Australia with China socially and culturally. She fills in the gaps by imagining a China opposite to the way she lives now. This imagination finally leads her to many travels back to China and many dialogues between Silver and Kim are about the changes in China, the one in Silver's past and the one in Kim's present.

Australia, like Singapore, is multicultural and people speak different languages. Silver Sister's identity experiences another transformation through living in-between her present Western culture and her past's mixed cultures. Silver engages in more intellectual thinking about her homeland and Australia; the fragmentary recollections mingled with past memories in each part, from "Village" to "Australia", accumulate and weighs heavily in the part set in Australia. Though the travelling routes of Silver provide a complex picture of Chinese women in diaspora, it is the persistent question of how diaspora influences identity through constantly comparing the present identity with the past that Ng attempts to explore. Ng presents Silver's brave decision to fly to Australia as a symbol of detachment from her previous Chinese community and stepping into a whole new world. With her previous experience, Silver Sister has already gained an identity as an independent, self-supportive woman, but it is in Australia that she finally feels she is a "free woman".

According to postmodernists and cultural critics, identities are fluid, unstable and always under reformation. As noted in the previous chapter, Hall reminds us that cultural identity has become a matter of "becoming as well as being" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225) In other words, Hall's notion of diasporic identity is one based on "difference" and "hybridity". It is "defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity…hybridity" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235). Silver's life in Australia echoes Hall's conception and consolidates her identity as a woman living in between different cultures and memories. The migration to a different world drives her to improve her appearance, intelligence and life philosophy.

Australia, to Silver, is very Western and "differed greatly from the Chinese, their customs, ideas, myths, beliefs" (269). Australia symbolizes "civilisation" and "wealth". To fit into the new society with huge differences from anywhere she has been before, Silver decides to change her look by having her long hair cut and styled. "I wanted to wave my hair like the women in Sydney, to blend in with their style, so as not to embarrass Kim by looking strange or out-of-space with a long pigtail."(249) The act of shedding her past by having her hair styled into short, curly, Western-style hair is painful because she considers her hair "an extension of [her]self, mark of [her] status" (249), since her hair symbolizes her identity as a "comb-up". She cuts her hair and begins to blur her Chineseness in order to bond with Kim more closely and to be accepted by Western society.

Unlike the descriptions of any other journey Ng writes, here language with stronger emotions is applied to demonstrate the dramatic psychological change in Silver: "I felt like a caterpillar

moulting, shedding my past, and stepping out of my shell into another life." (251) This psychological change is added on top of the previous experiences of dispersal and setting off to another place, which to Silver Sister is already a habitual practice of identity transformation. This time, the change will be more dramatic. However, the past comes back to both Silver and Kim, signifying the omnipresence of memory and its power to shape one's existence against our own efforts or desires.

Silver unconsciously reminds herself of her mother's labour and miscarriages when she accompanies Kim in her labour, and similarly the topic of losing weight refreshes her memory about the beggars along the road in her village. The memory alerts her to pay attention to something more than basic living, since now she is speaking from a position that is qualified to reconsider her past. She gradually transforms from an illiterate woman into a woman who asks for more intellectual and language skills for self-development to suit her needs when living in a more "civilised" country.

In this book, Ng also uses languages as tools to reveal the "doubleness" in narrative voice. For example, Silver Sister once describes the modern way of farming in Australia and begins comparing the Australian way and the old Chinese way: "It fascinates me to watch the shearing of sheep and Australian methods of farming: the use of machinery, tractors, piped irrigation, greenhouses of controlled temperatures and large trucks with cutters for harvesting and collecting the produce, with only one man in command at the wheel, not an animal in sight to do the plowing" (11-12). The diction is vivid and specific since the narrator is using many concrete words and the sentences are lengthy as well as complicated. Though the

concepts and thoughts belong to Silver Sister, the voice is that of Lillian Ng. Paul John Eakin argues that "the self and language are mutually implicated in a single interdependent system of symbolic behaviour" (192). As language plays a role in demonstrating the self, Ng writes herself into the book by mingling simple sentences with complicated ones to achieve an effect of doubleness. When Papa is seriously sick and Silver begs the doctor, she uses quite simple and even inaccurate language: 'Oh, no' I cried. 'Please do all you can. Papa must live. We've nobody else in this world….' (24). While mourning the death of her best sister Ah Yin, Silver's reflections read like the language used by an educated person:

> I am glad she had a proper burial; a wake in a funeral parlour, a well-polished wooden coffin, and now lying in a prestigious graveyard, her plot cemented, a marble tomb-stone etched with a recent photograph of her. I cannot help comparing her burial with that of my Papa's, and I often wonder how I got the strength and the guts to bury Papa in the back of our ancestral home. (25)

The phenomena of an illiterate Chinese woman using complicated sentences as well as intellectual arguments about Chinese history and Australian refugee policy, generate doubts about the narrator. As narratology reminds us, a real narrator should be detached from the author, *Silver Sister* clearly does not achieve this goal. However, this doubleness or duality in narrative voice juxtaposes the identity of Silver, Kim and Ng.

As has been mentioned before, Kim's identity is consolidated by her bond to Silver who helps her take care of her child. The role of Kim opens discussion on various Chinese cultural identities in diaspora. As Chiang summarizes, diaspora is a collective experience, in which

the dispersed manage to develop and sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication, such as language, media or rituals. Though many analyses of *Silver Sister*, including Chiang's article, suggest that this is a book on the unique life of Silver, the bond between Silver and Kim suggests a possibility for Chinese women to establish a collective identity outside their homeland. In addition, the "sisterhood" formed by Silver and her sisters is also a symbol for thinking about a paradigm of Chinese community in diaspora. However, Ng's intention clearly does not focus on the community bonds of Chinese women. What she makes an effort to do is to show the possibilities of a different Chinese cultural identity. Silver and Kim are two connected but divergent Chinese women. In this novel, being Chinese is complicated by the fact that Chineseness itself is a hybrid, contested term. As suggested by Hall, "ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak" ("The Local and The Global," 34). By demonstrating life experiences in different areas of China and countries with diversified cultures, Ng, intentionally or unintentionally deconstructs what is Chinese and who can be Chinese. When Silver came to Lee Sao for more information about the war, Lee Sao replied:

> "Who knows? The Kuomingtang and the Communists are Chinese, the Manuchurians look Chinese and speak Chinese and they are all fighting among themselves. The Japanese are the short myopic people but also can be easily mistaken for Chinese. It's very hard to tell them apart." (17-18)

Starting from the war between "Chinese and Chinese", Ng deconstructs the notion of Chineseness in this novel, and suggests that ethnicity is also a term undergoing its formation

in certain social, cultural and emotional circumstances. In this biographical fiction, representations of diasporic experience are split into two parts: the individual memory of Silver and the collective memory of other Chinese people with diversified backgrounds: her other sisters bonded by "sisterhood", her brother, Kim's family and many minor characters from Vietnam such as May Ly who are called "the boat people". These characters form a grand picture of the diasporic experience of those of Chinese descent. Though they are all Chinese, Silver has plenty of cultural memory to enhance her Chineseness but Kim has little knowledge about China and Chinese culture, contrasting each other with different opinions on abortion, Chinese medicine, and food culture. Ah Sai represents Hong Kong culture, which is presented as a grey zone of transition between China and the West, while the families of Kim, living in South East Asia for generations, are another segment of "Chineseness".

Thus, what we construct as "Chineseness" is at stake, be it in or outside China. That brings the concept of "in-betweeness" to discussions of the novel, given the fact that *Silver Sister* is about Silver's cross-boundary journeys in diaspora and goes beyond temporal and geographical space by jumping between memory and the present. I agree with the use of Homi Bahbha's concept of "hybridity" to explain the in-betweenness of the Chinese diaspora and their new places. Silver remains ambivalent, pushed and pulled as she is between both poles: "[i]n-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present" and future (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 219). Their experiences of "unhomeliness" – Bhabha's term to describe the "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" – are defined by trans-border memories about trauma, chaotic historical moments and rootlessness (*The*

Location of Culture 9). This novel creates Silver as a protagonist experiencing "unhomeliness". With other characters with routes from mainland China, South East Asia, America, to Australia, Silver travels across various cultures and her final settlement does not give her a sense of belonging, so she is always in diaspora spiritually.

Besides, each of the places depicted in this novel also indicate typical perceptions of different Chinese cultural identities. Villagers have an unclear perception of who is Chinese and why Chinese are at war with other groups of Chinese. Canton, as a more developed area, has offered more job opportunities and serves as the bridge between poverty and well-being. Hong Kong, as the colony of Britain, is distinctive from inland China, demonstrating a strong hybridity of East and West, a door to Western culture. Singapore, with its large proportion of Chinese population, and mixed ethnicities, pushes the question of Chineseness further away from the distinction between Northerners and Southerners in mainland China to whether a hybrid family with some Chinese descent can be counted as Chinese or whether indeed Chineseness is essentially hybrid. The geographical arrangement of *Silver Sister* shows the diminishing outline of Chineseness from very strong forms to blurred boundaries.

5. Conclusion

As demonstrated above, *Silver Sister* merges three features of diasporic literature – trauma, memory and identity, into one biographical novel, and offers a distinctive way of thinking about Chinese diaspora by displaying the significance of memory and trauma. From the past to the present, memories have naturally changed Silver's identity and revisiting her past brings her new thoughts on it. However, her happy life in the present still does not validate

her identity as a citizen of Australia. On the contrary, she is always emotionally longing for her homeland with all her personal memories of homeland culture. This implicitly questions how a multicultural Australia might ensure personal wellbeing. A text written on a now remote China and Australia in the 1970s can bring new meanings to the present – trauma should be healed if Silver is happy in Australia – but the fact that she is still in pain suggests that her identity is inextricable from her memories of trauma, war, and diaspora. As Chiang summarises, identity is "mediated by different representations, language practice, memory, fantasy, and so on" (39). *Silver Sister* covers Chinese diasporas across various countries, through the narration of traumatic individual memories, in which the main character's "Chineseness" is constructed and reinforced by repeatedly referring to the past, and relies on cultural memories of such things as festivals, food cultures, and medical knowledge. However, as an illiterate woman with fragmentary English speaking skills, she is rootless in Australia at first, and begins to recall her repressed memory, unleashing the pressure of trauma and constructing a "storied" memory of significant "Chinese history". In plot and narrative structure, Ng utilizes double voices and double perspectives on China's past to help Silver find her individualised identity. Silver finally feels relieved from the traumatic past but remains Chinese inside and a mixed-self outside. Memory, trauma and identity are three features thus of both Silver and the fiction itself, whose conclusion is that only constructing a community in the new place can help one temporarily escape from "emotional diaspora".

Chapter Three: Contesting Identity and Forming "Cosmopolitan Memory" in *Shanghai Dancing*

This chapter examines how "cosmopolitan memory" works in Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) as a way of challenging the notion of identity confined to nation-state and community. *Shanghai Dancing* is the seventh book by Brian Castro, who currently lives and teaches in Adelaide, Australia. It took over eight years to finish and Australian publishing agents rejected the book several times. Eventually Ivor Indyk, at Giramondo Press, who has helped Brian Castro publish several of his other books, put this book into print. I regard it as his most representative book, in that it not only challenges conventional ways of writing by contesting the genres of fiction and autobiography, but also demonstrates the relations between memory and identity, as Castro suggests in an interview with Wang Guanglin:

> The topic of *Shanghai Dancing* is memory and forgetting - how people forget the past but at the same time, the past is vital to the present. Therefore, dancing is a way of forgetting the past, but the fact that they take no effort of remembering the dance steps suggests the omnipresence of memory. (Wang, "Cultural Translation," 163)

Inspired by Castro's own words about memory and self in *Shanghai Dancing*, this chapter is interested in discussing how a fictional autobiography can contest the notion of identity defined by ethnicity and nationality, through discussing representations of "cosmopolitan memory". This chapter will apply the theory of cosmopolitanism, and borrow from Daniel Levy's and Natan Sznaider's definition of "Cosmopolitan memory" (87) to investigate how

Castro challenges the notion of identity in his unique attempt to form literary cosmopolitan memory.

1. Literary Review of *Shanghai Dancing*

One of Castro's best creative works, *Shanghai Dancing* was published in 2003 and has received a variety of responses because of its complicated genres, exotic representations and seductive language(s). It blurs the boundaries between fiction and autobiography by fictionalizing the family history of Castro and parodying autobiography in complex ways: it contains a family tree in the preface and inserts both photographs and documents to trick readers with apparent authenticity and remembrance. The reason why Castro is interested in parodying auto/biographical form is because, as he argues, it is "unstable in itself" and "has the potential to transgress the furthest" (*Estrellita* 106).

By recalling the diverse life stories of Castro's family members through fictional characters, this book puts forwards the questions of how memory and forgetting are represented in literary narratives and how the notion of cosmopolitan memory in *Shanghai Dancing* affects the notion of identity. The reliability of memory and the attempt to recover memory are proven futile. Memory is invented, re-remembered, texualized and imagined. The notion of identity is contested temporally and geographically. Questions such as hybridity, cultural disinheritance and the understanding of self and belonging through family memory are put at stake. Brian Castro attempts to establish a form of cosmopolitan memory through this complex contesting process. Collective memory of a particular area and history can be

extended to a cosmopolitan memory of global history for people who experience migration, globalisation, international travel and interracial marriage.

In Castro's novel, the narrator connects with half-sisters and first cousins through both family memory and secrets. The novel mimics modernist texts, especially those by James Joyce, and unsettles the conventional representation of history and memory. In this novel, family memory is fragmented by interruptions from national historical events and history is narrated as unsettled and non-linear in relation to a hybridized family. Castro further questions the relation between memory and self by creating a father who doesn't care about the past and only lives in the present and the future, and a mother who depends on the past to achieve a solid belonging.

In contemporary Australian literary circles, Brian Castro is known for often mingling his fictions with theoretical discussions and family autobiographical accounts related to global history. He also publishes critical essays, such as some of the essays in his collection *Looking for Estrellita* (1999), and poems. Though Castro is regarded by many Australian and international critics as an "Asian-Australian" writer or "minority" writer, both Sneja Gunew and Wenche Ommundsen view him as a "cosmopolitan" writer, given that he comes from a mixed-race family and advocates for cosmopolitanism in his writing. Gunew comments that "Castro remains remarkably difficult to categorize and this has occasionally been insinuated to be an attribute of his 'mixed-race' cosmopolitanism" (363). Ommundsen expresses a similar view from the angle of his national and international influence: "He can hardly, today, be described as a 'marginalized' writer: he was awarded the Vogel prize for his first novel

Birds of Passage and received a number of literary awards for *Double-Wolf* (1991) and *After China* (1992)." ("Multiculturalism, Identity, Displacement,"151)

Born in Hong Kong and living in Australia, with an Anglo-Chinese mother and a Portuguese-Jewish father, Castro seems particularly interested in theoretical and literary discussion on both "cosmopolitanism" and "hybridity". He denies the "ethnic" perspective in literary discussions on authors and their works, and refuses to represent a particular ethnic group: "It seemed to me that identity had become more important than writing, with the inevitable consequence of writing becoming invisible." (*Estrellita* 29) In order to make writing visible, Castro explores postmodernist writing practices and intentionally crosses the boundaries between theory and literature, hybridity and ethnicity, as well as making efforts to cross genres from autobiography to fiction. For Castro, what you write is more significant than what group your writing represents.

Echoing literary critics who conduct research on him, Castro also comments on hybridity in his work and considers his fictions a contesting subject in relation to the notion of a fixed identity. Hybridity is one of Bhabha's central ideas as a response to Edward Said's work. Hybridity, to Bhabha, is a new cultural form generated in the changing cultural environment moving from single, enclosed culture to multiculturalism. The notion of hybridity transforms people's understanding of colonialism and proves to have great influence in cultural identity. As Bhabha says, there is a space "in-between the designations of identity" and "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, *The*

Location of Culture 5). In this regard, hybridity refers to the fact that an individual can have access to two or more ethnic identities. Castro regards hybridity as "a sort of bridging" (*Estrellita* 150). Embracing the concept of hybridity, he writes:

> I often wonder why I'm constantly attracted by hybrid forms and strange juxtapositions. Most of my novels deal with two or three 'voices' and move through different spaces, rather in the manner of a hologram. That is when one sees things in depth, and when one abandons the notion of a fixed, two-dimensional reality. But hybridity — or its shadow, miscegenation, has always been viewed here with a kind of embarrassment or puzzlement. And yet, when one thinks about it, it is in the interest of the puritanical perpetrators of hierarchy and exclusiveness to encourage such bewilderment. So when one speaks about the 'authentic' in culture, one is actually adding to the canonical process of exclusivity. (*Estrellita* 150)

He uses traditional literary genres to express irony and parody as he does in his fictional autobiography *Shanghai Dancing*. As a literary figure, Castro jumps out of the frame of "identity":

> I write precisely because I want to write myself out of my artificially imposed corner … I am not only Portuguese, English, Chinese and French, but I am writing myself out of crippling essentialist categorizations, out of the control exerted over multiplicities. (*Estrellita* 114)

Therefore, Castro's efforts to contest an essentialist understanding of identity are obvious. In a sense, Castro is not interested in establishing a "self", but rather demolishing one that is formulated as "other".

On this point, Katherine Hallemeier comments:

> Castro centres his writing around autobiography, not in an attempt to formulate an ethnic or hybrid self within a society hostile to that self, but rather because he finds in autobiography an opportunity to challenge society's tendency to define a distinct, "other" self. (126)

Here, I am more interested in the way *Shanghai Dancing* represents memory and identity. In this chapter, I explain how identity defined by ethnicity and nationality is contested by Castro's book through a cosmopolitan remembering of a family's past, which is presented as a new way of collectively remembering global history. Collective memory transcends ethnic and national backgrounds in this novel, in which, by writing on the history of a cosmopolitan family, the notion of identity is contested and the issue of cosmopolitan memory is raised. This deserves more attention, in that it exerts influence on the identity of individuals who live in a globalized world and share a cosmopolitan memory of the past.

2. *Shanghai Dancing* as a Postmodernist Fictional Autobiography

Upon the relations between fiction and autobiography, Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir argues:

> As the individual autobiographer writes on universal experiences, such as mother-daughter relationships, experiences of crossing cultures, or the death of a parent, he or she has to deal with the universal structure of these experiences. Universal structures necessarily contain a component deriving from conventions of representation, so they are in some sense always already 'made-up'. (6)

That is to say, autobiographers attempt to retrieve past experiences, but even a pure autobiography involves a certain degree of fictionality. As a fictional autobiography, *Shanghai Dancing* exaggerates its fictional elements yet still addresses memory and the past in an autobiographical mode. By crossing from fiction to autobiography, Castro expresses his understanding of truth and fiction. Sometimes, the boundaries between truth and fiction are very blurred and to distinguish between them is the least we want to do. *Shanghai Dancing* exemplifies Castro's practice of genre crossing as well as the techniques of "irony and parody" (374). Castro emphasizes the importance of destabilizing genres when interviewed by Koval Ramona: "I think genres imprison you within certain things and unless you jump out and parody them, you're not really tackling any advancement in writing" (8). Castro also comments on the differences between a novel and an autobiography:

> A novel usually only risks one thing: its form … An "autobiography", however, does make some claims. Claims about oneself, one's family, lineage, history. This is usually done within the "grammar" of an accepted system, a cultural norm imposed by families, societies, nations. (*Estrellita* 205–206)

At the same time, Maryline Brun also offers us some theoretical approaches to thinking about genre-crossing in *Shanghai Dancing*. She introduces Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" and Bhabha's formulation of "hybridity", both of which, according to Brun's arguments, "interrogate canonical authority and established literary genres" ("'Miscegenating' Writing," 346). Based on Brun's opinion, S*hanghai Dancing* is a typical postmodern text challenging clichéd literary forms and setting free the concept of genre by hybridizing the genres of autobiography and fiction. Her idea is evoked by Brian Castro himself as well. In an interview with Brun, Castro comments on the generic features of *Shanghai Dancing*:

> Because there were vastly exaggerated chapters and episodes and they moved through time—from the sixteenth century right through to the present—in one sense *Shanghai Dancing* was one big epic. I wanted to test the longue durée. I wanted to use the full range of the piano, from the lowest key to the highest key. The book-you have probably noticed-starts with the letter A, and the last chapter starts with the letter Z, so it actually works through the whole notion of the dictionary as well. (" 'Grammar of Creation'," 25)

The parody of genres in *Shanghai Dancing* is explicitly represented by the problematic use of photographs and documents in this book. In this book, there are several photographs serving as illustrations of the text. While some of them are possibly related to the text, others such as photos about a parade on the streets in Shanghai do not have direct connections. As David Brookshaw puts it, these photos play "ambiguous" roles (79). The way of combining photos with texts suggests "a crossover between the purely visual and the purely textual, or an

abolition of the border between ways in which we sense or perceive our environment" (Brookshaw 79). Photographs from ambiguous sources and with blurry implications to serve as documentary evidence frequently appear in this novel. These photographs, together with personal wills and diaries, form a visual and semi-linguistic space where readers are confused, teased and constantly challenged.

There are several family photographs aligned with texts in this novel, some of which are related to Antonio's half-sisters (Castro, *SD* 90) and others mainly project to Antonio's mother Jasmine (Castro, *SD* 367). Among the photographs in *Shanghai Dancing*, a photograph of an attractive "Asian" model looks intriguing (247). It is positioned next to a line about Antonio's mother, Jasmine, which invites the reader to connect the photograph with her: "To think that she once did advertisements for Sunlight soap." (247) Castro plays games with readers about the identity of the woman in the picture, and in this way, these connections do offer a non-linguistic space which readers find self-conflicting and self-deconstructing. These dubious photographs of Asian women are found on Chinese websites as illustrations of advertisements in the 1930s for batteries and soaps. Another photograph of Jasmine is presented when talking about Jasmine's disappearance; a photo of a chair is next to the text indicating the non-existence of Jasmine. As Bernadette Brennan reminds us, in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes, mourning the death of his mother, goes searching back to find her. He "discovers only one photograph of her; she is five and stands in a Winter Garden" (Brennan 168). The intertextuality offered by this photograph poses identity in danger and not only the identity of the girl in the photo, but also for Jasmine. Thus, these photographs transcend the boundaries of visual illustrations and interact with linguistic representations,

indicating Castro's reflections on family, history and identity. By creating such a hybrid space in a fictional autobiography, Castro practices hybridity as a transgressive agency through which he intends to make his claims about authenticity and stabilized identity. Authentic Australian culture or Chinese culture do not exist, and identities generated by national boundaries or cultural affiliations are not stable either.

Another picture is aligned with texts describing the narrator's half-sister from the Chinese heritage of the family (Castro, *SD* 90). However, on this page, there are two women mentioned when telling the story of the narrator's grandfather – Stella and Vienna, the half-sisters of Antonio. The photograph, according my research, is of a Chinese model in the 1910s in Shanghai, clearly no direct relation to the characters narrated in the text. These photographs are acting to challenge the narrator's claim to the authenticity of his family history, thus putting the genre of autobiography at risk. Autobiography as a genre indicates the intention of recording memory, but has to deal with forgetting and disinheritance first, in order to narrate the "remembering". [7]

Besides this, parody is also found in the characterisation of the fictional family members. The disabled child called Marbles, only suspected to be a member of the family, is generally regarded as a parody of the author. Marbles' inability "to live at the level of others, to observe protocols of 'decency' and his exclusion resemble the author's" (Campbell 22). The

[7] Castro explains this term in a chapter titled "Dangerous Dancing: Autobiography and Disinheritance" included in *Looking for Estrellita*: "Disinheritance may be the cause or the consequence of autobiography, whose riches depend on nothing. It may be that to write oneself you have to court no public. Along with yourself, you say, families, nations, sugary-sweet celebrations and ideologies, are all cast into the fire. Your ashen hair. Somewhere you had read Celan and had never shaken him loose. You see the point at which you divided. A cancerous cell. Dislocating those who would make you a token, legacy, braid of their wonderful tolerance or beautiful theories" (Castro, 214).

identity of Marbles is unclear and mysterious, symbolizing a belonging that does not fit in traditional identity formations. By parodying Marbles, Castro shows his interest in ripping off the labels of individuals from family connections.

In this way, *Shanghai Dancing* plays with novelistic elements and historical reporting and fudges the line between subjectivity and objectivity, indicating an omnipotent narrative view of both memory and history, blurring the lines between what we remember and what we are supposed to remember.

3. *Shanghai Dancing* as a Memory Text

Shanghai Dancing is not only a fictional autobiography in the way acknowledged by scholarly readers. Generically, fictional autobiography belongs to a sub-genre of autobiography, embodying some of the main features of autobiography, but can present memory even in a fictional frame. In this sense, *Shanghai Dancing* is also a memory text, a text soliciting both memory and forgetting. In this novel, it is not Castro's intention to include real and authentic family letters, wills, and photos to record exactly what happened in his family past. Instead, he intends to give readers a sense of how a fiction extends the realms of family history and memory.

We may use "transgressive" to describe such kinds of writing practice, questioning traditional literary genres and using fiction to invade the borders of autobiography. However, as Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir says, "autobiography is inherently the genre of memory" (11), so it is also reasonable to suggest that, in a fictional autobiography, memory still plays a significant role in re-writing the past. She believes that, "memory and fiction interact in

autobiography: firstly in memory's relationship to writing, secondly in the role of forgetting in life-writing, and thirdly in the connection between private memories and public events" (Gudmundsdóttir 11). In *Shanghai Dancing*, the narrator Antonio tells about the search for his family history mostly in Portugal, Brazil, Britain, Hong Kong, Macau, and Shanghai. However, Antonio never perceives a clear understanding of his family's past. In the novel, Antonio Castro narrates family scandals and secrets in which he knows more about his father's affairs with lovers in Shanghai and his mother's suppressed inner world. He follows the clues to find out that he has a disabled brother named Marbles. While this novel reads like an autobiography, the family history narrated by Antonio is not reliable and Castro deliberately reminds readers that autobiographical accounts can be deceptive. Antonio comments on his father Arnaldo: "I think he was a liar. Most of his side of the family were liars. But then you could never say *that* categorically because every now and then you could come up against the truth." (32) Since many of the stories Antonio knows are passed down by Arnaldo, the claim that Arnaldo is a liar put the genre of autobiography in serious question. In this way, Castro makes the fictional characters more fictional, what he calls "stories locked inside stories locked inside" (33). By remembrances of an unreliable past, Antonio questions not only the essence of history, but the identity as well.

The existence of a stable identity defined by ethnicity and nation is contested by challenging the traditional way of writing family history. On one hand, *Shanghai Dancing* demonstrates how the dialectic of memory and forgetting influences the question of identity; on the other hand, this novel adds more to the understanding of collective memory by extending it to a cosmopolitan memory of global history through the search for family pasts.

The repetitive concept of "Shanghai Dancing" exemplifies the book's interests in representing memory and the past in new ways. The novel's Shanghai is not the contemporary city; on the contrary, it is the city of the 1930s, or even earlier than that, when Analdo, father of Antonio, ran his shipping business and wandered between various beautiful Chinese women. The family tradition of dancing is a way to forget the unforgettable, but the power of memory is always there and loss of memory results in loss of identity. In the novel, Arnaldo thinks dancing means flexible choices: "It is the point at which you could enter or leave" (79), symbolizing Arnaldo's life attitudes: he never bothers to remember or forget. He lives in the present, while Jasmine, Antonio's mother, views dancing as a way of remembering her past, because "a repression of the body is a repression of memory" (242). The novel shows the dilemma that though memory is so significant, these characters have to forget to escape from an unsatisfacotry reality.

This lost "Shanghai" is frequently represented in many international fictions and autobiographies, triggering the door to nostalgia, as well as amnesia. For this novel, Shanghai represents the golden age of Arnaldo, father of the protagonist Antonio. It is also somewhere before identity diminishes and when memory is not about separation or departure. Shanghai as a place of memory and forgetting becomes what Nora called a "Site of Memory". In the novel, Shanghai is the place where Antonio revisits and rediscovers the past. It is also the "Site of Memory" where most of his father's life was lived and family history is located. For example, Castro explores the life of his grandmother Dora – a missionary – and his grandfather Virgil, a general in the army. Shanghai, applying Nora's theory, is not a place containing natural memory, because there is only "lieux de memoire, sites of memory" (Nora,

"Between Memory and History," 7). A "lieux de memoire" can refer to anything connecting the past with the present, such as a place, a piece of art or symbols. In this book, photographs of 1930s Shanghai, maps, calendars and even posters are frequently shown to emphasize Shanghai as a 'Site of Memory'. Via Nora's ideas, Shanghai becomes a cultural phenomenon rather than a city. Castro's special treatment of Shanghai in the novel suggests his interest in knowing Shanghai as a cultural reservoir of memory rather than a tourist place. In Shanghai once lived the Castro family with other cosmopolitans, who were rootless but spiritually happy. Brian Castro writes, "It is also possible to be Shanghaied by nostalgia" (*SD* 23). This pun offers his nostalgia about the cosmopolitan cultures of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macau, which makes a sharp contrast with Australia, especially Sydney. Sydney, for the protagonist Antonio, is a place where his "mind was never right" (*SD* 4). In this sense, Shanghai as a "Site of Memory" suggests a place culturally harmonious and cosmopolitan.

Apart from treating Shanghai as a site of memory to contrast with contemporary life in Australia, the title phrase "Shanghai Dancing" offers more evidence to show the dialectic between past and present. The title has many implications in this text. Brian Castro explains the meaning of this phrase several times, without confirming one of them:

> Shanghai-Dancing. Nothing there yet. No bluish epiphany; no flaring gas jet above my head. (*SD* 3)

> Shanghai-Dancing. Something in my bones. (*SD* 5)

> *Shanghai-Dancing*. To cast a line from an old spool: it is the attainment of disorientation and instability. (*SD* 6)

> *Shanghai-Dancing*. To come through something. A rite of passage. (*SD* 21)

Literally, "Shanghai Dancing" is a direct summary of the life of Arnaldo in Shanghai when his business was prosperous and he indulged in "playing around" and going out dancing with different women. However, it is indicated by Antonio, the dancing in Shanghai brings him peace and comfort compared to life in Australia. Though he does not know the meaning of Shanghai Dancing, he felt he "could breathe, could swim the relentless stream of possibility" (*SD* 10). Dancing to Antonio is a sensual feeling of relaxation, in which he finds possibility to live. In other words, the phrase leads the reader to travel back to the past when the Castro family was in their Golden Age. "Shanghai Dancing" repetitively reminds readers of a liminal space between past and present, a place where life is complicated and cosmopolitan. The complexity of re-discovering the past suggests the impossibilities of going back to the unfragmented identity. Since the day Antonio was born on a ferry between Macau and Hong Kong, he began the journey of diaspora from which he could never return to a fixed belonging, suggesting Nora's notion of "unrecoverable identity" ("Between Memory and History" 17-18). Antonio seeks belonging and identity through family history, and the journey to the past shows that he becomes more lost because what he could find is unsolved secrets, hidden scandals and unreliable lies.

The role of forgetting also acts as a way of contesting the notion of self in this novel. Jasmine, the mother of Antonio, suffers from the struggle between remembering and forgetting, and

Antonio, the writer who is so ambitious and insistent on recovering details of his family history, does not find any accurate answers to his puzzling, realising only that his family past is a riddle following another. He sees his dead relatives in the end of the book, symbolising his final rest with the other members who have already passed away. For Jasmine, memory loss means identity loss. Jasmine's identity is only vaguely described in this novel; none of the three possible photographs of her are actually said to be Jasmine. In *Shanghai Dancing*, a photograph of a chair that Jasmine used to use before her suicide is presented. The texts next to the picture tell readers that Jasmine's death is a mysterious incident: "they thought she had been picked up by her daughter, indeed some saw through their woven wicker helmets a silent Jaguar stalking in the gardens, but no one could say for sure. Others suggested it was a tiger" . (*SD* 367) Antonio describes the life of Jasmine: "life exists for Jasmine as though it were behind glass; as though she were under glass like my grandmother in her coffin" (*SD* 242). Jasmine does not like to touch or kiss anyone. Antonio has never seen her dance, but he tells us that when she dances, "she is missing": "She wants to forget something and she repeats whatever it is over and over again to herself, her embarrassment forcing her to code each event, memory, smell, face, in a series of tortured phrases" (*SD* 242). Jasmine is an oxymoron. She wants to forget and remember at the same time. Once she chooses to forget about the past, she suffers from forgetting.

Unlike Jasmine, Arnaldo believes: "The only use for the past is to get a future out of it." (*SD* 66). Living between the conflicted attitudes of his parents towards the past, Antonio "dances around as a way of moving away from or masking something he is driven to remember but longs to forget" (Brennan 163). His memory is presented as "muscular" and miserable:

> There is no interpretation of a life; there is only muscular memory. There is no memory more muscular than that of a move of house, a move of circumstance and disposition. A move from one country to another. There were early rumors of sending me away…it was traumatic for me. I jumped from the school roof (*SD* 161).

The father, the mother and the son have quite different perceptions of memory and the remembering of the past. Their ways of remembering and forgetting indicate what Brennan summarizes:

> In refusing to distinguish between the past, present, and future and in focusing his narrative perspective on multiple individual moments within a global context, [Castro] offers a conception of time and history similar to that postulated by Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, and for Castro, the present is not the culmination of a linear, homogenous past. The past is not some distant, contained or stable entity. The past becomes present through the act of recognition. (154)

While reading this book, the reader feels episodes from the past are made dynamically present through the acts of narration and reading. Thus, the role of memory cannot be neglected when looking at how Castro contests the notion of identity. The following parts will further elaborate on how Castro plays with the notion of "cosmopolitan memory" to express his notion of identity.

4. Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitan Memory

Maurice Halbwachs has argued that "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (*On Collective Memory* 38). Thus, collective memory regards memory structures as restricted by social norms, nations and ethnicity. The family memories of Castro's central characters Antonio and Arnaldo interweave and merge into global historical events, dating back as early as the year 1639 when "the Portuguese were evicted from Japan" (*SD* 103), as depicted in the novel. Castro is not intending to represent his family memories, but rather how these memories cross the boundaries of nation and ethnicity, and how the transnational remembrances contribute to the formation of cosmopolitan memory.

What is "Cosmopolitan memory"? What is its relation with collective memory? How does "cosmopolitan memory" influence understandings of identity in the novel? As Levy and Sznaider argue, there is a recent trend that global concerns become part of the local experiences of an increasing number of people. Based on this, Levy and Sznaider further proposes "cosmopolitan memory" as a different kind of memory, "a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries" (88).

Upon the relationships between cosmopolitan memory and collective memory, it is argued by Levy and Sznaider that the conventional concept of collective memory is embedded within the "Container of the Nation-State" while this container is in the process of being slowly cracked (88). They argue as follows:

> Our central objective is to trace the decoupling of collective memory and national history. National and ethnic memories are transformed in the age of globalization rather than erased. They continue to exist, of course, but globalization processes also imply that different national memories are subjected to a common patterning ... The new, global narrative has to be reconciled with the old, national narratives; and the result is always distinctive. (89)

The definition of cosmopolitan memory, of course, should be related to a notion of cosmopolitanism. Remaining a problematic term that is still undergoing questionable re-definition, cosmopolitanism does have consensus on its original meaning and philosophical references. Cosmopolitan is noted to derive from the Greek words for "world" (cosmos) and "city" (polis), and refer to "a man without fixed abode, or better, a man who is nowhere a stranger" (Cheah 487). Pheng Cheah comments that the term's philosophical usage, to refer to a "citizen of the universe", however, emphasizes that this intellectual ethos or spirit is not one of rootlessness (487). Cheah challenges the popular view of "cosmopolitanism as an elite form of rootlessness and a state of detachment and nomadic non-belonging" by claiming that "the cosmopolitan therefore embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself, namely its power of transcending the particular and contingent" (487). In this sense, cosmopolitanism does not equal rootlessness or detachment from any culture.

The notion of cosmopolitan memory proposed by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, is a "new form of memory" (88). It is a sociological term coined to explain the phenomena in which collective memories transcend national and ethnic boundaries, extending the notion of

collective memory structures that are "being bound by tight social and political groups like the 'nation' or 'ethos'" (Levy and Sznaider 88). In this thesis, I refer to cosmopolitan memory as a form of memory emerging in transnational literature, focusing on the perceptions of cross-boundary collective memory, providing "a new epistemological vantage point, one that questions the 'methodological nationalism' that still prevails in much of the social sciences" (Levy and Sznaider 88). In this sense, cosmopolitan memory does not necessarily oppose collective memory; on the contrary, it is an extended form of the latter. In *Shanghai Dancing*, Castro plays with the idea of cosmopolitan memory and its relations to identity politics by narrating a "fragmented" family history. The play with memory and identity shows Castro's resistance towards a frame of collective memory within national boundaries, and also demonstrates a refusal of a fixed identity.

5. Establishing "Cosmopolitan Memory": Identity at Stake

In *Shanghai Dancing*, Castro depicts family history as a representation of cosmopolitanism, and by telling family stories, makes collective memory transgress national and familial borders, extending it to cosmopolitan memory. In this novel, family memory is fragmented by interruptions from national historical events and history is narrated as unsettled and non-linear in relation to a hybridized family. By probing into the memories of father, mother and son, Castro depicts at least three different way of viewing the past, which all contribute to an unstable identity or self.

Readers usually regard Antonio as a fictional version of the author Brian Castro. Both his background and his life experiences match with the resume of Brian Castro. However,

Antonio is just a clue to the past in the book, where the biggest myths await the readers, and his identity is also fictionalised and even mythologized as "Theseus" who is lost in the maze. Brun comments on the role of memory in *Shanghai Dancing*:

> The question of memory is essential to the novel not simply because the work represents a record of, and reflection on, past memories, but also because its narratives follow the detours of Antonio's reminiscences. ("'Miscegenating' Writing," 347)

The mixing of the life experiences of Antonio with the epic figure Theseus, in a way, is an example of genre-crossing and the metaphor of a hero lost in a maze represents the unreliable memory of the past. Theseus is a great Athenian hero in Greek mythology. Theseus grows up without his father and when he becomes an adult, he begins to search for his father. Antonio also goes back to search for his father's life back in Shanghai, sharing the similar experience with Theseus. Theseus is set for a journey by his father to kill the Minotaur, and he finally succeeds.

Theseus kills the Minotaur with his bare hands and goes back to Athens. In *Shanghai Dancing*, everyone is lost in a maze if attempting to be involved in searching for a self or a sense of belonging. The search for family history is represented as walking in a maze. Castro teases readers with his unique way of talking about history. History is mixed with memory, imagination, and myth, leaving an impression that the past is difficult to define and the present is in a mixed world as well. People live in this chaotic world and feel trapped in complexity, uncertainty, and postmodernity.

Shanghai Dancing, though telling of a search for identity through a family past, does not focus on representing the state of being rootless. Rather, it contests a notion of identity defined by ethnicity and nationality to show a "cosmopolitan" concern. The protagonist Antonio does not consider himself either Chinese or Australian. Neither does he consider himself a result of hybridity. He is the accumulation of his ancestors, parents, and siblings. He is the signifier of cosmopolitan memory. His view of each fragmentary part of the family histories is objective, and without bias. His interest in China is not to confirm his Chineseness nor deny his Australianess; instead, his stepping into the maze of a cosmopolitan past indicates his state of being a person who regards everywhere as home. The notion of cosmopolitan memory can be used to discuss how collective memory of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the 26 Martyrs of Japan, the hand-over of Hong Kong, the 1912 Revolution, and Jewish history in Europe around 1647, becomes cosmopolitan memory of Portuguese, Chinese, British and Australians through Castro's account of a cosmopolitan family. The family past opens the door to collective memory of significant historical incidents such as the Japanese Invasion of China and the colonialisation of Macau, which are remembered by people who come from different backgrounds and have a cosmopolitan way of living. The representation of collective memory of the local and the cosmopolitan memory of global history triggers more thinking on the relations between memory and identity, and memory's role in observing how global concerns become local or even familial experience.

There are quite a few examples from the text to prove the above argument. Antonio's grandfather and grandmother are presented as characters with cosmopolitan memories. Virgil Wing studies Medical Science in Britain and marries Dora who is a British missionary.

Reading Dora's narration of China in the 1910s, it is clear that it is her willingness to participate in the collective memory of the Chinese people, while yet being treated still as a "foreigner" that drives Dora to mental instability. While Virgil thinks food binding is "noble fetish", Dora is helping Chinese women get rid of this torture (134). Dora's experience in China is not presented as a happy experience because she never talks about it and when she speaks in English, it seems that she has left those memories behind. Dora's feelings towards China are different from Virgil's but the experience in the war and activist campaigns demonstrates her "world-shuttling diplomacy" complimented by her husband Virgil (135).

The representation of 1910s Chinese history is a vivid example of cosmopolitan memory in the novel. Having lived in China for many years, Arnaldo and his family join the war fighting against the Japanese. Arnaldo is caught up in the war, experiencing hunger, disease and threats to life. He is interrogated by the Japanese forces but because he speaks a bit of Japanese language, they decide to release him (295 - 296). To Arnaldo, he is not afraid of disasters because he is "a man" (280). The way of telling his father's war experience is a cosmopolitan one for everyone who fights in the war, rather than highlighting that it is a war about China fighting Japan.

Another good case in point is the narration of the events surrounding "the 26 Martyrs of Japan". The history of the persecution of Japanese Christians in sixteenth century Japan is not directly linked to the family history of Castro. However, the novel deliberately narrates these events in detailed melancholic language, perhaps indicating an intention to portray as much

global history as possible within the framework of family remembering. Antonio finds out the following family past through searching:

> Already Israel de Castro's name had spread from Goa to Malacca to Macau and the Philippines. A black who was a hero; who saved the ship. When he fully recovered, he signed on another ship and worked the trading routes between India and China. Each voyage lasted three years. He heard more about the famous priest Dom Francesco and about the martyrdom of his followers. He heard how on the fifth of February 1597, twenty-six of them were crucified in a wheat field on Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki, Japan. A party of Spanish Priests and their Japanese converts. (*SD* 100).

Believed as the ancestor of Castro family, Israel de Castro is depicted as a hero in the text. In the chapter titled "Taboo Tags", this incident is remembered as the cause of Israel's humanistic act to retrieve the bones of the murdered priests and Christians in an anti-Christian activity in Nagasaki, Japan. According to the text:

> It was the only way their deaths will have meaning. Chiyoko had said to the bone-man she was harbouring, and together they had spent nights digging down into the loamy soil for thin yellowed bones which they wrapped in cloth and placed aboard his fishing boat. He said he was not of this faith, but was moved by the sacrifice and understood, he said, its drama and seduction. (*SD* 111).

The depictions of memorials of fights for freedom, revolution, and religious belief demonstrate the cosmopolitan concern of human beings' life turmoil going through this entire

book. Family characters, rather than being understood as real members of Castro's family, become symbols of collective memories unbound. Brookshaw comments on how the characters in *Shanghai Dancing* link personal experience to a broader spatial perception: "Cindy Ling represents what Macau is to become again, a part of China, and what Antonio might also become, a member of the newly wealthy, but with all the constraints upon him implied by its hierarchies based on duty and protection." (81) This concern also blurs the borders between collective memories of significant historical events in Japan, China, the Jewish diaspora and Australia from different perspectives and voices, which indicates that human history cannot be separated from family history, and collective memories, instead of diminishing, are transformed under diaspora and globalisation, becoming a cosmopolitan experience.

The accumulation of different versions of family stories about Grandmother Dora's experience in China, the mysterious relationship between the bones of the murdered Japanese Christians and the Castro family, and the participation of Arnaldo in the Sino-Japanese War all contribute to the formation of the cosmopolitan memory of Antonio. "Shanghai Dancing", as a pun, not only suggests Shanghai as the centre of cosmopolitan memory but also suggests "Shanghai" as "kidnapped" or "slingshot" by the painful dancing of fighting for humanity as a whole. The unstable or inaccurate narration of the family's past helps the deconstruction of a sense of belonging restricted by space and nation. Family memory, as a way of showing fluidity and instability, connects personal experience with global history.

In *Shanghai Dancing*, global history about fighting for justice and freedom is presented as family history, so that the "discovered" narrated incidents are represented as a major concern of this book rather than Antonio's search itself. How does this cosmopolitan memory influence the novel's understanding of the notion of identity? Since the family past is remembered as a shared past for all human beings, the identity of characters is at stake. Antonio's Jewish ancestors' escape from punishment of the Portuguese court, Arnaldo's heroic behaviour in the Sino-Japanese War, and Dora's courage during the 1910s Revolution in China all demonstrate that people can choose not to be confined by an "imagined community". The collective memory of Chinese people, British missionaries, or Japanese Christians will be passed down through generations and circulated in another country, another form. It is also possible that, through inter-racial marriage or mass media, these global histories will take the form of cosmopolitan memory. Thus, generational memory transcends national and ethnical boundaries and influences the way belonging and identity work. The traditional approach of establishing identity through nationalism is contested and the conventional understanding of an absolute sense of belonging is also challenged. The fact that Antonio and his family do not regard any particular place as "home" demonstrates the power of cosmopolitan memory. Neither China nor Australia is portrayed as a place where Antonio can settle down and have a sense of belonging. His search for a solid belonging eventually fails, because one family riddle leads to another, which connects the critical historical moments of global history using every branch of the family tree. Antonio does not have a strong sense of "rootlessness", but a state of "cosmopolitanism" resulting from the

accumulation of cosmopolitan memory. His perception of home is neither China nor Australia, but a state of being comfortable.

Writing a shared past within the framework of fictional autobiography allows Brian Castro to fully express his literary concerns: cosmopolitan memory goes beyond the imagined community, challenging presumed identity politics. Identity politics are presented as a combination of what the Castro family have, in line with Castro's own view of identity politics expressed in his essay "Dangerous Dancing" using the metaphor of Chicken Creole:

> It is sometimes called Chicken Creole, a mélange of chicken, shallots, onions, garlic, potatoes, chilli, coconut, tomato purée, peanut butter and paprika. You can taste the flavours of Umbundu, Portuguese, Kikongo, Bantu and Araby and that Macanese mixture, a centuries-old compression of European and Chinese. (n.p.)

In the essay, Castro explains what "African Chicken" is:

> African Chicken is a Creolising of forgetting and memory. In the end, it is a working around a subject in order to get beyond it, and having turned and turned about, to find yourself disowned by it is also to discover its own autonomy. Autobiography is disinheritance. ("Dangerous Dancing," n.p.)

Castro links the metaphor of African Chicken to his perception of memory and identity politics, and both of these perceptions go beyond postcolonial genealogy and add broader enlightenment. Castro does not want to surrender himself to an "ism". In this way, he

challenges the boundaries of Anderson's "Imagined Community" by presenting history and memory as not "collectively imagined" by the local or nation state, but globally imagined, not bounded by ethnicity. Antonio summarizes his perception of identity similarly as:

> I'm eating *minchi*, a Macanese pot-pourri of mince and onions and garlic and diced cabbage and crispy potatoes fried in olive oil, soy and saffron and curry which together represents for me the unforgettable essence of confusion and security and signifiers of my own *mélange*, mess of life, mixture of worlds, swooning, bad-ass attitudes…I am *minchi* and eating was security. (190)

So, in place of a "true" narration of one's life, Castro offers us a self as recipe, a self whose texture mirrors his writing. That is to say, despite the numerous similarities between Antonio's and Castro's lives, the only self we discover in reading *Shanghai Dancing* is a textual self, rather than a fixed identity resolved through the exploration of the family's past. By confronting his futile search for his family pasts, Antonio finally understands that the best way of living in a complex, unstable and chaotic world is to live "cosmopolitan". Though pasts define the present, his search suggests that memories transcend borders and break free from collectivity, becoming "cosmopolitan memory" eventually.

6. Conclusion

Shanghai Dancing is a unique book. Castro writes life stories in different places (Europe, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macau) and diverse cultural representations bring up other questions: cosmopolitanism and the question of identity. A wide mix of global history is vividly covered

in the book's characters: a missionary from Britain in the grandmother, a Chinese peasant girl from a hybrid origin like Jasmine, a European merchant like Arnaldo. The past is not something we remember or attempt to remember but also may be the unforgettable forgotten. Castro is telling two stories in one book: one is fictional and one is autobiographical. Or one is the past and one is a narrative of the investigation of the past. The past negotiates the identity making of Antonio and finally he understands the other side of memory: memory is unstable and false inside, offering false consolation. Documents as a form of unreliable remembering suggest the non-linear progress of human history and memory.

Identity politics is not only contested by the representation of memory and forgetting, but challenged by the possibility of establishing a cosmopolitan memory, which in the novel is represented by the polyphony of telling global history from different times, in different places. Cosmopolitan memory is a new form of collective memory, which does not oppose but offers a new perspective on viewing collective memory. Collective memory is extended in space and time into a new form - cosmopolitan memory - and is not imagined as collective remembering confined to one particular group. Instead, in the contexts of globalisation and mobility, collective memory is constantly represented by a form of cosmopolitan memory, indicating the inability to validate identity as a stable notion in explaining transnational belonging and choices of being "at home".

Shanghai Dancing manifests the possibilities of identity making through memory, and eventually proves the futility of searching for an "original" identity. Theoretically, the impossibility of recovering the past also suggests the inner problems of autobiography as a

genre. This book challenges readers' traditional understanding of identity by contextualizing it in time and space so that identity and origin are problematic. In the novel, characters do not choose to live within the frameworks of ethnicity and nationality; instead, their choices of belonging are much broader and free.

Chapter Four: Language, Cultural Memory, and Translated Identity in Ouyang Yu's *The English Class*

In the context of a transnationally mobilised world of migration, diaspora and globalisation, forms of language perception and the conditions of memory have been dramatically transformed. Both languages and memories travel across borders with the process of migration. Theorists, sociologists, linguists and anthropologists have studied the mobility of language and memory from different perspectives and have reached the consensus that in the process of migration, or the imagination of migration, both language and memory can be asserted to be in a state of migration. From the migration of population, attention is turned to the mobility and migration of language and memory, together with their influence on a sense of self, or identities (Creet 2011; Levy and Sznaider 2002). The relation of bilingualism and identity, transnational memories and belonging, as well as that of language, narrative and memory are again at the centre of discussion related to transnational literary studies. What is the new relationship between language and memory in a world of mobility? How does it relate to identity? These questions are not only researched in sociological studies but also represented in diasporic literatures.

This chapter will elaborate on Ouyang Yu's *The English Class* (2010), a novel dedicated to language. In *The English Class*, the main character Jing struggles between his mother tongue and father tongue, which disturbs his sense of belonging. The imbalanced relations between Chinese and English languages confuse Jing in his understanding of "who he is", "why he is

here" and "how he lives here with his cultural roots there". In what language is the past remembered? Is language a part of the past? Who should speak English? Is "Cultural translation" a way of "translating" identities? Does language "otherise" migrants? These will be discussed in the following.

Complex as it is, the relationship between language and memory is debated in various areas including linguistics, cognitive research, and sociological as well as cultural studies. Recently, the relation between language and memory has been examined within migration studies and transnational literature. Historically, at different moments Plato and Wittgenstein have identified the close interaction between language and memory; linguistic study also demonstrates their interaction by researching the linguistic stimulus. For example, as Echterhoff suggests drawing from Hunt and Agnoli, "when a language lacks linguistic categories to describe a stimulus, speakers of that language exhibit poorer memory for that stimulus than do speakers of language that offer better linguistic means to capture the stimuli" (263).

Therefore, language, to some extent, influences how individuals perceive memory. This viewpoint echoes the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypotheses, named after the anthropologist Edward Wadie Sapir, and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. Echterhoff summarises: "In its strong version, the hypothesis states that our experience of the world is intrinsically linguistic and that cognition is inherently determined by the thinker's language." (263) Based on the above, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the cognition of remembering and forgetting is essentially linguistic and the linguistic aspect of life will not be comprehended without the

participation of memory. As the globe enters a new era of transnationality, language and memory are also constantly imagined in literary works. Bilingual migrants are often treated as research objects in the search for relations between language, memory and culture. Scientifically, there is already evidence showing that bilinguals produce different memories in different languages.[8] Language, seen as a tool to influence memory, is treated as a significant angle or perspective through which to look at the cultural dimension of memory. The most discussed issue is the relations between bilingualism and the cultural identity of migrants who live between memories woven by two languages.

Despite the benefits of bilingualism in daily communication and career development, bilingual and linguistically diverse people are considered to be faced with "a menace and demand that bilinguals use only the official language of the country" in which they live (Segura 119). This demand, according to Catalina Ribas Segura, is "especially targeted at immigrants who use different languages, as they are considered outsiders and, consequently, potential enemies" (119). Thus, migrants, as cross-boundary persons, "have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often also with the resentment of a hostile population" (Sarup and Raja 1). Researchers also address the imbalanced relations of mother tongue and father tongue. Françoise Král, a literary critic specializing in theorizing the cultural identity of migrants, comments that, for those who live in a country where their mother tongue is neither the official language nor the most used, the relation with the second language can be similar to that of a father or a step-mother. Based on Král's understanding, a mother tongue means

[8] "In one study, Marian and Neisser found that Russian-English bilinguals recalled more experiences from the Russian-speaking period (often from the period before their emigration to the United States) when interviewed in Russian (and vice versa when interviewed in English)" (Echterhoff 269).

the language of affect while a father tongue represents the language of domination (131-42). To the protagonist Jing, Chinese is the language he uses to express his emotions while English is the one he desires to master.

Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka's co-edited book, titled *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures*, points out the monolingualism of Australia. While the Australian population is rich in languages, these two scholars notice that actually there is "little awareness" of three issues: what it means to live between cultures; how difficult intercultural communication really is; and how much there is for everyone to learn about other cultural perspectives before effective intercultural communications can be established (xiv). Thus, it is obvious that learning a new language for individuals or accepting a new language for a society is very much associated with the question of whether people from different backgrounds can have effective communications about their different pasts and cultures.

As is asserted by Echterhoff, membership in different language communities can play an important role in how we remember our personal pasts. Echterhoff also observes that "because differences in the linguistic environment are likely to entail cultural differences, a wider implication is that between-language effects might also affect cultural memory" (169). In recent trends in literature, the experiences of bilingual migrants are often represented to expose the relations between language, memory and identity. It is often suggested that bilingual migrants create a world of cultural hybridisation, fabricated by the integration of memories generated by both mother tongue and adopted language. As the author of the

influential piece *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language*, Polish Canadian writer Eva Hoffman emphasizes the performativity of this tension, as well as modification and collaboration in the merging of old and new languages:

> When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. Each language makes the other relative. Like everybody, I am the sum of my languages - the languages of my family and childhoods, and education and friendship, and love, and the larger, changing world - though perhaps I tend to be more aware than most of the fractures between them, and of the building blocks. (273)

Hoffman's reckoning on the role of mother tongue and adopted language reflects the way she views her identity as a migrant. She is the sum of both her past and present, indicating that the most secure way of being a migrant is to welcome both cultures and languages. Hoffman comments on the relation of language and existence: "I'm not filled with language anymore, and have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don't really exist" (108).

In *The English Class*, speaking English for Chinese migrant characters, represents "a new beginning", as Segura argues, "a new chapter" to welcome the opportunities Australia offers and to leave behind "the bad memories" (Segura 123).When entering a new world, migrants always struggle between mother tongue and father tongue and memory is transformed through this struggling. In this chapter, the notion of "translation" is addressed to examine the representations of language, memory and transnational identities in *The English Class*.

1. Ouyang Yu: "Angry" Bilingual Writer in Australia

As a teacher, translator and writer, Ouyang Yu, with a doctoral degree in literature, has a long list of works published in English and Chinese, including poetry, novels, essays, edited bilingual journals and translations. His prolific publications, according to Huang, have not yet brought the fame he deserves, which becomes part of the reason why he pays much attention to the issue of racism, bilingual writing and the issue of transnational identity.

Ouyang has mixed opinions about being bilingual. He comments on the roles of English and Chinese languages when interviewed by Liang Yujing, a Chinese literary scholar and also a creative writer:

> I am not a non-mother tongue writer. I am a writer and creator of two languages – English and Chinese. If we use father and mother as metaphors, then Chinese is my mother tongue while English is my father tongue. Or you can say similar claim, vice versa. Chinese and English, as two languages, are interrelated and interactive, and if you could master either of them, it will benefit the other. ("Anti-academy" 33).[9]

Though bilinguality is seen to be an advantage for creativity to Ouyang, as a migrant who came to Australia decades ago, he still has difficulty in identifying his status as an Australian writer and in solidifying his identity as an Australian citizen. The key issue, according to

[9] This is Beibei Chen's translation of the original.

Ouyang, is not the language itself; rather, it concerns how to manage two minds, two contexts and two cultures. He openly addresses the choices faced by bilingual writers: [10]

> As a bilingual writer, I have to make my own linguistic and cultural strategies in order to sell my books in Australia. I find out one issue that more and more Chinese bilingual writers in Australia tend to write novels in English and poems in Chinese... Novels are easy to be manipulated for the sake of gaining popularity… My first English novel was rejected by 28 publishers and my Chinese novels are paid by myself for publishing. This is the dilemma faced by bilingual writers. ("Farewell to Chinese Language," n.p.)

Ouyang's confusions not only include which language he should use for writing but also concern over which language expresses his identity. Being called the "angry Chinese poet", Ouyang expresses anger in many of his works about the racism related to bilingualism in Australia, including in poetry collections such as *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-coloured Eyes* (2002), *Moon over Melbourne* and *Self Translation* (1995) and novels such as *The English Class* (2010) and *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* (2002) .

In one poem titled "Second Drifting", Ouyang writes:

> I used to have two tongues
> one Chinese and the other English

[10] This is a keynote speech Ouyang gave on the 2002 conference titled "开花结果在海外[Blossoming Overseas]" held at University of California, Berkeley.

I used to have two hearts
one east and the other west
but I have nothing left now
only this instinct to wander again

Another called “The wanderer” also expresses his confusion about belonging:

Wherever you go it comes back to you
you are yourself and the loss of you
hovering around the border and dreaming of the freedom on the other shore
you have walked for a long time in the territory of the heart

From Ouyang’s poetry collection *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-coloured Eyes*, these poems express Ouyang’s thoughts on the anxiety of being a bilingual writer and his confusions as a bilingual wanderer in his adopted country. As Nicholas Jose comments on this poem collection:

> Anger at displacement and invisibility is modulating to a recognition of the mystery of where and who he is. Ouyang writes from a compulsion to express himself, as if there is no other way of talking. He catches jagged everyday impressions, surges of desire and melancholy, in the language that is uniquely his. (Jose, Preface to “Two Hearts”)

The poetry collection opens discussions on the role of language in the life of Chinese migrants in literary representation. Ouyang further expresses these concerns in his novel *The English Class* from 2010 in which he highlights the role of languages (both mother tongue and adopted language) in defining migrants' identities, or even, their fates. By narrating the story of a young Chinese man learning English in both China and Australia, Ouyang is making some claims that languages change people's perception of both the present and the past. Speaking English opens a door for migrants but at the same time, it means you have to give up your old identity in order to be accepted by an English world. Speaking English, in *The English Class,* is both gain and loss. The fact that the protagonist Jing can speak English secures him a position in a Chinese university after the Cultural Revolution, but meanwhile, the "Foreigness" haunts him and he fights with his "Chineseness". English leads him to a new country where he has to give up his cultural memory and his language. "Englishness" drives him crazy at the end. Questions such as how migrants cope with a new language, culture, territory and space, and how Ouyang represents the difficulty in keeping a balance between languages and identities are at play. A possible answer is: language signifies identity and, in a transnational environment, balancing the relations between languages means a good balance between migrants' past and present. Thus, more attention should be directed to the role of language in a multicultural country like Australia.

2. *The English Class* as a Book on Language and Memory

The English Class, published in 2010, is the first novel by Ouyang Yu to elaborate on relations of language, bilingualism and identity. The book is autobiographical in some ways,

and the protagonist, as in other of Ouyang's novels, is a Chinese male intellectual who experienced the Cultural Revolution as a university student. Jing as an educated youth, after living in the countryside for several years, becomes a truck driver delivering goods between towns. He is a language lover and always learns English by himself whenever he has time. Finally, he gets into Donghu University to study English and meets classmates from diverse cultural and family backgrounds. He often discusses English grammar with his classmates and continues to learn English diligently. In this English class, he falls in love with Deirdre, the wife of Dr. Wagner, the English foreign teacher. Jing migrates to Australia by marrying Deirdre but he feels isolated by his Australian counterparts and he is not used to Australian society. The whole story is very intriguing in the way of presenting relations of language, memory and identity crisis during migration.

The book provides an interesting way of reflecting on the migration experience through the perspective of learning English. The frequent scenes in this book are set on the campus of East Lake University in China and Ouyang puts his efforts into representing an English class where Chinese students talk about English and how English as a foreign language could possibly lead the protagonist as well as his counterparts to a "bright future". The English class in this book sets for a "hybridization zone" where the main characters experience identity instability caused by linguistically transformed memories. Since the day it was published, *The English Class* has received varied discussions. It is a book with two extreme responses. Some reviewers are positive, like Jackie Tang, recommending it as a book exploring "two cultures and […] the profound ways that language influences a person's identity and worldview" (31). Despite the positive response, Tang is disappointed with the

novel's slow start, along with Michael X. Savvas, who points out that this novel "did lack some of the widely agreed upon rules of engagement in storytelling" (n.p.). Savvas dislikes the first two chapters because they "focus on ordinary lives of ordinary people, with a protagonist who remains unlikeable, yet never enough to become interestingly evil anti-hero" (n.p.).

Based on the above reviews, *The English Class* is, up to now, better received for the stories it tells than its way of storytelling. It has not received as much attention as other successful works by Ouyang, partly because Australian readers may have limited knowledge of the many examples in this book, and partly because it is a book that does not elaborate very strongly on the expected narrative of the Cultural Revolution even though the first two chapters are set in that background.

Structurally, the text is divided into two distinct parts: extended text in italics indicates the author's writing process, while the non-italic text is divided into two sub-parts: before and after the main character Jing arrives in Australia. The book develops a metafictional writing structure and creates a postmodernist style, experimenting both in the form and the content. Ouyang innovatively writes an ordinary story of an ordinary character to tackle these questions. Some readers are actually impressed by the ordinariness of the story, too. It is honest, straightforward and not politically superficial. Ouyang is neither selling the Cultural Revolution narrative, such as the traumatic stories written by Geling Yan or the stories of "Shangshan Xiaxiang" written by Hajin, nor appealing to his counterparts in China with stories of overseas Chinese experiencing difficulty and racial discrimination outside China.

Instead, he dramatizes his experience as a student majoring in English into a unique narrative, telling "world readers" about the reality of living between languages and between the past and present affected by languages.

From Jing's past to his present, Chinese and English as the two languages influencing Jing's identity are represented as more and more imbalanced and conflicted. Jing's struggles between Chinese and English after arriving in Australia trigger his hidden desire to go back to his past and demonstrate his problems at not being able to do so. By depicting the war between the Chinese language and English language happening in Jing's mind, Ouyang actually expresses a migrant's cultural affiliation towards the past. Jing's sway between two languages demonstrates two selves: Chinese and Australian. There is a tension between the two languages and this "untranslatability" literally drives the protagonist crazy.

Despite the fact that this text has a slow beginning and tells an ordinary person's ordinary life, it is worth noticing that it is a book about language and cultural translation; it also tells stories or reflects on memory and identity. Jing, as an ordinary migrant in Australia, was once an ambitious young man who liked studying both languages. He chooses English for pragmatic reasons, but he is not denying his "Chineseness". His struggle between two cultures and two languages is demonstrated by the countless translation cases in his daily life – both campus life and marriage life. He represents those who have difficulty in abandoning old linguistic systems and welcoming their new identities. The dubious attitude towards the power English exerts shows his urge to "translate". His "ethnic English" is performing as the bridge between two cultures. However, the fact that most of people in Australia require him to speak standard

Australian English drives him to return and only feel disillusioned by a past different from his translated cultural memory. The book is intriguing in that it investigates English relates to "Englishness" and how Chinese migrants balance between a graphic past and an alphabetic present.

3. The Loss of Memory and the Failed Translated Man

Speaking English, in a way, equals the loss of cultural memory constructed by another language. Thus, in order to be accepted in the host society, migrants in Australia, under the condition of assimilation and transformation, are forced to forget, or compelled to review the past. In the process of migration, migrants are forced to give up family histories, customary practices, and languages that carry quite different modes of narration and remembrance. Their identities in the new country are expected to be detached from their old ones, and by speaking English, these migrants are expected to be "Australians" instead of Chinese, Indonesians or Vietnamese. English, as a global language, is constantly imagined in relationship with national and transnational identities.

To interpret the concept of identity from the perspective of languages, it should be clarified that neither language nor identity has fixed boundaries and barriers; speaking more than one language means you have more choices on identity formations. Identity, especially transnational identity, is more involved in the dynamic "translation" process linguistically and culturally, indicating that transnational identity is flexible because in the frequent use of both mother tongue and adopted language, the dynamics of translated selves are generated.

Migrants, labelled as “translated men” in Salman Rushdie’s phrase, according to Emily Apter, enter the “translation zone” (129) where cultural differences are contested; languages set barriers; memories force themselves to be silenced; and identities are translated and transformed. In the act of translation, migrants construct a liminal space, or a “translation zone”. Both language and culture go through a phase of transformation in this zone. Cultures are no longer regarded as “holistic, authentic, static entities”, and “the transformation of languages, which far from homogenizing, are becoming more multiple and certainly less discrete, has in turn had the effect of transforming concepts of translation also” (Young 169).

The idea of “translation” in cultural and anthropological studies has evolved from its original meaning in translation studies, and is developed by anthropologists to explain cultural phenomena. According to Young, all translation, to some extent, is “cultural translation” (157), and “cultural translation in anthropology is a discourse of power and appropriation that destroys the particularity of the culture that it translates” (157). Cultural translation, based on what Young cites from Papastergiadis’s formulation, is a process of: “cultural exchange, dialogue or negotiation.” (163) Thus, cultural translation translates, normally, from native to modern cultures. However, Bhabha examines the issue of cultural translation differently. Young points out that “for Bhabha, the migrant’s cultural translation involves a process in which the migrant intervenes in the hegemonic culture that he or she finds him or herself confronted with” (157).

In Bhabha’s version of cultural translation, it is the migrants who have the power to translate rather than the hegemonic culture itself. Cultural translation not only involves making sense

to the local people, but also means intervention in and interaction with local cultures. The sense of belonging is thus created in a new country if cultural translation is successful; otherwise, the identification of migrants with their adopted countries will fail. A successful cultural translation is one in which not only migrants' cultural heritage from the homeland is translated and transplanted in their new territory, but also the migrants' linguistic and cultural modes influence the local and merge into the local culture. Only a healthy hybridisation of both can ensure a successful cultural translation.

In a monolingual country such as Australia, migrants have modified the way English is spoken: not only with "broken English" and "ethnic English", but also with vocabulary that is incorporated into Australian English. This shows the power a language can exert: languages reinforce both communication and resistance (Segura 122). Therefore, a rational way to view human's linguistic competence is not to see conflicts between languages and cultures, but to enhance the communication between languages and to accept the memories brought up by languages from distant others (Levy and Sznaider 91). Languages are dissolving into each other, rather than always competing with each other in power relations.

However, this ideal state is utopian and in reality, because of the power differences between nations, and the hierarchy of languages, there is never a successful translation. Just as Wang Guanglin notes, "Translation ... represents a minor use of language in which the translator tries to communicate the marginal or foreign into a host language and into a translating culture, a process during which the translator enjoys the writerly status" ("The Chinese Poetess," 5). Wang realizes that migrants "live in an intersection of history and memory"

("The Chinese Poetess," 2). Combined with the previous part talking about relations of language and memory, criticism of migrant literature should turn its attention to how languages and the act of translation influence both the past and the present of migrants and how cultural translation transforms migrants' identities. Both Brian Castro and Ouyang Yu are being included in the discourse of cultural translation when representing migrants experience in Australia.

4. Speaking English Represented as the Loss of Memory

Transnational literature has an interest in addressing the past. *The English Class* addresses the past differently from *Silver Sister*, which tries to confirm "Chineseness" outside China, and also from *Shanghai Dancing*, which demonstrates the possibility of establishing a mode of cosmopolitan memory. As a writer born and raised during the Cultural Revolution, Ouyang does not emphasize the suffering under that suppressed social environment. Instead, he narrates Jing's migration story as a language learner trying to strike roots in Australia who refuses to give up his cultural heritage and his mother tongue. Ouyang's irony and satire are directed towards both countries – China and Australia – and Jing's constant cultural translation aims to show the forgetting of cultural memory in another country and the urge to translate in order to preserve it. For example, he likes to use Chinese phrases a lot when talking with his wife and he calls the silver clouds "white fish belly" (*TEC* 361). He insists on explaining the difference between dead fish, dead men and any Chinese phrases related to 'dead' to his wife, if he has time to talk about it (362). His way of preserving memories from the past is through constant translation, even when he has no audience.

In this book, English is represented as a medium for the loss of Jing's cultural memory, when he gains his flight ticket to Australia – a place where he can speak English every day. *The English Class* does not address the politics of remembering and forgetting directly, but, instead, addresses memory by demonstrating the danger of forgetting one's mother tongue and cultural heritage and the instinct of trying to keep the mother language. Remembering and forgetting the cultural heritages carried by languages lead to an unknown future where identity is put in a dubious position, with no future direction and no chance to retreat. The protagonist attempts to translate himself out of the impact of China's Cultural Revolution but just enters another "Cultural Revolution" in Australia where he finds himself trapped in a white English world.

At the very beginning of the novel, the protagonist Jing treats English as a language tool to be used in the future. Discussions about English happen mostly between him and his classmates within the campus and though he is very diligent in learning English vocabulary, he is aware of his Chineseness by declaring that: "Learning English, then become English? That's ridiculous! Learning English made him even more aware of his cultural and literary heritage, thus more determined to claim it back" (*TEC* 160). For Jing, learning English in China means to master a skill, to have a better economic future, or to gain respect. His dissatisfaction towards his job as a driver drives his urge to learn English, from which he finds new ways of expressing feelings and interpreting life: "I am sick of this place, little, dirty, noisy and cold. Life should not be like this" (*TEC* 94). And even an unknown future: "for God's sake, he had a future in English" (*TEC* 111).

There is a clear time division in the novel. Though the text is written in the past tense, it is at the point, when Jing transforms his name into Gene that his past is left behind. In the main text, the "future" is set in Australia, while, comparatively, the past becomes the part in which Jing has learnt English with his classmates. Echoing Hoffman, Jing feels a sense of loss after he masters English and comes to Australia: "Many years later, he was to replace this crowded world with a sparsely populated one and would keenly miss this lost world" (219). This lost world is his homeland where he speaks Chinese and does not bother about whether his expressions are used properly or not. His life is confused by both languages. At one point, his wife tells him that he "speaks English like Chinese" and speaks "Chinese like English" (380). It is indicated in the novel that Jing needs to firmly belong to either language, and due to the inability to do so, he gradually loses his mind.

At first, learning English fuels Jing's ambition and aspirations. It is also, for Jing, a way to leave his bad memories behind – both familial and social. However, speaking English eventually leads him to not only just "leaving" but "entering". His constant translation from Chinese to English and from English to Chinese suggests that he is in the "translation zone" where he is aware of the loss of his cultural memory and he wants to "claim it back" (160). In a letter to his wife, Jing expresses such feelings when visiting Dali, China:

> Dear Dree, years ago I imagined my home lay elsewhere, born to someone else of another language, until I came to you and realised that I was no match. I now go back into the shadow, cast over my ancestral land by your language, my semi-language. (305)

Jing's confession to Deirdre is actually a confession to his past. He regrets replacing his name and his mother tongue. According to Král's terminology and Ouyang's poetry, English, in this case, is Jing's father tongue. Král argues that "the language used by the immigrant is never used in the exact same way as his [or her] mother tongue" (157), not only because the migrant has to learn the language, but also because using specific expressions may highlight the foreignness of the speaker.

Though Jing can speak English well, he is never treated as a local Australian. English leads Jing to an estranged world, a world of alienation. The imposition of Englishness on Jing modifies his bad memories and makes him more determined to claim back what has been lost with the loss of his mother tongue. In order to search for his lost past, Jing goes back to Dali where his father once lived. He begins to link his belonging to Dali through his father's life experience:

> In my hotel room, I took a look at myself in the mirror and saw someone else. It was my character from the past, a past that was more past than ever before, a past anchored in a war that had destroyed so many lives and yet managed to create me. My character, whose name is not yet given and known, had just arrived in Dali by bus. It was in fact my dead father Jing senior whom I found inside me, struggling to get out. (314)

It is also the moment that Jing realises he is "less correct than Australia" (315). Finally, Jing feels he is able to "stand firmly on [his] own soil, vulgar and primitive, but full of energy, better, in a way, than a sanitised, deodorised and sterilised recent past" (315).

In contrast to his sense of belonging to Dali in China, Jing expresses his loneliness and confusion in his "head writing" to his Australian wife:

> I am alone, even when I am with you, side by side here. For so long I have been doubtful about my genesis: was I born of a Chinese father and foreign mother? Why has no mother ever turned up to claim me? Why do I still look as Chinese as ever, even more so than before? What is it that makes it impossible for me to return to my origins and where are they? (304)

His wife also feels that the past haunts him, and his English 'sky' is being changed back into its original state, when Gene was Jing, and the past was the present, when she detects that Jing has a tendency to go out alone at night:

> It seemed that everything had gradually reversed for him, day became night, the sun became the moon, what he had once regarded as ideal become hellish, happiness turned into bitterness, English, perversely, had become Chinese. (362)

These changes result from Gene's relationships with the outside world. He perceives the world as hostile and terrifying. He cannot adapt himself to Australian society and in daily life, his wife always acts as his English teacher, thus becoming the empowered one in their relationship. She corrects Jing's grammar and although enjoying Jing's translation of Chinese culture in daily life, she feels that he is "never happy with anything, more so than ever in Australia" (362) The house they live in is "totally silent" (304). The "future" dreamed of by

Jing is replaced by Gene's dull and tedious, routine life, day-by-day. Meanwhile, the past is reformed and re-imagined, with bad memories modified and transformed into good ones.

Thus, depressed by the reality of his life in Australia, unsurprisingly, like many migrant characters, Jing decides to "return" to his past, and even his father's past. The reason why he decides to return to his homeland is because of his alienation from his wife and his position as an outsider in Australia. Gene's interest in translating ancient Chinese poems shows his retreat to a remoter past where his cultural identity is preserved intact. Gene translates a poem written by a Chinese poet from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and shows to his wife:

> Mountains white, an occasional bird calling
>
> Stones cold, frost about to creep over.
>
> The flowing spring, stained with the moonlight
>
> Turns into a creek of snow. (376)

He explains the reason why he likes to work with these ancient poems: "I can only deal with them; the dead are dear, closer, more alive. Death into life, a condition of dual living" (376).The classical Chinese poems manifest Gene's attempt to escape from his present tedious life and allow him to hide in a remote past.

In the novel's structural design, there is another protagonist in the book who is also trapped between languages and cultures. It is the implied author, whose voice keeps appearing in the italicized text. Therefore, identity is not only contested through the role of language in transforming it, but also through the cultural translation in the liminal space of postmodernity.

Structurally, the book is intentionally divided into two frames: the main text and the italicized text. The main text tells the story of Jing who aspires to use English as a way to gain material benefits and the italicized text narrates the writing process in a voice that can be taken to be the author's:

> How are you going to structure the middle part of this novel around twenty or so people of an English class that takes four years to finish? Perhaps this novel writing is about the moment, the moment lived that will pass, the moment retrieved from memory or simply imagined. (134)

This suggested authorial voice is indicated to be a migrant too, who experiences difficulty in adapting to Australian writing circles and life. He narrates his "in-between" state after writing in English:

> But you felt unsafe again and involuntarily opened your eyes to check that there was not someone stalking you. Finally, you had to get up and walk home, the only safe way you knew how. You wondered why. Was it an inbuilt distrust in you that made you fearful of strangers once outside your own home?
>
> Was it the Chineseness in you that made you so doubtful, so suspecting, and thus so un-Australian? (166)

These above quotations, rather viewed as questions, are answering those questions by themselves. Because of an inability to fit in with the Australian cultures, this suggested

authorial voice has some similarities with Jing – both feeling insecure in Australia and both are alienated by not speaking or writing in authentic English. This figure, similarly to Jing, looks forwards to missing memories (188). Temporality is disrupted with the voice of the suggested authorial voice so that Jing's perception of the present and the past is confusing. The suggested authorial voice is a postmodernist persona fragmented by his linguistic competence and cultural capital. He is a "schizophrenic decentring" self (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 309).

Jing, as a person without a stable identity, indicates that speaking English forces him to lose his memory in his Chinese language. This loss belongs to both migrants and those who suppress migrants' pasts. The loss is always in a process of being claimed back by cultural translation, as represented in *The English Class*. However, it is the untranslatable that determines identity and belonging.

5. The untranslatable and failed "Translated Man"

In this process, all migrants enter Apter's translation zone to become "translated men". Or, in a way, according to Wang Guanglin, migrants are translation itself. Wang points out that the idea of translation "does not move from original to copy and back, from home to other (or new "home") – it is a conception of translation, more or less permanent, without home or original to return to" ("The Chinese Poetess," 3). For Rey Chow, during the process of translation, a "mediator" between cultures is often viewed as a "traitor" to one's native

culture.[11] Jing's translation of words from Chinese to English demonstrates the direction of his identity: he loses his home and he cannot go back through translating English to Chinese.

After his arrival in Australia, Jing becomes Gene, and English becomes his enemy instead of his friend. Jing's story with English starts in the year 1977, when China is at the end of The Cultural Revolution. Jing, as a truck driver, is proud to be "a little Aristocrat". He dreams of changing his social status, his "class", by starting to learn a second language – English. Jing's eagerness to study English originates in his "whiteness", his physical feature of white skin. Jing often indulges himself imagining English decadence. Jing's self-imagination about an English mother shows his willingness to enter the process of "self-colonisation", which he regards as a way of escaping his current "in-between" status.

In *The English Class*, Jing as a truck driver has a role in transporting culture to culture, language to language. He studies most of his English in his truck and he eventually passes the entrance examination and goes to university. He is also a fan of translation. At the time when he feels life is boring in Australia, he chooses to translate ancient Chinese poems to pass the time. (374). Lots of plotted events happen on the campus before Jing comes to Australia, with discussions on the differences between English and Chinese and the strategies of translation. The concept of cultural translation is reinforced by Jing's tireless repetitive translation of phrases, sentences, stories and poems with his classmates (113, 119). Besides clarifying the huge linguistic difference between Chinese and English, Ouyang also indicates that Jing's

[11] See Chapter One in Rey Chow's *Not like a Native Speaker* (2014).

tireless translation practice from Chinese to English demonstrates his subtle transition from a Chinese boy to a boy who is like a "foreigner" (206).

In this way, he gradually loses the past (cultural memory, family history and friendships). Ouyang shows Jing's awareness of being translated in one of Ouyang's poems: "Translating Myself", in which he seizes the chance to express the oxymoron of being "translated":

> Translating myself is a problem
>
> I mean how can I turn myself into another language
>
> Without surrendering myself
>
> Without betraying myself
>
> Without forgetting myself
>
> With forgiving myself
>
> Without even losing myself in a different con /text. (*Moon Over Melbourne* 82)

Like Ouyang, Jing is a young man who is trapped in the translation zone and eventually becomes a mentally-disturbed patient, diagnosed with a disease similar to linguistic schizophrenia. His insistence on literal translation demonstrates his unwillingness to be translated brutally without respect to his original culture. The psychiatrist, Mr Sandringham, thinks Gene suffers from:

> cultural disorientation and bilinguistic confusion … exhibiting such symptoms as a difficulty in switching back into a 'foreign' culture after living in his 'mother' culture for a brief time; a constant need to assert the superiority of his former culture over the present culture in public while unreasonably denouncing his former culture in private; and a perennial sense of victimization that he did not enjoy full rights as his other fellow citizens did because of his 'wrong' skin colour, his wrong shape of eyes and his wrong gait. (364)

However, Jing's illness is shown to have started earlier, back in China, due to the imbalance of languages in his life. Jing's confusion with living between two languages becomes more severe as the novel goes on. He wonders "instead of saying 'make sense', you'd say 'brightly white'? That would make little sense in English!" (122), and ponders on "yin": " yin feng, yin ying, yin leng, yin an, yin si, yin mou, yin xian, yin hun, yin mai, yin zai, yin jian, all related to women, the yin, and all considered bad" (*TEC* 155).

Eventually, it becomes clear that "linguistic entanglements like this easily tired him out as he muttered and chewed them until his tongue got tired, tired, tarnished by the Englishness of his thinking" (200). The quotation shows how different English and Chinese are, and that to master another language does not only mean to know how to speak it, but also to know the cultural indicators carried by languages, or how to disguise yourself in Englishness. To translate yourself from Chinese to English does not mean you are now a white person. Rather, the untranslatability is the part that decides your identity. Jing's perception of otherness starts from the moment he began to study English and the supposed superiority of English and

Englishness continues to be in conflict with his Chinese and Chineseness. He attempts to resist the linguistic influence of English and the erosion of his Chineseness because he feels he is being colonised, while he still keeps the materialistic benefits of learning English and reading the sublime literature produced in English. Thus, Jing is being partially translated. He is no longer a complete man.

Speaking Chinese or English is not only an issue of personal choice; rather, it is an issue of identity. Ouyang's novel itself reads as a combination of translation from Chinese with original English text. It reads like a Chinese story in an Australian setting. It is a hybrid text not only because the first two parts address Jing's life in China, but because the style of writing and structure of sentences read like English writing with ethnic Chinese heritage.

Meanwhile, due to the dual structure of the text, Ouyang also innovates on metafictional representations of cultural translation. He lets the author's voice into the text and, by juxtaposing the author with the protagonist, incorporates the notion of cultural translation into the migration of characters, and into the migration of writing as well. In the text, Chinese prose-style narration is inserted, which transcends the limitations of English by adding the author's own cultural stamp. For instance:

> It was a very cold day but there was sun and people everywhere. Restaurants were open where you could buy re gan mian (hot and dry noodle), fu zi jiu (rice wine), you tiao (fried twisters), you bin (fried cake), mi fen (rice noodle),-this last one Dad loved - bao zi (meat wrappers), hua juan (flower rolls) and a variety of other things. (93)

This paragraph not only uses traditional Chinese prose writing techniques, such as opening a paragraph with descriptions of the surrounding environment, but also adds English translations to the Chinese names of the foods. Such practices are omnipresent through the text, intended to demonstrate how migrants attempt to be able to be acclaimed as real masters of English and members of host lands such as Australia.

The traces of "Chinese English" indicate a division between ethnic English and standard Australian English. Jing's consistent acts of translation make this point more obvious for readers, and mirror a clear gap between ethnic minorities and white Australians linguistically and culturally. Jing, as a migrant crossing nationalborders, inevitably inhabits this "translation zone".

Though the notion of multiculturalism was officially launched by the Australian government, in the 1980s, the fact that Australia is still a monolingual country cannot be denied, and Australia is still culturally a white-dominated country. Author Eva Sallis considers it "a linguistic Third World, a land in which languages are threats and too often stamped out and forgotten" (151). Jing enters the "brave new world" with a naïve wish that English will bring him a happy marriage and a stable belonging, but finds only that he is a failed translated man. He and his wife fight over small things that don't make sense in Chinese or in English; he hates everything in Australia including the food and the accent; his father-in-law is estranged from him because of cultural differences. Immigrants such as Jing need to translate concepts that do not exist in the host culture, or learn new notions. He experiences difficulties in cultural translation partly because he finds he is inferior to the local English speakers:

> As a non-mother tongue speaker and user, you ARE inferior to your white brethren and sisters whose command of the language entitles them to be artists in that language, owners of that language, whereas yours merely keeps you in serfdom, at best an abuser and, at worst, a slave. (384)

These quotations show the dilemma faced by migrant characters like Jing. They are like the slaves of language, and it is indicated that part of the reason for Jing's unhappiness in Australia is because of this dilemma. More importantly, by narrating the story of Jing and intervening in the text with the meta-thoughts of the implied author, Ouyang confirms the untranslatability existing in this translation zone. Ouyang gives as an translation example the saying "shui zhi qing ze wu Ouyang, rem zhi cha ze wu tu". Jing translates it as "If the water is too clean there will be no fish and if a person is too intelligent he will have no friends" (113). This case demonstrates the difficulty in translating ancient Chinese philosophy into English. The original meaning is not well conveyed after being translated into English. It may sound awkward to audiences like Jing's wife. Through the dialogue between Jing and his classmate Ma, the text gives us classical cases of difficult translations from Chinese to English "Ni chi le me" (have you eaten?) should be translated into "how are you" because Chinese people greet each other by asking whether they have eaten any delicious foods. "Don't talk love", when not literally translated from Chinese actually means "Don't have boyfriends or girlfriends". These examples not only show the difficulty of cultural translation but also the impossibility of translating a person's identity.

This “untranslatability”, according to Bhabha, is the “foreign element” that “reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the ‘unstable element of linkage’”. It reveals “the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which ‘newness comes into the world’ ”. (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 326). Because of this “foreign element”, Jing always feels English cannot adequately describe his meaning, thus, in a way, making both languages “broken languages”. The fragmentation of languages merges with the fragmentation of identities and this fragmentation is the result of both diaspora and postmodernity.

The English Class represents Jing as a translated man in his confusion of being a person with hybrid identities. He hates his hybrid identity:

> I hate myself so much for being unwhole, for being a traitor to everything I once held dear, for being unable to resist the temptation to fall into delightful pieces, for the delirium that I have courted. (372)

Tortured by his linguistic conflicts between Chinese and English, Jing loses his direction in life and also wants to destroy the seemingly happy life in Australia:

> For a moment, he thought he was the boy looking at Gene from his boat: an aimless and distraught man, abandoned to the elements, a lonely figure cut against the Western sky bent towards hell, twisted out of shape by its own capability to destruct. (360)

Jing's identity is presented as unstable from the very beginning: he is an enthusiastic English learner and he does not look Chinese or talk like Chinese in China. When he comes to Australia, Deirdre, his Australian wife, finds it difficult to communicate with him because he often uses translated phrases to talk to her or express feelings to her. Deirdre, a monolingual speaker, cannot understand the past carried by Jing's translation and broken English. Though Jing is diagnosed as a patient suffering linguistic disorders, he expresses his wish to be treated equally as an English language speaker, rather than a migrant whose second-language is English. Ouyang expresses his way of viewing identity through contesting relations of mother tongue, father tongue and translation. In multicultural countries like Australia, the way people treat migrants demonstrates the way people treat memory and identity. Migrants live in a space where they are fighting for equal opportunity to remember their pasts, to express their authentic feelings and to claim their identities through translation.

The English Class demonstrates the existence of a "translation zone" and the possibility that cultural memory of the homeland can be transported by migrant characters to the host land. Migrants may culturally translate themselves out of one country and into another. The process of cultural translation is a process of searching for belonging and identity. The hybridisation of languages and the dissolving of languages into each other manifest Bhabha's notion of hybrid identity and its relationship to cultures. Identities are culturally and linguistically hybrid. There are not only two identities, just like there are not merely two directions of translation. This novel, by telling a story about keeping a linguistic balance between English and Chinese, indicates the difficulties presented by the way that cultural memory is translated into different languages. Jing is a happy boy when going to university in

China and he becomes frustrated after using English everyday as the only acceptable language in Australia. He realises the fact that he cannot become even equal to Australians because he is always a second-language speaker. The inferiority of speaking other languages in a host land causes the inferiority of being a migrant in Australia. Jing creates "Jinglish" to demonstrate his eagerness to have a kingdom of his own, to speak whatever language he likes and to live in a society which recognises hybridity as a normal state of identity formation. Only in that society, will Jing be cured of his linguistic disorder and identity crisis.

6. Conclusion

"Jing Ying", the full name of the protagonist in this book, is satiric because these words in Chinese mean "the elite". Oppositely to the indication of his name, Jing is culturally rootless, representing a suppressed group of people whose languages are not accepted and whose memories are modified. The novel suggests that migrants like him experience countless cultural translations in their daily lives and imaginations, many of which are useless and suppressed; also their cultural memories of their "remote past". The novel's presentation of translated English phrases and Chinese "pinyin" translations not only demonstrates the author's awareness of cultural translation and its function in claiming back suppressed cultures, but also is a way of showing the in-between status of bilingual migrants. Jing's failure is the result of resistance from both languages and cultures. His failed attempt to establish a "Jinglish" suggests the difficulties incurred during the translation process, represented by the linguistic impossibility of fully communicating and comprehending in English after using only Chinese since birth. This linguistic barrier not only suggests the

cultural dilemma these migrants face, but also indicates the powerful influence of past memory upon a multicultural present. When they cross borders, migrant characters bring together their memories, histories as well as languages and cultural customs, and this constantly sets up discontinuities by fragmenting their present, eroding their imaginary new identities and cracking their pride as English speakers.

Ouyang touches upon these dilemmas and discontinuities of the migration process. More than just showing these, he also suggests it is this translation zone where a solution for such problems might be found, by better translation between cultures, languages and identities. This translation zone symbolizes the possibility of communication, of dialogue and of hybridity. Jing's linguistic translation between words, phrases, and sentences is a way to metaphorically demonstrate the existence of this zone, in which migrants like Jing are at once translating and translated. Language is used as a lens to observe how cultural memory is translated when migrant characters cross borders. The novel examines dynamic identity evolution, through translating oneself in and out of a country's borderlines. To sum up, Jing's identity crisis demonstrates the 'instable nature' of diasporic identity summarised by Rushdie: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (15). Jing searches for his "new signs of identity" through translating from Chinese to English, but his denial of Australian culture shows his inability to adapt himself to the new world he is living in. His memory of the past is transferred from homeland culture to host land culture through his self-conscious cultural translation. But he fails the process of transporting/translating host land culture back to the homeland, suggesting that his attempt to establish an identity in the English world is a failure.

“Jinglish” is a way of showing Jing’s chaotic linguistic state, and in this regard, it is a way of demonstrating how migrants like Jing struggle in translating themselves out of the “in-between” cultural space.

Chapter Five: Political Memory, Amnesia and Identity in *Playing Madame Mao*

1. Overview

The significance of memory to identity formation has been discussed in the previous chapters and this chapter continues the discussion on how political memory plays a role in forming identities. Judy Giles comments "Memories play a role in the individual's struggle to construct a social and personal identity in a world in which subjectivity is both fragmented and fractured" (21). Amnesia, on the other hand, refers to "the general loss of memory" and usually, is "not to be explained solely psychologically… Rather it is social amnesia – memory driven out of mind by the social and economic dynamic of this society" (Jacoby 4). It can be experienced both personally and nationally in literary discussion. Collective amnesia can be a pinpoint for observing what the nation asks people to remember and what to forget, why they do so and the nature of the relation between a forgotten past and the loss of either personal identity or national identity. The past sheds light on the future; on the contrary, the forgetting of the past may destroy the future. Memory is an act of remembering through which new understandings of both the past and the present are created. As people in diasporic communities always look back to the past, their narratives are more powerful in observing the issues of memory, amnesia and identity politics.

In her 2000 novel *Playing Madame Mao*, Lau Siew Mei skilfully demonstrates her concerns about these issues and situates them in the postcolonial society of Singapore, highlighting political and sociological influences on defining national identity and personal belonging. This novel weaves Chinese mythologies and histories with contemporary issues in

Singaporean society, and triggers readers' reflections on the relations between the Chinese diaspora, political amnesia and Singaporean national identity. In this way, it is a different book from others discussed in this thesis. Besides addressing the significance of memory to one's personal identity, it enquires how collective social amnesia affects identity disorientation. It not only represents identity at an individual level, but at a national level as well. In addition, owing to its complicated approach to representing diaspora, memory, amnesia, and identity at the same time, this novel adds new points to the existing literature of Chinese-Australians and its innovations in style, narrative, voice and story all contribute to elevating the status of Chinese-Australian writing.

Born in Singapore of Chinese background, Lau Siew Mei came to Australia in 1994 and became a writer whose stories have been published in international literary journals in Britain, America and Australia, and broadcast on the BBC. Published in 2000, *Playing Madame Mao* was her first novel, and has enjoyed success with literary awards, being shortlisted for a 2001 NSW Premier's Literary Award and a 1999 Queensland Premier's Prize. The protagonist is a Singaporean actress named Chiang Ching, who has the same name as the last wife of Mao Zedong, and she plays Madame Mao very successfully on stage, but experiences traumatic family turmoil in life. After the suicide of her husband Tang and betrayal by her best friend Roxanne, Chiang Ching eventually migrates to Brisbane, Australia. Her story of exile finally joins those of the global Chinese diaspora after being disillusioned by her search for a stable identity in the city-state, Singapore. Chiang Ching, in the novel, is a representative both of feminist power against traumatic life experience and the search by the Chinese diaspora for belonging and a stable identity. She is also a critic of contemporary Singaporean politics.

The novel has an interest in interweaving histories, mythologies and allegories. The story of the protagonist is based on the 1987 "Marxist Conspiracy" incident in Singapore, when the government arrested several Catholic activists and theatre artists under the International Security Act for their allegedly subversive plans against the nation. The official declaration by the Singaporean government was published in the *Straits Times* on the 27 May, 1987, and warned the public about the "subversive activities" of these activists and artists: "Their subversive activities are prejudicial to the security of Singapore and if left unchecked would lead to unmanageable political instability and chaos" (1). The Home Affairs Ministry also claims:

> Singapore now has to contend with new hybrid pro-communist types who draw their ideological inspiration not only from Maoism and Marxism-Leninism, but also from the ideas of contemporary militant leftists in the West. They augment traditional CPM (Communist Party of Malaya) tactics with new techniques and methods, using the Catholic church and religious organisations. This marks a new phase in the unceasing communist efforts to subvert the existing system of government and to seize power in Singapore. (1)

These official claims by the Singaporean government received a different response from many in the society, and writers like Lau Siew Mei seriously doubt the truth of the crimes attributed to these people. The historical facts shimmer as unstable background in *Playing Madame Mao*. Under similar circumstances, Chiang Ching's husband Tang Na Juan is arrested because of some outspoken articles in a Catholic journal. He commits suicide after

torture and repeated interrogations by the government police. Chiang Ching, Tang's wife, is forced to realize the significance of freedom to her life. The city she lives in is dominated by materialism and authoritarianism. She has a good income but a hollow heart. Disillusioned by her futile search for a solid identity, and shocked by the censorship exercised by the Singaporean government over freedom of speech and the media, Chiang Ching finally decides to leave her country and immigrates to Brisbane, Australia.

It is obvious that *Playing Madame Mao* has a clear dual pattern in the design of its characters and space. Individually, Chiang Ching has two reflective selves: the image of Madame Mao and Roxanne. Madame Mao is the identity Ching wishes to acquire while Roxanne is the one imposed by society. She struggles between the two and becomes hybridized and confused. This imbalance eventually leads to Ching's paranoia. Lau depicts her initially as a talented, successful actress, but Ching becomes delusional later on. Traumatised by the arrest and suicide of her beloved husband, she is trapped by two worlds: one is the city where she lives and suffers (reality); and the other is the mirror world through which she attempts to re-gain her identity (magical). The mirror world exists in Chiang Ching's imagination and merges with the real world. By presenting readers with two different worlds, *Playing Madame Mao*, argues by Lyn Jacobs, "conjures a multi-layered cultural experience of a society subject to government-controlled identity formation as a feature of its management of space and people" (115).

According to the text, Chiang Ching shares many other aspects besides her name with Jiang Qing, the real Madame Mao: she is an elegant, beautiful actress, and a fashion-lover. Most of

all, she has a sympathetic understanding of Madame Mao: "They blame her now for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, for the death of the arts. But who better than herself to know what the arts was about?" (13) Thus, Jiang Qing (Chiang Ching), the wife of Chairman Mao in history, is represented in unconventional ways in *Playing Madame Mao*. Unlike the stereotypical representation of a manipulative, greedy and powerful female Empress, Madame Mao is not judged as being good or evil. Instead, according to Shirley Tucker, Lau presents her "in many contradictory roles played by an actress in Singapore who eventually takes over the character and the writing of her script" (55). *Playing Madame Mao* is, continues Tucker, "a novel about life as theatre with an intensely personal narrative set against a larger than life but not nostalgic history of dynastic China" (55).

In a way, performing Madame Mao is the starting point for Chiang Ching in her search for the identity lost to authoritarianism, and it gives her temporary relief from her suffocating life: "I am conscious only of my feet. Yes, my feet planted firmly upon the stage. *Here* is my refuge, this stage I am upon" (64). She enters the inner worlds of different roles she plays and she re-constructs the image of Madame Mao in her performance, while her identity as an actress off stage is fragmented by her illusions and imaginations of the mirror world. In the last several chapters, the boundaries of Ching's worlds—the real, the mythical and the imagined — become blurred. She becomes delusional and her mind is occupied with schizoid paranoia after enduring her husband's suicide by hanging. Her identity as a Singaporean is contested by observing the city she lives in as a displaced dreamland where "mirror creatures" emerge from the underground to claim the land back and start a revolution to recover the past state of the city. Her search for lost identity is portrayed in the weave of Chinese and

Singaporean mythologies, histories, as well as diasporas. Lau utilizes the Chinese mythology of a mirror world to symbolize the urgency of the need to transform Singapore's present politics. The tragedy that happened to her husband, and the disappointment mounting in her mind triggers Ching's escape to Brisbane, Australia.

Tang Na Juan, the husband of Chiang Ching (whose name is similar to the first husband of Madame Mao, who was called Tang Na), is a journal editor, an activist hoping to make changes to the current situation of media censorship in Singapore. He publishes articles challenging the government's approach to controlling people's minds and thoughts. For the efforts he has made, he is identified as an "enemy of the state" and taken by the national security staff charged with "plotting against the government" (20). From an activist urging freedom of speech to a detainee confessing he is "wrong", Tang experiences torture by government agencies and then a psychological transformation into a suspicious person with a lack of security. Having returned after being detained, interrogated, and released, Tang goes to a restaurant and runs into Chiang Ching. Suspicion begins to emerge between Tang and his wife. When he tries to greet Ching and she does not see him and leaves without returning his greetings, Tang wonders: "Does she ignore me because she is ashamed or afraid, because I am under suspicion all the time, and government spies are everywhere?" (116). As a representative of the avant-garde working tirelessly for freedom of speech, Tang is persecuted and chooses to hang himself after feeling outraged by the government that rules the city through authoritarianism.

Another important character is Roxanne, who is a friend of Chiang Ching but betrays her eventually because Roxanne is supportive of collective amnesia towards what has happened in the city. She works as a journalist and it is clear that her archetype is the renowned journalist Roxanne Witke (Tucker 55), American author of *Comrade Chiang Ching* (1977). She secures her job by betraying her close friend Ching, while her husband secures himself by sacrificing Tang's dignity. For Lau, the character of Roxanne adds a different voice to the main protagonist Ching's voice and, as the supporter and follower of reality, Roxanne performs a role in maintaining the present order of the city. She tries to persuade Ching to accept what the city or the government offers the people, rather than searching for a more truthful identity. She prefers to stay secure and chooses to forget. In order to protect herself, she eventually chooses to stay away from Chiang Ching (Lau 51).

Beside Ching's beloved husband and best friend, Lau also presents several male characters including the director Hui, a manipulative man who likes to give orders, and two Chairmen: Chairman Mao and the Chairman who governs the city-state in which Ching lives – "intellectual, meticulous, a tough opponent" but "not one to look too deeply into matters of the heart" (22). This is a transparent representation of long-term Singaporean president Lee Kuan Yew. Both of these Chairmen share similarities such as a love of control. Lau depicts the Chairman of the city-state as being keen on progress and on manipulation. It is the Chairman in the depicted city who perceives the Catholic journal as a communist conspiracy and arrests several of the editors and authors including Tang. Under his authority, the city is "hysterical" (217) and "temporary" (219), especially for young people.

To make this point more explicit, Lau aligns him with the historical Chairman Mao and Chairman Mao's idol Chin Shih Huang Ti, both of whom have the same willingness to "control history" (17). The two major actions of Chin Shih Huang Ti, the king of the state of Qin in China ruling from 246 to 221 BC (building the Great Wall and burning of the books of earlier ages), are seen to be part of the will of the dictatorship to control both history and memory. In the text, Chin Shih Huang Ti claims: "To put it simply, I will build this wall. I will be remembered" (17). The comparison of the two Chairmen works to show the omnipresence of the ruling and controlling power that, if challenged, will become the power of destruction. In the novel, the images of the Chairmen are blurry but terrifying. Chiang Ching, though being the previous lover of the Chairman of the city-state, can do nothing to save her husband but join the league of the imagined mirror creatures to launch a revolution against the government. By doing this, she attempts to save Tang from torture, fear, and loss of dignity.

The mirror creatures, who live in the mirror world where they serve the Yellow Emperors as slaves, always try to break the glass wall that separates them and emerge into the city. Lau borrows Chinese mythologies to create this imaginary space:

> In Chinese mythology, death is a watery realm. When I die my soul will travel to the Yellow Springs that runs from the foot of the fu-sang tree in the east to the ruo tree in the west. When I die, I shall be as one of the creatures in a mirror world. (15)

Mirror people are the alternative owners of the city-state, and break through to "become palpable presences" (Jacobs 115). The creation of the mirror creatures has much to do with

the search for Ching's identity and the city's national identity as well. The mirror, Lau writes: "is used to define identity, to define I, but who superimposes definition upon the other, the mirror creature or I? The mirror creature or my alter ego? " (Lau, 151)

Therefore, the aim of *Playing Madame Mao* is to demonstrate how the politics of memory and amnesia work to influence people's identity within a country where national identity is undergoing a re-definition process. The text has a general concern with establishing a solid national identity in Singapore as a postcolonial country. During the process of building a national identity for Singapore, the public has been divided into divergent groups. People like Chiang Ching and Tang attempt to examine the present problems of their city state and try to fix them by looking back to the past with the aid of mirror creatures. But there are more powerful forces like the Chairman and media workers like Roxanne functioning as the protectors of the present and the dictators of the past. Memory influences both individual identity and national identity, and the novel shows that collective amnesia will lead to collective loss of identity and belonging.

To showcase the above themes, *Playing Madame Mao* experiments with the structure of the narrative and language. In terms of structure, the narrative is "recursive and fragmentary" (Holden 64). The same event may be narrated by more than one narrator from different perspectives and this novel is noted for its multiple voices and multiple focalizers. For example, the arrest of Tang is narrated in more than one voice. Chiang Ching recollects a walk with her husband Tang before the arrest:

> I think of the last walk we took, the warm wet breeze that rippled the dull face of the water, the silver fish glimpsed in glints of light, and the river bank with the lantern-shaped fruits of the putat laut, dangling like beacons, summoning us to a fare we did not know awaited. (19)

This memory is feminine, and detailed, forming a contrast with what she experiences after the arrest. On the other hand, Roxanne's account of the same event focuses on the confirmation of the facts of arrest (86), while Tang himself narrates his interrogation from both a realistic perspective and through the illusion of being sent down to purgatory and being judged by the red guards (118). Through such complex structuring, the narratives are entangled with each other. In addition to the main narratives of Chiang Ching's stories, there are some less complete parallel narratives that work as supplementary narration to the main thread. Narrators change voices and story lines are broken by inconsistency and interruption. Within the main thread of Chiang Ching's search for identity, the most consistent plot is the gradual emergence of the mirror creatures who live under the city land and eventually break into the city to compete for this land with human beings. The allegorical plot of the mirror creatures assists the main plot of searching for identity. The frequent changes of perspective and voices, borrowing Tucker's words, "enable[s] a merging of history and legend, myth and fiction to create a world filled with uncertainty and change that is reflected in the characters' lives" (Tucker 55).

In this way, *Playing Madame Mao* uses several postmodernist techniques and also, in some parts of the story, offers intertextual references to texts like Orwell's *Animal Farm,* published

in 1945. The postmodernist style requires readers to jump between images and plots, characters and narratives, reality and a dreamworld, leading to a very interesting interpretation of the characters' identities: uncertain, reflective, and attached to memory.

2. The Politics of Memory and Amnesia

Understanding memory is crucial for identity formation. In the previous chapters and the proceeding theoretical framework, the significance of memory to identity has been marked. So the politics of remembrance also influence the formation of identity and, in terms of politics, the control of memory means the power to control people's identity. As Peter Verovšek points out in his essay conceptualizing the study of memory in politics, "Politicians frequently make references to the events of the past, or rather to myths created within memory, to justify their decision and standpoints on a variety of issues, both foreign and domestic" (Verovšek 1). In a novel discussing the role of the past in deciding people's present political stand-points, understanding memory's role in political discourse is a key issue. Collective memory of the past often works as a medium connecting the present life to the past history. Whether collective memory can be treated as treasure is a matter of whether the national identity built upon collective memory can be sustained.

As a novel telling of a woman's failed search for a stable identity, *Playing Madame Mao* asks questions like "why does memory matter to a nation like Singapore?" and "what is the result of collective amnesia reinforced and required by the city-state government?" The novel does not answer these questions directly, but rather makes them a central concern of the protagonist and leaves space for readers to participate in the search for answers.

According to memory scholars Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone:

> To contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contesting the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward. (1)

After Singapore's postcolonial rebirth, many unsolved issues concern national attitudes towards the past, and are often associated with issues of ethnicity, nationalism, national identity, and diaspora. The opposite of memory is amnesia. The use of "amnesia", in sociological and cultural research normally points to a collective, forced forgetting, indicating the official power's control over remembrance and governance over what should be forgotten. As the opposite of memory, amnesia, especially collective amnesia, plays a key role in the political context of remembering and forgetting. Politicians like the Chairman of the city-state, Chairman Mao, and Chin Shih Huang Ti in *Playing Madame Mao,* all contribute to the social amnesia of their governed territories. The acts of burning books, launching the Cultural Revolution, and controlling freedom speech and migrancy manipulate both remembrance and amnesia to serve a purpose of claiming territory and ruling the country with authoritarianism. In *Playing Madame Mao*, the city is a realm of collective amnesia and ignorance of the past, while the mirror world is a place containing remembrance and tradition. The mirror space symbolizes order, peace, and spirituality; the reflective space of the city. In the following, the roles of the city and the mirror world are examined to observe how Lau narrates the contrasts between reality and the past, and the forgotten and the remembered.

2.1 The City as a Space of Collective Amnesia

In *Playing Madame Mao*, the city is portrayed as a modern place expressing "narrow materialism" (97), insecurity, migrancy, and amnesia. Among all these terms, amnesia is the major concern of the protagonist Chiang Ching. She claims: "My city has sprung up almost magically. Nothing has remained the same. I have known the transience of what appears solid. Some things are better forgotten, they tell me" (114). Thus, modernity brings changes, along with amnesia towards the recent past. Under a politically authoritarian government and a materialistic culture, the people living in the city are portrayed as "floating beings, ghosts wafting by as air" (109). This impermanence is best demonstrated in the relationships of people with the city: Roxanne betrays her best friend to secure her job while Chiang Ching, after living in Singapore since birth, chooses to immigrate to Brisbane, because nothing can hold her on that land. The city is an amnesiacal space where people only care about progress, leaving the past behind or even ignoring it totally. Ching wonders at "the amnesiac state of my city's people. Do they forget? Or does the past cease to exist, once it is past" (111). Here, through Ching's questions, Lau points out the nature of political memory: it serves political aims. Amnesia and remembrance are arranged by government for the people and Lau portrays the city as a space of amnesia that even the younger generation regards as a "temporary" place (219).

Ching believes it is because of the nature of the city that:

> White light bounces from it into the clouds, as though from a giant mirror. The rain is cold and grey. It could be anyone's city. It has no past, no roots, so that one can say, 'This is mine, it belongs to me.' (153)

This imagery suggests the connections between modernity and authoritarianism. Both Ching's and Tang's testimony criticizes the city as a modern yet rootless place where people are "ghost-like". It seems that the city is hollow and without hope; however, Lau leaves space for optimism. There is at least one citizen who keeps on searching for the past: Chiang Ching. She relies on the past and is enthusiastically recording her past – she keeps a two-hundred-page memoir to record her existence (160). With the power of remembrance, Ching finally merges with the creatures from the mirror world and together they launch an imaginary revolution to contest the "reality without existence" (160). Yet, Ching lives in fear and tries to hide her fear. Her fear comes not only from Tang's arrest but also from confusion about history and memory. She struggles between remembering and forgetting. She fears that "time collapses and history rewrites itself" (28). Individual remembering is so fragile that Ching must fight very hard to keep a memorial space of her own.

In the novel, the main impact of forced amnesia upon people is to cultivate their habitual obedience to the government. The concept of a "chicken coop" (20) is used to describe the mental state of the people in the space of amnesia – the city. The "chicken coop" image conveys confinement and lack of freedom and only through escaping from the coop can Ching sees reality more clearly. According to the commentator Chin, in contemporary Singapore, the "art-for art's sake" standpoint is pitted against the prevailing state emphasis on

"art-for-society's sake." Chin records that "just a few years ago in November 2000, the Minister of State (Defence, Information and the Arts) David Lim cautioned Singaporean artists 'to [recognize] and accept that there is a need to try and resolve this apparent dilemma: achieving artistic integrity, while at the same time being socially responsible'" (14). In postcolonial nations like Singapore and Malaysia, there are very controversial debates over modernity and tradition, memory and amnesia, Asian values and Western values. Lau weaves these contemporary issues into this novel and argues that identities are not stable at either national or individual levels in Singapore. This novel presents the issue of how modern Singapore faces its recent past and Lau presents the "recent past" by gradually creating the world of "mirror creatures" to contrast with the chaos happening in the present day in Singapore.

2.2 The Mirror World as a Space of Memory and Tradition

As indicated above, the construction of the "mirror world" is the only consistent process happening in this novel and the only thread which can be pulled out to see the pursuit of the protagonist more clearly. Lau gradually and skilfully builds the "mirror world" and creates the images of the mirror creatures based on Chinese mythologies. Starting from the image of a fish, the novel moves to identifying a mirror woman, and then to Ching receiving an invitation from the envoy of the Emperor in the mirror world to visit them and conspire in a revolution against the Chairman. Bit by bit, Chiang Ching senses and enters the mirror world where live the "perfect" creatures, as told of by her mother (85). The mirror world is presented as Ching's imaginary realm, based on her madness and hysteric behaviours after

her husband's suicide. The uncertainty of whether this world exists informs the postmodernist style of the whole text, adding more magic realism to the already shaking city.

In the text, the mirror world has several features. First, it is an equal society where "every creature in the hierarchy of the mirror world is considered of value to its stratum of being" (Lau, 151). Secondly, the mirror world's ruler, the Emperor, advocates for the remembrance of the past by claiming "…the past does not disappear as if it were nothing…" (135) in contrast to the Chairman's belief in progress. Thirdly, mirror creatures, the inhabitants of mirror worlds, are slaves of the Yellow Emperors, always waiting for a chance to emerge in the city, and in the later chapters of the novel, they do emerge and walk among human beings. By definition, "the creatures that exist with us, [are] our mirror selves. The creatures from the watery underworld. The creatures living in the Yellow Springs. Some call them death creatures" (154). Mirror creatures ensure our identity.

These features of the mirror world construct a space where Ching is eager to enter. By depicting such a world of belonging, this novel poses questions such as "is Singapore a free and independent nation after gaining political independence from foreign power?" "What is supposed to be remembered and what is to be forgotten?" The characterisation of mirror creatures brings the city's past back to reality while the Chairman represents the city's present and future. The doubleness of these two worlds presents Singaporean society as a space of hybridity, of modernity and tradition, Chinese values and Western values. Thus, in this way, Singaporean national identity is represented as watery and unstable because of cultural confusions of the East and the West and complete denial of the nation's past.

3. Where are They Going? Contesting Singapore's National Identity

Playing Madame Mao is different from the other novels considered in this thesis such as *Silver Sister* and *Behind the Moon*. Although set partly in Singapore, Ng's concerns are largely Silver's personal diasporic experience and belonging to Chinese culture, while Lau ambitiously contests both individual and national identity by using the metaphor of mirrors. The reflective feature of mirrors is used to challenge the stability of identity. Thus, it connects colonial pasts to the postcolonial present. The city is a liminal space, rather than a cosmopolitan one. Lau portrays it as a place with ghosts and emptiness:

> Cold towering concrete. Glassy shop fronts. Neon lights. Clean green wayside trees. Fines for littering. A virtual parkland, a mini Disney-land often thronging with harassed pedestrians. Under rain, the city lies glistening. It is like a luminous pearl in an oyster with a hard scalloped shell to prise open. White light bounces from it into the clouds, as though from a giant mirror. The rain is cold and grey. (153)

The city's modernity compels the amnesia towards its past. Its residents are people of commodity culture, capitalism, and "programmed to shop until they drop" (115): "The men wear large gold watches. The women have hair that shines and glistens like black sheets, a waterfall of night. Their confidence says Christian Dior or Yves Saint Laurent or Versace" (161). The booming of the economy is a mockery of the city's emptiness: of retaining no history, no past. Under a government that controls freedom of speech, people in the city are not willing to value their past and they choose to live in the moment right now. Collective

amnesia prioritizes progress and, the modernity of the city and at the same time, is responsible for the loss of national identity and what is presented as fake flourishing:

> And down the chutes for the garbage man to discover in the mornings: dead babies, mostly female. The babies have taken the long ride down the chute together with the garbage. Down down one floor, the next, with the garbage bags of leftovers, empty tins, bottle jars, oh down and down, who knows whose garbage it is? Who knows from which floor the baby comes hurtling down? In a block of anonymous flats all alike, neighbours crammed together, unwilling to listen, to see, there is too much noise, too much vision, it is better to tune out and watch television. (169)

Mornings in the city start with shocking images like dead babies in the chute. These unpleasant scenes are the "other side" of the city. The contradictions between an economic boom and moral deterioration interrogate the city's soul: do people living in it have a collective identity? Is the city-state still a community if people already forget, or are forced to forget their pasts? Based on the descriptions in the text, Singapore as a city-state is clearly the archetype Lau's writing is based upon. In the novel, the city is not a closed space or a community; rather, it is no longer a nation owing to the loss of memory and history.

The common concept of nation is constructed through what Hobsbawn calls the invention of tradition:

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate

> certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (1)

Hobsbawn's "Invented Tradition" is replaced by materialism in the city-state in *Playing Madame Mao*. Though many scholars argue Singapore has established its own national identity, it is still a fact that Singapore suffers from politically forced amnesia towards its colonial and diasporic past, as political scholars suggest.

In Ortmann's view, many of these studies distinguish between two different phases: an emphasis on the development of the economy from 1965 until the 1980s when the government increasingly became aware that economic growth alone cannot be the only basis for Singapore's national identity:

> First, after Singapore was ejected from the Malaysian Union and became independent in 1965, the government promoted pragmatic values, which were geared toward economic growth. The second phase started in the late 1980s when Singapore's economy had made significant progress, which was not only evident in the many skyscrapers and large shopping malls, but also in the emergence of a consumer culture. Modernization, it seemed to the leaders, had been accompanied by the vices of Westernization reflected in the increase in individualistic behaviour such as materialism and the atomization of the family. (30-31)

In *Playing Madame Mao*, Ching's city is such a place, where the ruling party only focuses on the economy and on social order, even at the cost of people's freedom of speech. Media and

press control is very rigid so that the Chairman feels the city is all under control. And self-censorship prevails in the city in order to protect oneself from being taken to prison. Lee Kuan Yew claimed "We want the mass media to reinforce, not undermine, the cultural values and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities" (Ortmann quoting Lee, 29).

Ortmann points out that "there are not many remnants of Singapore's colonial past that still survive today, and those that do stand in the shadow of Singapore's gigantic skyline" (29). The city-state in Lau's novel is presented in exactly the same way. The city's identity is not constructed on the remnants of the past, but on a consensus built under authoritarianism.

In the novel, Lau expresses the inability of establishing a stable identity in the city, either for individuals or for the communities.

The national identity is imposed by patriotism and thus very unstable:

> In this city, you can't walk away and return to find things the same as they were. What then of the city's inhabitants who have to live with so much inconstancy in their landscape? Is there a foundation for a stable identity? (197)

To address this inability to construct a stable national identity, Lau's mirror world takes over the city and the mirror creatures rebel against the city people. After Tang is arrested, Chiang Ching receives a message from the Emperor regarding a plan to save her husband and a conspiracy to rebel against the Chairman (134). The Emperor is aware of Ching's affair with the Chairman and he sends his envoy to persuade her to join a revolution and save her

husband. The condition is that she must return to the Chairman. "'But,' I say, 'If I had any influence with him, surely you know, I would have used it on my husband's behalf-the Emperor mistakes me'" (134). The plan to save Tang and invade the city represents the society's hidden resistance towards amnesia. In the novel, Lau offers another approach for Singapore: to establish a national identity by restoring lost memories and cultures, instead of progressing to explore new ones. Chiang Ching is excited about the plan and she feels "The breaking of the glass. The recovery of what was once lost to us" (138). The revolution raised against the city is the beginning of a plan to gain what was lost before. People who live in the city feel confused and live without directions, due to the collective amnesia.

Lau attempts to connect the mirror world with the landscape of the city to demonstrate the power is in memory of the land: "'People forget,' the mirror creatures say, 'But the land does not shake off its past as easily as men do'" (155). Lau questions what Chin argues about postcolonial culture in places like Singapore and Malaysia that they are:

> deeply ambivalent about Western democracy and its doctrine of liberty and autonomy, an ambivalence which also stemmed in part from the opposing ideological polemics that define cultural and religious differences between Asia and the West... it was therefore in Malaysia's and Singapore's interest to assert an independent identity by returning to their ethnic and cultural roots through the ideology of "Asian Values". (14)

Lau does not point out which values Singapore should adopt to establish its national identity. However, as a multicultural country, Singapore's national identity is challenged by class,

ethnicity, and cultural differences. Under collective amnesia, the city's national identity is challenged by the mirror creatures, which alludes to the instability of Singapore's present situation. The danger of losing the present cultural roots is obviously demonstrated by the large fluidity of migration:

> In the city there are people leaving. The emigration offices are at wit's end, swamped by persistent demands. The newspapers highlight the situation calling it a BRAIN DRAIN. All those who wish to emigrate are traitors. This slows the drain a little. At least those who have something to lose should their application fail, think again before applying. (220)

Chiang Ching, as one of the migrants to Australia, proves the danger of a nation losing its past. People like Ching will choose to restore a stable identity by reinforcing the memories, mostly represented by the changing role between Madame Mao and herself, and by the changing space between Singapore and China. Chiang Ching travels between the mirror world and the reality, the stage and her life. She is a confused and in need of salvation. Ching feels "The mirror people hold the key [to the past], which I would wrest from them. Without it, I am lost" (161). The mirror creatures are the other side of the self, the other aspect of one's identity. They are the fearful creatures allowing us to see what we are not willing to become:

> Everyone fears the mirror creatures. The English-educated fear the Chinese-educated and vice-versa. The different races fear each other. (178)

In *Playing Madame Mao,* mirror creatures and the city people rely on each other to solidify their identities, and their selves. Lau's interpretation of the problems and existing issues in Singaporean society functions as a mirror to observe the role of both the nation and the avant-garde in postcolonial countries.

"Chineseness" in *Playing Madame Mao* is represented in various ways: through mythology, history, and contemporary Chinese culture like Zhang Yimou's films. Chinese culture is represented as patriarchal, habitually amnesiacal, and authoritarian. Lau not only challenges the formation of Singaporean national identity, but also questions the identity issues of Chinese avant-gardes like Madame Mao and her ex-husband Tang Na, alluded to by the figure of Chiang Ching's husband Tang. The figure of Chiang Ching resembles Madame Mao, and through these connections, Lau links the history of Singapore with China. Chinese avant-gardes are presented to face similar problems of forced amnesia and imposed political identity.

As Lau indicates, forced collective amnesia is not a problem unique to Singapore, but is universal or at least has roots in "Chineseness". Lau implies that Singaporean history and Chinese history echo each other in terms of the way governments treat the avant-garde. History is presented as cyclic and repetitive. But it is also implied that Chineseness is one of the controversial issues in Singaporean society. Postcolonial societies like Singapore are finding ways of dealing with Chineseness as their heritage or their obstacles. As a country where around seventy-five percent of the population are Chinese, Singapore faces a challenge of marching forwards by putting down the old, or rebuilding a national identity on the

original. However, Lau presents Chineseness as something never to be changed and Chinese culture as authoritarian, patriarchal and politically cyclic. As Holden notices:

> The content of Chinese culture in *Playing Madame Mao* is not Singaporean dialect-based cultures and practices but high cultural transnational Chinese elements: history and mythology from China itself. While there are a few Malay words, a couple of dialect phrases, and some reference to a distinctively Singaporean landscape, there are—in contrast to Baratham's novel—no major non-Chinese characters. (65)

Upon the presence of Chinese culture in the novel, Holden argues:

> Chineseness in Singapore is frequently normative, and Chinese Singaporeans frequently speak from unexamined positions of privilege, but it is a reconstructed Chineseness in which the "West" still occupies a privileged place. Chinese identity has been refashioned by processes of ethnicization in Singapore, with both the radical modernity of the May Fourth Movement and the lifeworlds of so-called dialect cultures disavowed for a Chinese modernity in which the West becomes an object of desire. (65)

The presence of Chinese culture complicates the novel by representing Chineseness as a normative issue impeding the progress of Singaporean society. Chiang Ching as a confused individual is faced with the issue of searching for the past. Though Singaporean history is tangled with Chinese history, it is not the novel's intention to make Ching follow cultural memory in China, but a past created by Singapore.

4. A Search for Identity

4.1 Die for Art's Sake—Tang's pursuit of Identity

I've argued that *Playing Madame Mao* contests the notion of identity on two layers: the national and the individual. The 1987 Marxist Conspiracy is the central incident allegorically represented in the text leading to its critique of the exile and diaspora of the Singaporean avant-garde. Chiang Ching, together with the imaginary Madame Mao, form major voices of the avant-garde in exile.

As suggested, historically the Singaporean government has required artists to self-censor when performing artistic work. Lau writes "MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. It is written upon my forehead, everyone's forehead" (20). Tang and Ching, as avant-garde activists resisting this principle, have been "punished" by state-induced psychological destruction, facing pressure from both family and society. Tang suicides after repetitive interrogations about his "crime" and Lau links Tang's experience with those who were persecuted in the Cultural Revolution in China. The combination of theatre with real life is a tactic in *Playing Madame Mao* to form more powerful effects of presenting the difficulty of pursuing identity under authoritarianism. Tang is judged by several Red Guards:

> 'Crimes?' Tang cries aloud. 'What have I done?'
>
> Voices of a Red Guard: Do you, Tang Na Juan, believe you are fit to escape the punishments?
>
> 'But first…' said Tang. 'Let me know what I have done.'

The voice continues: Have you broken promises?

Have you tortured animals?

Cheated a friend?

Murdered someone?

Lied to someone?

Stolen?

Blasphemed against the Chairman?

'Wait,' says Tang. 'You do not give me time…'

The Red Guards all together chorus: Eaten too much? (123)

Tang has been interrogated for every possible misdemeanour and he is now surely a criminal of some kind. The trial reads like a performance – readers know Tang lives in the "city" that is not China, but he experiences a trial by Red Guards, the special name for those young activist followers of Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution. The textual reality mixed with the characters in Chinese history creates an effect of on-stage performance. Through the mixture of reality and theatre, Lau satirises the silencing of freedom of speech in contemporary Singapore and China in the 1970s.

Like George Orwell's work, Lau's novel also depicts pig-like human beings when Tang travels to the underworld, to suggest that a money-focused society transforms people's

physical and psychological features. When Tang enters the underworld, he observes the creatures in the room: “The room’s occupants, he sees with shock, are a succulent pig lying on a sofa and a polished snake with hooded eyes, in the process of uncoiling itself on a cushion” (121). This reminds readers of *Animal Farm* and also the Chinese mythological phrase “niu gui she shen” (cow-like ghosts and snake-like gods), a terminology used for intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution as part of charges against them for committing crimes of betraying the country.

Lau continues to formulate the mirror world and the idea of the “mirror” as reflections of identity. Tang’s identity is reflective in those mirrors in the room, allegorically claiming the notion of identity as reflective, hybrid, and unstable. Tang sees himself in mirrors:

> In one he sees himself as a serpent with a forked tongue sticking out. In another, he is a bull with two heads. Upon the ceiling mirror he is a pig with enormous nostrils flaring and then in another instant he is a raven with tearing claws...The room has a hundred reflections, a hundred mirrors, and in each of them he sees his self in a different aspect. (122-123)

Tang’s reflections in a hundred mirrors suggest the multi-dimensions of political identity. Identity is socially constructed rather than self-acquired. Tang’s persistent pursuit of freedom of speech and art-for-art’s sake is contested by the reality in which people view him as a “traitor of the country”, “an incapable husband” or “an irresponsible colleague”.

Tang's identity is not decided by his own perception, but is an outcome of a combination of social factors and self-representation. Tang realizes that he has:

> made a serious mistake to speak up, to stand up for what he believes in … It does not work in this city, in such a society, with people who do not have humanitarian impulse, but who believe that people are digits to be used or crushed, that the individual can be sacrificed for the greater good of the community. (234)

Tang's death is represented as a form of exile. He enters the death realm, which is believed to be a "water realm" in Chinese mythology. Water symbolizes freedom, so Tang's unfinished career will continue in another space. Tang's tragedy is, as indicated by the text, an outcome of the collective amnesia.

Tang and Ching both feel that life is just illusion. The loss of the nation's past indicates a loss of everyone's hold on a stable identity. People live, make money, spend money, and die. Tang expresses the fragility of identity when a song triggers re-remembrance of his past and he reflects on what this loss means to him:

> Something of what you once were when you were young and which in some part of you you realise you have hidden, sometimes hidden so well it is a loss which you do not know is a loss, until you hear the chords of it sung. And then you ask yourself, 'How have I been living?' (117)

The portrait of Tang, I argue, is to indicate the fragility of identity, while the portrait of Ching is to expose the flexibility of identity. Unlike her husband, who feels ashamed to "confess" and admits he wants to "lie low" (221), Ching is strong in her insistence on holding on to herself. She has the same perception of life as Tang but she has made the stage her refuge.

4.2 Exile and Crossing Borders—Ching's search for a "stable" Identity

Ching and Madame Mao not only have similar names, similar family backgrounds, and similar life experiences (both of them become the mistress or the partner of a Chairman) but they resemble each other in their ways of looking at women's identity in a society in which the government is reluctant to rely on the past. Ching expresses her feelings towards the role she plays multiple times:

> I do not know why Madame Mao's ghost is to haunt me. Perhaps it is the collected karma within my self, the hunger to assert an identity, the unreasonable that only builds ego walls around the soul, indeed … it is hard to be an empty boat. (71)

This paranoia shows Ching's eagerness to escape from the city's suffocating space: "The city cannot contain me. My destiny is wider than its narrow confines." (64). Roxanne, on the other hand, is Ching's "realistic self". Roxanne and Ching reflect each other. Identity is entwined, in a dual reflective pattern, rather than individually acquired. From Roxanne's understanding, Ching is looking for "a stable sense of her self and her life" and Roxanne challenges that, by saying the action of searching for a stable identity is futile and useless.

She says: “Perhaps you are seeking perfection. Which is impossible. The dream reminds you how impossible” (51).

Before the mirror creatures emerge, Ching struggles between Madame Mao and Roxanne, so their emergence as creatures opens a third option. The mirror creatures symbolize the omnipresent presence of the past, starting from the mirror woman who visits the city and shoots a young man on the street. No one knows why she did it and how she did it. The presence of the mirror creatures thus is described as mysterious. But after feeling insecure in her living space, Ching relies on them to tell her who she is and, where she should go.

Ching’s mourning for the loss of her beloved husband adds more fear into her life. And the accumulation of fear and insecurity leads to her exile overseas to Brisbane, where she aspires to re-build her confidence and her identity. After the arrest of her husband, Ching lives in fear and tries to hide her fear. Her fear comes not only from the arrest but also from the confusion resulting from the collective amnesia. In her fears, “time collapses and history rewrites itself” (28). Ching feels she lives in darkness and for years she feels she is “wearing a mask” (31). The fear eventually takes Ching to the diaspora. She explains to her friend Roxanne: “I wanted only to be real… And then I realised nothing I did was real.” (302)

Ching decides to leave for a new start, and her new city Brisbane is also not her city. She expresses her status as a woman in exile: “A condition of exile, of being émigré, is always one of not being known.” (310) The anonymous Ching hides her past intentionally in order to begin a new self, but her flexible citizenship depends on the sacrifice of having left her past. She has no frequent contact with her white neighbours in the community and she feels lonely

and hopeless. In Singapore, she is deprived of freedom, while in Brisbane, she feels "invisible".

The diasporic life of Ching in Australia as a Singaporean Chinese exile, the mixture of Chinese mythologies and Western mythologies, the cultural reliance on Chineseness and the clinging to a Western mode of democracy and freedom, evidence Ching's understanding of her Singaporean identity as hybrid, between East and West. At the same time, the ending also indicates that Ching is living between the Chinese diaspora and Singaporean diaspora, which makes her more bewildered and flexible about her identity. After migrating to Brisbane, Ching does not find her identity as she confesses:

> I am an actress and I have managed to step across, from one stage to another, in exchange for that elusive something one calls freedom or anonymity or simply to drift along the edges.
>
> I am alone with myself. I mock my efforts to specify, to draw dimensions, to make sense of the new land. Only a memory lifts me above this void, this place where I am no one. (309)

Ching finds herself in a "different world" (308) and she wonders: "when the landscape will begin to make sense to me, to yield to me its codes of being. Am I doomed to wander on its surface?" (309) To Ching, Brisbane is a place where she is still wandering alone and no one knows how long it will take before she feels "accepted" by Australian society.

5. Conclusion

Pasts haunt the present and a nation's past influences greatly people's national identities. *Playing Madame Mao,* instead of telling a simplistic story of political incident, mixes different narratives and voices into one entity. The central focus of the book is a collective identity crisis and collective amnesia in postcolonial Singapore, compared to China, with links to Chinese history of the Cultural Revolution and Australia, with the contexts of migration and exile. Identity is thus contested at both the national level and the individual level, while the issue of the avant-garde's sense of belonging is also discussed as a specific example of where loss of memory can lead art. Identity is considered as having a reflective nature. Identity is always hybrid, subjective and often manipulated politically.

Apart from understanding identity at national and individual levels, in *Playing Madame Mao* identity is also contested through dynamics of political memory and collective amnesia. The feature of political memory reinforces the approach taken by Singaporean avant-garde activists to fight for a better future. Collective amnesia works on establishing a new collective identity for the nation. The outcomes of collective amnesia are deterioration of society, rootlessness of the people, especially the avant-garde, and forced migration to wherever people are able to settle down.

The novel demonstrates and represents the relationships between amnesia, political memory, and political identity. Its complications in representing history, memory and identity show the complex interactions of literature and memory. Memory manipulated by politics will result in

collective manipulated identity. To challenge the political formation of identity, the first thing is to transform controlled memory.

Chapter Six: Brave New World: Transgenerational Memory and "Future Identity" in *Behind the Moon*

Literatures written on migration experiences normally have two axes: one oriented to the homeland and the other to the host land. Amy Tan's best-selling novel *The Joy Luck Club* focuses on how her characters view "China" from the remote adopted "home", America. Similarly to it, both *Silver Sister* and *Playing Madame Mao* in this thesis are interested in how migrants live and remember in relation to the histories of "homelands" (China and Singapore, for example). In the previous chapter, *Playing Madame Mao* was analysed from the perspective of political memory and its relation to the characters' sense of belonging before exile. *The English Class* and *Shanghai Dancing* are both interested in representing transnational memory. There is space to ask questions such as – how is memory circulated and translated in an adopted country and what is the future of migrated memories? How is memory perceived by succeeding generations? How do changes in memory strategies influence perceptions of belonging or identity for both migrants and local people?

These issues are addressed in Asian-Australian novels such as *Behind the Moon*, published in 2005 by Hsu-Ming Teo, and *Unpolished Gem*, published in 2012 by Alice Pung, that mainly narrate second-generation stories set in Australia. This chapter will examine how Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* responds to these issues, as a novel described by Tony Smith as moving "towards an Australian 'voice'". The Australian writer Hsu-Ming Teo of Malaysian-Chinese heritage was born in Malaysia and migrated with her family to Australia in 1977. *Behind the Moon* is Teo's second novel after *Love and Vertigo*, which won the Australian Vogel Literary Award in 1999. Teo has a doctoral degree in history and English Literature

and she is an academic at Macquarie University in Sydney, teaching European history and travel history. This book responds to Australian multiculturalism and seeks a better frame for identity and belonging apart from conventional identity politics. Published in 2005, *Behind the Moon* is an exception in the corpus of Chinese-Australian literature because it mainly focuses on representing how "identity" is treated as a fantasy of the future by second-generation migrants. Through such a perspective, *Behind the Moon* probes into the representation of a mutual future, signified by the groups of second-generation Australians, by narrating how they struggle to establish friendships that may or may not enhance their identities as "normal" Australians.

As a book containing solitude, un-belonging, fear and cultural assimilation, it has received many critical responses from various angles. Deborah L. Madsen is interested in "the textual representation of moments when the 'homeliness' (Freud's *heimlich*) of the hegemonic national narrative is disrupted by confrontation with the excluded Other" ("'The Exception that Proves the Rule'" 17). Madsen argues that this book focuses on the Other who is excluded and lives in a marginalized position for survival, without recognition, while Alice Healy writes from the perspective of language, mainly looking into the "Singlish" phenomenon appearing in the text. Robyn Morris is particularly interested in the representation of mateship, masculinity and "Australianness". Drawing on all these critical responses and holding an interest in the representations of memory in the text, this thesis will analyse how the notion of "future identity" is engaged through transnational memory in *Behind the Moon*, and how second-generation Australian migrants define their sense of belonging by establishing their own narrative voices instead of inheriting these from their parents.

Behind the Moon, viewed as a teenage Bildungsroman and a diaspora novel, is interested in both the first-generation's memories and the second-generation's belonging, and both diasporic Chinese culture and Australian culture. The "future", symbolised by the "growing-up" stories of second-generation migrants in Australia, is qualified by how, as their parents' dream carriers, the young characters struggle between inheriting parental memory to become duplicates of them, and moving on to create new identities. They understand they must live in their own space, rewriting the texts of their parents, and that the new text of the self carries traces of the old world transformed by influences from outside the family. For the second-generation characters in *Behind the Moon*, building a forward-looking identity is more urgent and necessary than inheritance of the old world.

By narrating three teenagers' growing-up stories, Teo enquires into the following questions regarding the circulation of memory:

1. How do second-generation characters view their parents' past memories and what are their strategies for survival and belonging in the new country?
2. How does memory circulate transgenerationally and what is its relation with identity formation?
3. Is there a "future identity" based on a divergent "transgenerational memory"?

In this chapter, I analyse Teo's portrayal of the memory strategies of second-generation migrants using theories of transgenerational memory, diaspora and identity politics. I argue that, while Teo creates a fictional world in which second-generation migrants can meet and interact in a multicultural country (Australia, in the textual context), these characters face challenges in establishing their own remembrance worlds or fitting into an "Australian" mode

of inheritance. Teo challenges the notion of an ethnic "gated community",[12] and opens up conversations in a transnational context to discuss how both Australianess and belonging influence Australians' daily lives. The circulation of memory transnationally suggests a way to view second-generation migrants' sense of belonging. The circulated memories influence how the perception of identity changes over time. Memory not only travels but also is regenerated by second-generation migrants, who are eager to welcome new identity and new remembrance modes in order to adapt to the ever-changing transnational globe.

1. Australian Teenager Bildungsroman

As Tamara S. Wagner suggests, *Behind the Moon* consists "of an intricate juxtaposition of three interrelated narratives of growing up, of Bildungsroman translated into the multicultural imaginary of contemporary Australia". It tells three different but interrelated growing-up stories set in the suburbs of Western Sydney. The protagonists are Tien, Gibbo and Justin, who have known each other from childhood and experience the complications of life together, with their friendships tested and challenged. Each protagonist varies in family background and personality, but all of them fear displacement, alienation and not "fitting in", in multicultural contemporary Australia. Their friendships connect them with each other's families, and memories of each family's past. Friendships extend understandings of transgenerational memory and open a multicultural perspective on how migrants remember their pasts and how notions of clichéd identity politics are challenged in a multicultural social environment.

[12] Usually, a gated community refers to a kind of residential community or housing estate having strictly controlled entrances for pedestrians, bicycles, and cars, and often distinguished by a closed perimeter of walls and fences. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gated_community> Here it is used in its metaphorical meaning, indicating a social community which does not open to strangers or people from outside the community.

The title phrase "Behind the Moon" first appears in Tien's imagination: "it's not a place you can get to by a boat or a train. It's far, far away. Behind the moon. Beyond the rain. Somewhere over the rainbow" (24). By naming her novel *Behind the Moon*, Teo plays with Chinese cultural perceptions of the moon as both perfect and watery, which suggests the futility of finding a perfect place and that searching for a solid belonging to any place is dubiously unnecessary. Thus, in a way, *Behind the Moon* as the title suggests the aim of the book: this is a book about the displacement of second-generation migrants in Australia and the futility of attempting to build a solid "future identity".

The main storyline begins when the Singaporean-Chinese-Australian and homosexual Justin has his first sexual experience, which occurs in a public toilet while his friends Gibbo and Tien are at the shopping mall buying groceries. Justin hides his real sexual orientation from both his friends and his family, and thus his first sexual encounter with a man in a toilet means both secret pleasure and deep guilt. Linking the Strathfield massacre, a shooting rampage which happened in Sydney to Justin's sexual experience suggests the beginning of a dysfunctional friendship where everyone shares guilt, trauma and displaced belonging. Messy complications follow, with negotiations of racism, belonging, and homophobic social attitudes. When Tien and Gibbo are shopping, Justin encounters a boy in the mall's public restroom. While the killer was killing people and while his friends are in danger, he is having his first homosexual experience. Teo likes to align plots with real historical events, as she explains in an interview: "I suppose that's because I'm a historian, that's one of the reasons, but also another is to look at the way history affects ordinary people, because we live in an age of heightened historical consciousness" (Broinowski, "An Interview" 194). Excluded from mainstream recognition as "normal" Australians, Teo's characters in *Behind the Moon*

are mostly hybrid, invisible and lonely; most of all, they are eager to build a "future identity" by contesting the memory forced upon them by their families and society.

Justin comes from a Singaporean-Chinese family. He has a father obsessed with Karaoke and a mother obsessed with cleanliness – especially the hygiene of toilets. He is a "good boy" in his mother's eyes and a B-grade student contrary to his father's high expectations. To make his mother happy, he carefully follows the filial duties of Chinese culture and hides from his parents the fact that he is gay. His reflections on whether he is gay start from when he is twelve years old. He has no one to share or to discuss this with until he sees the film *Gallipoli*, which assures him of his sexual orientation (5). Watching the film *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir 1981) works as a triggering incident for Justin because he discovers his homosexuality by watching the male characters' bodies. While *Gallipoli* has probably never been interpreted as a gay film, this perspective highlights how a young homosexual man views Australian history. In this Singaporean-Chinese family, Justin is the future of his parents and is expected to carry much responsibility as well as hope for his family. When Justin buys a poster of the film and Blu-Tacks the picture of Mel Gibson and Mark Lee to his bedroom wall, his father "nodded' approvingly" (6) because Tek, Justin's father thinks this is "a sign…that Justin is growing up an Australian" (6). Justin's mother admires the fluent English of Gibbo's mother, Gillian Gibson, and would like to urge Justin to study English with her, while Justin resists his parents' dream that he become the ideal intelligent and filial son, a real Australian-born Chinese son. Justin's parents inherit the traditional Chinese educational mode – to convert their son into an elite citizen serving the country. His resistance towards this parental expectation and his inability to know his future drive him to explore his identity: who is he? What kind of person will he become? His parents Tek and Annabelle keep part of Chinese

culture to themselves and hope their son will grow up to be a real Australian. They remain Chinese people whose emotional attachment still relies on the family bonds in Singapore but they choose to encourage Justin to shake off his roots. Justin is displaced at the very beginning of the novel and remains displaced before he is beaten by gay haters into a coma at the end. He does not know where his real home is and does not have a past to return to. He is also trapped in the dilemma of not being able to attract white men as a homosexual coming from Asia. In the eyes of his friends, Justin:

> is just 'ordinary': such a stereotypical Australian-born Chinese boy that he was virtually invisible. To his friends, he was nice, there was nothing more to be said. (13)

Justin has to hide his sexuality because his parents react with homophobia when talking about homosexuality: Annabelle and Tek hold that gayness is not clean and not healthy, and is a "bad influence" on children (5-6). Justin's mother hates any topic related to sex: "Sex was a four-letter word to Annabelle and it spelt DIRT" (5-6). Justin uses an "easygoing" smile to hide "the thoughts he did not utter" (13). He is the most silent protagonist in the text. He does not say much and he does not argue much. The "silence" of Justin signifies the silence of the "Asian gay" in contemporary multicultural Australia. With a pushy father and a cleanliness-obsessed mother, young Justin is thrown into cosmopolitan Sydney, rootless, lonely and anxious. His sense of belonging is created by assimilating and the route to the "past" has been cut off, with no memory to cling to. He has to create his new identity as an Australian male, starting with his friendship with Gibbo.

Nigel "Gibbo" Gibson became Justin's childhood friend when they attended Mrs. Yipson's piano classes together at about nine years of age and "the trauma of shared humiliation was as

good a basis for friendship as any at that age" (8). Gibbo represents the "exception to the rule": a white boy who cannot be defined by his own father as a real Australian, a white boy who dreams of being Asian and is keen on knowing Chinese culture, such as cooking. According to the text, Gibbo is an ordinary Australian boy, with "muddy brown eyes and a thick thatch of coffee-coloured hair" (27). Gibbo's appearance as "a bubble boy, a hungry soul encased in a stout body" suggests part of the reason why he becomes the "class reject" (27). Gibbo is not welcomed by classmates, and becomes a lonely boy who "looked out longingly at the world that passed him by" (27). Growing up as a "class reject", Gibbo has learned to cherish friendship much more than his counterparts. Gibbo's mother "is so anxious not to appear racist that she overcompensates, which is wince making" (Broinowski, "An Interview" 191) and his father's behaviour is contradictory towards Asian people (sometimes he complains about Gibbo becoming too Asian; meanwhile, he is kind to Tien). The Gibson family demonstrates white Australians' fear of being excluded from cosmopolitan society and Bob's bitter attitudes towards the Cheong family show his mixed feelings towards migrated families' assimilation:

> The perfect Singaporean family who had made the perfect transition from pidgin-speaking migrants to perfectly acculturated Australianness. Perfectly multicultural…they are quoting Australianness ironically; they were cultured and sophisticated enough to play these multicultural games and win. (133)

Bob's ironic mocking of Tek Cheong's family shows the anxiety of white Australians in the novel. The anxiety demonstrates the problems of Australian national identity as a notion and its relation to the promotion of multiculturalism, since the latter poses a threat to the former.

Australian national identity is challenged in the text in its representation of complicated friendships: Gibbo wants to be Chinese while Justin and Tien dream of being Australian. Teo expresses Gibbo's craving to be Chinese in the chapter "The Urge to be Asian": "As long as Gibbo could remember, he wanted to be thinner and he wanted to be Chinese, just like Justin" (54).

Gibbo's early dialogue with Tien shows that his estrangement from his classmates pushes him to question his belonging, both culturally and ethnically:

> 'Why do you keep pretending to be Chinese?' Tien said, exasperated.
>
> 'Because I am,' Gibbo said.
>
> 'It's ridiculous.'
>
> 'It's true. My great-grandfather came over from China during the gold rush. He opened a grocery store at Ballarat but they eventually moved to Sydney. Then my great grandfather fell in love with this Anglo woman and they had an affair.'
>
> 'Well, you don't look Chinese. ' Tien said, as she always did whenever Gibbo made this claim.
>
> 'But I am. ' he insisted stubbornly. (55)

These conversations suggest that in a country dominated by a presupposed "national identity", anyone who is believed not to be fitting into that mode may be excluded from mainstream community. Appearance is a common means by which to identify one's race. People like Gibbo are not treated as authentic Australians because they don't match the clichéd images of Australian males: Gibbo is stout, and does not look fit. However, he is not "yellow" in skin

colour to make Tien believe he may have Chinese ancestry. Teo criticises white Australian masculinity by creating Gibbo, the white Australian boy obsessed with Chinese culture and Chineseness. Also, Teo further enquiries into the double sides of racism when describing Justin's Malaysian trip with his partner, during which he complains about his Malaysian family's conservative attitudes towards homosexuality, while Justin himself is afraid to come "out of the closet". Gibbo's obsession with Chinese identity is shown as a strategy to adapt himself to the multicultural mix. For Gibbo, Asians like Justin and Tien save his life as a failed "Aussie boy", and he begins to no longer feel alone:

> His two best friends – his two only friends – with him in school, fortifying him against his own oddness, demonstrating to the rest of his classmates that he was no longer an outsider. Two could still be the class rejects; three were a *gang*! (54)

The three form the "reject group" in a postcolonial, multicultural Australia that values masculinity, mateship and "whiteness". The ideas here are obvious: people who are excluded from the mainstream will form their own community, which is against the centred community. Justin, as an Asian gay boy, and Gibbo, as not "a real Aussie" (98), together with Tien, the girl discriminated against by both Asians and whites for her skin colour, form the "reject group".

Tien is a complication and always a rebel in the book. Tien's mother is Chinese-Vietnamese and her father is half African-American, half-Cajun, while she has a grandfather who is a Francophile Vietnamese intellectual. Unlike Justin and Gibbo, Tien lacks a mother figure. In the novel, her mother Linh sacrificed a seat for Tien's grandfather when the whole family fled to Australia by boat, and Tien was brought to a Philippines refugee camp by her relatives

and then became part of the "boat people" in Australia, where she lives with her uncles and aunties until her mother reunites with her when Tien is thirteen. As a refugee and a non-white girl with mixed heritage, Tien experiences bullying and mocking from her peers because of her blackness, described in this way:

> She wasn't Asian, she wasn't even Eurasian. The other Asian girls whispered that so-and-so heard someone say that Tien's father had been a black man. One day a few of the older boys yelled at her crudely, 'Hey, Abo! Whatcha doin' here?' (29)

Tien's blackness makes her classmates think of her possible relation to Aboriginal people in Australia and they mock her by asking why she is "here" with them. The double play on Tien's blackness suggests skin colour's importance in terms of peer friendships in the 1990s in Australia. Tien is not only discriminated against as a refugee but insulted as if she were an Aboriginal girl.

Tien's confusion about "why I am here" and "who I am" is different from Justin's and Gibbo's. Overwhelmed by many labels of identification, she chooses to create her new identity starting from the day she arrives in Australia. Madsen comments on the role of Tien:

> Both somatically and nationally, Tien's blackness combined with her yellowness symbolically enacts the fundamental anxiety of Australian nation formation. Australian anxieties in relation to dispossessed indigenous black communities ("Abos"), the threatening proximity of Asia ("boats"), and a tenuous Anglo-Celtic settler culture increasingly threatened by multicultural diversity are focused upon this character. ("'The Exception that Proves the Rule'" 20)

Regarding Tien's eagerness to be an Australian girl, the text says: "Tien wanted to be like everyone else, but with Gillian Gibson it was hard to forget that she was a refugee" (33). Tien, as an exception to her "invisible" family, wants to become an "ordinary" Australian girl who "learned to cook chops and make chocolate crackles with Gillian" (34). Because of Gillian's persistent interest in re-discovering Tien's family history and refugee experience, Tien has mixed feelings towards her but Tien's need for mothering weaves her life with Gillian's.

Tien is afraid of not fitting in and she tells her mother Linh after they are reunited: "It should be enough just to be alive, but somehow it isn't" (355). Here, Tien distinguishes the divergent needs of first-generation and second-generation refugees. For Lihn, survival is what she needs: a job to pay bills with, a television to receive everyday news broadcasts and a house to live in. But Tien has more to ask from life: she wants to become a real "Aussie". As the story progresses, Tien's efforts to fit into Aussie culture and her search for her father suggest her concerns are different from her mother's philosophy of survival: She is like many Australian children in her mother's eyes, who value progress and do not appreciate the past. Linh complains about her daughter being too "Australian" and she thinks "Australians are always moving on, always living in the present. Meanwhile the rest of the world walks hand in hand with the past, but you can't understand other people's grief and pain" (239). The tension between a Chinese-Vietnamese mother and an "Australianised" daughter demonstrates the tension between the past, the present and the future. Tien's eventual choice to estrange herself from Gibbo is due to not only her obsession with Justin, but also Gibbo's persistent claim to being Chinese. Gibbo, to Tien, is the past, while Justin and she would like to be "the future" – happy Aussie teenagers who have brand new pages to write on.

In *Behind the Moon*, everyone has their fears and Teo admits that "It's hard to reduce any novel down to one thing, but fear is definitely a significant part of *Love and Vertigo*, and especially in *Behind the Moon*" (Broinowski, "An Interview" 191). Thus, in a way, Teo creates a triangle of multicultural friendship and inside the triangle she writes one phrase: fear of un-belonging. Tien's mother Linh finds that fear is pervasive all over the Australian suburbs:

> Australian life, she saw, was a patchwork of constantly dieting mums, shonky builders, tyrannous bank fees and branch closures, teenage crime and lax laws upheld (or not) by corrupt police…Ordinary Australian teetered on the verge of victimhood, clinging on with a death-grip to a nostalgic past when unity of race had ensured equality in the nation, and they cast panic-stricken glances around for someone to blame for all this gut-roiling fear. It was infectious, this deep anxiety that strangers were moving into the neighbourhood and now you had to lock your doors and barricade yourself into your home; that even in the midst of plenty, you hovered over the precipice of poverty. (197-98)

Linh's perception of the Australian suburb is the perception of many migrants, especially refugee migrants, who are afraid of losing their old identities together with their memories, while the second-generation of a migrated family is eager to claim their ownership of the new land and new territory. Their strategies of memory and belonging allow us to observe how memory of the past is transnationally accepted and digested, and how a multicultural friendship can provide a new perspective of thinking about the formation of identity. At the end of the story, the three families are reunited after Justin' beating. Teo provides hope in

multicultural friendships and the unity at the end shows hope and a solution in cosmopolitan culture: forming a tight community bound by love, not by race, nor any of the terminology of identity politics. *Behind the Moon* extends the white Australian fear to a fear of cosmopolitan culture and to the way people easily label each other with identities. It poses different options for identity politics, through the reuniting of three families from different backgrounds.

Teo also indicates that if Justin wakes up from the coma, things may be restored as before and everyone will still struggle with their relations. Justin's coma brings peace and harmony to the three families, symbolizing a temporary relief from confusions and misunderstanding resulting from multicultural communication. However, if he wakes up, friendships may collapse again. Teo ends the story with a myth, leaving the reader to think about the possibilities: they either will be bounded by friendship or love, or won't talk to each other again. The fragility of their friendship signifies the weakness of Australian national identity as a notion in defining people's belonging in a multicultural society. The conflicts between Tien, Justin and Gibbo demonstrate how friendships can be complicated by ethnicity and issues of belonging.

2. Transgenerational Memory and "Future Identity"

Teo weaves many contemporary Australian issues such as racism, homophobic attitudes, and refugee problems together into one book. By creating characters from different backgrounds, this text forms a past, represented by Linh's and Gillian's heritages, to contrast the future, represented by the second-generation migrants. Teo tests the bonds of friendships in a multicultural society to contest identity politics. Her characters have demonstrated divergent approaches to their "Australianness" and, to readers' surprise, Australianness is not

necessarily contrasted to "Chineseness" or "Vietnameseness", as the future is to the past. Rather, through the lens of transgenerational memory, any notions of identity politics (national identity or cultural identity) based on race, sexuality, and difference are questioned in this book.

"Transgenerational memory" is a term coined in this thesis to illustrate how memory is passed down from the older to the younger generation, in ways that are not restricted by national boundaries or time. In this sense, transgenerational memory may refer to both memory travelling from other spaces, such as Lihn's cultural memory of Vietnam, and memory passed down within a culture, such as the Australian national memory inherited by Bob from his father and refused by his son Gibbo. Under globalisation and the fluidity of migration, the nature of memory has experienced dramatic changes. In a co-authored article by Lacroix and Fiddian, a new framework of "travelling memory" is introduced as a kind of memory that can "travel between the older and younger generations, and across space when separated from their parents and broader refugee community when they leave home-camps" (685). They further argue:

> although diaspora studies often implicitly centralise the inter-generational transmission of a common and collective memory of the homeland as a perquisite for the survival and strengthening of the diaspora (as noted above), the diverse ways in which children and youth 'inherit', contest, negotiate, transmit and mobilise specific memories have, nonetheless, infrequently been examined in diaspora studies. (692)

In this chapter, inspired by the notion of "travelling memory", I use the concept of "transgenerational memory" as a frame through which to view the dynamics of travelling

memory and the flexibility of diasporic identity. In *Behind the Moon*, the three families in which the protagonists grow up have different approaches to memory and building a new identity in Australia. This "new" identity is referred to in this chapter as "future identity", meaning identity to be built in the future, and is not only applied to the second-generation characters, but also to observe the changing identities politics of "white" Australia.

As is indicated in earlier theoretical discussion, identity is a term under question and essentialist identity politics based on race, culture or sexuality are seriously debated in the humanities, especially literary circles. Chih-Yun Chiang from the University of Denver points out the impact of globalisation on borders and cultures: "Since globalization de-territorializes, the borders of countries and the bounds of cultures become blurred, contested, open-ended, unstable, and frequently modified" (31). This trend will clearly influence the way people view others. As migrants flow into countries such as Australia, Canada, and the U.S.A, the modes of identity formulation are expanded, challenged, and contested.

Published in 2005, *Behind the Moon* is set in an earlier period of the promotion of multiculturalism in the 1990s when a specific time in Australia is experiencing "a changing face". Brock Bastian comments on "the changing face of Australia" over the last 200 years:

> The changing face of Australia is both a personal experience as well as an object of social and political contestation. As Australia opens its borders to an increasingly diverse population, this also requires that Australians themselves open their minds to include new and diverse lifestyles, foods, cultural traditions and values. Barriers to change not only exist within policy, but also within individual responses to change. (56)

Teo creates three marginalized characters who respond to changes happening in both their personal lives and Australian history, and creates a "marginalized space" symbolized by the eventually dysfunctional friendships between Tien, Gibbo and Justin. The function of this space is as "a place of power, a place of resistance" (Chiang 39). As Chiang observes, such marginalized people seek "not only to search for their hidden histories, to reclaim the representation of themselves, but also to open up a new possibility to critique the restraints of identity politics" (40). In *Behind the Moon*, identity formulation is contested by the responses to transgenerational memory in different families, while each family has a unique parent-to-child pattern regarding their transgenerational memory strategy. Tien is trapped between a Vietnamese mother and an Australian form of mothering; Justin has no past to cling to because he was educated to be "a real Aussie"; and Gibbo, as an "Aussie" boy, fails to meet the standards of the identity offered by Australian national memory, and chooses to be a man who cares about love instead of ethnicity, race or culture.

Teo critiques the negative influence of transgenerational "sentimental" Australian national memory and myths on individual Australians. *Behind the Moon*, together with books like *Unpolished Gem* (2006) and Simone Lazaroo' s *The World Waiting to Be Made* (1994), forms an updated negotiation of:

> Asian' identities in new generations, [in which] new identities are formed for immigrant children through a concept of themselves as first and foremost Australians and a combination of cultural influences-Australian, American, European and 'Asian'. (Healy 3)

The idea of being "first and foremost Australian" involves "new" understanding and re-negotiation of the transgenerational memory through which second-generation migrants claim their belonging but conflict with the "ancient history" imposed by their parents. In the following discussion, I observe how the three main protagonists, Tien, Justin and Gibbo, respond to the issue of transgenerational memory passed down, questioned, or cut off by their parents, or adopted parents. For Tien, her problems lay in-between two culturally divergent "mothers" between which she has to choose in order to establish her mode of remembrance and belonging. With a loss of family roots and as an Asian gay man, Justin is more concerned about how to "fit in" with Australian mateship and meanwhile maintain his sexual orientation, while Gibbo's issue is whether he can rely on the "national myth" to become a real Australian or on his partly "self-invented" family memory to be also Chinese.

3. A "Vietnamese Daughter" with an "Aussie Heart"

In *Behind the Moon*, the most complicated and contested "transgenerational memory" is presented through Tien's relationships with her two "mothers": her real mother Lihn and her "adopted" mother Gillian Gibson. Lihn attempts to fill her mind with Vietnamese cultural memory and traditions, to help her be an obedient Vietnamese daughter, while Gillian helps Tien adapt to her "adopted country" and become a "normal" Australian teenager. Tien's strategy towards these divergent and contradictory modes of remembrance is clear: she relies on the notion of becoming a new self, a real "Aussie". Although she feels she has debts to pay to her real mother, she is willing to build a "forward identity" without the participation of an "imposed past" from her mother Lihn, who is deeply influenced by the *Hieu Thao* in Vietnamese culture.

To Lihn, Australia is a big refugee camp, rather than a "new home". Before discussing the way Tien treats transgenerational inheritance, Lihn as a filial Vietnamese daughter herself should be examined to help understand how Teo helps readers understand the dilemma faced by second-generation refugee children that they have "abandoned" homeland in memory and also must survive in a "not quite welcoming" new country. Lihn's frequent quotes from *The Tale of Kieu* also demonstrate her reliance on Vietnamese cultural memory and reading history. To begin each chapter, Teo quotes from the well-known Vietnamese poet Nguyen Du's verse *The Tale of Kieu* as clues in *"*foreshadowing each chapter's moral focus*"* (Healy, 2). As a very significant moral guidebook, it tells the story of a miserable woman who experiences personal misfortune in relationships with men and life. Linh resembles the protagonist in her previous romance with the American GI Bucky and her first marriage with a Chinese man. She is also a follower of *Hieu Thao*, the Vietnamese notion of filial duty. Her father Ho used to own a printing press in Cholon that published Vietnamese literature. The novel recounts that Lihn spent her childhood in her father's publishing house and learned to recite many Vietnamese poems including *The Tale of Kieu.* She bonds herself closely and deeply to Vietnamese cultural memory, so she teaches her daughter Tien to look back to these memories in order to build a more harmonious mother-daughter relation built on mutual identification as Vietnamese.

However, Tien's experience as a refugee changes the way Tien's memory works. Unlike the transgenerational inheritance from father to daughter, like Ho's to Lihn's, Tien's homelessness and motherlessness voids the normal "function" of transgenerational memory as a torchlight leading to the past. Kieu said, "You once bore me, you've brought me up, a double debt I've not repaid one whit" (196). Teo quotes these lines to express Tien's

complicated feelings towards her mother Lihn. She feels she owes a lot to her mother, but at the same time, she is not willing to pay Lihn back by following Vietnamese moral requirements as a filial daughter who dares not challenge her mother. In the five years while her mother Lihn sends no news and has contact with her, Tien feels like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, unwanted by her relatives, because "there was a shortage of mothers, and not enough of Auntie Ai-Van to go around" (*BM* 27). From a very early age, Tien learns to contract her space as much as possible, so that she feels she is not causing trouble to her relatives: "She never lost her temper and she never showed her hurt. She kept her feelings to herself and tried to efface herself from their lives" (*BM* 26).

Her lack of a mother is temporarily addressed when she meets Gibbo's mother Gillian, a nice Australian woman who always holds sympathetic attitudes towards refugees like Tien. Her wish to have a daughter coordinates with Tien's urge to have a mother and results in close "parental relations" crossing ethnicity. Tien dreams about "slipping her hand into the older woman's. She longed for the intimacy of mother-daughter chats" (*BM* 34). Tien regards Gillian as her "Australian mother" who teaches her to cook Aussie food and teaches her about female hygiene. "It was Gillian who bought Tien her first bag of bulky sanitary pads and Tien kept them as her 'treasure'" (35) and "Sometimes, Tien also imagined calling Gillian 'mum'" (35). In a way, Gillian opens a door to Tien's new life and new sense of identity as Australian. She wants to form her own future starting from the day she arrives in Australia, with a wish to re-write her past as a refugee and build a future with nothing related to her life in Vietnam or in the refugee camp. Gillian's participation in Tien's life makes Tien confident in a "new" self. She wonders "if Gillian understood how important it was for her to do these mundane mother-daughter things with this white Australian woman." (34). And Tien

realises that “when Gillian didn’t go on and on about Vietnam and refugees, there was nobody Tien loved more” (34).

Gillian is keen on knowing the past that Tien feels “she didn’t really want to belong to” (*BM* 33), which indicates a conflict between them about the question of facing Tien’s past as a refugee. It is Gillian who “made Tien aware of problems she didn’t want to know about, because all she wanted was to be a normal, everyday Australian” (33). This temporary mother-daughter relationship suggests the need of second-generation teenage refugees to establish an identity that is not discriminated against by the locals. The Australian identity they would like to adopt is the clichéd one established on Australian national myth or cultural memory. Tien’s strategies towards her mother’s memories of the past are resistance and deliberate ignorance. When her mother reappeared in her life five years after Tien has arrived in Australia, she hates her mother who “poked and pried into ” her life (41), the life starting not long ago with Gillian, Gibbo and Bob, a happy Australian family which welcomes her as “Tina”.

To Tien, memories about her refugee experience should be eliminated from her current life while her mother is viewed as a force to drag her back to her identity as a refugee and as a Vietnamese daughter. Her mother’s return requires Tien’s detachment from Gillian since Gillian feels it is the right thing for Tien to return to her biological mother’s side, and she suggests to Tien that she needs to “spend more time at home” (*BM* 41). This brings Tien hurt and a feeling of rejection which “was swift and stunning, a lightning-quick punch to the solar plexus” (41).

Lihn's identity as a refugee cannot be simply erased and her past is part of the collective memory of the turmoil that happened in Vietnam. Her participation in Australian national memory is not as a 'normal' Australian but as a refugee who is an object for study and research. She feels she is not being treated equally. Her attitudes towards the past show how she is eager to establish a new life in the new country but memories of the refugee experience haunt her and impede the process of forming a new self. Lihn's attitudes towards her past are paradoxical: she wants to escape from poverty and war, but she is not willing to give up her Vietnamese identity. Her pattern of viewing identity as a culturally established formation influences her daughter, while Tien has a different perspective. She wants more than to "be treated normal"; she is longing to fit in and become a real citizen of Australia. Lihn mentioning Tien's childhood memories makes Tien feel unhappy and she makes it clear that she does not care about what happened in Vietnam, be it a traumatic or quiet childhood. Tien avoids anything that happened before her arrival in Australia. Lihn's fragmentary memory is rejected by Tien because they have different life objects and divergent views of identity. Lihn wants to live a happy life while Tien urgently seeks belonging to her adopted country.

Lihn's and Tien's life experiences open the discussion of refugees' "in-betweenness" in two countries. For refugee migrants, the first thing is to survive and the second thing is to be treated as normal citizens rather than carrying the "refugee" label all the time.

> There were those on television talk shows who revelled in remembered traumas; who believed that by recovering the past and reliving pain, they could conjure up the meaning of their lives. They told and retold their autobiographies in the hope that, this time, the end result would be something different from the disappointment life

> generally turned out to be. This time there would be healing. There would be wholeness. They would at last achieve normality. (*BM* 43)

Lihn does not like this way of telling refugee stories such as on television shows because she treats her refugee experience as a wound which cannot be touched. These differences are proven by the play of trans-generational memory in *Behind the Moon*. Tien does not inherit and follow *Hieu Thao*, though she feels she owes her mother. Her efforts to become a real Australian are often interrupted by her mixed feelings towards both cultures:

> You haven't earned [my respect]. Tien decided, but the thought did not sit comfortably with her because a large part of her was still Vietnamese, however much she might flail against it. (*BM* 46)

> Sometimes she wished she was still an orphan. (*BM* 46)

To fit in and realise her dream, Tien needs not only to forget her past, but also change her mother culturally and linguistically: Tien mocks her mother's dress and looks, and reminds her "You're not in Vietnam anymore" (49). She has a clear sense of wishing to belong to Australian culture and traditions.

Lihn confronts her daughter, asking whether Tien knows "Hieu Thao", and Tien says no and indicates she knows nothing of the Vietnamese language (49). Tien does not want to hear her family past in Vietnam and regards Lihn's family story as "ancient history" (*BM* 68). Tien is trapped in-between the fresh start of being an Australian citizen and the haunting past of being a Vietnamese girl. Her skin colour is a tattoo symbolizing her origin as "non-white" girl and the non-whiteness brings her worries and anxiety about not fitting in, no matter how

hard she tries. Tien's strategy towards the transgenerational memories of Lihn and Gillian suggests her orientation: she does not want to be treated as an "outsider" in Australia so she chooses to start learning how to be a real Australian girl in terms of dressing, cooking and using language, but her relations with Gillian shows the dysfunctionality of her choice. Thus, the difficulty of becoming suggests the inflexibility of a clichéd white Australian approach to identity in which many selection criteria such as skin colour, language competency and cultural tradition play crucial roles in judging one's identity.

Similarly to Tien, Justin has a refusal strategy towards his family's past, left behind in Singapore, and he would rather establish his own realm of remembrance. He is not willing to live like Singaporeans but his urge to grow up an Australian is conflicted with the clichéd definition of Australian masculinity and Australianness built on national myth. Teo complicates Justin's life with his engagements with the notion of Australian masculinity, established by his re-working of the film of *Gallipoli* from the perspective of an Asian gay, and his participation in national memory as a failed male. The Strathfield massacre is an event of national trauma but when the incident happens, he is having his first sexual encounter in a public toilet. His personal pleasure adds to his guilt at not being "man" enough as a real Australian to witness the historical moment and for his absence from the mall and his two best friends where the killer is shooting people. This doubles with his shame for his later labelled identity as "Rice Queen", a sex toy for his gay partner. Teo's reflection on Australian masculinity, observed by Morris:

> allows for a (re)visioning of 'other' models of mateship; models that exist outside of the heroic, white male duo otherwise encoded in *Gallipoli*. In this sense, *Behind the Moon* is a timely intervention in the debate about national identity, prompting as it

> does a collision between discourses of masculinity, mateship, nationhood and race. (151)

Engaging Justin's sexuality with national expectations of "Aussie boys", Teo playfully uses *Gallipoli* as a contested context in which Australian mateship and masculinity are seriously questioned. Justin carries shame and guilt as long as he knows he is gay, thus, to him, "normality" matters heavily in his life. Unlike Tien, he does not have a parent to guide him about Chinese history or culture. His parents encourage him to be a real Australian citizen and they allow him to completely ignore their cultural roots. He may look Chinese to Australians, but he is Australian when he returns to Singapore for a family reunion. Justin is determined to create his "new" identity by creating his own remembrance. Though transgenerational memory is not made obvious in Justin's life, Teo interweaves Justin's life with Australian historical incidenst to imply the connection between Justin's personal life and Australian national memory. Justin's participation in Australian national memory is a "failed" one. He never appears as a real Australian man. His efforts to shake off his cultural roots as a Chinese and become a new self are outweighed by his "otherized" gay identity:

> Justin had tried to make himself normal for his parents - the good son - and then he'd tried to make himself normal for his friends. He now realised that it was impossible because he didn't know who he was either. People said being gay wasn't a lifestyle, it was an orientation. But this wasn't entirely true as far as Justin could see. Being gay was a complicated affair. Gayness was an identity and, if you got it right, it was a means of belonging. If you didn't, if you were an Asian gay, it was practically an oxymoron. (14)

Justin's identity is an oxymoron in Australian society partly because he is "rootless". He is an Asian boy who knows little about the cultural heritage through which he may be visually recognized as a real Asian, which suggests the lack of inherited transgenerational memory from Justin's parents. On the other hand, his gayness indicates his "wrong" perception of and participation in Australian national memory, which demonstrates his dilemma as an Asian gay man. Owing to the absence of memory of his homeland, Justin is determined to claim his own space of remembrance, first by changing his physical looks, and then by making friends with Tien and Gibbo.

With a "future" to be built, Justin decides to assimilate into Australian culture and after he develops a "gym-fit swimmer's body", he finally approaches a white man (*BM* 150). Justin is close to the future he designs for himself: "He could not help fantasising about the future. Here was a white man who actually appreciates Asians!" (151) And when he meets his white partner Dirk, he feels "accepted, wanted, loved, by a white man" (162). Second-generation migrants are shown to value progression, and to be prepared to sacrifice their past for a future. Justin's "new" identity depends on the memory he creates for himself. At this point in the novel, Justin is satisfied with his life and the relationship with Dirk makes him feel his life is moving into a new stage. However, the relationship does not last long and Justin ends up in a coma after being beaten by gay haters. Justin's "search for love and identity results in him being beaten almost lifeless" (333). This is the moment when Justin realises "the closer he got, the further away it danced, those particles of white light refracted in a weeping sky" (334). Justin's strategy towards the "absent" memory of his past is not successful because of his inability to build a "new" space for memory in his new life. He is pushed by the norms in Australian society and has no autonomy to claim his space as an Australian. His participation

in Australian national memory is passive, because he has no voice. However, Teo does provide some optimism for Justin in the end:

Before falling into a coma, Justin

> thought about Gibbo and Tien. That was what he really wanted, he thought. His friends. In the lilt and drag of his pummelled body he remembered the rocking motion of a Ferris-wheel cage in Glenelg and he would have given anything to be a child again. (*BM* 333)

Justin's childhood memory with Tien and Gibbo, the naive experience when he does not consider identity as a serious issue, is his treasure through which he sees his future. At the last, Justin realises he "no longer needed the external markers of identity, the first thing people saw or learned about him and judged him by" (*BM* 333-334). For Justin, his "otherized" identity is a critique of Australian national memory on which the notions of Australian masculinity are built. Through creating Justin as a character, Teo indicates how the ignorance of national collective memory in the host land may lead to the failure to fit into traditional norms of identity in a diasporic society. However, the exclusion of Justin suggests that identity as a notion performs the role of exclusion, rather than inclusion. Justin's eagerness to gain recognition is disappointed by the "gated community" in Australia.

Gibbo is the only central white character in this book though equally invisible among his counterparts, and the one who is stout and the "class reject". Gibbo's whiteness does not ensure his identity as an Australian, opening a space for re-considering whether the definition of a "real Aussie" stands stable or is being contested, as Australia has been in its new phase as a multicultural and multilingual country. Like Justin, Gibbo's problem of belonging is

contested through his position as an excluded white boy in Australian society and his inability to inherit his father's mode of memory as a white male. His father Bob is a retired Army officer who once fought in Vietnam and met Tien's mother Lihn and father Bucky there. He is a "typical" white Australian man, falling perfectly into the definition of a "real Australian": he is white, masculine, eats barbequed meat and once served in the Army. For Bob, Gibbo is not "a proper man, a real Aussie" (*BM* 98). When Gibbo asks where is the *choy,* the response is*:* "'Bloody idiot,' Bob growled. 'Speak English, why can't you. And you eat what your mother puts on the table'" (101). Bob hopes Gibbo plays sports, speaks English and is slim and fit. In reality, Gibbo cannot fulfil his father's dream that he be an ideal Australian teenager. As Morris argues, Teo challenges Australian mateship, what Rattigan defines as "the single most important element in the cultural identity of Australia" (Morris 27). In the novel, both Justin and Gibbo are excluded from "Australian mateship" owing to its strict barriers and restrictions.

Gibbo is not successful in inheriting his father's mode of remembrance, against which Gibbo insists on his Chinese heritage. His family memory about the Chinese heritage is a blurry shadow in his family and Bob never mentions this part so the novel leaves Gibbo's Chinese heritage a mysterious unsolved case. Gibbo's search for his family history related to Chinese heritage is interrupted by a father who wants to convert Gibbo into a typical Australian and a mother who has no interest in knowing that part of history. Gibbo's Chinese heritage is put into doubt and mystery, but his insisting in knowing his identity as a Chinese conflicts with his forced identity as a white Australian, thus in this way, Gibbo's belonging as an Australian is shaky and unstable. Gibbo's inability to be seriously considered as a boy with Chinese heritage by his Asian friends owing to his whiteness forms an "opposite" gaze from the Asian

community and pinpoints the problematic nature of identity. Once you need to be defined, you need to be recognized. By looking for a solid identity, Gibbo loses track of who he really is. His whiteness in appearance contrasts with his "yellowness" in mind and eventually leads to his 'abnormal' behaviour in pursuing Lihn, the mother of his best friend.

For a long time, whiteness in Australia has been a symbol of advantage: in Australia, white people claim their ownership of this country as "settlers" and use whiteness as a marker of Australian national identity. Gibbo, as a figure of a disadvantaged "white boy", is an ironic comment on the traditional way of viewing other ethnicities from the "white" point of view. Faced with two "Asian" friends and marginalised by his "White" classmates, Gibbo as a rejected boy feels he is not good enough to be Australian and not "yellow" enough to be Asian. In the text, Gibbo expresses his anxiety about losing his two friends because of his ethnicity:

> As he watched Tien and Justin drawing closer together in the later years of high school, he felt the panicky sensation of being left out. He began to fear that it was because he was not Asian. (*BM* 61)

Gibbo also reflects on the question of identity:

> It bewildered him, for when he looked at Tien, he did not really see a Vietnamese. She hardly spoke Vietnamese anymore. In any case, she was a half-American … something. Who knew what her father was? Some of the Asian parents looked down on her, so why would she want to identify with them? Unless ethnicity was bred into your bones by the thousand daily rituals and the million different meals you ate

> throughout your life. Unless identity was like a radio wave that pulsed through the ether until it found an available channel which decoded it as ethnicity and broadcast that to all the world. Did Tien think of herself as Vietnamese or Australian or some hyphenated mixture? More worryingly, was there some intrinsic Asianness that would bind Tien and Justin more closely together, cutting him out of the loop and leaving him alone once again in his not-quite-Australianess? (61)

As an unwanted white boy Gibbo reverses the colonized and colonizer; he is thus becoming the one who wishes to be colonized by Asian culture, though he is regarded as an image of a settler. His example questions fixed notions of identity politics based on ethnicity, race or culture. For Gibbo, Tien is not quite Vietnamese and he is not quite Australian. His shadowy illusions about his Chinese heritage expose the anxiety of white settlers, as they are hybrid themselves, and the norms established by whiteness are self-conflicted. Gibbo's strategy towards transgenerational memory from his father is doubtful and even rebellious because, for Gibbo, what matters is his friendship with Tien and Justin, and "identity" to him is less important than love. Gibbo struggles to live like a "normal" Australian because of his confused sense of belonging to two modes of memory: one is Bob's, which remembers his family as white settlers, and the other is Gibbo's self-taught family history. While Gibbo's strategy in selecting which transgenerational memory to belong to is made obvious in the novel, this is an issue that bewilders him and makes him ponder problems of the "inheritance" from his parents:

> your parents are your parents, and although the quest for their approval might bend and shape the pattern of your life, it could never fill the empty womb that grew within you still (*BM* 292).

Gibbo's "empty womb" is a symbol of his "confused" belonging: to which culture should he be close and which mode of remembrance should he adopt? To follow in his father's footsteps to be Australian with no white friends, or to follow the scent of Asian food and learn Singaporean dialect to be "Asian" based on his fantasy of a Chinese great-great-grandfather? Gibbo poses these questions to readers and to himself, and he questions the essence of identity. Even though he is Australian by appearance, he may be not recognized as one, because he is not authentic enough as a real "Aussie". He feels empty in his soul, and so do his best friends. The estrangements of the three indicate the hollowness of minds driven by the enthusiasm to become an authentic Australian.

Tien, Justin and Gibbo form a dysfunctional triangular friendship, in which each person has some similarities with the others and also challenges the others. Rebellious Tien and silent Justin are "Asians" in Bob's and Gillian's eyes, and they both turn against the memories of their parents or relatives. Their transgenerational memory strategies show their desire to start "new journeys" in their adopted country. However, as shown by Justin portrayed as a "Rice Queen" to his white partners, and "Asian faggot" to gay haters, and as shown by Tien portrayed as "Tina" in Bob's eyes and "Abo" in her classmates' mind, the process of creating a new self is dependent on others, whose definitions might be hostile. Though memory crosses borders and crosses generations, both Tien and Justin ignore the relations between memory and identity. They have no past and no roots, thus their assimilation into Australian society is a failure. On the other hand, the flow of second-generation migrants into

Australia is shown not only to confuse those migrants about who they are but also the local children like Gibbo. Traditional "Aussie" patterned friendships and parent-child relationships are influenced by mixed multiculturalism. By looking at the function of transgenerational memory in different groups and individuals, *Behind the Moon* deconstructs the notion of identity as a "useless" term, indicated by Justin's own confession before entering a coma:

> And at last, for the first time in his life, he knew that this was true. He no longer needed the external markers of identity, the first thing people saw or learned about him and judged him by. He was not reducible to his ethnicity or his sexuality or his occupation or geographical location or even to his family. Somewhere between the surface of his skin and the creases of his soul, in the interstice of mind and matter, there was a void in which he simply was. (*BM* 333-334)
>
> 'I am me,' he said. He accepted it. (*BM* 333-334)

In the end, the three of them look at their past from the present. Despite the futile struggle for a "future" identity which will solidify their "Aussie" way of living, Tien, Justin, and Gibbo realise the most precious thing they have created is their childhood memory as "Three Musketeers". Though the text complicates the relations of the three by narrating Tien's openly declared love for Justin, Justin's bold attempt to "kiss Gibbo long and hard" and Gibbo's obsession with Tien's mother, Lihn (*BM* 92), the text presents the futility of the efforts to search for a place "Behind the Moon", the ideal home, by creating an optimistic ending. Finally, the three of them start to learn to cherish their friendship. Tien regrets to leave her friends:

> for the first time in years, she yearned for her childhood friends. She wanted Gibbo and Justin and she mourned for the stupidity of lost time and squandered friendships. (332)

Tien succeeded in establishing her kingdom of memory in Australia by bonding with her friends but it is by leaving that space that she could realise the existence of the bonds to her self-created memory.

Gibbo regrets his rudeness towards Justin:

> He wished he'd had the maturity, the compassion and courage to kiss Justin back, hug him tightly, then ease away and say with a smile, 'Jus, if I was gay you'd be it for me. Maybe in our next lives, mate. Let's drink to that, eh? (337)

As for Justin, he is the one being cherished by his friends and family. The ending of this novel suggests that the only way to live a happy life in Australia in a time when both memories and identities are seriously doubted and contested is to not think about any labels and markers, but to believe in love.

Transgenerational memory for Justin, Tien and Gibbo is a burden that they do not want to bear. Not only do they rebel against their parents' pasts but they also select a shared but unique way of remembering. Because of lacking a voice in seemingly multicultural but actually "hollow-hearted" Australia, the protagonists discover that the only way to find an ideal home is to live in love. *Behind the Moon* addresses the issue of memory in transnational and transgenerational frames, but it is a text with three protagonists either fighting against imposed cultural memory or building new memories – such as childhood memory of the three

protagnists. Finally, Tien, Justin and Gibbo realise that rather than make so much effort to be recognized by others, they need to cherish what they have in the present life. They begin to create their remembrance of their recent past:

> [Gibbo] could not help rewinding and replaying the past in his mind, and his memories always stuttered to a stop when they reached that night at Reef Beach. In a life strewn with mistakes, Gibbo had one major regret. He wished he had kissed Justin just once that night. (*BM* 337)

While Tien and Gibbo begin to cherish the "new" memories generated by them, Justin also thinks about Gibbo and Tien before he loses his consciousness due to the beating by gay haters. Justin "clung to the thought of Gibbo and Tien, and said, 'I'm a Mouseketeer. All for one, and one for all'" (*BM* 334). Instead of inheriting from their parents, they have generated "new" memories for them to create a "sense of needing" each other, rather than judging each other by ethnicity, sexuality or appearance.

The ending shows that belonging and identity are both like moonlight – blurry and watery. Second-generation migrant Australians face challenges of being and becoming Australians. The dream of becoming an authentic Australian has disappointed the three protagonists, and also takes their homeland memories from them, thus the second-generation migrants in the novel become hollow-hearted with "empty wombs". They cannot generate more cultural memory for the next generation, and they cannot bear more of the burden of identity. Teo ends this story with a hope: all the three characters have realised that identity is not a norm, but a fantasy. If you want to live happily, you'd better live without it.

Conclusion

> Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, languages, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall, "Who needs 'identity'? " 4)

In the introduction to this thesis, I introduced the existing research on Chinese-Australian literature and argued that, though a certain amount of criticism on Chinese-Australian literature has been published discussing many aspects of it, there has not yet been any consistent work talking about memory, as one of the major features of English-language literary works by migrants with Chinese heritage. I argue that a heavy focus on memory and identity is one of the main features that distinguish Chinese-Australian literature from other literatures. And starting from this claim, I have investigated how selected works represent and engage with notions of memory and identity. To support this argument, I analysed five English-language novels written by Chinese-Australian writers to observe their approaches to representing memory and identity. At the start of this thesis, I asked several questions as to how these novels demonstrate the proposed features, and what are the relations of memory and identity represented in these novels are. It is now time to reflect on whether these enquiries have been answered.

Firstly, this thesis does not solely discuss representations; it also aims at interdisciplinary research, theorizing memory and identity in a diasporic literary frame. It has been demonstrated through these texts that memory and identity have causal relations. Memory, to some extent, decides identity. These selected texts not only represent memory and identity, but also prove that the relations of memory and identity are crucial to the central ideas of these novels. Rather than understand memory as restricted to the characters' personal memories about homeland trauma, diasporic sufferings, and deeply rooted cultural memories about China, this thesis enlarges the critical horizon by engaging with memory studies and identity studies in sociological and cultural research. Through this, the thesis unfolds a bigger picture of how memory is perceived and constructed in these novels, as a dynamic notion that transcends divisions between individual and the collective, ethnic differences, national borders, political frames, as well as generations. The thesis, in this way, fills a gap of theorizing the notion of memory and identity represented in diasporic Chinese literature.

1. Re-thinking Memory and Identity in Chinese-Australian Literature

Interdisciplinary research into memory studies offers insights into the representations of remembrance and forgetting in literatures, and explains the need for closer observation of the issue of memory in Chinese-Australian literature. The way in which diaspora and memory are interactive notions is introduced too, based on which this thesis has stepped out on a journey probing into the dynamics of past and present in Chinese-Australian literature.

The thesis' theoretical framework has also discussed how identity is apprehended in diasporic literatures. Identity is a term with many problematics and is also a contested notion in a transnational context. Identity, rather than a notion defined by a nation state, is now, like

memory, entering a phase of transition. Literary identity is entering Apter's "translation zone", and is constantly translated in different textual contexts, such as these represented by the selected novels, along with the dynamics of memory. Both memory and identity are challenged in this thesis since diasporic memory – as a reference to nostalgia towards a homeland, traumatic remembrance as healing, and a way of confirming one's belonging to one's past – has been greatly challenged. The connotations of diaspora memory are extended by looking at the narratives of divergent stories about remembrance, forgetting, and even the creation of new modes of remembrance and forgetting. Accordingly, the conventional way of perceiving the identity and belonging of Chinese migrants – as either homeland-bound or in a state of rootlessness – has also been seriously challenged. As Peta Stephenson claims, Chinese-Australian literature narrates both "where they are from" and "where they are at" (124). This thesis' deconstruction of both fixed memory and identity drives the whole discussion into a seemingly contradictory but consistent conclusion: there is neither fixed modes of memory nor stable belonging and identity within Chinese diasporas in Australia.

The five novels addressed – *Silver Sister* by Lillian Ng, *Shanghai Dancing* by Brian Castro, *The English Class* by Ouyang Yu, *Playing Madame Mao* by Lau Siew Mei and *Behind the Moon* by Hsu-Ming Teo – represent five ways of interpreting how memory works, and each mode of memory has a significant role in influencing the sense of belonging for the characters. These novels also reinforce the relations of memory and identity in literature. Among the selected texts, *Silver Sister, Shanghai Dancing* and *Playing Madame Mao* engage the role of individual memory in interaction with collective memory or cosmopolitan memory. However, their ways of representing these similar notions are quite different. *Silver Sister* focuses on representing the courage of Chinese women who joined Chinese diasporas from

the 1910s to the 1990s and how they experienced identity crises when crossing borders. The main character is portrayed as an illiterate Chinese woman in exile, full of curiosity, determination and strong will. The past diasporic experience described in *Silver Sister* is set a significant distance from the present and the story stretches across about seven decades, with travelling routes covering more than five places, beginning in a remote village in China and ending up in Australia. The way it represents Silver's individual memory is different from that in *Shanghai Dancing* and *Playing Madame Mao*.

As the chapter discussing *Silver Sister* outlines, Silver's remembrance of her ancestral home in China shows her nostalgia towards the remote past across national borders and her longing for a stable identity. The interactions between Silver's personal recounting of Chinese history and the collective memory of the Chinese people show the characters' ambivalence in choosing between living like an authentic Chinese or like a rootless person who has no place to belong. The novel's plots indicate the relation between diasporic routes and Silver's identity transformation. Changing from an illiterate peasant girl to a well-off Australian citizen, Silver demonstrates both the way in which the transformation of female identity in clichéd Chinese diasporic texts and the way Chinese female characters can view their individual memory against the national past. This individual memory offers a perspective to observe how women characters grow into maturity in chaotic social environments. Furthermore, through analysis of *Silver Sister*'s generic features as a feminist bildungsroman, the detachment of the protagonist from a national past can be interpreted as the same process as the detachment of individual memory from collective memory.

This novel provides a way to theorise the relation between individual remembrance and a collective national past in diasporic literary texts and, as it is shown through close reading of

the text, characters in clichéd representations of Chinese diaspora, instead of seeking for a sense of belonging in a host country, pay more attention to their development of individuality and well-being. Characters are portrayed as people who attempt to exert authority over their own remembrance and narratives. Thus, *Silver Sister* is a book where individual memory claims its territory against collective memory. Because it narrates Chinese diasporas that begin in China, where power shifts frequently and governments change due to war, the protagonist Silver, through challenging the traditional socialist narrative voice, is presented as a character who views her migration story to Australia as the success of her life. However, this is a book challenging the essence of Chineseness and collective memory; it is not an essentialist representation of the Chinese diaspora. By focusing on the interactions of individual memory and collective memory represented in this work, my chapter finds that even in traditional Chinese diasporic writing, the problematic relation of memory and identity is also present. Texts like *Silver Sister*, due to their focus the diasporic journey, pay more attention to connecting the collective with the individual memory mode. Both "collective memory" and "Chineseness" are contested; the perspective of individual memory is highlighted to demonstrate how Chinese women characters gain both maturity and individuality during travels to another place and culture. My inclusion of *Silver Sister* works as a starting point for the thesis, from which the issue of belonging in Chinese diasporas has gradually changed its face. *Silver Sister* represents the start of challenging an identity based on homeland cultural memory. However, because of the confinements of cultural environments in Australia and the language barriers set between the protagonist Silver and the locals in Sydney, *Silver Sister* portrays a state in which Chinese people in diaspora experience a detachment from the homeland but find no attachments in the host land.

While the failure of attachment in Australia is shared by the central characters of *Playing Madame Mao,* the dynamics between individual memory and collective memory become more active and instead demonstrate political conflicts. These conflicts between remembrance imposed by governmental force and remembrance guided by free will, go further in challenging notions of national identity and an imposed collective belonging. Unlike the main character in *Silver Sister,* Chiang Ching, the major character in *Playing Madame Mao,* is a talented actress and also a cultural intellectual. Her individual remembrance of Singapore, the homeland in the novel, is, similarly to that in *Silver Sister,* pitted against the 'agreed' national past, but only differentiates itself in the narrative structure, voice and central ideas. With its detailed examination of the complications in structural design, and its dual voices in narrating contemporary Singapore, the meaning of past and present is found to be mixed, merged and blurred in this novel. The history of the Cultural Revolution in China merges with the persecution by Singaporean government agencies of Ching's husband Tang, and the failed multiculturalism in Singapore echo with the equal failure of multiculturalism in Brisbane, Australia. In *Playing Madame Mao,* issues of identity for women in the Chinese diaspora are presented as not only about maturity and individuality, but as more general concerns contesting notions of national identity and personal belonging at the same time. The failure to establish a stable national identity within the novel is presented as the loss of memory. Memory, thus, not only links to the issue of personal belonging, but also is viewed as a significant aspect of viewing imagined national belonging. China, Singapore and Australia are presented in this novel as countries that have all failed to establish national belonging. Identity is manipulated by political power, and thus becomes complicated in terms of its formation.

So these two chapters deal with the issue of memory and identity from the perspective of collective memory and individual memory in different ways: *Silver Sister* shows us how forced diasporas work as a way of generating nostalgic feelings towards a remote traumatic past while *Playing Madame Mao* narrates how the protagonist sets herself free from imposed collective memory and willingly migrates. These different representations of modes of diaspora help readers understand how individual belonging can be influenced by the dynamics of memory. Compared to *Silver Sister*, *Playing Madame Mao* takes the question of identity further into a political frame of understanding but joins the former to enrich our understanding of the interactions of individual memory with questions of human rights, political governance as well as national frames of identity formation.

The English Class expresses the issue of rootlessness by addressing the confusions of bilingual migrants. The text creates Jing as a patient who does not know whom he should become, and his identity is at stake because of his bilingual capacity. His past refers to the time when he explains English terms in Chinese while his present life is full of "translated" communication, in explaining Chinese phrases in English to his wife. Jing is stuck between the two languages and their past-present dynamics make him more confused about who he can be and how he can achieve a stable identity as either a Chinese or an Australian citizen. The rootlessness of the protagonist is not due to a flexible national identity resulting from personal confusion, but because of confusions caused by cultural translation in the daily life portrayed in the novel. Ouyang comically represents the relations of memory and identity exposing the conflicts between Chinese language and English language. The issue of attachment to mother language or father language influences the perception of past and present, and belonging or rootlessness. It involves the question of whether the past can be

kept within a language and whether Jing needs to abandon his mother tongue (Chinese) in order to be recognised in a society where Chinese is not a dominant language and Chinese culture is not the most powerful culture. The protagonist Jing attempts to keep his past experience and homeland culture in his mind, so he translates ancient Chinese poetry and also tells stories in English to his Australian wife about his past. Jing's failed communication to his wife and with Australian society as a bilingual migrant not only shows his state of un-belonging but also questions the aims of multiculturalism – does it reinforce migrant identity and recognise uniqueness including the uniqueness of languages, or does it only value a written label of a country with migrants from different cultural backgrounds? Jing's rootlessness, though caused by his refusal to be assimilated into mainstream Australian society and his ambition of translating homeland culture into his cross-cultural family, is avoidable if the mainstream society recognises Jing's capacity to speak two languages fluently. Jing's creation of "Jinglish" is a way to claim legitimacy in being a hybrid language learner and cultural reader.

The chapter on *The English Class* has attempted to explain the uniqueness of this book in its way of viewing how cultural memory is translated through languages and how diasporic identity is influenced by translation. Memory, especially cultural memory, is of great significance to migrants in this book, but the attempt to keep cultural memories even through translation is proven to be futile, because migrants like Jing are presented as unaware that they are being translated into the Australian society as well. Their pasts are not translated by themselves, and any autonomy in accepting these translations is also controlled by the main voices in the host country, not migrants themselves. Thus, identity is a term contested culturally by Ouyang. Cultures are usually believed to be closely related to one's identity, but

when cultures are translated into other cultures, what happens to identities? The chapter on *The English Class* suggests that old forms of cultural identity (identity based on homeland cultural affiliations) are being questioned in the process of migration and diaspora, and new forms of identity are being explored and discussed in novels such as this. The question of rootlessness challenges the notion of identity as an essentialist way of labelling people. Protagonists in both *Playing Madame Mao* and *The English Class* are represented as either avant-garde or intellectual; but they still feel they have no belonging to either country. The two books, thus, suggest the possibility that people who seek identity will feel more alienated and rootless. Since memory is fluid and flexible in political frames, cultures and languages, it cannot offer a fixed mode of identity or belonging.

Shanghai Dancing takes the discussion further, into a global vision. It is the only book in the thesis that places cosmopolitan family history in a global diasporic framework. The geographic perspective in this book is broader and the time frame of diaspora is much longer than any of the other novels. The chapter on *Shanghai Dancing* explores the possibility of expanding the understanding of collective memory by engaging with the notion of cosmopolitan memory, which was first proposed by Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider. Structurally and generically, it is a complicated book with a focus on deconstructing both traditional remembrance and clichéd identity decided by ethnic, national and gender boundaries. Castro's approach towards modes of memory is different from any of other texts discussed, as outlined. Instead of relating memory to cultures, ethnicity, and individuality one to one, this novel brings them all together into one notion of cosmopolitanism. Like Chiang Ching and Jing, its protagonist Antonio, as a rootless figure, narrates his stories in postmodernist plots set in broken structures of text, dual or multiple voices, as well as

interactions of the past and present. However, Antonio's life in Sydney is depicted as a central plot setting in Australia. In this way, Castro aims at representing how Australian diasporic figures view their pasts. Antonio's rootlessness is presented not through direct narration of diasporic routes, nor his traumatic past as an individual, but through a cosmopolitan voice speaking about a cosmopolitan family. By allegorically depicting a family in which memories of family members can be dated back to the 1600s, Castro presents memory as travelling in time and place. By analysing representations of cosmopolitanism in terms of memory and identity, the chapter on *Shanghai Dancing* reaches the conclusion that Castro is longing for a world where individuals are more concerned about family bonds, humanitarianism, and mutual understanding than their ethnic labels and cultural differences. Castro's novel calls for removing identity as a notion and creates a new identity formation based on cosmopolitan sharing of global history.

Behind the Moon is discussed in the last chapter of this thesis because it narrates three characters' lives in Australia, which makes it notably different from the rest of the four novels, all set loosely in different countries such as Singapore, China, Malaysia, and Hong Kong and even Portugal. *Shanghai Dancing* and *Behind the Moon* are somehow mirrored in their efforts to portray more than one protagonist and to formulate a new approach to interpreting memory forms within a fictional frame. Cosmopolitan memory works as an extension of collective memory, crossing national borders, and transgenerational memory in *Behind the Moon* helps examine memory across generations. The chapter examines how transgenerational memory is viewed as a deciding factor of future identity. Combining the word future with identity, I coin the term "future identity" in this chapter to refer to an imagined belonging to the host country. Through a close reading of the stories of three

protagonists coming from three different families and analysing their transgenerational memory, the chapter comes to the conclusion that there is no a fixed belonging waiting for the protagonists in their future. This is because a sense of belonging is not necessary for them to establish bonded relations with each other. Teo's ending shows them bonded together through new memories generated by themselves, rather than those passed down by parents. Using a memory lens and examining the plots using the notion of transgenerational memory has exposed how different forms of remembrance can conflict with each other in a multicultural country like Australia.

2. Beyond Homeland Nostalgia and the Australian Dream

As is argued, one of the key features of Chinese-Australian literature, especially novels, is the representation of diasporic memory. Therefore, all the selected novels represent their homelands (China, Singapore and Vietnam) and Australia as two poles on their memory globes. But there is not a fixed spiritual route from homeland to host land in these novels' narration; rather, the notions of homeland and host land have become merged and dynamically interactive with each other. Looking at how the protagonists remember or forget "homeland" and "Australia", Chinese-Australian literature can show how the notion of diaspora is also being transformed. Homeland is imagined by central characters in the five novels as a past to which they are never able to return. Since China is constantly imagined by various characters, as discussed in the thesis, China functions as the key example of an image of a homeland. Of these five novels, three of them are not focused directly on representing China as the starting point of diaspora. *Shanghai Dancing*, *Playing Madam Mao* and *Behind the Moon* include China only as one of the locations where protagonists once lived or imagined living. Since these novels are more about the host country Australia, or Singapore

for Lau, China works rather as an elusive past that does not arouse much of the protagonist' nostalgia, as a "You Zi", the Chinese term for a person in diaspora who is nostalgic towards his homeland. However, it is worth noticing that "China", though it is related to wars and messy family pasts, is represented as a place where people can enjoy a moment of peace. In the above novels, the concept of homeland does not equal nostalgia or a place storing nostalgic memory. Most of characters in *Shanghai Dancing* adopt a cosmopolitan approach towards their homelands, which indicates that homeland memories are not collective remembering based upon which characters have a collective belonging, but cosmopolitan. In *Shanghai Dancing*, the hostland- "Australia" is the place where the protagonist keeps more traumatic memories. In this sense, *Shanghai Dancing* blurs the boundaries between many possible "homelands" and deconstructs an essentialist way of understanding "China" as a place of nostalgia and trauma. In Castro's novel, Antonio goes back to Shanghai and encounters Carmen, a beautiful photographer, and becomes obsessed with her; she represents the charm of being "cosmopolitan" rather than "oriental". Antonio hates "orientalism", and the "cosmopolitan" mode of remembering a place, a period of history, enables Antonio to search for more places related to his family. Through the search for a cosmopolitan family past he concludes that identity as a label is useless. But in a way, the notion of "homeland" is also contested. China, to Antonio, is neither a destination nor a starting point. Thus, by using the phrase "Shanghai Dancing" to indicate diverse ways of understanding life and living cosmopolitan, Castro claims that nationalism does not help in acquiring identity, and diaspora can be cosmopolitan if the concept of a homeland is inaccessible.

Behind the Moon, instead of imaging "China" as either a homeland or a cosmopolitan symbol, represents it as "difference" or "other". Homeland memories are not directly addressed

because building hostland memory is the focus of this novel. None of the three protagonists come from China, but they all relate to China in some sense. Tien's mother used to be married to a Chinese man while Justin is from a Singaporean-Chinese family. Gibbo, as an Australian boy, has been longing to become Chinese. Though they have lost or intentionally refused homeland memories, the three protagonists are "refused" by Australian society in different ways: their imagined or imprinted Chineseness does not help to establish community or belonging, but makes them drift apart. Tien does not like to be related to anything Vietnamese or Chinese, while Gibbo's imagined identity as Chinese is not accepted by any friend or family members. Justin is tortured between the Confucius cultural burden to be a real man and a future father, and the idea of "coming out the closet" as an Asian gay. "China" is not represented as a sense of home, but as an imagined label; some want to rip it off while others wish they could have it tattooed to their body. *Playing Madame Mao* in a way, similar to *Behind the Moon*, does not address homeland memory directly, but "Chinese" history powerfully influences the "city-state" in the novel. The allusive links to the Cultural Revolution and other significant Chinese historical moments show Lau's intention of representing history as cyclic and identity as reflective; we see others and we perceive what we are. We look back to the past and we know what errors we are committing now.

In *Silver Sister*, China is a troubled homeland with turmoil, war, and painful memories. Silver, as a Chinese, is imprinted with Chineseness. However, the novel contests the notion of Chineseness by demonstrating the interactive relation between Silver's personal remembrance and the collective memory of a common Chinese. Silver's China is a haunted homeland and she wishes to go back to find a sense of belonging. (She does but is disappointed by the changes which have transformed her hometown.) Though her

remembering of the past is more cosmopolitan than that of people living in China, she still regards China as a place of nostalgia and belonging.

Jing in *The English Class* does not explicitly acknowledge China as his beloved motherland because of his dissatisfaction there. He imagines Australia (or any of the developed Western countries) as both a host country and a motherland where he can earn a fortune (125). China is presented as a "troubled" place where Jing has to suffer poverty and a low level of education. Homeland memory in this novel is represented as paradoxical and fluid. At first, Jing hates China and his memory of his past in China does not ensure him a sense of belonging; rather, by learning English, he is longing to migrate to an Anglo world where he can speak English. However, conversely, Jing wants to keep as much Chinese culture as possible, through cultural translation. The way *The English Class* presents China is oxymoronic: it is the source of pain and also the source of pleasure.

In conventional diasporic narratives, homeland equals nostalgia, homesickness, and trauma; however, homeland may refer to a "place of wisdom" as in Castro's case. China or Chinese culture is represented as the past in these novels, and the past keeps disturbing the present. Each novel's way of interpreting China as the past helps construct the new formations of identity.

Australia, represented as the host country in the five texts, is also a concept at stake. Through the representation of different kinds of memories crossing national boundaries, Australia, the hostland is presented as as equally troubled about the past and is represented as a contested place where memory begins to change, to deform and to become fluid. *Silver Sister* offers the most positive representation of Australia, compared to the other four texts. Silver, however,

has the least education and has not learned much about her host country because she does not speak English very often. Silver's individual memory is generated along her diasporic routes but it is in Australia that she constantly reflects on her homeland and generates clear thinking on her perception of identity. *Shanghai Dancing* initiates Antonio's return trip to China because of his troubled present in Australia, where he feels very bored and never feels "normal". Australia is not a place where Antonio generates new memories but a place where he starts to realise how important it is to live in a cosmopolitan way. *Behind the Moon* portrays Australia as a country with homophobia, racial discrimination and hostility towards "otherized" people or minority communities. Old memory encounters new memory in this novel and the question of how to belong is closely related to the question of how to deal with different memories. To the protagonists in *Shanghai Dancing* and *Behind the Moon*, "normality" is a state of being, which is difficult to find in Australia. In a way, Australia does not offer the "Australian Dream" to migrants; on the contrary, in Antonio's and Justin's eyes, it is a place of nightmare and trauma.

The English Class portrays a male character that is eager to go to Australia or any Western country. However, he is portrayed as suffering linguistic disorders and cannot live a normal life in his dreamland. He eventually travels to Dali, a place in China where his father once served his military duty in order to find his connection with China and Chineseness. Though he does not succeed in converting himself into an authentic Chinese by returning, neither does he become a real Australian, and he hates himself when staying in Australia because of being treated as inferior to others. Through Jing's case, this novel reminds readers that when cultural memory transcends borders, it is greatly influenced by the cultural environment in the hostland, and the protagonist demonstrates how cultural memory can be reimagined in a

different linguistic environment. These representations of Australia in the novels are not optimistic at all. Memories in both China and Australia are "troubled" and so is identity. None of the protagonists in these novels succeeds in finding a solid belonging in either homeland or host land. They all feel disillusioned in diaspora, self-consciously, or not. The ghost-like state of being suggests the failure of being attached to any of the destinations or homelands. In this way, the notion of diaspora is contested: there may be two homelands or no homelands at all. Host countries do not always mean the start of a new and prosperous life; instead, it may be another place of traumatic memory.

3. Strengthening the Relation between Memory and Identity

People in diaspora worry about the issue of identity; this is prominent in the five novels discussed in this thesis. The term identity covers many connotations: belonging, roots, cultural identity and citizenship. All the protagonists in the selected novels are implied to hold Australian permanent residency or Australian citizenship, but their stories reveal more about the ineffectiveness of citizenship and political identity. Neither Chineseness nor Australianess ensures them a fixed belonging. Diaspora texts thus destabilise hegemonic perceptions of national identity and fixed boundaries of place, which articulates the difficulties of pursuing a sense of belonging after migration.

What will the discussion of memory add on to the existing literature? The role of memory has been discussed in each chapter from different angles and it has been affirmed that understanding memory is crucial for understanding identity. The past keeps talking to the present in Chinese-Australian literature. Compared with Chinese-American literature, Chinese-Australian literature contains a larger proportion of literary works written by authors

with refugee experience, or as political activists, as well as by international students from mainland China, Singapore and other Asian countries with a Chinese populations. The Chinese diaspora in Australia are distinguished by a diversity of memories. Through the analysis of the five novels in this thesis, a reasonable conclusion is that these works, besides writing on memory, also contest the notion of memory. Since memory decides identity, so an unstable memory will explain the causes of an unstable identity.

One of the major findings is the diversity of memory representations in the selected novels. Although much research has been done on other diasporic literatures using memory as a perspective, such as Jewish literature and Mediterranean literature, little has been conducted on the Chinese-Australian field. Before starting the thesis, I once doubted where this micro perspective of memory would lead me. Here I am. These texts unveil a world of new modes of memory and the rich memories represented in these novels illustrate how memory travels across national borders, time, and across cultural and language barriers. The nature of memory is always in transit. The dynamics of memory influence identity formation and each identity reflects how memory modes work individually.

Another finding is that a heightened relation between memory and identity is one of the major features of Chinese-Australian literature. Chinese-Australian literature is an emerging

literature in Australia and it has been considered as a minority literature in Australia and China for its entire history. A recognition of the heightened relation between memory and identity as one deciding feature of this literature can attract scholars to conduct further research on it, since this feature shows that Chinese-Australian literature can also touch on cosmopolitan topics and on contemporary interdisciplinary thinking and philosophical

theories. Through highlighting these two key words, Chinese-Australian literature can be considered as one of the reservoirs of diasporic remembrance through which diaspora studies can explore more possible topics for research.

Lastly, the thesis offers a variety of examples to show the heightened relations between memory and identity. Both memory and identity are complicated in nature and in terms of representation. In this thesis, I have identified at least seven kinds of memory in terms of their play in the outlined texts. Individual memory and collective memory, as identified in my analysis of *Silver Sister*, have the broadest applications in sociological studies, psychological research and literary narratives.

The real value of engaging these two familiar notions with a Chinese diasporic text is to find how identity is formulated or deconstructed through the dynamics of memory moving between the individual and the collective. An individual mode of remembering of collective experience challenges the normative notion of identity defined by collective memory of national pasts, and by looking at the relation and differences of individual memory and collective memory, we come to an understanding that memory and identity are causally related and are explanatory in literature.

Cosmopolitan memory, though not a new term, applies to *Shanghai Dancing* and exerts its influence in relation to cosmopolitan culture and multiculturalism. Cosmopolitan memory is a way of understanding identity as not necessary. We have understood through the interpretation on this novel that cosmopolitan memory exists and is very powerful in challenging a fixed notion of identity. If you can live as cosmopolitan, you do not need any identity to confine you within a specific location and migration, thus, instead of being

miserable, becomes enjoyable. Cultural memory normally helps one to enhance one's identity. However, in *The English Class*, it meets challenges from failed cultural translation. Cultural memory, if it can be translated, must have a qualified translator and a welcoming host society. Language as the media of cultural memory, if not accepted, will bring the failure of cultural transplantation. Political memory and transgenerational memory are two terms coined by the author of this thesis to explain the phenomena of specific modes of remembrances. They do not apply themselves to every diasporic text and also have their own limitations in explaining identity. However, both of these two terms are very effective in identifying the relation of identity with particular, diasporic social contexts. Political memory helps us understand how memory can be tangled with political manipulation and conspiracy, while transgenerational memory exposes who will inherit or disinherit the memory of the last generation and why.

These memory terms and their interactions with the selected texts are innovative in the way they demonstrate a tightened relation with identity. Identity, though contested in many discourses, is further interpreted and understood with the assistance of memory. This thesis recognises and demonstrates the strong relationship between memory and identity, and argues that through the representation of these two indicators, Chinese-Australian literature in English language is defined.

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