

อดีตที่หลอกหลอน: บทบาทของผีในการสะท้อนอัตลักษณ์ของชาวจีนอพยพ
ในนวนิยายของเอมีตัน

นางสาวพิชญภา สิริเดชกุล

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ภาควิชาภาษาอังกฤษ
คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
ปีการศึกษา 2551
ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

A HAUNTING PAST: THE ROLE OF GHOSTS IN REFLECTING CHINESE IMMIGRANTS'
IDENTITY IN AMY TAN'S NOVELS

Miss Pitchayapa Siridetkoon

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in English

Department of English

Faculty of Arts

Chulalongkorn University

Academic Year 2008


Copyright of Chulalongkorn University

พิชญานา สิริเดชกุล : อดีตที่หลอกหลอน: บทบาทของผีในการสะท้อนอัตลักษณ์ของชาว
จีนอพยพในนวนิยายของเอมีตัน . (A HAUNTING PAST: THE ROLE OF GHOSTS IN
REFLECTING CHINESE IMMIGRANTS' IDENTITY IN AMY TAN'S NOVELS) อ.ที่
ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก : ผศ. ดร. คารินา ไชติรวี, 101 หน้า.

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ศึกษาการนำเสนอผีและบทบาทของผีในนวนิยายสามเรื่องของเอมีตัน
นักเขียนชาวอเมริกันเชื้อสายจีน ได้แก่ เรื่อง เดอะ คิทเชนก็อดไวฟ์ เดอะ โบนเซ็ทเตอร์สคอเทอร์
และ เดอะ ฮันเดรดซีเครตเซ็นส์ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์ในการศึกษาเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นว่าภาพของผีและ
ธรรมชาติที่จับต้องไม่ได้ของผีซึ่งทำให้เกิดภาวะมีอยู่แต่มองไม่เห็น สามารถนำมาใช้เพื่อบรรยาย
ถึงลักษณะของวัฒนธรรมและบทบาทของตัวละครสตรีในงานเขียนชาติพันธุ์ นอกจากนี้ผีจะ
สามารถสื่อถึงภาวะไร้อำนาจของตัวละครได้แล้ว วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ยังนำเสนอการอ่านผีในมุมมอง
ใหม่ซึ่งสามารถมองได้ว่าผีเป็นแหล่งที่มาของอำนาจและการต่อต้านสำหรับตัวละครชายขอบ

การศึกษานี้ใช้บทวิเคราะห์ของแคทลิน โบรแกน ในหนังสือ *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts
and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (2005) ซึ่งกล่าวถึงบทบาทของผีที่ปรากฏอยู่
ในนวนิยายว่าผีสื่อถึงความเสื่อมสลายและความต่อเนื่องทางวัฒนธรรมโดยทำหน้าที่เชื่อมโยง
ช่องว่างระหว่างวัฒนธรรม นอกจากนี้ ในนวนิยายทั้งสามเรื่องยังแสดงให้เห็นถึงสภาวะเสียบของ
ตัวละครสตรีชาวอเมริกันเชื้อสายจีนซึ่งเรื่องเล่าและอดีตของตัวละครเหล่านี้ถูกละเอียดและกดทับ
โดยเรื่องเล่ากระแสหลัก (Official Narrative) ดังนั้นภาพของผีจึงสื่อถึงสถานะความเป็นอื่นของตัว
ละครสตรีชาวอเมริกันเชื้อสายจีนที่ไร้ซึ่งอัตลักษณ์และตัวตน อย่างไรก็ตาม สภาวะที่คลุมเครือ
ของผีซึ่งท้าทายต่อความพยายามที่จะควบคุมหรือให้คำนิยามความเป็นผี ทำให้อาจมองได้ว่าผี
เป็นรูปแบบหนึ่งของการต่อต้านวัฒนธรรมกระแสหลักและเรื่องเล่ากระแสหลัก (Official
Narrative) ที่พยายามจะลบล้างความเป็นอื่นซึ่งถูกถ่ายทอดผ่านภาพลักษณ์ของผี

ภาควิชา..... ภาษาอังกฤษ.....
สาขาวิชา..... ภาษาอังกฤษ.....
ปีการศึกษา..... 2551.....

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต พิชญานา สิริเดชกุล
ลายมือชื่ออ.ที่ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก 
ลายมือชื่ออ.ที่ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ร่วม.....

4980174622 : MAJOR ENGLISH

KEYWORDS : ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE / NOVELS / GHOSTS/ CULTURAL HAUNTING / MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS / IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

PITCHAYAPA SIRIDETKOON : A HAUNTING PAST: THE ROLE OF GHOSTS IN REFLECTING CHINESE IMMIGRANTS' IDENTITY IN AMY TAN'S NOVELS.

ADVISOR : ASST. PROF. CARINA CHOTIRAWE , 101 pp.

The thesis will examine the representation of ghosts and their role in three novels by Amy Tan: *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. The thesis seeks to show how ghost figures and the elusive nature of their absent presence aptly describe both the culture and status of women characters in ethnic writing. While ghosts can be viewed as powerless figures, this thesis will offer a re-reading of ghosts as a source of empowerment and resistance for marginalized figures.

To provide a theoretical framework for this thesis, Kathleen Brogan's assertion in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (2005) that ghosts play a double role of cultural extinction and cultural continuity suggesting that the presence of ghosts in the novels can be seen as the link for cultural gap shall be used. Also, I argue that the novels suggest the silenced state of Chinese American female characters whose past and narratives of pain have been ignored and suppressed by the official narrative. Therefore, ghost figures represent the status of Other of Chinese American female characters who remain voiceless, nameless and faceless. However, with the malleable nature of ghosts that challenges the attempt to control or define them, it is possible to consider ghosts as a form of resistance to the mainstream culture and the official narrative that try to erase them.

Department :	English	Student's Signature	<i>Pitchayapa Siridetkoon</i>
Field of Study :	English	Advisor's Signature	<i>Carina Chotirawe</i>
Academic Year :	2008	Co-Advisor's Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and extend my heartfelt gratitude to the following people and institutions who have made the completion of this thesis possible. First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Assistant Professor Carina Chotirawe, Ph.D., my advisor, for her vital encouragement and support throughout the period of my research. I am indebted to Associate Professor Pachee Yuvajita, Ph.D., Assistant Professor Simon J.P. Wright, and Assistant Professor Sivaporn Nakhachai, Ph.D. for being on the thesis committee and for their insightful comments. My appreciation also goes to my colleagues at Naresuan University and all my dear friends who have always given me encouragement. Especially, I am grateful to Naresuan University for offering a scholarship. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my dear parents who have helped me find inspiration at many crucial moments. For their love, support and understanding, I am deeply grateful.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT (THAI).....	iv
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH).....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II OF GHOSTS AND GODS: REINTERPRETING A HAUNTING PAST IN <i>THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE</i>	20
CHAPTER III GHOSTWRITING: REBURYING THE ANCESTRAL SPIRIT IN <i>THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER</i>	47
CHAPTER IV RETURN TO THE HAUNTED LAND: IDENTITY, LAND AND GHOSTS IN <i>THE HUNDRED SECRET SENSES</i>	68
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION.....	92
REFERENCES.....	98
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	101

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis has taught that the dead...can be more alive for us, more powerful, more scary, than the living. It is the question of ghosts.

Jacques Derrida

Through the seemingly innate fear of death and a sense of mystery in human beings, ghosts are curious figures that have aroused people's interests since time immemorial. These elusive beings, whose presence is often confronted with disbelief, influence the human mind more than one can imagine. While we may have never seen a ghost ourselves, we can see their importance through their manifestation in American literature from every culture and every period. Through American literature we see that the representation of ghosts has been deeply rooted from the time when people clung to the belief of supernatural elements. We view their presence throughout the age of religious persecution, the age of reason, the modern world of scientific experiment and into the present day of technological progress—where they undeniably still hold a place in society.

The existence of ghosts, however, will not be debated here- as this thesis is focused primarily on their representation in literature. Ghost figures exist mostly in folklores, tales and creative writing. In American literature, one tends to think of the main function of ghosts as producing a thrilling effect. However, critics such as Anna Maria Cimitile suggest that in fact another interpretation of the role of ghosts signifies the status of what is deemed to be the Other as well as to symbolize something morbid, abnormal or resistant to categorization. If one looks more closely then one can see that there exists a strong relationship between the representation of ghosts in

literary works and the societies that produce them. While ghost figures appear in American literature of every period, the way they are represented, though most of the time carrying a negative connotation has changed with time. In the past ghosts may have been used simply to define ideas like evil or death but to more mature readers and authors it is possible that ghosts have come to be employed to signify more and more complex phenomena, such as psychological states, hallucinations, or to indicate perversity of human beings.

Within this framework this thesis will explore the presence of ghosts in American literature through the theme of cultural haunting in contemporary American novels. If one looks back and traces the manifestation of ghosts in American literary history, it is clear that ghost stories gained great popularity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ghost stories at this time became a dominant genre and were highly appealing and accessible to readers. For example, we see the emergence of works from authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, the father of American Gothic stories, to Henry James and his tales of the psychological haunted self. Leslie A. Fiedler suggests in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, that it is through gothic images that American writers have explored concerns about this new national life in a newly founded Nation. Within the spirit of exploration and the mystery of the unknown land and nature there remained ambiguity in people's relationships with Native Americans and subsequently African-American slaves as well. This important American critic notes that

In the American Gothic... the heathen, unredeemed wilderness..., nature and not the society become the symbol of evil. Similarly, not the aristocrat but the Indian, not dandified courtier but the savage colored man is postulated as the embodiment of villainy. Our novel of terror... is well on the way to becoming a Calvinist exposé of natural human corruption rather than an enlightened attack on a debased ruling class or entrenched superstition (Fiedler, 1982: 160).

The Gothic genre and tradition thus created a sense of terror through the depiction of these ghostly figures. However, once we get to the late twentieth century, ghost figures have been used to symbolize something quite different from this traditional representation. After many years of silence, the American literary circle became populated with the works of ethnic minority writers. Minority writers, whose original culture is generally regarded as rooted in superstition, as well as irrational and animalistic behavior, did not reinforce ghost stereotypes in their works. However, they aimed, instead, to present ghosts as a symbol of their dying culture and discontinuity with the past. In contrast, within the literary creations of mainstream white American writers, whose culture typically plays down the idea of superstition, there are actually many more superstitious elements present than in the works of ethnic minorities. This literary characteristic refers to what Fiedler (1982: 138) describes as the “hunger for [the] inexplicable.” Ghost stories in the traditional fashion are found primarily within the works of the white dominant culture. Ethnic writers, on the other hand, whose cultures are rooted in supernatural beliefs, incorporate ghosts into their works as a means of reflecting upon a social phenomenon.

The cultural history of many ethnic minorities has usually been poorly documented if not partially erased. This presents ethnic minority writers with the need to recuperate their history through the means of invoking the Gothic tradition to “illuminate the more shadowy or repressed aspects of characters” (Brogan, 1998: 2). Kathleen Brogan defines this kind of writing, which borrows from the Gothic tradition while intermixing tribal beliefs in ancestral spirits, as cultural haunting. The term *cultural haunting* refers to a genre of ghost stories in America that directly confronts the issues of multiculturalism. It is through this theme of cultural haunting

that marginalized groups were able to eventually find a voice of their own. Within this genre of cultural haunting, the literary use of ghosts in ethnic writing and tales is used to define America as a multicultural country. In contemporary American novels, it is inevitable that ghosts will play a prominent role in representing a nation made up of diverse ethnic groups. Kathleen Brogan (1998: 4) observes that: “The ghosts haunting contemporary American literature lead us to the heart of our nation’s discourse about multiculturalism and ethnic identity”. Within ethnic groups such as the African-American, Asian American, Native American, and European, there is what Brogan (1998: 4) defines as “shared historical traumas” which have come to be written down in narrative form.

Due to their malleable nature, it is possible for ghosts to symbolize two opposite characteristics at once within the text of American cultural haunting. For example, ghosts can symbolize the status of the Other, as well as the model of empowerment. Ghost figures have been utilized as an appropriate ingredient in presenting the problematical situations experienced by ethnic minorities in American literature. While ghosts are regarded as *Other* due to their status as a separate entity from the world of the living and logic, they have come to represent that source of empowerment, described by Kathleen Brogan as a “powerful figure of powerlessness ...emerg[ing] at and through [the] social gap” (qtd. in Redding, 2001: 2).

Since many ethnic minorities in America faced similar experiences and difficulties in assimilation, it is necessary to understand their backgrounds and the history of their settlements in America in order fully to appreciate the representation of their cultural identities within the themes of their literary works. Within the novels of Chinese Americans, for example, there is the prevalent use of cultural haunting in

relation to exploration of the dichotomy between ghost representation and the Chinese Americans' experience within immigrant culture.

The Chinese were the first group of Asian immigrants to migrate to America. Like many other migrant and ethnic groups, with the exception of African-Americans whose migration was largely of a forced nature since they went to America as slaves, they came in pursuit of the American Dream of success regardless of birth, background or social status. This dream, however, was not easily obtainable by these ethnic minority groups. Many Chinese found the path towards their goal extremely difficult as the dominant white class saw them simply as a source of cheap labor. Unlike Caucasian immigrants who aimed to settle in America, most Chinese Americans entered the country as temporary laborers. The Chinese Americans became an important workforce, particularly in the construction of the American transcontinental railroad. Not surprisingly, their social status as predominantly working class gave rise to many negative stereotypes, reinforcing their perceived inferiority amongst the dominant whites. Although Chinese immigration to America dates as far back as 1848, long before other Asian minorities, Chinese Americans were initially not able to assimilate well into mainstream American society. Policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned the entry of Chinese people into the United States and denied them citizenship. According to Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong (1993: 40), it was not until the 1960s, through the movements of (primarily Chinese) Asian American activists that progress was seen in the passing of immigration laws. Under the Immigration Act of 1965 for example, Chinese Americans, and other Asian immigrant groups, were able to claim full membership in American society.

In the early years of immigration, literature by Chinese immigrants was scarce, due in large part to the existence of the language barrier and harsh working

conditions preventing the Chinese from expressing themselves creatively. However, the representation of Chinese immigrants within the history of American literature is prominent. Although Chinese Americans have not always been fully embraced by American society, Chinese immigrants have nonetheless been represented in the literary works of Western authors. The first appearances of Chinese characters in American literature were those portrayed by Western authors through caricatures of Chinese people; for example, Sax Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* and Earl Derr Biggers' *Charlie Chan*. These fictional Chinese characters tend to fall into two types: wicked like Dr. Fu Manchu, and comical or loyal servant types like Charlie Chan--a detective who works for white clients. One should however also acknowledge the fact that much of the literature by Chinese writers themselves reinforces certain stereotypes as well. These writers have been labeled, "ambassadors of goodwill" by Elaine H. Kim (1982: 24) due to the fact that they were members of a more privileged class, searching for compatibility between two different cultures. For example, such writers as Lin Yutang, the author of *My Country and My People* (1935) and *Chinatown Family* (1948) and Chin Yang Lee the creator of *Flower Drum Song* (1957), had the tendency to romanticize and idealize the lives and traditions of the Chinese upper-class, while simultaneously upholding American modernity. Kim (1982: 108) claims that the stereotypes present within the works of these authors may not only be in response to the palate of Western readers, but also may be due to the fact that these Chinese authors did not belong to the working class like Chinese laundrymen or waiters, so "it [is] difficult for them to distinguish between reality and stereotype".

While these aforementioned pioneering authors have been recognized as mediators, who "bridge the gap between East and West" (Kim, 1982: 24), another group of writers chose to focus on the harsh reality of the life that the first group of

writers ignored. These writers came primarily from California Chinatown's bachelor society, a community of Chinese working class bachelors and married men who were not permitted by law to marry American women nor invite their Chinese wives to join them in America. This group of writers raised the issues of discrimination and hardship that they encountered in their daily lives within their literary works. For example, in H.T. Tsiang's *And China Has Hands* (1937) and Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) the authors realistically reflect upon the lives of laundrymen—where the unnatural community of single men and the hostile discriminatory environment deprived them of a normal family life, and left them in isolation. Consequently, America is often portrayed as a “prison” which Chinese bachelors have to endure in order to achieve their illusive goal of returning to China rich and successful (Kim, 1982: 99). There is also an acute sense of despair present in most of their work, due to the fact that they cannot fulfill their goals, as there is no hope of returning to China, and no way of bettering the condition of their lives in American society.

Following the end of World War II, Chinese women and the second generation of Chinese Americans were finally allowed into America, bringing to an end the Chinatown bachelor society. With the greater gender balance, there were subsequently more literary works by university-educated Chinese American women, such as Jade Snow Wong, the author of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945). The works of an author like Wong reflect her views of gender inequality between male and female children in Chinese American society, as well as aiming to present and interpret, rather than criticize, Chinese customs to Western readers. Cynthia Wong refers to this kind of writing as “autobiography as guided Chinatown tour” (46). Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, earned immense success as a result of its function as a cultural mediator. Through her works Wong also earned Chinese Americans the reputation of

being a “model minority” due to her emphasis on the positive Chinese work ethic and integrity.

It was in the late 1960s that the term ‘Asian American’ was coined as a result of the civil rights movement and new immigration laws which led to an increased ethnic consciousness amongst Chinese Americans as well as a dramatic increase in the ethnic Chinese population in the United States (Yin 229). However, the dramatic change of Asian American literary scene would not be possible without the emergence of an Asian American movement, the anti-war movement, the rise of feminism and ethnic literary activism (Yin, 2000: 229). It could be said that all of these social events contributed to the production of a groundbreaking work of the first influential Asian American anthology, *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974) by four young Asian American authors, Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong. In *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States* (1996), Shan Qiang He (1996: 52) observes that the book not only asserted the Asian American voices on the cultural scene but “also laid down in the introduction the general tone of anger and militancy as part of the aftermath of the rebellious 1960s and the civil rights movement.

Nevertheless, it was not until the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* in 1975, which was heralded for its literary qualities amongst mainstream critics and readers, that Asian American literature gained a wide acceptance. Chinese American literature saw a change in subject matter in Kingston’s work. Kingston went from drawing upon stories of hardship in America, to addressing the field of women’s writing. Kingston is also recognized as a pioneer figure in her use of Chinese myths within her writings. Within her works Kingston draws upon the style of a women’s personal narrative to depict stories of Chinese women’s

experiences and illustrates their search for identity. *The Woman Warrior* shows that America is not a land free of ghosts, as it claims, but a place full of cultural haunting for immigrant minorities. These immigrant women authors were not able to simply wash away the past and begin their lives anew on these distant shores. They have brought with them belief systems, cultures and languages from their old countries, making it difficult for them to blend into mainstream American culture. On the contrary, they maintain the status of 'the Other' and images of ghosts appear frequently in their literary works.

Not only were their voices suppressed by the mainstream, but some Asian American writers could be seen as silencing their own narratives as well. Stoicism is considered an admirable quality in many Asian societies and is reflected in Asian American literary works. The literature of those confined to internment and concentration camps, for example, tends to avoid talking about detention and confinement due to the fact that there is nothing present to better their situation. Silence is utilized as a coping mechanism employed in order to survive. Some writers tend to withhold their own personal stories from their fictional characters' actions due to the fact that their experiences are simply too painful and unbearable to talk about. These authors prefer to keep their stories to themselves and remain silent.

Ghosts, spirits and elements of the supernatural are often featured as prominent, if not vital, ingredients within the genre of Asian ethnic literature. One of the major reasons why this phenomenon occurs may be due to the Chinese cultural heritage. Chinese people believe very strongly in the existence of an ancestral spirit and the shadows of ghosts have an influence upon every stage of their lives. In Chinese culture ghosts enjoy a privileged position and possess supernatural powers. The Chinese believe that ghosts can control an individual's destiny and human fate by

bringing about luck or misfortune. This belief in the supernatural is clearly reflected in the portrayal of Chinese characters within Asian American literature. Characters are often described as believing that both the fortune and mishap they encounter in their lives are purely the manifestation of ghosts—who are capable of protecting or seeking revenge from them. This phenomenon also reflects the attitude of the western audience towards the East as an exotic, mythical and mysterious region.

One other interesting feature to note is that it is quite common for Asian American Chinese women to be treated as analogous to ghosts in the sense that they are often silent, voiceless and nameless beings both in their Chinese community and in the mainstream American society as a whole. In literature, ghosts often manifest themselves as a means of asserting their presence but their voices still often go unheard and their existence is rejected. The images of ghosts and their haunting that Asian American literature provides us with have many similarities with the stories of Chinese women who, despite the attempts by others to suppress them, remain indelible and capable of re-emerging to claim their existence. Women characters in ethnic writing frequently draw upon the ghost image as a source of empowerment. For example, the no-name woman in Kingston's *Woman Warrior* is the model that challenges the patriarchal power for the protagonist. The leading Feminist critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1995: 79) also describes in *Ghostwriting* a woman who assumes a ghost's identity as her own, stating "[s]he will not remain a spectator. She rises as a specter to perform the impossible deconstruction of the binary opposition".

Acclaimed Chinese American author, Amy Tan, is another example of a writer who draws upon the aspect of cultural haunting within her works. As a writer whose works have appeared in literary circles since 1989, her first published book, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) proved to be an immense success—both as a bestselling book and a

subsequent film adaptation. These early successes gave her a strong reputation as an important American contemporary novelist. She is often aligned with other American female authors, such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Louise Eldrich, and Maxine Hong Kingston, who is also of Chinese heritage. Within her works Tan presents the stories of Chinese female immigrants and their struggle to survive in America.

Through her works Tan addresses aspects of cultural change and adjustment to the mainstream, providing observers of American society with the perfect picture of itself through multiculturalism. Within her stories depicting mother and daughter relationships Tan also brings to the forefront not only struggle for self-identity amongst Chinese Americans but also the struggle for a sense of self amongst those who face difficulties in assimilation in general. Tan is often labeled as an “ethnic writer,” but she strongly refutes this sort of categorization, claiming that her culture and immigrant experience are just “part of the tapestry. What my books are about is relationships and family” (qtd. in Huntley, 1998: 38).

As Tan contends, most of her novels present troubled relationships within a family setting, and primarily those between mothers and daughters. In many of her novels such as *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Tan draws upon her own family experiences, such as her mother's life experiences before migrating to America and her own strained relationship with her mother during her teenage years. As a teenager Tan regarded her mother's different and strange behavior as a source of embarrassment but later in life it was her mother who became one of the major inspirations of her work. It is not surprising therefore that Tan's relationship with her mother is often reflected upon through many of the mother and daughter characters within her novels. Tan's novels can thus be viewed as semi-

autobiographical in nature due to their incorporation of personal narratives within the texts.

It is also interesting to note that Amy Tan did not have any direct personal experience of a traumatic history, like many other first-generation immigrants or minorities, to draw upon. In contrast, she belonged to a well-educated middle class family. Curiously enough, ghost figures are still prevalent in most of her works. The presence of these ghosts can be attributed to Tan's interest in presenting them as part of the Oriental myth, to serve the Western readers curiosity; or, on the other hand, the presence of these ghosts may indeed reflect something of the author's own life experiences. One example would be the series of deaths of her loved ones. Jane Ganahl (2001: 1) maintains in her article "Amy Tan Gets Her Voice Back," that "mortality is a subject with which Tan is intimately familiar". Over the years Tan is faced with her father's and brother's deaths due to brain cancer, her best friend's murder, as well as the death of her mother and a close friend within the span of a month. These personal losses had the effect of bringing her attention to the "cycle of the wonder of life and death" (Ganahl, 2001: 1) as she said, and are reflected within her novels in the impending deaths of her characters.

Conversely, if we consider Tan's works as a form of ethnic writing, it can be said that the presence of ghosts in her writing is a direct result of a minority writing style that has always included ghosts as part of its nature. According to many critics, the use of ghosts in the literature of ethnic minority narratives serves the purpose of cultural identification for the minorities. The Chinese, as well as other ethnic groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicanos have faced many obstacles in their attempts at assimilation into mainstream America, primarily due to their racial difference. Like the literary works of Chinese immigrants and their

descendants before her time, Tan's works also directly address the difficulty of assimilation through her characters fragmented identities and the descriptions of clashes between cultures.

In order to explore the theme of cultural haunting constructively, it is also beneficial to consider the preceding studies of ghosts. Ghosts have long appeared and been interpreted within many diverse fields of study including literary analysis. Bianca Del Villano (2007: 6) maintains that ghosts initiate pluralism in the study of history and literature because they create "the rift and ambiguity which render multiplicity in viewpoint and interpretation". Villano herself based her study of literary ghosts on Sigmund Freud's theory as presented in, *The Uncanny* and *Mourning and Melancholia* as well as Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*.

In spite of their differences in theoretical thinking and of the eras of composition, Freud and Derrida can both be considered prominent and influential figures in the study of ghosts. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, explored the myth of ghost figures during the early 20th century. Freud is deemed responsible for laying the groundwork for psychoanalysis as a means of exploring the workings of the unconscious. Nearly a century later, his works had great influence on Derrida, a major theorist and a leading figure in the theory of deconstruction. Derrida based his studies of deconstruction on Freud's findings while simultaneously developing the theories to serve his own philosophical thinking.

When exploring the subject of ghosts, one may start with Freud's *The Uncanny* which describes a particular state of mind that is "close to anguish and horror but difficult to define precisely" (Villano, 2007: 3). In his studies Freud seeks to explain why it is that in most cultures ghosts are haunting and frightening to people. The word "uncanny" which corresponds to the German term "unheimlich"

and could be translated as “something that should have been kept hidden but has emerged within the familiar, domestic domain of the known,” or in other words, “a place haunted by spectres” is explored at length by Freud who claims that this frightful feeling is caused by the slippage of what had been familiar long ago but had been transformed over time into something unrecognizable. Ghosts, thus, stand for, “the skeleton in the closet, the ghost haunting the house, the other within the self” (Villano, 2007: 4).

Another useful explanation of ghosts from a psychological perspective is found in Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*, which sees ghosts as the painful memory that “fixes itself on a particular wound” (qtd. in Villano, 2007: 79). Freud also defines the mechanism of melancholia which is as a thought that “produces a sort of ghostly presence within the self” (Villano, 2007: 79). Melancholia is described as a “reaction to a serious loss” and the attempt to preserve the memory of a loved object. However, unable to overcome the grief of the loss “[t]he melancholic subject re-produces a ghost who functions as a reminder of the loss, establishing a continuity between what is dead and the living” (Villano, 2007: 113). In this sense the act of mourning is seen as a way of coping with melancholia, by attempting to come to terms with the loss and reconciling the past with the present. Today some might be wont to consider Freud’s psychoanalysis theories outdated but his studies on the mental/emotional state of human beings in relation to ghosts are still pertinent and useful as a way to analyze literary representation of ghosts and explain the characters’ psychological state of being.

Obviously Freud is not the only authority on the subject of ghosts as a reflection of psychic and emotional well being, in modern criticism ghosts are also studied from a variety of perspectives. It is interesting to note that in the writings of

pioneering critic of postmodern theory, Jacques Derrida, there is room for discussion on the topic about ghost in relation to Freud's works, albeit quite differently. In Derrida's *Specters of Marx* ghosts are discussed in terms of their *materiality*, a term that defies their formlessness and invisibility. It is said that ghosts do possess a sense of body, although not in the sense of flesh and blood as humans do. The paradoxical bodies of the specters, while recognizable in human forms, are still invisible, thus illustrating the privileged position of ghosts. This suggests that they possess a superior critical knowledge, for they live "between this world and the other, between the representational and the un-representational" (Villano, 2007: 31). Like Freud's *The Uncanny*, ghosts may be read as a symbol of the Other whose representational existence is denied; however, it is also possible to consider ghosts' invisibility as "a sort of strategy of resistance" despite the fact that invisibility is often associated with passive objects (Villano, 2007: 38). In this sense, the strategy of resistance may be what Derrida refers to as "the *visor effect*: we do not see who looks at us" (qtd. in Villano, 2007: 29).

Furthermore, from the perspective of postcolonial studies and cultural theory, we could see that such criticism also reinforces this point. Homi Bhabha demonstrates the significance of invisibility as the "counter-gaze that turns the discriminatory look...back on itself. There emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot see me" (qtd. in Villano, 2007: 44). Ghosts' invisibility therefore deconstructs the predominant "white gaze" discourse by redefining invisibility as the condition that renders the power to the specters/spectators.¹ Through the process of redefining, the power of gaze is shifted to the ghosts who used to be (the) object of gazing (Villano, 2007: 44).

¹ Villano draws a connection between the word 'spectre' and its Latin roots meaning the act of looking at. (29)

In order to read the body of ghosts, one must draw upon their roles as reminders of a crisis in representation. Within documented history, reality is not reflected transparently and stories of ghosts or of the dead do not easily comply with the logic of texts. In Molly Westerman's work (2006: 1), "Of Skulls or Spirits", De Certeau's analysis of historiography is cited as an act of "entombment by which the writer both commemorates, and hides the dead." Within these works ghost stories either emerge from within the texts or remain quietly unrecorded. The manifestation of ghosts within the text suggests that there is "a crack in the text itself which may open to other realities" (Villano, 2007: 32).

In many ethnic writings, one finds the theme of cultural haunting is prevalent, so it may be helpful to refer to Missy Dehn Kubitschek's study of the process of psychological haunting. In *Toni Morrison A Critical Companion*, Kubitschek suggests that without the process of mourning the past, the present would be plagued by discontinuity. She states that the "past literally haunts the present... The past cannot be exorcized; it demands recognition in the present." In some cases loss of an unbearable measure may cause amnesia, presenting the inability to remember as an act of refusal towards the past. This reaction can generate "the return of the ghost [which] is a tragic moment in which what has been kept hidden--shame, a crime, an unspeakable secret--becomes evident, and once out of the unconscious enacts a complete destabilization of all the psychic mechanisms" (133). It is only through the process of mourning, and reopening of the wound, that the past will survive the forgetting, and the ghosts will be exorcized. Even though Toni Morrison and Amy Tan are writers who deal with different experiences, African American and Chinese American, the concept of mourning is still prevalent in the works of both these novelists who represent American ethnic writing.

Ghosts are the true embodiment of the hidden, the unrecorded truth that is omitted from the official narrative within the process of historiography. Ellen J. Goldner in her article, “Other(ed) Ghosts: Gothicism and the Bonds of Reason in Melville, Chestnutt, and Morrison” therefore suggests that:

Haunts comprise an arena of contestation in which the very appearance of the suppressed *other* reveals that the dominant discourse’s control is incomplete. Yet often the *other* appears only in ghostly traces because the dominant discourse continues to police her or him. The haunts of Gothicism break through the boundaries of the dominant culture’s paradigms and identities. (Goldner, 1999:2)

Goldner’s observation is somehow similar to what Kubitschek says before that ghosts’ representation in the novels implies there are cracks or crisis in representation.

Significantly within this study Kathleen Brogan’s analysis of *cultural haunting* in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* will be employed. Her interpretation of cultural haunting will be applied to the works of Chinese American authors, represented by Amy Tan, to explore the relationship between ghost representation and the Chinese American search for identity. Many American-born immigrant writers describe in their works the problems that they face within their daily lives. In many cases, the challenges that these American-born immigrants face are quite different from those experienced by first-generation immigrants. Different circumstances make it such that second-generation immigrants may not have suffered the same degree of social injustice and discrimination that their parents experienced. They may instead have been faced with different challenges, such as identity problems, which are the result of cultural differences and conflicts between their Chinese family values and those of the prevailing mainstream American society. This conflict is frequently represented in the form of mother-daughter relationships in Amy Tan’s novels through the prevalence of haunted characters. Some of Tan’s characters are haunted by their past lives in China, and their Chinese

heritage which they feel prevents them from assuming an identity of their own, and allowing them to assimilate into mainstream American society.

In Brogan's works great emphasis is given to the relationship between ghost figures and ethnic culture in American society. Brogan demonstrates that in ethnic literature ghosts function on three separate levels. Firstly, they illustrate the cultural invisibility or cultural extinction of minorities, which is caused by the mainstream's attempt to erase or demonize them. Secondly, they represent a link or continuity with the past. Brogan (1998: 31) states that, "The return of ancestor spirits ensures a continuity between present and past". Ghosts have the ability to retrieve lost traditions and connections between generations, which were destroyed as the result of the experience of displacement. Finally, the curious state of 'there versus not there' of ghosts plays a double role as a metaphor for cultural invisibility, as well as cultural continuity. Ghosts possess a malleable nature, making it possible for them to represent "a symbol of the imaginative element in the construction of ethnic identity, and group history" (Brogan, 1998: 31-32). Like tradition, ghosts are partly remembered and partly imagined; therefore, the invocation of ghosts can be seen as a survival strategy.

By employing the theme of *cultural haunting* to examine the novels of Amy Tan through the theme of 'cultural haunting,' and considering the relationship between ghosts' representation and the characters' identities, this thesis seeks to analyze the role of ghosts' influence on character development; as well as ghosts' ability to lead characters to the recovery of their self-identity. In analyzing these three novels, it is obvious that the representation of ghosts is relevant to the formation of the characters' identities. Ghosts play an important role in bridging the gap between two worlds, old China and modern America. Ghost stories offer Chinese American characters the opportunity to confront their pasts or reflect upon their Chinese cultural

roots. This study thus aims to illustrate that rather than evoking fear, ghosts can fulfill a very different role. Through the characters in Amy Tan's novels, we will see that ghosts can help us to realize the significance of the past, which is a crucial step in the process of self-actualization. This study is divided into five chapters: the first chapter analyzes the background of Amy Tan's works of Chinese American literature in relation to spectral images and theoretical frameworks of ghost figures in literature. The second chapter offers the study of ghosts in *The Kitchen God's Wife* as a symbol of a haunting past, where the repression of traumatic memory is implemented through storytelling. The third chapter focuses on an immigrant mother's obsession with her past mistakes in Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The results of her obsession and belief in curses of the ancestral spirits, as well as the transformation of sinister ghosts to benevolent ones will be examined. The fourth chapter explores the sense of place in *The Hundred Secret Senses* to reflect upon the relationship between cultural roots, the motherland, and the haunting places that provide the background for the characters who seek to recover their lost identities. The final chapter provides a comprehensive conclusion on ghosts as mediators linking the past to the present. Ghosts are examined as a symbolic representation of the loss of cultural tradition by generations; as well as bestowers of the retrieval of the past or the ancestral spirit, providing characters with knowledge about themselves and their identities.

CHAPTER II
OF GHOSTS AND GODS: REINTERPRETING A HAUNTING PAST
IN *THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE*

Amy Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, gained immense success both as a best seller and as a subsequent film adaptation. It was therefore inevitable that her subsequent stories of family romance not only garnered vast popularity but were also studied extensively through the lens of feminist critics—primarily by way of the mother daughter relationships represented in her novels. The often-antithetical relationships between mothers and daughters illustrate the results of generational and cultural differences. Marina Heung (1993: 600) argues in, *Daughter-Text/Mother-Text*, that the issue of matrilineal relationships is often closely bound with those of acculturation and race, causing the daughters to struggle towards self-definition. The cultural differences within the Chinese American families cause rupture for the daughters, who are ambivalent towards the two cultures and unable to identify with either. Thus the mother plays an important role in “set [ting] into motion the daughter's [process of] working through [and] toward a separate selfhood and a new racial identity” (Heung, 1993: 600). The Chinese heritage provides the mother with a strong sense of self, and becomes the major source of conflict between the two generations of women.

It seems the mothers are able to identify more clearly with their ethnicity than their American-born daughters. The American-born daughters often find that their Chinese heritage creates an unbearable confusion for them. Heung's study finds that the daughters “have uneasily assimilated lives in the United States, and their Chinese mothers' customs, clothes, and languages often embarrass them” (Heung, 1993: 4).

Even though the daughters are exposed to Chinese culture at home they also attend American schools where they learn the English language and are surrounded by the dominant images of American pop culture. This causes the daughter to take her Chinese culture for granted and gravitate towards American culture. The daughter often rejects her Chinese ethnicity as a means of accepting and being accepted as an American. The daughter thus views the Chinese beliefs and practices ingrained in and imposed upon her as irrational and ridiculous. In contrast, the immigrant mother who plays the role of the preserver of Chinese culture wants her daughter not only to adopt but also to continue Chinese tradition. The daughter is therefore alienated not only from her traditional Chinese culture but from her own mother as well. "The otherness of her daughter's hybridized self...makes it unlikely that mother and daughter can achieve perfect identification: the burden of differences in personal history and cultural conditioning is too great" (Heung, 1993: 603).

There are many instances of discrimination against Chinese women rooted in Confucian teaching as well, making it almost impossible for the daughters to embrace Confucian belief and becoming a cultural preserver as their mothers wish. Moreover, it is also important to recognize that many important features of Chinese culture are based on Confucian thinking, which favors boys to girls. Within the rigid family hierarchy boys hold a higher rank than girls, due to the fact that boys perpetuate the family name while girls do not. To be considered a successful mother, a woman must fulfill the family's expectations of giving birth to a male child; if no male child is born the mother will be seen as having failed in her role of both wife and mother. While these prejudices are undeniably evident many Chinese mothers still cling to their customs and beliefs, as it is all they know. These prejudices against females in Chinese families create strong cultural conflicts between Americanized daughters and

their traditional Chinese mothers. Having been brought up in China the mother has been influenced by an ideology that “significantly contributed to the indoctrination of women into voluntary subordination” (Yuan, 2005: 18); the woman’s inferior role is reinforced by Confucius and the hierarchical organization within the Chinese family where “women [are] born with a lower identity” (Yuan, 2005: 15). The Chinese mother who migrated to America attempts to transplant this patriarchal ideology into the new soil, while the daughter in turn grows up in an environment encompassing many more aspects of gender equality. This sexual bias cultivates frustration for the daughter, and prevents her from understanding or identifying with her mother. This cultural conflict therefore generates the daughter’s antagonistic reaction towards both her mother and Chinese tradition.

Language and the linguistic factors of communication contribute to and exacerbate the problem as well. Claire Kramsch (1998: 3) maintains that “speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language”. In the case of many immigrant families however children face problems of identification with their parents due to the different languages spoken within their families. Within most Chinese immigrant families the parents prefer that their children become proficient in the Chinese language. The children however, can only speak the Chinese language partially and are often limited to day-to-day communications with their parents. On the other hand, while the children are fluent in American English, the parents often have a very limited knowledge of English, making it difficult for either side to communicate with and understand each other. Victoria Chen (1995: 2) argues that “the woman’s [the mother’s] desire for her daughter to speak perfect American English foregrounds the problems and difficulties of communicating and translating between the different languages that they speak,” for the daughter “this linguistic

competency, ironically, signifies her departure from her mother...deepening the chasm between generations and cultures”. Until the daughter is able to acknowledge and celebrate her mother’s articulation in English she will not be able to accept her bicultural identity and translate the special meaning of maternal language that requires translation (Chen, 1995: 6).

Within Amy Tan’s work, *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, we see her recognition of the misunderstandings between generations and varying degrees of conflicts. One of the characters in this novel, Winnie, endures much that echoes the experiences of other immigrant mothers. At the beginning of the novel, Winnie’s relationship with her daughter, Pearl, is going through a crisis; Winnie, however, is totally oblivious to the problem due to the fact that she habitually chooses to suffer in silence. Despite having experienced pains and hardships in her life she is never able to successfully articulate them. Winnie, like most Chinese mothers who underwent hardships in China before their migration to America, prefers to bury the past and keep her stories silent from the children. Winnie strives to convince herself that:

When I [Winnie] came to this country [America], I told myself: I can think a new way. Now I can forget my tragedies, put all my secrets behind a door that will never be opened, never seen by American eyes. I was thinking my past was closed forever (Tan, 1991: 71).

Winnie feels it would be best for her daughter to be ignorant of her painful past, and sees no use in digging up past secrets. The reader however, sees the opposite take place, when Pearl’s ignorance of the past turns out to be more problematic than beneficial. Winnie’s inability and refusal to articulate her story affects Pearl negatively in her own attempts at assimilation. Although Pearl may be seen as embodying a successful model of acculturation—through her marriage to a white man and professional success as a speech therapist, it is obvious that she cannot negotiate her double identity. During rituals and celebrations her alienation is seen clearly

through the awkward joining of her extended Chinese family, and the American family she has become a part of by way of marriage.

Social rituals, like weddings and funerals render opportunities for the characters to highlight the issues surrounding these interpersonal family relationships. These kinds of social event bring family members together, creating a sense or a semblance of family unity—the problematic nature of their relationships however is often highlighted as well. Such events as the funeral rites for Auntie Du create the opportunity for conflicts to begin as well as to possibly be resolved. This particular event creates a time and place for family members to gather and mend their fractured relationships. The fact that Pearl cries for Auntie Du’s death surprises not only herself but her mother as well, due to the fact that Pearl’s acquaintance with her aunt was largely minimal. Auntie Du was Helen’s blood relative but there has been no mention of the old lady between Pearl and her mother for years; Pearl states that she “thought she had already died years ago” (Tan, 1991: 13). Although the presence of Auntie Du in Pearl’s life has been minimal her death prompts a strong emotional outburst from Pearl during the funeral. Tan writes that, “suddenly a sob bursts from my chest and surprises everyone, even me. I panic and try to hold back, but everything collapses. My heart is breaking, bitter anger is pouring out and I can’t stop it” (Tan, 1991: 44). Winnie is the only one who really understands Pearl’s reaction. Pearl notices her “mother’s eyes are also wet. She smiles at me through her tears. She knows this grief is not for Grand Auntie Du but for my father. She has been waiting for me to cry for such a long time, for more than twenty-five years, ever since the day of my father’s funeral” (Tan, 1991: 45). This incident leads us back to the tension and unresolved conflict between mother and daughter that has perpetuated since the death of Jimmy Louie, Pearl’s father.

There is however some hope that this ongoing conflict between mother and daughter will eventually be resolved when Helen, who is known to be Winnie's sister-in-law, suggests that Winnie should reveal the secret of her past to Pearl. Helen advises Winnie that, "We should sweep all the lies out of our lives, no more secrets, no more lying... If you don't tell, I must—before the new year" (Tan, 1991: 79). Helen acts as a mediator to generate reconciliation and understanding between Winnie and Pearl, as she is the one who knows the true secret that both of them are keeping from each other. While Winnie is concealing her past from her daughter, Pearl is concealing from her mother the fact that she is suffering from multiple sclerosis, a serious illness. Helen feels that in order to draw their relationship closer Winnie must first reveal her secret to Pearl. Pearl is unaware that her mother was married to a man in China prior Jimmy Louie, therefore Helen is not in fact related to Winnie as kin—Helen and Winnie were merely friends back in China and helped each other to escape to America.

The breaking of this silence would, in essence, mean that both women would be forced to reveal their true identities to the community to which they belong. They have been concealing the secrets of their identities for many years out of pure necessity since they would never have been able to migrate to America if they were not in fact relatives. Winnie reacts to Helen's suggestion with anger stating that, "a bad feeling was moving in my stomach. Why was she talking this way? She wanted to expose everything... everything I had worked so hard to forget" (Tan, 1991: 79). Through Winnie's staunch refusal to reveal the past it is clear that she would rather have the secret die with her. "How can you do that?' I scolded her. 'You want to tell my secrets, just like that? We made a promise—*never* to tell'" (Tan, 1991: 79).

Following the heated argument with Helen regarding this decision, Winnie returns home and curiously enough begins cleaning her house thoroughly. “All night long I cleaned my house to forget. I shook my curtains, beat my sofa, dusted my tables and the rail going up my stairs. I wiped down the TV set, wiped the picture frame on top, the glass” (Tan, 1991: 81). The action of cleaning the house can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture—perhaps Winnie is attempting to erase and clear her mind of having to confront a disturbing truth. The incessant cleaning may also create a sense of relief for her as she can do nothing else to control or better her situation. Within the Chinese cultural context the act of cleaning signifies that Chinese women are traditionally cast into a domestic role, confined to the acts of cooking and cleaning. Winnie’s action also reflects the belief that bad luck can be wiped away like dust through the process of cleaning. While cleaning the rooms that her children had occupied when they were young, where numerous memories keep recurring to her, Winnie has the chance to cool down and reflect on her relationship with her daughter. “I [Winnie] was thinking about this, while cleaning her [Pearl’s] room. That is how she is. That is how I am. Always careful to be polite, always trying not to bump into each other, just like strangers” (Tan, 1991: 82). The discovery of Pearl’s treasure box is the key that allows Winnie to unlock the heart of her daughter, to realize the fact that Pearl loves her father, resents his death, and is crying inside. It is the acquisition of this knowledge that prompts Winnie to finally reveal her secret past life to Pearl.

While in the kitchen together Tan’s female characters are finally able to open up and reveal their innermost secrets to each other. Winnie releases her true story to Pearl, letting out a flood of long suppressed memories. This is the first time that Pearl is really able to understand all that her mother has been through. Tan’s use of the

kitchen as a setting for her entire novel has an underlying significance as well. Some feminists consider the domain of kitchen as a symbol of women's subjugation, or of the isolated domestic life of women who remain outside the realm of masculinity. The kitchen however is the only place in the house where women can define their domain and enjoy their privacy, in spite of the fact that the function of this place is aimed at satisfying the needs of other family members. Harriet Blodgett suggests that "their domain and women's designated role as providers of nourishment can be re-evaluated as an activity that helps them through the process of self-empowering" (Tan, 1991: 7).

For the Chinese especially, whose culture has a great concern for food and the preparation of food, the significance of the kitchen is closely tied with that of eating practices-- which can in essence be regarded as a means of cultural identity for ethnic groups. It is obvious through the eating habits of the Chinese people that they have a very strong sense of food culture. Wherever Chinese immigrants settled they brought with them their recipes and the practice of using chopsticks. Many Chinese people feel very uncomfortable without the presence of chopsticks as their main tableware. Food and the process of eating are very important for Chinese people, therefore, it is not surprising that food presentation is prevalent in Chinese American literature. It has been observed that the importance of food to Asian Americans lies in the fact that "for Asian Americans, one's own food is one of the few last cultural guards against assimilation apart from language....Chinese mothers in Tan's novel may adopt Christianity, they may wear westernized attire, but they can never change their diet" (Chantharothai, 2003: 59).

Most Chinese women feel that the social role they have inherited from their mothers and grandmothers is dictated by society and is, in essence, unavoidable. To maintain the role of a good Chinese woman is to embrace the duties of cooking,

cleaning and caring for the members of both the immediate and extended family. Food imagery thus becomes a very apt tool in presenting the life of Chinese women who are confined to the domestic sphere. For the mother character in, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, food and the process of its preparation come to represent her subjugation and subsequently her empowerment. Chantharothai (2003: 59) suggests that, "in many cases, the Chinese mothers express their resistance against injustice through food". Stephen Soitos' study (2002: 7) of Chinese culture also finds that food is not only a "leitmotiv of Chinese cultural expression," but also "creates the illusion of verisimilitude, evoking the China of Winnie's girlhood. It individualizes the characters through preference, represents continuity and family life, and highlights the difference between the immigrant generation and its American-born children".

Some readers may find it ironic that while the kitchen is regarded as primarily the domain of women, Tan deliberately employs the figure of the male Kitchen God as the guardian for the Chinese household. Tan utilizes the Kitchen God myth effectively to point out the many injustices towards women in Chinese society. Although women are often the people in charge of household chores, they are not the ones who are credited for their work or deemed to have authority over the kitchen. Pin-chia Feng (1996: 7) states that "Tan exposes the poignant irony in the old myth: a wife abuser was apotheosized as a household deity and the guardian of kitchens, the space traditionally assigned to women". The myth itself describes the oppressive stories of a dutiful wife who, like Winnie, has never been noticed or rewarded. The role of the Kitchen God to report the behavior of each family symbolizes male intrusion into the female realm; a patriarchal attempt to control and monitor the life of women. Tan writes that, "from then on, people in China knew Kitchen God was watching them, from his corner in every house and every shop" (Tan, 1991: 55). The

way in which Tan portrays the woman's domain, as being under the governing of a male god, reinforces the woman's subordinate and submissive position. This also reflects the curious fact that women's cooking in everyday life for family members is not deemed as important as the work of men in the world through professional careers. One also realizes that most of the world's most famous and celebrated chefs are men and not women. The kitchen can thus be seen as a battleground of sorts-- where men and women struggle to claim the space as their own and exercise their power. However, the woman's position is obviously subservient to patriarchal control, as represented by the Kitchen God, who subdues and demonizes women into a ghostly presence.

Through the parallel story of god and ghost, representing male and female characters, we see how the god and ghost are treated differently because of their genders. While the story of the god and the representation of manhood is retold over and over, the story of the ghost, which implies female status, is kept silent. Brogan (1998: 25) equates women's silence with ghosts when she states that, "the ghost can give expression to the ways in which women are rendered invisible in the public sphere". Brogan further suggests that, the stories of haunting in women's texts are often connected with reproductive issues as a means of demonstrating the strict control and regulation over women's bodies in a patriarchal society. Often the only power that women are equated with is that of their reproductive power. For example, "ghosts often arise from traumatic memories of rape, abortion, or miscarriage" (Brogan, 1998: 25). Therefore, both women and their narratives of victimization are silenced. The rise of the Kitchen God accentuates this silence and invisibility while the women's ghost-like position reflects patriarchal control as a form of violence towards Chinese women.

Tan's narrative relays yet another mother daughter conflict between Winnie and her long lost mother as well. This relationship conflict takes place in a ghostly form and initiates the protagonist's haunting memories. The relationship between Winnie and her mother, who abandoned her when she is a little girl of six, turns out to be the most painful memory--with aspects of love, doubt, hope and disappointment. Winnie expresses her feelings towards her own mother to Pearl when she states that, "She left me before she could tell me why she was leaving. ... even to this day, I still feel I am waiting for her to come back and tell me why it was this way. I never told you about my mother? ... That's because I never wanted to believe it myself" (Tan, 1991: 88). Prior to their separation Winnie and her mother enjoyed an inseparable relationship, which Winnie describes nostalgically. She recalls how her mother carried her everywhere until "I refused to walk even ten steps by myself. ... I always wanted to see the world at her same height, her same way" (Tan, 1991: 89). However, following her mother's elopement with her communist lover, Winnie was torn between the deep desire to embrace her mother as a role model and her family's strong sense of propriety. Cast into the role of the abandoned child of a disgraceful wife, Winnie was sent to live with her uncle's family on an island. In her new home, Old Aunt, who demanded nothing less of her than absolute obedience, raised her. Winnie was taught through threats such as-- "Do you want to be sent away forever and become a beggar, just like your mother?... Do you want to get a terrible disease that eats away your face same as your mother?" (Tan, 1991: 132-133). This eventually provided Winnie with a negative image of her mother, making it difficult for her to identify with her mother whose behavior seemed corrupt within the eyes of the community.

Ghosts are thus used to represent women who transgress the patriarchal norms and definitions of a good wife; in this case Winnie's mother is condemned as a ghost. Winnie's mother is pronounced dead and a mock funeral service is organized for her as a way to lessen the scandal. Her supposed death is considered a sign that she has been cut off from the family, denying her any subsequent involvement with them. Winnie's mother, though an educated and strong-willed person with a mind of her own, is seen as pursuing her own desires over the family's respectability--which is most unacceptable. Her family thus sees it preferable that she be regarded dead and labeled as a ghost. Brogan (1998: 25) observes that, "[t]he uncanny power of the ghost reflects the disruptive force of strong women in societies that restrict the expression of female power". Even as a child Winnie is able to understand the situation fairly well, and claims that "what my mother did was a big disgrace. That's why they said she died, to bury her scandal" (Tan, 1991: 100). Despite the fact that Winnie's mother was ostracized by her family, it can be said that from her point of view, she was in actuality the one who gave up on her family first. Her elopement with a communist lover can be seen as a direct challenge to the patriarchal authority of her husband who had made her life miserable; by putting her in the unlucky position of his dead second wife, allowing other wives to mock her as a "double second" (Tan, 1991: 97). He doesn't care about her feelings regarding her status as his first wife; from his perspective wives should be economically dependent on husbands anyway. "You think I cannot change this?" (Tan, 1991: 93) Winnie's mother asks before she leaves him, in essence a sign that she can liberate herself from his power. Not only does she reject the role of wife, she also rejects the role of mother that society posits by leaving her daughter Winnie behind. This action can be interpreted as her triumph over the tyrannical power of her husband. Her husband is subsequently

forced to remove everything from his life that reminds him of his wife, as any recollection of her is a painful reminder of his own shame and defeat.

Winnie's mother's past is kept secret not only as a means of hiding the shame and scandal but in an effort to eliminate her existence within the official narrative of the family. Winnie learns from an early age that any mention of her mother is forbidden. "I only remember that everyone was nervous, whispering secrets" (Tan, 1991: 98). Although the attempt totally to delete her story seems successful at first, since everyone avoids talking about Winnie's mother openly, her story does not fade away. Therefore, despite the lack of her physical presence, her existence is confined to only a subject of rumour, whisper and gossip. It can be said that Winnie's mother, in essence, does return--but in a ghostly form. While she may be dead in the official narrative of this family, her story will never be lost. Everyone will always remember her—albeit in secret.

And yet, many times they gossiped about her. They all did—Old Aunt, New Aunt, Uncle, and their friends—over tea, during meals, after the noontime nap. For many years, my mother was the source of funny and bad stories, terrible secrets and romantic tales. It was like digging up her grave, then pushing her down farther, always throwing more dirt on top. (Tan, 1991: 100)

As a daughter, it is painful for Winnie to hear gossip and derision concerning her own mother, yet ironically it is this form of narrative, which gives the absent mother her presence. Over the years this presence, this gossip, serves as the only link between Winnie and her mother. The gossip provides Winnie with a vehicle for enduring and surviving the pain; it creates a means of justification for the reasons why her mother deserted her. Winnie therefore is not totally helpless and ignorant of her mother's stories but utilizes them as well. Despite the fragmented and fabricated nature of these stories it is through them that Winnie is able to learn of her mother's fate. The stories serve not only as a link between them but also the single source of

information from which Winnie can translate her mother's story for her own understanding. In one situation, she recalls:

Sometimes I would try to put together all the pieces of gossip I heard, I would try to make one whole story. But then each part would contradict the next. Until no part made sense. So then I looked at what I knew about my mother, both good things and bad. I tried to think of all the reasons why her life went one way or the other. And this is what I think happened, how my mother came to be the second wife to my father and, later, why she left (Tan, 1991: 100).

This lack of a mother figure in her life has an understandably strong effect on Winnie, and leads to subsequent years of trauma and suffering. Winnie's mother appears to her as a ghost in many shameful and insulting stories, causing Winnie to avoid taking the same steps as her mother did; instead choosing to follow the teaching of her traditional Chinese family to excess. The result of her actions is that, while she finds herself spared from the undesirable label of ghost, she is hereinafter unable to free herself from the confines of patriarchal structure, claiming "that was how I was raised—never to criticize men or the society they ruled, or Confucius, that awful man who made that society" (Tan, 1991: 257). Winnie learns to conceal her feelings and accept the sense of alienation she detects from her family. Without a mother to turn to, Winnie subconsciously keeps her feelings to herself, internalizing the pain she experiences by learning the language of introverted silence. In retrospect she admits: "I did not have my own mother, someone who could tell me what I was really feeling, what I really wanted, someone who could guide me to my expectations. From that family, I learned to expect nothing, to want so much" (Tan, 1991: 112). It is, therefore, not surprising that Winnie subsequently marries Wen Fu, with the hope that she will be able to escape from her old life—a life of social inadequacy, to be salvaged by a man. "I dreamt of living in a happy household where nobody ever complained" (Tan, 1991: 138). One would expect that utilizing marriage as a means

of compensation for her unhappy and lonely life would compound her problems rather than solve them. When her marital relationship goes sour, Winnie blames it on the fact that her mother was not around to arrange her marriage and draws upon her lack of a mother figure as the cause of her poor decisions. “I did not have a mother to tell me who to marry, who not to marry” (Tan, 1991: 110).

Wen Fu, Winnie’s first Chinese husband, was abusive and irresponsible, creating memories of fear that will forever haunt her. Wen Fu spent her dowry money without any qualms at all and also required Winnie to prepare food for many parties in order to gain popularity among his pilot friends. Winnie was forced to endure the pains of unwanted sex and verbal abuse throughout their married life from this man who called himself her husband. Not only did Wen Fu derive sadistic pleasure from torturing and humiliating her, he also demanded from her absolute submission in order to gain a sense of superiority. Winnie recalls that “right then, I knew he wanted to see me suffer...he would not be satisfied until he proved over and over again that he had conquered me completely” (Tan, 1991: 308). Eventually his power began to deteriorate following a car accident, which destroyed his facial appearance and the sight in one of his eyes. Winnie now not only feels disgusted by his frightening appearance, but as a result of the accident, Wen Fu begins to express more of his ill nature as well. The accident enlightens Winnie to the fact that Wen Fu was involved in promiscuous behavior with a mistress who died in the accident. Through the accident it also becomes known that he stole the military jeep he was driving for his own purposes, which is a crime in itself. Wen Fu, however, exploits her friendship with Hulan, his boss’ wife, to escape his own punishment. Winnie is forced to bear all the burdens of his actions, and accept his pains and shame for herself. Following the accident Winnie secretly wishes to see Wen Fu dead so that she, in turn, can be free.

This wish however is never fulfilled and becomes a constant nightmare for Winnie—that of Wen Fu perpetually chasing her each time she tries to runaway.

An additional aspect making the experience of victimization even more unbearable to Winnie is that society seemingly condones the violence towards women. No one is willing to listen to her complaints, as if it is the wife's duty to endure all suffering and sacrifice for the sake of the family. Even other women choose to ignore the pain and injustice that Wen Fu inflicts upon his wife, leaving Winnie to struggle and suffer alone. In one instance at a dinner with friends, Wen Fu has a violent outburst after hearing other people celebrating while he lies sick in bed. He slaps Winnie for no reason, calling her “a whore,” (Tan, 1991: 252) among other things. To Winnie's great surprise she cannot look to anyone for protection or even sympathy.

I remember this: All those men, Hulan—nobody tried to stop him. They watched and did nothing as I lay with my head touching the floor. They said nothing when my husband ordered me to say, “Sorry, I am wrong, you are right. Please forgive me.” They did not protest and tell Wen Fu, “This is enough,” when he told me to beg for forgiveness, again and again. And as I bowed and begged, cried and knocked my head on the floor, I was thinking, why doesn't anyone help me? Why do they stand there, as if I were truly wrong? (Tan, 1991: 252)

The strong sense of duty and responsibility that is instilled in Winnie becomes a tool employed by Wen Fu, to torture her and keep her under his control. Many times Winnie tries to break away from her marriage like her mother, but she fails due to her maternal bond with her children. On the occasions when Winnie is able to overcome her fears and challenge Wen Fu herself, he strikes back by turning his violence on their children instead. The violent treatment at his hand on his own six-month-old daughter inflicts severe and permanent damage to the child, causing it to develop abnormally.

Kwah! Wen Fu hit her [the baby] again—*kwah!*—again and again. And by the time I could get to my feet and push my body in between, I saw Yiku had rolled up into a little ball. She was making small animal sounds. And I was crying and begging Wen Fu, “Forgive me! I was wrong! Forgive me!” (Tan, 1991: 262)

Winnie is not able to pursue a divorce from Wen Fu for fear she will lose the custody of her children. Wen Fu maintains the role of rightful father in Chinese patriarchal society and challenges Winnie to a divorce; although not before reminding her of the fact that “you see, you are divorced... You have no husband. You have no home. You have no son” (Tan, 1991: 308). Again, Winnie is reminded of her mother’s strength and her own weakness. “How foolish I was! To think my body was my own, something to protect or lose only for myself. I could never leave him [Winnie’s son] I could never do what my mother did to me” (Tan, 1991: 308). Winnie’s inability to reject her role as a mother and her love for her children is transformed into absolute submission under the power of a brutal husband.

Winnie is confined to her role of mother, therefore when her child dies there is nothing left to confine her--no longer a mother, she is no longer held captive; hence the death of her child bestows upon her a sense of aggressiveness. Enraged with grief at the loss of her child, Winnie is eventually able to overcome her weakness. “I didn’t cry. By then I had no tears left, no feeling” (Tan, 1991: 267). It is at this time that Winnie finally begins to reject the reproductive role of a mother, the role that has been forcibly imposed upon her by a male abuser, by “[stopping] another baby from coming into this world” (Tan, 1991: 268). Infanticide becomes a sign of violence within a society where a mother is often helpless and powerless. This act of violence clearly illustrates Winnie’s desperate situation and her vain attempt to save her children from brutality. Infanticide, from Winnie’s point of view, is the only way of saving the children from a miserable life like her own. Winnie views the abortion as

an act of love. “I cried to myself, this is a sin--to give a baby such a bad life...so I let those other babies die. In my heart, I was being kind” (Tan, 1991: 312).

Tan’s novel relies largely on the literary technique of storytelling and without the mother’s narrative revelation much of her life would have been omitted from her daughter’s knowledge. Utilized as a form of female oral tradition, storytelling turns against the written text or official narrative that often distorts and suppresses reality. Tan’s novel illustrates that: while society fabricates stories, myths, or novels as a means of imposing morality upon women and controlling their sexuality; storytelling offers a counter narrative to such an ideology. It is through these stories, such as the one regarding her cousin, Peanut, who has divorced her husband and joined the Communist party, that Winnie is faced with a flicker of hope. Winnie sees Peanut’s story as an example, a possible reality, and wishes to ask Peanut how to put an end to her own marriage. Winnie decides to make a journey to see Peanut at her hiding place; this journey provides Winnie with the chance to review the past and the story of her mother as well. Winnie’s own mother had by this time in her own life eloped with her lover as well, creating a parallel to Winnie’s own situation.

At that moment, and until then, did I consider that all these stories were false--only stories, like Peanut and everyone else, I had imagined an unhappy ending to my mother’s life. Like Peanut, I had allowed myself to be scared by those sad tales. And look what happened. It did not prevent disaster from coming into my life. Just the opposite. And then I thought about it this way: Perhaps my mother’s life was now filled with joy! Perhaps I too could still find the same thing. This was my hope. (Tan, 1991: 340)

Through Tan’s novel it is clear that storytelling plays an important role in the process of female liberation. Storytelling brings the past back to the present and, through this process, allows characters to remember and reshape the past. Kathleen Brogan (1998: 18) states, “the creation of narrative is central to the process of reshaping the past”. As a grown woman who undergoes marital problems, Winnie is

able to use storytelling as the means whereby to consider her mother's case differently. Winnie is able to see her mother's story in a new light, as a counter narrative to typical sad romantic tales, resulting in death or an undesirable fate. The story of her long forgotten mother flashes across Winnie's memory, causing her to question the reliability of the official narrative. Bianca Del Villano observes how the "ghost functions as a reminder that there is a crisis in representation" (2007: 32). Winnie begins to realize through her mother's story that the patriarchal myths may, in actuality, all be false stories; she begins to see the possibility of liberation for women. Coincidentally, following her recollection of her mother's past, Winnie meets and re-establishes her relationship with Jimmy Louie, who eventually will marry and take her to America. She claims, "it was a sign that I had finally come to a true thought of my own" (Tan, 1991: 341).

Tan's works illustrate that storytelling can have the power to rid characters of the burden of their pain, and the shame and secrets they have repressed inside. Winnie's reunion with Peanut provides both women with the chance to share the painful experiences they have encountered in their married lives. Winnie finds Peanut's marriage not to have been any better than her own and, for the first time, connects with someone who has endured a similar fate and understanding of suffering. Winnie is finally given the opportunity to release some pain of her own through the narration of the stories she has heretofore told no one:

That afternoon, we had such a good talk. We sat on the bed and told each other secrets, in the same way as when we were girls, only this time we did not have to whisper. We talked openly about everything. Nine years before, we had argued over who had found the best marriage. Now, nine years later, we argued over who had the worst. (Tan, 1991: 350)

The novel asserts that the virtue of storytelling for Tan's female characters provides them with the means of restoring their connections with each other and

finding alignment through female friendships and camaraderie. Winnie gains support from Peanut and the others living in Peanut's hiding place—a refuge for divorced women who have run away from their marriages. These women provide Winnie not only with open ears to listen to her story but also assistance in her plan for legal separation from Wen Fu as well. Winnie is able to discuss openly her personal family problems with these women; she finds that “they all asked me questions. And even though they were strangers, I told them everything, about Wen Fu's family, about my family, about how Wen Fu now controlled everything” (Tan, 1991: 356).

Curiously enough, these stories that reunite female characters are in many ways stories about dead people as well. Peanut, who herself is on the brink of suicide, finds her dead friend's story to be a life saving inspiration. She says, “I now think it was Little Yu's voice guiding me to her mother. Because later that year it was Little Yu's mother helped me escape from my marriage” (Tan, 1991: 354). Similar to the story of Winnie's mother, Little Yu's sad ending is kept silent as well. As Peanut tells Winnie, “the mother was so glad to see me. Nobody, it seemed, ever mentioned her daughter's name anymore. And this was because her daughter did not die from an accident. She committed suicide” (Tan, 1991: 353). Little Yu's escape from her marriage through suicide is so horrific to the community that they prefer to omit her story altogether. Conversely, Peanut and many other girls who want to break away from their marriages as well see Little Yu's strength to end her life as a source of empowerment within their own struggles.

In spite of all the help and support Winnie received from her network of female companions, she was not able to achieve freedom. During her escape from Wen Fu Winnie was accused of killing her son, who had actually died of a disease spread by the Japanese army. Winnie was wrongfully imprisoned for nearly two

years following the accusation. Auntie Du came to Winnie's rescue through the creation of a story. She avowed that Winnie was related to a high-ranking communist leader during the time the Communist took over China. Auntie Du was able to use the power of narrative effectively to threaten officials, resulting in Winnie's release shortly before China fell into a new political regime. "You see—what power is—holding someone else's fear in your hand and showing it to them! Besides, maybe it is true. Maybe Peanut and Little Yu's Mother are now big Communists, who knows" (Tan, 1991: 387).

Winnie's successful migration to America seemed to be the end of all her problems; however, she was still haunted with memories that could only be cured through her own storytelling remedy. Even to herself, Winnie is unable to accept the fact that Wen Fu is Pearl's real father, causing her to keep this secret hidden and unknown from her American family for many years to come. Brogan (1998: 7) suggests that for many women "the past...resists integration into the present because it is incomprehensible or too horrific". While Winnie tries to forget this fact, it progressively creates a haunting within her memory, prohibiting her from completely coming to terms with her own past. She states that, "this is the part I have been afraid to tell you. This is the part I always wanted to forget." (Tan, 1991: 382) Through Winnie's storytelling and narration to Pearl, she is able to finally exorcise her haunting past. Pierre Janet, a scholar of traumatic memory disorders finds that "the movement from traumatic to narrative memory allows for the possibility of revision" (qtd. in Brogan, 1991: 9). Through the narration of her story, Winnie is given the chance to give meaning to her past experiences. Through the process of revisiting the past, the memories begin to lose their haunting effect, creating the possibility for comprehension of the problems in a new light.

Ghost figures play an important role in signifying the haunting past. As the past and the ghosts both naturally resist forgetting, the ghost figures are employed as a symbol of the haunting effects of the past. Ruth Maxey (2005: 6) maintains that as the motherland, China is often portrayed as a place full of haunting experiences. She writes that, for many Chinese American authors like Amy Tan, the country is represented as “a site of passionate love and vicious hatred, violent death and miraculous survival, incredible virtue and shocking evil--and it undoubtedly haunts those who escape”. America, on the other hand, is often portrayed as the opposite—a safe place, a land without ghosts, a place of rationality and a place free from mystery. For many immigrants the ghosts and the memories of the past refuse to be buried, even when the immigrant character settles upon new soil. At the conception of the novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, it cannot be refuted that Winnie's treatment of the past is one of denial. “All those people there [China] became like ghosts. We could not see them. We could not hear them. So I thought I really could forget everything” (Tan, 1991: 72). However, according to Pierre Janet's study, Winnie's attempt to forget the past “coexists with the intruding memory, and the repetitive images of traumatic events” (qtd. in Brogan, 1998: 6). For her, the past is like haunting ghosts trying to interfere with her present life. Even though the abuser is long gone, Winnie still finds herself haunted and tormented by the thought that the past will ruin her family.

Through their malleable natures, ghost figures are able to simultaneously render haunting effects while leading their characters towards exorcism. For Winnie's character in particular, the exorcism refers to her re-evaluation of past experiences, providing her with an opportunity to reconcile and cope with memories of the past and the dead. Through her narrative to Pearl and the symbolic conjuring of her ghosts,

Winnie can look at the past through more selective eyes, choosing only to focus upon what is useful for her present life. Winnie's nightmarish experiences are no longer able to force her into the state of victim. She is eventually able to recall her own strength as a survivor, "so you can understand why I became weak and strong at the same time...according to my life, I had to be both, that was the only way I could live" (Tan, 1991: 313).

Brogan claims that ghost figures create continuity, providing Winnie with a means of negotiation between the past and the present. Throughout Tan's novel, we see evidence of dead people bringing back elusive past memories to Winnie. The deaths of Jimmy Louie, Auntie Du and Wen Fu all provide reminders of the past, of both her own life and her daughter's. All of these ghosts of the past are in one way or another related to Pearl as well, which according to Brogan (1998: 31) "ensures a continuity between the present and past." While the conflicting mother daughter relationships draw upon the mother's fear of the past, in contradiction of the daughter's ignorance of herself, the story of one's ancestors helps to mediate an understanding between them. The rupture between mother and daughter is mended. Brogan (1998: 31) emphasizes that ancestor ghosts hold great importance, fulfilling "what experience and memory alone cannot provide, a vital connection between the generations." Ancestor ghosts in essence generate a family bond, the past is accommodated to the present, and the characters can, therefore, proceed towards the future.

Brogan (1998: 31) suggests that through the ghost figures assistance of the characters' negotiation of the past and the present, the ghosts have become a metaphor for cultural extinction and cultural renewal in the novels of ethnic authors. In Tan's novel for example, Pearl who is a second generation Chinese American finds herself

haunted by her mother's Chinese culture, which seems irrational and impossible to comprehend. "To this day it drives me crazy, listening to her various hypotheses, the way religion, medicine, and superstition all merge with her own beliefs... she's like a Chinese version of Freud, or worse" (Tan, 1991: 29). The mother's Chinese culture is, in essence, under the threat of extinction through both her daughter's rejection of it and her simultaneous assimilation into the mainstream culture. Pearl is personally uncomfortable and irritated by both her mother's beliefs and her mother's recollection of her childhood experiences with ghosts. Instead of comforting her daughter, Winnie succeeds only in making her child more frightened, by looking for ghosts and "searching the room" (Tan, 1991: 41). Even Pearl's American minister father insists that "the only ghost was the Holy Ghost²" (Tan, 1991: 41) and attempts to console her through scientific means. It is no wonder that Pearl finds herself standing in limbo between two cultures--Christianity, and Chinese superstition. "I was not comforted by his answer, because my mother had then stared at me, as if I had betrayed her and made her look like a fool" (Tan, 1991: 41).

However, it is possible also to interpret the images of ghosts as symbols of the retrieval of Chinese culture, assisting Pearl in the reconciliation of her double identity. According to Brogan, the immigrant descendents must be allowed to be "haunted by their source culture in order to render it into their target culture: contemporary America" (1998: 11). Following her haunting, caused by ignorance of her Chinese heritage and alienation from her Chinese relatives, Pearl finds she is able to connect to her Chinese roots through the stories of her ancestors. The connection is made

² Here, as in the aforementioned quote whereby Pearl compares her mother to a "Chinese version of Freud," one wonders whether it is possible that Amy Tan is quite likely to be juxtaposing Oriental/Occidental concepts. Sigmund Freud's attempt to analyze and explain the human mind and emotions – an invisible sphere – or Christianity and its concepts of the soul or the Holy Ghost – might not be too different from the Chinese world of supernatural beliefs as seen by Pearl.

through symbols of her roots as well, such as the statue of a female deity given to her by her mother in substitution of a male kitchen god. Her mother gave her this gift as an attempt to pass on her Chinese culture and belief system to her daughter. Her mother's female deity, Lady Sorrowfree, can be interpreted as a symbolic negotiation between two cultures. While Pearl does not share her mother's belief in the supernatural force and deity, she does not totally reject the negotiation of her mother's goddess either.

The image of the female goddess also plays an important role in the reversal of the tone of the novel. Tan's novel is not a story of female oppression, as many would expect, but rather a story of empowerment with its emphasis on female revenge and resistance. Winnie succeeds in defying the original version of the myth and its oppressive nature by canonizing the female deity. The replacement of the male kitchen god by Lady Sorrowfree signifies the parallel transformation within Winnie towards her new self. Winnie's ghost-like presence in the novel is similar to that of the kitchen god's wife, who has no name of her own and whose story is kept silent. Winnie, however, refuses to keep silent, battling the forces oppressing upon her through her identification with the image of the female goddess. By choosing to name the goddess Sorrowfree, Winnie is illustrating her desire to be sorrowfree herself--to put her sorrow and pain behind her and free herself from her haunting past. Winnie's story eventually merges with that of the goddess when she muses to herself, "no one would call her Mrs. Kitchen God. Why would she want to be called that, now that she and her husband are divorced" (Tan, 1991: 414)?

It is also possible to consider the statue form of the goddess as an effigy symbol, suggesting the theme of cultural haunting through visual representation. While ghost figures are deployed to signify the haunting effects of Chinese culture

upon a second-generation character like Pearl, the veneration of the goddess as a statue also represents the attempt to rescue the Chinese culture from its deterioration within American society. The female deity thus becomes a form of cultural adaptation for second-generation characters, who, living in a multi-cultural society, find themselves to be characters of cultural confusion. The retrieval of the Chinese deity provides Pearl with an alternative space to stand between, a bridge between two cultures, a means of reflecting upon her Chinese cultural roots without having to accept the misogynist Kitchen God figure's original meaning.

Women are often regarded as bearers of culture due to their role of caretaking and cultivating the generations to come; the goddess statue, therefore, becomes an apt metaphor for women through its presentation of the successful retrieval of Chinese culture. The malleable form of ghosts, the idea of *there* versus *not there*, and the Chinese culture are made clear by Tan through the corporeal establishment of the goddess statue. The transformation from ghost to god creates a dramatic and positive change for both Winnie's and Pearl's characters. Winnie and Pearl are now in a position to free themselves from the haunting effects resulting from cultural differences and painful memories. At the inception of Tan's novel, both mother and daughter may have looked at the ghosts in awe but eventually the goddess becomes a source of respect and encouragement for their characters.

The role of ghosts in the novel thus helps to reflect and reveal the character's identities. Pierre Janet argues that, without the ghosts of the past, a person experiencing a traumatic event is devoid of a "large realm of experience," as well as "aspects of personality" (qtd. in Brogan, 1998: 6). Tan's character, Winnie, succeeds not only in burying aspects and memories of her past, but also innate and vital parts of her life and self as well. The return of the ghosts, in spite of their haunting effect,

succeeds in bringing back these memories and re-establishing connections with the long forgotten past. As Brogan contends “the ghost gives body to memory, while reminding us that remembering is not a simple or even safe act” (1998: 29). Although the process of remembering the past can be painful and traumatic, it is ultimately effective in helping the characters in Tan’s novel to move on, and beyond, towards better futures.

CHAPTER III
GHOST WRITING: REBURYING THE ANCESTRAL SPIRIT
IN *THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER*

In chapter two, this thesis has discussed the ways in which Amy Tan deals with issues of the past and the profound effect that the past has on the characters' lives and their relationships, especially those between mothers and daughters. In her fourth published novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Tan revisits a subject she is very keen on, the mother daughter dyad. While *The Kitchen God's Wife* centers around the pain and suffering that the immigrant mother longs to forget, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is mainly concerned with issues surrounding transgression and the reconciliation of both mother and daughter. Both novels place much emphasis on the past as rendering unavoidable effects; but while the past in *The Kitchen God's Wife* becomes a means of haunting through resisting the character's amnesia, the past in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* not only haunts the characters but possesses and confines them with elements of guilt as well. Therefore, this chapter examines how the existence of ghosts or the characters' confrontations with the haunting past, does not only harm them but can also bring about positive effects, initiating the process of past revision that eventually frees them from their burden of guilt.

Although *The Bonesetter's Daughter* follows the trajectory of Amy Tan's preceding novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, in unearthing the painful past of a Chinese American family, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* shifts from talkstory as an important form of communication (a major device in developing the plot of *The Kitchen God's Wife*) to written text. This literary feature is quite different from most of Tan's novels that follow the pattern of oral storytelling. A principal element of the novel features a

mother's story transcribed in a manuscript with the hope that her daughter will one day read it, henceforth learning her family history and understanding her mother more. LuLing, an eighty-year-old Chinese immigrant mother, finds herself declining in memory; she thus fears that her past and the history of her family could be lost forever. It is quite common that a person will forget general details or information in daily life but the idea that all past memories could be erased is agonizing, as it is a threat to one's personal and collective identity. In her article "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and the Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels" (2006), Lisa Dunick (2006: 5) notes that the importance of writing is further highlighted in this novel as LuLing realizes that "her memory-and thus her ability to orally narrate those memories-is failing". When she hands this precious manuscript to her daughter, she says it is "my story, begin little-girl time. I write for myself, but maybe you read, then you see how I grow up, come to this country" (Tan, 2001: 12). However, the text is written in Chinese, a language the daughter barely understands. Ruth, the American-born daughter, therefore, neglects the precious manuscript for almost six years. The Chinese characters and script resemble a secret code to the daughter, who may understand and speak Chinese, but is not familiar enough with it to decipher the Chinese characters' meanings. Unable to understand the message, Ruth leaves the manuscript in the bottom of a drawer, the place where "whatever had lain there the longest by neglect" (Tan, 2001: 12). Only after noticing the signs of her mother's dementia does Ruth take the written account more seriously, making the effort to have the manuscript translated in order to find out what it is that LuLing wishes to tell her.

As Brogan (1998: 141) observes in *Cultural Haunting*, for ethnic authors whose narrative mainly lies in the oral tradition "the very act of writing family stories indicates a displacement of tradition, a deviation that in turn widens tradition". This

observation echoes the novel's plot, where conflict and misunderstanding between the mother and her daughter stems largely from cultural differences and language barriers. For example, while LuLing consistently feigns humility for the sake of politeness, Ruth is straightforward and vocal in what she says. When Ruth gives her mother a gift, insisting it is "nothing much," LuLing is prompt to believe that her daughter is playing humble, misinterpreting from Ruth's gesture that the gift must be very expensive and "the bona fide article, proof of a daughter's love" (Tan, 2001: 88). This makes Ruth feel what is described as "the slap of guilt whenever she overhears her mother boast to her friends" (Tan, 2001: 88). For Chinese immigrants in general, whose traditions still largely comply with those of their old country, family members are not expected to speak openly about their own past experiences as it is not considered important and silence is preferred. These silent actions may be in part due to the fact that the subject feels shameful and taboo. Writing in many instances, therefore, becomes a significant act; it can compensate for breakdowns in verbal communication that often occur in Chinese-American families. Writing mediates where the Chinese mother avoids pointing out what she really wants to say and the daughter fails to understand or does not pay attention to her mother.

For the immigrant mother, writing also becomes an alternative way of communication that can withstand cultural and linguistic differences. This idea is supported in Dunick's study (2006: 2) claiming that "literacy in the form of writing and written texts represents an important and often more effective means of transmitting cultural memories and cultural identity across generational lines than talkstory". Despite the silence that often prevails in Chinese-American families, the act of writing offers the mother a means of crossing the boundary between silence and speech, transmitting her story to her daughter. Also, as the process of writing renders

the absence of the audience, the speaker gains more freedom to narrate the subject matter she herself feels ashamed of or is uncomfortable talking about freely. As most of Amy Tan's novels deal with family secrets, the breaking of silence can be interpreted as the act of digging skeletons out of the closet or the revelation of a family history.

Just as the immigrant mothers in Tan's novels are frequently preoccupied with day-to-day living, their daughters fail to recognize that their mothers once led very different lives back in China; these lives, however, were forgotten and buried along with the history of their dead ancestors. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the mother's written composition about her past concerns elements of death; it is a symbolic gesture towards reviving these ghosts. In this respect, the ghosts symbolize the characters' past secrets that they do not wish to mention; the secrets that lie hidden forever haunting them with elements of guilt. In the novel, this is evident through LuLing's preference for telling her story through the means of writing; the past and her memories are not something she can talk about with ease. LuLing's reluctance to reveal her past secrets can be seen in her mannerisms and gestures when handing the manuscript to Ruth, "'just some old things about my family,' she had said, with the kind of awkward nonchalance that meant the pages were important...Ruth had heard bits of her mother's life over the years, but she was touched by her shyness in asking Ruth to read what she had obviously labored over" (Tan, 2001: 12).

As aforementioned, the process of writing is a major form of narrative in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*; from a Feminist perspective, the written medium becomes a tool of empowerment for the female characters. It is unconventional in Tan's characterization that the female characters, in spite of being Chinese women, gain access to the expression and medium of writing. In China, a place where

Confucianism is firmly established and influential in people's thoughts and everyday aspects of their lives, writing is often an unattainable form of expression for women, due to their lack of education and their illiteracy. Therefore, in the case of LuLing and her mother, their ability to write is quite extraordinary. Not only can they write but both LuLing and her mother, Precious Auntie, are also skillful calligraphers as well who, the reader learns, come from a family that manufactures ink. Dunick notes that "connections between the physical nature of ink, the process of writing, and the lasting nature of text resonate throughout the narrative" (Tan, 2001: 5). It is only through the reality of writing that the mothers and daughters can finally generate understanding and become reconciled with each other.

The mother-daughter conflict in this novel is represented through Ruth's life crisis; she faces relationship problems with her boyfriend and lacks satisfaction with her career as a ghostwriter of self-help books, a career that obviously suppresses her identity and expression. Moreover, she has the additional burden of caring for her mother who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. On the brink of a collapse, Ruth decides to take a break from her work. She cancels her vacation plans in Hawaii with her boyfriend Art and instead moves into LuLing's house to provide attentive care for the mother. While taking care of the household chores, Ruth learns the disturbing truth that her mother's stage of dementia has deteriorated to the point where she can no longer take care of herself and her basic needs. Ruth also finds things that she and her mother have kept hidden under the floorboards, in the walls and ceilings for years--so long ago she had completely forgotten about them. The rediscovery of these items which include, mementos, valuables and the unfinished manuscript of her mother's story, reminds her of the past, the conflicts, and the feelings of guilt she has towards

her mother. Racing against time, it is imperative that Ruth decides to explore and understand her mother's stories before it is too late.

However, simply reading LuLing's manuscript describing dead relatives and her life in China alone can not enable Ruth to fully understand her mother. It is important for Ruth to incorporate her imagination and shared experiences with her mother into the story as well in order to make sense of her mother's past. Ruth begins to recall memories of the numerous ghost stories she was exposed to during her childhood. She hasn't thought about these stories in many years as she has been preoccupied with the demands of her career and her partner's family, two daughters from a former marriage who need her care. Through this process of past revision, ghost figures are conjured.

Not only do ghosts embody the family secrets but in this novel ghosts also appear in the form of ancestral spirits, which are a cornerstone of the Chinese belief system. The immigrant mother maintains a strong belief in ancestral ghosts, accepting that both the luck and misfortune in her life are determined by the ghosts. For the daughter, the haunting occurs from experiencing the ghostly aspect of her mother's cultural roots, which largely lies in Chinese superstitious beliefs that appear irrational and incongruous to her American upbringing. Brogan (1998: 131) discusses this situation that widens the gap between first generation immigrants and their children saying that "these immigrant parents nevertheless attempt to draw their children back by populating their imaginations with another kind of ghostliness entirely, the *invisible world* of Chinese spirits". LuLing, who is at all times faced with regret and feelings of wrong doing contributing to her mother's suicide, is prompted to believe that the series of tragedies in her life are the direct result of a curse from her mother's ghost. Ruth notes, "according to her mother's cosmology, the world was against her

and no one could change this, because this was a curse” (Tan, 2001: 42). Despite Ruth’s inability to accept and comprehend her mother’s superstitious practices, she has to admit that, in some ways, she is herself influenced by her mother’s pessimistic worldview, eventually altering Ruth’s relationships with other people. In the novel, Ruth muses to herself, “why did she feel she didn’t belong to anyone? Did she unconsciously choose to love people who kept their distance? Was she like her mother, destined to be unhappy” (Tan, 2001: 95)?

It is no coincidence that Amy Tan chooses the career of ghostwriting for the daughter character. As a ghostwriter of self-help books, Ruth gives people advice on how to overcome problems and better their lives, yet ironically she herself does not realize how to deal with her own life crises. Furthermore, while Ruth plays the role of a ghost author who can express her feelings in her writings, Ruth fails to express herself. Instead, she forces herself to hide within the text, disguising her identity and suppressing her own voice. Ruth fears writing her own books due to the fact that the readers might acknowledge her true identity. The job, therefore, reflects Ruth’s inner conflicts as she is in constant oscillation between fearing to write and desiring to become a successful author. In this monologue, Ruth reveals her disappointment at not being recognized:

And when the books were published, Ruth had to sit back quietly at parties while the clients took the credit for being brilliant. She often claimed she did not need to be acknowledged to feel satisfied, but that was not exactly true. She wanted some recognition. (Tan, 2001: 38)

If we employ Kathleen Brogan’s interpretation in analyzing the text, it is clear that Ruth’s career aptly serves the theme of cultural haunting, in which the character fails to reconcile her double-identity, the cause of her inner conflicts and feelings of alienation. Since Ruth is brought up by her Chinese mother, Amy Tan foregrounds the

relationship between LuLing and Ruth as a difficult and conflicting one, a major factor paving the way for Ruth's career as a ghostwriter.

Being the only child of a widow, Ruth had always been forced to serve as LuLing's mouthpiece. By the time she was ten, Ruth was the English-speaking Mrs LuLing Young on the telephone, the one who made appointments for the doctor, who wrote letters to the bank... in an odd way, she now thought, her mother was the one who had taught her to become a book doctor. Ruth had to make life better by revising it. (Tan, 2001: 43)

From an early age, Ruth learns to utilize her language abilities and writing skills to assist her mother in communicating within a foreign environment. Such tasks thus provide her with the ability to revise and translate the messages.

Ruth's experiences and developed writing skills become catalysts influencing her decision to become a ghostwriter. As a writer she is aware of her ability to express her thoughts through writing as well as the destructive power of those words. During her teenage years, Ruth constantly has fights with her mother whenever she finds her reading her diary. Due to Ruth's American upbringing, she perceives LuLing's reading of her diary as an intrusion on her privacy. LuLing, however, without understanding the concept of privacy like most people from Asian countries, claims a "daughter should have no secrets from a mother" (Tan, 2001: 133). Ruth expresses her anger by writing the words in her diary that nearly murder her mother; knowing LuLing will read the diary Ruth writes, "[y]ou talk about killing yourself, so why don't you ever do it? I wish you would. Just do it, do it, do it! Go ahead, kill yourself! Precious Auntie wants you to, and so do I!" (Tan, 2001: 135). These harsh words result in LuLing's eventual suicide attempt by jumping out of a window. The tragic incident haunts Ruth with guilt into adulthood and as Dunick (2006: 5) observes, "Ruth states that her childhood guilt and fear has prevailed over her desire to write her own words". Ruth also reasons to herself why it is that she refuses to write her own book, concluding that "the idea of revising her life also frightened her, as if by

imagination alone she were condemning what she did not like about herself or others” (Tan, 2001: 27).

Since Ruth chooses ghost writing other people’s books as a means of hiding herself in the text, it is no wonder that she lacks satisfaction in the job. By giving credit of authorship to other people, despite the comforts of invisibility, Ruth takes on the ghostly presence which would be a threat to her own existence. “Most people called her a ghostwriter—she hated the term” (Tan, 2001: 27). The term *ghostwriter* implies two meanings; it is a ghost who is the writer, similar to Ruth’s ghostlike situation in the text where no one acknowledges her existence nor her identity as her name is kept invisible. Secondly, *ghostwriter* can refer to LuLing’s misunderstanding of her daughter’s job, “her mother thought it meant that she could actually write to ghosts” (Tan, 2001: 27). Both interpretations, however, have a negative meaning, playing down the importance of her job and subduing her identity.

For Ruth, *ghostwriting* refers not only to her present occupation but also points to a time when she actually wrote to ghosts. In one episode of her childhood, Ruth had to act as a shaman for her mother who believed that her daughter had the ability to talk to the ghost of Precious Auntie. LuLing wished Ruth to write down the words of her deceased mother on a sand tray. Ruth, without any concept of what her mother was doing, was left clueless and, therefore, had to guess and write down what she thought her mother wanted to hear. The image of Precious Auntie’s ghost, who Ruth recognizes as LuLing’s nursemaid, appeared frightening to the child. Ruth knew that she had died by a horrible suicide and that LuLing told her was the cause of a series of tragedies in her life. Ruth at one point wrote down the word *doggie* in the sand tray as a way of asking her mother to allow her to have one as her own pet. LuLing, however, upon seeing the word, burst into hysterical sobs because *doggie* is

what Precious Auntie used to call her. Thinking the phrase was a sign from Precious Auntie, LuLing forced Ruth to continue to communicate with the ghost. “Close your eyes, turn your face to heaven, and speak to her” (Tan, 2001: 73). Ruth vividly recalls the first time LuLing forced her to translate the ghost’s message:

Her mother sometimes talked about this Precious Auntie ghost who lived in the air, a lady who had not behaved and who wound up living at the end of the World. That was where all bad people went: a bottomless pit where no one would ever find them, and there they would be stuck, wandering with their hair hanging to their toes, wet and bloody. (Tan, 2001: 72)

Through a character like Precious Auntie, Amy Tan seems to be representing the ghostlike status of women in Chinese society. Precious Auntie does not appear just as an evil spirit in an ordinary ghost haunting story to the child like Ruth; her own life story and her position in the Chinese society signify more of her ghostly presence. When she was alive, Precious Auntie’s physical shortcomings gave her a ghostly presence in the community as the scar on her face made her look like a living ghost. Precious Auntie suffered from the loss of her father and her future husband on her wedding day. In her suicidal attempt, she swallows boiling ink, melting the lower part of her face and causing a horrific wound. In a sense, she died along with her father and her husband but somehow came back to life in a ghostly form for the sake of her illegitimate daughter. Although Precious Auntie survives through the help of the groom’s family, her disfigured face generates an aversion from the people around her, forcing her to devote herself to the family’s business of manufacturing ink. In spite of her exceptional skill at making ink and her ability to write beautiful Chinese calligraphy to display in the shop, she gains no recognition for her efforts. Her appearance both evokes fear and makes her invisible. Even the family members criticize and call her names that dehumanize her such as “Burnt Wood, [and] Fried Mouth” (Tan, 2001: 320). They even state that upon “seeing her even a demon would

leap out of his skin” (Tan, 2001: 2) or exclaiming, “How terrible to have a face like that. It would have been better if she had died.” (Tan, 2001: 229).

Precious Auntie’s silence can also be associated with ghostliness because her voicelessness makes her a “shadow-character, a ghost without a substance” (Villano, 2007: 38). Since her mouth has been horrifically burnt, Precious Auntie is unable to speak. In her recollection, LuLing remembers “she [Precious Auntie] had no voice, just gasps and wheezes, the snorts of a ragged wind” (Tan, 2001: 2). No one understands her except LuLing, the daughter who was brought up communicating with her mute mother through the language of silence. “Hand-talk, face-talk, and chalk-talk were the languages I [LuLing] grew up with, soundless and strong” (Tan, 2001: 2). However, the language of silence that mother and daughter share turns out to be ineffective as the daughter does not care to communicate with her, seeking acceptance from her community and adopting their negative attitudes towards her mother. As LuLing grows up, she does not realize that Precious Auntie is her real mother. LuLing begins to detach herself from Precious Auntie, regarding her as just a servant and an insane woman like other family members. Without the help of LuLing to translate her messages, Precious Auntie, in spite of her ability to write, is left “wordless [and] powerless” (Tan, 2001: 176). None of her female family members at home can read, write or understand her gestures.

Apart from her physical muteness, Precious Auntie also assumes a ghostly identity due to her silenced stories, which are secrets that she cannot speak aloud. She cannot claim that she is LuLing’s mother because LuLing is her illegitimate child whose father died just before the wedding ceremony. In order to avoid a scandal, the groom’s family decides to hide Precious Auntie’s true identity, making her LuLing’s nursemaid and claiming that LuLing is Big Aunt’s daughter. Moreover, no one

believes Precious Auntie's story regarding Chang, the coffin maker, who was involved in the robbery that killed both her father and her future husband. In contrast, they believe in Chang's lies and regard her furious reaction towards Chang as madness. "Big Aunt added 'Good thing she can't talk, it would be a terrible embarrassment to our family if anyone knew what she was trying to say'" (Tan, 2001: 176). Precious Auntie's account of the story is thus rejected without any attempt at investigation.

Although the status of a ghost may signal the character's silence and invisibility as passive, it is possible to employ ghost figures positively as a symbol of empowerment. In a desperate attempt to prevent LuLing from marrying Chang's son, an opium addict whose father wants to exploit LuLing's knowledge of a secret place to find the priceless dragon bones, Precious Auntie commits suicide. A letter is sent to the Chang family stating "if [LuLing] joined the Chang household, Precious Auntie would come to stay as a live-in ghost, haunting them forever" (Tan, 2001: 204). The threat is successful and the Chang family cancels the marriage proposal. Through Precious Auntie's revenge against injustice, her death makes her more real than when she was alive; she possesses more power through her absence of presence, gaining her voice and getting the kind of attention she never received when living. The capability of ghosts to immortalize submissive characters and give them identity is clear. Villano argues that ghost figures empower and obtain a privileged position, as one that "inhabits an interstitial space [becoming the] bearers of some knowledge or truth not known by the living" (Villano, 2007: 10). Big Aunt is furious that Precious Auntie has ruined the marriage between LuLing and the Chang, a wealthy family who could supply camphor wood for ink making, so she orders the body of Precious Auntie to be thrown at the End of the World, a place where people dump useless garbage. The

ensuing events cause the whole family to believe that Precious Auntie has taken revenge, after the body is disposed of, the ink shop burns down and the whole family faces calamities creating great debt. The uncles blame Precious Auntie's ghost as the cause of the fire at the ink shop, claiming she wanted revenge for their negligence of her plea when she was alive, and for depriving her of a proper burial following her death.

Not only does Precious Auntie's ghost save her daughter from a dreadful marriage, she is also the reason that the family decides to send LuLing to an orphanage, claiming that "if you remain in the house, who can tell, the ghost might return" (Tan, 2001: 216). The orphanage, however, turns out to be a more secure place, where LuLing enjoys her job as a teacher of the orphans while the rest of the family faces hard working conditions in order to pay off their debts. LuLing finds that it is the knowledge she gained from Precious Auntie, like calligraphy, which secures her a position at the orphanage—where due to the war there is no room for any new orphans. At the orphanage, LuLing also has the chance to meet her first husband, Kai Jing, a geologist who is part of the excavation team attempting to unearth Peking Man. Kai Jing is the one who convinces LuLing that there are no such things as curses; his death, however, ironically seems to further acknowledge the existence of the curse. Kai Jing and LuLing are a happy couple, but their marriage is unfortunately brief due to Kai Jing's untimely death.

In spite of Precious Auntie's intention of protecting LuLing, her daughter cannot help thinking that the series of tragedies she faces following the death of Kai Jing are all the result of the curse. Burdened with feelings of guilt, LuLing cannot let go of her past mistakes. She is haunted by the shadow of the past that always saddens and looms over her. LuLing's breakdown is clearly seen in her forgetfulness, a

symptom that develops from depression. In her conversation with Ruth, she uncovers her feelings of guilt towards Precious Auntie.

“Nobody listen my heart! You don’t listen. GaoLing don’t listen. You know my heart always hurting. I just don’t complain. Am I complain?” ...
 “But the doctor said sometimes you forget things because you’re depressed.”
 “Depress ’cause can not forgot? Look my sad life!...When Precious Auntie die, all happiness leave my body...” (Tan, 2001: 92)

From the passage above, it is obvious that although LuLing does not try to forget the past as a means of easing her pain, she does still suffer from haunting memories and fails to adapt the past to serve her present life. Despite LuLing’s efforts to treasure the memories of her mother, she begins to forget everything due to her best attempts to keep them secret. At one point, she can no longer even remember Precious Auntie’s name. LuLing fails to claim the name that once belonged to her mother and her ancestors the bonesetters. This symbolic gesture signals her disconnection from the past. LuLing is antagonistic towards preserving the past but finds that secret keeping destroys her past and her history. She writes in the manuscript, “there is one name I cannot remember. It is there in the oldest layer of my memory, and I cannot dig it out” (Tan, 2001: 1). It is not until LuLing can initiate the process of remembering the shared past that she can successfully reconstruct a connection with Precious Auntie, who has long become a mark of guilt rather than that of a loving mother in LuLing’s memory.

Curiously enough, although Ruth never comes to experience the past in the same painful way as her mother does, she is still possessed by the same past that haunts her mother. In her formative years, Ruth hears only repetition from LuLing’s complaints about her tragic life and this does not help generate understanding between them. Although such an environment becomes an element contributing to Ruth’s unhappiness, heredity should also be considered as a possible aspect of Ruth’s

personality, overwhelmed as she is by her mother's pains and her own. Goldie Morgentaler (1999: 204) remarks on the issue of heredity stating that "while one's identity is the result of upbringing, environment, and tradition, heredity becomes another determining factor in the formation of the self". Ruth inherits some aspects of her identity from her mother, specifically her mother's pains and obsessions with the past, thus she unconsciously internalizes the pain against her will. In many cases stories help to generate identity and understanding between ancestors and offspring; for Ruth, however, the fragmented and incoherent stories she hears from her mother are not powerful enough to provide her with any specific meaning helping her to identify with the past. Her mother's repetitious ramblings fill Ruth's mind with indignation and a negative attitude towards the dead. For this reason, when her mother shows her a photo of Precious Auntie, Ruth criticizes the woman, not knowing the person in the photo is actually her own grandmother.

This was the crazy woman who had cared for her mother since birth, who had smothered LuLing with fears and superstitious notions... Precious Auntie was the reason her mother was convinced she could never be happy, why she always had to expect the worst, fretting until she found it. (Tan, 2001: 87)

Instead of performing the role of creating a bond between ancestors and their offspring, the stories make Ruth initially see the ghost of Precious Auntie as a sinister force, one that keeps haunting her family with a curse that appears meaningless.

LuLing resents the death of Ruth's father, who should have inherited the family's wealth if he had not been killed in a hit-and-run car accident that occurred when Ruth was two. LuLing and Ruth received only a small amount of money as their inheritance, "just because you not a boy" her mother explained (Tan, 2001: 53).

LuLing never stops complaining about her disappointment and this subsequently makes Ruth feel very unhappy with what she is. Ruth thus finds it hard to be satisfied

with her life, hearing her mother's repetition of the story of her dead father. At one moment, Ruth recalls:

LuLing said this so often Ruth could not help fantasizing what her life might have been like had her father lived... Sometimes she stared at a photo of her father and felt angry he was dead. Then she felt guilty and scared. She tried to convince herself that she deeply loved this father she could not even remember (Tan, 2001: 53).

LuLing's constant reference to the past reaches the point where she appears no different from someone who is possessed. According to Kathleen Brogan's analysis (1998: 71), "the characters who are possessed are those who fail to possess their own history or to be eaten up by a history they cannot digest," so they are always "locked into repetition, doomed to reenact the past without relevance to present realities" (Brogan, 1998: 10). Although LuLing repeats her painful past all the time, she never articulates the story in a full narrative. Preoccupied with pain, LuLing fails to understand the importance of the past for her daughter. Ruth, therefore, never knows the true story of what really happened but is instead burdened by her mother's pains as well. Ruth is possessed by the past since she is trapped in her mother's narrative, which offers no possibility for revision or redefinition. For Ruth, the past she overhears for years from her mother remains unchanged, never losing its haunting effect.

The effects of being possessed by the past can also be seen in the characters' silence, illustrating their failure to cry out, their pain remaining repressed in soundlessness. Further, as Brogan (1998: 10) claims, "possession is associated with the conditions of invisibility and voicelessness," and it can be interpreted that, in their silence, both LuLing and her daughter are possessed by the past. LuLing's silenced stories afflict her memories with forgetfulness while Ruth's annually reoccurring muteness illustrates her inability to claim the past as her own. Ruth has little

knowledge of her family's history; she, therefore, has no idea from whom she inherits voicelessness. Ruth's muteness parallels Precious Auntie's inability to speak and this may be interpreted as a ghostly possession or inheritance from her ancestor through her bloodline. Ruth fails to acknowledge her relationship problems and seems to enjoy her silent state as a means of effacing herself from social circles where she feels uncomfortable. Although Ruth does not know why she loses her voice for a week every year, she takes it as "a decision, a matter of will, and not a disease or a mystery" (Tan, 2001: 10). She even "enjoys her respite from talk, for a whole week she did not need to console clients, remind Art about social schedules, warn his daughters to be careful, or feel guilty for not calling her mother" (Tan, 2001: 10). It can, therefore, be seen that Ruth embraces and employs her silence as a temporary escape from the conflicts and problems in her daily life.

The process of breaking the silence takes place through the act of writing a manuscript as it offers revision for both the writer and the reader. For the first time the stories of the dead are revealed giving body, form, shape, and even existence, to the ghosts' absent presence. LuLing once more has a chance to remember, record and pass on these stories to her daughter. The narrative helps recuperate the Chinese heritage as well since Ruth can re-establish the connection between herself and her ancestors. After reading the translated manuscript, Ruth is able to identify herself with her dead ancestor whom she had abhorred for so long.

She [Ruth] understood more clearly why her mother had always wanted to find Precious Auntie's bones and bury them in the proper place. She wanted to walk through the End of the World and make amends. She wanted to tell her mother, 'I'm sorry and I forgive you, too.' (Tan, 2001: 297)

In this novel the idea of a proper burial is emphasized as a key cultural practice for the Chinese, as it is considered vital for the dead. Without a proper burial, Chinese people believe that spirits will not be able to find peace and eternal rest, and

will therefore haunt the living until they are properly buried. In LuLing's case, her failure to find Precious Auntie's body and prepare a proper burial for her mother inadequately fulfills her duties and role as a daughter. She further loses the chance to mourn her mother's death, which is an important process in coming to terms with one's loss. In Jacques Derrida's theoretical framework, the necessity of mourning cannot be overlooked since it is "a process necessary for making known the dead's identity and their burial place. Through this process the dead are recognized and kept in a safe place where they can no longer haunt the living" (qtd. in Villano, 2007: 20). As mourning signifies a break with the past, LuLing's inability to mourn illustrates that she is unable to liberate herself from the shadow of the past; thus, she is haunted and possessed by it.

However, it would be impossible for LuLing to bury and mourn her mother who died in China long ago and whose grave can not be located. Her only option is to dedicate writing as a symbolic gesture of offering a burial ground for the dead. LuLing's writing memoir becomes a ritualistic act of mourning and burying her dead ancestors; Brogan (1998: 73) refers to this act as "a kind of verbal tombstone". The dead in this novel are exhumed and subsequently reburied in a narrative tomb when LuLing, through the process of remembering the past, transforms the sinister ancestral spirits into benevolent ones. The ghosts take their presence in the text and their deaths are, therefore, eventually mourned--setting the mourner free from the past.

Although mourning can be interpreted as a sign of detachment from the past, it also establishes a connection between the living and the dead. Robert Hertz (qtd. in Brogan, 1998: 67), a pioneering scholar of death rituals, argues from the anthropological perspective that the liminal period of mourning "ends in the reassertion of the boundary between the realms of the dead and the living, the dead

are rendered safely accessible rather than inaccessible by their ritual reinterment". Therefore, rather than complete detachment from the past, mourning offers integration of the past into the present. LuLing's amendment of the past is possible because she has had a chance to revisit the painful circumstances of the past, eventually finding reconciliation and forgiveness from her mother.

Upon reading the manuscript, a record of her mother's past, Ruth also understands her mother and considers the ghost's presence in their lives a positive circumstance connecting her with her Chinese ethnicity. Through the process of writing her own family history, Ruth is able to embrace her newly imagined Chinese identity, offering a secondary burial for Precious Auntie whom she comes to realize is her grandmother. Through the process of recording the past by volunteering to become possessed, Ruth acts as a shaman, offering her physical being not only to Precious Auntie but to her own mother and all her Chinese ancestors as well. All of her ancestors are known as the bonesetters, hence the title of the novel. Her ancestors earned the name of the bonesetters because for many generations the family pursued medical careers, using bones as medicine for treatment. The emphasis on bones can be interpreted as having symbolic connections with both ghosts and ethnicity. In her thesis, Xiumei Pu (2006: 36-37) investigates the significance of bone and sees it as a direct relation to the issues of ghosts, souls, essence and spirits, signifying "the ethnical character of the Chinese". As a bone is what is left of the dead, the completeness of the skeleton as a whole body suggests the spiritual wholeness of the ancestors who became the bonesetters, the ones who gave birth to their descendants. Ruth's last act of shamanism, writing, and offering herself to be inspired by all the bonesetters thus can be seen as an attempt to reconnect with her Chinese cultural roots. "Side by side, Ruth and her grandmother begin. Words flow. They have

become the same person, six years old, sixteen, forty-six, eighty-two...They write about the past that can be changed” (Tan, 2001: 338). Writing becomes a powerful and empowering channel for Ruth; its symbolic significance allows her to reclaim the name of the ghosts and their identities as well as her own.

The narrative text that Ruth reconstructs through memory, pain and possession not only serves as a bridge connecting her with her dead ancestors and allowing her to recover her identity but it also establishes a firm relationship between mother and daughter. Eventually both LuLing and Ruth reach reconciliation as they forgive each other for past mistakes that caused each other pain. Although it is impossible for them to revisit the past and correct those mistakes, LuLing and Ruth are able to make amends through their revisions of the past. LuLing’s dementia that seems to be a threat to her own identity ironically turns out to be helpful for LuLing in coming to terms with her own painful past. The illness offers her a means of looking at the past without focusing on the pain and shame. Her forgetfulness in a way spares and liberates her from the unpleasant memories and the burdens of guilt towards Precious Auntie that she carries. “Though her mother still remembers the past, she has begun to change it. She doesn’t recount the sad parts. She only recalls being loved very, very much. She remembers that to Bao Bomu [Precious Auntie] she was the reason for life itself” (Tan, 2001: 337). Ruth further regains her own voice, no longer fearing to write her own story, for she is able to revise and rewrite the past that belongs to her. “It feels like I’ve found the magic thread to mend a torn-up quilt. It’s wonderful and sad at the same time” (Tan, 2001: 297). In the end, despite LuLing’s failing memory, she calls Ruth in a moment of lucidity and asks for her daughter’s forgiveness. “I just wanted to say that I hope you can forget just as I’ve forgotten. I hope you can forgive me, because if I hurt you, I’m sorry” (Tan, 2001: 338).

In this chapter we have seen how Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* features ghost figures playing the double role of avengers and protectors. While ghost figures can represent "a dangerous possession of the past," they also come to represent an "imaginative liberation from the past" (Brogan, 1998: 11). Without these characteristics, none of the events in this novel would be possible. The ghost figures enable the characters to achieve the negotiation of a new identity. In spite of the initial pain and shame, Ruth finds the story of her ancestors in the manuscript brings her comprehension, allowing her successfully to develop a shared common experience with her mother, which largely lies in supernatural beliefs and practices. At last Ruth comes to realize that the stories full of supernatural beings play an important role in liberating her from a life haunted and possessed by a painful past. Ruth is able to accept and preserve her ethnic Chinese roots, which are crucial in forming her identity as a second-generation immigrant in America. While Ruth comes to acknowledge and put her ancestors into words, they become not only ghosts but "the women who shaped her life, who are in her bones...they taught her to worry...She has also learned that these warnings were passed down, not simply to scare her, but to force her to avoid their footsteps, to hope for something better. They wanted her to get rid of the curses" (Tan, 2001: 338).

CHAPTER IV

RETURN TO THE HAUNTED LAND: IDENTITY, LAND AND GHOSTS

IN *THE HUNDRED SECRET SENSES*

In the previous chapters, ghost figures in Amy Tan's two novels, *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, are seen as the embodiment of past memories lingering on to haunt the living characters. Despite being a story that also deals extensively with the subject of the past, *The Hundred Secret Senses* features characters who are not tormented by their past memories but rather by the haunting presence of ghosts in their lives and in their homes. This chapter suggests that within this novel a dramatic change is taking place in Amy Tan's writing style, whereby it can be seen that some of the techniques she uses for this novel seem to resemble what has come to be known in literary jargon as magical realism.³ In Tan's novel, however, ghost figures do not appear simply as products of the characters' imaginations, they exist in day-to-day living, telling the characters secrets about their previous lives and the mysterious world of the dead. Moreover, while the settings in the other two preceding novels by Tan serve as stories of a haunting past, requiring both the reader's emotion and imagination, *The Hundred Secret Senses* builds on the element of the haunted house, whereby the characters are haunted within the familiarity of their own homes. Curiously enough, *The Hundred Secret Senses* is the only novel among the three novels in this study where the characters actually return to China. As the motherland, China in this novel offers possibilities for miraculous, strange and supernatural phenomena that counter the Americanized characters' logical reasoning. It is in China that a sense of place is underscored--through the country's rich ancient

³ See Magdalena Delicka, 1

civilization and long history, providing people with an identity and strong ties with the land. In the Western imagination, according to Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978: 1), Asia has long been "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories...landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences". China can be regarded as possessing a poetic quality of space. Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher, describes China as "the space that is poetically endowed with an imaginative or figurative value...the space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process" (qtd. in Said, 1978: 54). China is thus perceived as exotic and foreign in the eyes of the Americanized characters who view Chinese people, culture and society as "backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded" (Said, 1978: 207). This chapter will, therefore, investigate how the characters, through their homecoming journeys, are confronted with a haunted house--eventually leading them to find their ethnic roots.

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the story follows dual narrative threads of two half sisters, Kwan and Olivia. Kwan's narrative recounts the lives of a group of Western missionaries and their Chinese servants set against the historical context of the Taiping war in China during the 1860s. Olivia, on the other hand, presents an account of her present unhappy life and failed relationship with her Chinese American husband, Simon. After the couple is separated, Kwan intervenes in an attempt to restore her sister's marriage. She plans a trip for all of them to visit China. Olivia and Simon both receive an offer from a U.S. magazine to write an article on Chinese rural life and cuisine, which both of them are interested in. The three leave San Francisco for Changmian, Kwan's hometown, which provides the backdrop for Kwan's tales in which many strange occurrences take place.

It comes as no surprise that, through the technique of magical realism, Amy Tan creates a memorable character like Kwan, a Chinese immigrant character who claims to have *yin eyes* or *secret senses* enabling her to see and communicate with the dead. Having migrated to America at the age of eighteen Kwan is Olivia's half sister, who was long ago abandoned in China by their Chinese father, who left for America in pursuit of the American dream. Prior to his death Kwan's father begs his American wife to adopt Kwan. When he is dying in the hospital, he claims to see the ghost of his dead Chinese wife appearing at the foot of his bed and threatening him to claim Kwan back as his daughter. Upon settling down with her new family in America, Kwan holds Olivia, her half sister, as the object of her unconditional love even though the affection is only one-sided. Kwan's attention is largely given to Olivia, her only female sibling in America, regardless of the presence of Olivia's two brothers Kevin and Tommy.

Because of her extraordinary perception, Kwan knows that she and Olivia once lived in nineteenth century China. Every night in their shared bedroom, Kwan recounts secrets and tales of their previous incarnation during the Taiping Revolution Movement to Olivia, who is, at this time, a mere seven years old. A bond of sisterhood is created between Kwan and Olivia through her narrative of these ghost stories. It is interesting that Kwan narrates her stories in Chinese; Olivia, therefore, learns the language from listening nightly to Kwan's bedtime stories. Olivia is the only one who has the opportunity to be exposed to Kwan's stories. As the girls are the only ones in the family who can understand the language so it becomes a sort of secret code, a language of intimacy. Later Olivia recalls how "Kwan infected me with it. I absorbed her language through my pores while I was sleeping. She pushed her

Chinese secrets into my brain and changed how I thought about the world. Soon I was even having nightmares in Chinese” (Tan, 1995: 11).

The relationship between these two half sisters proves to be a difficult one as Olivia, being a mixed blood younger sister, often finds Kwan’s presence in her life upsetting. Seeing her through childish eyes, Olivia thinks Kwan is going to replace her and compete for her mother’s love. However, it is actually her mother whom Olivia realizes is ready to forego her role to Kwan. “To Mom, Kwan was a handy baby-sitter, willing, able, and free” (Tan, 1995: 9). Olivia resents Kwan playing the role of substitute mother. Her mother, who, by then, has formed a new relationship with man, uses Kwan’s babysitting as an excuse to pay less attention to Olivia. As an adult, Olivia recalls her childhood memories with a more analytical perspective:

With Kwan around, my mother could float guiltlessly through her honeymoon phase with Bob. When my teacher called Mom to say I was running a fever, it was Kwan who showed up at the nurse’s office to take me home. When I fell while roller-skating, Kwan bandaged my elbows. She braided my hair. She packed lunches for Kevin, Tommy, and me. She tried to teach me to sing Chinese nursery songs. She soothed me when I lost a tooth. She ran the washcloth over my neck while I took my bath. (Tan, 1995: 10)

Moreover, with Kwan as her big sister, Olivia often feels ashamed of Kwan’s strange behavior, as it becomes the source of laughter for people around her. The situation seems to emphasize Kwan’s contrasting position in American society where she can never fully assimilate herself. “Kwan would latch on to me and tag along wherever I went. By the first grade, I became an expert on public humiliation and shame. Kwan asked so many dumb questions that all the neighborhood kids thought she had come from Mars” (Tan, 1995: 10).

Apart from Kwan’s playing the influential role of substitute mother in Olivia’s life and appearing as an outsider in the community, Olivia’s ambivalent feelings towards her half sister can be explained by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s explanation of

the psychic phenomenon called *racial shadow*. Wong is an Asian American woman scholar who describes *racial shadow* as a state of mind where a person projects “undesirable ‘Asianness’ outward onto a double [...] one renders alien what is, in fact, literally inalienable, thereby disowning and distancing it” (Wong, 1993: 78). Considering herself a member of the superior white race, the mixed blood Olivia sees the other half of her Chinese self in Kwan, with whom she seeks to avoid an interpersonal relationship. However, Kwan’s love, care and devotion often force Olivia to battle between guilt and aversion. “I’m not saying I don’t love Kwan. How can I not love my own sister? In many respects, she’s been more like a mother to me than my real one. But I often feel bad that I don’t want to be closer to her” (Tan, 1995: 19).

However, Olivia still finds herself influenced in many ways by Kwan and her ghost stories, even though it is against her own will. “For most of my childhood I had to struggle not to see the world the way Kwan described it” (Tan, 1995: 43). Although Olivia never believes in Kwan’s tales, and even finds them irritating, she comes to understand the Chinese language of her father to the extent that her dreams are perpetuated with Kwan’s imaginative tales of China and fears of ghosts whose presence Kwan attests to. Olivia even begins to see ghosts herself. Kwan reveals her secret of seeing ghosts to Olivia making her promise to tell no one. Olivia, out of fear, tells her mother everything, resulting in Kwan being put in a mental institution to undergo electroshock treatment. Kwan tells Olivia when she visits her in the hospital that “When the doctors and nurses ask me questions, I treat them like American ghosts – I don’t see them, don’t hear them, don’t speak to them” (Tan, 1995: 14). Kwan’s reaction towards the American medical staff is also interesting; it reflects Chinese people’s attitudes towards Westerners through language, categorizing

foreigners as ghosts. In Chinese language the word *guei*, which means *ghost*, is often used to designate foreigners. For example, *yang guei* means ghosts from overseas and *guei ji* refers to people from other countries that have invaded China. Kwan never blames Olivia for this revelation; it only makes her feel more guilty. “I betrayed her and that’s what made her insane. The shock treatments, I believed, were my fault as well. They released all her ghosts” (Tan, 1995: 15). In an attempt to make up for her mistakes, Olivia tells Kwan to pretend she does not see ghosts so that she can get out of the hospital. This, in turn, means Olivia has to go along with Kwan. “I then had to pretend the ghosts were there, as part of our secret of pretending they weren’t” (Tan, 1995: 43). It is in this situation that Olivia actually begins to see ghosts herself. Paradoxically, “Kwan saw what she believed, I saw what I didn’t want to believe” (Tan, 1995: 45).

It is possible to view the relationship between these two major characters in a different light from that of *The Kitchen God’s Wife* and *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*. In the previous texts, family secrets became a major source of conflict between the mothers and their daughters. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, however, the story is between two half sisters, whose sharing of secrets indicates their relationship’s level of intimacy. Kwan makes no attempt to withdraw knowledge of the past from Olivia but is more than eager to reveal her own stories, which Olivia entirely rejects and resists. Kwan wants Olivia to remember the past, a story of their previous lives in Changmian, a small and remote village in China. Kwan believes the stories are what binds them together. “In spite of all our obvious differences, Kwan thinks she and I are exactly alike. As she sees it, we’re connected by a cosmic Chinese umbilical cord that’s given us the same inborn traits, personal motives, fate, and luck” (Tan, 1995: 19).

Kwan's stories of dead people in ancient China come alive in Olivia's dreams. At one moment Olivia recollects, "for my childhood, I thought everyone remembered dreams as other lives, other selves" (Tan, 1995: 25). In her sleep, Olivia dreams of herself as another person, Miss Banner, who lives amongst all the dead people Kwan often speaks of such as: Nunumu, Yiban, and Lao Lu. "She had planted her imagination into mine. Her ghosts refused to be evicted from my dreams" (Tan, 1995: 25). Dreams play a significant role in the plot like ghosts; they work to "blur the lines between fantasy and reality, even suggesting that dreams represent memories of other lives in other places" (Huntley, 1998: 8). No matter how much Olivia vigorously denies Kwan's tales, in her sleep the dreams work to sort out the other self she fails to recognize. Stephen Soitos describes the significant function of dreams in his analysis of Amy Tan's novels:

Dreams connect characters in important ways and are used to foreshadow events to come. They help to emphasize associations with Chinese culture buried deep within the dreamer. Dreams also function as bridges between the modern world and older Chinese civilizations. Dreams reveal hidden selves and deeply repressed yearnings and fears. (Soitos, 2002: 7)

Through the technique of magical realism, dreams are employed as a link to the characters' pasts, describing their previous incarnations that took place over one hundred years before. Olivia is able to glimpse the past through her dreams, reconstructing her mysterious relationship with Kwan. "I would trace my way back to the previous dream, then the one before that, a dozen lives, and sometimes their deaths. Those are the ones I never forget, the moments just before I died" (Tan, 1995: 25).

Contrary to what the reader may expect, Kwan who strongly believes in her supernatural senses and imaginative dreams enjoys her job and her life in America. On the other hand, Olivia, who believes she is more rational and sophisticated, finds

herself suffering from a sense of insecurity. It is ironic that, as rational and sophisticated as she is, Olivia is unable to rationalize and analyze her problems and her inability to do so only frustrates her even more. She seems to be a product of successful assimilation but cannot work out what is the cause of her unhappy life. In spite of her marriage to Simon, which on the outside appears to be a perfect match, Olivia is filled with agony; she finds that “everything in [her] life seemed predictable yet meaningless” (Tan, 1995: 112). While having dinner together one day, suddenly Olivia realizes that, after fourteen years of marriage, she and Simon are just “partners not soul mates, two separate people who happened to be sharing a menu and a life” (Tan, 1995: 112). In the house that they share, Olivia is the only one who encounters her fears and despair. “I felt stuck in the bottom of a wishing well. I was desperate to shout what I wanted, but I didn’t know what that was. I knew only what it wasn’t” (Tan, 1995: 114).

Curiously, it is within her own home that Olivia feels most haunted by a sense of insecurity. Through the setting and atmosphere, the concept of a haunted house is utilized as a backdrop for Olivia’s struggle. The house Olivia buys with Simon, contrary to her impressions on her first visit, begins to feel intimidating. “The apartment felt familiar at first--as if I had secretly visited this place a thousand times before, the rendezvous house of nightly dreams...It was like coming back to a former home, and I couldn’t decide whether my sense of familiarity was comforting or oppressive” (Tan, 1995: 104). It is interesting to consider the setting as it lends an eerie and uncanny effect throughout the novel. Through the description of the house having undergone many adaptations from former inhabitants, the reader senses Tan’s attempt to use the house as an embodiment of history.

The place had become a boardinghouse for itinerant salesmen and war widows in the twenties. In the forties, ‘gothic revival’ evolved into ‘handyman special’

when the building was converted into twenty-four dinky studios, cheap wartime housing. In the sixties, it became student apartments, and during the real estate boom of the early eighties, the building was again reincarnated, this time into the present six 'semi-luxurious' co-ops. (Tan, 1995: 104)

Olivia removes the thick wallpaper in search of the original mahogany walls described by the real estate agent, imagining herself as "an archaeologist digging through the strata of former lives whose histories could be reconstructed by their choice of wall coverings" (Tan, 1995: 106). Her discovery, however, is shocking. Instead of mahogany walls, Olivia comes across masses of coarse gray hair inside the cheap fir walls. She is frightened by the sight at first, thinking she has discovered the remains of "an age-old unsolved crime" (Tan, 1995: 106). The hairy remains are removed after they turn out to be horsehair, used for effective soundproofing in well-to-do Victorian families. After the removal of the soundproofing, Olivia begins to hear mysterious and strange sounds in the house. In spite of Olivia's panic, other people think it is only her imagination that haunts her.

Simon never seemed to be at home when the creepiest sounds occurred--like the time I was in the shower and heard the theme to *Jeopardy* being whistled, a melody I found especially haunting since I couldn't get the annoying tune out of my mind the rest of the day. I had the feeling I was being stalked. (Tan, 1995: 107)

Drawing from the *Jeopardy* (television gameshow) theme haunting, it should be noted that Olivia is not only haunted by Chinese culture, like Kwan's tales of ghosts, but also by the American pop culture that also forms the basis of her identity.

Apart from the eerie setting of the house, it is also important to consider Olivia's haunting experiences as a reflection of her own sense of insecurity. At thirty-six years old, Olivia finds her married life meaningless. She and her husband have no hope or future to share. It seems pointless for them to remain married primarily because they are childless. After six years of marriage, Simon is found to be sterile, eliminating all their dreams of parenthood. Both of them avoid discussing the topic,

“Year after year, we avoided talking about babies, real, imagined, or hoped for” (Tan, 1995: 104).

Moreover, Olivia constantly feels the presence in her house of Simon’s dead Jewish ex-girlfriend, Elza, who died in an accident before they met. Having witnessed Elza’s death, Simon is not able to recover from the loss until he narrates the painful moment when she died to Olivia. His narrative haunts Olivia with Elza’s ghost forever afterwards. Olivia cannot help thinking she is only a replacement for Elza.

I knew he was thinking about Elza again...that in the dark my voice was hers, with the same overly passionate tone, the one I used to express ordinary ideas, the one she would have used to save the whole damn world. And then I felt myself becoming smaller yet denser, about to be crushed by the weight of my own heart, as if the laws of gravity and balance had changed and I was now violating them. (Tan, 1995: 85)

In her imagination, Olivia can not let go of Elza’s presence in their life. “I thought of Elza. Long ago, she had vanished from conversation, but she managed to dwell in the back of my brain, frozen in time, like a tenant under rent control who was impossible to evict” (Tan, 1995: 108). At a certain point, Olivia finds herself in a state of repression; she can no longer pretend there is nothing wrong with her life anymore.

There was the fact that we couldn’t talk about Simon’s sterility--not that I wanted to have children at this point in our lives. And the spooky sounds in the house, how we pretended they were normal. And Elza, how we couldn’t talk about her, yet she was everywhere. (Tan, 1995: 112)

The relationship comes to an end as Olivia pleads for a divorce from Simon. While Olivia considers changing her surname from Simon’s, Bishop, to her father’s, Yee, Kwan reveals to her another secret concerning her father’s identity. “Ba’s [father’s] name. Yee not his name, no. This true, Libby-ah [Olivia]! I only telling you so you don’t go through life with wrong name. Why make ancestors happy not our own” (Tan, 1995: 143)? For the first time Olivia learns that her father is not Jack Yee, the name he has chosen to call himself throughout his life in America. It turns out that

Jack Yee was actually the owner of a coat that her father had picked up by chance. The coat contained official documents for migrating to America, a student visa and paper of enrollment, all of which conveniently became his ticket to a new life. He, therefore, assumed the identity of Jack Yee and used it ever after. Kwan persuades Olivia to visit China, reasoning that she could take this opportunity to find out what her father's real name is. Kwan does not know his name either because her aunt, Big Ma, who had raised her after her mother died, had refused to tell Kwan his name as a means of taking revenge on him. Therefore, the three of them, Kwan, Olivia and Simon, all agree to go to China for different purposes. Olivia wants to find out her father's name while Kwan longs to visit her aunt, Big Ma, and help Olivia and Simon reconcile. For Simon, the trip means a lot as it is his dream to write an article about China.

It is in China that the characters' senses of alienation from the land are significantly emphasized. All of them find themselves unable to blend in with the local people in spite of their Chinese appearances. In the market, the vendors charge them more than they charge the local people claiming "of course! ... You three are tourists" (Tan, 1995: 170). Upon reaching Changmian village, Olivia and Simon do not feel at home, they view the village as conforming to their preconceived notions of what constitutes an oriental experience.

I feel as though we've stumbled on a fabled misty land, half memory, half illusion. Are we in Chinese Nirvana? Changmian looks like the carefully cropped photos found in travel brochures advertising 'a charmed world of the distant past, where visitors can step back in time. (Tan, 1995: 185)

One could apply Edward Said's analysis, considering Olivia and Simon as representations of a Western attitude "whose sensibility tours the Orient...a watcher, never involved, always detached" (Said, 1978: 103). Changmian, the exotic site they have discovered, becomes an object of gazing. It is portrayed as "static, frozen, and

fixed eternally” (Said, 1978: 208). When Olivia first sees the place she admires how “miraculously Changmian has avoided the detritus of modernization” (Tan, 1995: 184). Although Changmian seems familiar to Olivia at first, she realizes that this is not due to a developed sense of connectedness and true belonging to the place; the village is also reminiscent of “the setting for Kwan’s stories, the ones that filter into my dreams” (Tan, 1995: 185).

The death of Big Ma on the day of their arrival can also be interpreted as a failed attempt at retrieving their Chinese roots. During their long cab drive to the village, they come across a car accident that has killed a large number of passengers. It is not until they reach Changmian that Kwan learns it is Big Ma who was killed in the accident. She sees an apparition of Big Ma’s ghost standing at the village wall waiting for her. The highly anticipated reunion between Kwan and Big Ma ends in a failed attempt at reconciliation without the physical presence of her aunt. Despite Kwan’s ability to communicate with dead people she seems to know the limitations of her *yin eyes*. Kwan can look at what has already passed and communicate with the deceased, but there is no chance to fix or change anything. Perceiving her sister’s grief, Olivia consoles her saying, “at least you can still see her... I mean as a yin person. She can visit you” (Tan, 1995: 189). Kwan replies, “but it’s not the same. We can no longer make new memories together. We can’t change the past” (Tan, 1995: 189). Big Ma’s ghost can be interpreted as representing cultural memories. Although the characters can recall some things about Chinese culture, they no longer practice and continue the traditions resulting in cultural extinction. Both traditions and the ghost are still present as reminders of the past but they have no physical presence to establish new relationships or connections with the living.

Ghosts in *The Hundred Secret Senses* are quite different from the typical portrayal of ghosts, one that is often frightening and sinister. Ghosts in this novel, according to Ken-fang Lee's article (2004: 7) *Cultural Translation and the Exorcist*, "seem harmless and eager to communicate". The author further suggests that ghosts "symbolize the unknown and the unfamiliar to the over-rationalized mind, which ignores a person's true feelings and memories" (Lee, 2004: 7). Thus, after Big Ma's death is announced by the officials, Kwan's conversation with her invisible aunt or her aunt's lifeless body appears strange and awkward to Olivia and she often questions Kwan's ability (her *yin eyes*) and sanity. "Kwan is sitting in the back, chatting loudly to Big Ma's body as though they were girls on their way to school" (Tan, 1995: 206).

Olivia's rational thinking prevents her from embracing spiritual values and believing in ghosts. This also reflects her limited view of life and the world. Despite Big Ma's death, Kwan is still able to converse with her through her *hundred secret senses*, the senses that Kwan lovingly describes as a "secret sense not really secret. We just call secret because everyone has, only forgotten...Memory, seeing, hearing, feeling, all come together, then you know something true in your heart" (Tan, 1995: 91). While Olivia concludes that the secret sense is the language of ghosts, Kwan corrects her referring to it as the "language of love. Not just honey-sweetheart kind love, any kind love, mother-baby, auntie-niece, friend-friend, sister-sister, stranger-stranger" (Tan, 1995: 192). Drawing from Kwan's answer, it can be said that her extraordinary senses offer various kinds of relationship, those that go beyond restrictions of time, place and people--either dead or living. Kwan's ability to love and understand others seems to be what Olivia lacks.

As aforementioned, Changmian plays an important role in developing the plot. The village is portrayed as another world that is excluded from reality. Simon also remarks how “now that we’re in China. A lot of weird stuff has already happened, and it’s only the second day” (Tan, 1995: 208). Thus, the setting heightens Olivia’s anxiety and the surroundings seem to challenge the reliability of her sense perception and her rational mind. After their arrival in Changmian, Olivia cannot stop questioning and contradicting her American worldview due to the Chinese one she is now confronted with. Bit by bit she hears more about incredible stories that do not make sense to her. Once Olivia asks Du Lili, Big Ma’s friend who now owns the house where they stay, “when Kwan says she sees a ghost, does everyone believe her?” (Tan, 1995: 215). The answer makes Olivia even more confused as people here seem prone to accepting magical elements as facts of life. “I believe whatever is practical, the least trouble. Most people here are the same way... Maybe Big Ma’s ghost is here, maybe not. What does it matter” (Tan, 1995: 215) ? Olivia often struggles to bring herself back to reality when she is carried away by Changmian’s magical charm. For example, when Kwan tells her that Big Ma wishes she could have Olivia take her photo, Olivia accepts her request but cannot help thinking that it is Kwan, not Big Ma, who asked her for the favor. While taking Big Ma’s photo Olivia snaps at herself for talking to the dead body, ““Okay, Big Ma,’ I say, ‘don’t move.’ Am I losing my mind? I’m talking to Big Ma as if I too believe she can hear me. And why am I making such a big deal over a photo of a dead woman” (Tan, 1995: 219)?

It is in Changmian that Olivia finds herself trapped in her own confusion regarding people’s identities. Kwan and Du Lili’s misplaced identities terrify and frustrate Olivia as no one can provide her with an exact answer regarding the stories. Both Kwan and Du Lili’s stories appear unbelievable to Olivia and contradictory.

Unlike people in Changmian, who are ready to accept the way the world is without questions, Olivia finds it is difficult to negotiate between the ordinary and the extraordinary. While Du Lili believes that she is Buncake, her dead daughter and Kwan's childhood friend, Kwan tells Olivia another story about her death and resurrection. She states that when Kwan and Buncake were young, they drowned. Later after two days of lying dead in the coffin, Kwan came back to life in Buncake's body. When people saw Buncake they heard Kwan's voice.

At Buncake's funeral, I stared at my body in the coffin. I cried for my friend, I cried for myself. The other mourners were still confused over who was dead. They wept and call my name. And then Big Ma corrected them, they again wept and called Buncake's name. Then Du Yun [Du Lili] would begin to wail. (Tan, 1995: 231)

Grieving for her daughter's death, Du Yun (Du Lili) begins to think that she herself is her daughter. The villagers pretend that there is nothing wrong with either of them. "What was wrong was now right. What was right was now left... They pretended I was not a ghost... They pretended nothing was the matter with a woman who now called herself Du Lili" (Tan, 1995: 230). Both of these characters suggest the idea of an *other* within the self, a notion of Sigmund Freud's uncanny or *unheimlich* mentioned in the first chapter. The meaning of uncanny in German refers to "something that should have been kept hidden but has emerged (as something extraneous) within the familiar, domestic domain of the known" (Villano, 2007: 3). The stranger within the self thus becomes a situation that is unacceptable to Olivia due to the sense of ambiguity that is created by such thoughts. Olivia, who accepts only one possible reality, struggles to find the truth that will satisfy her curiosity questioning whether Kwan is really her sister. "Who and what am I supposed to believe? All the possibilities whirl through my brain, and I feel I am one of those

dreams where the threads of logic between sentences keep disintegrating” (Tan, 1995: 222).

Olivia is the only one who feels at a loss in her failed attempts to sort out the truth; Simon does not only accept the stories but also criticizes Olivia for her restlessness and skepticism. “Why? What difference would it make? All I know is what I see. To me, Du Lili seems like a nice lady. Kwan is Kwan. The village is great. And I’m glad to be here... Even if she [Kwan] isn’t blood-related she’s still your sister... Even so, what would you do? Disown Kwan?” (Tan, 1995: 235). In Changmian, where miraculous things are possible, Olivia cannot allow herself to believe in what she sees or hears. If she does, it will mean she has come to accept the existence of ghosts and a spiritual world that she has denied throughout her entire life. Olivia fears she will eventually embrace Kwan’s tale of their previous incarnation, in which she was supposedly related to Kwan by some kind of sisterhood bond. Ken-fang Lee observes that “what mortifies Olivia in truth is not Kwan, however, but the fear of yielding to her own intuition and letting her true, primary senses rule” (Lee, 2004: 4).

Whether Kwan is Olivia’s blood-relative or not, she is successful in establishing a firm connection with Olivia, confirming what Kathleen Brogan explains as kinship. “In this literature, ghostly ‘kinship’ replaces biological descent as the basis for ethnic affiliations” (Brogan, 1998: 12). Anthony C. Yu’s article, *Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!’ Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction* (1987), reinforces this idea. He suggests that “for Tan, sisterhood encompasses not only biological bonds but also emotional and cultural ones” (Yu, 1987: 3).

The place plays a significant role in the theme of cultural haunting as the land “is invested with meaning, providing a spatial symbolic order that reflects cultural

value” (Brogan, 1998: 33). The longer Olivia stays in China, the more she is confronted by her identity crisis. It is during a dinner in the courtyard that Kwan first points out the mystery of the caves in the mountains. Kwan translates the geography of the landscape into a verbal legend for both Olivia and Simon for this way they can appreciate the landscape as a part of the local history. According to Barbara Allen’s *Regional Studies in American Folklore Scholarship* (1992), the sense of place is:

Consciousness of one’s physical surroundings...a fundamental human experience. It seems to be especially strong where people in a neighborhood, a community, a city, [or] a region, possess a collective awareness of place and express it in their cultural forms. (Allen, 1992: 1)

Kwan is eager to show both of them how the sight of the mountain peaks resembles “two side-by-side dragons” (Tan, 1995: 242). Through the song of *Two Dragon*, the cultural and symbolic meaning ascribed to the landscape is emphasized. The mountains thus embody a specific meaning that connects and provides people with a sense of their identity. “All Changmian people know. For five thousand year, every mother singing this story to little children, song call *Two Dragon*” (Tan, 1995: 244).

Located between the Two Dragon peaks are caves which the villagers believe are cursed by ghosts. The ghost stories about the caves told by Kwan generate different reactions in Simon and Olivia. When hearing about the ancient village residing in one of the caves, Simon thinks of fame and fortune. “This could be an incredible find. A prehistoric cave. Stone Age houses, pottery” (Tan, 1995: 249). In contrast to Simon’s enthusiasm regarding the discovery, Olivia is filled with fear and uneasiness. “I pretend to laugh, but I’m bothered. Why does Kwan have so many stories about switching places with dead people” (Tan, 1995: 248). Olivia, who at all times rejects Kwan’s ghost stories and refuses to believe in supernatural occurrences in Changmian, is frightened by the idea of going up to the caves. Kwan claims people going to this place never come back “except as ghosts” (Tan, 1995: 245).

It is interesting to note that the places in Changmian can be categorized into two types, one within the village and the other uphill towards the caves. The space between these two places is divided by two archways, the landmarks that Olivia describes:

As I step through the archway, the pulse in my neck pounds. My head begins to float. I stop in the middle of the tunnel and put my hand on the wall. The tunnel is about five feet long and five feet high, tomblike. I imagine ghostly warring troops waiting for us on the other side. (Tan, 1995: 261)

The village is portrayed as a place full of harmony where Simon and Olivia are surrounded by friendly and welcoming neighbors. Particularly within Big Ma's home, where the three of them stay with Du Lili, the domesticity generates a relaxing atmosphere in spite of the presence of Big Ma's ghost. This is where Simon and Olivia seem to be reconciled. "For a few seconds, Simon and I smile at each other. It's the first warm moment we've shared in a long time" (Tan, 1995: 210). Du Lili suggests that they "sleep in one bed, and in the morning you'll both be warm and happy as before" (Tan, 1995: 213). Simon and Olivia at last have sexual relations, the first time since their separation, in an old marriage bed that has belonged to the family for generations.

On the other hand, the caves are depicted as a dangerous and mysterious ground that people in Changmian call a "Doorway to the world of Yin [the dead]" (Tan, 1995: 248). The villagers all know there is an ancient village in the cave but no one knows where, precisely, it is located. Although the view of the mountain and the caves strike Olivia with their beauty, she seems to admire the place only from distance. When she approaches the caves during her morning walk with Simon, she is filled with awe. "I see a landscape that both chills and mesmerizes me, a fairy-tale place I've seen in nightmare" (Tan, 1995: 267). Once at the caves it begins to rain. Simon goes inside to explore the cave leaving Olivia waiting outside alone. The place

somehow seems to stir Olivia's feelings of insecurity in reference to their newly reestablished relationship. She again thinks of Elza's ghost and when Simon comes back from the cave they have an argument that ends with harsh words on both sides. Simon criticizes Olivia, "you use Elza as a scapegoat for all your insecurities. You've made her a bigger deal in your life than she ever was in mine. You never even knew her, but you project every doubt about yourself onto her" (Tan, 1995: 271). Following the fight, Olivia returns to the village but no one finds Simon.

The cave plays a significant role in this novel in the process of recovering both identity and history. Cave imagery in literary tradition is often associated with several interpretations such as: "the entrance between worlds, neutral ground or a sanctuary outside the reign of human difference, law, [or] trouble, and a place of great spiritual significance" (Bleck, 1999: 9). It is often equated with the womb where people "emerge from the world of darkness into the world of light" (Bleck, 1999: 9). Chantharothai (2003: 275) observes that the cave is a "space for the encounter of one's shadow." At this point the place seems to generate the atmosphere of a haunting place, where death and decay are embedded in the surroundings. Conjuring up the figures of ghosts, the ground seems threatening to Olivia.

As I continue walking, this strange gathering of rocks resembles more and more the blackened victims of Pompeii, Hiroshima, [and] the Apocalypse. I'm surrounded by an army of these limestone statues, bodies risen from the calcified remains of ancient sea creatures. (Tan, 1995: 279)

Upon Olivia's return to the cave with Kwan to find Simon she is haunted by the place and she is left alone among the figures of hundreds of rocks that look like "faceless statues" (Tan, 1995: 280). It can be seen through her extreme panic that the piles of rocks terrify Olivia, giving her the thought that she could become like those faceless statues, among which no one would ever know or find her. Olivia also feels restless, insecure and completely out of place in what she perceives to be a hostile

environment and she staggers and bumps into rocks until she bleeds. “I howl like a madwoman at how ridiculous I look, how stupid to die in a place like this” (Tan, 1995: 280). The surroundings seem to bring out her weakness and despair. “I begin to cry like an infant. I can’t walk. I can’t think. I sink to the ground and clutch myself. I’m lost! They’re lost! All three of us are trapped in this terrible land. We’ll die here, rot and slough, then petrify and become other faceless statues!” (Tan, 1995: 280).

The ghostly figures of the rocks represent the shadow of Olivia’s Chinese heritage that she so often ignores. However, since Olivia fails to recognize her racial identity, the cave appears like a maze to her, a link to her own ethnic roots. She finds herself lost in the unintelligible Chinese culture. “Now there seem to be more rock mounds – have they multiplied? – I must weave through this maze, my legs going one direction, my mind arguing that I should go another” (Tan, 1995: 279). When Kwan comes back and saves Olivia from her hysterical state. Olivia babbles, “Oh God!... I’m lost. I thought you were too” (Tan, 1995: 280). In contrast, Kwan, as Ken-fang Lee (2004: 3) notes “has a better command of a different culture, be it the ghost world, the previous life, or China.” She does not feel haunted or lost as Olivia does because she is deeply rooted in the place. “This is my childhood home. Every rock, every twist and turn in the hills, I know them all like old friends” (Tan, 1995: 276). Kwan brings back with her an ancient music box that is the key towards their shared past and identity.

After being haunted by the place and exposed to her own fears, Olivia begins to embrace more of the ghost stories. Within the cave Kwan unlocks the music box, a relic of their shared past in a previous lifetime that was hidden in the cave a century before. She then narrates the end of the story about Miss Banner and Nunumu, the tale that she never finished. In spite of the obvious pieces of evidence within the music

box, such as Miss Banner's journal that reaffirms the accountability of Kwan's stories, Olivia still finds it is difficult to believe.

My hands are shaking. I have a terrible craving for a cigarette. What the hell is going on? Maybe I have become as crazy as Kwan. Maybe the water in Changmian is contaminated with a hallucinogen. Or maybe I've been bitten by a Chinese mosquito that infected the brain with insanity. Maybe Simon isn't missing. And I don't have things in my lap that belong to a woman from a childhood dream. (Tan, 1995: 286)

However, as the cave can be seen as middle ground offering a reconciliation of differences, Olivia eventually overcomes her fears towards the process of past remembering. Looking at the night sky from the cave, Olivia lets herself be ruled by the sense that she used to fear, her hundred secret senses, the ability to embrace more possibilities.

The same sky that Kwan see, that all her ghosts saw, Miss Banner. Only now I no longer feel it is a vacuum for hopes or a backdrop for fears. I see what is so simple, so obvious. It holds up the stars, the planets, the moons, all of life, for eternity.... If only I can remember to look at the sky and wonder about this, I can use this as my compass, I can find my way through chaos no matter what happens. (Tan, 1995: 291)

It is important to note that the cave is also the home of bats who act as intermediaries (Bleck, 1999: 9). Despite their ugly appearance, Olivia feels connected with the creatures and their dwelling place. "I was not afraid of them then, nor am I now. They are harbingers of hope" (Bleck, 1999: 278).

Furthermore, Chantharothai (2003: 270) suggests that the cave "is an ancient metaphor of a woman's womb that protects, nourishes, makes grow, and prepares lives for birth.... It is also the midwife of the emerging of new selves and new ideas." Olivia is ready to accept Kwan's stories. "I listen, no longer afraid of Kwan's secrets. She's offered me her hand. I'm taking it freely. Together we're flying to the World of Yin" (Tan, 1995: 292). The image of the cave as a midwife is also employed to reflect Olivia's newborn identity and cultural consciousness. She eventually believes in

Kwan's narrative of their past relationship that Olivia had forgotten. Olivia learns that she is Miss Banner, Simon is Yiban her lover, and Kwan is Nunumu, her loyal friend in a previous lifetime. Kwan comes back to help Olivia and Simon rejoin with each other, as she had promised Miss Banner she would in the previous incarnation. After fulfilling her goal, Kwan disappears in the cave leaving Olivia in the darkness. Olivia finds her way out of the cave, which can be seen as a symbolic gesture towards her successful struggle for acculturation. Olivia's emergence from the darkness of the cave to the light outside can be interpreted as her spiritual rebirth.

It's as if a thick blanket had been thrown over my eyes. I don't panic...but in here, I don't know the boundaries of the dark. The blackness is like a magnet drawing me in. I backtrack toward the cave opening, but I'm disoriented, with no sense of direction, not in or out, nor up or down. (Tan, 1995: 309)

After stumbling in the darkness, Olivia finds the fresh open air where "the light is so hard and I can't see... when I can see the world again, he'll [Simon] be Yiban and I'll be wearing a yellow dress stained with blood" (Tan, 1995: 310). The cave where Olivia or Miss Banner died in the previous lifetime becomes her birthplace where she is able to negotiate between past and present and conceive her identity.

Apart from being a midwife for an emerging self, Chatharothai (2003: 274) also suggests that the cave functions as "the adjoining point between past and present which also suggests the immortality and continuity of women's alliance through regeneration." While coming back from the cave, Olivia visits the Ghost Merchant's House, a place where Olivia and Kwan, the former Miss Banner and Nunumu, lived together with a group of missionaries before they were killed. Olivia digs out the jars of thousand-year duck eggs⁴ that Kwan claims she buried in the garden of the house a century ago. "I pulled out a blackened egg, then another, and another. I hugged them

⁴ also known as preserved egg, hundred-year egg, and thousand-year-old egg. It is a Chinese cuisine ingredient made by preserving duck, chicken or quail eggs in mixture of clay, ash, salt, lime, and rice straw for several weeks to several months, depending on the method of processing.

against my chest, where they crumbled, all these relics of our past disintegrating into gray chalk. But I was beyond worry. I knew I had already tasted what was left” (Tan, 1995: 318). The discovery of the duck eggs assesses to Olivia the truth of Kwan’s tale through the sense of place. Although the house was burned down long ago, Olivia can trace through the geography linking her with the history. Stephen Soitos (2002: 10) concludes that “the recovered music box and the discovered jars of duck eggs that Nunumu buried during the Taiping Rebellion are proof of a deep bond that has withstood the test of time.”

Kwan’s disappearance in the cave seems to underscore the magic elements of the novels. Kwan’s character can be seen as a ghost who acts as a cultural translator for her sister. Benzhi Zhang (2004: 3) also remarks that “Kwan’s mysterious disappearance provokes a magical effect that can be found in a traditional Chinese tale...[she] enters the cave of her own stories and disappears... readers are left with the feeling that the world of yin is eventually translated into real life.

Miraculously, in spite of Simon’s sterility, Olivia gives birth to a girl nine months after Kwan’s disappearance, Olivia believes the baby is a gift from Kwan. The child’s appearance, “dimples in her fat cheeks” (Tan, 1995: 320), could be identical to Kwan. The baby girl, as Soitos sees it, is where the past and the present are fused, providing Olivia with the insight that:

I think Kwan intended to show me the world is not a place but the vastness of the soul. And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless, endless, all that moves us toward knowing what is true. I once thought love was supposed to be nothing but bliss. I now know it is also worry and grief, hope and trust. And believing in ghosts – that’s believing that love never dies. If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary senses. If we remember, we can find them anytime with our hundred secret senses. (Soitos, 2002: 321)

Olivia finally makes up her mind to take Kwan’s surname, Li, for herself and her daughter, Samantha. She does not choose Simon’s, her father’s, Jack Yee the

stranger's, or even her maiden name Laguni of her stepfather. Curiously enough, while being able to embrace Chinese culture, her choice of surname does not comply with Chinese tradition—where only males perpetuate the family name. However, through the female bloodline, the idea that women are bearers of culture is, once more, reiterated.

In this chapter, it is important to see that the sense of place plays a major role in helping the characters recover their identities through the process of a cultural construction offered by history. The reconnection with the past in the case of these characters entails not only remembering but also forming, a personal and cultural identity. As Villano (2007: 139) sees it, ghost figures in *The Hundred Secret Senses* thus act “half-way between two dimensions, as a bridge, uniting times and places very distant from one another in an uncanny proximity.”

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Three of Amy Tan's novels, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and *The Hundred Secret Senses* reflect the lives and the struggles of Chinese immigrants as they move towards assimilation in America. In each of these novels, the characters face identity problems due largely to their inability to negotiate between the two dominant cultures, Chinese and American. This thesis examines how, in the course of their struggles towards acculturation, ghost figures appear dominantly in the novels as a reflection of the characters' confused identities and haunting experiences. It is evident that although ghost figures are utilized to reflect the characters' fears and insecurities regarding their ethnicity, the haunting of these ghosts further initiates the characters' processes of remembering the past, eventually leading them towards a newly constructed identity.

Ghost figures are closely related to the past in all three novels; therefore, the past is worth discussing since it can be regarded as the embodiment of cultural identity and a connection to one's own history. However, in each of the three novels examined, Amy Tan deals with the past differently. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the past is presented in terms of its haunting characteristics due to the character's repression of their painful memories. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, it is depicted as a mark of guilt that the character cannot forget. The past in *The Hundred Secret Senses* is essentially forgotten as a result of the notion of time and space that clearly divides the past from the present.

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the past is presented in the painful memories that Winnie, the Chinese immigrant mother, tries to forget. However, despite her attempts

to bury the past, hoping that the painful memories will eventually fade away upon her departure from China, the past becomes even more haunting. Winnie silences her stories, even concealing them from her daughter, Pearl, who therefore never really gets to know her mother. It is through the death of the characters that the past returns to remind Winnie of what she has kept silent for so long. It is not until Winnie eventually breaks her silence and initiates the process of remembering the past with her daughter that the past loses its haunting effect. The past becomes the bridge that reconnects the fractured relationship between the mother and her daughter.

While the past in *The Kitchen God's Wife* becomes a haunting one due to the character's attempts to forget, the past in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* poignantly haunts the living, as the character cannot let go of the painful past. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, it is clear that the act of remembering the past can also be harmful if the past is remembered in ways that could lead to self-destruction. LuLing, who feels shame for taking part in her mother's death, never had a chance to mourn her mother's loss or even express her regret. She continually torments herself with the thought that her life is doomed by a curse from her mother who will never forgive her. In the case of Winnie, the past must be remembered as a way to exorcize ghosts, whereas LuLing, conversely, needs forgetfulness from her Alzheimer's disease as a means of healing. With parts of her memories omitted by the disease, LuLing is eventually free from her haunting past.

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Kwan, a Chinese immigrant sister, does not conceal the past from her mixed blood half-sister, Olivia, but the past is still haunting as Olivia refuses to acknowledge it. Having been brought up in America, Olivia is influenced by the notion of time and space that distinguishes between the past and the present, China and America. She thus cannot identify herself with the stories of her

previous lifetime in China that seems so distant in both time and space. Olivia never embraces the past as her own history, which is why she often refers to Kwan's stories as dreams or tales.

In each novel, the importance of personal narrative is underscored as a resistance to the official narrative. The second-generation characters gain knowledge of who they are from their mothers' stories, while the official narrative is questioned in terms of its reliability. The daughters in the three novels are not able to generate an understanding of themselves and their mothers through the official narrative that offers them at best an incomplete truth. In the novels, Chinese immigrant identities appear slippery, as the daughters often learn that they have realized inaccurate identities of their fathers and relatives. The daughters often find out from their mothers' narratives that their biological fathers are someone whom they have never known, or that their so called relatives are not actually related to them by blood but are, in reality, just the family's close friends. Many critics thus argue that Tan's novels reflect a postmodern phenomenon questioning America's cultural hybridity, races and identity, all of which make the characters restless, finding their life and their relationships meaningless. The characters, although they are the descendants of their Chinese parents, often fail to recognize their ethnic essence. They find themselves estranged from their family and relatives and are unable to grasp the true meaning of what Chinese American is.

In these three novels, narrative is utilized not only as a literary tool for developing the plot but also as a means of generating cultural consciousness for the characters by mediating the gap between mother and daughter, sister and sister. The characters in Tan's novels often find the narrated stories to be a source of knowledge for understanding themselves, their mother or sister, and their Chinese culture. Amy

Tan draws on different techniques in each novel for the characters to articulate their stories. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, storytelling plays a major role in generating reconciliation between the mother and her daughter. As a form of woman talk, storytelling offers them the chance to disclose secrets that are haunting to the mother and suffocating to the daughter. The revelation of the past thus rids them of the shadow of ghosts that often visits them in the forms of a ghostly past, haunting memories, family secrets, and shame.

On the other hand, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, writing seems to be a more effective way of communication as the mother's memory is failing. The permanence of the written text proves to be important because while memories are vulnerable to time and forgetfulness, the daughter still has access to the past through her mother's manuscript. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, there is the hint that the notion of time is challenged through the permanence of the written text; this is more vividly seen in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, where Amy Tan employs a technique similar to what has come to be known as magical realism. Ancient China and modern America are interwoven within a narrative populated with ghost stories. Finding herself unable to identify with any culture, Olivia feels haunted both in her home in America and in China. Here, the sense of place is underscored. Upon visiting China, Olivia, who refuses to believe in the narrative, sees the landscape as a medium connecting her with an unintelligible Chinese culture. The cave can be interpreted as a symbolic middle ground offering her an empty space not occupied by any culture or civilization, either Chinese or American. Olivia, having reconciled both cultures within this in-between space, can emerge from the cave with a newly acclaimed identity.

Within these three novels, it is obvious that ghosts play a major role in reflecting the characters' identities. As the characters in each novel are confronted with hidden and discomforting truths regarding their families, ghost figures emerge as a sign of the characters' personal crises that can be exorcized only by acknowledging and remembering these ghosts. For the characters in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the knowledge of the past, despite its haunting effect, is important in identity forming for both mother and daughter; through this knowledge the characters can identify themselves with the group and no longer feel alienated from their community.

In the same fashion as *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the characters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are able to develop their identities through the stories of their ancestors. The narrative of their family history helps to transform the ancestral spirits from sinister ghosts into benevolent ones, who inspire the descendants to develop their identities. The daughter in this novel eventually embraces the spirit of her grandmother as a part of her self, a woman who "shaped her life, who are in her bones" (Tan, 2001: 338).

Upon reading *The Hundred Secret Senses*, it can clearly be seen that ghosts are closely related to the issues of identity and ethnicity. In the novel, American characters reject ghosts and supernatural beings considering them to be elements of madness. For Kwan and the residents of Changmian, however, their lives are inseparable from ghosts and a belief in the supernatural world. Here, ghosts and superstition suggest the distinct characteristics of Chinese people and can be seen as an example of their strong cultural vigilance. Olivia, who finds herself at a loss among her American pop culture and the Chinese culture, eventually recovers her identity through the narrative of her Chinese sister. Olivia at last comes to terms with her

relationship with her sister and accepts the existence of ghosts, embracing them as a part of her own identity.

It is curious that in all three novels only women are portrayed as ghosts or haunted by them. With the absence of male characters, especially father figures who come to represent reason and order, ghost figures take their presence in the world of women, a world that is open to supernatural beliefs. Mothers in these novels are educated, strong willed and powerful figures. In spite of their experiences of victimization, these mothers have a strong influence on their daughters and become as Kathleen Brogan claims, the bearers of culture.

It cannot be denied that in Amy Tan's novels regarding mother/daughter relationships, she cannot escape from using stock devices and stereotypes to present the issues of identity and ethnicity. In analyzing these three novels, it is obvious that Tan emphasizes the characters' coming to consciousness, both as daughters and as Chinese Americans. While this thesis demonstrates that ghost figures can be seen as a symbolic representation of the loss of cultural traditions amongst generations, as well as the retrieval of cultural memories and identity, it is also possible to study ghosts from different perspectives. While ghost stories are not endemic to minority writing, one will find similar characteristics of ghost figures in the works of other ethnic groups such as African Americans and Native Americans. In mainstream literature, besides representing the status of *Other*, ghost figures are often utilized to deconstruct postmodern culture, for as Avery Gordon (1997: 16) claims, "No shadow, no ghosts."

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

- Tan, Amy. The Kitchen God's Wife. London: Harper Perennial, 1991.
- Tan, Amy. The Hundred Secret Senses. London: Harper Perennial, 1995.
- Tan, Amy. The Bonesetter's Daughter. London: Harper Perennial, 2001.

Secondary Sources

- Allen, Babara. "Regional Studies in American Folklore Scholarship. Eds. Barbara Allen Bogart and Thomas J. Schlereth." Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures. Lexington: Kentucky University, 1992.
- Bleck, Melani. "Linda Hogan's Tribal Imperative: Collapsing Space through "Living" Tribal Traditions and Nature." SAIL 11(Winter, 1999)
- Blodgett, Harriet. "Mimesis and Metaphor: Food Imagery in International Twentieth-Century Women's Writing." Language & Literature 40 (3, 2004): 260.
- Brogan, Kathleen. Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature. Virginia: University of Virginia, 1998.
- Chantharothai, Sasitorn. Transforming Self, Family, and Community: Women in the Novels of Anne Tyler, Toni Morrison, and Amy Tan. Doctoral Thesis. English Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2003.
- Chen, Victoria. "Chinese American Women, Language, and Moving Subjectivity." Women and Language 18 (1, 1995): 3-7.
- Delicka, Magdalena. "American Magic Realism: Crossing the Borders in Literatures of the Margins." Journal of American Studies of Turkey 6 (1997): 25-33.
- Dunick, Lisa. "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and the Written Word in Amy Tan's novels." MELUS 31 (Summer, 2006): 3-20.
- Feng, Pin-chia. "Amy Tan." Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 173. American Novelists Since World War II, Fifth Series. Eds. James R. Giles and Wanda H. Giles. Brucoli Clar Layman Book. Gale, 1996. 281-289.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. Love and Death in the American Novel. New York: Penguin, 1982.
- Ganahl, Jane. "Amy Tan Gets Her Voice Back." Book (January), 2001.

- Goldner, Ellen J. "Other(ed) Ghosts: Gothicism and the Bonds of Reason in Melville, Chestnutt, and Morrison." MELUS 24 (Spring, 1999): 59-83.
- Gordon, Avery. Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- He, Shan Qiang. "Chinese-American Literature." New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage. Alpana Sharma Knippling, Ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Heung, Marina. "Daughter-Text/Mother-Text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan's "Joy Luck Club."" Feminist Studies 19 (Autumn, 1993): 597-616.
- Huntley, E. D. Amy Tan: A Critical Companion. Westport: Greenwood, 1998.
- Kim, Elaine H. Asian American Literature An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context. Philadelphia: Temple University, 1982.
- Kramsch, Claire. Language and Culture. Oxford: Oxford University, 1998
- Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. Toni Morrison A Critical Companion. London: Greenwood, 1998.
- Lee, Ken-fang. "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's Ghost Stories." MELUS (29, 2004)
- Maxey, Ruth. "The East is Where Things Begin: Writing the Ancestral Homeland in Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston." Orbis Litterarum 60 (2005): 1-15.
- Morgentaler, Goldie. Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like. London: Macmillan, 1999.
- Pu, Xiumei. Spirituality: A Womanist Reading of Amy Tan's The Bonesetter's Daughter. Master's Thesis. College of Arts and Sciences, Georgia State University, 2006.
- Redding, Arthur. "'Haints': American Ghosts, Ethnic Memory, and Contemporary Fiction." Mosaic 34 (4, 2001): 163.
- Soitos, Stephen. "Amy Tan." American Writers: a Collection of Literary Biographies. Supplement X. Jay Parini, Ed. Chales Scribner's Sons, 2002.
- Said, Edward W. Orientalism. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- Spivak, Gayatri Ghakravorty. "Ghostwriting." Diacritic 25(Summer, 1995): 64-84.
- Villano, Bianca Del. Ghostly Alterities Spectrality and Contemporary Literature in English. Stuttgart: ibidem, 2007

- Westerman, Molly. "Of Skulls or Spirits: The Haunting Space between Fictional(ized) History and Historical Note." CLIO 35 (3, 2006): 369.
- Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Necessity and Extravagance in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: Art and the Ethnic Experience." MELUS 15 (Spring, 1998): 3-26.
- Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. Reading Asian American Literature: from necessity to extravagance. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993.
- Yin, Xiao-huang. Chinese American Literature since 1850s. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Yu, Anthony C. "'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction." Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 47 (Dec, 1987): 397-434.
- Yuan, Lijun. Reconceiving Women's Equality in China: A Critical Examination of Models of Sex Equality. Lanham: Lexington, 2005.
- Zhang, Benzi. "Reading Amy Tan's *Hologram*: The Hundred Secret Senses." International Fiction Review. 31.1-2 (2004)

CURRICULUM VITAE

Pitchayapa Siridetkoon was born on September 24, 1982 in Bangkok. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University in 2004. She has been a lecturer at the Department of English, the Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok since 2005. In 2006, with a scholarship from Naresuan University, she furthered her studies for a Master of Arts in English at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.