

Memory Restoration: Working Through Histories in the North American Chinese Diaspora

Jun Lu

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Abstract

From the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, this dissertation attempts to clarify the way and possibility of working through difficult histories in the Chinese diaspora in North America. Considering the discrete nature, fragmentation, mobility, and prevalence of individual and familial units within the diaspora, psychoanalysis provides an advantageous framework for investigating and addressing historical experiences and their aftermath. I examine the contributions of three prominent psychoanalytic theorists, Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Donald Winnicott, in order to explore the ways in which their respective theories provide insights to the questions of: what one is working through, what one is working through to, and where one may locate the experiences of working through. Specifically, based on Winnicott's concepts of 'use of object' and 'transitional space,' I argue that the use of cultural production, such as fiction, should be considered an integral part of the process of working through histories for the Chinese diaspora. I present three case studies that illustrate the utilization of cultural products from the Chinese diaspora as a means to comprehend their ongoing struggle between the processes of remembrance and forgetting. In my analysis, I consider not only the textual material itself, but also the factors pertaining to the authorship and reception of the text. These factors include situations of diaspora, traumatic experiences, the act of bearing witness, modes of learning, and the diligent endeavours of working through.

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Chapter One

Do Not Say We Have Nothing

[F]or the psyche, the historical could be defined as a combination of:
 —what has happened,
 —what has not happened,
 —what could have happened,
 —what has happened to someone else but not to me,
 —what could not have happened,
 —and finally—to summarize all these alternatives about what has happened—a statement that one would not have even dreamed of as a representation of what really happened.

— André Green¹, *Experience and Thinking in Analytic Practice*

History is about the past that we thought we had left behind. The epigraph borrowed from André Green raises a question of how complex history is to the psyche and extends our understanding of what the past may and may not mean to us. *Memory Restoration: Working Through Histories in the Ethnic Chinese Diaspora* explores interactive relationships between history and individual, and history and group by looking at two dimensions: what histories do to us, and what we do to histories. This study builds on an epistemological basis, which prioritizes the innate relationship between knowledge, and experience, brings body and affect back to the process of knowing, and shifts the focus from truth as final and absolute to truth as a mode of participatory disclosure. It respects the multifaceted feature of history and the complex interrelation between history and memory via representation.

In recent decades, trauma and its causes have been studied extensively as a key component of history, which reveals the importance of affect and its effect on memory in striking

¹ See Abram's *André Green at the Squiggle Foundation*, p. 2.

ways (LaCapra, 2018). In this vein, *Memory Restoration* stands on the intersection of history, memory, and trauma and attends to experience and its narrative quality. One of the primary concerns of this study is “what we are left with,” which focuses on how to live with the afterwordness of traumatic histories and how these conditions shape the narrative quality of memory. The traces and remains examined here are not those of historians, but rather those of cultural expression. This study specifically investigates how memory, forgetting, and fantasy are implicated in the constitution of lived experience and cultural representations. Thus, the histories discussed in this project are no longer remote and detached, but haunted and affective.

Relations to the Parental Past

Memory Restoration grew out of my observations over the last eight years, in which I see a compelling challenge for Chinese diaspora in the North America to grasp their link with tragic events that occurred in mainland China and explore opportunities to work with the haunting legacies through the trend in diaspora literature and public memorialization. From 2016 to 2018, I witnessed the active participation of Chinese Canadian community in demanding a public recognition of Japan’s assault on the Chinese city of Nanjing in 1937. The recall and commemoration of the history of the Nanjing Massacre initiated by Iris Chang and her book *The Rape of Nanking* (1997) has turned into some kind of political appeal in North America. The unity and rare political participation of the Chinese community were impressive. They supported members of city council and provincial legislatures to propose motions to establish December 13th as the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day. After succeeded in Toronto City Council in 2016, the Ontario Legislature also passed a similar motion to designate the date for remembrance in 2017. Although such political appeal was stopped at federal level in 2018, it raised debates

over whether the government of Canadian had the responsibility to recognize a massacre that involved neither Canada nor Canadians and then, what the host country could do for immigrants or diaspora groups to remember their past. On December 9, 2018, the first overseas Nanjing Massacre Victims Monument, funded by local Chinese, was unveiled at Richmond Hill in the Greater Toronto Area. Not only asking for a recognition, the Chinese community was also calling for a mourning.

Another inspiration of my dissertation is Canadian writer Madeleine Thien's novel *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (2016), which broke into the public eye in 2016 with its Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor General's Award, as well as short-listed for the Man Booker Prize and the Women's Prize for Fiction. The novel tells a story of how a second-generation Chinese immigrant tried to understand her late father by exploring his past in mainland China. Its encyclopedic way of storytelling invites readers to re-imagine the traumatic Chinese history from early days of the new regime to the Cultural Revolution in 1960s to 1970s and the Tiananmen Square democratic movement in 1989. From then on, I noticed a blooming of second-generation immigrants' perspectives in Chinese diaspora writing on traumatic histories. These novels also include Meng Jin's *Little Gods* (2020), Vanessa Hua's *Forbidden City* (2022), and Belinda Huijuan Tang's *A Map for the Missing* (2022). The writers are American/Canadian-born daughters of Chinese immigrants who wrote about stories in the time frame of 1960s to 1990s. Their literary representations of the past raise a critical question: how can diaspora make sense of and remember histories that they did not experience?

Memory Restoration studies how memory can be employed to comprehend our relationship to history as a diaspora subject. Memory carries the past, drifts across borders and transmits to new generations. Compared with the Jewish diaspora and the Holocaust trauma,

which had been well integrated into the North Americans' historical consciousness, the Asian diasporic groups and their traumatic histories in the 20th century are less recognized in the public narrative even as the Asian population is the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the North America. However, memory is also complicated by the internal fact that many immigrant memories involve painful pasts that were suppressed in their native countries. The turn to memory study, as Marianne Hirsch (2012) stated, enables us to account for the power dynamics behind forgetting, oblivion, and erasure, and thus to seek reparation and redress outside of the hegemonic structure by advocating on behalf of individuals and groups whose lives and stories have not yet been thought (16). Complications in memory leads to a series of research questions of this dissertation. What importance does the past have for the present? How does the social and political use of narrating history construct the collective memory and group identity? What are the psychological structures and conflicts in remembering, repressing, and forgetting? How do the subsequent generations reconcile their family history and cultural roots with their lives as contemporary Chinese Americans/Canadians?

What I have observed in the Chinese diaspora prompts in-depth thinking on how to understand our relation to a parental past, which has been thoroughly discussed in Jewish diaspora and Holocaust studies. Marianne Hirsch (2012) considers the "syndrome" of belatedness as "post-ness" and develops the concept of postmemory to frame the phenomenon of postgeneration's connection to the past and the transmission of memories.

"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (p. 5)

Moreover, the memory in the postmemory context, as Stephen Frosh (2019) explained, “is not necessarily a memory at all, but a representation (or gap in representation) that emerges from the actual or blocked memories of others” (13). Thus, the traces and remains are received history (Young 1997), rather than the history of fact. What I observed in Chinese diaspora literature is different attempts to make connections to the past by filling the representational void. In the opening quote, André Green’s painting of the psychic landscape also illuminates the multi-layered and multi-faceted nature of representation in various forms of cultural expression. Although we will never go back to the historical scenes, our “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” allow us to remember and integrate the past, which is what, in this study, is called “working through histories.”

As a pivotal concept in psychoanalysis, ‘working through’ was first introduced by Sigmund Freud in “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through” (1914) to suggest a process of getting to know why and how memories became unwanted and inaccessible and were first reproduced in the form of action. Such process involved “[a] sort of psychical work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition” (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973, 488). Thus, remembering as a crucial component of working through is “an act of appropriating the past” (Meyerhoff 1962, 6), which will be expended and elaborated upon in this study.

Difficult Histories

Memory Restoration investigates how individual and collective trauma can inform the field of social thought for insight into the breakdowns and restoration of social bonds. Specifically, it attempts to understand how the Chinese diaspora group works on their

relationship with the difficult histories by exploring the functions of memory and its cultural expressions. The Nanjing Massacre (1937), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement (1989) are three significant traumatic events in modern China that will be discussed. Rather than discussing how to work through specific historical events, my purpose is to show different orientations to the ways history is dealt with by the Chinese diaspora and where locates the possibilities of working through.

Before delving into the three histories, the notion of difficult history must be introduced. Difficult history is a term developed from Deborah Britzman's (1998) idea of difficult knowledge, which sheds light on the emotional challenges in learning and teaching traumatic pasts. Specifically, difficult knowledge "signals felt wordlessness, shock, and even sorrow as qualities of learning made from the history of the reception of human-induced catastrophe and the confrontation of denial in pedagogical time" (Britzman 2021, xvii). Furthermore, Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman's (2003) investigation of the qualities of difficult knowledge provides scholars with a framework for theorizing the effectively difficult aspect of histories. According to Ben Walsh, David Hicks, and Stephanie van Hover (2017), difficult histories, in an affective aspect, trigger learners' struggle with: "(1) their own prior beliefs, expectations, and understanding of events, people, and issues; (2) issues of the complicity of their countries, culture, families in structural violence against others; and (3) the anxiety that comes with identifying with victims, bystanders, and perpetrators of violence in the past" (18).

For the conceptual aspect, Magdalena Gross and Luke Terra (2019) are not satisfied with the affective highlight and propose five criteria to consider the difficult qualities. They are: (1) being central to a nation's history regardless of being recognized by political rulers or integrated into the national storyline; (2) tending to be dissonant with the narrative template that

characterizes the overall memory of a national past or contradicting stated national values; (3) in relation with questions or problems facing us in the present; (4) usually involving collective or state-sanctioned violence, or violence that citizens of good social standing may commit; (5) creating disequilibria that challenge existing historical understandings, or requiring people to change their assumptions or beliefs when integrating these periods or events into an existing historical narrative (4).

Thus, from both the affective and sociological dimensions, the three historical periods in this dissertation are treated as difficult histories. Nanjing Massacre (1937) did not play an essential role in the Chinese historical remembrance until the first Japanese textbook controversy in 1982. It had been suppressed due to political reasons, which include (1) the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuomintang (KMT)² and a series of revolutions and movements in the early years of new China interrupted the reckoning for Japan's war crimes; (2) the political ideology of seeing the KMT as the perpetrator to Chinese people denied the reality that they were also the victim when fighting against Japanese in Nanjing; (3) the normalization of diplomatic ties between China and Japan muted the discussion of historical problems. In North America, the Nanjing Massacre was not recognized as a horrific atrocity in World War II within the historical narrative dominated by a European-centered perspective. Although Japan's war crimes were given verdict by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, the history of the Asian battlefield and its trauma had been overshadowed by the discourse that Japan became a victim of war when it was hit by the US atomic bomb. Nanjing Massacre did not get claimed until Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* (1997) became popular and opened discussions

² The Kuomintang, also known as the Chinese Nationalist Party, holds significant political influence in the Republic of China. Originally established on the Chinese mainland, the party relocated to Taiwan following the civil war in 1949.

and debates when the US's suppression of the knowledge of Japanese war crimes were loosened due to their trade war with Japan in the 1990s (MacDonald 2010).

In contrast to the clear-cut external identifications between perpetrators and victims in the discussion of the Nanjing Massacre, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is a much more complicated history given its ambiguous distinction between perpetrators and victims. This is true not only because the Chinese Communist Party continues to rule and the party's legitimacy in power would be undermined by the denial of its great leader Mao Zedong, but also because many Red Guards, the rebels motivated by Mao, and those who have committed wrongdoings against others have viewed themselves as victims of the revolution despite having committed acts of perpetration (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik & Cui 2016). The “universal complicity” constructed by the 1981 “Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century” could not pacify the tension between different groups but led to minimize the public discussion on the Cultural Revolution (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik & Cui 2016). It has become common for the person who harmed you in the past to remain your neighbours, coworkers, or family members. Many people have a tendency to emphasize their experiences as victims and forget their experiences as offenders. (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2006). Moreover, what happened during the ten years includes state-sanctioned violence, collective killings, verbal attacks, home ransacking and many other situations that caused loss, harm, humiliation, and betrayal. These traumatic experiences were buried in silence in the absence of perpetrators accountability and sustained public reflection.

In mainland China, the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement (1989) is a much more taboo topic that is barely mentioned in history textbooks. This university students-led demonstration called for political and economic reform but ended up with a crackdown on June

4th, 1989. The brutal suppression of unarmed civilians by the apparatus of state violence called into question the people's faith in the CCP-led government. The June 4th incident was well recognized and reported by western countries. The government of the United States even passed the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992 to grant permanent residence to Chinese who came to the United States from June 5th, 1989, to April 11th, 1990. A similar program had also established in Canada to help Chinese students. In mainland China, however, all words, texts, and visual representations associated with the Tiananmen Square massacres have been censored and removed.

Memory Restoration recognizes the difficult histories of particular Chinese diaspora groups and follows Britzman's idea to discuss the dynamics of learning the traumatic past and understanding our complicated relationship with it. Whereas difficult knowledge concerns the subject's encountering the process in which what happened in the past, the term difficult history is framed to identify events and historical periods that are challenged to know and learn. The connection between the two terms tells us that the discussion of traumatic history must link to human experience and signals the relational perspective in which a two-way question is asked – “what do histories do to us” and “what do we do to histories.” Simply talking about the difficulty in terms of the occurrence of history is not enough to reflect its afterwardness. As Britzman (2021) points out, the most compelling part of talking about difficult histories is “the force felt from inheriting the presence of history yet to be thought and emotionally acknowledged” (xvii). Here we can associate with the etymological root of ‘history’ in Ancient Greek ἱστορία (historía), which highlights the role of research in this knowing journey and means learning through research on narration of what is learned. Thus, the development of the two terms indicates that understanding history is a participatory, dialogic process rather than a one-way

knowledge transmission because the past not only is in historiography but also lives through ordinary people and their ordinary lives. Instead of focusing on what makes these three histories hard to talk about, I ask how difficult qualities of coming to know are represented and what people do to work through them.

Trauma in the Modern Chinese Context

Difficult histories make memory difficult, mainly because witnesses experience trauma, loss, and emotional distress. Additionally, collective memories are repressed and erased as a result of political forces. In the case of the Chinese difficult histories, the transmission of memory is not done by telling what happened. Transmission occurs through not being able to tell — the silence. Somatization becomes the primary way of expressing suffering. For example, the American medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (Kleinman 1982; Kleinman & Kleinman 1994) interviewed 100 patients diagnosed with neurasthenia in China's Hunan Province in 1980 (four years after the end of the Cultural Revolution). He discovered that the majority of patients had been affected by the Cultural Revolution, as evidenced by broken families, unemployment, child separation, etc. Some patients experience various physical pains such as migraines, stomach pains, cardio problems, etc. Kleinman termed this type of physical discomfort somatization —the body remembers and tells with symptoms. The Cultural Revolution did not have a uniform impact on all aspects of a society. The vast majority of Chinese people experienced the trauma of the time, although in diverse ways.

Furthermore, while children of traumatized parents may not learn difficult history from their parents' actual memories or stories, they can receive it from traces of affect revealed by traumatized bodies. These cues may include a grief-stricken expression, a forced smile that lacks

authenticity, unexplained bursts of anger, or prolonged periods of depression (Schwab 2010, 14). Thus, what has inherited from the parental past is a combination of affect, fantasy, and historical fact, which is what Green described as a constellation of what had or had not happened, what could have or could not have happened, and what you thought it was but not or what you never thought of. Yet, the inheritance is so fragmentary and filled with gaps and holes that these children have to piece together a history they have never experienced through images, stories, and letters even those are from others. Madeleine Thien's novel *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is telling such a story—a daughter's journey of patching a history together.

“Scar” or “wound” is the closest term to trauma for the Chinese to make sense of the aftermath of a difficult history. In late 1970s, Scar Literature and Introspection Literature emerged as genres of Chinese literature after the end of the Cultural Revolution, which brought to light the traumatic experience and historical reflection. Whereas Scar Literature “often appears to be a mere cathartic expression of individual grievances” (Li & Tam 2018, 443), Introspection Literature critiques China's political and social failings and gives thoughtful consideration to the cultural underpinnings of these issues, frequently reaching far beyond the immediate historical context of the period (Li & Tam 2018, 444). However, the discussion on trauma and social and political reflections brought by the Cultural Revolution suffered a severe setback after Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement in 1989. In order to safeguard its legitimacy, the Communist leadership firmly believes that it is crucial to retain exclusive control over the interpretation of history, thereby preventing any challenges from the general public. Since 1989, “patriotic education” has promoted the idea that the Communist Party has saved China from Western and Japanese humiliation, which leads to the rediscovery of Nanjing Massacre as national trauma (Beja 2011). However, when it comes to the Cultural Revolution and the

Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement, public discussion becomes impossible. Not only are these periods of histories repressed, left out from discussion is the trauma brought about by difficult histories. For these reasons mainland China has not developed a trauma theory in response to the Scar Literature and Introspection Literature.

While one can point to the difficulties of recognizing trauma on a social and historical level, there has been some progress in the field of personal mental health. German experts were the first group to be invited to give Chinese psychiatrists and psychologists lectures and seminars in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Soon after, taught by a team of German psychotherapists, the first three-year training program was launched in 1997 and became the Sino-German program (Huang & Kirsner 2020). The systematic effort to introduce and develop psychotherapy also brought a psychoanalytic understanding of trauma to a traumatized country (Plaenkers, 2014). Moreover, German experts' reflections on German history and their applying the psychoanalytic framework to work through the Nazi past inspired their Chinese trainees (Gerlach, 2021) and brought stormy classroom discussions to the Chinese situation. Since early 2000s, mainland China experienced the emergence of 'psycho-boom,' which refers to "a surge of popular interest in psychotherapy as well as the infiltration of related ideas and values into the cultural sphere" (Huang & Kirsner 2020, 8). Due to the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, psychic trauma started to be widely introduced to ordinary people and Chinese government strives to provide psychological assistance for victims and professional training for mental health practitioners. The prevailing opinion among mental health experts is that there is a clinical urgency to teach Chinese mental health practitioners to acknowledge trauma and its psychological consequences at cultural and individual levels even as open discussion of social and historical trauma is still taboo (Scharff 2014, 56).

This shift indicates that the idea of endurance of individual suffering for the collective good in the Chinese mentality began to loosen in the wake of China's adoption of economic reforms and opening up policies, which ushered in a market-oriented economy since 1980s. In situations where societal changes require individuals to take responsibility for their actions, the examination of personal experiences of a particular living individual can be valuable for comprehension and consideration. Despite the absence of social containment or public hearing for mass individual trauma resulting from political movements, the experiential reality of being wounded remains undeniable. Although the introduction of the concept of trauma to China occurred relatively recently, the lived experience of trauma has remained a persistent phenomenon.

Diaspora and Its Conditions

Leaving mainland China and studying in Canada was a turning point for me. The desire to understand trauma and traumatic history became legitimate when I decided to settle in Canada and started my research. Benefiting from a horizontal distance from the motherland and a vertical distance from the past I had never experienced, I take my diasporic situation as an asset for working on this project. Moreover, I am curious about how others in the Chinese diaspora dealt with the past and what I can learn from their experience or achievement. The scope of this research is defined by my status and the object of study—the Chinese diaspora in North America, especially first generation of immigrant from mainland China.

The term diaspora was initially used to describe the Jewish people's dispersion and extended to any scattered population. By the Chinese diaspora, I refer to the Chinese descent who live outside of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau with heterogeneity. Since

1978, when the Open Door Policy was implemented, there has been a constant flow of mainland Chinese students and intellectuals to the West. This flow became enormous after the Tiananmen demonstration (Kong 2012). Moreover, the flood of Chinese writers from the post-Tiananmen era into the United States has substantially altered the landscape of Asian American literature due to their efforts on resisting the forgetting of June 4th incident through writing (Kong 2010).

Rather than seeing diaspora only as a category and an object of analysis, I focus on the subjective experience of being diasporic, which was coined as a diasporic condition by William Safran (1991), Lily Cho (2007), and Lingchei Letty Chen (2015). Safran (1991) was pioneering in indicating that “diasporic consciousness is an intellectualization of an existential condition” (87) which became the bedrock for subsequent discussion. In response to Rogers Brubaker’s (2005) concern about the overuse of the term diaspora, Cho (2007) argued that “diaspora as first and foremost a subjective condition marked by the contingencies of long histories of displacements and genealogies of dispossession” (14). She distinguishes the transnational from the diasporic based on whether the subjectivity is built on “the security of moving through the world with the knowledge of a return” or “conditioned by the knowledge of loss” (19). Highlighting the role of memory, Chen (2015) further proposed to understand diaspora “as a state of being, an existential condition, and an emotional and psychic disruption” (53). Both Cho and Chen shed light on the emotional depth of the diasporic experience and call for the study of memory to get involved, which will be followed and expanded in this dissertation. As Belinda Kong (2012) said, “A diaspora, after all, comprises not just body in motion but also the production of cultural in transit” (11).

Despite the prevalence of collective traumatic events in China throughout the twentieth century and the subsequent migration of Chinese individuals to North America, the current body

of research on the transgenerational transmission of trauma is lacking. Only five studies have been conducted thus far (Plänkers 2014; To 2014; Siegel and Han 2018; Chou et al. 2023a, 2023b). In comparison to the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese diasporic scholars have conducted greater research on the traumatic memory of the Korean War and Vietnam War, as well as its intergenerational transmission and cultural expression (Cho 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2020; Liem 2003, 2007, 2009; Bui 2015; Kaus 2016; Nguyen 2007, 2009, 2012, 2021a, 2021b). Centering on specific war trauma, these scholars theorize Korean and Vietnamese experiences of making sense of difficult history and navigating intergenerational transmission of trauma. Their journeys also reflect how claiming the victimhood of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union plays a significant role in their diasporic subject formation. They see historical amnesia as a luxury for diaspora, and their works unveil how the haunted past conditions diasporic subjects and discuss the ethical responsibility of remembering history.

The Chinese diaspora lacks their own theorization of memory, history, and trauma, but not literary writing. For the North American Chinese community, Iris Chang was a well-known diasporic writer who revived Chinese memories of the Nanjing Massacres. Although she was not an academic scholar and did not theorize about the diasporic experience, her pioneer work on rediscovering Chinese traumatic experience in World War II (Chang 1997) and reviewing the history of Chinese in America (Chang 2003) granted her a foundational role in understanding how Chinese diaspora deal with their relationship with history. After Chang's groundbreaking work, Chinese diasporic scholars in North America make efforts to re-examine and redress the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Chinese head tax in a context of racial discrimination. However, understanding the Chinese experience of trauma and its transgenerational transmission still needs

to be developed, especially considering the third wave of Chinese migrants from mainland China started in the 1980s reshaped the demographic composition of overseas Chinese (Zhuang 2021). People who grew up in the 1960s to 1990s in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are likely to carry the memory and postmemory of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square democratic movement when they immigrate to other countries. Unlike the previous waves, new Chinese immigrants maintain a more or less direct connection with mainland China due to the fast-paced development of the Chinese economy and the convenience of the digital age.

Memory Restoration considers these changes in reshaping the discussion of memory and history as a legacy for the Chinese diaspora and investigates how the working through of the PRC's difficult histories can be integrated into the efforts made in North America to address the traumatic history of the Nanjing Massacres.

Ways to Learning

Discussing traumatic history is heavy-lifting work because trauma always carries unhappy experiences, ambivalent affects, and contested pasts. It creates a crisis of knowledge and truth (Caruth 1995a, p. 6) and challenges our conventional understanding of learning. Encountering difficult knowledge inevitably triggers internal conflict and resistance in the learner. Here comes our problem: why does such painful learning still need to happen and be investigated? If history means something detached and far away, why is the feeling of being haunted so real that the past is always in the background of the present? This dissertation is a journey of making sense of difficult history and reflecting on the challenges of listening to its testimony.

As Britzman (1998) reminds us, there are two learning dynamics, ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’, when contemplating how to deal with difficult knowledge. Learning about assumes a distance between the learner and learning object, and “focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes, and facts” (117). In contrast to the detached way of learning about, learning from is an open process that “requires the learner’s attachment to, and implication, in, knowledge” (117) and demands patience and tolerance in making sense of the fractured, broken, and lost situations (118). Such interaction between the learner and learning object brings subjective enrichment to understanding of “who I am” and “what I will become” in the world. Thus, we shall be aware that the ‘learning about’ model may become a defence against knowing, as building a knowledge base gives stability that guards against the feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and suffering (Fraley 2007, 70).

Additionally, given the Chinese tradition of censoring historical knowledge, the model of learning from can break through the hegemonic structure of grand narrative and bring the ‘experience’ back to history. Etymologically, the word ‘history,’ in Chinese, *lishi* 历史, consists of *li* 历, experience, go through, undergo, and *shi* 史, the person who records, and historiography. An etymological reading of Chinese characters of history reveals that understanding history requires an understanding of experience; subjectivity is unavoidable in the process of recording. In addition to writing down history, the body also records and stores what has happened through memory, feelings, and affect. Thus, learning from history contains learning from experience —the experience of the traces and remains, the experience of what we had left with. It values the personal that, as suggested by Alice Pitt (2003), needs to be considered as a method of experiencing —to observe how we experience ourselves in the

world— rather than as an assertion of stable experience (89). Learning from experience requires us to know our limitations and failures, to face the narcissistic injury after knowing what has been buried, and to integrate unwanted and affective findings (Fraley 2007, 70-71).

Theoretical Lens and Study Objects

This dissertation centers memory as a mode of investigation to study what people do with memory. It draws on cultural studies on memory and trauma and engages with psychoanalytic theory to analyze the making of different forms of cultural expression. Memory, carried by the body, is a personal territory and part of the collective landscape. In the collective aspect, Maurice Halbwachs's work *The Collective Memory* (1925) lays the ground for understanding memory as socially and culturally constructed. His basic thesis is that one needs others to remember. Our memory is composed with help from social settings such as public commemorations, monuments, archives, and other social practices recognized and empowered by the dominant ideology. In other words, Halbwachs (1925) indicates that the social framework of memory determines whether an individual's memory can be evoked and in what way. However, how would those who have unencouraged or forbidden memories live with such alienated materials?

As a medium of lived experience, memory has to be represented and communicated. It can be read as a text "with narrative codes and representational conventions" (Keightley 2008, 177). Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) provides a comprehensive review and profound analysis of the forms of experience in which memory functions in our lives and how its presence affects our relationship with the past. Ricoeur emphasized the narratorial nature of history and memory. He understood history as the present reworking of memories of individuals into a representation of the past. In addition, the fictional narrative does not record reality as a

copy of an event; rather, it depicts what we make from what happened to us. (Ricoeur 1991). By reading and interpreting the text and reviewing the text's social context, we understand ourselves as a historical subject in front of the text—a proposed world that people could inhabit and wherein readers could project one of their most possibilities (Ricoeur 1991, 142). For Ricoeur, the narrative quality shared by history, memory, and literature provides the possibility of working through the past. Memory functions as the matrix to bridge the history-as-it-happened and the history-as-received and open up the meanings.

Meanings of the traumatic past are hard to generate. Cathy Caruth's (1996) study on trauma and literature indicates that the literary representations of traumatic memory attempt to give the wound/trauma a voice by providing it with a text. Building on Freudian psychoanalysis, she urges us to consider that traumatic memory speaks differently across cultures and historical experiences and requires unique listening. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) observes a similar situation and points out the "impossibility of testimony" in remembering the Holocaust. Their studies provide a framework to understand the condition of experiencing the breakdown of the world (traumatic past, complicated history), words (narrative, unspeakable), and meanings. Thus, traumatic memory is not anti-narrative, but rather embeds resistance into incorporating the narration. The fragmented narrative attempts to express the experience of being unspeakable. As a result, the story must be told, albeit incoherently and fragmentarily. The meanings come to us as a result of narrating and telling the story.

I examine three major analytic objects to understand how the representations of the past, their ways of memory reconstruction, and the reception of these cultural products can inform the field of social thought for insight into both the breakdowns and restoration of social bonds. The

three primary objects of study are a filmic representation of the Cultural Revolution titled *Coming Home* (2014), the Chinese American novelist Yiyun Li and her fictional works, and the Chinese American author Iris Chang and her nonfictional works. My examinations focus not only on the content and the texts, but also on their production. I value the author's role in creating the work and shaping its meaning, as opposed to the view that the author is dead and the work takes on its own life. I consider both the author and the audience as the subject of working through. The message conveyed by the creators' works and the space created by their works provide readers an opportunity of working through.

Moreover, I will apply John Forrester's (2017) thinking-in-cases method, which suggests "reasoning with shared examples" (52), as the primary approach to use the three cases as mediums or containers for conceptual discussion. Thus, "[t]he aim of analysis is to restore to metaphors their metaphoricity: their ability to carry" (Forrester 2017, 104). Through unpacking the making or producing of the representations, I attempt to show the challenges involved with working through and grieving the legacy of traumatic histories, especially politically instigated trauma, in both personal and social aspects. The chosen cases do not represent ideal scenarios but powerfully illuminate key issues and complexities of memory's return and extend our conceptual understandings.

Organization of Chapters

"Remember history or be bound to repeat it" is the most compelling rationale for working-through the traumatic past. This dissertation is organized to reflect different paths of working through difficult histories. Chapter Two explores the difficulty of diasporic working through of traumatic histories and the possibilities opened by engaging with psychoanalytic

theories and three potential paths. Through a review of the psychoanalytic discourse on “remembering or repeating,” I first examine the development of the concept of working through in Freud’s metapsychological papers “Remembering, Repeating, and Working through” (1914) and “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), which laid the groundwork for understanding remembering what had been forgotten and mourning what had been lost as a means of working through. I then consider Melanie Klein’s notion of reparation as a developed path which has been extended by Karl Figlio (2017) to discuss the two tendencies ‘remembering true’ and ‘remembering false.’ The third potential path which I found in Donald Winnicott’s (1971) notions of object relating, the use of object, and transitional space/phenomenon opens an understanding of where one locates the working through and then how cultural expression and representation may serve as a medium of working through for both authors and audiences.

Chapter Three analyzes the movie *Coming Home* (2014), a film adapted from a Chinese-American writer’s novel bringing the traumatic history of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) back into the public eye. The movie mimics how trauma works and focuses on the problem of memory. Its filmic representation gives this study a means to grasp the drifts of memory and the consequences of loss in what is remembered. I investigate how the film confronts us with how to remember and resist forgetting by unfolding the story within a nuclear family. *Coming Home* presents the audiences with the experience of personal trauma and the trauma of contemporary Chinese history by silencing the violent and chaotic elements in the narrative of the past. I engage psychoanalytic theory to discuss three symptoms shown by this film — forgetting, repetition, and historical void. Choosing not to represent the historical details of the Cultural Revolution in the storytelling perfectly illustrates the distance between history-as-it-happened and history-as-we-recalled/received. Such an indefatigable gap reminds us, as Paul

Ricoeur's theory suggests, "the issue of representation of the past begins with memory, not with history" (Hannoum 2005, 127). Thus, the film *Coming Home* brings us to think about how to understand memory as the matrix on which the meaning of what has happened is open to interpretation.

Chapter Four analyzes the Chinese diasporic writer Li Yiyun and her ways of working through history through writing. As a first-generation immigrant, Li went to the United States to study immunology but decided to quit and became a writer. Her writings explore the human conditions in heartbroken situations and present how she, as a subject of diaspora, is caught between "living here and remembering/desiring another place" (Hua 2005, 193). Her works are awarded and well recognized in the United States. Li devotes her first two long novels, *The Vagrants* (2009a) and *Kinder than Solitude* (2014), to discuss the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Massacre by adapting stories of real historical actors. Rather than leaving history blank, Li subtly reconstructs the real historical events and configures the life of ordinary people to invite an understanding of what it feels like to live at that time. The strategy of intertwining historical facts and everyday life allows Li's works to become a shock and challenge to undermine the grand narrative of contemporary China's history. What makes Li an interesting case is that she gave up science to tell stories, that she refused to write in Chinese and had her works translated from English into Chinese, that she confronted her own mental breakdown and the loss of a son by writing them into books, and that she admitted that her claim of not being an autobiographical writer was a lie. I engage with Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory on transitional space and the use of object to discuss how Yiyun Li creates a potential space for mourning and working through difficult histories.

Chapter Five examines how the late Chinese-American writer Iris Chang and her historiographical book *Rape of Nanking* marks the Chinese diaspora's intergenerational memorialization contribution to remembering the Nanjing Massacre's history. Chang was haunted by her parents and grandparents' memory of Nanjing and motivated by other Chinese American and Canadian activists who made efforts to disseminate information about Japanese crimes during World War II (Chang 1997). Spending ten weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list made *Rape of Nanking* a spectacular success. Chang provided not only historical evidence of what happened but also testimonies from Western witnesses. She constructed a community of seeing (Felman & Laub 1992, 211) by engaging with the diaries of Minnie Vautrin, an American missionary in Nanjing who served as president of Ginling College and tried to save women from Japanese oppression, and John Rabe, a German businessman and Nazi Party member who helped establish the Nanking Safety Zone and protect local civilians in 1937. Her way of narrating made the international community of witnessing possible for the forgotten Japanese atrocity. Moreover, Chang's case sheds light on how the absence of the past challenges second-generation immigrants' sense of being in relation to history and how retelling historical trauma constructs a sense of collective or shared identity. Her last book *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (2003) explores the historical experiences of Chinese immigrants in the context of America's long and complicated history of racial discrimination and exclusion. She brought us to realize that understanding the experiences of Chinese immigrants is essential to understanding the broader history of race and racism in America.

Chapter Six presents the Chinese diaspora through a state of transition for restoring history, as evidenced by their living status as subjects of diaspora, the transformation of their perspectives on history, and the manner in which they explore working through. I provide a

review of how the three analytic objects reflect three potential working-thought paths and how the theoretical discussion can shed light for Chinese community. Furthermore, I will review my writing this dissertation as the hidden fourth case that represents my own way of working through the past. I will discuss my intergenerational transmission experience and my psychological journey in this study, as well as the female perspective hidden in the selection of research objects and the inspiration provided by female narratives. I also argue that racial and historical consciousness must be incorporated. Through examining the Sino-US trade war in 2018, the prejudice against Chinese people during the pandemic, and the growing Sino-US competition, I expand on Iris Chang's formulation of how Sino-US relations and the US economy affect the situation of Chinese diaspora. Additionally, I incorporate David L. Eng and Shinhee Han (2019)'s notion of "good enough race" to discuss the challenges facing the Chinese diaspora community in terms of restoring memory and challenges for identity and reconciliation.

Chapter Two

Working through Histories for Diaspora: Return and Departure

The diasporic experience entails the migration of individuals from their country of origin, whether through active or passive means, to a different country. Individuals are displaced from their initial social and cultural context and subsequently endeavor to establish themselves in a novel environment. The disruption of an individual's perception of continuity can lead to breakdowns and losses that occur throughout their experience. Consequently, the diaspora's understanding of historical consciousness has been shaped and potentially altered to a certain degree due to the prevalent reliance on the country and nation as the primary context for constructing historical accounts. Individuals find themselves in a state of liminality, caught between their country of origin and the country in which they currently reside. For them, history has become personal and familial, and it can only be discussed in a collected rather than a collective sense. So, what does working through histories mean for diaspora? If history refers to an immutable occurrence that has transpired in the past, why bother working through it? This chapter delves into the psychological dimensions involved in the formation of historical consciousness. It explores the challenges faced by diaspora communities in comprehending their connection to history, with a particular focus on the Chinese diaspora. Additionally, it examines the psychoanalytic perspectives on the process of "working through" in relation to three key inquiries: what one is working through, what one is working through to, and where one may locate the experiences of working through.

Historical Consciousness and Its Concealment

With the advent of modern society, according to historian Jörn Rüsen (2005), the concept of history evolved to encompass “the totality of the temporal change of man and the world,” commonly referred to as “the history.” This understanding of history is also characterized by the notion of “progress” or “development” (136) and considered as a linear trajectory based on the temporal continuity of past, present and future, in which events occur and are regarded as causally connected. The emergence of postmodernism, however, has criticized the modern historical perspective that is rooted in Eurocentric ideology. The postmodern viewpoint holds that there is no such thing as “the” history, because history is not a factual entity but constructed by narration. Consequently, the prevailing understanding of history has shifted away from the linear progression of time, and has embraced the idea of multidimensional temporal frameworks. This shift has been accompanied by the emergence of postmodern historiography, which questions and subverts the genetical connection between past events and the present by placing emphasis on the role of language and narration (Rusen 2005, 138). In his work “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940/2007), Walter Benjamin had discussed the distinction between two forms of history. The first form pertains to events that occurred in the past and is considered factual. The second form, however, holds greater significance as it refers to the act of writing or narrating history, which enables us to establish a connection with the past. Postmodern historiography exhibits a resonance with Benjamin’s theory of history, as it embraces a novel hermeneutical approach to examining the lives of people in the past. Narration, as postmodern way of historical presentation, prioritizes the depiction of events and interactions in contrast with the old emphasis on explanation and abstract analysis. In addition, narratives place greater significance on microhistory rather than macrohistory and favors the victims of modernization, who are primarily members of the lower classes, minorities, and women. New historicism

emphasizes how individuals experienced and interpreted their own world and aims to restore their cultural autonomy (Rusen 2005, 139). Thus, the concept of history is now recognized as being neither monolithic nor abstract. The release of “the” transforms it into emotionally loaded and relation-based experience for every living person. The importance of history for us lies not in studying and explaining it as an external entity, but rather in recognizing our active involvement as “being-there-in-history,” where we possess historical consciousness and the capacity to construct meaning with our mental function of memory. This post-modern perspective on history provides valuable insights into the diaspora community and aids in their self-reflection, enabling a deeper understanding of their own experiences.

Historical consciousness, as summarized by Anna Clark and Carla L. Peck (2019) in *Contemplating Historical Consciousness*, “refers both to the ways people orient themselves in time, and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory” (2). The question of working through histories considers whether or not and the degree to which individuals are aware of this bound and connection. When an individual lacks awareness of this connection, they are confronted with an existential dilemma, that Martin Heidegger would refer to as “falling into oblivion” in his analysis of Ancient Greek experience of truth (*Aletheia*) in *Parmenides* (1998). Heidegger (1998) applied his hermeneutic phenomenological method to unpack the term *Aletheia*, which combines “*lethe*,” meaning forgetfulness or concealment, and the prefix “*a-*” meaning un- or not. He further elaborated that truth is more than just knowledge but a process of unveiling or unmasking what was previously hidden or concealed. The experience of untruth, non-truth, and not being able to disclose the truth are also part of the participatory journey of unveiling in which we come to understand how our existence limits and determines what we know and how our modes of

knowing and seeing determine how we act. Forgetting as concealment is one of the situations. As he described, “In forgetting not only does something slip from us, but the forgetting slips into a concealment of such a kind that we ourselves fall into concealedness precisely in our relation to the forgotten” (Heidegger 1998, 24). Thus, the absence of historical consciousness can be interpreted as the concealment of one’s connection to history, resulting in an inability to recognize the influence of historical circumstances on one’s present condition. Here, Heidegger (1998) brought us to consider that amnesia is not just about memory disturbances but rather “the forgetter is concealed to himself in his relation to ... the forgotten” (71), which he referred it as falling into oblivion.

Heidegger (1998) elaborated further that oblivion signifies an action of falling away, which “is a kind of being-away and being-absent” (73) and “withdraws what is essential and alienates man from himself, i.e., from the possibility of dwelling within his own essence” (72). In this sense, the neglect of historicity reveals that one’s mode of existence is clouded by “the concealment that lets the past, the present, and the future fall into the path of a self-absenting absence” (83).

Forgetting, as experience by the Greeks, is neither a subjective state, nor is it only related to the past and the “recollection” of it, and neither is it simply a matter of thinking in the sense of “re-presentation.” Concealment places the entire essence of man in hiddenness and tears him in this way from unconcealed. Man is “away” from it. He is no longer with it. He neglects and forsakes what is assigned to him.....Forgetting is no-longer-being-there-with-it and by no means only a no-longer-remembering as the lack of a representation. (83)

The notion of “self-absenting absence” proposed by Heidegger can be regarded as a plausible approach to delineating the occurrence of social and cultural amnesia, as well as individual forgetfulness. This dissertation investigates the relationship between the Chinese diaspora and three prominent contemporary Chinese histories that have undergone varying degrees of “no-longer-being-there-with-it” – collective forgetting as if they occurred in an alternate universe.

Thus, if we adhere to Heidegger's interpretation and consider the personal aspect of historical consciousness, working through histories addresses the existential question of how to restore the relationship to history and incorporate the past into one's life in order to be there-with-history.

Wounds of History

What kind of history requires our effort to work through? When history ceases to be regarded as an abstract concept, the underlying implication of this inquiry pertains to the specific type of historical experience that necessitates thorough examination and resolution. The focus in this dissertation is the traumatic experience in history, brought by history, and transmitted through history. Modern history has witnessed a number of catastrophes and upheavals, leading to the emergence and widespread application of the concept of trauma which signifies a phenomenon that emerged within the context of modernity and has expanded its scope from being solely a medical category to becoming a cultural paradigm—crisis of meaning (Sütterlin 2020). Historian Jörn Rüsen (2021) conveys that trauma can be understood as wounds in history that hinder the capacity of historical consciousness to engage with contingency effectively. This is because trauma destroys the existing language of historical meaning and the process of constructing a language capable of effectively articulating this crisis may require a considerable amount of time, potentially spanning multiple generations. “Trauma is a crisis that destroy the reference frame of the historical formation of meaning and prevents its renewal into another, which could fulfil the same function as the destroyed one” (Rusen 2021, 44). In this sense, trauma represents a sense of temporal injury. It is a wounding experience of things that occurred in the past, which can be a single incident or a period of time and psychological wounds accumulate. Trauma discourse, as Davis and Meretoja (2020) point out, marked a significant

social shift in understanding both personal and collective experience by acknowledging “how a painful past can resurface in the present, often through indirect symptoms, silences and repetitive patterns of thought and affect” [and by providing] “a new vocabulary for explaining suffering and for approaching it both as an injury that requires treatment and as a resource that can be mobilized to claim rights” (3).

Traumatic experiences, when viewed from the standpoint of the individual affected, possess a transformative nature that significantly alters the fabric of their world, rendering it irreversibly changed. Not only is the world different, but so is the individual, both in a factual and a meaning-making sense. Thus, trauma always involves loss; a loss of what it once was (Curtis 2018). One notable consequence of trauma stemming from historical occurrences is the inability to conceive of the possible course of one's life and familial circumstances in the absence of the catastrophic event. For the Chinese diaspora that has been influenced to varying degrees by the occurrence of traumatic events in mainland China, the wound of history entails a loss of ‘what could have been,’ which can also be blamed for one’s misfortune in later life if they are unable to attain a safe and comfortable life in the host society. It is comprehensible that immigrants residing in their adopted country hope to heal their wounds, or at the very least, avoid worsening them. Additionally, the Chinese diaspora, which has been subjected to the practices of thought control and language engineering, undergoes a dual trauma when attempting to comprehend the ramifications of these traumatic histories. Being diasporic and leaving one’s homeland and its regime, as noted by Khatharya Um (2018), can gain “a space where politically suppressed memories can be made legible in ways not possible at the source” (329). Chapter Four will present a compelling argument in support of this perspective.

Obstacles Faced by Diasporic Subjects

As described in Chapter One, difficult histories not only present a challenge by virtue of their wounded nature, but also necessitate a process of difficult knowing and understanding. Drawing from the insights of Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman's seminal work on "The Difficult Knowledge Project" (2003), working through history requires a thorough examination of the obstacles to learning and understanding traumatic history, as well as the obstacles to narrating this process. The primary project here is to symbolize our journey of coming to terms with the past rather than to represent history itself.

In addition to the realm of discontinuities, diaspora individuals in the host society encounter not only the obstacle of navigating their lives but also the complexity of reconciling their cultural and historical identities. The complex dynamics among diasporas, their adopted countries, their countries of origin, and the broader political environment influence the capacity of diasporas to commemorate and work through their histories and collective experiences (Um 2018). The susceptibility and vulnerability of diasporas to political manipulation may be heightened when their traumatic experiences are linked to conflicts such as wars, civil wars, and political struggles. Specifically, when their historical trauma related to political wrongdoing, support from the host country is more likely predicated on aligning with those of the original country or interested states. However, those who engage counter-hegemonic discourse will be extremely vulnerable, under pressure, and may even be suppressed (Um 2018). In the context of the Chinese diaspora in North America, there has been a notable focus on the traumatic histories resulting from the ruling of the Chinese Communist Party in mainland China, particularly in light of the ideological confrontation between communism and capitalism. This attention has allowed for a certain degree of the commemoration and expression of criticism to the Chinese

government within the North American society. It is important to note that such political emphasis – good and bad splitting—might impede the personal process of historical reconciliation, which will be further explored in a later section.

On an individual level, moving to a country that permits free expression does not guarantee the healing of historical trauma. In fact, those in diaspora often adopt a state of detachment from experiences as a preferred means of existence in the face of internal distress and external pressures. According to Susan Bodnar's (2004) clinical observation, there exists a spectrum of psychological adaptations in the realm where various cultural identities intersect with personal and familial trauma, ranging from multiplicity to relatively minor dissociative disturbances to more severe dissociative phenomena. Similar observations were made by Sophie Walsh and Shmuel Shulman (2007), who refer to this phenomenon as "split in the self" after immigration. Furthermore, in addition to voluntary choice, the procedure of relocating to a foreign nation and immersing oneself in a different cultural milieu necessitates the assimilation of individuals. It is within this process that individuals are confronted with the difficulty of reconciling the past. Glenys Lobban (2012) points out that immigrants in the United States, who are exposed to the cultural ideal of America as the 'melting pot,' frequently lack access to a comprehensive multicultural framework that could effectively support the integration of their original cultural experiences with those of American culture. Combined with the internal conflict of love and hatred for the original culture and society, the pressure to assimilate into the host culture can easily create a persistent disconnect between these two experiences, making it easy for diasporas to live in a state of tension between remembering and forgetting. In Canada, the cultural composition commonly referred to as the Mosaic, exhibits distinct characteristics when compared to the melting pot concept observed in the United States. The perspective espoused

promotes the concept of integration as opposed to assimilation, wherein immigrants are encouraged to preserve their cultural heritage while simultaneously establishing interpersonal and occupational connections with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. While the degree of assimilation pressure in Canada may be lower compared to the United States, it is recognized by scholars that immigrants are still frequently encouraged to adopt assimilation strategies as a means of integrating into the dominant Canadian culture (Hébert 2016; Naffi 2017).

Moreover, the social construct of racial issues significantly influences the ways in which individuals within diaspora communities navigate their historical connections. In her seminal work “The Melancholia of Race”, Anne Anlin Cheng (1997) delves into the realm of emotional encounters within both individuals and communities, positing that racial identity in the United States frequently manifests as melancholia. This state of profound and enduring sadness is attributed to the enduring effects of historical and cultural racism, discrimination, and displacement. Followed Cheng’s turn, David Eng and Shinhee Han (2000, 2019) posit that Asian immigrants frequently encounter a deep sense of distress when confronted with the societal demand to conform to the dominant mainstream culture, which encompasses the prevailing standards and principles associated with whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle class values. This phenomenon is termed as “racial melancholia” (Eng and Han 2000, 675) and defined by a lasting aspiration to embody whiteness, coupled with a sense of inadequacy in attaining this societal standard. They identify that this experience extends beyond the first generation of immigrants to subsequent generations and may result in a prolonged experience of bereavement, resentment, and melancholy that are internalized, thereby affecting the individual’s perception of their own self and identity. Eng and Han (2019) further propose the concept of “Racial

Dissociation” to describe a psychological mechanism used to cope with the overwhelming effects of racial melancholia by detaching from their racial identity or compartmentalizing their racial experiences in order to protect themselves from the pain they involve. They examine critically the notion of “model minority” as the central discourse that creates unrealistic expectations among the Asian diaspora and causes them to minimize their own experiences of racism or inequality, distancing themselves from their racial identity in order to fit the mould of the successful and high-achieving model minority. Eng and Han (2019) contend that the internalization of the “model minority” by Asian Americans is detrimental, as it perpetuates racialization and leads to a form of racial erasure. I perceive the phenomenon of ‘erasure’ as a significant obstacle faced by the Chinese diaspora in their endeavours to engage with their historical connections, as will be further discussed in the subsequent section.

The Entry of a Wounded Past: Through Silence and Family

When examining the dispersion of members of a particular ethnic group from their original place of residence to different geographic areas, families and individuals are the most significant units through which to gain insight into diaspora experiences. Thus, instead of conducting an extensive analysis of the diaspora community as a whole, it is crucial to focus our attention on studying the individual experiences and their families in response to historical trauma. Additionally, a trans-generational perspective is necessary to examine the transmission and impact of psychologically traumatic events from the parental generation on the well-being of subsequent generations (Epstein 1979, Faimberg 1988, Apprey 2003, Salberg 2015).

In the context of individuals and families affected by trauma, an observable phenomenon emerges: the presence of silence. “Empty circle” is a term coined by Dori Laub (1998) to

describe the gaps and silences in Holocaust survivor testimonies and its applicability extends to other groups affected by traumatic experiences. Laub (1998) observes that these are the moments of horror, pain, and trauma that survivors frequently find difficult or impossible to express. As powerful as language is, it may fall short of capturing the entirety of their lived experiences. He captures the dilemma that survivors face: On the one hand, survivors may feel compelled to share their stories in order to serve as witnesses and ensure that the events are not forgotten. On the other hand, the magnitude of the trauma and the limitations of language can leave portions of their experiences unspoken, resulting in gaps in their testimonies. According to Laub (1998), the core legacy of massive psychic trauma includes the absence of representation, the rupture of the self, the erasure of memory, and the accompanying sense of void (p. 507). Chapter Three will present a compelling argument in support of this aspect.

By examining the empty circle, or void, it becomes apparent that the enduring nature of trauma is sustained by its isolation and lack of verbal expression, resulting in its existence as a concealed phenomenon that is neither acknowledged nor openly discussed. However, its testifying without testimony retains the potential to be transmitted through subsequent generations, as highlighted by Byers and Gere (2007). According to Laub (1998), the offspring of survivors undergo what is known as “wounds without memory” (p. 509) in which parents transmit a sense of void or absence to their children as a result of the traumatic impact they have experienced. Haydée Faimberg (1988) believes that the imprint of void or absence for the offspring is not devoid of content but rather contains a condensed history of previous generation (9). She introduces the notion of “telescoping of generations” (1988) as a means to elucidate the transgenerational transmission of trauma, whereby the psychological ramifications of trauma can be passed down from one generation to the next, despite the absence of direct exposure to the

traumatic events by the subsequent generation. The process of transmission can manifest through diverse mechanisms, encompassing unconscious identifications, familial dynamics, and the intergenerational narratives that are transmitted within family units. Consequently, it is plausible that individuals may unconsciously take on the emotional burdens of previous generations, resulting in a fusion of emotional boundaries between oneself and family members.

Furthermore, Jill Salberg (2015) investigates the transmission process further through the lens of child-parent attachment formation. It is well established that children seek a safe base in order to establish a secure attachment with their caregivers. However, the unresolved past hinders traumatized parents' ability to provide children with sufficient safe and warm emotional connections. She observes, "The parent's deep bond and affective intensity may be generated from within an unmetabolized trauma scene. As a consequence, the child—in order to attach to this parent and get this parent attached to her/him—will need to enter and become enmeshed in the trauma scene" and shape "himself/herself to fit a parent's wound of history" (Salberg 2015, 37). Thus, the trauma survivor's family attachment patterns encode the wound of history; the past is woven into the fabric of daily life.

Chou et al. (2023b) discover in a recently published study on Chinese Canadians that the phenomenon of silence in the context of suffering may be perceived as a typical response by parents, whereas for their children, such silence may represent trauma or oppression. In conjunction with the Chinese cultural value of filial piety, it is common for offspring to adopt a reticent attitude or actively avoid displaying obedience and respect towards their parents, thereby fostering a phenomenon known as a "conspiracy of silence" (Danieli 1982). The gap of communication regarding parental and family history has played a role in fostering a feeling of detachment between individuals and their parents. Consequently, this disconnection has also led

to a sense of detachment from both self-awareness and cultural heritage within the younger generation (Fossion et al. 2003). Here, Eng and Han (2019)'s lens of "racial melancholia and racial dissociation" can be employed to comprehend the dual deficit experienced by individuals of the second generation of Chinese immigrants, characterized by an inability to fully embody whiteness and an inability to fully embody Chinese experience due to the discontinuity occurs in the historical legacy of the family. The second generations are more likely to find themselves entangled in two distinct historical narratives: one encompasses the experiences of their parents in China; the other revolves around the historical discourse prevalent in North America, predominantly focused on European whites. It becomes a huge struggle for second generations to establish a genuine sense of belonging within either historical sense.

Nevertheless, certain scholars look into the ways in which silence can be take as an entry but not a negation. For example, Carol Kidron (2012) emphasizes the importance of avoiding pathologizing silence in her analysis of the long-lasting effects of genocide on the second generation of Cambodian-Canadian and Jewish-Israeli survivors. She contends that silence can be understood as a means of establishing connection, fostering interaction, and serving as a mode of communication and proposes that silence should be viewed as a 'container' that enables people to delve into their historical past (729). As Roger Frie (2017) stated, "The term 'silence' is typically understood to mean the absence of sound. When silence is defined as something that is not said, it constitutes a form of signification. It may even become a narrative strategy on its own, to the degree that it fills and defines a space between articulated narratives" (184). In their research on Chinese Canadians, Chou et al. (2023b) note that the presence of a gap and silence also serves as a catalyst for some second generation of Chinese immigrants to understand their parents' past, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms that

drive their parents' adoption of particular behavioural patterns. They are also motivated by their own need of understanding own identity and working through the disconnection from social and familial ties. Chapter Five will present compelling evidence through the case of Iris Chang.

Chinese Diaspora to be Comprehended

Currently, there are only two qualitative studies (Pleankers 2011; Chou et al. 2023a, 2023b) on the transgenerational transmission of trauma within the Chinese population; one focuses on mainland Chinese and the other on Chinese Canadians. The study conducted in mainland China, led by German psychoanalyst Tomas Pleankers (2011), focuses on the trauma resulting from the Cultural Revolution. Six pairs of interviewees, consisting of individuals with a parent-child relationship, were interviewed for this research. For all interviewees of the first generation, the effects of trauma were severe and long lasting. Rarely did they engage in self-reflection, as the majority of their recollections of the Cultural Revolution were merely descriptive. They displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and exhibited a mix of depression and rage towards the Cultural Revolution. The inability to fully develop a capacity for mentalization rendered them vulnerable to trauma later in life. The phenomenon of transgenerational transmission becomes evident upon examining the psychodynamics of the second generation in relation to the first generation. The second generation exhibited notable limitations in their capacity to form and maintain positive interpersonal connections, as well as to cultivate well-defined identities characterized by stable self-regulation. The deficits observed can be attributed to the adverse effects of parental trauma and the process of identification which aligns with Faimberg's (1988) findings.

The narrative study by Chou et al. (2023a, 2023b) includes eight Chinese participants

from the Great Vancouver in Canada, including three parents and five offspring. Four of them were present in the form of two distinct parent-offspring dyads. This study encompasses the collective trauma experiences that have occurred in mainland China as a result of wars, famine, and political turmoil, as well as the trauma experiences associated with immigration in Canada. For the parental group, the Cultural Revolution as a significant and distressing historical event was frequently discussed. Nevertheless, they encountered challenges in identifying whether the events they encountered were classified as “traumatic.” Chou et al. (2023a) argue that the difficulty arises due to the potential for dominant cultures to suppress or invalidate individual trauma narratives, particularly when these memories contradict official party statements within the context of Chinese political discourse. The offspring cohort indicated that they came across silence and possessed a restricted understanding of the historical background of preceding generations. They were aware that parents’ traumatic experiences led to fears of similar difficulties for their children, resulting in disciplinary or overprotective parenting styles. Furthermore, the offspring cohort emphasized the significance their family system attributed to education, with parental apprehension leading to heightened expectations for their children’s academic accomplishments, thereby subjecting them to substantial pressure. This study did not reveal, however, how the offspring group reflects on the impact on their attachment or intimate relationships.

It is noteworthy to mention that the studies of Chou et al. (2023a, 2023b) reveal that the narratives of participants regarding transgenerational transmission place a substantial emphasis on future and subsequent generational expectations. Anticipating future was an important part when they looked back to the past. The cohort of offspring involved in this study exhibited a recognition of the necessity and a strong inclination to bridge the generational connection by

seeking to comprehend their parents' experiences. This awareness is extremely valuable, and it may be the reason why they are willing to participate in this study. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that there are still a lot of the second generation who are unaware of the profound impact parental trauma has had on them, and those of the first generation who are deeply troubled by traumatic history at the unconscious level.

The impact of traumatic histories on the Chinese diaspora remains largely unexplored. However, it is evident that these experiences persistently affect individuals in a profound and difficult-to-articulate manner. Consequently, addressing viable approaches for navigating and resolving these traumas is of utmost significance within the Chinese diaspora community. The transmission of trauma is not halted by silence, but rather continues to manifest in various forms. These two studies serve as an encouragement to initiate the process of comprehending the intricate connection between the Chinese diaspora and their experiences of trauma. This understanding is crucial in order to gain insight into the existential state of this particular group, which includes consideration for their mental well-being.

Psychoanalytic Insights on the Possibilities of Working Through

The aforementioned studies pertaining to trauma and its transgenerational effects exhibit a close association with the field of psychoanalysis, with a considerable number of researchers actively practicing as psychoanalysts themselves. Prior to discussing the process of working through histories, it is necessary to elaborate on the significance of psychoanalysis as a useful theoretical framework for examining our relationship with history. According to Hans Meyerhoff (1962), psychoanalysis, as a theoretical framework derived from clinical experience, possesses an inherent historical dimension. Its fundamental premise is that understanding a person's history

allows us to comprehend her/him. History matters to psychoanalytic method not only in terms of what happened, but also in terms of how one receive and recollect the experience, which includes unconscious fantasy and affective and emotional response. In addition, psychoanalysis develops a ‘censorship’ model to gain insight into psychological structure and defence mechanisms, and investigates memory in terms of how and why a person chooses to remember or forget certain things and not others. Trauma, due to its complex relationship with history, memory, and subjectivity, was the crucial phenomenon that prompted early psychoanalytic pioneers to establish the entire system. Psychoanalysis is a discipline that can be considered as a trailblazer in its focus on investigating the influence of traumatic historical events on the development of an individual’s or a collective’s current condition, with the aim of facilitating improved prospects for the future. Furthermore, psychoanalysis, with its development in both intrapsychic and interpsychic perspective, offers valuable insights into the dynamics between individuals, individuals and groups, as well as the psychological aspects of group behavior. As Cathy Caruth (2013) highlights, “psychoanalysis has long been interested in the relation between history –personal and collective history—and the ways that its memory is suppressed or repressed: the ways that history is not available for immediate conscious access” (77).

The discrete nature, fragmentation, mobility, and prevalence of individual and familial units within diaspora make psychoanalysis an advantageous framework for investigating the potential for addressing historical experiences and its aftermath. In this analysis, I will examine the contributions of three prominent psychoanalytic theorists, Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Donald Winnicott, in order to explore the ways in which their respective theories provide insights to the questions of what one is working through, what one is working through to, and where locates the working through.

Freudian Path: Remembering and Mourning

Sigmund Freud, widely regarded as the founding father of psychoanalysis, introduced the notion of “working through” and discussed its relation with “remembering” in his groundbreaking book “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” (1914). This paper marked the beginning of Freud’s renowned exploration of the phenomenon of “remembering or repeating,” which is highly relevant to the common “remember history or be doomed to repeat it” debate, despite the fact that Freud only addressed it in terms of individual experience. He observed the act of carrying forgotten items through behavior. “[T]he patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud 1914, 150). Furthermore, Freud pointed out that “The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering” (151).

Thus, as a psychoanalytic technique, working through was first termed as filling in gaps in memory by overcoming resistances due to repression (Freud 1914, p. 148). In addition, what needs to be filled in gaps is not only the content of memory but also the “thought-connection” (149), which means that the path to memory must be channeled in order to overcome resistance. Because Freud believed that forgetting in a neurotic sense is “dissolving thought-connections, failing to draw the right conclusions, and isolating memories” (149). In other words, what has been forgotten has not vanished but has become disconnected, aligning with Heidegger’s concept of oblivion at the beginning of this chapter. Marcia Cavell (2006) specifies four different situations of how memories become inaccessible.

But experiences that are not merely unfamiliar but also frightening and bizarre may at once have an intense psychic impact, yet be unintelligible. Later such unintegrated experiences may surface as isolated memories, disconnected from the person’s sense of her own history. Or they persevere as a kind of a historical hallucination, as they do for

holocaust survivors (Laub 1993). Or they are ‘remembered’ in a displaced, emotionally isolated, trivialized form. Or they are expressed as repetitive, behavioral enactments. (43)

The key to the treatment process is no longer discovering what has been forgotten, but rather understanding why and how past and present memories have become unwelcome and inaccessible. When the path to remembering resumes, one is more likely to say, “As a matter of fact I’ve always known it; only I’ve never thought of it” (Freud 1914, 148). As stated previously, diasporic individuals who have experienced collective trauma frequently exhibit resistance and avoidance of open dialogue. Freud’s seminal model explains that working through entails eliminating resistance in order to establish a link between the past and the present, so that the traumatic history is no longer in a state of separation and can be linked with the victim.

In his later metapsychology paper “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud provided another “remembering or repeating” scenario and discussed another task for working through—the work of mourning. He distinguished melancholia as a pathological reaction to the loss of loved objects, as opposed to the normal reaction of mourning. He observed that for the melancholic, loss is unclear or unknown. Instead of remembering or knowing what has been lost, the melancholic acts it out in which Freud (1917) observed the phenomenon of self-reproach, the significant decrease in one’s self-esteem, and the delusional anticipation of punitive consequences. Freud’s analysis suggests that it is unbearable for the person to acknowledge her or his hatred, anger, resentment, and aggression to the loss-object. Individuals detach themselves from these emotions but continue to hold onto them “by the circuitous path of self-punishment, in taking revenge on the original object and in tormenting their loved one through their illness, having resorted to it in order to avoid the need to express their hostility to him openly” (Freud 1917, 251). Through identification, the person now carries the loss-object within the ego and becomes the “substitute object” for attacking and blaming, which Freud (1917) described as “the

shadow of the object fell upon the ego” (249).

Freud’s classic discussion has a significant relationship with the depression observed in the first generation of survivors and the importance of identification in the transgenerational transmission process. The phenomenon of this ‘shadow’ resembles an elusive presence that accompanies individuals, yet remains indistinct, exerting a detrimental impact on their well-being. Whereas the mourner is remembering the loss by acknowledging the love and hatred and saying goodbye to it, the melancholic is attaching to the unknown loss by detaching from themselves. Freud makes the distinction that “when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (Freud 1917, 245), whereas the melancholic is trapped in an impoverishing internal world. As Adam Phillips (2016) notes, “working through is a way of seeing the future through the past, and not as the past” (379). This is what I consider as the ‘return.’ For those in diaspora, while one may believe they have left or were never born in the place where the traumatic history occurred, one may have unconsciously returned to it in their minds or revisited it by identifying with their parents. So long as they are permitted (working through the resistance) to return in full (working through the loss), they will be able to realize their true departure.

Kleinian Path: Embracing Love and Hate as Reparation

The theoretical framework developed by Melanie Klein was derived from her psychoanalytic observations of children. Rather than discussing the technique of working through, Klein directed her attention towards the emotional state of individuals and formulated the concept of reparation as a means of comprehending the potential for psychological recovery. This concept of reparation is regarded as a constructive force that facilitates the process of

mental healing.

In “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud identified the conflict between love and hate as the cause of the sadistic ego and the obstacle to recovery. Subsequently, Melanie Klein further delved into the origins of love and hate, tracing their lineage back to early childhood experiences. Klein’s seminal publication, “Love, Guilt and Reparation” (1937), explicated the correlation between the development of love and the mother’s prompt and efficient fulfillment of the infant’s needs, thereby fostering a sense of enhanced security. Hate and aggression are aroused when the baby feels hungry or needs remain unfulfilled. Mother, as the first object of love and hate, “is both desired and hated with all the intensity and strength that is characteristic of the early urges of the baby” (58). In addition, Klein observed that when a person begins to realize that the loved object is also the one who let them down and was unable to meet their demands and alleviate their distressing emotions, guilt exists for the aggressive attack on the love-object in unconscious fantasy. It is the guilt that “acts as an incentive to making reparation” (Klein 1937, 110).

However, if the feeling of guilt becomes overwhelming and the individual cannot contain hostility toward one’s own feelings, the reparative guilt will transform into a persecuting one. Concern for the object converts into fear for its survival and retaliation. Klein’s formulation is grounded in the context of childhood dependency. For Klein, “the feeling of guilt and the drive to make reparation are intimately bound up with the emotion of love” (83). The experience of goodness and love is vital for preserving the reparative drive and their memory enables the work of restoration. The good and caring object is introjected into the self and becomes the guardian of love to diminish the hatred, guilt, and fears and preserve or rebuild the harmony of the inner world. On the contrary, the experience of bad, deprivation, insecurity makes the external object

introjected as a persecutory internal object, which increases hatred, guilt, and fears. When the paranoid state is intensified, individuals are more prone to externalizing their overwhelming emotions, projecting them onto others, and expressing aggression.

In this context, Klein outlined a precondition for engaging in the process of working through: the capacity to repair allowing by holding both love and hatred. She stated, “If we have become able, deep in our unconscious minds, to clear our feelings to some extent towards our parents of grievances, and have forgiven them for the frustrations we had to bear, then we can be at peace with ourselves and are able to love others in the true sense of the world” (Klein 1937, 119). Klein’s elaboration suggests that to “clear our feelings” does not mean to rip out or get rid of them; rather, it means to “make the feelings clear” so that we are not blocked by them and can think them through. Here, Klein appears to have dealt with precisely what Freud identified as resistance to remembering and the obscurity of mourning.

When considering the Chinese diaspora through the lens of Klein’s perspective, it is noteworthy that the enduring practice of filial piety in Chinese culture presents a significant challenge for offspring in acknowledging and accepting their feelings of hatred towards their parents. Furthermore, if the concept of homeland is imbued with the psychological significance of one’s maternal or paternal figures (motherland or fatherland) within an individual’s unconscious mind, then the process of growing up in one’s homeland can be interpreted as the childhood dependency situation in Klein’s sense. When confronted with traumatic events resulting from governmental or state misconduct, one may create a negative or evil internal representation of the home country and an internal object of hatred that is unjust, untrustworthy, and unreliable. Klein’s discussion also reminds us that excessive hatred cannot promote reparation and can even cause fear and persecutory anxiety in the individual. When immigrants

move to a country that is ideologically opposed to their home country, it is likely that their hatred, dissatisfaction, and resentment will be manipulated and amplified to meet the political line of the host country. In such situations, however, individuals' psychological reparation may be impeded, and working through will be a difficult process.

Klein's theory serves as a reminder that recognition should not be limited solely to negative emotions such as hatred, but should also encompass positive emotions such as love. The crux of her theoretical framework lies in the acceptance of seemingly contradictory affects concurrently. Thus, working through histories entails the following for the Chinese diaspora: For the offspring of Chinese diaspora, their love and hate can move beyond the filial piety and identification of transgenerational trauma. For the first generation of historical victims, their criticism toward home country can be expressed while their love toward the homeland can be restored.

Karl Figlio's (2017) *Remembering as Reparation: Psychoanalysis and Historical Memory* applies Klein's theoretical framework to comprehending the process of repairing historical trauma. He emphasizes that "guilt is a historical force and historical enquiry must deal with it" (17) and subsequently differentiated between two distinct forms of reparations: remembering true as reparation proper, and remembering false as manic reparation. Obviously, he agreed with Klein's assertion that reparation is not a psychoanalytic technique, such as Freud's working through, but rather a type of psychological drive inherent in people (Klein 1937, 57). As a psychological force, reparation exhibits distinct tendencies and outcomes, which Figlio (2017) identified as reparation proper, which is predicated on the capacity to mourn, and manic reparation, which is one facet of melancholia. Figlio (2017) elaborates that the Kleinian sense of manic reparation acts under the persecutory anxiety, "provokes a move to alleviate an

accusation, whether by trying to do good or by defending against it, perhaps aiming to triumph over it” (11) and aims at denying guilt and responsibility.

Furthermore, based on his observations of Germany’s treatment of Nazi history after World War II, Figlio (2017) points out that the incapacity to mourn “locks the generations into a prison in which the inability to recognize and mourn the destruction of love objects is coupled with an inability to forgo the idealization of self, identified with the nation’s ideal” (17). In my perspective, the traumas resulting from the sequence of political revolutions witnessed by mainland Chinese subsequent to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, specifically the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement, exhibit resemblances to the characteristics identified by Figlio (2017). From the founding of the new regime to the earliest days of the Cultural Revolution, people had a strong desire to construct an ideal new society and become the country’s true rulers. During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, however, the violence and ugliness of human nature and the disorganized governance were revealed radically, shattering people’s idealizations of the self, the other, and the nation. What once gave people hope hurt them the most. In the Tiananmen Square in 1989, young college students eagerly hoped to implement political reforms to realize their dream of democracy, but they were crushed by the country’s tanks. Since then, the younger generation has been afraid to have ideals. The country that was once so beloved could be so cruel to its citizens.

How do individuals who have undergone such experiences confront the harsh realities of history? Figlio (2017) offers his take on working through, remembering, and remembering in true. He conveys, “‘Remembering true’ is a form of reparation and of thinking. It refers not to a final record, taken to correspond to the facts of past, but to a continuing process of finding and excluding distortions. It won’t represent a coherent memory, shared by everyone to whom it

might apply, but a self-reflective openness” (11-12). It is impossible, according to Freud’s (1914) discussion of the shift in psychoanalytic technique, to obtain an absolutely accurate and complete picture or memory of what occurred in the past. Working through goes beyond recalling historical facts, which is a limited sense of remembering. Working through histories, according to Figlio (2017), implies an ongoing process and the openness to knowing, savouring, and integrating. Remembering is not enough. Working through histories calls for restoring the path to freely review and discuss the past, containing the ambivalent affects, recognizing the harm and guilt, and proper reparation.

Winnicottian Path: The Use of Object as Entry to Potential Space

Donald Winnicott, a well-known pediatrician, developed his psychoanalytic theory by drawing on his extensive experience working with children and their mothers. He studied with Melanie Klein and contributed significantly to the field of object relations theory –an interpsychic scope. His famous tenet is “there is no such thing as a baby” (Winnicott 1952, p. 99), because that the baby must be understood in relation to the mother or ‘other’ as the facilitating environment. Winnicott’s theory on the relational environment highlights the critical role of caregivers in creating a supportive, secure, and attuned environment for a child’s psychological development. It is the nurturing relational context that forms the foundation for the child’s sense of self, emotional resilience, and ability to establish meaningful connections with others. The concept of transitional phenomena and potential space proposed by Winnicott (1971) offers insights into the question of where locates the working through process.

An important question for Winnicott is how infants perceive the external world and differentiate themselves from others. He believed that the initial sensation experienced by an

infant is primary unintegration (Abram 2018, 77). The process of differentiating between the self and others, known as Me and Not-Me, occurs as a result of the child's interactions with their caregiver and the extent to which their needs are promptly fulfilled. In this process, Winnicott (1971) identified a crucial element –the transitional object, which is an actual object and used by the infants to defence against anxiety by comforting themselves. Its typical examples include blankets and stuffed animals. According to Winnicott (1971), these objects help children transition from total dependence on their primary caregiver to a greater sense of independence. Transitional objects act as a bridge between the inner world of the child and the external world, providing comfort, security, and a sense of continuity.

Winnicott (1971) further developed notions of object-relating and object usage to elaborate how the transitional object can be used to establish the one's sense of reality. He considered the undifferentiated state between an infant and external world/object as object-relating in which subject relates to object narcissistically while believing that object is under their omnipotent control. When the subject makes destructive changes to the object and the object survives through the destruction, subject becomes to realize that they live a life in the world of not-me objects. As stated by Winnicott (1971), "In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes–in to the subject, according to its own properties" (121). In other words, according to Winnicott, an individual must experience "subject's placing of the object outside the subject's omnipotent control" (120) in order to transition from object-relating to object-use. During this process, the subject perceives the object as an external phenomenon with independent existence, not as a projective entity, and recognizes it as an entity in its own right with its property of having been there all the time (88).

The ideas presented by Winnicott regarding the progression from object-relating to

psychological differentiation appear to be in conflict with the Freudian concepts of forgetting and disconnection previously discussed. However, it can be argued that the two concepts are not inherently contradictory, but rather exhibit internal coherence. In Freudian remembering, when a person is able to recall the past or an affect, he or she has recognized it “in its own right” as opposed to being under the control of the unconscious or being in the dark. In other words, remembering as the core in working through the past entails what Winnicott would consider as reality testing, the differentiation. Thus, what Freud considered as forgetting and lack of conscious connection is what Winnicott would term as an underdeveloped object-relating state, whereas remembering, in both Freudian and Kleinian sense, is the result of Winnicott’s object usage. A theoretical development trajectory can be seen, in which Kleinian theory offers a nuanced approach to addressing affects and facilitating repair based on the classic Freudian perspective, and Winnicott’s theory offers an equally comprehensive alternative route, emphasizing object utilization.

Additionally, Winnicott’s theory offers further elucidation regarding the circumstances in which the utilization of an object takes place, which is called transitional space or potential space (Winnicott 1971). The genesis of this concept stems from Winnicott’s empirical observations of the interactive dynamics between children and their mothers during playing. He posited that the mother or primary caregiver serves as the initial object of perception for the child, resulting in the emergence of an intermediate area between the mother and the child. This intermediate zone is “not completely subjective, nor completely objective” (Abram 1996, 312) and is where cultural experiences such as reading, writing, playing, artistic creation, and religion are located. In this realm, which Winnicott sometimes referred to as “the third area” (Abram 1996, 311), one can practice the use of object, which develops into the use of symbol.

So what implications does Winnicott's theory have for diaspora to work through histories? I propose that the utilization of cultural production, such as fiction, should be regarded as an integral component of the process of working through histories for the Chinese diaspora. According to Winnicott (1971), cultural experience is an extension of the transitional phenomenon, and what he refers to as 'cultural' is an inherent tradition "that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*" (133, original italics). The traumatic histories discussed in this paper appear to fit within what Winnicott refers to as 'cultural,' particularly for the second generation of the Chinese diaspora, because these histories are the pre-histories existed independently of them and shared by parental generation. As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter One, a number of Chinese female authors from the Chinese diaspora in North America have emerged in recent years to write novels about parental histories. This is a phenomenon of such significance that I believe it can be examined through Winnicott's lens. In addition, when discusses on the diaspora and the politics of memory, Khatharya Um (2018) points out that the cultural production within diasporic communities serves as a form of counter-narrative to both the notions of home and historical accounts, carrying significant political implications in terms of restoring, preserving and transmitting the histories unmuted by hegemony or political suppression.

Serge Tisseron (2013) extends Winnicott's idea of transitional phenomenon and transitional space to understand the use of fiction and its function. He believes that fiction, as a significant form of cultural production, serves as a container for cultural experience, both in terms of its writing and reading. He elaborates, "Humans have invented fiction as a space where we can freely and safely put the sense of reality on hold. Fiction does not make us believe that it

is real, but it does not stop us from responding to it ‘as if’ it were—though the ‘as if’ response has its limits if something we prefer to forget enters into the story” (Tisseron 2013, 121). From the perspective of authors, what they do is to “have somewhere to put what we find,” as Winnicott put it. It is in literature writing –the potential space that they interact with the inherent tradition as external reality while incorporating elements of their own internal world, such as their experience of transgenerational transmission. This process involves both drawing inspiration from and contributing to the development of a personal style or idiom (Kuhn 2013). In light with Winnicott’s theory, when one can write the family-related history into story, they are able to place the haunted past outside of their unconscious and remember it, rather than repeating it.

For readers, engaging with novels centered on this particular theme presents an avenue through which they can explore and immerse themselves in a potential space. In addition, if they have the ability to use fiction, according to Tisseron (2013), “it can be the starting point of a productive encounter with the self” (127), which I interpret as a return to the self and relationship to traumatic experience in order to departure for a hopeful future. Furthermore, Tisseron (2013) believes that one of the factors influencing readers’ preferences for specific novels or movies is the perception that these narratives bear some relevance to their own lives. Tisseron notes,

all fiction creates a frame, and it is for the user alone to determine whether the world inside the frame bears any relation to reality. At this point we might enquire whether our choice of fictions is made on the basis of our capacity to ‘defictionalise’ them—to regard them as personally relevant, in other words. Users will often make moral judgements about fictional characters as if they were real people, even to the point of psychologising those characters. In short, we are always seeking parallels with our own lives in the fictions we are drawn to. (122)

With Tisseron’s (2013) thought, making use of fiction provides us with an opportunity to perceive our own lives from an altered perspective, thereby enhancing our comprehension of certain aspects that may appear ambiguous or perplexing. Alternatively, it allows us to obscure

distressing elements from our consciousness, akin to perceiving them through a metaphorical opaque lens. For this reason, I will present a comprehensive examination of three cultural texts in the subsequent chapters (Chapter three, four and five). My research encompasses not only the textual content, but also the authorship and reception of the text.

Chapter Three

The Inhibition of Remembering: *Coming Home* (2014) and Its Symptoms³

Introduction

Remembering takes efforts. In the case of difficult history as a wounded past and social taboo, remembering becomes almost impossible. Memory, as elaborated in Figlio (2017) encompasses more than mere cognitive recall, as it intertwines with instincts and the unconscious, incorporating affect-laden experiences from the past that resurface in consciousness through opportunities given in the present. In addition to psychological mechanism, one's social-cultural-political environment has a substantial impact on what can be remembered and how. Because individuals must secure their membership in the group by conforming to what can be tolerated and what must be modified as a present-day memory (3). Memory screening occurs at two distinct levels: the individual psychological level and the social collective level. The objective of this chapter is to examine a common scenario in the Chinese where the act of remembering is suppressed on multiple levels. The dual repression results in a sense of alienation in the connection to the historical context of the Cultural Revolution in China.

May 16, 2014, the releasing of *Coming Home* (2014) marked the 48th anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution.⁴ This movie depicts a nuclear family dealing with their traumatic experiences after the Cultural Revolution. It is based on Chinese-American writer Yan Geling's novel, *The Criminal Lu Yanshi*, which is considered to be in the style of Scar Literature.

³ Parts of Chapter Three are revisions of the article "Coming Home (2014) and Its Symptoms," which was originally published in *Arts (Special Issue Picturing the Wound: Trauma in Cinema and Photography)*, volume 12, no. 5: 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12050180>.

⁴ The Cultural Revolution was one of a series of political movements launched by Mao Zedong. It began with the "16 May Notice" issued on 16 May 1966. *Coming Home* was released on 16 May 2014.

Directed by the internationally famous Zhang Yimou⁵, *Coming Home* reconfigures the novel by transforming it into a story of aftermath rather than representing the difficult history. Its lack of historical representation is in stark contrast to the novel's full of historical details. This narrative strategy is intentionally applied by Zhang, who referred it as "*liubai*," leaving a space or blank (Zhang 2014). Considering this film as a text, this chapter is a reading in the sense of a rescanning of the film (Cahiers 1972, 6). I use psychoanalysis and trauma theory to examine the plot, characters, and underlying implications inherent in the structure and narrative, with a focus on three specific traumatic symptoms: "as-if-forgetting," "repetition," and "historical void." I aim to provide insight into the concept of forgetting as a unique form of remembering, the phenomenon of compulsory repetition as an unspoken expression, and the lack of societal response/witness to traumatic subjects that contributes to the historical void. My inquiry centers on the significance of the film's presentation of trauma in a traumatic manner. How does its inability to depict the historical event illustrate the gap between history as it occurred and history as we remember/receive it? Moreover, how does this film address the pressing question of how collective trauma is treated within the Chinese cultural framework?

Why *Coming Home*?

Films depicting the history of the Cultural Revolution have been banned or censored in China. However, because of its stunning cast, acclaimed director, and the renowned author of the original novel, *Coming Home* received considerable attention from the start. The marketing strategy of promoting the film as a story about family and love attracted audiences of different ages and brought the film in line with the dominant ideology, allowing it to bypass censorship

⁵ Zhang Yimou is the first Chinese director to win the top prize at the three most prestigious international film festivals, the first Chinese director to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and the director of the opening and closing ceremonies for the Beijing Summer and Winter Olympics.

and gain official recognition. Coupled with commercial operations, it earned nearly 300 million at the domestic box office, making it the highest-grossing Chinese melodrama film to date (People.cn 2014). As a result, *Coming Home* became the most successful film about the Cultural Revolution, appealing to the largest audiences in mainland China ever. When *Red Amnesia* (2014)⁶, another film about the aftereffects of the Cultural Revolution and its transgenerational effects, was released a year later, it did not receive the same official support as *Coming Home* and failed at the box office. *Coming Home*'s ability to reach to huge audiences and across ages is the first reason I chose it as my object of analysis.

Secondly, *Coming Home* not only tells a story about trauma, but also unfolds in a traumatized way that displays the struggles and challenges of representing the past, loss, and forgetting in the emotional situations of the present. When he brought *Coming Home* to the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival, director Zhang Yimou voiced his concern over the forgetting of the past. He acknowledged that he was using films to inform and influence people, particularly China's younger generation, about history (Koepke 2015). *Coming Home* serves as a placeholder for audiences to reflect on their own experience and reclaim the traumatic past by focusing on the suffering of individuals. As Susannah Radstone (2001) points out, "[t]he part trauma film may play in their spectators' integration of individual and collective traumas may therefore mitigate traumatized isolation and create empathy with the sufferings of other in present" (192).

I consider *Coming Home* to be an example of modernist trauma films, which aim to expand the possibilities for representing the past and allow for mourning, remembrance, and forgetting by rejecting the conventional assumption of accurately depicting what happened.

⁶*Red Amnesia* is a Chinese movie directed by Wang Xiaoshuai. It premiered in Venice on 4 September 2014 and was released in China on 30 April 2015.

(Radstone 2010). However, due the underdevelopment of trauma discourse in mainland China, the meaning of this film has not been thoroughly examined and requires further analysis and exploration. Gaining access to a traumatic history, as Cathy Caruth (1995b) reminds us, requires “listening beyond the pathology of individual suffering, to the reality of a history that in its crisis can only be perceived in unassimilable forms” (156). By focusing on a family’s story, an in-depth analysis of *Coming Home* will provide an opportunity to consider the processing of the trauma of the Cultural Revolution.

The Making of *Coming Home*

Zhang Yimou directed the film *Coming Home* as a subsequent piece to his prior work, *The Flowers of War* (2011), which was also derived from Yan Geling’s novel, *The Flowers of War* (2007). Influenced by Iris Chang’s (1997) *The Rape of Nanking*, the novel depicts how the Japanese army raped women during their occupation of Nanjing and massacre: prostitutes hiding in the church stood up and replaced young female students who were taken away by the Japanese army for sexual assault. According to Zhang’s screenplay coordinator Zhou Xiaofeng (2015), Zhang made a deliberate decision to film the subject matter of the Cultural Revolution so close to the Nanjing Massacre because of the inherent pertinence between the two: namely, the denial of what happened. Zhang’s original intention in creating *Coming Home* was to convey a message to Chinese people who had learned to turn their backs to history. When preparing the shooting, Zhang said, “We condemn Japan for denying the Nanjing Massacre with righteous indignation, but when it comes to our own history, how can we approach the situation fairly? Other people’s backs are visible, but our own faces are not” (Zhou 2015, 264, my translation).

How to make this movie out of the tiny crack under the dual pressures of market demand

and film censorship had been the primary concern of Zhang's team. Although he realized that the Cultural Revolution topic was unappealing to young audiences and would be naturally resisted and rejected by them, Zhang stated emphatically "if the theme of Cultural Revolution is out of date, does that imply that the theme of World War II is also out of date? Does this mean Auschwitz does not need to exist as a memorial? Don't worry about the box office, don't criticize the censorship system all day, just ask what we can do with our best efforts under the current circumstances!" (Zhou 2015, 264, my translation). The dilemma that went into making this film was that there was too much to say but not enough space to say it. Zhang's screenplay coordinator Zhou Xiaofeng (2015) drew an analogy from the word guessing game: some words are forbidden to be spoken and can only be expressed through body language so that others can guess. Those who could not guess would think the performers were incompetent and inept because the grotesque body movements were so ridiculous. However, it must be understood that if the performer violates the rules, they will be asked to leave the stage.

Consequently, during the initial phases of film production, Zhang suggested the omission of flashbacks and voice-overs in favour of utilizing the present circumstances to introduce the characters, because the explicit inclusion of relevant historical images would be subject to censorship and editing. The art of film, due to its ability to depict events and its resemblance to the workings of memory, is widely regarded as a highly effective medium for conveying historical narratives. However, Zhang's decision was to inhibit the cinematic techniques of recalling the past. He advocated the use of strategies like refraction, symbolism, and metaphor, though these strategies can be difficult to employ because they require a certain level of understanding and creativity on the part of the audience in order to achieve interactive consonance. Zhang insisted that, similar to sending ciphers, *Coming Home* must make ambiguity

and implicitness a mode of thought for the audience, not a sign of weakness (Zhou 2015, 264-265). Consequently, in the final filmic presentation, the void of history is also the void of memory. The aphasia of a medium that best represents memory and the past amplifies the Chinese inhibition of remembering on the screen. I will expand my analysis by examining three of the *Coming Home*'s most prominent symptoms: forgetting, repetition, and historical void.

As If Forgetting

Centering on the problem of memory, *Coming Home* challenges our understanding of what forgetting is and how we remember. In the film, the dramatic conflict involves a husband returning home only to find that his wife does not recognize him. The inability to remember creates enormous tension between the two major characters: Lu Yanshi, the husband, and Feng Wanyu, the wife.

The film opens with a tense homecoming scene. Lu was a professor who, unfortunately, became a political prisoner and was subsequently sent to a labour reform camp⁷. In 1973, he escaped from the re-education farm and came home to see his family. However, to show her loyalty to the Communist Party, Lu's daughter Dandan informed on Lu to the government, enabling them to catch Lu when he made an appointment to meet Feng at the train station. In that morning, Lu was brutally arrested in front of Feng. This violent separation is the first traumatic of the story. In the late autumn of 1979, when the newly freed Lu walked into the community where he lived 20 years ago, it had not occurred to him that his wife would not recognize him anymore. For Feng, Lu was a complete stranger. Feng, for his part, felt strange to Lu.

⁷ In the original novel, Lu Yanzhi was one of many intellectuals labelled as rightists during the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement which that imprisoned and sent to farms a large number of Chinese intellectuals to farms for labour reform. The Anti-Rightist Movement is regarded as one of the key factors that paved the way for the Cultural Revolution.

However, we should question whether Feng truly forgot her husband. Feng's apartment was covered with various notes reminding herself of leaving the door open for Lu to come back. She resented her daughter and blamed her for betraying Lu, her father. Her discontent towards Dandan served as her way of caring for Lu. She clearly remembered going to the train station to pick her husband up on the fifth of every month and wearing decent dress. For the sign that she made in order to find Lu easily in the crowd, Feng practiced her calligraphy by repeatedly writing his name, to ensure she presented to him the best. During his incarceration, she cherished his piano and letters, and kept them close to her heart. She invested a great deal of time listening to his letters and being with him through his writing. When Lu wrote to her and asked her to forgive their daughter, she gladly obeyed and let Dandan move back home. It is obvious that Lu had always been Feng's dear husband in her mind. However, one and half year before Lu's release, Feng started to act out psychogenic amnesia. Thus, the mysterious question at the heart of the film is what is holding Feng back from recognizing Lu and embracing his return.

In the film, the doctor's diagnosis of psychogenic amnesia for Feng implies that the underlying cause of Feng's forgetfulness is psychological trauma rather than physical injury. According to McKay and Kopelman (2009), psychogenic amnesia is a psychological condition characterized by the inability to remember important personal information, often stemming from traumatic or stressful experiences. The individual exhibits a level of memory impairment that surpasses typical forgetfulness and is not attributable to substance misuse or any underlying medical disorder. In the psychoanalytic understanding, psychical trauma contains at least three elements: a violent shock, a wound, and consequences affecting the whole mental organization (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 466). A very straightforward explanation provided in the movie is Feng Wanyu's experience of a violent shock when, at the train station, she saw not only that her

loving husband had been living a subhuman life, but also he was brutally taken away by officials. She was hit on the head and deeply hurt in the heart. The concussion may be the cause, but I argue that Lu's second homecoming is the main trigger of Feng's symptoms.

As a historical movie, *Coming Home* grounds its storytelling in the specific period of Lu's escape from the labor camp in 1973 and later, his homecoming in late 1979. Feng began to suffer psychogenic amnesia in the middle of 1978, when the Chinese central government issued Central Document No. 11 as the guideline for "removing the rightist hats" (Veg 2014, 515) of most of the political rightists like Lu and releasing them from labor camps. Feng would have known that her husband was coming home again and the violent scenes that had happened a few years before at the train station would have been aroused.

However, the manifestation of trauma does not follow a linear pattern. The phenomenon of experiencing difficulties in memory recall serves as a prominent exemplification of the theoretical concept referred to as "afterwardness" within psychoanalytic discourse. This construct, originating from the German term "Nachträglichkeit" and developed by Sigmund Freud, denotes a retrospective process wherein traumatic significance is attributed to past events in a delayed manner (Sutton 2004). During this process, "earlier memories are re-worked in accordance with later experiences and circumstances" (Aron 2016, 273n). In the movie, Lu Yanshi tried very hard to restore his wife's memory by arranging familiar scenes for her: encountering her at the train station dressed in the decent clothes of the good old days; retrieving an old photo showing his handsome face; and playing a beautiful and moving piano piece for her. Unfortunately, Feng still failed to register his appearance. Ricoeur (2004)'s *Memory, History, Forgetting* provides a comprehensive review and profound analysis of the ways in which memory functions in our lives and how its presence influences our relationship with the

past. Reading with Ricoeur, Feng's situation can be under-stood as one in which there are certain impediments that hinder her ability to access her buried memories (444). Even when someone from the Party came to vouch for Lu's identity, she still did not believe that the person in front of her was her husband. Lu Yanshi never considered that he would have to live out the meaning of his name: *yanshi*, "Why could you not recognize me?"⁸

The narrative of *Coming Home* compels us to consider the circumstances underlying the as-if-forgetting. Every time Lu approached Feng's bedroom and bed, she became horrified and shouts at Lu as if he was Officer Fang. Why does Feng Wanyu mis-recognize Lu as Official Fang? The implication of Officer Fang as an intruder in the private realm reveals that Officer Fang had violated Feng Wanyu. It turns out that after Lu's first homecoming, Feng had asked Officer Fang, who served in the local Revolutionary Committee during the Cultural Revolution, to assist Lu in avoiding the death penalty for his escape. It is not difficult to comprehend why Feng may feel shame for having been sexually violated by Officer Fang and no longer being chaste for her husband. She was so afraid that Lu would discover what had happened to her and what she had done to save him. As a result, for Feng Wanyu, identifying Lu as her husband cannot happen without allowing herself to freely reconnect with Lu. The obstacle lies in her repression of strong and ambivalent emotions. As Clara Mucci (2013) elaborates the situation of "knowing and not knowing" in traumatized subject, "the reconstruction of the 'real fact' cannot take place without a reconstruction also of the emotional link within the relationship with another being allowing the integration of the affects and the meanings connected to the event that has been traumatic" (73).

⁸ Yanshi (焉识) in Chinese can be interpreted as "how one could/could not know or recognize something," which comes with a rhetorical question.

Feng's emotional situation was complicated by her conflicting feelings of love and hatred. She had been raising the family and caring for their daughter on her own for twenty years, during which she had to contend with the difficulties and disgrace that Lu had brought upon them. After Lu's escape from the labor camp, Feng was so worried that Lu might get a death sentence that she put herself in a vulnerable place for Officer Fang to take advantage of. So, how could she not feel any resentment in experiencing such difficulties? But Feng did not express any other emotions besides love when mentioning her husband. She refrained from harbouring resentment and hatred toward Lu because she understood cognitively that her humiliation, disgrace, and hardship were not her husband's fault. This is evident from a scene that she shed tears when she saw the official document that removed Lu's "political rightist" label. However, these conflicting affects can be read into Feng's mistaking of Lu for Officer Fang: spilling out the truth by naming the perpetrator. Feng made a devastating accusation against Lu by identifying him as the perpetrator, revealing her unconscious resentment towards Lu, whom she believed unconsciously had contributed to her suffering.

Moreover, when Officer Fang assaulted Feng, he was in a position that represented the Party and its power and authority. For Feng Wanyu, the Party's representative, and by extension the Party itself, was not only untrustworthy but also persecutive. She feared being punished like Lu and numerous others who expressed discontent or revealed the truth at the time. It makes sense that Feng claimed to trust the Party when questioned by a Party representative, but she insisted that the man in front of her was not her husband but Officer Fang. Feng Wanyu's traumatic experience includes not only the violent separation at the train station, but also the traumatic situations that gave rise to the formulation of symptoms.

The symptom of as-if-forgetting in *Coming Home* demonstrates the "dialectics of

remembering and forgetting” (Cattell & Climo 2002, 1). Through not being able to recognize Lu, Feng’s forgetfulness becomes a defensive way of remembering her husband. It creates an ironic distance between the urge to get close to the husband by reading his letters and waiting to see him, and the fact that Lu is readily at hand. Through this ironic distance, Feng Wanyu expressed her internal conflicts between love, hate, fear, desire, and self-preservation. Here, the film does a good job of demonstrating that whereas remembering is an act of linking, forgetting or not knowing are matters of not being able to link or put memories that are in fact thematically and affectively related into a coherent story (Cavell 2006, 45). Such lacuna then leads us to the discussion of the problem of historical void, which will be expanded in a later section.

Endless Repetition

Prior to exploring the significance of the lacuna and understanding the void of history, I need to investigate Feng’s confusing behavior of waiting at the train station through applying psychoanalytic theory on transference and repetition. As demonstrated in the previous section, it is more likely that Feng Wanyu has a memory block than that she has lost her memory. She denied herself access to her ambivalent affects caused by traumatic situations. The blocked memory, as Freud (1914) discussed in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through”, speaks in a language of acting out—and what Freud termed as repetition. In doing so, an individual acts out what has been resisted as a way of remembering and communicating what could not have been known at the time of the injury or event. The compulsion to express without words outlines a traumatic condition in which some early experiences can neither be remembered nor forgotten (Roughton 1993, 444). *Coming Home* poses a compelling question to the audience: What does the repetition convey?

After receiving Lu's letter saying that he would come home by train on the fifth, Feng Wanyu went to the train station every month on the fifth day. Feng's repeated waiting at the station seems to result from her forgetfulness and the incomplete information in the letter. But more than that, the repetition is her way of acting out the traumatic memory of Lu's homecoming. In this case, repetition replaces the act of remembering and expresses the memory of real situations, which are repressed in the public sphere, through the use of behaviors. It is the nonverbal communication that contains meaningful material for understanding Feng's experience of trauma.

As discussed in the previous section, Lu's second homecoming is a situational trigger that activates or intensifies Feng's internal conflicts. Psychoanalytically, this kind of situation is termed as transference, during which, as Freud noted ([1905]1953), "a whole series of psychological experiences are revived" (116). Melanie Klein (1952) further suggests that transference signified the "total situations transferred from the past into the present, as well as of emotions, defences, and object-relations" (437). By means of interpretation of events occurring in a particular present context, transference offers insight into potential occurrences in a comparable past situation. Thus, analyzing Feng's repetition in a transference lens helps us understand the 'here and now' as the afterwardness of the 'there and then.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud (1920) took a child's game as an example to formulate the relationship between trauma and compulsory repetition. In his observation, the child repeatedly threw a wooden reel out and reeled it back using a string. Freud interpreted that the disappearance and return of the wooden reel mimicked the mother's departure and return. Through playing this game repetitively, the child was retrospectively trying to gain control of the unpleasing experience of the mother's departure. Similarly, traumatized people are more likely to

revisit the traumatic situation and unconsciously attempt to master the experience retrospectively. In *Coming Home*, Feng's repetition is her way of mastering the traumatic separation. She not only blamed her daughter for being the informer, but also herself for not opening the door for her husband at his first homecoming and not being able to assist in his escape or ensure his safety. Furthermore, in the film the missing scenes of Lu's first departure—how he became a political prisoner and was taken away from home—also consisted in Feng's mimic game of departure and return. Feng experienced at least two shocks: the husband was taken away suddenly, and then, after suddenly coming back, he was taken away again. The repetition of going to the train station and not being able to bring Lu home invites the audiences to imagine what Feng experienced years ago, and what kind of experience make a person has to express affects in such pathological way.

According to André Green (2002), in addition to gaining control of traumatic experiences, repetition also serves as a wish-fulfillment through which the individual gains enjoyment or makes things come true (80). What has been repeated is not only the behavior but also the embedded affects. Every time she repeats the journey, Feng Wanyu walks out of the house with great anticipation and comes back with great disappointment. On one hand, she may attempt to master her heartbreaking feelings; on the other hand, she indulges herself in great hope. Because she is no longer forced to declare a break with Lu and denounce him as a political enemy, her desire for her husband is legitimized. She can finally welcome her husband home and express her love openly. However, she will never “meet” the husband because she “yields to the compulsion to repeat which now replaces the impulsion to remember” (Freud 1914, 151). Such compulsion expresses a force of putting oneself in similar or identical conditions to reproduce affectively (Green 2002, 83). Hence, as shown in the movie, no matter how old Feng Wanyu was

or how bad the weather was, she never asked her daughter to go to the train station on behalf of her.

Green (2002) elaborates that the repetition functions as a close-circuit in which a set of interdependent elements forms a meaningful whole and all evolution is erased by the return of what is repeated (84). In *Coming Home*, Lu Yanshi tried very hard to break the close-circuit by filling the gap of Feng's memory. However, after visiting Officer Fang's family, he gave up trying. When confronted with Official Fang's wife, who was also enraged that her husband had been taken away, Lu did not want to make things difficult for her in the same way that Official Fang had done for his family. Lu could also imagine how his wife, as a family member of a politically incorrect man, would have endured countless hardships. Lu realized that he was unable to exact revenge because he did not have anyone or anywhere to vent his rage. He became the sole and direct cause of Feng Wanyu's suffering. These feelings of incompetence and powerlessness overwhelmed Lu and made him sick after he returns from Official Fang's home. He may have felt foolish for believing that everything would be fine and repaired as long as he could return home. Restoring Feng's memory could be extremely painful and cruel to her. Here the movie confronts audiences with an ironic and sad scene of the victimized forgiver left in silence whereas the forgiven not only did not reflect and repent, but instead became a victim in resentment. For people like Lu Yanshi, how does one fight against the displacement of memory and the wrongdoing of a country and an era?

Before *Coming Home* and its protagonist Feng Wanyu, there was another well-known literary figure in modern Chinese literature who embodied the traumatized woman acting out her repetition. Portrayed by the most significant Chinese modern writer Lu Xun (1881-1936),

Xianglin's Wife⁹ represents the objectification and oppression of women under traditional social norms. She had two arranged marriages, the first after being sold by her parents, and the second by her mother-in-law. She resisted vigorously, but conventional society muffled her voice. After losing her second husband, and then her only son, Xianglin's Wife was overwhelmed by guilt and began to seek empathy by repeatedly recounting the traumatic scenes of her son being devoured by animals. Unlike Feng's acting like no one else in the *Coming Home*, the villagers initially found Xianglin's Wife's repetition to be amusing, though this amusement eventually gave way to disgust, including the I-narrator in the novel. Xianglin's Wife's compulsion to tell never led to greater comprehension, but was instead viewed as psychotic and unsettling. No one attempted or was able to help her; only bystanders were present. As a Chinese prototype of a repeated act, the figure of Xianglin's Wife later evolved into a derogatory representation of expressing one's suffering in contemporary culture. Lu Xun's portrayal of this character is highly impactful in illustrating the dilemma faced by individuals who have experienced trauma within Chinese society. The depiction effectively highlights how the desire to articulate their traumatic experiences is overshadowed by their fear of alienation and rejection.

In the original novel, Feng Wanyu repetitively moved around furniture at night and her neighbours were very angry and vehemently complained about the disturbance. In contrast, *Coming Home* rewrites the characteristic's compulsory repetition into a quiet and unobtrusive routine, as if not being seen by those around her. *Coming Home* foregrounds the memory issue and the symptoms of trauma by removing the response from other people, which suspends social judgment toward the traumatic subject. Repetition ends up being a family's sole burden. Failing to break the close-circuit, the whole family became collaborators in the repeated act. At the end

⁹ Lu Xun (1881–1936), real name Zhou Shuren, is regarded as one of the pioneers of modern Chinese literature. Xianglin's Wife is a protagonist of Lu Xun's 1924 short story "New Year's Sacrifice". See (Lu 2009).

of the film, accompanied by the subtitle “many years later”, Lu’s family starts a day of going to the train station as usual, without saying any words. The silence between family members, the natural station routine, and the subtitle of “many years later” create an endless, timeless, and spaceless sense of repetition, as well as a suffocating sense of hopelessness. When the iron gate of the train station closes in front of them again, with the camera shooting from the other side, Feng and Lu appear to be imprisoned. This symbolic final shot sends a strong message that every isolated traumatic subject is trapped in the past, a history that will never pass.

Lu Yanshi’s failure to repair Feng’s memory, as well as Dandan’s silence to her mother’s drama, is predetermined. In a society that turns a blind eye to the aftermath of traumatic history, victims of massive trauma have no way out. The absence of otherness in the movie, on the other hand, brings out the critical problem of lacking a ‘cultural third’ (Gerson 2009) to recognize individual and collective trauma. This leads to an in-depth discussion of historical void.

The Problem of Historical Void

The tension between ‘the forgotten past’ and ‘the disrupted present’ is well developed in *Coming Home* through Feng’s as-if forgetting and compulsion to repeat. More importantly, the symptom of as-if forgetting also hangs over the whole narration that as if there was no recollection of the historical details in the film. This adaptation, termed “liubai” or “leaving space or blank” (Zhang 2014), becomes the most contentious aspect of *Coming Home*. In comparison to the original novel, the film’s retelling of the story is merely the tip of the iceberg. Many critics note that this is a compromise strategy for Chinese filmmakers who are constricted by censors, particularly when producing a film about the Cultural Revolution. But there is still strong disappointment towards Zhang’s decision not to bring the history to screen. For example,

Australia-based scholar Cai Shenshen (2015) refers to this as a “collaboration between Zhang, and the coercive powers of both official, mainstream, and commercial discourses as they conspire to intentionally shun, camouflage, depoliticize, and romanticize the painful memories of the socialist revolutionary eras and their subsequent repercussions” (278). She asserts that this reconfiguration turns the story into “a poignant twilight romance” which lacks analytical and mediating power (Cai 2015, 288). I, however, make the opposing case. In this section, I discuss how to understand the problem of historical void in relation to trauma and what we can learn from *Coming Home*’s historical void.

First and foremost, *Coming Home* should be considered as an independent story in which a traumatized family is burdened with endless repetition and stuck in the past. I have demonstrated that what appears to be “eternal and innocent love” (Cai 2015, 283) is actually a hopeless sorrow; without a social support network, there is no way for individuals to escape the lifeless cycle. Indeed, Cai’s analysis highlights the negotiation between *Coming Home* and the political conditions of the society that produced it. But we should not be satisfied with what the film claims to say or what it appears to say; instead, we should focus on the unspoken premises of the narrative. As media scholar Richard Dyer (2002) explains, the structuring absence “does not mean things which are simply not in the text, or which the critic thinks ought to be in the text” (83) but is instead “an issue, or even a set of facts or an argument, that a text cannot ignore, but which it deliberately skirts round or otherwise avoids, thus creating the biggest ‘holes’ in the text, fatally, revealingly misshaping the organic whole assembled with such craft” (83). For the ideological criticism of films, the most important reference factor is not the time frame when the story in the film took place, but the time when the film is produced, distributed, and screened. In this sense, *Coming Home*’s omission of what it was like to experience the Cultural Revolution

necessitates further examination and is not merely a compromise with censorial authorities.

The historical void in *Coming Home* is manifested in different aspects. First, in general, it lacks representations of what happened during the Cultural Revolution. Dandan's desire to be the leading role in the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*¹⁰ is one of the few scenes, representing the fervent competition among young individuals to embody the revolutionary ethos. Instead of representing the cult of Mao or the violence and destructiveness of class struggle, the movie only uses symbols, such as the printed slogans, the badges of Chairman Mao, the *Little Red Book*, or the revolutionary song "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman" to outline the time period. Second, as I have discussed, Feng's experiences of the Cultural Revolution do not show in the film, but are buried with strong affects. Third, as a victim of the political movement, Lu Yanshi's experience of being in the labor camp leaves no trace on him and his body. He lost his freedom, but came back without any resentment or disciplined behaviors. The same erasure also happens to Dandan, leaving her internal trajectory of changing from idealization to disillusion empty. It is not hard to understand that the trauma belongs to not only Feng but also the whole Lu family. These 'holes' and lacuna are there to confront audiences with a question: Do they really have nothing behind these holes? These questions – "do you really have nothing in relation to this history?" and "do people who live through that era really have nothing to it?" – are implanted in the mind of audiences.

On an individual level, a void or hole are metaphors for experiential states such as inner deadness, or being unavailable to oneself or others due to traumatization (Erich 2009). As historian Dominick LaCapra (2001) argues, "[t]rauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only

¹⁰ *The Red Detachment of Women* was one of the revolutionary model operas used as a political tool to transform the ideology and values of the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution.

with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered” (41). Feng Wanyu’s amnesia is indeed individual but also reflects the collective condition of the Chinese memory of the Cultural Revolution. This message is implied by Feng’s name Wanyu (婉瑜) which is a homophone to 婉喻, meaning to make an implicit analogy. Rather than historical fact, the narrative structure and the characters’ conflicts revolve around the difficulty of retelling a story from the past. A nation, as well as an individual, cannot bear to face a particular period of history and chooses an attitude of escape. Thus, in an analogous manner, the structural void in *Coming Home* parallels Chinese society’s refusal to confront its traumatic past.

Massive trauma, as elaborated by Laub and Auerhahn (1993), produces a rupture or void that refers to the inability of representing traumatic experience due to “the collapse of the imaginative capacity to visualize atrocity” (288). This collapse is bridged in film by focusing on an ordinary family and presenting the human conditions of being in the afterwardness. With this absence, *Coming Home* invites audiences to recall their own experiences of deep and unspeakable affects in family life and to project their imagination to grasp, if only a little, what it might have felt like to be a part in that history. This ‘leaving blank’ also indicates that the Cultural Revolution-induced trauma is heterogeneous, consisting of a series of events that have accumulated under a given set of conditions. Tomas Plaenkers (2014), a pioneer of psychoanalytic research on Chinese trauma, points out that “[t]he Cultural Revolution was not a homogeneous event that affected an entire society in the same way. On the other hand, a large majority of the population in China did partake of the trauma of the period, yet in different ways” (40). While not depicting the Cultural Revolution and its related movements as it unfolded, the movie does show the painfulness and almost irreversibility of the scars a traumatic past leaves on people and families. In this case, the emotional quality of being wounded resonates with

audiences and elicits the recognition of trauma and reflection on our understanding of history.

The absence of witness in the film is crucial. The family of Lu lives in a community, has neighbours, and interacts with people. But there appears to be no ‘witness’ to their uncanny situation. Witness, according to Samuel Gerson (2009), can be seen as a ‘live third’ “whose engaged reaction and concerned responsiveness to the individual’s experience create livable meaning” (1343). It can be an individual, relationship, or institution that solidifies the sense of continuity and serves the functions of containing and meaning making for traumatized people. However, when this support is absent, “the living thirds in which the person was nested now become a nest of dead thirds from which he or she cannot escape” (1343). The absence of social support and the lack of response from others towards this peculiar family renders the Lu family’s existence akin to that of a desolate island. What *Coming Home* has shown is not only how a family lost its aliveness in close-circuit repetition, but also in a nest of dead social and cultural thirds which turn a blind eye on the existential experience of trauma and the demand for recognition and reparation. Werner Bohleber (2012), who studies trauma and its social impact, elaborates on how a cultural third is needed by traumatized groups, and its lack renders traumatized individuals much more vulnerable. He writes,

Man-made disasters,—such as Holocaust, war, and political persecution—involve specific means of dehumanisation and personality deconstruction, the aim of which is to annihilate the victim’s historical and social existence. It is beyond the individual’s capacities to integrate such traumatic experiences in a purely personal narrative context; a social discourse is also required respecting the historical truth of the traumatic events, as well as their denial and defensive repudiation. Generally, only scientific explanation and social recognition of causation and guilt are capable of restoring the interpersonal context, thus opening up the possibility to determine what actually happened at the time in an uncensored way. If defensive impulses predominate in society, or rules of silence prevail, traumatized survivors are left alone with their experiences. Instead of drawing support from other people’s understanding, they are often dominated by their own guilt feelings, which they come to rely upon as an explanatory principle. (364)

In this vein, we can now comprehend Feng Wanyu’s distrust of the Party, Lu Yanshi’s giving up

on restoring his wife's memory, and Dandan's abandonment of her specialty and becoming an ordinary worker. All of these demonstrate what the dead third does to vulnerable traumatized subjects. Feng was compelled to endure a prolonged period of anticipation for her husband's arrival, unable to discern his identity due to the overwhelming burden of her personal guilt. Similarly, Lu was compelled to come to terms with the reality of a household to which he was incapable of returning. Outside of the cinema, public discussions about the Cultural Revolution or other political traumas in Chinese society remain notably missing. In places where we cannot see them, there are countless families trapped in silence and embodying traumatic experiences. In the absence of otherness lies a potential answer to the question of why director Zhang's failure to bring historical truth to the screen is so disappointing: the strong demand for a live third.

Early in his career, Zhang Yimou had worked diligently to represent history via film. His film *To Live* (1994) depicted the plight of ordinary people from the 1940s to the Cultural Revolution which has been denied a theatrical release in mainland China. While Zhang achieved international acclaim and government recognition in China, he was expected to break the silence of traumatic history with his artistic works. Still, when *Coming Home* passed the censorship authorities and was screened on the 48th anniversary of Cultural Revolution, he received harsh criticism from *Cinema World*, one of the most prestigious and oldest film magazines in China. In an article titled "Named as the teacher of state, he (Zhang Yimou) is actually an obedient citizen" (Hong 2014, 23), the leading contributor of *Cinema World* viewed Zhang's transition from self-censorship to self-castration in *Coming Home*. The author asserted that what Zhang called an artistic approach was nothing but rewriting the story in an oversimplified and crude manner that turned a blind eye to an unforgettable history (Hong 2014, 25). However, the high expectations of Zhang and the desire for historical accuracy, in my view, prevent critics from appreciating the

efforts made to represent the aftermath of the traumatic history. People expect Zhang Yimou to be the one who overcomes censorship, but Zhang is well aware that he can only dance with chains on. When people anticipate seeing a traumatic history on screen, such as the film *To Live*, they undoubtedly project their own hopes of challenging authority. Such expectations, on the contrary, limit Chinese scholars and the public's advanced thinking about how *Coming Home* promotes the understandings of the relationship between history and memory, between personal history and collective memory, and the intersection of trauma, memory and history.

One of the contributions of *Coming Home* is visualizing the belatedness of trauma and emphasizing the subjective experience of time. In doing so, it challenges audiences with “the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential” (Caruth 1996, 11). This non-linear circularity is shown in Feng Wanyu’s psychic reality, in which the current situation is interfered with by previous events. As has been shown through analysis, internal circularity like this could continue for years. The embodiment of trauma alters one’s perception of time and history in an existential way. As Cathy Caruth (1996) points out, “[f]or history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18). Such inaccessibility of what happened is represented in *Coming Home* as an empty circle that “symbolizes the absence of representation, the rupture of the self, the erasure of memory, and the accompanying sense of void that are the core legacy of massive psychic trauma” (Laub 1998, 507). In this sense, through the absence of representation the film displays not only the historical power of trauma, but also trauma as the testimony to the past.

Indeed, navigating censorship is a challenge in the Chinese film industry. Ruan Jiale (2023) contends that the formulation of rules pertaining to film censorship lacks clarity and

precision. The absence of well-defined quantitative criteria and explicit guidelines for making such assessments can result in excessive discretion being granted to administrative censorship, thereby introducing a significant degree of subjectivity into the censorship procedure. In general, themes involving significant historical themes, racial or religious issues, or that realistically depict social conflicts, such as *To Live*, will not be approved. Only projects containing no sensitive historical or social information, such as *Coming Home*, may be made public. The dissatisfaction with or criticism of Zhang and *Coming Home* reflects the demand for a social discourse which, as described by Bohleber (2012), respects historical truth and provides scientific explanations and recognition of causation. However, political reality overshadows the potential for considering historical void as a traumatic symptom. In addition, it is evidently insufficient to comprehend personal and collective trauma and its symptoms in the Chinese context, as collective traumas are less likely to be represented in cultural products due to the censorship system.

When Can It End?

One of the film's most intriguing unanswered questions is whether and when Feng is able to recognize her husband and ends the repetition. The silent ending, in which Lu holds a sign bearing his own name and waits for himself to emerge from the station, plunges the audience into an abyss of despair. When three 'Lu Yanshi' simultaneously appear on the screen, even those who find the film silly and absurd cannot laugh. The tragedy of the story is magnified by the fact that the sign "Lu Yanshi" is supposed to represent the physical Lu who has returned, but instead represents an imaginary Lu whose return is awaited. The real Lu Yanshi has been excluded and become a homeless and ghostly person. In an analogous way, Lu's uncanny

situation as a foreign body to the family is what traumatic experience is to a traumatized subject, and, moreover, what the memory of the Cultural Revolution is to the Chinese people. They are constantly present but never fully integrated. *Coming Home* does a masterful job of subtly presenting the haunting legacy of the past: The amnesiac Feng becomes a monument, a reminder of what happened, and an embodiment of the traumatic experience and traumatic remembering when she stands in front of the train station like a timed alarm clock. Standing next to Feng, Lu realized he would never be able to provide her with the Lu Yanshi she desired. Because that person had been lost, for both Lu himself and Feng Wanyu. Lu is perpetually mourning his lost self, conspiring with Feng's repetition and becoming part of the monument. In doing so, this film serves as a poignant reminder that the traumatic history a broken past that cannot be mended and those who suffer from it are unable to move forward and are constantly mourning their loss.

Disguised as a love story, *Coming Home* is actually a film about trauma through which history leaves its traces and calls for re-evaluation. While people expect to see history on the screen, the film invites audiences to listen to voices from the site of trauma. Its way of storytelling urges a non-conventional understanding of history and truth. By showing the historical enigma betrayed by trauma, *Coming Home* brings out the problem of what Caruth (1995) called the crisis of truth, which “extends beyond the question of individual cure and asks how we in this era can have access to our own historical experience, to a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access” (6). This is demonstrated by the obstructiveness of Feng Wanyu’s memory, the unknown of Lu Yanshi’s suffering, and the emptiness of Dandan’s development. The stories of the three protagonists are not allowed to be told, just like other countless stories. The breakdown between signifier and the signified is also the breakdown of the sense of history. When the lived experience of individual and their

memories are muted, it severs one's relationship with history and damages subsequent generations' sense of reality (Bohleber 2017). As Caruth (1995) noted, trauma "requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure" (153). The very basic of saying/telling and listening will start the integration when "a traumatic memory becomes a narrative, a story now told, and with all the appropriate feeling, to another person" (Cavell 2006, 43). While historicization requires witness—the live third—at the individual level, it requires a community of seeing and witnessing for testimony to occur at the national level. In this sense, *Coming Home* tells a quiet and small story in a deafening voice.

Chapter Four

When Stories Are Allowed to Be Told: Li Yiyun and Her Writings

Introduction

Telling confirms the witness. Walter Benjamin discussed how to communicate experience through storytelling in his influential essay “The Storyteller” (1936). He emphasized the ability to tell stories as a subject’s constitution. When someone tells a story, he or she is drawing on personal experience or that of others. The ability to tell is a necessary part of bearing witness to experience. What makes a traumatic past so difficult is its unresolved affects and the challenge of narrating what happened. In the Chinese context, being unable to speak or express is the result of internal damage caused by traumatic events and external political suppression. The long-standing social environment in which people are punished for saying is a significant obstacle to narrating subjective experience, especially when such suffering results from political factors or political wrongdoings. The path for subjects to work through difficult histories is marked by questions about how to break through inhibitions and let the experience register properly and become something that can be learned from. When learning from experience yields to repetition, the past will always be the present and trap individuals and the group. As a diasporic writer, Li Yiyun is an excellent case to show how one restores the capacity to tell.

This chapter aims to analyze Li Yiyun and her style of writing as a case of how to work through histories. Li devotes her first two long novels to the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Massacre by adapting well-known historical events. Rather than leaving the history blank, Li subtly reconstructs real historical events and configures the life of ordinary people to invite understandings of what it felt like to live at that time. The strategy of intertwining historical facts and everyday life allows Li’s works to shock, challenge, and

undermine the grand narrative of contemporary Chinese history. What makes Li an interesting case also lies in the fact that she left a career in science to narrate stories. She resisted writing in Chinese and having her works translated to Chinese, confronting her own mental breakdown and the loss of a son by writing them into books, and admitting that, when she said she was not an autobiographical writer, she lied.

Li Yiyun lives in United States and writes about Chinese stories¹¹ in English. Growing up in Beijing, Li witnessed the Chinese social and political changes from 1970s to 1990s. In 1996, she came to the United States for graduate study in immunology, but later found that her inner calling was creative writing. In 2003, her first essay, “What Has That To Do with Me”, was published in *Gettysburg Review*, and first short story, “Extra”, in *The New Yorker*. Since then, Li’s works have been embraced by the American publishing community. Her debut story collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005), won the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award (2005), the PEN/Hemingway Award (2006), the Guardian First Book Award (2006), and the California Book Award. Besides publishing short stories in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Zoetrope: All-Story*, and *The Threepenny Review*, Li’s publications include two short story collections, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005) and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* (2010); four novels, *The Vagrants* (2009a), *Kinder Than Solitude* (2014), *Where Reasons End* (2019), and *Must I Go* (2020); and two nonfiction books, *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life* (2017) and *Tolstoy Together: 85 Days of War and Peace with Li Yiyun* (2021). Li, who has been referred to as “A Chekhov from China” (Hulbert, 2014), has been the recipient of esteemed accolades and distinctions from the American literature society. In April 2022, Li was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Saxon 2022).

¹¹ One exception exists. *Must I Go* (2020), Li’s most recent work with no Chinese themes or settings, is currently being translated into Chinese for publication.

Li finds her voice by telling stories about ordinary Chinese people in transitions: a changing Chinese society or a Chinese diasporic journey. She captures the human conditions of being wounded and writes about how the contested past intertwines with a promising future and challenges the thinking of now. Her writing is also marked by her own journey of navigating diasporic subjectivity and working through difficult histories. Li's effort on writing the ordinary back into history is regarded as a counternarrative to China's dominant historiography (Hartmann 2022, 643). Despite Li's recognition and success in the United States, there is a lack of comprehensive research on her in both Chinese and English academic spheres. The current body of research predominantly centres on Li's short stories, with limited scholarly investigations into her novels and non-fiction works. This body of research comprises ten journal articles, eight master's theses, and one doctoral dissertation.

In contrast to previous research, this study examines Li's writing and literary works through the method of thick description (Geertz, 1973). The purpose is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that shape her writing, to discern the underlying intentions and meanings that inform her work, to trace the development and progression of her writing, and to view both Li and her works as interpretable textual entities (Denzin 1989). In this analysis, I examine the utilization of memoir, interviews, and two lengthy novels as a means to understand Li's approach to storytelling and its implications for her engagement with the contested historical narrative. Instead of delineating the author and her literary works as distinct entities, my methodology adopts a perspective that regards Li as a paradigmatic example through which one can gain insights into the development of a diasporic individual engaged in the exploration of memory and history. The first part of this chapter examines Li's personal experience of restoring the ability to tell stories, while the second part

examines Li's two novels, *The Vagrants* and *Kinder than Solitude*, in order to discuss her strategies for dealing with contested histories through writing.

I, Want to Tell

Li Yiyun had never thought about becoming a writer before she lived as an overseas student in Iowa City, the “City of Literature.” Li's parents raised her as a future scientist, but she was brave enough to find another path for herself. While writing stories about China and Chinese, Li denied being an autobiographical writer until she published her first non-fiction work, *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life* (2017). In this memoir, she confronts her own mental condition and admits, “One writes about what haunts one. Thus looked at, no one is exempt from being autobiographical” (101). Li's motivation for writing is to contemplate what troubles her. Since she has admitted that her writing contains traces of her lived experience, I attempt to discover what Li is haunting questions are and what inspired her to begin writing. As Benjamin (1936/2007) pointed out, storytelling “does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again” (91-92). Through Li's self-exposure, it becomes gradually apparent what shaped her life and her writing.

Born in 1972, Li grew up within the Cultural Revolution atmosphere in which the individual was defined by political life. As a child, when Li and her mother walked around the neighborhood looking at the execution announcements, she could not get any explanation of who they were from her mother. Those people's lives shrank into bits of information: their crimes, names, and ages. At that time, one did not care or have the capacity to care about others, and no one tells or dares to say more. But such a glimpse of life and the curiosity about who they were

remained with Li (Idaho Public Television 2014, 15''30 -15''53). She desires to comprehend individuals in their true essence.

Li's motivation for engaging in storytelling was derived from the profound impact of her maternal grandfather, who had dedicated a significant portion of his career to the role of an editor. Her loquacious grandfather imparted poetic knowledge to her and regaled Li with captivating narratives, thereby engrossing her. Li provided an account in an interview where she recounted her grandfather's storytelling practices (Wachtel, 2019).

Wachtel: Your grandfather experienced the famine between 1958 and 1961, long before you were born. What kinds of stories did he tell you about that?

Li: He would say, for instance, "My neighbour..." and then describe the neighbour, a very respected old man or a respected intellectual: "Oh, he would walk in the street and see a little kid with half a bun, and he would be so hungry, he would grab the bun and run." It was even worse than hunger when you lost your dignity, when you robbed a little child, and that was the kind of story he would tell. And then he would go back through history and tell the stories about, you know, in this-and-this dynasty, there was this famine here and people would have to eat their own children. But it was so hard to eat your own children, so neighbours would switch their children so they could eat other people's children..... (Wachtel 2019, n.p.)

It is not difficult to understand how grandfather's narration satisfied Li's curiosity. In his storytelling, a man is a complicated person with multiple layers that could not be reduced to a verdict or an execution announcement. Her grandfather instilled in Li a way of perceiving things that transcended a given circumstance and possessed historical depth. Similar narrative techniques can be found in Li's writings, which provide readers with a window into the effects of historical power on individuals. However, even a skilled teacher of storytelling could not overcome the era's silences. Even though Li's maternal grandfather was an outspoken man, her parents taught her to be cautious in public and to never put her thoughts into writing. Words, whether spoken or written, may get someone into trouble. For Li's family and many others, the revolution's legacy instilled the notion that speaking and writing could be perilous. The scientific

path was much safer. (Idaho Public Television 2014, 7''35 -8''05).

During her formative years, Li experienced disdain, humiliation, and disciplinary measures from the kindergarten caregiver due to her independent thinking. Li was subjected to a menacing warning from a kindergarten aunt, who cautioned her that excessive self-determination could potentially lead to a future characterized by criminality and subsequent execution. This incident occurred immediately following a collective visit of the entire class to witness a public denouncement preceding an execution, when Li was at the age of five (Li 2003). The subsequent events in Li's life remain unknown; however, it is indisputable that a child would undoubtedly experience significant fear as a result of such an encounter. Within the pages of her memoir, Li delves into her personal experiences and reflects upon the stark contrast between her concealed persona and the uninhibited and expressive nature she embodied as a five-year-old child named Yiyun.

I have been asked throughout my life: What are you hiding? I don't know what I am hiding, and the more I try to deny it, the less trustworthy people find me. My mother used to comment on my stealthiness to our guests. A woman in charge of admission at the public bathhouse often confronted me, asking what I was hiding from her. Nothing, I said, and she would say she could tell from my eyes that I was lying. (Li 2017, 7)

Li's expression was severely repressed as a result of her upbringing in a time when an independent mind was not welcomed or encouraged. Li had to disguise what she really wanted to write in her diary and leave the most important details blank because she knew her mother would read it (Idaho Public Television, 2014, 10''36 -11''09). However, at the age of sixteen, Li experienced a turning point that allowed her to overcome the repression of speech: the 1989 Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement.

Li mentioned in an interview that the Tiananmen Square massacre was a "life-changing experience" for her (Wachtel 2019). She was locked in the house by her parents, but one of her friends went to the square that night. After telling everyone around him what he saw and being

reported, this sixteen-year-old boy was caught by the police. Li felt fear and uncertainty and lived consciously after that. Two years later, when Li was sent to the army for a one-year university freshman training “to prevent future insubordination” (Li 2017, 27), her mother warned her to zip her mouth tight. She brought a lot of English novels with her. Reading literature in another language was her way of coping.

However, when she found her fellow soldiers knew little about what happened two years ago, Li was shocked and angry. She could not stop talking about the Tiananmen Square incident to them. She said, “It was almost like my goal to make everyone admit that these things happened. And part of the squad was iffy. I mean, everybody was very cautious around that time, so nobody wanted to talk about these things openly. But I took a stand as an activist in that little space, and I forced people either to listen to me or take a stand, and I was very unhappy” (Wachtel 2019, n.p.). It was extremely risky for Li to discuss such politically delicate topics in the army. She feared she would be detained and denied permission to return home. But as her fear increased, so did her volume (Wachtel, 2019). Instead of concealing herself or restraining her critical thinking, Li made no secret of her intelligence and defiance. She established the “I” by setting herself apart from others in this regard. As she described in her memoir,

In the army, with youthful conceit, I presented myself as someone different from others: submitting obliquely subversive poetry when I was ordered to write propaganda, making cleverly insolent comments about the officers, taking every opportunity to undermine the authority of our squad leader. To defy any political authority, to endanger myself in a righteous way, to use my words to distinguish this self from people around me—these, at eighteen, were shortcuts to what I really wanted: confirmation that life, bleak and unjust, was not worth living. (Li 2017, 27-28)

Li’s personal narrative highlights her profound opposition to being silenced following a distressing incident. The primary source of distress for her was the inability to disclose the truth, the unavailability of factual knowledge regarding the events that transpired, and the prohibition on her high school friend, who served as a witness, from providing testimony. After her one year

of army training, Li started her undergraduate studies at Peking University and went abroad soon after graduation. In 2000, when she decided to quit science and turn to writing, it was another turning point: I write to tell. From then on, telling stories became Li Yiyun's lifework.

To Break through the Mother Tongue

Writing about Chinese stories in English while refusing to translate them into Chinese has made Li Yiyun a distinguished diasporic author. The majority of overseas writers who have the freedom of expression hope that their works will be read by the Chinese, particularly those within the wall, so that their voices can be heard and awaken the dreamers. However, Li is very dissimilar. She herself requested that her work not be translated because both she and China were not prepared (Rustin, 2012).

She has been honest in talking about what using another language to write means to her. "For me, writing in English is the most liberating experience. In English, I am free to express things that I would have consciously censored—both out of political pressure and cultural pressure—had I been writing in Chinese" (Li 2005, 211). Li's short story "A Thousand Years of Good Prayers" (2005) contains a breathtaking scene in which a father confronts his divorced daughter, asking why she was able to express herself with an American man but not with him.

Mr. Shi's daughter, startled by the vehemence of his words, looks at him for a long moment before she replies in a softer voice. "It's different, Baba. We talk in English, and it's easier. I don't talk well in Chinese."

"That's a ridiculous excuse!"

"Baba, if you grew up in a language that you never used to express your feelings, it would be easier to take up another language and talk more in the new language. It makes you a new person."

"Are you blaming your mother and me for your adultery?"

"That's not what I'm saying, Baba!"

“But isn’t it what you meant? We didn’t do a good job bringing you up in Chinese so you decided to find a new language and a new lover when you couldn’t talk to your husband honestly about your marriage.”

“You never talked, and Mama never talked, when you both knew there was a problem in your marriage. I learned not to talk.” (Li 2005, 199)

This narrative revolves around a father who had received instruction to refrain from discussing professional matters with individuals outside his immediate circle. However, he faced retribution as a consequence of establishing a connection between a female colleague and the concept of unrestricted self-expression. The father employed the conditions of his occupation as a justification for maintaining a state of reticence within the domestic sphere. Upon his retirement, when he paid a visit to his daughter residing in the United States, he observed a distinct transformation in her demeanor and behavior when she conversed in a language other than her mother tongue.

Li’s work presents a critical scenario in which individuals face challenges in expressing themselves, and examines the potential consequences for subsequent generations. This perspective facilitates a historical comprehension of the evolution of Chinese individuals’ language experiences over time subsequent to the establishment of the new regime. One example of a distressing experience involves individuals who have been subjected to abuse recounting narratives of their pain and suffering. Additionally, there is the imposition of commemorative practices that adhere to rigidly established phrases and standardized scripts. This is accompanied by the use of formulaic language in both spoken and written communication, as well as the intrusion of political terminology into private expressions. Furthermore, personal emotional expression is suppressed, leading to a state of silence as a means of self-preservation. Lastly, the act of informing against others is employed as a potent political tool to accrue political advantage.

As a language, Chinese lost its safe and private space. According to the daughter character, the language employed was one that had not been previously utilized for articulating emotions. The expression of genuine thoughts and emotions may be hindered due to the potential for others to gain access to the content being communicated. The implementation of political coercion engendered a sense of fear among individuals, leading them to internalize the authority and adopt self-censorship. Li's portrayal of the father figure in her work highlights the lasting impact of the Mao era on individuals, specifically the suppression of authentic self-expression. The individual also expressed the manner in which this imprint could be passed down to future generations via familial dynamics and parental approaches, exemplifying this by illustrating how the daughter mirrored the tacit marital relationship of her parents in her own marriage.

For Li Yiyun, Chinese is never a private language. By adopting English, she regained her creativity and storytelling ability, just as the daughter in the story regained her ability to enjoy a close relationship. Li's coping strategy in her youth was to find solitude by reading English novels. When communicating in a foreign language, she could enjoy a carefree and secure time. She once stated, "When I was growing up, the concept of privacy did not exist in China. "I was a sensitive child who strongly reacted to a lack of psychological space" (Rustin, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that she brought English novels into the army as a form of resistance to communal living and a defence of her own private world.

Li (2017) devotes an entire chapter of her memoir, written between two hospitalizations following suicide attempts, to her ambivalent relationship with her mother tongue. She contradicted what had been stated in interviews regarding the ease with which she transitioned to writing in English. She acknowledged that her determination—the absoluteness of the abandonment—was a form of suicide. She said, "One's relationship with a native language is

similar to that with the past” (142) which is not something one can get rid of by just cutting it off. “What comes before—other people’s past, other people’s relationship with that language—claims a right against one’s will” (142).

According to Li (2017), every individual learns two languages: the public language, or “the one spoken by others,” and the private language, or “the one spoken to oneself” (146). She was troubled by her own insincere words when she realized she could become a skilled writer of propaganda by mastering the language used to evoke people’s emotions. She approached the process of constructing an inauthentic self through public language with extreme caution. As she has always done, Li chose to be honest with herself and the world at that time. While some would view abandoning one’s mother tongue as a tragedy, she viewed it as her redemption. “Like all intimacies, the intimacy between one and one’s mother tongue can demand more than one is willing to give, or what one is capable of giving. If I allow myself to be honest, I would borrow from Nabokov for a stronger and stranger statement. My private salvation, which cannot and should not be anybody’s concern, is that I disowned my native language” (Li 2017, 139). Such redemption can be understood as a way of allowing one to speak. By adopting another language, Li distanced herself from the suffocating supervision and made some elbowroom to cultivate thoughts and narrate what haunts her.

The outlined trajectory of Li Yiyun’s journey involves her pursuit of separation and subsequent individuation through the means of studying abroad, abandoning her scientific pursuits, and embracing the English language. She displayed a strong resolve to establish a significant separation from both parental oversight, particularly from an intrusive mother, and ideological dominance, particularly from the influence of an intruding mother tongue. Instead of prioritizing self-expression, Li has directed their efforts towards narrating previously unexplored

narratives and articulating topics that have traditionally been left unspoken. As she stated, “Is it really to express myself that I write? Not is I think about what it is in myself that needs to be expressed: hardly anything new. This tireless drive to write must have something to do with what cannot be told” (Li 2017, 159). The untold of Tiananmen Square and conviction of her high school classmate are the beginning, but not the end, of her writing. She admitted that, in her perspective, the haunting experience pertains to China. She said, “The big reason I still wonder about China, write about China, is I have so many questions about China that are not answered yet.....So, unless I find answers to all my questions to China, I am still doing that to look for answers” (Idaho Public Television 2014, 12’’56’-13’’29’).

Writing as Bearing Witness to Experience: The First Published Article

In contrast to Li Yiyun’s widely acclaimed short stories and novels, her initial published work, “What Has That To Do with Me” (2003), received relatively limited recognition. In this article, Li presents a narrative that she subsequently adapted into her novel, *The Vagrants*, after a span of five years. Li persistently inquired about the essence of writing, the underlying motivations behind her desire to narrate tales, and the potential impact that storytelling could have. The text elucidates Li’s profound yearning for expression and her aspiration to engage in writing as a means of bearing witness. This section centres on Li’s initial published article “What Has That To Do with Me” and offers a thorough analysis that reveals her underlying perspective concerning the methodology employed in addressing historical testimony.

Li (2003) began her work with the statement, “This story I am going to tell you, it is a true story,” indicating that she intended to tell the truth. Constantly revealing the horrors of the unfolding situation, she added new layers to the story. In doing so, she demonstrated the

malleability of a story, similar to how a pebble thrown into water can cause ripples in circles: “one’s story does not end at death” (Li 2003, n.p.). The narrative depicts the condemnation of two female individuals to capital punishment due to their unwavering commitment to the principles of unrestricted expression and equitable legal treatment. The first female engaged in this action in order to protect and uphold her personal autonomy in terms of thinking and expressing ideas, while the other female participated in order to justify and support the actions of the former. The events that transpired during that period have been examined and resolved, however, Li engaged in a deliberate revision of certain details, including the relocation of the incident from Jiangxi to Hunan province, as well as alterations to the execution timeframe, the age of the initial female individual involved, and the gender of the second female’s child.

According to Li, narratives have the capacity to convey truth, albeit not as a mere replication of an authentic source. She purposefully modified her expression to convey her refusal, as Arthur Frank (2010) expounded, to perceive narratives as mimetic, or simply imitating a reality that exists independently of the stories themselves (p. 88). Li engages in a meticulous examination of historical accounts while also allowing space for the exercise of creative thinking and imaginative processes. Li employs a narrative approach that is grounded in real events, wherein she navigates the delicate balance between accurately recounting events and the subjective interpretation of truth (Portelli 1997, 48). Through the utilization of Alberto Manguel (2007)’s discourse on narratives and actuality, a deeper understanding can be obtained regarding the specific genres of stories that Li seeks to construct. Manguel (2007) conveys that “They can’t be fictional inventions, in the sense of forgeries or misrepresentations; they need to be invented fictions, in the sense of discovering historical truths that can be granted reality in narrative words. They must, in a deeply literary sense, ring true” (115). In this sense, Li offers a

metaphorical representation, referred to as “a sketched window” (Frank 2010, 88), which allows the observer to glimpse elements beyond the immediate view. However, it is important to acknowledge that this sketch does not present an entirely accurate depiction of the reality it portrays. More importantly, the sketch itself, the creative fabricating, is well worth looking at (Frank 2010, 89).

So what else did Li Yiyun describe in this essay? She connected the story to one of her earliest memories: witnessing a public denunciation of counterrevolutionaries prior to their execution, which occurred in the same year as the true story. Yiyun, age five, was as excited as if it were a ceremony. She was reprimanded for being noisy while playing with an ant. She chanted the slogan along with everyone else but was unaware of its significance. Li wondered,

So I could have been there in the Hunan stadium, five years old or seventy-five years old, a child trapped in her small unhappiness or an old man already getting tired of the long morning. Did I see the violent struggle of the young woman as the medical workers tried to pin her limbs down? Did I hear the muffled cries that came from her gagged mouth? (Li 2003, n.p.).

Li subsequently proceeded to recount her subsequent encounter of attending a trial within a densely populated theatre, employing temporal and spatial shifts. Yiyun, a 19-year-old individual, experienced feelings of boredom and began to drift into a state of drowsiness. She harboured a strong aversion towards the oppressive nature of the camp environment, leading to a consistent state of absent-mindedness whenever feasible. Li experienced a sense of futility in her existence and posed the inquiry, “What has that to do with us?”

When Li revisited the story of the two women, the same question is posed. She desired to know what those spectators in the Hunan stadium were thinking. She desired to know the thoughts of the doctor, patient, soldier, and janitor who appeared in the story. She wrote,

I want to know, too, who those medical workers were, rushing in and out of the stadium in the ambulances. Was the surgeon the same one who, when I was ten years old, operated on my mother to take her gallbladder out? I saw him shortly after the operation, and he

even joked with me..... (Li 2003, n.p.).

Li created a parallel universe by employing two techniques: immersing herself in the historical setting and establishing connections between the characters in the narrative and individuals she encountered at least five years later. Through these methods, Li effectively portrayed the individuals in the extraordinary story as ordinary individuals akin to those we may have encountered in our own personal experiences. She wondered if there was any sort of link between people from the past and those from the present. She demonstrated that she was once just a regular kid watching or an indifferent bystander: I could have been there, and they could have been someone I knew. But now, through writing, Li keeps asking herself, “What has that to do with me? Why do I feel compelled to tell the two women’s stories?” If she were the same as those nameless onlookers, she would not return to the past and write to make sense of them. What she wants to show is that the witness is not just about seeing. Her storytelling is a way to bear the witness to experience, especially the unthought experience.

On the other hand, Li admitted her desire in the process of storytelling. According to Frank (2010), “stories often reflect more desire for what might have happened than commitment to an accurate description of what did happen. Stories give that desire a material reality” (90). In the concluding segment of the article, Li drew a connection between the two women and Autumn-Jade, a prominent figure in the Chinese women’s liberation movement during the early 1900s. Autumn-Jade, like the aforementioned women, met a tragic fate as she was publicly executed and crowded at by ignorant onlookers. Li wrote, “I can never tell the story of Big Man and Autumn-Jade right. I cannot resist the temptation to make Autumn-Jade one of my family.....I want Autumn-Jade’s fearless blood running in the two young women’s bodies” (Li 2003, n.p.). Here, one may perceive that Li’s motivation to recount the stories of these women arises from her personal encounter with the silencing of her own voice, as previously discussed.

Li's inaugural published article displays her inherent motivation for writing and her distinctive utilization of writing methodologies. Instead of a telescope, Li used a kaleidoscope as a storytelling metaphor, describing it as "a grotesque kaleidoscope spinning with patterns and colours" (Li 2003, n.p.). For her, the real-story-based writing is like having the basic elements of patterns and colours in the tube. Through spinning - the desire to tell and be told - stories are reconfigured by the author and configured in the mind of the reader. By evoking a sense of human ordinariness, Li's narration transports readers through time and space and arouses their curiosity about how it might feel. In doing so, she creates a bridge between then and now and brings the past to the readers.

History in Kaleidoscope: Two Novels

As a writer, Li Yiyun has a clear ambition: to deal with difficult history. She said, "The things I had wanted to prove were ambitious, even inhuman: to be free from all that haunts one, and to keep a distance so as never to haunt others" (Li 2017, 105). Li's two novels, *The Vagrants* (2009a) and *Kinder Than Solitude* (2014), serve as compelling evidence of her diligent endeavours. She once said in an interview that it took her a long time to process things and the 1970s was where she started (Gathman 2008). Within this particular section, I aim to provide a concise overview of Li's methodologies in contextualizing the contested histories by means of a comprehensive analysis of these two literary works.

First of all, Li's primary approach to writing involves the utilization of narratives that are grounded in actual events. Through the incorporation of her personal recollections into the narrative, Li demonstrates her approach to contextualizing historical events. Li's first length

novel, *The Vagrants*, draws inspiration from the real experiences of Li Jiulian (李九莲)¹² and Zhong Haiyuan (钟海源)¹³, while also incorporating her own memories of reading weekly on-wall death sentence notices and participating in acts of denunciation during her formative years. According to Gathman (2008), Li had stated that she was raised in a cultural environment similar to that depicted in the novel. Taking place in the year 1979, immediately following the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, *The Vagrants* centres on the capital punishment of a female protagonist and offers a portrayal of existence within an industrial town centre devoid of any significant historical legacy. Li adeptly depicted the experiences of individuals from marginalized communities, skillfully presenting the narrative from their unique perspectives.

Kinder Than Solitude is the second novel-length work by Li. After addressing her early childhood memory, Li turned her attention to the life-altering 1980s. The novel was inspired by Zhu Ling (朱令)¹⁴'s case of thallium poisoning at Tsinghua University and incorporated the 1989 Tiananmen Square Democratic Movement into the protagonists' upbringings. Li acknowledged that "this (what has been present in the novel) is my generation. It is what we experienced from 1989 to now" (Hoggard 2014, n.p.). The primary thematic concern of the novel centres on the enigmatic occurrence of poisoning, which involves Shaoai, a university student who actively engaged in protests at Tiananmen Square. The narrative presented by Li involves the recollection of three adolescent individuals, namely Boyang, Ruyu, and Moran, who experienced deep feelings of guilt and regret in relation to the tragic event involving Shaoai. These emotions persisted and influenced their lives for a period of twenty years.

¹² See Guo, Song, & Zhou's *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (2006), pp. 141-142.

¹³ See Hu's book-length literary reportage "Zhongguo de Mouzi" (中国的眸子 China's Eyes Unpeeled) for the history of Li Jiulian and Zhong Haiyuan.

¹⁴ See Jacobs's "Poison Attack Revives Fury in China over '95 Case" published in *New York Times*.

Secondly, small people are the best witnesses in Li's writings, as their experiences add complexity and multifaceted reality to the monotonous and unified historical narrative. The title "The Vagrants" suggests that vagrants are marginalized by institutions or ideologies, rendering them a valuable lens through which to examine society. Within the narrative, Nini, a 12-year-old girl with a disability, showed the capacity to perceive the grief and hopelessness experienced by Gu Shan's parents, who were confronted with the imminent execution of their daughter. In stark contrast, the remainder of the town, including Nini's own family, was engaged in jubilant festivities. Bashi, an idle 19-year-old young man, observed the postmortem disposal of Gu Shan's deceased body on the periphery of the town subsequent to her being shot, with the additional detail that her kidney was extracted prior to her demise. Without the inclusion of perspectives from marginalized characters, the reader's comprehension of a totalitarian society would be significantly diminished. It is through these perspectives that one gains a profound understanding of the normalized perception that counter-revolutionaries deserved to die and should not be granted any mercy. Furthermore, these marginalized characters shed light on the belief that deviants' bodies are deemed disposable, akin to waste, due to their ideological opposition to the ruling party. Moreover, their organs, which had served to benefit those in positions of power, were deemed worthy of relocation.

In *Kinder Than Solitude*, Li effectively conveyed her perspectives on the political event by employing her characters as conduits for her ideas. Shaoai, the 22-year-old university student who was later poisoned, claimed that every generation has its own revolution and accused her father of being government-obedient. Shaoai was enraged by Ruyu's apathy and mocks her by asking, "But those people shot dead in Tiananmen Square? Have you found yourself thinking, for even a moment, about them or their family?" (Li 2014, 115). Through the perspective of

another character named Moran, Li offered valuable insight into how Tiananmen Square was utilized as a location for People's Republic of China National Day celebrations after the 1989 massacres. This portrayal suggests a collective effort to disregard the tragic events that transpired merely four months prior. There was an absence of protests, disruptions, or instances of chaos during the festivities. In a high-pressure political environment, even the most terrifying events can only be anecdotal. Li wrote,

One day the neighbors in the quadrangle would refer to this time as the days when Shaoai had been mysteriously sick, as they would speak of the May afternoon when an army tank was overthrown and burned down at a nearby crossroads, or the day in June when Teacher Pang's cousin pedaled three bodies on his flatbed tricycle from the Square to the hospital (Li 2014, 255).

As she stated in remembrance of Toni Morrison, Li believes that "History can be manipulated, whitewashed and rewritten, but people who have lived in history all have their stories, which no single dictator or censor can rob. Memories, kept in stories, keep history alive" (Li 2019). In *Kinder Than Solitude*, Li carefully examines the psychical landscape of the characters rather than portraying social and cultural atmospheres. Boyang, the individual who extended invitations to the two friends to tour his mother's chemistry laboratory, which served as the origin of the toxic substance two decades prior, finds himself ensnared in a pervasive state of emotional void, despite his accomplishments as a prosperous entrepreneur residing in Beijing. Ruyu, who cohabitated with Shaoai and transported the toxic substance from the laboratory to their residence, emigrated from China and obtained lawful permanent residency in the United States through two marital unions, yet remains unable to ascertain the meaning of existence. Moran, who bore witness to Ruyu's act of stealing yet refrained from disclosing this information to others, subjects herself to a form of self-imposed banishment in the United States. By framing a traumatic past that could not be faced or forgotten, Li illustrates that the body and ways of living can be the most powerful testimony when people cannot talk. Moreover, the three friends

are also poisoned by a toxic relationship with the past, namely the inability to work through the poisoning. The unworked-through past causes damage to the soul as much as the erosion of toxins to the brain. In this regard, Li implied that denying the events of Tiananmen Square is also toxic to the nation.

Thirdly, Li perceives the world as a complex entity that transcends simplistic dichotomies of black and white. She employs writing techniques to convey intricacy. In the novel *The Vagrants*, the two female characters, Gu Shan and Kai, are depicted as former Red Guards who initially displayed fervent participation in the Cultural Revolution, resulting in personal harm inflicted upon others. However, as the narrative progresses, both individuals undergo a transformation in which they begin to question and criticize the very movement to which they were once devoted. Kai, who married the only son of the most powerful couple in town and secured a prosperous and successful life, insisted on speaking out for Gu Shan and organized a collective demonstration. Both Kai and Gu Shan ultimately paid with their lives for their independence of thought and voice. So, are these two characters considered heroines in Li's perspective? Within the novel, Li employs the utilization of various character voices as a means to present a multitude of perspectives, thereby engaging in the deconstruction of the overly simplistic portrayal of the hero archetype. For example, when Mrs. Gu called their daughter a martyr, Teacher Gu said, "A martyr serves a cause as a puppet serves a show. If you look at history, as no one in this country does anymore, a martyr has always served the purpose of deception on a grand scale, be it a religion or an ideology" (Li 2009a, 226). There is also a naive character Tong, a seven-year-old boy, who was taught stories about young heroes and believed it was an honour to die for the Communist Party. When Tong expressed his admiration for heroines who meet an untimely demise, he was met with a contrasting perspective from Old Hua, a street

cleaner, who advised him, “Young children should think about living, not about sacrificing. It’s up to us old people to ponder death” (Li 2009a, 15). In contrast to her strong identification with the two female characters in her first published article “What has that to do with me,” Li articulates her skepticism towards the idea of ‘heroism’ in *The Vagrants*.

In the novel *Kinder Than Solitude*, the narrative perspective shifts to include the voices of the parents. For example, when Shaoai posited that her generation’s inclination to rise up and resist was a consequence of the preceding generation's lack of action, her father retorted, “Every generation recognizes easily what they are owed by the last generation. Every generation thinks they can achieve what the last generation have not. We’ve had enough revolutions in our lifetime because of that thinking” (Li 2014, 147). When discussing Shaoai’s expulsion from the university following the protest, Moran’s mother sincerely conveyed to her daughter that “being good means nothing in this country. Being right, and being on the right side of any conflict, is the only way to stay safe. An egg never wins when it hurls itself against a rock” (Li 2014, 177). Boyang’s mother, whose academic career was destroyed by the Shaoai incident, becomes a business stakeholder in China’s economic reform and opening up. She refused to discuss the tragedy and insisted that key to success is to have “the capacity to selectively live one’s life, to forget what one ought not to remember, to untangle oneself from lesser and irrelevant others, and to recognize the unnecessariness of human emotions” (Li 2014, 12).

Moreover, Li offers a window through which one can envision the lived experiences of individuals during specific historical periods. Instead of engaging in political critique, Li’s writings seek to depict the challenges and struggles inherent in the human condition. By the time she wrote *The Vagrants*, Li was no longer interested in the two women, as she was in her first published article, but in the town - the entire community (Wachtel 2019). Her vision of life after

the Cultural Revolution confronts that the bleakness of life did not end when the purported sinners of historical writing (the Gang of Four¹⁵ and Mao Zedong¹⁶) were arrested or died, but continues with a terrifying inertia. There are individuals like Gu Shan and Kai who were close to the centre of power but chose to move to the periphery for reasons of belief and justice. There are also individuals, such as Gu Shan's boyfriend and Tong, who achieved political prominence by reporting the deviant speech or behaviour of others to the authorities. Toward the end of *The Vagrants*, through Teacher Gu's mouth, Li expressed her thoughts on this predicament, a repeated history.

They think they are revolutionary, progressive, they think they are doing a great favor to the world by becoming masters of their own lives, but what is revolution except a systematic way for one species to eat another alive? Let me tell you—history is, unlike what they say on the loudspeakers, not driven by revolutionary force but by people's desire to climb up onto someone else's neck and shit and pee as he or she wants. (Li 2009a, 314)

Li consistently refrains from offering solutions to readers. By portraying the diminutive individuals within a significant historical period, she effectively embodies the essence of that era, specifically its spiritual quandary. In the novel *Kinder Than Solitude*, following Shaoai's poisoning, Boyang assumed responsibility for the care of her entire family for a span of twenty years, while Ruyu and Moran chose to flee and establish their lives abroad. Upon the demise of Shaoai, who had endured paralysis for a long time, the three friends initially experienced a sense of relief, as if they were liberated from the burden of confronting a damaged body that consistently served as a reminder of their guilt. However, Li wrote, "The body (Shaoai's), in its absence, took up more space than it had when alive" (Li 2014, 10). When the three friends believed that the evidence of an irreparable and painful consequence had vanished, they

¹⁵ See Guo, Song, & Zhou's *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (2006), pp. 101-104.

¹⁶ See Guo, Song, & Zhou's *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (2006), pp. 175-179.

discovered that their bodies and poisoned spiritual worlds had become stronger witnesses bearing the testimony. Li wrote, “Time, refusing to become memory, demands one’s attention with a suffocating grip, yet one can do nothing about time, nor can one do away with time” (180).

Similar to the characters depicted in *The Vagrants*, the characters in *Kinder Than Solitude* also serve as representations of various societal groups. Boyang embodies individuals who reside in China and leverage the nation's economic advancement to amass substantial material affluence, whereas Moran and Ruyu constitute a cohort that establishes their livelihoods abroad and disengage themselves from their country of origin. If we turn the kaleidoscope—replacing the guilty history of the three friends with the Tiananmen incident, we can see that Li’s portrait of her generation, a generation was on the Tiananmen Square or witnessed the time when it happened in 1989. In *Kinder Than Solitude*, Li explores the internal struggle with memory and a painful past in which what you have done and what you have not done are both difficult to confront. Li further questions whether solitude adopted by the character Moran, is a good way to deal with an unwanted past. She wrote, “rather than living in the past, (Moran) was not allowing the past to live on. Any moment that slipped away from the present became a dead moment; and people, unsuspecting, over and over again became the casualties of her compulsive purging of the past” (Li 2014, 61). Li’s message implies that for individuals like Moran, severing ties with the past did not result in a state of tranquillity. On the contrary, the distressing experiences of the past cost people’s vitality due to the suppression.

Each character in the works of Li Yiyun conveyed the pain of witnessing history through their bloody lives. While *The Vagrants* explores the theme of vocalization, *Kinder Than Solitude* centres on individuals who face challenges in expressing themselves and engaging in communication. Li demonstrates her approach to contextualizing challenging historical

narratives by drawing inspiration from actual instances, reintegrating marginalized individuals into the historical discourse, incorporating diverse perspectives, and presenting existential quandaries within a framework. As Walter Benjamin (1936/2007) said, “To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living” (87). Undoubtedly, Li’s kaleidoscope presents a compelling methodology for re-examining historical narratives.

A Private Business

I have examined Li Yiyun’s distinctive methodology in investigating and subsequently recounting challenging historical events. The individual’s early life was intricately intertwined with the historical context of the era that she subsequently explored in her writings. According to Johanna Hartmann’s analysis in the *Handbook of American Short Stories* (2022), the act of writing serves a therapeutic purpose for Li, enabling her to delve into unsettling experiences and subsequently extricate herself from them. Li utilizes the act of writing as a method to actively explore and interact with concepts related to loss and absence, ultimately aiding in the process of mourning.

Li writes to be, foremost, a witness to herself. Following the release of her memoir titled *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life*, Li openly acknowledged her hospitalization due to two suicide attempts during the composition of her novel *Kinder Than Solitude*. This memoir is the result of her exploration and reflection upon her most vulnerable experiences and internal emotional conflicts. Li (2017) stated that “The books one writes—past and present and future—are they not trying to say the same thing: Dear friend, from my life I

write to you in your life? What a long way it is from one life to another, yet why write if not for that distance, if things can be let go, every before replaced by an after” (20). The memoir reveals her effort to restore a good internal object that can be called *you* by writing and to seek connections to external *thou*—other brilliant writers who had experienced similar circumstances—by reading their memoirs and letters. In this sense, the titular “dear friend” can be interpreted as the author’s younger self whom she seeks to console, the esteemed writers with whom she engages in dialogue and admiration, or the two friends who tragically took their own lives at the beginning of the book, necessitating her process of mourning.

The phenomenon of separation in Li’s case can be observed as a means of self-preservation when the distinction between private and public spheres becomes unclear. This separation may also be demanded when the public encroaches upon the private domain through oppressive measures, resulting in significant suffering primarily originating from the public realm. Li sought to liberate herself from the burden of cultural and linguistic constraints by engaging in the act of reading in a foreign language, going abroad, defying parental expectations, and distancing herself from her mother tongue. This desire for escape stemmed from a deep yearning to break free from the negative influences of toxic otherness, as well as the motherland. Li expressed a desire to avoid leading an inauthentic lifestyle, in contrast to her mother who adeptly acquired and embraced the use of public language. As she revealed in one interview, “If you look at my mother, she’s very much like a person brought up in the communist era – all her vocabulary, her thinking. You know she doesn’t believe in the party line but her thinking and logic are very close to it” (Rustin 2012, n.p.). The suffocating supervision of her mother and her motherland impeded the development of her true self, which she ardently endeavoured to safeguard and flourish.

However, Li, as a diasporic subject, came to the realization that mere departure and estrangement did not confer genuine freedom, despite attaining a stable social and financial standing and acclaim for her writing in the United States. As she admitted in the memoir, “One crosses the border to become a new person. One finishes a manuscript and cuts off the characters. One adopts a language. These are false and forced frameworks, providing illusory freedom, as time provides illusory leniency when we, in anguish, let it pass monotonously” (Li 2017, 143). She never claimed that being away from her motherland was the solution, not even through the characters in the *Kinder Than Solitude*. Her desired freedom resides in the manner in which she narrates stories and conveys authentic human experiences.

For Li, politics do enter her works, but she rejects the label of ‘political writer’. She said, “I’m not going to turn away from politics, but I’m not going to use politics as something that I could cash in on” (Chin 2008). She is aware that any form of advocacy has the potential to transform into propaganda. Li is occasionally likened to the Chinese contemporary intellectual Lu Xun due to their shared decision to abandon the medical profession in favour of a literary pursuit. While Lu Xun advocated for the awakening of the Chinese consciousness and the spiritual rejuvenation of its people through literary expression, Li holds a contrasting perspective, asserting that literature lacks the capacity to effect significant transformations. In contrast, she posits that the enduring aspects of life are the driving force behind the continued production of literature (Li, 2009b). Li was questioned regarding her tendency to focus on the darker aspects of Chinese history while neglecting to highlight the positive aspects of contemporary Chinese society. Drawing inspiration from the literary contributions of Toni Morrison, Li (2019) asserts, “History, vulnerable to the attacks of misused and misleading language, can be protected by the language that achieves the purity of truth” (Li 2019, n.p.). Instead of promoting a particular

viewpoint, Li demonstrates how the political nature of regular individuals is manifested in their daily existence, as exemplified by her comment to her characters “They are on strike for their whole lives” (Rustin 2012, n.p.). When stories are allowed to be told and ordinary experience can be narrated, Li achieves her goal of telling the truth in the truth of telling.

In a Winnicottian sense, and through her way of constructing stories, Li shows a way of making use of object, symbol, and history. For the two long novel about the aftermath of traumatic histories, she incorporated verifiable historical events and real historical figures, while also presenting her own interpretation of the historical context. She was elucidating to the readers her engagement in the intermediate area –neither totally subjective nor objective. History is cultural. These stories about Chinese history were, in my opinion, also written by Li for herself. She used symbolization to fill in the unanswerable confusion she experienced as a child and the suppressed expressions in her teenage years. Through writing and framing stories, she was able to contain her mourning to the past. The cultural works that she has created are also her own transitional objects, allowing her return and departure as a diasporic subject.

The path taken by Li Yiyun is private, personal, and even considered depolitical regarding her own experience and her way of writing. In contrast to the protagonist of the following chapter –Iris Chang, Li demonstrates no desire to represent the Chinese group, reach out to the Chinese community, or assume collective responsibility for working through the histories. However, it is indisputable that her exceptional literary contributions possess the capacity to serve as a tangible symbol of commemoration and facilitate intergenerational dialogue as a cultural conduit.

Chapter Five

Remembering in Distance: Iris Chang and Her Inquires

Introduction

In discussing the Chinese diaspora's approach to history, it is imperative to consider Iris Chang, a preeminent Chinese-American author whose name has always been associated with the remembrance of the Nanking Massacre. Her famous book *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997) brought the largely ignored tragedy to the attention of the world, shedding light on the estimated 300,000 Chinese killed and the survivors who suffered immeasurable trauma. The book achieved global success and received acclaim for its historical importance. In addition to her written works, Iris Chang demonstrated a fervent commitment to public speaking, engaging in frequent travel to deliver lectures and participate in interviews aimed at raising awareness of the Nanjing Massacre and advocating for justice. She became an influential Asian voice in promoting conversations about historical trauma, resilience, and the significance of remembering and learning from the past.

This chapter examines the exploration and processing of history and memory by second-generation immigrants, using Iris Chang as a representative case study. Despite being far from mainland China, where history occurred, the Chinese diaspora group makes an effort to remember some of the past. In addition to physical distance, generational distance does not prevent them from researching their parents and grandparents' histories, but rather brought the past to the present in a way that actively filled gaps in the historical narrative. Moreover, the theme of Chinese identity runs throughout these efforts. The three works of Iris Chang provide a unique path entangled with history and racial formation.

Iris Chang was born in 1968 to a Taiwanese immigrant family; both of her parents graduated from Harvard and worked as postdoctoral researchers at Princeton. Thanks to her parents, she benefited from the favourable living conditions and a conducive growth environment in a university town. Similar to numerous Chinese youths, Chang was initially urged to focus on mathematics and science studies. However, during her second year of university, she opted to switch to the journalism department with the aim of pursuing a writing profession. Although Iris Chang did not spend her childhood in close proximity to her maternal grandfather, her mother's (Chang, Y. 2011) memoir suggests that he influenced her in some way. Chang's grandfather had served as a general in the national army during the Anti-Japanese war and later held the position of editor-in-chief at "*China Daily News*" in Taiwan. Iris Chang grew up hearing her mother recount at the dinner table how her maternal grandfather defended the nation and was imprisoned for penning critical articles. Chang described her maternal grandfather as "an intensely headstrong, vociferous, and individualistic man –a man who was determined to air his opinions even during politically dangerous times" (Chang, Y. 2011, 154) in her remark for remembering her grandfather. In addition, the time in which she was active is intimately connected to the activism of the entire Chinese community in North America. Undoubtedly, these had a profound impact on Iris Chang, who we now know to be a special Asian female possessing the bravery to voice her opinions, a strong drive, and exceptional expressive skills that defied conventional stereotypes of Asian women.

This chapter continues the approach of the two preceding cases by discussing Iris Chang and her works, as well as the impact she had on the exploration of history and historical trauma by Chinese in North America and mainland China. First, I reconstruct the North American Chinese activism and organizations' landscape that emerged in conjunction with Chang's

investigation prior to the release of *The Rape of Nanking*. In doing so, I demonstrate the existence of a large Chinese community that provided support, assistance, and advocacy towards the rekindling of global awareness and remembrance of the Nanjing Massacre. I situate Iris Chang within the three influential strands of Holocaust research in the United States during the 1990s: Marianne Hirsch's postmemory (1992), James E. Young's received history (1997), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's witnessing and testimony (1992), along with feminist critiques of comfort women at the time. By analyzing a dance drama portraying the inconceivable violence penned by Iris Chang, I discuss how she becomes a cultural symbol for encouraging Chinese on the mainland to comprehend difficult knowledge and difficult knowing. Lastly, I discuss how her works and efforts shed light on a path for the Chinese diaspora in North America to navigate difficult histories and a complex racial reality.

Remembrance in Local Communities

The year 1997 witnessed the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Nanking Massacre, which was accompanied by the publication of Iris Chang's work, *The Rape of Nanking*. During that period, it was unforeseeable that an obscure author and a history of atrocities in the East Asian would generate significant interest and provoke intense debates, first in the United States and subsequently on a global scale. This non-fiction book achieved extraordinary success by spending a duration of ten weeks on the New York Times best-seller list¹⁷. However, it is important to note that this literary work did not originate spontaneously. Prior to Chang's contributions, Chinese communities in America were engaged in the active preservation of their history and the organization of commemorative events. Both the

¹⁷ See Fox's "Iris Chang, Who Chronicled Rape of Nanking, Dies at 36" published in *New York Times*.

governments of mainland China and Taiwan displayed a lack of interest in this historical period, driven by their respective political ideologies. However, the Chinese diaspora in North America had managed to transcend this barrier.

Chang never hesitated to acknowledge local Chinese activists' contributions to her research and publication. She admitted that she decided to document the historical account of the Nanjing Massacre in the English language during one of the events hosted by a local Chinese association in 1994. In her introduction to *The Rape of Nanking*, Chang made an observation that Chinese activism sprouting up like mushrooms was related to the 1989 Tiananmen Square Democratic Movement.

What strengthened much of this newly emerging activism was the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, which prodded Chinese communities all over the world to form networks to protest the actions of the People's Republic of China. The pro-democracy movement left behind vast, intricate webs of Internet relationships; out of this network a grassroots movement emerged to promote the truth about Nanking. (Chang, 1997, 9)

However, Chang overlooked the fact that the revision of Japanese history textbooks in the early 1980s greatly aided Chinese-American activists in publicizing the issue of Japanese government's denial of history.

The initial organization in the North America dedicated to commemorating Japanese atrocities in Nanjing was The Chinese Alliance for Memorial and Justice (对日索赔同胞会) located in New York. Reported by the New York Times, an art exhibition was curated in New York City, which took place from December 12 to 20, 1987. According to organizer Sam Chen (陈宪中), the objective of the event was not to propagate anti-Japanese sentiment, but rather to address the issue of historical amnesia surrounding the fatalities in Nanjing. This was especially relevant in light of the modifications made by the Japanese to their historical textbooks regarding the Nanking Massacres ("1937 Invasion of China", 1987, Section 1, 63).

In December of 1990, a delegation consisting of representatives from the Chinese Alliance for Memorial and Justice and five other Chinese associations visited the Japanese Consulate General in New York. Their purpose was to submit a formal “Protest Letter to the Japanese Government” in response to some Japanese politicians’ attempts to conceal the facts surrounding the Nanking Massacre. (“American Chinese Association”, 1990, 6). In addition, they purchased a complete page in the New York Times at a cost of \$60,000 (Xinhua News Agency, 2019) as a form of protest against Shintaro Ishihara’s statement to an American publication that the Nanking Massacre was a fabrication by the Chinese (“The Nanking Massacre”, 1990, D16).

In 1991, the second group, The Alliance of the Victims of Nanking Massacre (纪念南京大屠杀受难同胞联合会), was founded in New York. The objective of the group was to gather evidence pertaining to the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese military during their invasion of Nanjing, with the aim of pursuing legal redress and reparations on behalf of the Chinese victims of the Nanking Massacre. They were in active contact with mainland China in order to plan a large-scale commemorative event in Nanjing in December 1991. However, the plan was shelved due to the visit of Japan’s then-Prime Minister to China in September 1991. Although their enthusiasm was chilly in China that year, it spread to the West Coast of the United States—San Francisco through an exhibition to commemorate the Nanking Massacre coordinated with New York in December 1991. The San Francisco Chinese community reacted angrily to the event, prompting the organizers to consider forming a group, which became The San Francisco Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II in Asia five months later, in 1992.

In December 1994, the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II in Asia was established with the San Francisco Alliance as its core in order to recruit more Chinese

and increase its influence. The Global Alliance unites similar Chinese organizations around the world to carry out efforts to collect evidence and safeguard the truth of history. It was in this year that Iris Chang attended a conference sponsored by the Global Alliance and saw the horrified photos of Nanjing Massacre. It is evident that the Global Alliance significantly contributed to the encouragement of Chang's resolve to document the history of the Nanjing Massacre.

Chinese Canadians swiftly established branches in response to the call from the Chinese in the United States. When the Baodiao movement¹⁸, which was started in the 1970s by Taiwanese students in the United States to defend Chinese sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands (Fic 2001, p. 156), heated up and expanded again in 1996, the Chinese activists were much more bonded and motivated. For example, Thekla Lit, the founder of the British Columbia Association for Learning and Preserving the History of WWII in Asia, was involved in the Baodiao movement and was inspired by the Global Alliance when she attended their conference in San Francisco in December 1996. Upon her return to Vancouver, Lit rapidly established the inaugural organization of its kind in Canada in January of 1997. In addition, many of BC ALPHA's founding members were activists in the 1996 Baodiao Movement (Tse & Cheung 1997, 6). Similar organizations were also formed five months later in Toronto and Calgary. The three chapters merged to form the Canada Association for Learning and Preserving the History of World War II in Asia. As a result, when *The Rape of Nanking* was published in late 1997, there was a network of Chinese activist groups in the North America ready to support Chang and her book. They assisted Chang in organizing her book tour and used her book launches to distribute pamphlets highlighting the massacre and other Japanese atrocities (Buress 1998).

¹⁸ The Baodiao movement, also referred to as the "Defend Diaoyu Islands" movement, is a grassroots movement that originates from mainland China and Taiwan. Its primary objective is to assert the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands over Japan.

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that these organizations have very distinct characteristics. They are located in major North American cities with a large Chinese population. Their founders and organizers are well educated, fluent in English, well adjusted to American or Canadian society, and originate from Taiwan and Hong Kong. These activists exhibit a high level of activity and strategic thinking, coupled with a strong skill set. They established international partnerships, engaged with established media outlets such as the New York Times, incorporated academics and instructors in recurring biennial conferences, and advocated for pertinent educational programs in nearby educational institutions. Some of them acknowledged that their activism was inspired by how Jewish people dealt with their traumatic history during WWII, as well as how the Holocaust was recognized and redressed by the German government and internationally. For example, Shao Tzeping, the founder of The Alliance of Nanking Massacre Victims, was one of them. In the 1960s, he studied and worked in Germany before moving to the United States to work for the United Nations Conference Services Department until his retirement in 1996. With his German connections, he assisted Iris Chang in locating the diary of John Rabe, a Nazi who established a safety zone in Nanjing to protect locals in 1937 (Chang 1997). Moreover, the alliance also developed a working relationship with the World Jewish Congress, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles and the Canadian-Jewish Congress (Fic 2001, 158-159).

The influence of Jewish introspection on their own historical experiences is evident in Iris Chang's decision to title her book 'The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II', as she delves into the events that took place in Nanjing. Significantly, her writing viewpoint was profoundly shaped by the nascent scholarly discourse on Holocaust studies at that time. Paula Kamen

(2007), in *Finding Iris Chang* documented the recognition that her friend Iris Chang received from the Jewish community and how they saw parallels between the two experiences.

As a result, in 1998, Iris drew standing-room-only crowds speaking at the Simon Weisenthal Center in Los Angeles—and at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., where her talk garnered the largest audience in its five-year history. Along with Asian activist networks, such Jewish groups also defended Iris when Japanese officials attacked her book. Upon Iris' death, the Times of London quoted a fan of hers, Dan Rose, who had heard her speak at the Holocaust Museum. "As with many speaking programs there, it was 50 percent elderly Jews, many of them war survivors, in the audience," he said. "I was overwhelmed by the warmth and immediacy with which they embraced and applauded Chang. It was an instance of bearing witness, of never forgetting, which is holy to the Jewish community. They related to her as a daughter, and vice versa." This support was strong despite some controversy over Iris' use of the word "holocaust," which Jewish groups had adopted early on to refer to their specific history. (Kamen 2007, 51)

As demonstrated in the review of the evolution of Chinese activism in the 1980s and 1990s, a significant portion of the success of Iris Chang's book can be attributed to her interaction and collaboration with the Chinese community. Iris Chang and her works embodies a retrospective approach to history that serves to distill the current state of affairs and anticipate future developments. Moreover, we can see that the primary reason why Chang's inquiry is highly recognized by the Chinese community is that discussing the Nanjing Massacre, a historical event and its unfair post-war treatment appears to be a means of establishing the identity of the Chinese diaspora. As a result, the Nanjing Massacre is not only a collective memory, but also a chosen trauma, a psychological phenomenon in which individuals or communities consciously or unconsciously hold onto and perpetuate a collective memory of trauma, often shaping their identity and influencing their actions and worldview (Volkan, 2001). The North American Chinese communities reinforce their sense of identity, solidarity, and resilience in the face of adversity by constantly remembering and retelling the story of the trauma.

Trending Thoughts in Her Time

I view Iris Chang's inquiry as a cultural phenomenon, rather than solely a historical endeavour. Given that Iris Chang was born in 1968 and came of age during a period marked by heightened attention to the Holocaust in the United States, it is plausible to suggest that she did observe the representation of the Holocaust and how this historical trauma as part of shaping Jewish identity. As previously stated, Chinese activists commonly espouse the notion of commemorating the Nanjing Massacre through the lens of the historical and ethical considerations surrounding the Holocaust. We can also see that Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*, identified the Nanjing Massacre as the Asian holocaust and contrasted its obscurity with that of the well-known Holocaust. Along with considering Iris Chang's own Chinese identity, I propose understanding Chang's inquiry into the historical event through the three key concepts of Holocaust Studies in the 1990s, which are postmemory, received histories, and witnessing and testimony.

In 1980s, the graphic novel "Maus" by Art Spiegelman made the Holocaust more accessible and relatable to a wider audience through its innovative visual storytelling technique, which challenged traditional modes of historical representation. "Maus" delves into the complexities of memory, representation, and the limitations of historical storytelling by tackling the challenge of portraying the atrocities of the Holocaust with precision and acknowledging the subjective nature of personal remembrances. It offers a dual narrative structure that tells the story of Spiegelman's father, a Holocaust survivor, as well as Spiegelman's own struggles as the son of a survivor. This intergenerational aspect of the narrative added depth and complexity to the depiction of the Holocaust, emphasizing its lasting impact on Holocaust survivors and their

families. Inspired by Art Spiegelman's work, Marianne Hirsch (1992) framed the concept of postmemory in her article "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory" and developed it in her following books, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (1997) and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012).

The concept of postmemory describes how the memories of traumatic events are transmitted to the second and third generations. The term 'post' refers to the delayed impact of a traumatic experience's haunting quality. It conveys a form of second witnessing, the witnessing of the survivor's account of the past or its embodiment. Hirsch (2012) offers a thorough explanation of the term.

"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (5)

According to Chang's self-disclosure and the recollection of her mother, it can be argued that Chang's attachment to the Nanjing Massacre is an illustration of the concept of postmemory (Shan 2019). Starting from her fifth grade, Iris Chang developed great interest in her familial origins and cultural root, which led to a profound curiosity that endured throughout her formative years. She was keen on questions such as where the whole family were from and why they had to immigrate to the United States. During these dinner table discussions, her parents told her about the hardships her grandparents endured during the war against the Japanese and the tragic history of the Nanjing Massacre. According to Chang's mother, the narrative was recounted by her parents on multiple occasions during their formative years, and subsequently, they relayed the same account to Iris Chang (Chang, Y. 2011, 53-54). In the opening of *The Rape of Nanking*, Chang talked about how her parents played a significant role in her learning of the history of

Nanjing. She said her parents did not experience the horrible past, “[b]ut they never forgot the horrors of the Sino-Japanese War, nor did they want me to forget. They particularly did not want me to forget the Rape of Nanking. Neither my parents witnessed it, but as young children they had learned the stories, and these were passed down to me.” (Chang 1997, 7-8)

As a third generation, Chang inherited the memory of Nanjing from her family. In addition, she was acutely aware that she had encountered a situation in which she had memory but no history. This phenomenon is referred to as “history and memory do not come together” by David L. Eng and Shinhee Han (2019, 51). Chang was deeply affected by the absence of historical narration and did not accept it as a given. Instead, she began to harbour criticism and a desire for transformation from a tender age. She wrote,

Throughout my childhood *Nanjing Datusha* remained buried in the back of my mind as a metaphor for unspeakable evil. But the event lacked human details and human dimensions. It was also difficult to find the line between myth and history. While still in grade school I searched the local public libraries to see what I could learn about the massacre, but nothing turned up. That struck me as odd. If the Rape of Nanking was truly so gory, one of the worst episodes of human barbarism in world history, as my parents insisted, then why hadn’t someone written a book about it? (Chang 1997, 8)

Moreover, photography also plays a critical role in Chang’s postmemory case. In her theory, Hirsch (1992, 1997) highlights photographs as the most effective postmemory medium. She argues that photographs have the ability to provoke emotional responses and imaginative identifications, allowing individuals to emotionally engage with the experiences and events depicted in the images. Those who did not directly experience the past can develop a sense of connection with the past by viewing photographs of historical scenes. She also investigates the ways in which photographs can both illuminate and distort memories and emphasizes the significance of engaging critically with photographs, recognizing their limitations and possible biases, and seeking for a more nuanced understanding of the past. Chang’s experience at the 1994 photo exhibition supported Hirsch’s elaboration. When Chang saw the poster-sized

photographs of the horror in Nanjing, the “lack of human details and human dimensions” had been filled. Chang (1997) identified these images as potent stimuli for postmemory, serving as material traces that facilitate the imaginative reconstruction of past experiences and events:

Though I had heard so much about Nanking massacre as a child, nothing prepared me for these pictures –stark black-and-white images of decapitated heads, bellies ripped open, and nude women forced by their rapists into various pornographic poses, their faces contorted into unforgettable expressions of agony and shame..... I was suddenly in a panic that this terrifying disrespect for death and dying, this reversion in human social evolution, would be reduced to a footnote of history, treated like a harmless glitch in a computer program that might or might not again cause a problem, unless someone forced the world to remember it. (9-10)

Chang was not satisfied with simply remembering what she had heard. She felt compelled to demonstrate that the Nanjing Massacre was not a myth but a real historical event. She demonstrated a strong desire to fill the void.

In regards to comprehending Iris Chang’s contribution to the production of historical knowledge, the concepts of “literary historiography” (1988) and “received histories” (1997) put forth by James E. Young prove to be advantageous. Young’s scholarly inquiry centres on the representation of collective memory, trauma, and historical events. He suggests combining literary and historical truths in relation to the Holocaust, rather than separating the two (Young, 1988). Termed as “literary historiography,” he values cultural reconstruction and believes that historical truths include both factual and interpretive elements. Because “What is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form” (1). He emphasizes the importance of examining the significance and meaning of historical events created in these texts, which reflect the prevailing understanding of the past among individuals during that particular period. The interpreted versions of history direct our actions in the world in light of what has come before.

Iris Chang encountered criticism from scholars in the academic community subsequent to the publication of her book. The primary critiques pertained to her insufficient historical expertise, showing pronounced emotional sentiments and having factual inaccuracies within the book. In my opinion, however, adopting Young's method of "literary historiography" provides a more comprehensive framework for interpreting Chang's book *The Rape of Nanking*, as opposed to solely perceiving it as a historical text. In "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust" (1997), Young clearly pointed out that the notion of history is not only about what happened, but also how it is passed down to us. He introduces the term "received history" to describe how a society receives, interprets, and perpetuates a specific version of history which includes widely accepted narratives, official accounts, and established memorials associated with significant historical events or traumas. "Instead of enforcing an absolute gap between what happened and how it is remembered," Young (1997) writes, "we might also ask what happens when the players of history remember their past to subsequent generations - and then suggest that this is not only memory, but also another kind of history-telling" (41).

Iris Chang's case is unique in that she has intergenerational memories of Nanjing but also she engaged in history-telling when she discovered she could not find written records of what happened. For Chang, in stark contrast to the Holocaust, what happened in Nanjing was still ignored and denied, with less historical researches and cultural representations. As a result, she firmly believed that preserving the truth about this historical event was one of her responsibilities. Young's (1997) notion of received history considers an interactive loop between the history teller and receiver:

the receiver of history might now paint in the texture of its reception: Under what circumstances was it received? Who told it, when, in what social and political context? What did the teller read that morning in the newspapers? And what preoccupied the listener that day? At what point did the listener's attention lapse as he was reminded of

his own recent past, or that of others nearby? How did the listener's response to a particular story shape the teller's story as it unfolded? Where does the survivor's life story end and mine begin? How are we marked by the histories we receive? And how does that marking become part of the historical text? (42)

Through this lens, we can see how Iris Chang as a receiver of history of Nanjing became an author of the history of its reception. Writing marked her response. In addition, her use of the term Holocaust as an analogy, harshly criticized by a number of scholars and critics, demonstrates her participation in received history. More importantly, because of her efforts, the "second rape" of Nanjing –being forgotten –has been stopped and revised. The memory of Nanjing has been restored, and its history and memory can now coexist.

Examining Iris Chang's writing about the Nanjing Massacre from a closer vantage point, we can see that she also employed the concept of witnessing and testimony, well discussed by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) in response to the problem of how to understand survivors' testimonies in Holocaust studies. Felman and Laub (1992) investigate the dynamics of witnessing and the complexities involved in both testifying and listening. They contend that the testimonial process is a three-way conversation between the witness, the interviewer, and the audience. The listener's presence is critical in validating the witness's experience and allowing their testimony to be heard. In *The Rape of Nanking* (1997), such three-way dynamic is embedded in the writing structure. Chang, functioning as an interviewer, not only provided historical materials but also made extensive use of the narratives of historical witnesses, such as their diaries or memoirs, to describe what transpired when the Japanese army captured Nanjing in December 1937. In this regard, she approached the past more as a journalist than as a historian.

The work of Felman and Laub (1992) prompts readers to adopt a critical approach towards testimonial literature, recognizing its capacity to question prevailing historical narratives

and promote empathy and comprehension. Prior to the publication of Chang's book, the depiction of the Asian battlefield of World War II, including the Nanjing Massacre, was seldom acknowledged within the historical narrative of the United States and other Western countries. In China, according to Rui Gao's (2011) research, the discourse surrounding class struggle hardship served to conceal the scars of war and aimed to establish the archetype of the proletarian hero during the Anti-Japanese War. This discourse simultaneously disregarded the Chinese experience as victims, instead emphasizing the portrayal of the people's heroes who engaged in active and strategic resistance. In addition, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) espoused an ideology that regarded the Nationalist Party of China (KMT), a participant in the anti-Japanese war, as an adversary of the populace. The inclusion of the Nanjing tragedy within the trauma perspective necessitates a redefinition of both the victim and the perpetrator, thereby generating a conflict with the ruling discourse of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) before late 1980s (Alexander & Gao 2007). As for the KMT regime who fled to Taiwan, "the memory of the Nanjing Massacre was never institutionalized in Taiwan" (Yoshida 2006, 111).

Chang's reconstruction of historical narratives challenged both the prevailing Western and Chinese historical narratives. Her historical account not only offers a chronological record of events, but also encompasses a multi-dimensional narrative through the incorporation of three distinct perspectives. These perspectives encompassed the experiences of the Chinese army and civilians who were victims of the atrocities, the Japanese journalists and soldiers who were involved in the perpetration of these acts, and the Western individuals who were present in Nanjing during that period. She also talked about her purpose to describe the event from multiple perspectives. She stated, "It is for the reader to pull all the recollections together, to credit or discredit parts or all of each account, and through this process to create out of subjective and

often self-serving perceptions a more objective picture of what might have occurred” (Chang 1997, 14).

Iris Chang’s contribution is to broaden “a community of seeing” (Felman and Laub 1992, 211) in which different historical witnesses can corroborate each other. Moreover, in the sixth chapter of *The Rape of Nanking*, “What the World Knew,” Chang described in detail how three American journalists at the time reported the Nanjing atrocities in major American newspapers. By doing so, she effectively transported American readers to the historical context of December 1937, thereby serving as a reminder of the events unfolding in Nanjing, which were being witnessed by the United States at that time. The criticism of Chang’s book by Japanese scholars (Yamamoto 2000) as well as other historians (Buruma 1999; Yang 2001; Fogel 2000, 2007), failed to recognize the book’s most significant contribution adequately, which is the establishment of a community of witnesses through the testimonies presented. These critics questioned Chang’s use of oral history and survivor testimonies, suggesting that these sources could be unreliable due to the passage of time and the emotional trauma experienced by survivors. In the 1990s, as a result of the economic war with Japan, the United States was a prominent member of a community of witnessing, a wider community of witnessing beyond the victimized country itself. As explained by Felman and Laub (1992), while telling is inextricably linked to the audience, witnessing must also be witnessed. The comprehensive nature of the testimony provided in *The Rape of Nanking* is also attributable to the reaction it has garnered from its audience, as evidenced by the significant reception the book has received upon its publication. “The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to –and heard –is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*” (Felman and Laub 1992,

57). In this regard, because of Iris Chang's efforts, the Nanjing Massacre was thus clearly seen, and knowledge of it was thus born.

Lastly, Chang's narrative also highlights the prevalence of sexual violence against women in times of war. Throughout the 1990s, there was a growing international awareness, recognition, and discussion of wartime violence against women due to the rise of the third-wave feminism and the shocking mass rapes and violations in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, as well as the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Ropers 2017). The recognition and prosecution of gender-based violence as a war crime were also significantly advanced through the establishment of international tribunals, namely the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). As a result, the emergence of substantial public discussions regarding the historical phenomenon of coerced military prostitution became feasible (Ropers 2017). Sexual violence, such as rape, is acknowledged as more than just an unintended consequence of armed conflict, but rather as a deliberate tactic employed to instill fear, intimidate, and undermine the morale of communities. Thus, Chang further regarded the connivance of the United States to Japan after the war and Japan's revision of historical narratives as "the second rape of Nanjing" (Chang 1997, 199-214).

The legacy of Chinese civil war after World War II and the mutual disapproval of the regime that remained on the mainland and the one that fled to Taiwan exacerbated the difficulties of remembering and working through Nanjing's history. North American Chinese efforts on this period of history as a diaspora subject, led by Iris Chang and other activists, broke through the influence of political ideology and gave voice to women and Asian diaspora in the North American, allowing the history of Nanjing to be better commemorated.

Transnational Impact: Iris Chang and Difficult Knowledge

Although containing errors and causing controversy, Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* contributed to the flowering of Nanjing scholarship in America (Yoshida 2006) and inspired other diasporic writers' novelistic representations of the history, such as Yan Geling's *The Flowers of War* (2007) and Ha Jin's *Nanjing Requiem* (2011). The rise of memory and commemoration of Nanking from overseas strongly influenced public perceptions in both mainland China and over the world. *Deep in Memory*, a Chinese dance drama by female director and choreographer Tong Ruirui, is another excellent work created under Chang's influence and in her memory. I am intrigued by the prospect of examining the importance of Iris Chang within the context of mainland China and delving into the means by which cultural remembrance and historical trauma can be represented. What follows is my analysis of the Chinese dance drama *Deep in Memory*. I work with the theoretical framework of Layla Zami's (2020) notion of "perforMemory" and Britzman's (1998) concept of "difficult knowledge."

Before Iris Chang died in 2004, she attempted to adapt *The Rape of Nanking* into a cinematic production. However, her efforts were unsuccessful. In a written correspondence addressed to her mother, Iris Chang expressed her desire to construct the screenplay for the film that would feature individuals from diverse racial backgrounds. She further aspired to depict people's decision-making during the darkest and most difficult times and to show the change of the characters after the war. She expressed a desire for the film to encompass the viewpoints of Minnie Vautrin, John Rabe, Li Xiuying, and a Japanese soldier or journalist, in addition to selecting an additional three perspectives (Chang Y. 2011, 296). Iris Chang's wish and her vision were realized in the dance drama *Deep in Memory*, which debuted twenty years after *The Rape of Nanking* in 2017.

Deep in Memory is not Tong Ruirui's first dance drama based on the Nanjing Massacre. Influenced by the discourse on the Nanjing Massacre as a national trauma in the 1990s, Tong Ruirui, who was a young choreographer at that time, had been searching for the most effective approach to convey this historical event through the form of dance drama. Upon receiving news of Iris Chang's suicide in November 2004, Tong Ruirui was profoundly touched and gained a newfound appreciation for Chang's experiences. As a result, Tong went on to produce her debut dance drama *Nanjing 1937* in 2005¹⁹. Twelve years later, in 2017, when deciding whether to re-stage *Nanjing 1937*, Tong Ruirui decided to deconstruct her own work and make a new dance drama with a novel way of expression. She wondered what else is worthy of presentation but is still missing among the existing representations of the Nanjing Massacre. She thus turned her primary focus to memory and the reception of history. From the title of the dance drama "Nanjing 1937" to "Deep in Memory", it is evident that she has shifted from a documentary-like, linear narrative technique to a non-linear presentation technique that foregrounds psychological time and space.

For *Deep in Memory*, Tong Ruirui (2018) prioritized the portrayal of "truth" over the aesthetic appeal of conventional dance dramas, despite shifting away from a historical reproduction focus. In my view, the notion of "truth" encompasses not only the factual accuracy of historical materials, but also the subjective experiences of the characters involved, a kind of real in psychological dimension. Tong challenged the binary perspective of traditional portrayal of heroism and instead, her deconstructive endeavours presented a more nuanced and complex characterization by revealing the temporality of psychic reality. She chose to deviate from the conventional event-driven plot structure of customary dance dramas and instead, introduced

¹⁹ Iris Chang's parents and her younger brother made a special trip to Beijing Poly Theatre for this dance drama and stated with emotion that they were glad to see Iris being performed on stage.

psychological processes as a form of event/happening. The title “Deep in Memory” implies multiple layers of inquiry: What lies hidden in the depths of memory? What kind of memory exists in the depths? What happens when we (the character Iris and audiences) delve into our memories of the past? What happens when we (the character Iris and audiences) are immersed in the buried history and memory? Thus, there are at least two layers of remembrance in making this dance drama: to remember the traumatic history of Nanking Massacre and Iris Chang’s brave writing of that history.

Here, Layla Zami (2020)’s concept of *perforMemory* sheds lights on what performance can do with history, memory and trauma. As she points out, the field of memory studies has emphasized the importance of visual and literary arts in representing, reclaiming and recasting history. There has been insufficient scholarly investigation into the role of dance as an epistemological mechanism for cultural remembrance in the context of historical trauma, especially considering bodies as a living archive. The concept of *perforMemory* posits that memory functions as a site of movement, wherein there is a continual movement back and forth that blurs the boundaries between past, present, and future. This movement also involves countering absence and performing presence, understanding and imagining, emotions and reflections, science and fiction, transformation and liberation, as well as knowledge and truth (Zami, 2020, 29). Thus, dance performance can reveal the connection between a traumatic past and an ongoing mourning.

The central premise of this dance drama is to guide the audiences through Iris’s journey into the memories of four historical witnesses (based on their memoirs). This enables audiences to gain insight into what it was like living in that history and empathize with Iris’s emotions throughout the experience. We do know that the Iris portrayed by the dancer is not the actual Iris

Chang. Indeed, there is no concrete source for us to know the real Iris Chang's psychological processes as she attempted to comprehend the history of the Nanjing Massacre. However, the Iris on stage conveys the affects and feelings that one is very likely to feel when getting closer to traumatic histories. Thus, a body-in-motion-through-emotion can show how histories stay alive (Zami, 2020).

When dancers use their bodies to express emotions and trauma left by history, *Deep in Memory* leads us to understand the concept of "difficult knowledge" which developed by Deborah Britzman (1998). The choreographer's depiction of Iris highlights the emotional struggles during the acquisition of historical knowledge. According to Britzman (2021), the process of learning and teaching about traumatic pasts is a highly emotional experience that involves grappling with feelings of speechlessness, shock, and sorrow. This is particularly true when attempting to gain a deeper understanding of human-caused catastrophes and confronting societal and cultural tendencies towards denial. As per the memoir authored by Iris Chang's mother addressed to her daughter, Iris Chang experienced significant distress while perusing the materials pertaining to the Nanjing Massacre.

Iris told us that the most difficult thing was to read one case after another of the atrocities Japanese soldiers had committed in Nanking in 1937-1938. The Japanese soldiers carried out the rapes, tortures, and executions of innocent women and men with unspeakable cruelty. She read hundreds of such cases. She felt numb after a while. She told me she sometimes had to get up and away from the documents to take a deep breath. She felt suffocated and in pain.

One day in March 1996, she read a document that described a nine-year-old weeping girl being dragged screaming into bedrooms to be raped by Japanese soldiers. She felt a cold rage sweep through her. She could hardly contain her anger.

One night in April, she called and told me that she could not fall asleep lately. She had nightmares and had lost weight. Her hair fell out in clumps in the shower. (Chang, Y. 2011, 27)

During the initial segment of the performance, the choreographer incorporated numerous gestures of visual observation/seeing and tactile exploration/touching into Iris's movements, as a means of delving into historical themes. The dancer exhibits a keen sense of exploration and pursuit, as well as a sense of disorientation when confronting with the four witnesses simultaneously. She also conveys feelings of shock, pain, and fear when bearing witness to the memories of each historical actor, as well as a pervasive sense of helplessness when repeatedly witnessing traumatic events but not being able to prevent or alter them.

In the scene where Iris channels her grief and anger into writing the forgotten history, the dancer's movements are characterized by contorted and disjointed postures, which appear to mirror the pathological manifestations of trauma. Here, the choreographer takes into account the possibility of secondary trauma, which develops as a result of being exposed to the effects of a traumatic event endured by another person. The Iris on stage keeps falling down and rising up to symbolize the difficult qualities and convey the emotions of adversity, struggle, and perseverance. In doing so, she embodies the pain experienced by historical figures, while the audiences empathize with the pain of Iris.

In addition to the main characters, the choreographer created restless dead in the group portraits, symbolizing the lives taken by the cruel war. Those "dead spirits" lower their arms, bow, stomp their feet. They collapse one by one, get up, and shout but no voice. They also hold hands to form a circular shape resembling a "tomb." *Deep in Memory* abstracts the historical scenes and shows the extreme horror experienced by living bodies, as opposed to directly showing bloodedness and violence in dance drama *Nanjing 1937*. The movements designed by the choreographer for the group actors embody the Chinese traditional language's depiction of a living hell, where individuals are burned, screaming towards the heavens, and pounding on the

earth. As Zami (2020) points out, “[w]hen dancers embody history on stage, they can bring the past into motion, and emotion, and bring life to what at times become numb words or numbers” (26). Although every character on the stage has died in real life, they are so alive in dancers’ body and through their performance. Thus, the atrocities committed by the Japanese in Nanjing cannot be reduced to a discussion of death toll.

The choreographer also incorporated into the dance drama a true incident in which Iris Chang confronted the then-Japanese ambassador to the United States on American television after publishing the book. This intensive scene serves as the dance drama’s centrepiece. Iris is angry with the Japanese for continuing to deny and refuse to apologize while the dead spirits are roaring under the table. When Iris looks at the four historical witnesses confronting the ambassador of Japan, she rapidly turns her gaze to the audience as if to say, “Did you see it? This is the second rape I am talking about!” The theatrical performance presents characters and roles in different time and space at the same time, allowing them to communicate with each other. Iris’s looking at the audience with silent communication is as powerful as breaking the fourth wall, connecting the past and present with the hoped-for future. As Zami (2020) conveys, “[b]odies in movement can thus become, and be read as the location of re-emerging pasts, but also as living nodes channeling a past, present, and future connection” (27).

Moreover, the dance drama *Deep in Memory* has become a portable commemoration as it preserves and re-creates memories of the past through performance. Ever since its initial staging in 2017, *Deep in Memory* has been recurrently performed on an annual basis, specifically on December 13th, which is recognized as the National Memorial Day for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre. For Tong Ruihui, her primary objective is to provide a platform for these memories to find repose on the stage, as evidenced by the stage design, choreography, and the

conclusion part. The stage of *Deep in Memory* is characterized by a solemn, concise, and monumental design, featuring a “mass grave” situated on the left side, “Iris’s study” on the right side, and the “war ruins” located at the back of the stage. In one scene, Shiro Azuma, a Japanese soldier, visits the remnants of the battlefield to present flowers and make a confession as what he did in his real life. For the dance, Tong skillfully integrated Iris Chang’s experience of viewing a picture exhibition in 1994 and the statue “Endless flow of tears” in the Nanjing Comfort Women Memorial Hall completed in 2015. She demonstrates the fusion of physical and evidence-based commemorative activities, and theatrical performance. In doing so, she sends a message to audiences that their access to history as ordinary people is not limited to privileged individuals like Iris Chang. The difficult knowledge and the difficult knowing belong to every attempt of enlarging historical consciousness and understanding historical trauma.

The choreographer abstained from deifying or heroizing any character. Vautrin and Rabe, who had exerted considerable effort in rescuing the citizens of Nanjing, ultimately collapse on the stage; serving as a poignant symbol of the torment, they endured in the aftermath of their departure from Nanjing, culminating in their tragic decision to end their own lives. Despite the absence of conclusive evidence linking Iris Chang’s suicide to her exposure to traumatic historical events, Tong did not shy away from addressing this tragic outcome and grounded the characters in the ordinary. After Iris collapses at the end of the dance drama to represent her death, the dead spirits, like a baby curled up in the womb, laid down on the ground and slowly rest. When the requiem sounds, the names of Nanjing Massacre survivors and foreigners who assisted the citizens of Nanjing were displayed on the screen. At the end, the dancers close their curtains, hands folded in prayer, to appease the spirits of the deceased and to honor those who revealed the truth and protected justice.

What *Deep in Memory* holds is not only a storytelling through bodies and movements, but also a space in which the work of mourning is honored. The time and space of the dance performance contain three psychological landscapes: the psychological space of Iris, the psychological space of each historical figure, and the psychological space of the audiences watching the dance drama. When Iris' inner world contains the memory and traumatic experience of historical figures, audiences appear to find it easier to approach the traumatic history when holding Iris in their minds. Thus, the Iris on stage is transformed into a transitional object, while the theatre, the time and space of the dance performance, becomes a transitional space. When audiences enter this space, they are taken on an emotional journey through history and memory, experiencing feelings of sorrow, outrage, and helplessness before returning to the present with a sense of mourning and grief. Through the commemoration of Iris Chang and her efforts in preserving the facts of history, *Deep in Memory* serves as a bridge for the remembrance of a historical event that happened over eight decades ago.

This dance drama showcases how Iris Chang's writing about the Nanjing Massacre is incorporated into the way Nanjing is remembered. The Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre in mainland China features a bronze statue dedicated to Iris Chang, alongside her manuscripts, which are also on display for all visitors. Iris Chang has become a part of Nanjing's collective memory.

History, Identity, and Race

Iris Chang did not cease her writing when *The Rape of Nanking* was well-received and sparked heated debate. She quickly determined to write about the history of Chinese in America during her book tours. In the introduction of *The Chinese in America* (2003), Chang described how she became well known among the Chinese community in North America as a result of the

Nanjing Massacre issue, and on every book tour, quite a number of Chinese approached her to share their stories with her.

As I toured the United States and Canada giving talks on the subject [of Nanjing Massacre], I encountered vibrant Chinese American communities that I had not even known existed. The people I met ranged from descendants of transcontinental railroad workers to new immigrants studying here on scholarships, from illiterate factory workers to Nobel laureates at leading universities, from elderly survivors of Japanese wartime atrocities to baby girls adopted by white parents. (Chang 2003, xiv)

Chang's significant contributions to the Chinese diaspora have established her as a prominent figure within the Chinese community. By vocalizing the historical experiences of Chinese suffering during World War II, she has offered a sense of validation and acknowledgement to Chinese individuals. Meanwhile, her book tours served as a form of mobilization, allowing diverse Chinese voices to come together. Chang admitted that her sense of responsibility to document the experiences of the Chinese on the land of America was derived from the collective sharing of these individuals. She wrote, "At first, I feared the subject might too broad, but I couldn't let go of the idea of exploring the history of my people. Moreover, I believed I had a personal obligation to write an honest history of Chinese America, to dispel the offensive stereotypes that had long permeated the U.S. news and entertainment media" (Chang 2003, xv).

I have pointed out that the commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre by the Chinese community plays an important role to the formation of identity. In this context, we observe the presence of a general appeal that surpasses the confines of group identity, namely the desire for individuals to have their experiences acknowledged and witnessed. It would appear that Iris Chang did respond to such requests. The title of her book, "The Chinese in America: A Narrative History," reflects her approach of using a story-telling format to recount the past. She engaged in extensive and diverse research, incorporating oral histories, autobiographies, Chinese-language newspapers, diaries, court transcripts, and immigration records (Chang 2003, xvi), with the aim

of documenting and safeguarding the Chinese immigration experience in the United States (Chang, Y. 2011, 304). In the course of her correspondence with her mother, Chang referred to the esteemed historian of Chinese Americans, Him Mark Lai, who brought to her attention the scarcity of general histories on the Chinese in America. Lai also reminded her the notable neglect in research pertaining to the Mandarin-speaking population, such as people from Taiwan (Chang, Y. 2011, 294). As a result, Chang organized the book from a chronological standpoint, encompassing the historical events that transpired in China as well as the experiences of Chinese immigrants in the United States.

This book essentially tells two stories. The first explains why at certain times in China's history certain Chinese made the very hard and frightening decision to leave the country of their ancestors and the company of their own people to make a new life for themselves in the United States..... The second story examines what happened to these Chinese émigrés once they got here. Did they struggle to find their place in the United States? Did they succeed? And if so, how much more difficult was their struggle because of the racism and xenophobia of other Americans? What were the dominant patterns of assimilation? (Chang 2003, vii)

The quotation highlights Chang's efforts to establish a connection between China, which underwent a political division into mainland and Taiwan following the Qing Dynasty, and the experiences of the Chinese diaspora.

Although Iris Chang did not extensively explore the subject of race, she did recognize the presence of racism encountered by the Chinese community within American society. According to her writer friend Paula Kamen's *Finding Iris Chang* (2007), Iris Chang's husband believed she had never encountered racism: "Iris would always say, 'I've never experienced any racism in my life; I think this is silly. People should just move on and not worry about it'" (106). In addition, it appears that Iris Chang refrained from participating in such discourse. Her husband recollected her response, as "I don't want to participate in this. I'm not that interest in it, and these people are hostile towards me" (106). Although those close to Iris Chang believed that

Chang had no interest in racial issues, after finishing *The Chinese in America*, she clearly began to consider the issue of racial discrimination against Chinese people in the United States. In a 2003 interview, Iris Chang expressed that she was raised in a university town distinguished by its diverse composition. From a young age, she observed that individuals belonging to different racial backgrounds exhibited the ability to collaborate and engage in interracial marriages. She did not believe the United States was racist until she saw stereotype representations in popular culture. She once thought, “racism was soon going to be relic of the past” (Birnbaum 2003, np). However, after conducting research for *The Chinese in America*, she realized that “Racism is always there underneath, but usually it is exploited in these times of economic crisis, and it’s hard to find out when one slides into another” (Birnbaum 2003, np). “I find that they occur in cycles,” she said. “The pattern of acceptance and abuse is closely linked with the economic and political realities of the time and the state of Sino-American relations” (Birnbaum 2003, np). Chang was obviously aware that racism exists, but she was not able to articulate how structural racism affects the lives of minorities in a holistic manner.

The historical narrative in *The Chinese in America*, which spans 150 years, emphasizes the persistent perception of the Chinese as outsiders, despite their efforts to assimilate. It challenges the prevailing misconception among new immigrants that they can remain unaffected by racial discrimination as long as they personally do not experience it. This belief is often rooted in the assumption that factors such as educational attainment, high income, advanced skills, significant contributions, and residing in a desirable neighborhood, can safeguard them from discriminatory treatment. In her book for remembering Iris Chang, Kamen (2007) believes that writing *The Chinese in America* about how the Chinese experienced oppression and discrimination in the United States had a substantial impact on Chang, but that this impact was

largely ignored. She suggests that this impact may surpass *The Rape of Nanking*. Part of the reason is that Chang's belief that the participation and contribution of Chinese intellectuals in American higher education institutions shields them from racial discrimination has been debunked by reality. If the surveillance and confinement of Qian Xuesen by the U.S. government, as depicted in her initial publication, *Thread of the Silkworm* (1995), was considered an exceptional occurrence, then the United States' distrust and marginalization of numerous Chinese scientists and researchers during the 1990s exemplified a widespread phenomenon for Chang. She once remarked on this, as cited by Kamen (2007), "It tells you what happens when you get caught up in the government machinery; it doesn't have to make sense. In fact, you can get chewed up in this arbitrary reflex of power" (247).

For Iris Chang, the study of history and its representation is crucial for engaging in discourse related to matters of identity and race. In 1999, while she was working on *The Chinese in America*, she delivered the keynote address "The Human Right to Historical Honesty" at the Aspire 1999 conference organized by Asian-Americans in the Bay Area. According to Chang's mother, Chang argued for the inclusion of Chinese Americans within a comprehensive and accurate framework of American history, and that historical knowledge was essential for establishing and maintaining systems of accountability and oversight over those in authority. She insisted that the failure to acknowledge historical knowledge and learn from it had increased the likelihood of human rights violations and genocide.

She [Iris Chang] also gave her reason why historical honesty was important; it had direct bearing on our future as an ethnic minority in this country. "As Asian-Americans," she said, "we have the right to see our people included—both honestly and accurately—in the pantheon of American history." She continued: "Unfortunately, to this day, there are still few films or books about Asians that are historically honest. We still have images of Asian women as prostitutes or sex slaves, and Asian men as drug lords or spies—or just plain geeks." She told the audience, "One way to dispel prejudice is to write a book. I'm trying to combat stereotypes with my current work in progress—a narrative history of the

Chinese in America.”

..... She told the audience, “History is one way to maintain checks and balances to power. . . Historical amnesia only increases the possibility of human-rights abuse and genocide. For it emboldens those who think they could get away with murder, and not be judged for their actions by future generations.” Iris continued: “We have a moral responsibility to speak out against injustice. . . . It was this sense of moral responsibility—and moral outrage—that goaded me to write my second book, *The Rape of Nanking*.” (Chang, Y. 2011, 299-300)

A Voice for Group

The case of Iris Chang demonstrates that immigrants, especially second-generation immigrants, are confronted with two levels of history: one pertaining to their parents, the past experienced in mainland China, and the other pertaining to race, what occurred to Chinese people in North American history. The dilemma and difficulty they face stem from the fact that the history of their parents is distinct from the history of the country in which they are raised. The lack of narratives about these two histories in North America causes the Chinese to feel lost and unable to find their place. Iris Chang intertwined these two apparently parallel historical threads. She researched the Nanjing Massacre endured by her parents and grandparents and attempted to compose a narrative history of the Chinese in the United States. Rather than discussing race directly, she tackled the problem of history, about whether history has been told honestly.

Iris Chang passed away shortly after completing her third book, before she had the opportunity to theorize about her own path of inquiries. From my perspective, Iris Chang’s intellectual development is evident in her works, as she progressed from puzzling over historical images to advocating her thoughts. She endeavored to bring there and then with here and now, offering an alternative perspective to what the dominant narrative had fragmented. In *The Rape of Nanking*, Chang not only investigated the historical scenes, but also criticized the U.S.

government's decision to allow the Japanese to avoid accountability for their conduct after the war, suggesting that it was one of the primary factors contributing to the forgetting she referred to as the second rape of the Nanjing Massacre. In *The Chinese in America*, she traced the Chinese experience back more than 150 years, since the first Chinese set foot on American soil, and revealed that the U.S. has always treated the Chinese rough as a result of its own economic interests and diplomatic status with China. In her book and public speeches, Iris Chang expressed a poignant question, "Why can't you (the United States and the Western world) see our wounds?!"

The case of Iris Chang exemplifies how her investigation into historical events serves a public purpose by fostering a sense of collective identity, rather than focusing solely on domestic or individual psychological factors. By engaging critically with historical narratives, she sought to promote social justice and gain recognition for minority groups. Chang wrote in order to preserve history because she believed that "People die twice—once as mortals, and once in memory" (Chang, Y. 2011, 304). Chang's exploration method has served as a source of inspiration for the second generation of Chinese individuals residing in North America. This method emphasizes the notion that history should not be regarded as a relic of the past, but rather as an ongoing narrative that continues to shape the present. This has been demonstrated by the diaspora literature writing style of filling the gap in the historical narrative, studies on Chinese exclusive acts in the history of the United States and Canada, and political efforts to designate December 13 as Nanjing Massacre Commemoration Day in Canada. Moreover, Iris Chang has emerged as a significant figure in facilitating the Chinese population's engagement with their traumatic history, thereby enabling a collective process of mourning. In this sense, Iris Chang's brief life has influenced countless people across generations.

Chapter Six

Learning in Transition: Coda

How does history become ‘personal’ —only when it is survived, or only when private lives become public knowledge? What constitutes an ‘experience’ of history —‘being there,’ being told about it (telling it), being taught it (teaching it), reading about it, writing it? Or does history become ‘personal’ when an individual cares about it?

—Susan Crane, “(Not) Writing History”²⁰

Truth, Working through, and Learning

In the preceding chapters, the three cases illustrate the profound impact of difficult histories on individuals, their psyche, and the mean by which these pasts can be remembered and discussed. My primary focus revolves around the examination of various endeavours aimed at working through histories, with an emphasis on identifying key lessons that can be gleaned from these experiences. So far, this dissertation has presented three aspects of truth comprehension in relation to working through histories. First, it entails understanding truth as what happened that is expected to be known without concealment or modification. This is evident in Chapter Three, which examines the critiques and anticipations of individuals concerning the film *Coming Home*’s omission of historical scenes, and Chapter Four, which investigates the writer Li Yiyun’s longing to break through the suppression of narrating. Furthermore, it encompasses the psychological dimension of truth in its subjective manifestation. This is apparent in the novels of Li Yiyun, which employ a kaleidoscope-like technique to reconstruct mundane existence and depict ambivalent affects toward the past in the form of love and hatred, as well as in Chapter Five of Tong Ruirui’s dance drama on Iris Chang that explores the true experience in the journey

²⁰ See Crane’s “(Not) Writing History: Rethinking the Intersections of Personal History and Collective Memory with Hans von Aufsess,” p. 20.

of difficult knowing. Thirdly, when focusing on the personal aspect of history, the three cases also show how the experience of truth also includes finding or revealing the true self. In contrast to Lu Yanshi's lost of self in *Coming Home*, Li Yiyun's cutting of her mother tongue for preserving self and Iris Chang's putting herself back into the context of history showcase their effort to feel/be authentic and both of them remind us that working through histories is also a matter of mental health.

The term "working through" denotes a continuous process rather than an outcome or conclusion, which aligns with the idea of perceiving truth as a form of participatory revelation. In this process, it is imperative to highlight two key elements: work and learning. As evidenced by the cases presented, multiple strata of "work" are at play: work of mourning, work of memory, and work of narrating. Furthermore, to work through necessitates turning to, directing attention towards, and devoting effort and time to, all of which address the problem of denial first and foremost. Moreover, the concept of learning is enriched. *Coming Home* in Chapter Three demonstrates that compulsory repetition is a closed circuit in which one would never learn and learn out of it. *Kinder Than Solitude* in Chapter Four showcases that one cannot truly learn from experience and move on in solitude. In Chapter Five, Iris Chang's exploration of traumatic history highlights the emotional nature of the learning process, wherein individuals may encounter distressing, overwhelming, and despondent experiences. Before delving into a comprehensive examination of what we can learn from the cases, I want to introduce a hidden case as it also presents the relationship between learning and working through: the researcher and the creative process involved in the production of this dissertation.

A Hidden Case²¹: The Researcher and Her Work

Wounds in My Family History

Approximately eight years ago, when I began to focus my research on the Cultural Revolution, I met another Chinese Ph.D. student in critical psychology at the same university. I explained my research interest during our conversation because his work also dealt with memory and history. Then, with mockery, he said to me, “Many people still carry the Cultural Revolution in their minds just because they resent that it changed their life and social status. It is just resentment.” He implied that I looked into the Cultural Revolution out of the same resentment, and that this was an unjustified starting point for a research. When I heard his remark, I was stunned and did not know how to respond. On one hand, I was surprised that he did not consider the Cultural Revolution to be worthy of study in terms of history and memory. On the other hand, I was also asking myself if I did this research out of resentment, because my family has indeed undergone significant changes because of the Cultural Revolution. His questioning has been on my mind: What motivates my curiosity regarding the inquiry of how the past has influenced us?

Until I walked into my analyst’s clinic room and started my analysis, I was not sure why I tried so hard to understand what happened during the Cultural Revolution in my native China, and why people would become so violent and irrational. It was December 2015. My maternal grandmother passed away a month ago. An overwhelming amount of grief hit me. I finally decided to lay on the couch. I wanted someone to understand my pain and hold my feelings. When I was waiting outside the room for my first session, I wrote down the following lines:

Sadness poured out of my chest. Grandma died, and there was one less person in the world. Why do I feel pain so easily? Why can some people take the pain so well? My

²¹ Parts of this section have been modified from the article “Do Not Say We Have Nothing: Working Through the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” originally published in *Clio’s Psyche* (volume 29, Fall 2022).

heart always feels hurt. It feels like the outer layer of my heart has been torn off, leaving the beating heart. It hurts every time it beats.

With the help of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, I came to understand that the pain I felt had multiple layers. At first, I blamed my parents for my suffering, but later, when I dug deeper, I realized that my mother carried the wound inside her soul, related to her parents, and that she could not give me what she herself did not get from them. I also realized that although I am the daughter and she is the mother, I have been taking care of her and trying to take her pain away. When my mom informed me of grandma's death, rather than saying, "Kid, your grandma passed away," she said, "Jun, my mother passed away. I don't have a mother anymore." These words, the way they were said, brought me unbearable pain. I know now that the pain I felt was transgenerational.

The Cultural Revolution is a difficult history for me. Like most children born after the Cultural Revolution, I could not get too much information from my parents, grandparents, and elder relatives about that history. I am still not sure what happened to my parents and grandparents during that time. What I do know is that my maternal grandmother used to say, "If we went to Taiwan with the old regime, everything would have been different."

The history is muted. At first, I felt that the Cultural Revolution was too distant and irrelevant to our current lives for people to discuss it. Subsequently, I discovered that individuals tend to instinctively avoid engaging in conversations about the Cultural Revolution, and this avoidance seems to stem from some sort of unnamed fear. As if the mere mention of the history has the power to evoke its return. The "not talking" manifests itself in personality, parenting, and family dynamics, as my mother experienced in her childhood and I experienced in mine. Those unthinkable past and trauma, two generations away, can still make their way into present. I felt

guilty for not knowing what had happened, as well as the burden of carrying it. Even though I did not experience the history, such unexplainable affect haunts me.

Doing Research as My Way of Working Through

My research was initially motivated by the loss of my grandmother, a desire to comprehend the challenges facing the older generation, and the mark left on the family—the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Even though I was unable to identify a single traumatic event that occurred during the Cultural Revolution that caused the trauma, the ups and downs of that era made all the difference. One thing that the Chinese doctoral student was right about is that Cultural Revolution-related resentment did exist within my family.

I later discovered that my maternal grandfather, who was born in China at the turn of the twentieth century and graduated from an American-founded university in China –Fukien Christian University, worked as a middle school English teacher in a small city after the new regime was established. He lost his professional career in the old regime’s government, most of his property, and even became depressed as a result of being sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In 1963, when my mother was born, not only was the family’s financial situation significantly worse than it had been before, but her parents, who had been traumatized by war and various political movements, were unable to provide her with caring and loving parenting. So, should I just attribute everything to my mother having a depressed alcoholic father and a busy working mother? Then end the story?

My curiosity does not stop there. I want to comprehend what contributed to the challenging nature of the period. While researching the history of the Cultural Revolution, I discovered that serious factional conflicts occurred in my hometown of Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi Province, in 1968 during the Cultural Revolution. A total of 33 streets (lanes) in the

city were destroyed by fire, displacing over 50,000 people. Factions were equipped with firearms and engaged in combat using military-grade weaponry. These included light and heavy machine guns, grenades, explosive kits, earth tanks, recoilless guns, and rocket launchers. One of factions even flooded the city in the name of flood release, drowning thousands of opposition members and their families hiding in the underground civil air defense project. Even more shocking is the fact that mass murder and cannibalism occurred in the areas surrounding Nanning City at that time. It is currently referred to as the Guangxi Massacre. This was my hometown in 1968, when my mother was only five and my father was only eight years old. Both of their residences were located close to the primary documented sites of the violence. I have to wonder: What had they witnessed with their own eyes or heard from adults? Would they be frightened by the panic of those around them? Because when I asked my parents about it, they remembered the fight but could not recall any details. Then what about my grandparents? What happened to them during that time? I still have no way of finding out.

Upon reading Karoline Kan's article in *Foreign Policy* magazine on the fiftieth anniversary of the Cultural Revolution in 2016, a sense of shared perplexity was experienced. Titled "My uncle was a Red Guard in China's Cultural Revolution. He isn't sorry." (Kan, 2016), this article has an extended version in *New York Times* online Chinese edition four months later. It was my first time reading how a post-80s generation in China openly talked about the Cultural Revolution. Kan (2016) showed her confusion, shock, and the effort to make sense of the past. She questioned why her kind-hearted uncle had taken part in the Cultural Revolution's violence and caused harm to others. What drew him and his family members into the Cultural Revolution's dark side? Why doesn't uncle regret his time as a Red Guard? Why does he still believe the Cultural Revolution to be a positive event? These questions are as incomprehensible

to me as the reason why people in my hometown were killing each other in such a violent manner. I strongly resonated with the author's urge to go back to the historical scenes and the burden of not knowing.

Then I started the first stage of my research—to understand why politicians launched the Cultural Revolution and why people reacted to the initiative in extreme ways. In retrospect, the initial phase of my research involved revisiting the historical scene and attempting to discern the underlying collective psychological trajectory. I engaged psychoanalytic perspectives to investigate irrationality and read the history in a hermeneutic way. I used the Melanie Klein's perspective on paranoid-schizoid position and persecutory anxiety to examine Mao and the masses' psychical world ten years before the Cultural Revolution. I illustrated how the dominant leader and followers constructed a compelling social and political reality through newspapers and radio propaganda. On the one hand, I showed that Mao's persecutory anxiety might come from his experience of the loss of the superego's love, the loss of the object's love, and the loss of the object. On the other hand, I analyzed the class struggle, the cult of Mao, and unleashing of aggression as the manifestation of the masses' psychic defences against the persecutory anxiety and fear of death. I discovered that the psychical resonance between the leader and the masses via media contributed to the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution, which can be found similar in the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol in 2021.

A Violin Case in My Dream

At a conference in Poland in November 2018, I presented my preliminary thoughts on the Cultural Revolution as a defence against persecutory anxiety. During the trip, I had a healing dream:

I am carrying a violin case to take a subway train to visit my grandma. The violin case is old and the treasure of our family. I know I inherited it from the family/grandma. When I

see grandma, I also see that my mom is taking good care of her. She now takes the initiative and shoulders the responsibility within the family. I feel happy and light.

When I awoke, I felt so comforted by the dream. It must be a gift that I had the courage to reclaim my grandparents' experience in front of audiences despite not mentioning my family at the conference.

The violin case is a significant symbol in my dream. Despite the fact that no one in my family, including myself, has ever played the violin, I still feel this case like a dear friend. I carry it through a tunnel, dark, underground, waiting for the light. It signifies a potential container for difficult histories, intergenerational trauma, and unfinished family business. It also signifies the function of containing. In psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, scholars and clinicians study cases, report cases, and learn from cases. As proposed by John Forrester (2017), a historian of psychoanalysis, case thinking is a mode of scientific reasoning that recognizes the singularity of the individual and its representativeness. By seeing a case like a story, the case-based method leads us to contextualize the event, unpack the generic elements through the narrative, and restore the metaphor for its ability to carry (Phillips 2017, xi-xvi). With the case as a boundary, I can carry on now. I can play with my traumatic feelings and work on my relationship with my family without losing myself in the overwhelming past.

The artistic container, a violin case, also represents the creativity I restored through making sense of history and doing research on it. The intergenerational transmission of trauma is a case for me, and I am also a case of intergenerational trauma. For me, the holes in my family history will always be there. Not only because I was not born yet but also the difficulties of representing a traumatic past. The void challenges our sense of relating to history, family, and others. My urge to go back to the scene was expressed through my desire to make sense of the historical void. However, I later realized that what I can do is make a transition, as the violin

case is empty; I cannot fill it with the history of the dead, but I can fill it with my own experience. My research direction turns to the reception of history and explores how we make sense of the past from the vantage of the ways experiences are retold. Stephen Frosh (2013) reminds us that by finding ways to listen to various forms of haunted legacies, we can put them to rest and, more importantly, keep them alive to nourish a creative life.

What I have showed above outlines my affective relationship with my research topic. I acknowledge that my emotional and subjective sensibility have a role in doing this project. In light of Alice Pitt's (2003) idea that "the personal is constituted within a web of relations that includes relations of time (how the past works on the present) and relations with others, knowledge, and authority" (89), I use my personal story to make sense of the challenging history and selected cases' methods of dealing with the past. By recognizing my own experience, I bring in light the question of "what knowing and exploring trauma and its difficult history do to me" and "what I (will) do to the knowledge" in the inquiry process. In what follows, I include a critical analysis of my approach, along with a review of the dissertation's significant themes.

Women, Body, and Containing

My own personal story involves a lineage of women spanning three generations, from my maternal grandmother to my mother and to me, and is distinguished from other cases by the transgenerational transmission of trauma. It took me a considerable amount of time to realize that the cases I selected are exclusively centred on women and their perspective. When I considered myself as a case and reflected on my writing, I found that these cases embed a quest for how to become a woman, a diasporic woman, and a fertile body. In accordance with my desire as manifested in the dream involving a violin box, I aspired for my mother to fulfill the role of a

caregiver without me being solely responsible for her emotional well-being. After closely examining the three cases, I gain an appreciation for the unique vitality and transmission of resiliency among women.

In Chapter Three's analysis of the film *Coming Home*, I shift the focus to emphasize the female character, Feng Wanyu, rather than the male character, Lu Yanshi, which was initially highlighted in the novel and implied in the film's title. I turn my attention from the overall picture of Lu Yanshi's return home to Feng Wanyu's traumatic experience surrounding Lu's arrival and departure. My perspective aligns with a sympathetic comprehension of Lu's predicament of being unrecognized and unaccepted by Feng. However, my primary focus is on the female character's struggle to resist the patriarchal system's political suppression of memory. Despite Feng Wanyu's apparent amnesia, her persistent compulsive behaviours and unwavering determination, which even the patriarchal society cannot undermine, have become a lasting reminder of collective memory. The character of Feng Wanyu represents the countless unspeakable victims of the Cultural Revolution. Her aging body holds a history that cannot be told but cannot be forgotten. When she stands in front of the railway station, her silent struggle was audible to me, as if to say, "You captured and released my husband as you please; now I'm in charge, and the only way he can truly return is if I acknowledge his return." Feng's maternal role appears to have been diminished as a result of trauma, making it difficult for her to nurture and contain her daughter's development.

After reviewing Li Yiyun's personal experience in Chapter Four, I discovered that she is also a typical example of the struggle against 'not being allowed to say.' When she published stories about China in the United States, she steadfastly refused to have them translated from English, as if to say, "When I express myself, I refuse to inform you." She refused Chinese—her

mother tongue—and refused her mother to read her works. For Li, the disciplining of her mother by the patriarchal system resulted in her mother being perceived as a manifestation of patriarchal oppression. As a result, while fleeing and fighting patriarchy, she must flee her mother and motherland, seeking to transform herself into a different mother. Li incorporated her personal experiences and thinking to conceive artistic creations, which depict how the female body bears the effects of trauma. Her two novels about China's traumatic history are based on true female cases. In a story that took place in the town in the late 1970s, Li described how the bodies of female political prisoners were being assaulted and abused. Under the oppression of patriarchy, how can women with disabilities be despised, discriminated against and exiled. Even with excellent socio-political resources, the female announcer in the novel still felt oppressed, and determined to make her own voice even if it means giving up her freedom and her role as a mother. In another novel, *Kinder Than Solitude*, Li depicted the consequences of not telling/speaking out. Toxic chemicals corroded the body of a young female and the survivors who surrounded her punished themselves for feeling guilty and lonely, as if they, too, carried the poison in their hearts.

Chapter Five's case of Iris Chang, we can observe how she fought against the forgetting and denial of the war, which is the most emblematic product of patriarchy, not to mention the phenomenon of comfort women on the Asian battlefield. She conducted excavations of historical materials in order to bring to light the violent acts of murder and sexual assault committed against women by Japanese soldiers during the war. Additionally, she uncovered evidence indicating that following the war, the Western patriarchal system sought to appease Japanese imperialism for its own gain, rather than pursuing justice. She confronted the Japanese ambassador to the United States on a public television program, endured intimidation and

harassment from Japanese right-wingers, and was questioned by male scholars. Iris Chang challenged the conventional depiction of Chinese women as submissive, advocated for underrepresented historical narratives and marginalized communities, and resisted dominant power structures. Meanwhile, in her personal life, she has gone through the process of trying to conceive and wanting to be a mother. She also struggled with the discovery that her two-year-old son was autistic. Moreover, I selected the powerful dance drama *Deep in Memory* by female choreographer Tong Ruirui, which uses the body to preform the difficult history on stage, to reflect on how Iris Chang and her experience affected the remembering of the Nanjing Massacre in mainland China.

In these cases, women's voices are so potent. They do not conceal their vulnerability and strive to live with empathy. Their stories illustrate what Cathy Caruth (1996) refers to as 'double telling,' revealing the encounter with death through traumatic experience and the ongoing experience of having survived it. As I work on this project, my identification with them manifests itself in each chapter. I experienced the emotional distress caused by knowing the history of horror, just as Iris Chang did. When confronted with the historical void, I, like Chang, feel compelled to return to the historical scene. When I observed Li Yiyun's difficult relationship with her mother and mother tongue, I reflected on the difficulty of carrying my mother in my mind and being unable to relinquish my mother tongue. Strangely, the repetition of Feng Wanyu in the film *Coming Home* had an unexpected effect of inducing me to engage in a pattern of persistent revision of the chapter. Here, I would like to revisit Winnicott's theory on 'the use of object' as discussed in Chapter Two. Although I kept returning to these cases, women and mother, I finally place them outside of my projective world, allowing them to have their own externalities by theorizing them and making a closure. This also marks the beginning of my new

departure. In addition, I left the mainland China thirteen years ago and moved to Canada, but it appears that I have never truly left it in my heart. This project's completion process is also a gradual realization that I have departed the motherland and now live in a society in which the racial reality is so compelling.

Witness, Absence as Potential, and Holding Environment

In addition to the female voice, the witness is an important element that runs throughout all cases. In Chapter Three of the film *Coming Home*, the absence of witnesses condemns traumatized individuals and families to an eternity of hopelessness and helplessness, incapable of moving on. In Chapter Four, Li Yiyun's language impairment was caused by language engineering and thought control in mainland China, and she witnessed her high school classmates being arrested for attempting to testify about the Tiananmen Square Massacre. In an effort to regain her ability to express herself, she attempted to reconstruct her inner witness through writing in the United States. In Iris Chang's case in Chapter Five, the supportive Chinese communities as 'live third' aided her exploration of a traumatic past. Furthermore, she dispelled international ignorance of Nanjing through a style of writing that created a community of witnessing and community of seeing. These cases exemplify the significance of witnesses in the process of working through histories.

As a clinical term, working through is originally based on the context of a therapeutic relationship. In this relationship, one partner must regain the ability to speak, while the other must learn how to listen. Hannah Curtis (2018) outlines three criteria for the working through. The first requirement is that working through must occur in the context of a relationship with an independent-minded other. Second, this individual is interested and willing to participate in an

effort to understand the patient/client as a witness and to provide his or her own thoughts on the issue that must be resolved. The third criterion requires the patient or client to demonstrate an inclination toward introspection and a degree of curiosity regarding the potential cause of their suffering and pattern. Curtis (2018) points out that being able to turn to another is the first step for working through. As a pioneer in trauma study, Dori Laub (1992) highlights the significance of the witness in the context of Holocaust survivors and the collection of testimonies, emphasizing their role as empathetic listeners in the process of bearing witness to traumatic experiences. He posits that the act of witnessing serves as a means to pay tribute to the experiences of survivors, connect individual and collective narratives, and promote healing by acknowledging, validating, and establishing a common understanding. Samuel Gerson (2009) expands the concept of witness as “live third” to include a person, relationship, or institution that provides continuity and the functions of containment and meaning making for traumatized individuals.

In order to comprehend the expansion of witness as a supportive milieu, it is pertinent to revisit Winnicott’s theory as outlined in Chapter Two. By doing so, we can further explore his notions of the holding environment and the concept of a good-enough mother/mothering. According to Winnicott (1960), the act of being cradled by a caregiver upon birth, which is a commonplace occurrence, is indicative of the essential requirement for individuals to have a nurturing environment, akin to being held, in order to foster healthy development. Mother, as the representative of the most important primary caregiver, is initially responsible for providing a stable and consistent holding function. Winnicott (1960) believed that the adequate mother or mothering was the most appropriate, as it satisfies the child’s basic needs without being deficient or overly focused and satisfied. Winnicott (1960) placed significant emphasis on the period of

anticipation preceding gratification –waiting but no devastating, wherein children have the opportunity to cultivate the utilization of transitional objects as a means of self-soothing. This process enables them to enter the potential space and foster the ability to engage with objects and symbols.

Winnicott (1986) also stated “Holding can be done well by someone who has no intellectual knowledge of what is going on in the individual; what is needed is a capacity to identify, to know what the baby is feeling like” (28). Thus, the concept of holding function primarily pertains to the presence and responsiveness of the mother or mothering. It is important to note that while the mother plays a crucial role, she cannot fully substitute the individual’s ability to navigate and interact with the external world. However, the aim is to assist the individual in transitioning from a state of complete dependence to a state of partial reliance, ultimately enabling them to achieve independence. Let us return to the working through criteria proposed by Curtis (2018). As a working through partner, what matters most is not how intelligent he or she is, but how the dyad relationship makes the other party feel held: a sense of security that you are not afraid to fall because no one will catch you, and that you have the freedom to explore without being constrained. According to Winnicott (1986), the presence of a mother/witness, along with a holding environment provided by the family and community, plays a crucial role in facilitating the growth, well-being, and creative potential of an individual. In addition, mourning and healing can occur when a ‘good enough’ environment-mother makes the wound manageable (Colman 1988).

In his analysis, André Green (1986) delved deeper into the concepts of potential space and absence, providing additional insights into Winnicott’s theoretical framework. Green (1986) observed the absence in the psychoanalytic treatment process, which relates to Winnicott’s

viewpoint on making room for the absent, i.e., the mother's unavailability and the child's experience of waiting. He highlighted the existence of two distinct categories of absences as not knowing. Regarding the historical circumstances of the patient, the analyst's knowledge is limited, and even the patient themselves may not possess a comprehensive understanding. Likewise, in terms of the current circumstances unfolding in the patient's life, neither the analyst nor the patient can possess the all-encompassing perspective of a divine being. However, Green (1986) argued that the analytic situation could be used as a potential space in which the interaction between analyst and patient (mimic mother-infant dyad) transforms meanings from absence to potentiality, thereby assisting the patient in developing the capacity to have cultural experiences in the outside world. Britzman (2016) has a similar discussion when interprets Melanie Klein's theory. In Klein's perspective, the absence is first experienced by individual to the breast as a result of weaning. The absence is then perceived as needs cannot be met with anxiety. (Winnicott, unlike Klein, permits a degree of unsatisfied and delayed gratification.) In the Kleinian view of absence, there is a sense of loss and resulting anxiety. Britzman (2016) notes that if a person can tolerate anxiety as opposed to filling the void with emotion, then she or he has the precondition for thinking and the possibility of symbolization for the current situation. Symbol formation –a precondition for meaning making –can serve a holding function by filling the void with meaning (Britzman 2016, 63).

The preceding discussion demonstrates that both the Kleinian and Winnicottian perspectives believe that absence can have potential, depending on whether the individual is able to generate meaning from the potential with the necessary support and assistance. Hence, the issue of silence within the traumatized diaspora, the absence of witnesses, and the void resulting from inadequate representation, as examined in this study, possess considerable potential and

merit for further investigation. Winnicott's theory also reminds us that working through histories cannot be accomplished by an individual alone, but rather requires a community and society that provides a good-enough holding environment. This dissertation is my effort to symbolize and bring meaning out of absence. I practice what Laub (1992) referred to as the three levels of witnessing: first, being a witness to oneself within the experience (my case), second, being a witness to the testimonies of others (the three cases), and third, being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. In addition, my work as a witness to the process of witnessing itself has received encouragement and support from my supervisor and committee members, as well as recognition and funding support from national and provincial awards, which contribute to a holding environment for me. Can I now open the violin case in my dream and play the instrument? The process of writing this dissertation is akin to constantly fine-tuning the theme and myself in order to perform a musical composition. I echo and harmonize with these cases, but perhaps I am also an instrument that I played.

A Return of History and a Sense of Good-Enough (Racial) Self

In recent years, however, the socially constructed reality of race has become a source of concern for me as I examine the difficulties faced by the Chinese diaspora in creating a holding environment to work through their histories. This dissertation has argued of the need to address not only the traumatic experiences of the Chinese diaspora in their country of origin, but also to thoroughly examine, comprehend, and depict the historical narratives of Chinese racial experiences in the North America. In Chapter Two, I have examined the influence of racial dynamics on the Chinese diaspora's engagement with complex historical narratives, drawing on the analysis conducted by Eng and Han (2000, 2019). As this dissertation reaches its conclusion,

it becomes evident that the breakdown of social relations in relation to racial issues has intensified. If Iris Chang were alive today, it is probable that she would discern the similarities between historical events and contemporary circumstances. Two decade ago, during a public address at the University of California Santa Barbara, Chang censured the discriminatory treatment of Chinese Americans in the United States in relation to the SARS virus outbreak of 2003. Today, such discrimination has intensified as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic that began in 2020. Asian groups were implicated, leading to a significant increase in incidents of targeted verbal aggression and personal assaults.

Furthermore, since 2018, the Donald Trump administration's trade war against China has spawned a new round of global export of China threat theory. In the same year, the US's Department of Justice launched 'The China Initiative' to go after people they suspected of being Chinese spies in American research and industry in order to prevent economic espionage. Scientists of Chinese origin have faced scrutiny and, in some cases, have been subject to suspicion regarding their potential involvement in the unauthorized disclosure of classified information. A number of Chinese professors were unjustly accused and subjected to legal proceedings. According to a latest study (Xie et al. 2023), the investigations carried out by the initiative have resulted in the departure of valuable researchers of Chinese descent from the United States to China. In her book *The Chinese in America* (2003) Iris Chang examined the plight of Chinese scientists, including Qian Xuesen and other Chinese researchers who were targeted by McCarthyism during the 1950s, as well as the broader experiences of Chinese intellectuals employed within the US defence industry throughout the 1990s. All of them are under suspicion of espionage due to their Chinese heritage. The confirmation of Chang's

discovery of a recurring 100-year cycle reveals that instances of racism against Chinese Americans coincide with periods of economic decline in the United States.

Moreover, the matter of Asians' mental health has garnered significant attention subsequent to the occurrence of two mass murders in the United States during the early months of 2023. The tragic suicide of Iris Chang in 2004 prompted the Chinese community to engage in introspection regarding the stigmatization of mental health and to take notice of the prevailing state of mental health. How far has the Chinese community progressed in terms of mental health promotion, network building, and service delivery in the nearly 20 years since? The evolving dynamics in Sino-US relations over the past few years have also influenced the collective perception of the Chinese within the North American region. The escalation of anti-Chinese racism has significantly heightened the likelihood of Chinese individuals experiencing racial trauma in their everyday lives. In accordance with the findings of a new study by Angus Reid Institute (2023) in partnership with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, it is revealed that a significant proportion of individuals identifying as Chinese Canadians have reported experiencing adverse treatment on a personal level as a direct consequence of the political tensions existing between Canada and China.

It is somewhat reassuring to note that, since Iris Chang's advocacy for Chinese Americans, Chinese decent scholars have conducted studies on the Chinese Exclusion Act in both the United States and Canada in recent years. Their investigations focused on elucidating the historical experiences of early Chinese labourers who arrived in the United States to contribute to the construction of railways. As a result of their findings, Chinese communities have called for an official apology from the respective governments and the provision of reparations to address the historical injustices inflicted upon the Chinese community through

exclusionary policies. But more needs to be done to advance criticism and contemplation of the way Asian immigrants have been used as tools for the economy and their lived experience of anti-Asian racism. There remains a pressing necessity for people of Asian heritage to proactively pursue acknowledgment and enhance their viewpoints within the dominant discourse of the black-and-white dyad. On one hand, according to Cheng (1997) Asian groups have historically been perceived as unassimilable and foreign, resulting in their pre-immigration history being disregarded in the host country. In addition, their post-immigration history has been marked by experiences of discrimination and exclusion.

On the other hand, drawing upon Eng and Han (2019)'s analysis, the notion of the model minority may have fostered a belief among Asian diasporic communities that they occupy a position of relative proximity to white individuals within a hierarchical framework. They observe that "the social contract for Asian American demands acquiescence to the ideology of colorblindness –to the idea of a level playing field, to a narrative of individualism and merit outside of history, and to the absence of racism and interdependence in the liberal project" (124). Consequently, this ideology may have engendered a perception that the historical experiences of white Americans are inherently intertwined with those of Asian Americans and tragically, that model minorities become groups with no history. Because Asian Americans' historical narrative is often shaped to align with the interests and perspectives of the dominant white population and so leads to either a disregard of racial pain or a or downplaying of factors that do not conform to prevailing white values and expectations. Individuals may experience a sense of being unable to achieve the status of a model minority if they hold a perspective on historical events that differs from the dominant hegemonic narrative. Thus, working through the constraints associated with the model minority stereotype becomes crucial for the Chinese diaspora to establish their distinct

historical narrative, gain insights into familial heritage and suffering, and foster reconciliation with themselves and with preceding generations. As Guy Thompson (1994) states when he interprets Freud's concept of working through,

Freud's characterization of 'making the unconscious conscious' is only achieved by submitting to those experience that, however painful, put us in touch with the deepest levels of our being. When we resist them, a part of our subjectivity is negated. We're unable to situate ourselves in history. We can't say who we are exactly. By undergoing an experience with our self as it unfolds, we inhabit our history and come to terms with it. We finally realize what our suffering and our existence are about. (199)

Thompson's view on working through pays attention to a process of finding the true self, a state of being authentic through being-there-with-history. Drawing inspiration from Winnicott's concepts of the true self and the false, Eng and Han (2019) concern the pathological development of a (racial) false self which conceals the true (racial) self and results in "feelings of fraudulence and phoniness, the absence of 'true experience,' and the affective incapacity to feel real, spontaneous, authentic, or alive," [therefore] "sensations of wasted life –of emptiness, futility, and hopelessness –overshadow all social interactions and relations" (123). If extending Thompson's understanding, addressing racial melancholia and racial dissociation and working through histories are inextricably linked. Through this intertwined process, an individual's narcissistic wounds resulting from their learning of history and their understanding of their relation to history may be transformed into a sense of good-enough self, a self that is neither required to be white nor disregarded.

Reconstructing a Witnessing Community

This dissertation posits the contention that the recollection of individual experiences is invariably intertwined with a shared context, while the endurance of collective memory is upheld by the subjectivity inherent in lived experiences. According to Susan Crane (1997), it is imperative to recognize that "each self-expression of historical consciousness is an expression of

collective memory” (1383), and that variations in these expressions among members should be accepted. As a result, history is allowed to be written and represented by more than one witness in collective memory. Crane (1997) reminds that “Witnessing is a lived experience; it is an awareness of receiving another’s testimony, and of having the impact of that experience remain as part of one’s historical knowledge” (1382). One of the arguments posited in this dissertation is that cultural experience plays a pivotal role in facilitating the act of witnessing and the exploration and resolution of historical narratives. The assessment of whether cultural experience can be regarded as a prospective realm rather than a hostile realm relies on the existence of a nurturing social milieu. As Annette Kuhn stressed (2013), “Cultural experience is satisfying for the individual to the extent that the interaction takes place in a setting of relaxation, trust and reliability—in a good-enough holding or facilitating environment” (5). I consider the recent increase in Asian and Chinese American/Canadian-themed novels, television dramas, and films as a positive trend. Not only do they increase the presence of Asians in popular culture, but we can also use these cultural products as an entry to understand ourselves better. Through object-usage as elaborated in Chapter Two, we can participate in our own ethnic cultural experience, as opposed to a cultural experience dominated by racial hegemony. Because, as Alice Pitt (2003) points out, this process involves a transition of the subject from object-relating –an experience of the subject-in-isolation, to an experience of the subject in relation to other subjects (122). Thus, one has established their subjectivity and acquired the ability to witness others.

While Winnicott’s theory highlights the importance of a holding function, it does not suggest that the Asian community must rely exclusively on the host society to fulfill this role. The experience of social breakdown compels us to consider how to reconstruct and shape community through establishing diverse forms of holding spaces. Within these designated

spaces, there should be a strong emphasis on promoting and valuing cultural expression. For instance, when instructing on Asian and Chinese literature, it is imperative to engage in a nuanced examination of historical and traumatic themes. Careful consideration must be given to the development of instructional frameworks and reading materials, as they can serve as valuable tools for fostering historical and traumatic consciousness, as well as facilitating the process of working through histories. Engaging in narrative experiences is a means of honing active listening skills towards others. An area that warrants additional investigation is the potential of Asian American/Canadian literary and cultural discourses to explore and conceptualize Asian sociality against and beyond anti-Asian conditions through community, collectivity, and intimacy. It will enrich our experience of how to understand race as a relation, how to form the in-group relationality, and how to be a good enough (racial) self.

The importance of establishing a witnessing community lies in its focus on lived experiences rather than ideological frameworks. This study has shown that it is necessary to integrate the concern of mental health into the care for the existential challenges of Asians and Chinese as a social and collective issue, rather than perceiving them solely as an individual medical matter. By refraining from stigmatizing vulnerability as an attribute incompatible with diasporic societies, we can potentially liberate ourselves from the constraints imposed by the model minority stereotype and re-establish genuine care for both self and others. When people advocate for Asians to participate more in society and speak out more so that Asians are no longer considered ‘muted,’ this dissertation attempts to remind a step back: we should learn how to listen and how to listen to witness first. What sustains a community is the ability to see others, see ourselves, and allow witness.

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