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Transculturation : writing beyond dualism

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Chapter 1

Rift in Time: Tracing (Post)Memory in *Hunger*

Born and raised in Midwestern America, Chinese American woman writer Lan Samantha Chang also sets her novella *Hunger* there, and the environment in the novella mirrors this place where she grew up. Thus, the writer has a similar cultural background as the protagonists, and, like them, she has the experience of being an outsider in a culturally isolated environment. This provides her with an advantageous position to provide depth of expression to the conflicts narrated. Of four protagonists in *Hunger*, the narrator is Min, a Chinese woman who migrated to the US for a new life. There she works as a restaurant waitress where she meets Tian, her later husband and a passionate violinist. He was smuggled into the US with ambitions of obtaining musical fame, but after “outliving” his position as a junior instructor at a music school, he ends up as a busboy in the same restaurant. With the fading of his own achievement, he desperately turns to his two daughters and obsessively trains each at the violin. However, the elder daughter Anna is untalented in music, while the younger Ruth has no interest at all. Tian’s hope bursts when Ruth defiantly runs away from home under the pressure of his ruthless training.

Conflicts between family members and generations, cultural adaptation, and identity construction are themes prevalent in the works of Chinese American women writers. In Chang’s text, these thematic preoccupations are interwoven with the male protagonist’s hunger for artistic success. What distinguishes *Hunger* from other works I discuss is that all these conflicts revolve around a traumatic memory of the past. Tian desperately expects to become a musician. For this pursuit, he deserted (or was deserted by) his home in China, but migration and life afterward smash his ambition and traumatize him. However, despite the

determinant influence of his traumatic memory, his daughter Anna manages to build a new life. This new life defines her identity as a Chinese American. For the two protagonists, memory becomes a double-edged sword—it produces both favorable and unfavorable consequences. The narrative gives full play to both aspects. The topic of memory, and traumatic memory specifically, is far understudied in Chinese American literature as an independent motif.¹ For this reason, I will read *Hunger* in the light of memory and trauma studies. Different from memory studies in, for example, post-Holocaust literature, memory in immigrant literature is mostly concerned with events around immigration and displacement. My focus is therefore on the specific contexts that define the protagonists' memory in their Chinese American circumstances.

In this first-person narrative, all action is filtered through Min's thought, memory, and imagination. Her memories keep flooding back with increasing intensity. The narration begins by recalling a dream of how she first met Tian, and ends with Min's fear of their story being forgotten. Between this action the narration reveals more distanced and bizarre memories. Memory of immigration and life afterward are given great priority in the development of the protagonists' personalities. Memory exposes the structure by which Chang constructs her characters. I will use theories and concepts of memory studies to analyze Chang's characters in their immigrant context. Besides the usual ways of conveying memories—such as testimony, documentation, oral account, and fiction writing suffused in Holocaust literature—the working of memory in Chang's text suggests other models. The memories are sometimes factual and enlightening, and sometimes fantasized and enclosing. A full comprehension of *Hunger* crucially depends on examining how memory relates to the creation of the protagonists' experience in their specific immigrant realities.

Unlike the conventional descriptions of first-generation immigrants who undergo severe physical suffering and racial discrimination, *Hunger* emphasizes the conflicts within their mentality

¹ In Chinese American literature, “[f]amily, home, community, origin, loss, dislocation, relocation, racial differences, cross-cultural resistance, second-generation Americanization and assimilation, identity destabilization and reformulation [...] are common trajectories” (Lim, “Immigration” 292). These topics are results of the displacement after migration. They are studied more under the narratives of history and diaspora than those of memory and trauma.

and personality. Even though these people are not a majority, or representative of the entire Chinese immigrant group, they are part of it. Their story diversifies the collective memory of this group. It provides another story which might otherwise have been lost within dominant immigrant discourse. Chang is not confined to a dominant cultural vision of her ethnic past. Her writing makes use of culturally available theories of memory, trauma, and narrative to propel her characters in their immigrant context. Her narrative offers the reader different ways to understand the relationship between remembering and forgetting the past, between acceptance and denial of cultural heritage. This text is also a different psychological and philosophical practice. It demonstrates that the impact of one's personal past and cultural legacy remains a significant factor in the social formation of his or her mind and identity.

In this chapter, I analyze the various ways in which memory works as a repressive or progressive force for reference. I will also take a close look at how memory reflects the immigrant experience, and how it determines the protagonists' lives spanning two generations. Through the juxtaposition of memory and identity, I explore how the protagonists' present ethnic identity forms and defines their memory of their past. By tracing the writer's deployment of memory and identity, I will contemplate on the interrelation between the two. My analysis in light of memory studies aims to open up a new dimension in the field of Chinese American literature.

Min's Nostalgic Memory

Chang presents Min's memory in many forms: dreams, imagination, fantasy, (in)voluntary recall, and nostalgic reflection. I categorize them into three divisions: nostalgic memory, incomplete memory, and persistent memory. Each of their active performances casts a special light on the working of memory.

Immigrants come to a foreign land and leave their homes behind. But the past continues to weigh on the present. The narrator tells her daughter of her homesickness: "when you stay in one place long enough, it becomes a part of you" (*H* 75). Home serves as a bond between a person's past and present. Remembering home is a cultural recall of what is left behind in and around that "home." Immigrants experience two completely different worlds before and after migration. Memory

functions as a temporal link between the two worlds of past and present. “[C]ultural recall,” as Mieke Bal explains, is “not merely something of which you happen to be a bearer but something that you actually *perform*” (*Acts* vii). Bal’s formulation emphasizes the performance of a memory. It turns the noun “memory” into an act of memorization and recalling.

The narrator Min constantly performs cultural recall by reaching back to the time before migration. The images of her mother and home appear whenever Min is at a crossroad of choices, at a loss or in a dilemma.² Nostalgic memory connects the present to a particular version of the past. Sometimes, the past is comforting, and at other times it is sad.³ Min does not necessarily follow her mother’s advice, nor does the presence of her mother serve any practical purpose. But Mother’s “appearance” is a presence of somebody from whom Min can seek advice. It means that there is always somebody to whom she can turn when in need. The recalling goes beyond the time when her mother was alive. Even after Mother’s death, there are still moments in Min’s dream or fantasy when she meets Mother or recalls the stories told by Mother. It is Min’s belief that her mother’s soul “would help keep all of [them] together” (*H* 75). The distance that sets them apart in the two worlds between the past and present, Chinese and American, and Yin and Yang cannot cut off the endearment and affinity. Min easily expresses that intimacy with her mother: “even in this country, I had felt that she was holding me in her hands” (101).

The images of the narrator’s mother and home, though far away from her, still persist in Min’s life. These memories suggest a longing for what she has lost. In this completely foreign land, Min’s nostalgic memory is a fantasized temporary return to her home when it is impossible in reality. The extended presence of home feelings contrasts with the isolated physical surroundings of the narrator. In the non-

² For example, when Min first met her husband Tian in a restaurant, she remembered her mother’s advice. When she got married, her mother called from Taiwan and told her the meaning of *yuanfen*. When she was bewildered by Tian’s strangeness, in her dream her mother satisfied her wish of seeing Tian’s true home in China. When Min felt guilty over leaving her mother alone in Taiwan, she relived the moment of saying farewell to her mother before she flew to the US.

³ For example, when Tian seems unhappy about Min’s pregnancy, Min recalls the sad moments when her mother received news of prosecution from mainland China and how her family treasured children as the thread of family blood.

immigrant residential area, there is no one else whom she can ask for help.⁴ The text depicts Min working as either a housewife or a part-time waitress with little social relations.

The significance of Min's nostalgic memory does not lie in its continuity beyond the past and present in shaping the future, as Mieke Bal says (*Acts* vii). The psychological effect of Min's cultural recall triumphs over its practical use. Her memory is a mental defense against, and a psychic compensation for, a sense of loss. It is a reflection of the nostalgia the narrator feels after a series of losses in the foreign land: losses of expectations, of jobs, of both daughters⁵ as well as a loss of bodily "agile, thoughtless grace" (*H* 55). The losses are part of her own elapsed past and dwindled self. Her memory serves as a psychological means of adjustment, and is helpful to ease her sense of cultural displacement and alienation. In this way, the absence of sense of belonging in her real life is replaced by a construction of a memorial return. This return is an escape from the present harshness to a past left behind. More importantly, it is also an effort for new inspiration and a source of empowerment for coping with her present life. Frequent flashbacks are a recharge of spiritual power so as to face all the losses at the present time. The performance of this cultural recall is a source of comfort and a mental healing from the disconnection with her dearest family and home. For the narrator, this lost past operates as a metaphor of "a hole in [their] house, like a great mouth, filled with love words and lost objects" (61). It is exactly this big hole of love that enables Min to hold on.

However, the nostalgic obsession with losses at the same time contains and suppresses a person's progress. As Andreas Huyssen notes, the perception of loss will lead to an insistence on "safeguarding identity [...], thus ossifying the past and closing [oneself] off to alternative futures" (86). In mourning her losses of both daughters, Min feels left behind. She wonders, "If I had learned English, [...] would I have been able to follow them?" (*H* 101). Her obsession with Chinese nostalgic

⁴ As the writer mentions in "A Conversation with Lan Samantha Chang" collected in *Hunger*, the text's environment is closely related to her own "geographically isolated" residence where "months would go by when [they] did not have contact with Chinese or Chinese Americans outside of [their] immediate family."

⁵ Conflicts with her daughters make Min feel they have become estranged from her: "Somehow I had lost both of my daughters" (101).

memory hinders her progress. By the end of the novella Min still works as an assistant in a shoe shop, a stereotypical position for Chinese American women.

Min's Incomplete Memory

In addition to nostalgic recalling, there are also instances in the novella in which Min experiences involuntary memory. She anxiously searches for memories. These acts take place around her husband's strange and exacting temper. Her husband Tian seldom talks about his childhood and never mentions his experience of migration as a teenager. Unable to uncover the painful memories from Tian, Min builds up her own version of his past:

I knew only what I could gather from his tastes: that his family had been educated, cultured, passionate. I assumed his parents had supported and indulged, up to a point, his love for music, but I also knew that this kind of family, this kind of faded scholars' class, had suffered when the Communists came to power. And I knew that the Communist government would not look favorably upon a family who had let a son run off to the West. (*H* 29)

Min's assumption is not a factual account, but is instead formulated on the ground of reference to Tian's past. Tian's migration takes place in the 1960s, the time of the Communist Party's powerful centralization.⁶ The historical dimension is revealed behind the individual life. In this formulated "memory," the reader finds characteristics of a memorial process. Memory is not determined by whether a person recalls the true past, but is formed by how the person is influenced by the present conditions, by the reason for recalling, and the shape of what is recalled. Memory is therefore not a re-presentation of "how things were," or the transmission of a reality from the past; instead, it is subject to a continuous process of translation and mediation in the light of the

⁶ In the 1960s, after the breach of alliance with USSR, "China retreated into isolation and fanaticism, [...] displaying those xenophobic characteristics deeply imbedded in its culture" (Scalapino 67). Chinese people overseas were viewed with suspicion as possible capitalist infiltrators. So anyone with overseas relations might be accused of being a spy. Migration or contact with overseas Chinese was not encouraged by the government. That is why the narrator says that Tian's flight abroad made his family suffer.

present. This implies the active work of deducing and shaping, and sometimes a more active performance of the hidden, implicit, and uncanny in exploration of the past. There is no evidence to prove whether Min's inference is the real case of Tian's past, but evidently it is an alternative perspective from which the reader understands Tian's present conditions.

The narrator first tells about some strangeness in Tian's habits. Then she suggests that Tian's strangeness is associated with his childhood and home. Knowledge of his past seems essential to a more comprehensive understanding of his split personality. The idea of retrieving Tian's past is so persistent that it haunts Min, and later the daughters, throughout the narrative. The narrator raises the questions of "what happened to his parents, how he had managed to flee the north and head to the coast, when he was just a teenager" (*H* 29). The elder daughter Anna questions this experience again. But no clear answer is given. Min feels uneasy and frightened at Anna's inquiry, and only offers a vague answer "It was *yuanfen* [...]. *Yuanfen* is your fate" (64). However, the narrator refuses to offer a complete story. Instead, she concentrates on the motive and the weight of Tian's trip to the US by offering three accounts—all more or less the same—around the moment of migration.⁷ The retelling of Tian's past is not presented straightforwardly. It is made up of Min's uncertain inference, imagination, dream, and occasionally from Tian's fragmented and unfinished accounts. Even though Min claims to know more about Tian, only patches are narrated. It is only almost at the end of the novella that the episode of how Tian managed to smuggle himself first to Taipei and then to the US is partly revealed. Rather than telling a coherent story, the novella remains fractured in this respect. It ends with the beginning of Tian's smuggling. By consistently telling an inconsistent story, the narration seems to create a tension between a desire for a solid sense of identity based on a person's truthful past and a presentation of a fluid, decentered self from speculation and deduction.

In view of this tension, I will unravel some personal, social and cultural factors that determine the novella's purposeful indulgence with

⁷ The narration first reveals Tian's past through his own account of his music desire and of an irrevocably deserted past (28). Before his death, Tian recalls the impetus for his music dream (94). At the end of the novella, the narration gives a vivid account of Tian's smuggling journey—difficult and carrying weight (110-13).

incompleteness. The narration's insufficiency and failure of recollecting Tian's past echo the failure in his personal achievement. Tian fails in acquiring a sound personality, and beyond that, in establishing an identity as a Chinese immigrant. The task of reconstructing an identity from a fragmented past requires a non-fragmented environment and an effort of personal adjustment. But neither is accessible to Tian. Incompleteness underlies the unfinished task of identity construction and of personal pursuit. Tian gives so much weight to his desire that it cannot be completed with only one person's efforts within his or her lifetime. At the same time, the incompleteness suggests the unsmooth and formidable nature of Tian's past and the difficulty of reliving it.

Incompleteness is one of the merits of Chang's writing. It offers an "incoherent" development of conflict⁸ and "unsound" personalities of immigrants. The half-covered family secrets and broken stories distinguish themselves from the narratives of the other two female writers I discuss in this study.⁹ Chang's strategy of "reluctant-storytelling" is unique among the works of abundant "storytelling" or "talk-story" prevalent in Chinese American literature.¹⁰

Min's Persistent Memory

Another form of memory—persistent memory—is presented in Min's "immortally persistent stay" after her physical death. Unlike Tian's ghostly destination back home to China after his death, Min would not let go after she dies. Unwilling to erase the traces of memory of her family life, Min lingers on. The spirit of her hovers in the house. Her

⁸ Instead of a liberating resolution, the conflict goes through a process of beginning, development, explosion, and a quiet dying-down. I discuss this in the following chapter.

⁹ For example, in Ng's *Bone*, the writer also uses a lot of flashbacks to narrate what happens to her protagonists, but she finally constructs the whole story of the immigrant family. In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, there are also some uncertainties or indefiniteness. These uncertainties are based on two or more contradictory possibilities. It is not "incompleteness," but another extreme, i.e. "over-completeness" that structures the narrative.

¹⁰ The tradition of "talk-story" is a "long folk tradition of song and story" passing down from Sung dynasty in Chinese history. It is "continually revitalized" by "professional storytellers" such as Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Their works are masterpieces of "talk-story" (Sledge 143). I discuss "talk-story" or "storytelling" in Chapter Six.

persistent and palpable “ghostly traces” in the epilogue refer back to decades ago when Tian secretly fled to the US, and forward to the present and future of her daughter Anna’s new American life. The narration mentions two reasons for the ghostly return: vengeance and improvement. To these, I add the need to keep memory going.¹¹ Min’s ghostly presence suggests a haunting fear of being left behind and then forgotten.

Like most immigrants, Tian and Min can never forget the world from which they have come. Their unforgetfulness makes it difficult for them to fully assimilate into the adopted world. After Min’s death, the ghostly narrator constantly expresses her unwillingness to forget and her wish to keep going. The idea of “keep-going” is revealed long before in the narration when the narrator stores her savings every week:

In the closet, under my old books, I filled an envelope with cash. A dollar every week, even when we were at the bottom of the rice. After a year, I went to the bank and exchanged the pile for a fifty-dollar bill, but I never opened an account. I liked to have the money at hand. At night when I could not sleep, I would try to think of it, my secret. Sometimes I thought the money might be a way to escape. Sometimes it seemed like a way to keep us going. I added steadily to the pile and never touched it. (*H* 42)

Using Pierre Nora’s notion of “sites of memory” as a collective memorial heritage of a community,¹² I consider the dollars accumulated from the past as personal memorial heritage. The “most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire*,” Nora argues, “is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” (“Between” 19). A *lieu de mémoire* connects an event with a specific place at a specific time. The savings of memory to which I refer extends beyond that specific moment and stretches into a period of time. They are a materialization of memory in a tangible form of concrete accumulation from a moment in the past. The

¹¹ The narration tells that a ghostly spirit is “driven back to earth by a hunger for vengeance” or turns out “to be a vast improvement over its mortal counterpart” (40). I add another function here.

¹² Nora gives “an official definition” of *lieu de mémoire*: “a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (“From *Lieux*” xvii).

continuity of the tincture of the past has been kept on and on until the present.

I use “savings” to indicate its literal meaning of “money saved for future use,” but it extends to an act of “preservation or redemption, esp. from loss or danger” generally (“Savings”). Even when the family is “at the bottom of the rice,” the savings accrue. Accompanied with the savings are their desires that have endured, survived, and lived through time: “We had inventoried our desires, caressing and counting them” (*H* 36). This is a way to record and accumulate the past experiences with each passing day in a form of counting the materialized token of memory. Symbolically it is a way to make each day count. The savings are not only the measures of memory but also the treasure of it.

How the savings are kept works similarly to memory. In a continuous counting and producing process, the money with its congruity of memory is secreted in a countable form. Memory is saved and safe from ruin, destruction, or harm. Instead of being put on a bank account, the savings are kept at hand, and under control. What is under control is not only the accessibility of the savings, but also the memory accompanied with it. The act of saving has produced savings of money, and thus provoked a sense of preserving what would otherwise have easily been passed away. It adds to life a materialized memory through preservation and accumulation. Savings of memory produce added perceptivity that goes through/with time. They (money and memory) may be insignificant in the beginning, but as time elapses they will gradually grow to a wealth for the later generation. Without them, unforgetfulness, remembrance, and the generation of new memories may not have surfaced. Like the money saved between the tensions of meager wages and making ends meet, memory is preserved from the collision between remembrance and forgetting, and between “escape” and “keep going.”

Min’s memory, whether it comes unconsciously from her dream or from her conscious searching and scratching, constitutes a meaningful personal experience. The recurrence of it signifies the difficulty in her cultural adaptation to the present life. It expresses an immigrant woman’s ambivalent feelings of disappointment, longing, and hope. Min’s memory hints at both pessimism and optimism. It implies her complex feelings of loss and a wish to go on. Based on the negotiation between the two temporal spaces of past and present, her memory

inevitably involves a broader domain of her home and host culture. In a larger historical and cultural context, the personal memory can also be understood as the collective and social memory of this group of people.

(Un)Forgetfulness

In *Hunger*, the narrator tells a story which links the indigestion of certain food to a person's psychological trauma. The story is told like this:

On Taiwan, I knew a Fujianese woman who was suddenly unable to digest asparagus. It had been her favorite food, but suddenly it was bringing on deep cramps that made her burst into tears. [...] [T]hen one day she confided to a nurse that she had recently lost an unborn child. Afterwards she had no more stomach trouble [...]. (*H* 104)

The healing of the woman's indigestibility comes about by talking about her problem. This confirms the aim of Anna's oral history project at school: "there lay some hope of healing in mining the past, in digging it out and laying it down before others" (82). As Anna suggests, "Maybe talking about it will make him [Tian] feel better" (82). It seems that a traumatic event can be healed or eased as a wound if the memory relating to it is expressed in talking.

Tian is depicted as having little appetite. As the narrator says:

He had never paid much attention to food. He didn't know the names of vegetables; pork or chicken tasted the same to him. He sometimes had to be reminded to eat more than a single bowl of rice; he had a habit of simply sitting at the table, not even thirsty, with the light carving shadows into his face. (*H* 51)

Using this "seductive and naive idea" of healing poor digestion by talking through one's problems (82), I suggest that there is a correspondence between Tian's digesting disorder and his unspoken past. But unlike that Fujianese woman, Tian carefully avoids mentioning anything about his problem. He lacks forgetfulness to face it. Unforgetfulness deprives him of the chance to let it out. Memory is, as psychologist Elizabeth Loftus says, "a complex construct of experiences stored with particular attention to importance and accessibility" (13). If so, Tian endows this piece of unwanted yet unforgettable memory with so much importance that he purposefully suppresses it and denies

himself and/or others the accessibility to it. The problem remains there forever.

In his second essay “Guilt, Bad Conscience and Related Matters” from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche uses the metaphor of digestion to illustrate forgetfulness as an ability to will or to promise. The mental ingestion, or “the active use of forgetfulness” in Nietzsche’s term, is at work while “the underworld of our functional organs keeps working for and against one another” (25-26). In Nietzsche’s opinion, the work of functional organs is the work of physical ingestion. As he says, “we are digesting what we alone live through and experience and absorb” (25). It is this use of active forgetfulness that maintains a person’s “psychic order, quiet, and etiquette” (26). For Nietzsche, forgetfulness leaves room “for something new,” and “for the nobler functions and officials, for ruling, thinking ahead, determining what to do” (25). He thinks positively of forgetfulness as “an active capability to repress” (25).

However, forgetfulness “as a force, as a form of strong health” works against memory where promises were once made or wills were pledged (Nietzsche 26). That is to say, if a person is unable to forget, he or she will suffer from memories of his or her promises or wills. As Nietzsche says:

if forgetfulness were not present, there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hoping, no pride, no present. The man in whom this repression apparatus is harmed and not working properly we can compare to a dyspeptic (and not just compare)—he is “finished” with nothing. (26)

For Nietzsche, both forgetfulness and unforgetfulness are necessary in a person’s physical and mental wellness. They take place alternately in one’s memory. When forgetfulness ceases to function, unforgetfulness takes place. Nietzsche sees this inability to forget positively as,

an active wish not to be free of the matter, a continuing desire for what one willed at a particular time, a real memory of one’s will, so that between the original “I will” or “I will do” and the actual discharge of the will, its real action, without thinking about it, a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of the will can intervene, without breaking this long chain of the will. (26)

Nietzsche turns the passiveness of inability to forget into an active form. The inability is not a lacking to do anything, but is transformed into another ability of “a real memory of one’s will.” Therefore, this unforgetfulness goes beyond the power of merely not forgetting or indigestion of a promise a person has once made. It actively generates his will of power to act upon it. Thus, “he is strong enough to remain upright when opposed by misfortune, even when ‘opposed by fate’” (27).

In the light of Nietzsche’s argument, I regard Tian’s poor appetite as a symptom of his inability to forget.¹³ Specifically, Tian cannot accept the fact that he has not fulfilled his envisioned future after immigrating. It is his inability to forget the promise rather than the unrealized of the promise itself that makes food so indigestible to him, and his present life so unbearable to him and his family. However, in the case of Tian, he endures not only the living memory of his traumatic migration but also the fading prospects of his music career. Though he is tough enough to sustain harsh conditions and to hold on to his will, Tian lacks initiative and assertiveness to act upon it. In Nietzsche’s words, he fails to “keep his foot ready to kick the scrawny unreliable men, who make promises without being entitled to, and to hold his cane ready to punish the liar who breaks his word in the very moment it comes out of his mouth” (27).¹⁴ That is to say, he cannot transform his inability to forget to “a real memory of his will,” as Nietzsche has asserted. His unforgetfulness ruthlessly works along its negative track to achieve the harmful result. Tian fixes himself and his family tightly to his unforgetfulness. In the end, he is “‘finished’ with nothing,” and remains a man of inability (26).

Presentation of Tian’s Unforgetfulness

As is mentioned in the analysis above, Nietzsche perceives a connection of a person’s unforgetfulness with his inability to digest. Similarly, Tian’s lack of appetite is a physical symptom of his mental problem. In reading Tian’s experiences, I will extend this inability to several other aspects. It manifests itself in Tian’s powerlessness: he cannot work up to

¹³ In the next chapter, Tian’s poor appetite is discussed in contrast to his strong desire. Here, I elucidate his appetite in the light of Nietzsche’s view on unforgetfulness.

¹⁴ Nietzsche uses this sentence to illustrate what is necessary for a man of “an enduring unbreakable will” to do (27).

the position of assistant professorship in the conservatory, he has a tenuous relation with his colleagues, and he is caught in a troubled relationship with everyone in his family. In short, all these inabilities can be narrowed down to his failure to transform his inability to forget into forgetfulness, i.e. “the actual discharge of the will, its real action” (Nietzsche 26), so as to acquire an ability to will or to promise in the new circumstances.

If forgetfulness leaves out a space for “new things, circumstances” (26) as Nietzsche says, Tian “lacked the forgetfulness that is essential to moving on” (*H* 96). His refusal to talk about the past suggests his inability to move on. It is not the fearful weight of his traumatic past that makes it indigestible. Rather, his unforgetfulness deprives him of the ability to ingest and accept it. The haunting memory of the unforgettable experiences around migration denies him anything else. As the narrator says, “The shadow of his past had covered him, and he could no longer see us” (82). Tian does not notice his wife’s new shoes even though she stretches her legs to make him notice (18). His violin cover is worn, the lapels of his jacket have frayed, and his overcoat is shabby, but Min needs to spend time “coaxing him to buy new things” (21). Tian is unhappy with his wife’s pregnancies because he thinks “Musicians can’t afford children” (37). He makes no improvement in his stumbling English. He has foreseen no prospects in training his daughters, but he stubbornly goes on. In short, “he ignored everything, holding onto his own tight, shining wire of hope and plans” (112).

The contradiction between Tian’s life in new circumstances and his denial of anything new can be traced back to the time of his immigration. For Tian, home has passed away and cannot be relived. When he decided to leave, it was time to forget. But he cannot easily let go of the past. Nor is he capable of regaining his losses or of a new establishment afterwards in the new place. This is symbolically a non-identification with his new being and subjectivity. The paradox between what he should do and what he actually does renders him in a state of vagueness and gloominess. This state is repeatedly depicted in the text:

[He looked] as if he had just awakened from sleep and was remembering, for a moment, his interrupted dream. (*H* 49)

He had a way of looking at people as if he were envisioning them at another moment in time, the future, but there were also moments when

he stared blankly, as if reeling from the truth. Now his eyes had no expression at all. (54)

The more confused Tian looks, the more strongly his strangeness makes itself felt. Through his muteness, blank look, and silent melancholy, his past keeps flooding back into every ordinary day:

I began to see that all of Tian's specifications—the chopsticks, the breakfast food, the placement of lamps—were slips of willpower, signs of a forbidden loyalty to his other house that he had been barred forever from entering. Vigilantly, he fought against his memories of his house, but it could be called to mind by a simple trick of light, and it could not be forced away by sunshine or special food. (29)

In the narrator's speculation, Tian's specifications become a "living presence" of his past. Though he seldom mentions anything, his everyday habits, wrapped in the sullen silence, speak out. It is right there in his exactness: "the chopsticks, the breakfast food, the placement of lamps." The traces of homeland memory are everywhere. In his silence, Tian unconsciously speaks his past "in the language of family—a form of expression that is both more direct and more ruthless than social or public speech" (Hoffman 9). The potency and profoundness of this "direct" language reveals Tian's melancholy to repossess a connection to what he has missed. His desire to train his daughters as musicians is a reliving of his old desire. It is not a material goal, but the persistent memory of a desire that constitutes the anchor in his life in the US.

But the persistence of memory, i.e. his unforgetfulness, also constitutes his suffering. It becomes a source of his trauma. In the elaboration of what causes trauma, Ernst Van Alphen says:

It is not the extremity of the event which causes trauma. An event or situation can become traumatic for someone when this person's symbolic order does not provide consistent frames of reference in terms of which that event or situation can be experienced. [...] In short, the problem which causes trauma is [...] the split between the *living* of an event and the availability of forms of representation through which the event can be *experienced*. ("Second-Generation" 482)

Taking this idea into account, Tian's inability to forget produces another inability. This inability deprives his symbolic order of providing "consistent frames of reference" in his new socio-cultural environment.

The result is that he cannot work through that event or situation. Thus, he remains traumatized and continues to suffer. Burdened by an ideal brought with him from his homeland, Tian is detached from the present and still lives in his past. The present is weighed down under the heavy load of the past.

The excessive weight splits Tian's psyche into two. One part is living in the world of the past, which he tries (not) to recuperate through memories. The other lives in the present, a very difficult world of adversities. The migration problematizes his being. He cannot reclaim the Tian before migration, and the Tian after it disappoints him. The contradiction between the temporal discontinuity caused by migration and the continuity of his fixed desire leaves him in an ambivalent state of being both detached and attached. He lives in the confinement of the past, and can only be understood through the lens of past. His perseverance of a lost past contributes to his growing distraction and disenchantment with life in the present. He has no appetite for food, no desire for promotion, no tender love for his daughters, and no forgiveness for any excuse. Most importantly, he has no tolerance for anything going against the grain of his "desire."

The presentation of his resistance to new things reaches its climax when Tian is denied the teaching position in his music school. When his wife hears the news, she fights "an unaccountable anger at [her] husband" (*H* 48):

He had been unable, or unwilling, to assess the truth about his standing at the school. How could he have kept on, dogged, never changing his approach, never willing to fit in, without knowing that he would not be chosen? Or had he, somehow, understood all of this? Expected it? Wanted it? The resignation in his shoulders made me wonder if all along he had been hoping to fail. (48)

Tian's doggedness on the job with no prospect is another resistance to trying "anything else," or anything new. In the present lie new things and a future, but Tian ignores that. As he confesses before his death:

I didn't think about the hardships and sacrifices I was making, but of what was going to be. Even after getting fired, I didn't think about my job. That restaurant. But I focused on what was going to be. [...]
I kept thinking of the future. But I didn't understand. The future was already there. The future lay around me all those years. The

conservatory would never have given me tenure. Then the restaurant. And Ruth. One good look, and it would have been clear to any fool that all that hoping was a waste. (95)

Tian's last words suggest how he relates his past to the present and the future. Without full acknowledgement of the past, his present is built upon a deviated past, and the future is nothing more than a castle in the air. Tian is overwhelmed by a need to justify his act of deserting his parent's family. The failure of his music career makes him feel the desertion unjustifiable. He is caught in an ambivalent state of neither being able to confront nor to forget the memory of his past experience.

After Tian's death, the narrator looks back again at Tian's desire:

I know that he will not escape, cannot escape the punishment that invariably comes to people who dare to dream such flagrant and extravagant designs. [...] Even the ancient broken ship, the *Sonya*, with her vast indifference—how could she, I think, have failed to creak and shudder beneath the weight of this man's desire? The immensity of such hunger, folded into his cloth shelter, waiting in the middle of the sea. (*H* 113)

The narrator wonders at the immensity of Tian's desire. If even the *Sonya* barely bears the weight of it, how could he sustain it without being suppressed? How can one fulfill a desire of such weight carried over temporal and geographical distance? These powerful lines are narrated wholly in the present tense with acute emotions, set apart from the previous factual narration in the past tense. The change in tense attempts to bring into the present the immensity of Tian's still unsatisfied hunger. By letting a remote past speak in the present, the narration refuses to throw it into oblivion. The presence of this piece of memory makes the narrator, as well as the reader, come to understand the weight of "hunger" on Tian.

Tian's unforgetfulness is finally unlocked when, after his death, the narrator imagines his way back home. There, "it might be possible to forget that any time has passed" (*H* 96). The narrator hopes that "this memory can satisfy his ghost," and "will give him rest, [and] will help him to forget" (96). The fantasy offers Tian a return denied in reality. It is also a circular memorial trip. It starts from, and at last ends in, the old house back in China. In this trip, a bidirectional effect is generated. Memory can be both unsettling and settling. The fantasy offers a more

flexible way of looking at the effect of memory performance. Tian's fantasized return also miraculously unlocks the narrator. As she says, "After Tian's death, I went through several years with surprising ease. [...] I blew light and dry through the decisions and planning allotted me" (96-97). Min receives profits from Tian's benefits package and the collection at the restaurant. Finally she manages to make a down payment on their apartment (97).

Anna's Postmemory

With the emphasis on Tian's one-track mind, the daughters' "trauma," though explicitly narrated, seems not so severe. It is relatively unnoticed. However, the daughters grow up with Tian's unforgiveness and unforgetfulness. In the years of cruel violin practicing, they are uncomfortably exposed right under the fixed gaze of Tian's "dark, unblinking eyes" and "the spotlight of [their] father's fierce attention" (*H* 54, 63). They are "subjected to [...] his unremitting desires, his stubborn memories, his fury and personal disappointment" (82-83). The weight grows heavier when one daughter has no prospects and the other shows no interest in music. The heavy weight produces harmful effects on the daughters.

Tian's stubborn pursuit of music casts a shadow on the family. Like Ruth, Anna is also enveloped in the airtight family environment. Her cautious and nervous look follows Tian. In Anna's youth, her mother Min wonders if Anna has walked out of the shadow of Tian's melancholy (*H* 32). Min takes care to conceal her fears for Tian. When Anna is shut off outside the closed door of the practice room, Min reassures her that "Baba just needs to practice now. Baba will be back soon. Baba loves you" (32).¹⁵ Nevertheless, Anna is sensitive enough to develop inexplicable fears from early on:

Lately, she had begun to have specific fears; she saw menace in ordinary things: pigeons, headlights, faces in photographs. (38)

The teacher explained to Tian that she seemed afraid of the other children, stood apart and watched their gestures and expressions as if she could not hear. (46)

Anna, who stood big-eyed, listen[ed], in the doorway. Her wide eyes were riveted in terror on the tired man, her father. (47)

¹⁵ "Baba" is the Chinese expression for "Dad."

Memory leaves its unconscious traces in Anna's babyhood and childhood. She naturally understands the importance of music and the weight of her father's desire. In order to win Tian's love, Anna has been working hard at the violin. Even after Anna learns her limitation, her training still goes on. She decides to play a double concerto as a final hope to surprise and please Tian. But her lack of musical talents leaves her with no progress and actually results in a loss of love from Tian.

The shadowy effect penetrates into Anna's adolescence. She still has not grown more adventurous, but is "only sullen and withdrawn" (*H* 63). She "lacked the self-acceptance that might one day give her beauty or serenity" (63-64). Anna asks Min questions like "You and Baba never talk about yourselves" (64).¹⁶ She is interested in how and why Min and Tian got married, why they left China, why he wanted to be a violinist, and finally why music is so important (64-65). Anna believes that these questions "would unleash some crucial secret" (65). The last question is asked implicitly and explicitly many times. Min does not know why: "I don't know [...]. It's his desire. It's—it's part of his bargain with himself" (65).

The puzzlement Anna feels comes from a lack of knowledge due to the non-transmission of collective and family memory. The unspoken past is embedded in Tian's silence. The inaccessibility of the truth foreshadows the formidable nature of it. The children have no way to understand, or even to know, what actually happened to their parents. They are temporally, spatially and factually excluded from that experience. The family's culturally isolated living environment exacerbates the silence. Without any context to frame their reference, it is difficult for the daughters to make sense of their parents' beliefs and personalities. They do not "witness" even a second-hand trauma. The question "Is music so important?" that haunts the narrative in *Hunger* signifies the daughters' non-understanding to the father's past. The daughters are in a void of memory of the father's traumatic experience.

The void of a missing memory, in a sense, creates what Ellen Fine calls "absent memory." Fine uses this term to describe "the compact void of the unspeakable" (Fresco qtd. in Fine 44) in the children of Holocaust survivors. The children are "[r]epeatedly met with the silence of their

¹⁶ This sentence functions as a question because as is explained in the text, "many Chinese people don't like to ask each other direct questions" (64).

parents and relatives—who transmit the wounds of genocide, and not the memory” (43). As Fine writes:

They are haunted by the world that has vanished; a large gap exists in their history, and they desire to bridge this gap, to be informed about what occurred, to know something about members of their family who perished. However, they feel frustrated by the impotence of incomprehension; the past eludes and excludes them. (43)

The absence disrupts the continuity of a family narrative and the formation of identity in the children who grow up in those families. To fill in the blank spaces, Fine writes, the post-genocide children “are thus obliged [...] to find their own way back to the past that has been denied them—to remember what they did not know” (44). The paradoxical act of “remember[ing] what they did not know” is a symbolic memorization of a non-experience as if they had experienced it. The children of Holocaust survivors may “find their own way back” by visiting Auschwitz, the place where their parents lived through the traumatic event.

The children’s way back to the traumatic sites fills in the absence with a visual presentation of their parents’ memory. It is a “postmemory,” in Marianne Hirsch’s term. Hirsch develops this notion to describe the problematic situation of the second generation of survivors of traumatic events, especially of the children of Holocaust survivors. These children’s lives are overshadowed by their parents’ traumatic events of which they have no personal memory. As she says:

Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (*Family* 22)

The powerful memory of the non-experience is imposed on the children to the extent that it constitutes part of their own memory. They lose a sense of their own being. While recognizing the temporal delay of postmemory, Hirsch puts more emphasis on its continuity to the children. As she says, “the insistence on ‘post’ or ‘after’ [...] define[s] both a specifically inter- and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma” (“Generation” 106). The children are

generationally distanced from their parents' trauma, yet they live under its immediate consequences.

Hirsch uses "Holocaust postmemory" to address the specific postmemory that is experienced by the children of Holocaust survivors. Her modification of "postmemory" by "Holocaust" suggests that this kind of memory is not limited to the children of Holocaust survivors. As Hirsch says, "it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (*Family* 22). Susan Rubin Suleiman applies this memory to postcolonial diasporas (xi). In my analysis, postmemory specifically refers to "immigration postmemory." It is a secondary memory transferred from immigrants to their children. Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory is a useful frame for describing the children's relationship to their father's traumatic experience in Chang's text. The daughters live in the shadow of traumatic events which, like those of the Holocaust, "happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (Hirsch, "Generation" 107). Their "immigration postmemory" is also characterized by paradoxical feelings of an absent presence of their father's memory and a disconnected connection to that memory.¹⁷

Hirsch favors the term "postmemory" over "absent memory" (*Family* 22). As she explains, "Postmemory [...] need not be absent or evacuated: it is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself" (22). Following Hirsch's argument, I interpret absent memory not as a state of mind in which nothing is present, but as a state full of "the guilt of nonparticipation, a kind of regret for having been born too late" (Fine 43). The absence is replaced by senses of frustration, and feelings of being emptied or excluded. It is a memory filled with cracks or gaps, a "memory shot through with holes" (Raczymow qtd. in Hirsch, *Family* 23).

In Anna's childhood and adolescence, her life narrative is predominated by the traumatic effect inflicted by the traumatized and traumatizing father. Her postmemory is related to her father's unforgiveness, which works out of the performance of an unforgettable memory. She suffers the immediate effects of it, which constitutes a

¹⁷ As Van Alphen mentions, Hirsch uses the term "postmemory" because of "the children's close personal *connection* with the parents while at the same time speaking of a memory that is indirect and *dis-connected*" ("Second-Generation" 487).

secondary trauma. This trauma is more persistent and fluid than the father's because it lacks a solid base for reference. As Eva Hoffman says about the second generation's difficulty of living with their parents' trauma, "wrestling with shadows can be more frightening, or more confusing, than struggling with solid realities" (66). In my following analysis, I will use Anna as an example to show how the "frightening" and "confusing" effect propels her culturally-specific response to her family history of trauma, and how she turns this effect into a state of confidence and ease.

Working Through Postmemory

In Hirsch's formulation, "postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (*Family* 22). It is therefore suspended between the narrative of personal memory and that of collective history. Hirsch regards postmemory as a "very particular form of memory" (22). It is less immediate than memory because of a lack of knowledge of the source experience. It is more immediate than history because of a deep personal connection. However, the generational distance creates an immediate traumatic effect. The paradox happens out of the contradiction between the "absence" of the experience and the presence of its impact on the children's and the parents' life.

Hirsch also recognizes the ambivalent nature of postmemory. She says, "its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (*Family* 22). She further explains this statement: "This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past" (22). So in Hirsch's formulation, although the imposed burden of postmemory can be something consciously achieved, it is secured on a fluid base of personal imagination in the intergenerational transmission of a past experience. That is to say, the children re-create the parents' experience by imagining themselves in the situation of their parents. Hirsch's later text "The Generation of Postmemory" explores further how to perform the "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (107). As she explains, the children "'remember' [...] by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up [...] to constitute memories in their own right" (106-07). This way of

“remembering” is again paradoxical for its fulcrum is something the children have never experienced.

In Hirsch’s use, postmemory differs from memory in its “post-ness,” and its “generational remove.” Postmemory conveys “temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its belatedness” (“Projected” 8). The inherent qualities of postmemory, for example its indirectness, fragmentariness, and imaginativeness, seem to work in an opposite direction. This working articulates an urgency to subvert the “post-” qualities and to build up a solid base to make up for them. This is a desire to work through the traumatic effect transmitted to the later generation of a trauma in the working of postmemory. Between the tension of the generational distance and immediate effect of postmemory, between the factual absence and consequential presence of that event, I perceive a strategy of how to deconstruct it. It is to create a consistent frame of reference for a previous traumatic experience. The solidarity of this reference recuperates the precarious nature of “post-ness.” This construction is an act of coming to terms with postmemory, that is, to break the engulfment of the parents’ traumatic memory, and to undo the traumatic effect.

The constant presence of an absence of what happened to her father haunts Anna. She recognizes the necessity to fill in the gap. The absence of knowledge fastens her hold on her father’s past. It motivates her “interpretative urge” (Van Alphen, “Second-Generation” 477) to reflect on her family history, and “resolutely” beyond it to that of a whole people:

she studied the Chinese language, history, literature. She could recite the long line of dynasties as well as I had ever been taught to do. She had even begun to read in translation modern Chinese authors whom I had never bothered to look at. She developed a passionate interest in China’s warlord era, and the role internal factions and coalitions had played in the events that followed the Japanese invasion. (*H* 81)

Anna adopts another way of “remember[ing] what [she] did not know” (Fine 44). She studies Chinese history and culture. The desire to know the past leads her (re)search beyond family narrative.

Min does not understand Anna’s obsession with the complex Chinese history. She wonders, “Was she not interested in the present, or

the future?" (*H* 81). However, the boring history is meaningful to Anna because it is part of her cultural inheritance and it shapes her sensibility. Through historical research, Anna searches for the memories of her parents. Her research is a symbolic journey to the sites of her father's traumatic experience. In this way, she can position her narrative in the present. The study helps her to uncover her family history in a broader context. Her father's story is rooted in that particular context of history, politics, and geography. His story in that context is part of the larger story of immigrant children growing up in the US. In answering Min's question, I see that Anna's choice of study is exactly out of her interest in the present and the future. The denied inheritance of family and cultural narrative has deeply intrigued Anna's scholarly interest in Chinese history. For memory discourses are "tied to the histories of specific nations and states and need to be rigorously read within those contexts" (Huyssen 82). The inaccessibility of a personal past in public and private space conveys an urgency to mediate memory of that past across temporal and spatial distances.

Anna's study is a means to mediate memory of her family past so she can recover herself from postmemorial effects. The study provides her with a solid ground for historical reasoning. She uses history as a reference point to decode her position. This bridges the remove of a postmemory from both memory and history that Hirsch asserts. Personal concern is turned into a public connection. A family past is interpreted from historical perspective. Suspension of her parents' past is replaced by an informed understanding of that historical context. The depersonalized history gives Anna clues to understand her father's memories that have excluded her. This fills the memory holes with those specific, solid histories.

Anna's choice of study is motivated by an involuntary burden of her postmemory. This predestined burden is allotted to her as a member of the after-generation. She takes responsibility for her position as a descendent of Chinese American immigrants. The historical dimensions of her study transgress the boundary of her personal postmemory from her family narrative to a more distanced cultural background from which her family narrative derives. In turn, the specification of her position and the transgression of the boundary give rise to an ambitious "project" of a collective Chinese history. Anna takes the project to heal the traumatic effects of her postmemory. This discontinues the intergenerational

transmission of a traumatic memory. It matters little how close her reconstructions of the past are to her father's original experience. What is important is that she "remembers" the events, acts, and values of her collective group.

Anna's way of working through postmemory is a construction of a new life. It runs counter to the mechanism of postmemory. Hirsch's postmemory works in this way:

Postmemorial work [...] strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. ("Generation" 111)

Anna's construction reverses this process by working the other way around. It is the more distant memorial structures in Chinese history that work to activate and embody her new life. This new life is therefore composed of the activation and embodiment of social and cultural memory. It is steadily and solidly constructed by informed knowledge acquired in a scientific way.

The reverse mechanism deconstructs the working of postmemory, thus lessening or diminishing the postmemorial effect on Anna. This process can be seen from Anna's changes through college years and afterwards. In her college years, when Anna is home on the weekends, the vigilance returns:

when she opened the door there was still that watchfulness about her. She would sit at the kitchen table with me, her eyes darting over my shoulder and around the apartment to see if anything had changed. (*H* 80)

Behind "her intellect and sophistication," there is still "the yearning that had always tortured her" (82). However, college changes her:

she discovered a place where she could relax. She found friends at school; she seemed happy there. (80)
I heard a touching new confidence in her voice. [...] She had lost her whine, had grown self-possessed, attractive. (82)

The changes continue even after Anna's PhD study. She becomes more mature: "a little softer than she used to be, a little further into womanhood" (109). Anna feels relaxed not only because she is away

from home and makes friends at college, but also because college is a medium through which she can get closer to herself and her family past. There, she explores a personal history in a public background totally foreign to her.

Anna opens up a space of unraveling both a recent personal past and a remote public past. This relieves the perplexity that has haunted and dis-eased her for years. For Hirsch, postmemory is characterized by its “delayed, indirect, secondary” nature (*Family* 13). Anna’s active (re)search produces immediate, direct, and primary effects. It undoes the postmemorial bind on her. With enriched historical knowledge and increased understanding of the past, Anna has acquired greater ease and confidence with herself. This frees her from her sullenness and watchfulness.

Anna’s changes show that the trans-generational structure of postmemory generates a corresponding “trans-” effect. This effect first goes across generational boundary as a burden on the later generation. The inherent weight then transforms into forces to build up a new life. This disentangles a confusion of the past and lays a firm foundation to imagine future prospects in the present. In Anna’s life, memory grows with her expanded understanding of the past in a new context. Like the protagonists in other Asian American novels like *Monkey King*, *Face* and *Obasan*, Anna too, “ultimately affirm[s] individual identity through memory, the desire to know the past, and confront it” (Grice, “Mending” 82). Yet Anna’s confrontation, unlike these three texts, is not a simultaneous “double-edged” affirmation and traumatization.¹⁸ It is a “double-win” effect. Rather than being victimized by a victim, Anna interrupts her victimhood with her double task of academic research and identity construction.

The process of Anna’s exaltation from sullenness into sophistication and confidence can be termed under Nicola King’s conceptualization of “Nachträglichkeit.”¹⁹ This is originally a Freudian

¹⁸ Grice describes the “double-edgedness” of confronting a traumatic memory in these texts: confronting a traumatic past ultimately affirms individual identity, but this is always a traumatic process in itself (82).

¹⁹ Freud conceived the concept in 1895 in his project for a scientific psychology. According to Eickhoff, this term is translated into English as “deferred action.” It is characterized by “biphasic development and latency indispensable for understanding temporal connections and psychic causality” (1453).

term, which “provides the memory [...] with traumatic significance and signifies a circular complementarity of both directions of time” (Eickhoff 1435). King further develops it as a model of memorial work with reference to retranscription of memories (11). *Nachträglichkeit* operates in the present, but “must inevitably incorporate the awareness of ‘what wasn’t known then’” (12).²⁰ King develops the notion in the following way:

If the “fresh circumstances” according to which memories are “retranscribed” are read as the *actual* fresh circumstances of the life of the subject, including those circumstances in which the events of the past are remembered, this becomes a productive model for memory, and one which is close to the structure and effect of narrative itself. It also suggests that the construction of the self is a provisional and continuous process, rather than the “recovery” of an “original” identity. (17)

For King, the “retranscribed fresh circumstances” produced by the mechanism of *Nachträglichkeit* problematize the coherence between a person’s recovery of the past and unity with his or her self in the present. The dynamic and productive construction of identity over time is subject to the active introduction of “retranscribed fresh circumstances” within and around the self. When these “retranscribed fresh circumstances” are gradually incorporated into Anna’s ordinary life and become the “actual fresh circumstances,” they suddenly become unordinary. They produce a connection with her past and present life, and shape her identity with a cultural awareness of being a Chinese American. The “recovery” of Chinese history and culture is not a “recovery” of her identity defined by that history or culture. It brings about a continuous development of Anna’s identity in line with “what was unknown then” in her American realities. Anna’s example suggests that a person’s identity is continuously under construction in the light of the acquired past. It is a process of retranscription from a person’s “fresh circumstances” to the “actual fresh circumstances” in King’s term. The “actual fresh circumstances” produce actual differences between Anna in the past and the present, and between Anna and her parent generation. By

²⁰ King analyzes two contrasting models of memory within psychoanalytic theory: memory as archeological excavation and *Nachträglichkeit*. The former emphasizes the recovery of the buried past while the latter works with reference to retranscription of memories (11).

incorporating a collective historical knowledge and insight into a narrative reconstruction of an individual's life history, the rift with the past is repaired. A sense of continuous construction of identity is established.

In asserting the discontinuity of traumatic transmission between generations, Van Alphen points out that "it is precisely this failure [of continuity] that causes the intense desire for it on the side of the children" ("Second-Generation" 478). In *Anna*, the working of the "intense desire" discontinues the transmission of a traumatic effect. Her desire for continuity of a personal past sets her family history in a culturally meaningful background of reference. In this working, her instinctive "interpretative urge" is uplifted into a conscious and intentional urge of restoration and reconstruction. Symbolically, she constructs a frame within which she breaks through a traumatic event. This avoids "a repetition of the event in its full, immediate directness."²¹ If trauma is a doomed fate that falls upon someone, Anna's developed understanding of the past provides consistent frames of reference from which she walks and works out of the destined shadow. This working-through of a traumatic fate is not enforced by a total forgetfulness. It is out of acts of cultural recall, a retrieval of a history from which her family originates. If the dynamics between the two generations of the Holocaust is characterized by discontinuity as Van Alphen argues, in my opinion, this discontinuity also characterizes the migrants of two generations. The younger generation breaks away from the confinement inflicted by the past.

Anna's Later Life

The shadow inherited from the father is turned into affirmative construction in *Anna* and into rebellious resistance in *Ruth*. After her mother's death, only *Anna* is left in the apartment. She plans to flee the house with all its unhappiness and to start anew. She wants to "release her punishing ties to [their] old place, its floorboards warped from decades of unhappiness" (*H* 107). She sells the old apartment and buys a new one:

²¹ Van Alphen says, "This lack of a reference frame [...] can only lead to a repetition of the event in its full, immediate directness" (*Caught* 163). I use a reverse statement of it.

The magazines were filled with photographs of empty rooms: kitchens, bedrooms, breakfast nooks, each wall covered with framed paintings, each table holding a vase of flowers. [...] Living in these photographs, my daughter would finish her night of studying and walk to an imaginary bedroom, perhaps a vast loft, perhaps a small, high-ceilinged chamber of a Manhattan townhouse, with its narrow, antique wrought-iron bed and deep comforter of down. (106-07)

The pictures of new homes in magazines show grace and elegance. They imply a strong contrast with the family's old house with "the faded prints and furniture, [...] the place blown barren, faded clean and ready for change" (107). The imagined life living in the new homes is easy and comfortable. However, after some "false" attempts of looking at new apartments, Anna "refused to take one apartment, then another [...], and] she finally said no" (107). When a couple interested in the old house come to have a look at it, Anna watches them with an expression of barely quelled surprise, as if expecting that they could see "the dingy cobwebs of [their] long-endured unhappiness" (107). They bid, but again Anna refuses.

The reason why Anna refrains from looking at new houses is that they are "[s]trangers' houses, comforting because they held no past, meant to be viewed exactly in the moment" (*H* 107). The comfort and newness—two advantages usually associated with a person's choice of purchasing a house—become negative factors in Anna's decision. The hesitation between leaving and staying is a reflection of Anna's wrestling with not only the shadows of the past but also with her present and future self. She is at the critical moment of developing a vision of how to receive and interpret the past in the dilemma of acceptance or denial. Her final decision makes clear that the past is not something she wants to dispose. It is exactly what she expects to pick up and to rediscover with new insight. The past has been recorded in the family's house. The map of their lives has been drawn in this house (83):

our family story lingers here. It waits under the floor; it has slid into the crawl space, wound around the stubborn beams and girders that were already old [...]. (14)

Music lingers in these walls, uncoiling in the space between the kitchen and the practice room, moving through the hall in wisps and strands of melody. I hear the high, throbbing sounds rising up through the heating vents like a woman's voice. Blunt chords of anger, fragile

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notes that barely whisper. I hear the sorrow that seems to run in all our blood, and also an unbreakable thread of love. (114)

Then, after her PhD ceremony, Anna begins with the disposal. She drags down and hoists all the faded curtains into the dumpster. Workmen come and drag away the sagging, battered furniture. She burns boxes of canceled checks from long-closed accounts, hospital, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and Sears (108). The burning reminds me of the proverb: “let bygones be bygones.” The “bygones” in Anna’s burning are useless and outdated items. There is no sense to keep them anymore even though they are preserved during many years. There are other “bygones” of a more emotional order: the lack of tender love from the parents, the overwhelming control from the father, Ruth’s selfishness and irresponsibility of playing fast and loose with her family. The questions repeated in the text are not explicitly answered, and may never be answered. There is no further information about how Anna’s “oral history” project works. It seems that there is no urgency to continue it any more. The knot of the past has been undone with the burning of outdated checks and the falling of the ash.

After that, Anna starts to remodel the house. She repaints and refurnishes it with new colors, new furniture and ornaments. This is a symbolic adaptation of her family past and cultural heritage to better align with her contemporary realities. The refurnishing transforms the old house with new images of a modern, individual style. It both preserves and renovates what has been passed down to her. If “the experience of ‘homelessness’ [...] is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material” (George 171), then Anna’s new home spiritually and materially built upon her family “luggage” consolidates her hominess in the US. In reading what Anna has done, another proverb comes to mind: “keep the essence, reject the dregs.” The essence that Anna has kept is the richness and depth of her ethnic culture:

Now Anna works at a nonprofit organization called the Asia Culture Institute, and she collects old Chinese furniture, elegantly shaped rosewood pieces to complement the spareness of her pale, plain walls. Her coffee table, which she has never puts her feet upon, is a low K’ang table with graceful legs that curve out, then in, ending in what are called “horse’s hooves.” Her desk is a late-Qing rosewood version of a western desk. Her dishes are a simple rice pattern, the kind in

which the rice-shaped designs become translucent when the bowls are lifted to the light. (*H* 109)

Anna reclaims lost traditions and heritage. She reforms them with freshness, and rebuilds her present and future upon them. Even though Chinese cultural traces are apparent, I would not say that Anna's way of living is based on a Chinese past in an American present. Rather, it is a creative and meaningful adaptation of both. It is symbolically presented in the dish that she prepares:

She makes for herself the sort of thoughtful, savory dishes I have always made, although she uses odd vegetables in her stirfries and she has learned to cook with Indian spices. (109)

Anna inherits the thoughtful and savory part of her ethnic culture from her mother, but produces a dish with ingredients of the US and other countries. It is difficult to tell whether it is a Chinese or an American dish or which part in the dish is Chinese and which is American. Neither the metaphor "melting pot" nor "salad bowl" fits in the situation. From the former metaphor the original ingredients cannot be perceived while in the latter the ingredients still preserve their original flavor. Rather, it is a new dish, a dish that is representative of cultural transformation and hybridization in American culture. This dish may satisfy Anna's hunger in her multicultural environment. The implication here is not simply an ethnic denial or acceptance, but a renewed, hybridized balance between the two through contact, mixing and interaction with other cultural resources. Thus, the two cultural conditions are mediated in their everyday contact.

Hoffman emphasizes the "living connection" of the second generation of Jews to the Holocaust. She refers to this generation as the "hinge generation." It is because in them, "received, transferred knowledge of events is transmuted into history, or into myth" (xv). In my study, the hinge function works differently. A hinge is "a device for holding together two parts such that one can swing relative to the other" ("Hinge"). I consider that these "two parts" consist of more than one layer of meaning. They are the memory of the past and the reality of the present related to it, the traumatic situation itself and a new understanding of it. Through "swinging," i.e. the performance of memory, the binding and haunting force of a trauma is processed into a

new force of release. The act of swinging is not merely a movement from one part to the other. It is a transformation of the living connection with the past to a well-balanced understanding of a present. It is also a consciousness of drawing insights from the past to illuminate the present. This is an act of uncovering what has been covered, remembering what is forgotten, forgetting what should be forgotten, doing what has been undone, and finally undoing what has been done.

Unlike those Chinese American children who need to become “American” to fit into the mainstream culture, Anna picks up and holds onto Chinese elements. By living in the US in a self-made Chinese environment, Anna satisfies her need for a spiritual quest of a family past. She chooses to incorporate Chineseness into her cultural identity. Her affirmative memorization keeps her ethnic past alive in a new form in the present. The persistence of the past continues her ethnic identity as a woman of Chinese origin in an all-American environment that often disavows this identity. She maintains her family’s tangible and intangible legacies: a brownstone “softly falling” house on a neglected street in Brooklyn (*H* 15), and her mother’s desires to stay that “seep through the rooms, [...] and] move like molecules in her blood” (108).

Mieke Bal elaborates on cultural recall “in many instances” as “not consciously and willfully contrived” (*Acts* vii). I would say that Anna’s case does not belong to these “many instances” of unconscious and unwilling contrivance. She keeps memory alive in the new culture by weaving a fabric of individual and collective past into the present in a sensible and “scholarly” way. Life built on the connection with Chinese cultural heritage paves the way for her development in research and career. This adds a new perspective of living in the US as an ethnic Chinese American.

The preservation of Chinese culture is also about a fear of loss, of decay. The family’s “neighborhood has been declared a historic district” (*H* 114). Chang’s text is also historic in that it provides an alternative for the work of memory. In her last lines, the narrator voices her anxiety:

Perhaps she [Anna] has been dreaming of her greatest hope and fear—that the house is gone, that it is destroyed, and nothing more remains of it. This is an echo of my own fear: that there might come a time when no one on earth will remember our lives. (114)

The story ends with a sense of fear. This fear has been lingering as the narrator speaks Chinese less and less. She feels “as if [she] were a member of a dying tribe, and those with whom [she] cared to communicate were growing fewer and fewer” (97). It is also Anna’s fear. Memories, or people with memory, preserve Chinese tradition through the present and even into the future. Their fear also hints at a wish: to preserve and retrieve a memory even if it has been dismissed. The impetus to preserve their heritage becomes more pressing when their link to it is threatened. This is exactly what Anna has done. She reclaims and protects a past that is almost forgotten and ignored even by those of Chinese origin.

Conclusion

Cultural recall works differently in each of *Hunger*’s four protagonists. Tian and Ruth adhere to the past in a stubborn way. Memory degenerates their ability to forget. It generates a bind that pins Tian to his ambition, and a force that would have overwhelmed Ruth if she didn’t run away from it. Min is a woman of much sentimentality. She nurtures the past in her imagination, dream-work and fantasy. But because of her unforgetfulness she cannot fully assimilate into the adopted world. Throughout her immigrant life, Min remains in a subordinated position in the family and in American society. For Anna, memory is an “act of will.” Her early life is overshadowed by an unknown and unknowable past. However, she uses the very thing that overshadows her childhood and adolescence to construct a present and future life. The question that Hoffman raises— “how do you get over loss that has no concrete shape or face?” (73)—is an interrogation of its possibility. Anna answers it affirmatively by leaving behind victimhood suffered by the majority of the post-generation of survivors of a trauma. If it is loss or shadow that is transferred from the first to the second generation, as Hoffman claims, then Anna’s development builds a way to undo the losses and to de-shadow the shadowiness. Her construction of knowledge and maturity changes the melancholic fate of the following generation.