

5. *Lives Broken by the Tiananmen Square Massacre:
Consequences in Chinese-Australian Literature*

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Historical overview

Chinese peoples seem to have travelled to Australia and traded with Indigenous Australian peoples long before the British settlements were established (Macintyre 13). However, official Chinese immigration started in 1792 when the British Empire felt pressure to colonise the new territories and asked the Chinese government for help to populate this territory. Consequently, the Chinese Migration Scheme (1804) allowed thousands of Chinese workers to migrate to Australia (Jayasuriya, Walker and Gothard 209). In the 1850s gold was discovered in Victoria and many Chinese people felt encouraged to migrate. As Michele Langfield explains in *Australia and Asia*, between 1840 and 1900 “over 100000 Chinese arrived as ‘sojourners’ from mainland China mostly seeking gold... Most returned to China and the number of permanent Chinese residents was only 27000 at the turn of the century” (29). The British government, which regulated the entry of migrants in the colony, had a dual attitude: on the one hand, it encouraged Chinese migration to Australia as it was beneficial for British shipping companies; but, on the other hand, it imposed taxes on landing (as high as £100), restricted their numbers, limited their activities within Australia and, from the late 1870s to 1890s, different states and territories banned their entry to the goldfields (Langfield 30).

In 1901 Australia became a Federation and part of the Commonwealth. The population was approximately 4 millions and Melbourne was the largest city with more than half a million inhabitants. Only 3% of the total population was estimated to be Indigenous (full blood Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were not counted in the census), 77% had been born in Australia and 18% were first-generation migrants, mainly British (Woods 1). However, most of the migrants with a non-English speaking background were Chinese: approximately 30,000 were full blood (with less than 500 women) and about 3,000 half caste (“Chinese in Australia”). Regarding politics, two of the first laws passed by the new government were the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901) and the *Pacific Islanders Labourers Act* (1901) which effectively implanted the White Australian Policy (1901-67), aimed at creating a country inhabited by whites, without Indigenous

Australians and migrants of other races. Chinese migration virtually ended and the numbers of the Chinese living in Australia declined constantly. For example, in the Northern Territory numbers fell drastically: from almost 3,000 in the 1890s, to 1,330 in 1911, to 772 in 1921 and to 400 in 1939 (Dewar 14-21).

World War II and the common enmity towards Japan, which had invaded China (1937-45) and had attacked the north of Australia (Darwin, Broome and Townsville, for example, 1942-43) (“Air Raids”; Macintyre 191), had an effect on the diplomatic relations between Australia and China as these were established in July 1941 (Woodard 136). On the one hand, China wanted to encourage the United Kingdom’s and the United States of America’s support for the nationalist war through its relationship with Australia. On the other hand, Australia had mixed feelings: it sympathised with China due to the Japanese invasion of the country but Australia did not want a treaty of friendship with this country, distrusted China because of the Chinese interests in South East Asia, and, of course, had the White Australia Policy. However, John Burton, the leading foreign policy adviser, tried to “help build up the development and resilience of newly emergent Asian countries and nationalist movements” (Woodard 138-139). Consequently, in spite of their mutual distrust, diplomatic relations improved to the establishment of embassies in 1948.

However, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was formed on 1 October 1949, Prime Minister (PM) Chifley did not recognise the new government because communism was perceived as a threat. The Australian ambassador was called home for consultation, but his suggestion to recognise the PRC was not taken into account (Woodard 139-140). This situation was repeated with the following PM, Robert Menzies, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Richard Casey. The former was convinced by the American Domino theory and banned the PRC’s entry into the United Nations (Smith 102), while the latter failed to find a way of recognising the PRC with the support of New Zealand and Canada (Woodard 141).

Despite the tense relationship between China and Australia, the trade between the two countries continued: Australia exported wool and wheat to China, as wheat was absolutely necessary after the collapse of the Great Leap Forward and three consecutive droughts (Woodard 143).

Relations changed between 1972 and 1989. In July 1971, being opposition leader and, therefore, not the representative voice of Australia, Gough Whitlam led a delegation in Beijing (Woodard 143). Then, when he became PM in December 1972, he decided to open the negotiation for the recognition of the PRC which allowed the normalization of the relations between the countries. Furthermore, the Australian public started to change its perception of China from a threat to a friend. In the speech made on Parliament on 24 May 1973, PM Whitlam made his objectives explicit (“friendship, cooperation and mutual trust”), although this friendship was limited and not unconditional (“Our relationship with China will not develop at the expense of our relations with other countries”) (Woodard 144). PM Whitlam “believed in the universality of dialogue” (Woodard 145), and he even started conversations with North Korea in 1974.

The following Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser (1975-83), and his successor, Bob Hawke (1984-91), maintained a personal correspondence with Chinese leaders, so Australia maintained its influence as mediator. This was especially relevant when the countries did not share the same points of view over international conflicts, particularly,

over nuclear testing; human rights violation in Cambodia, an issue in which Australia tried to mediate; and, the situation in the Korean peninsula, in which Australia used to pass messages from the President of South Korea to China (Woodard 146-7).

Meanwhile, China stated that, regarding its relationship with Australia, “there were no matters left over from history” (Woodard 144), started considering Australia as an independent voice from the USA, and stopped seeing it as an imperialistic threat. Moreover, when Mao died and the ‘Gang of Four’ fell in 1976, China wanted stability and normalcy, was free to analyse its relationship with Australia without a framed ideology between them, and regarded Australia as a means to receive information and a different point of view of the events in South East Asia. Regarding home affairs, Deng Xiaoping, the core of the Chinese Communist Party, began the four modernization processes (in agriculture, industry, education and defence) in 1978 and birth control in 1981, therefore excluding political reforms (Creutzfeldt 3). The aforementioned reforms were introduced in two phases: the rural reform (1978-84) and the urban reform (1984-89) (Wang 23), which had three aims: to consolidate “the power of the government, [to consolidate] the coherence and moral authority of the Chinese Communist Party, and [to consolidate] the internal stability of the country” (Creutzfeldt 3) (my translation). The two main social problems became corruption and the growing dissatisfaction of part of the society, especially unemployed workers, peasants in rural areas and students, which caused the first protests at universities and led to the social movement of 1989.

During the 1974-84 decade, Australia and China improved their relations, which also meant more trade agreements and exchanges at educational, scientific, technological and defence levels. Some examples were: (1) trade agreement and parliamentary visit in 1973; (2) student exchanges in 1974; (3) agricultural exchanges and Family Reunion Agreement in 1976; (4) exchange visits of scientists, sport teams and media executives in 1977; (5) establishment of the Australia-China Council in 1978; (6) opening of state-to-province relations of the Bank of China between Victoria and Jiangsu and New South Wales and Guangzhou in 1979; (7) cooperation in Science and Technology signed in May 1980; (8) annual bilateral talks between officials and exchange of defence representatives in 1981; (9) establishment of the China Action Program to assist experts to Australia for a decade, in 1983; and, (10) direct flights between the countries, from 1984 (Woodard 147). All these exchanges and agreements meant that “Australian exports to China rose from \$62.8 million in 1972/3 ... to \$1056 million in 1984/5” (Woodard 147). In the visit of PM Hawke to North East Asia in 1984, Premier Zhao Ziyang took another step forward and suggested that “Australia and China should become an example of cooperation between countries with different social systems and different degrees of development” (Woodard 148; Hou 345). Therefore, Australia defined its relationship with China as a “special relationship”, focusing on “the pursuit of common interests” instead of on “political and cultural differences” (Hou 345), and China called it a “model relationship”, as it focused on “political friendship and economic complementarities” (Hou 345). The following year, in 1985, a China-Australia Senior Executive Forum was set up to review and coordinate the economic relationship between the two countries.

These good relations were shaken in 1987 by the dismissal of Hu Yaobang, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with whom Australia had a very good relationship. His dismissal was also a source of protests at different universities in China, especially in Beijing, and his death on 15 April 1989 together with inflation, economic instability, social inequality, tax evasion, abuse of public funds and bribes (Wang 28-29)

caused an urban social movement. As Wang Hui explains in *The End of the Revolution*, students, workers and intellectuals demanded constitutional rights, such as “workable democratic politics, press freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the rule of law (as opposed to the “rule of man”)”; state recognition of the legality of the movement as a patriotic student movement; “opposition to corruption and official malfeasance; opposition to ...[a] special privileged class; ... stable prices; restrictions on Yangpu Peninsula on Hainan Island...; and... social guaranties and social justice” (29-30). Wang Hui also explains that “the 1989 social movement was inherently a spontaneous protest against the proliferating inequalities spawned by market expansion, a critique of the way the government was handling the reforms” (30) and a critique of authoritarianism and methods of authoritarian rule.

The protest started on the days mourning Hu Yaobang’s death. On 23 April 1989 students of the twenty-one universities in Beijing participated in their first congress in the Summer Palace to discuss ways to improve the country and the CCP. The conservative members of the Party considered the students to be opposition and wrote an article against them, which was published in a newspaper. The students continued their protests inspired on the May, 4th Movement in 1919. On 15 May 1989, Mikhail Gorbachov visited Beijing, being this the first Sino-Soviet meeting in thirty years. Chinese leaders perceived the demonstrations, hunger strikes and press conferences given by members of the social movement in Tiananmen Square as a national shame and the leaders led personal campaigns and created alliances around Deng Xiaoping in order to prepare the Army to finish the movement. However, on 19 May, Zhao Ziyang ineffectively tried to mediate, talk directly to the students and make them go back to class and stop the social movement, which had spread to most of the main cities in the country. Consequently, 20 May saw the beginning of martial law.

On 2 June, 350,000 soldiers circled Tiananmen Square and, between 10pm on 3 June and dawn on 4 June, soldiers took the Square and the surrounding streets. The unofficial estimates are very varied: between 400 and 800 killed and thousands of injured, most of them in the streets neighbouring Tiananmen Square (Creutzfeldt 5) or between 800 and 3,000 deaths and more than 7,000 injured, most of them civilians (Soto 5). According to Augusto Soto, who lived the social movement as a journalist in Beijing, slept in the Square with demonstrators and reported from the area of Muxidi bridge (seven kilometres to the west of the Square) and parts of the Avenue of Eternal Peace on the night of 3-4 June, the Army had the order to clear the Square and it used police, and not military, methods to do it. This explains why most of the deaths took place one kilometre away from the Square (Soto 2). Furthermore, the repressive action did not finish with the taking of Tiananmen Square, but it concluded on 5 June, when “the man with the bag” stopped several tanks on the Avenue of Eternal Peace, west of Tiananmen Square, and made thousands of viewers around the world hold their breath, although the search for the leaders and followers of the movement took longer (Soto 2).

The people involved in the social movement (students, workers and intellectuals) “saw the government as a stubborn, despotic paternal figure used to doing whatever he wanted... but unable to kill his own children” (Creutzfeldt 5-6, my translation). This is the reason why the massacre caused such a collective shock. According to Soto, the Army had two possibilities: either to order the advance of the troops via presence or police methods or the massive use of fire arms (Soto 1). The two facts that led to the massive use of force and fire were that the advance of the troops was slow and that the

order specified a deadline: to clear the Square before dawn. The troops were formed by experienced and unexperienced soldiers. A mass of tens of thousands of people convinced some one hundred soldiers to abandon their vehicles and even desert. These vehicles were burnt, which caused the Army to intervene and forced the order to open fire (Soto 3-4).

Most national and international analysts thought that the CCP would not last long because the democratic movement was very intense, the corruption, inefficiency and authoritarianism caused too much anger and because other communist regimes were falling and China would not be an exception. However, Deng Xiaoping rebuilt his dominant position in the Party: Zhao Ziyang was formally excluded from the meetings and on 9 June Deng attacked demonstrators in a speech. At the end of the month, Zhao was expelled from the Party and confined in his home until his death in 2005 (Creutzfeldt 9-10).

These events changed the “special” or “model” relationship between Australia and China. A basic characteristic of their bilateral relations was the acceptance of “the principle of non-interference in China’s internal affairs, particularly with respect to human rights, democratisation, Taiwan, Tibet and China’s social system” (Hou 345). However, the events at the Tiananmen Square and its surroundings changed Australia’s attitude towards China and human rights became a topic that could not be avoided. Australia condemned the use of force, cancelled some visits to and from China and on 13 July imposed some sanctions: ministerial visits were suspended both ways as well as “official contacts at senior levels, important political visits, high-level defence visits and visits by public security and police officials” (Hou 349). Furthermore, “promptly and emotionally, [PM Hawke] extended the visa for the Chinese students in Australia so that they could stay longer and apply for permanent residence in later years” (Hou 349). However, the Australian government decided “not to cut the aid programme or put limits on cultural, economic and student exchanges” (Hou 349). There was a need to “[punish] the regime” (Hou 349), but Australia needed its relation with China, especially for economic and geopolitical reasons. Consequently, relations at a political level were frozen, but not broken.

These sanctions were lifted in February 1991 and Australia based its policy towards China on:

three principles: to do business as usual so as to develop bilateral economic relationship for mutual benefits; to seek to `strengthen bilateral links and develop strong cooperative relationship with China on regional issues such as Cambodia, and on multilateral issues such as disarmament and APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation]’; to seek to `maintain a constructive practical dialogue with China on human rights’ (DFAT, *Annual Report*, 1991-1992: 29) (Hou 350).

This pragmatic approach was a constructive engagement in the modernization of China. Meanwhile, the Chinese government considered retaliatory actions against the countries that had imposed sanctions, such as Australia, the USA or France, but these countries were so important at an economic level that this idea was finally dismissed (Hou 350). Therefore, China accepted the Australian dialogue on human rights and the two countries started to cooperate.

Part of the Australian population was of Chinese origin, either citizens who had arrived in the 19th or 20th centuries escaping from wars, natural disasters or persecution (refugees and asylum seekers), to join their families (family reunion), to improve their living standards doing specialised jobs (skilled migrants) or temporary residents (students, working holiday makers, visitors and tourists or specialists). In its pursuit of improving relations with China, Australia offered Chinese students the possibility of studying English in Australia with a program called ELICOS, which regulated the courses and accredited schools. As Timothy Kendall explains in his *Ways of Seeing China. From Yellow Peril to Shangrila* (2005), in “June 1989 there were 16,000 Chinese nationals in Australia on temporary entry permits, 11,400 of whom were students. By December 1992 a further 34,793 Chinese students had arrived” (185), most of them to study ELICOS courses. Most of these students were between 18 and 40, from mainland China, their world-view had been “determined by the experience of living in Mao’s China”, lived in poor conditions, with low incomes, lacked educational or business opportunities and took advantage of Deng Xiaoping’s reform to study abroad (Kendall 185). Consequently, most students “borrowed heavily to finance the up-front fees demanded by institutions in Australia”, needed to work more than “twenty hours a week and [could not attend] 90 per cent of classes” (Kendall 186). The jobs these students got were mainly in “factories and restaurants at very low rates of pay [which] forced them to work long hours and violate the conditions of their student visas” (Kendall 187).

The events of June 1989 had consequences for those ELICOS students and divided them into two categories: “those who had arrived before June were permitted to extend their visas for up to four years. Those who arrived after 20 June were to be deported if they had overstayed their visas” (Kendall 189). The outcome was the following: “[in] November 1993 the 16,000 students who arrived in Australia before 20 June 1989 were given permanent residency. Together with their family members, who immigrated through the family reunion program, they numbered 28,000” (Kendall 190).

Chinese-Australian Literature

The representation of Chinese men and women in Australian literature follows the changes undergone by the political and social situations since the British invasion of Australia, the gold rushes, the Federation of Australia and the establishment of the White Australia Policy, the World Wars, and the policies of assimilation and multiculturalism. Fiction, drama, poetry, storytelling, autobiographies, novellas and interviews are just some of the genres and subgenres used and temporary migrants, permanent migrants and their descendants are represented with their difficulties, worries, attitudes and perceptions. Some of the authors who devote critical study to the representation of Chinese in Australian literature are Ien Ang et al.’s (eds) *Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture* (2000), Helen Gilbert, Tseen Khoo and Jacqueline Lo’s *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia* (2000), Timothy Kendall’s *Ways of Seeing China. From Yellow Peril to Shangrila* (2005), Ouyang Yu’s *Chinese in Australian Fiction. 1888-1988* (2008) and Shen Yuanfang’s *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes. Chinese-Australian Autobiographies* (2001).

The experiences leading to the 1989 events and their consequences can be found in fictional and non-fictional literature. On the one hand, *Bitter Peaches and Plums: Two*

Chinese Novellas on the Recent Chinese Experience of Australia forms “a new genre of writing – overseas student literature” and these two texts “offer students an opportunity to challenge the official rhetoric [since] they are essentially ‘reportage’”(Kendall 190). On the other hand, Sang Ye’s interviews in *The Year the Dragon Came* (1996) include accounts of personal experiences of “refugees, entrepreneurs, academics, ELICOS students and immigrants to Australia under the family reunion scheme” (Kendall 218) which confront “both official and unofficial understandings of multiculturalism” (Kendall 210).

However, novels by writers of Chinese origin also include the improvement of the relations between China and Australia in the 1980s, the events leading to the social movement of 1989 and the Tiananmen Square massacre as well as the consequences for ELICOS students in Australia. Two of these texts are Frank Chan Loh’s *When Dining with Tigers. Roads to Tiananmen* (2000) and Lillian Ng’s *Swallowing Clouds* (1997).

When Dining with Tigers. Roads to Tiananmen

When Dining with Tigers. Roads to Tiananmen (2000) is Frank Chan Loh’s debut novel. This novel, which has a circular structure, explores seven topics in depth (slavery, fate, fear, duty, obedience, honour, liberty and gratitude) through the inter-cultural, inter-generational, inter-racial and inter-gender relations of the characters. It also includes Chinese folklore short stories and an inner novel set in China and in Australia between 1986 and 1989. Each chapter relates to one of the topics and begins with a short story, followed by the conversations of the friends gathered around the scholar who reads them his latest novel.

The characters I am going to focus on are set in this untitled novel-within-the-novel. They are Moby, a Beijing language teacher who moves to Sydney for a year as part of an exchange programme; Mr Wilson, his host, a retired journalist who spent his first professional years in Europe, especially Britain; their neighbours: the Lams, the Chous, Charlie and the Hunters; and Moby’s family in Beijing, which includes Zhenzhu—his wife—their son, his parents, his wife’s parents and their brothers with their immediate families.

The historical facts and the intertextuality that construct this inner novel provide realism to the whole book and make this the core text of the three. The novel begins with Moby’s arrival in Sydney in February 1986 and his change of name: from Sun Baijing, which means “white whale”, to Moby. Mr Wilson is reminded of *Moby Dick*, the white whale which appears in Melville’s novel and film adaptation, and suggests Sun Baijing adopt that nickname while in Australia. This is a metaphor of the changes Baijing/ Moby undergoes during his stay, which can be considered his journey of initiation into manhood, assertiveness and freedom: he experiences cultural clashes which consequently make him analyse his beliefs and life style in China, overcome some of his fears and strengthen some of his principles.

Moby is able to visit Sydney thanks to an exchange agreement between China and Australia which allows him to spend a year with an Australian and learn how English is taught as a second language, so he can learn other techniques and implement them in

China and, at the same time, improve his performance in English. It is worth noting that the text does not explore the reasons why Zhenzhu and their son do not accompany Sun Baijing in his stay in Australia, whether the exchange program does not permit it, whether her unspecified job does not allow her to take a leave or to work from Australia if it were a multinational company or whether the couple agreed she would stay in order to fulfil her roles as care-taker of her parents and her parents-in-law. During his stay in Sydney, he does things he would not be able to do in China due to their dangerousness. For example, he listens to a man criticising the government, reads cartoons mocking politicians and goes to two demonstrations (one against the creation of a national identity card and the other in favour of a law against experimentation on animals). Furthermore, Moby is asked to explain traditions, life in China, the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, the Democracy Wall, Tiananmen Square as a centre for the demands of citizens, different marches towards Tiananmen Square and the one-child policy. Besides these explanations, Moby sends letters to his wife where he explains the cultural shocks he experiences: from the sizes of houses, to parents not wanting to live with their sons in order to keep their independence, to freedom of speech, assembly and demonstration, and public displays of affection, among others. His wife's replies include explanations of the changes the country is experiencing with the open-door policy, the loosening of morals and the questioning of the one-child policy.

All these explanatory techniques allow the reader to learn about and understand some of the changes that China undergoes in the twentieth century; the 1976 protest after Premier Zhou Enlai's wreaths were removed overnight; the symbolism of Tiananmen Square as a place for demonstrations and for the Chinese peoples' demands; and some social changes, such as the increasing demands for freedom and against corruption. Consequently, the text prepares the reader for the Tiananmen Square massacre and the enquiries and detentions after it. The marches, demonstrations, gatherings, petition-handing and hunger-strikes after Hu Yaobang's death in April, May and June 1989 are explained through Moby's point view but also through Mr Wilson's, when he visits him. More details of the actual events are given, such as the fact that Zhao Ziyang accepts to talk with the students, that martial law is enforced, Gorbachov's visit and the raising of the Statue of Democracy on 29 May.

However, on 29 May Mr Wilson, Moby and Zhenzhu witness a man in a white shirt carrying two shopping bags who stops a line of tanks. The first tank tries to avoid the man, who steps in front of it again and again impeding its advance. This man even climbs up the first tank, then goes down and quietly walks towards where he has come from. This event was video recorded and photographed, but it took place on 5 June. The fact that this event does not agree with the historical events that took place is a fictional license in agreement with the raising of the Statue of Democracy on the same day that emphasizes the plight of the people against the establishment, their desire for democracy and social rights and the importance of individuality in contrast with the suppression of individuality under the CCP.

Furthermore, on the early morning on 4 June, before dawn, Moby and Zhenzhu are woken up by a neighbour who announces "The army's moving into Tiananmen Square" (Loh 342). Zhenzhu wishes to go but her role of mother limits her and she decides to stay home and take care of the children. However, she encourages Moby to pick up Mr Wilson and go to see what is happening. Mr Wilson and Moby go out on the streets and help some groups of people stop soldiers. At dawn, they are on Tiananmen Square

celebrating the soldiers' defeat and escaping from police. They spend the whole day on the Square, even though a man has warned Moby that the soldiers will clear it that evening and that Mr Wilson should go to his hotel. The man is right: that evening (the night from 4 to 5 June), more tanks go to the Square, fire teargas and bullets and crush the protests. Moby and Mr Wilson are witness to the brutality of the repression on the Square. Again, the data are not correct: the Tiananmen Square massacre took place from 10pm on 3 June to dawn on 4 June and the police, not soldiers, cleared the Square. According to Soto, "there were no victims during the evacuation [of the Square.] There were dead and injured Chinese in the external perimeter of the Square, but most of the victims fell more than one kilometre away" (2, my translation). This license of the author marks the text as fictional and not documentary, as something that could have happened because the means were available and the consequences of the event caused a national shock.

The main line of thought is provided by the insiders' points of view of Moby, a Chinese man who lived in a Western country, and of Mr Wilson, a journalist who lived in many countries, together with that of Zhenzhu, who wants democracy to have her rights as a woman and mother acknowledged and respected as well as freedom of movement, of speech and of control over her own body (Loh 218, 270). When Zhenzhu meets Mr Wilson and he shows her his sympathy for the death of her brother and sister-in-law, she positions herself and makes a statement: "Something like this couldn't have happened in your country, couldn't it? I'm sad for my country. This is sad. China's a sad country. It's got to change. This is why I support the students. They're fighting for change" (Loh 335). Another point of view explained in the novel is that of Zhenzhu's brother, who is also against the one-child policy (Loh 304-5). However, their point of view is opposed by that of Moby's brother, a former red guard, who is against any changes in society that may question the social order imposed by the CCP and who denounces Moby because he wants to do his civil duty. The characters are realistic in the sense that some question and challenge authority while others obey the government and believe everything officials say.

Moby is depicted as a caring family man who fears state repression and accepts the limitations imposed by the state. When he meets Zhenzhu, she is the one who encourages him to go to demonstrations and see things for himself, as she does. She wants society to change and is idealistic about it. "We can't live like tortoises, withdrawing into our shells at the slightest sign of danger. Come on, live dangerously", she encourages Sun Baijing (Loh 194). Once she goes to the Democracy Wall on her own because Sun Baijing is afraid of the reprisals and waits for her at her university. When she comes back unharmed, Sun Baijing "admire[s] her dicing with death, her courting of danger" and he "resolve[s] to match her courage" (Loh 198). Once they are married and have a son, he accepts the chance to spend ten months in Australia to improve his teaching skills. There, without family ties, he lives his initiation journey into the joys and limits of freedom, as he is put into prison after one of the protests.

When he goes back to China, he is eager to watch demonstrations, help those taking part in them or even participate in them. Zhenzhu wants to go to Tiananmen Square to check the events that will lead to the massacre, but her roles as mother and care-taker are a priority. She becomes the corner-stone of the family when her brother and her sister-in-law die as she raises her three year-old niece as her daughter, her five year-old son and tries to comfort her parents. When Moby is taken by the police accused of having taken

part in the demonstrations by his brother, she is the only person to take care of everyone else (the children, her parents and her parents-in-law). Besides her role as wife, mother and care-taker, she works outside the house, but the reader never knows her occupation. Communism declared that men and women were equal and could do the same jobs. However, the patriarchal system still puts more pressure on women as they are expected to fulfil all the family roles and accept the limitations on their bodies imposed by the state. She expresses her frustration in a letter to her husband:

Nowhere in the world would you have to obtain a permit like we have to from our work unit, just to have a baby and if the quota allocated to the unit has been filled, you have to wait till the following year to have the baby or be penalised with a cut in your salary or even face the sack. It should be the most natural thing in the world-giving birth; yet the authorities want to suppress this normal function of the human body (Loh 270).

Another of the Chinese women living in China depicted in the novel is Hongye, one of Moby's students. She is very well spoken and a leader during the protests. She is one of the six leaders who walk up the steps of the Great Hall of the People and she is the one who hands in the petition to government officials while saying the following words: "Make sure the government gets it" (Loh 297). When some weeks later some students go back to university, she remains in the Square, standing for democracy. On the night soldiers clear Tiananmen Square she is knocked down and run over by a tank (Loh 361), so she becomes a martyr. Hours before, when Mr Wilson tells Moby he is staying that night at the Square no matter how dangerous it is and asks Moby what he wants to do, Moby thinks of his brother-in-law, his sister-in-law, his wife and this student of his, "their fight to be individuals, their struggle against the juggernaut of state-imposed altruism" (Loh 349). Thus, three women and one man are examples for him. However, two of the women and the man are killed and his wife will have to take care of the whole family on her own when he is detained.

Swallowing Clouds

Lillian Ng's second novel is entitled: *Swallowing Clouds* (1997), in which the main character, Syn, a 37 year-old Shanghainese student of English, becomes stranded in Sydney after the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989. She stops receiving money from her mother and fears repression if she goes back to China. Therefore, she begins to work at a butcher shop, owned by Zhu Zhiyee; later on, also at a nursing home at the weekends; and, due to the working hours, she brings her English lessons to a standstill. Syn and Zhu Zhiyee begin a two-year love affair, in a way that can be considered sexual harassment, despite the fact that Zhu Zhiyee is married to KarLeng and has had three daughters with her, one of them mentally handicapped. Zhu Zhiyee's mother and sisters know about the affair, accept Syn and even prefer her to his wife. When KarLeng finds out, Syn is sacked from the butcher's, begins to work as a waitress and re-enrols in an English language course. The novel is a detailed account of the love affair, the power relations and expectations of Syn and Zhu Zhiyee and Syn's final revenge (for an analysis of desire, transgression and eroticism and the symbolism of pigs in this novel see Ribas-Segura 2010).

The novel is structured as a prologue and four days, each of which has a different setting and temporal location. The prologue introduces the story of an adulterous woman who was condemned to be drowned in a pig's basket in the HuanPu River in the summer of 1918, while her lover got away just paying a bribe to avoid being accused. As the reader finds out later, Syn is the reincarnation of this woman, whose purpose in life is to take revenge on men by taking their money. The four days, from 4th to 7th June 1994, mark the duration of a trip to Beijing and Shanghai that Syn takes. She now enjoys the security of an Australian passport and decides to visit her mother, who lives in Shanghai.

However, instead of travelling directly to this city, she joins an Australian tourist expedition to China. During these four days, the reader learns about different imperial Chinese landmarks, such as the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Ming Tomb or the Summer Palace, and some cultural hallmarks, such as a Chinese opera or Peking duck. These traditional cues are contrasted to Syn's personal experiences under the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, the rapes and abortions she suffered on the border of Inner Mongolia as a red guard show how women were not free from patriarchy under Mao; while for many being a red guard meant being free from family ties, travelling and doing things for themselves, many suffered abuses. Patriarchy and Confucianism were too deeply established in Chinese society to be so quickly broken. On the other hand, the death of Syn's father due to Communist repression ties in with the public humiliations that her mother suffered and caused her a temporal mental breakdown. Her mother was paraded with a ying/yang haircut, i.e. half her head bald, and a placard with her "sins" written, after having been accused by red guards. The resulting loss of face, to be avoided at all cost due to the lasting influence of Confucianism in Chinese culture, causes her trauma.

Syn's initial response to the hardships she experienced in China when trying to live up to Mao's promotion of egalitarianism is to follow in Australia the patriarchal convention for a woman: a concubine who enjoys the acceptance and support of the mother of her lover, who even encourages her to have a son in order to relegate his legal wife. The bulk of the plot, therefore, deals with the relationship, erotic games, fantasies and sexual intercourse between Syn and Zhu Zhiyee in the period comprised between 1989 and 1992, with their power relations and expectations and the details of Syn's final revenge in January 1993.

All in all, the features of the main character agree with the type of Chinese migrant who moves to Australia as defined by Timothy Kendall: Syn is a student aged between 18 and 40 (she is 37), from mainland China (Shanghai), her world-view has been "determined by the experience of living in Mao's China" (she had been a red guard and, when the Cultural Revolution finished, she had been exiled to Inner Mongolia as a barefoot doctor), lacks educational or business opportunities (she had been admitted to Fudan University but "couldn't catch up with the work, for she had lost too much time" (54) being a red guard and a barefoot doctor, and started to work in a silk factory), and takes advantage of Deng Xiaoping's reform to study abroad (she realised the importance of English and "when Australia offered a four-year English language course for overseas students, Syn was one of the first to apply" [54]). As most students, Syn "borrow[s] money from her neighbours ... the toothless grandmother next door, friends and relatives in Pudong and Shanghai" (54) but once in Australia, after the Tiananmen Square massacre, she works in typical, badly-paid women's jobs: for a butcher's, for a nursing home and for restaurants.

The events of June 1989 and the Australian government's decision make Syn and other students "political refugees on temporary student visas" (10). When Syn has only a year left of legal stay (1992), she wonders:

[Will I] be forced to return to China? How [will I] be treated in China now that [I am] on their blacklist? [Will I] be put in jail? Tortured? How [can I] avoid being deported? Unless, unless... [I marry] an Australian citizen or [have] a baby with him. (260)

She tries to have a "love son" with Zhu Zhiyee in order to stay in the country and to take the place of KarLeng, since she would have given him a son who would continue his surname, and she thinks that, as it used to happen with the emperor's concubines, the one who gave him the first son would have the highest rank. However, Zhu Zhiyee is already trying to get back the investments he made in her name now that his mother is dead and his relationship with KarLeng has improved. When Syn suggests Zhu Zhiyee they should have a "love child", he replies: "But you might have to return to China in a year's time and the child would have to go with you" (Ng 261). Syn states she would go anywhere in the world with the baby and that it would be a precious gift from him. Zhu thinks that there will be "no harm in this" as:

she [will] be leaving the country in a year, soon after the birth of the baby. And eighteen years is a long time. A whole lifetime. Anything [can] happen – she might get married to somebody else in China. In the meantime, I'll take this opportunity to get her to transfer all the investments back to me (Ng 261).

He agrees and decides they will try for a boy. Syn gets pregnant but Zhu Zhiyee never knows because he goes on different trips with his family and, when he is in Sydney he spends less and less time with her and their relationship starts to fade away. While Zhu Zhiyee is on a European tour, Syn considers their relationship, the possibilities of having a mentally handicapped child and his possible response to that. Furthermore, she starts going to English classes again and keeps working at a restaurant at nights and at a nursing home on the weekends. When he comes back, the relationship is quite distant, he compares Syn to KarLeng when they are having sex and he insists on the transfer of investments. Syn realises she has been an outsider all the time and decides not to tell Zhu Zhiyee of her pregnancy and not to give him the investments back, as she has been paying the mortgage on her own and has to think of herself. When Syn tells him that she is not signing the documents, they break up and, after his verbally abusive reaction, Syn begins her revenge: sending proofs of their affair to KarLeng with a monthly frequency. Syn wants to have a natural abortion—she exhorts "her child to leave her womb of his own accord" (Ng 284)—writes letters to the foetus, burns them and drinks the ashes (Ng 287). The foetus dies on 31st December 1992.

The following year is quite positive for Syn, who has neither partner nor child: Chinese students who were in Australia when the Tiananmen Square massacre took place are granted permanent visas; she gets a certificate in English, which will allow her "to get a proper permanent job" (Ng 294); sells the house and "upgrade[s] to a classy suburb" (Ng 294); she wants to "sponsor her mother to come to Sydney on the family reunion plan" (Ng 294) as she does not want to "live in China, a country so politically unpredictable"

(Ng 295); and she continues her revenge. The following year, 1994, she goes on the tour to visit Beijing and Shanghai, but goes back to Australia.

As a result, it can be said that the character of Syn is realistic in the sense that the social and political data that construct her context agree with the social and political events at the time, although neither the context nor the events are explored. However, the construction of Syn's gender is problematic: since the "novel is deliberately full of exotic feudal mores, mysterious Oriental sex and travelogues about China[, it] strives to fulfil the imagined desire for a peek at Other's experiences" (Khoo 165-6). Besides, at different points in the novel, Syn becomes "the ever-willing sexual [partner], global factory worker[, and] asexual female Communist [comrade]" (Khoo 166), that is, she follows traditional and non-traditional roles (Renes), which seems to be her way of overcoming patriarchy. Syn seems to be searching her identity within the boundaries of patriarchy and when these become too tight, she eventually breaks away from them: during the Cultural Revolution, she followed the guidelines provided by the Communist party, more male-chauvinist than expected and admitted; during her relationship with Zhu Zhiyee, she behaved as an imperial concubine, submissive and sexually available; but only when she does not follow the expectations of others, breaks the conventions and thinks of herself and of what she wants, she seems to have hope in the future and finally make it in Australia.

In her article "Selling Sexotica: Oriental Grunge and Suburbia in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds*", Tseen Khoo argues that the text tries "to be several types of novel at the same time" (171), that "it fails to be any one particularly successfully" (171) and that the "narrative often only speaks of Asian women and manipulates 'Chinese-ness' in a highly codified way" (172). The variable reception of Ng's novel may be caused by these three features, together with the unexplored context and political events that frame her behaviour and the construction of Syn's character as a modern and courageous woman who overcomes rapes, abortions without anaesthetics, is able to love and migrates to a country with a different language to improve her future but who blindly assumes the role of concubine and allows herself being used. Her debut was *Silver Sister*, which became the runner-up of the Angus and Robertson/ Bookward Prize in 1993 and the winner of the Human Rights Award in 1995, while *Swallowing Clouds* had controversial reviews (Murdoch, White, and De Castro Lopo in Khoo).

Conclusion: contrasting the novels

The two main characters analyzed function in terms of a gender binary, the first term male and positive and the second term female and negative. Moreover, where one was not a red guard, the other one was; one is close to his family, the other is not; one is engaged in politics, the other is not; one embraces his time in Australia, the other shuts herself up; one wants to go back to China, the other wants to stay in Australia. Lastly, the character of Moby is independent and well-rounded while Syn tries to behave according to different dependent female archetypes, which undermines her efforts to have a voice of her own. Gender marks their lives and influences their attitude towards their stay in Australia and their engagement with politics.

First, the main character in the novel-within-the-novel in Frank Chan Loh's *When Dining with Tigers. Roads to Tiananmen* does not defy patriarchy in order to prevent the state from harming him. However, when he goes to Australia, he learns the implications of freedom and understands its importance and weight in daily life. Therefore, he empathises with his wife's claims for freedom of speech and self-control of the body, rather than state-control. Once he is back in China, he faces and confronts state power in Tiananmen Square on the night of the massacre. However, the outcome is not a happy one due to his brother's report, that is, his submission to Chinese communism as patriarchy.

On the other hand, the main character in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* seems to have a kaleidoscopic or fragmented personality as she tries to live up to the conventions socially imposed on her: during her youth as a red guard, she behaves as a comrade, although she is abused and then is discarded as part of the "lost generation"; then, she resorts to the traditional role of a Chinese woman: she respects elders, is submissive and tries to reach her goals with the traditional means patriarchy provides her, but she is also discarded when she wants to stand up for her rights. Therefore, the option of staying in Australia as a permanent resident provides her with the chance of a new beginning in a society with different conventions (where unmarried sex and single mothers and their children are not stigmatized, for example) which allows her to have the possibility of finding her own voice as a woman.

Second, Moby challenges stereotypes, tries to become a bridge between cultures by exploring, experiencing and explaining different life-styles and by facing some of his fears. Moby is determined to make the most of his stay in Australia, as it is expected from him, and he embraces the experience with the help of his host and their neighbours. Furthermore, he is a man proficient in English and open-minded enough to succeed in his aim, and takes this experience back home.

Conversely, Syn does not explore the options that Australia offers her, but adopts a submissive role, allows others to guide, control and manipulate her life and does not leave her comfort-zone, the Chinese community, as her level of English is still poor. Syn has two reasons to learn English: to read some of the books that her father had and caused him the attack by red guards, and to improve her working conditions. However, when she leaves China, she stops pursuing her dreams and becomes submissive and dependent, does not explore the possibilities Australia offers her and shuts herself off and within the Chinese community. Only after her revenge is she in charge of her future, starts having a life of her own and begins embracing the possibilities that Australia offers her, although these are not explored in the novel. As she fears repression in China, she tries to stay in Australia as long as possible and only goes to her country of birth when she has an Australian citizenship and, therefore, the protection of her host country. Thus, she hardly engages in the social and economic situation in China that encouraged her to migrate and, when she goes on the tour, she explains traditions from the imperial past, not contemporary events, in an attempt to distance herself from the harmful recent past of her country of birth.

Finally, Moby's engagement with politics is encouraged by his wife and their common wish for freedom to be enjoyed by their family and their son and niece. They want a better and brighter future and the path to get it is freedom. When Zhenzhu and Sun Baijing meet and fall in love, she is on her way to the Democracy Wall and she

encourages him to go with her. After that, they go to Tiananmen Square and only leave it when it gets dangerous. Once they are married and Moby is in Australia, Zhenzhu encourages him to enjoy the freedom he is experiencing, but without forgetting or denying his identity (Loh 252). The facts that Zhenzhu prioritizes her role as mother and care-taker, that Hongye dies at the massacre and that Moby is willing to participate in demonstrations when he is back in China seem to imply that the public sphere belongs to males, and is not safe for mothers and single women. Furthermore, Moby's detention limits Zhenzhu's life even more to traditional womanhood as she becomes the only care-taker and provider of the family. As a consequence, the failure of the social movement that led to the Tiananmen Square massacre has negative consequences as patriarchy continues; it is tightened and not only is there not a new path, but just more suffering and repression.

In contrast, Syn participates in the demonstrations against the Tiananmen Square massacre (Ng 9), but she is in Australia. Her lack of desire to go back to China and fight for a more democratic future are probably due to the enduring maleness of the public in times of the Cultural Revolution and the traumatic incidents she experienced, a period which also caused the death of her father and the mental breakdown of her mother. Besides, her lack of engagement may also be due to the fact that her family dies with her: she will not have any children, her mother does not want to go to Australia with her and she does not want to live in Shanghai. Therefore, she does not feel the pressure to fight for a better and brighter future in China but to experiment and find her position as a woman within Australia's public space and live her life there the best she can.

In sum, Frank Chan Loh and Lillian Ng's election of the Tiananmen Square massacre in the construction of their novels, characters and events provides the space to question Chinese politics and its effects on the identity of its citizens, especially when these have the chance of living in a Western country, in this case, Australia, and of comparing them. However, *When Dining with Tigers. Roads to Tiananmen* focuses on the policies that limit individual freedom in China and on the social changes the open-door policy introduces, *Swallowing Clouds* refers to imperial times and does not mention the social changes that led to the social movement of 1989. This escape mechanism implies a critique of the path proposed to improve the situation of women: the changes women need are not reached by behaving like men or within the limits men impose, but by creating a self-defined position, and this they can only pursue in a democratic country.

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