

The Genealogy of Yun Ling's *Ressentiment* in Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*

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ABSTRACT

This reading of Tan Twan Eng's Garden of Evening Mists (2012) intends to examine the concept of Nietzschean resentment contained within the consciousness of the novel's main character Yun Ling, a war survivor who directs her subdued loathing, against her Japanese former oppressors and towards a Japanese gardener who has lived in Malaysia after the war. Grounding the paper's analysis on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals (GM), this paper aims to represent Yun Ling's narrative as an interpretation on the evolution of resentment as an internalised hatred — tracing the origins of its conception towards its eventual dissipation. Specifically, it explores Nietzschean concepts pertinent to Yun Ling's narrative such as: 1.) justice as an invention of the powerless; 2.) forgetting as a positive form of repression; 3.) memory as a painful continuation of a promise; and 4.) the body as the site of history. Moreover, these aphoristic ideas from Nietzsche are contextualised to explicate aspects relevant to Yun Ling's character such as her Malaysian Chinese identity, the Japanese occupation of Malaya, and healing through Japanese aesthetics.

Keywords: resentment; Malaysian novel; genealogy of morals; garden of evening mists; historical fiction

INTRODUCTION

Teoh Yun Ling is a woman of *ressentiment* — a French term explicated by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to signify a subjugated feeling of hate and negative sentiment directed against an outer force that oppresses a subject. This *ressentiment* within her stems from her containment of memories being a lone survivor of a brutal Japanese camp during the Second World War.

In Twan Eng's prize-winning work *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012), Yun Ling's character presents a familiar dilemma of a war victim struggling to seek closure and justice in order to cope with perilous memories of war. This paper intends to analyse and trace the path of one's handling of subdued loathing or *ressentiment* which, in the novel, is contained within consciousness of a war survivor who directs her subdued loathing against her former captors, the Japanese, after their occupation of Malaya.

Grounding the paper's analysis on Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, this paper aims to represent Yun Ling's narrative as an interpretation on the evolution of *ressentiment* as an internalised hatred — tracing the origins of its conception towards its eventual dissipation. The purpose is to probe into the ways in which a wartime survivor copes with the trauma of war by confronting a Japanese subject as they deal with the atrocious past through Japanese aesthetics. This is relevant as healing and forgiveness, especially in overcoming atrocious memories of the past, remains unresolved in the present.

As the character's *ressentiment* is explored, Nietzschean concepts pertinent to the novel's narrative are also explicated such as: 1.) justice as an invention of the powerless; 2.) forgetting as a positive form of repression; 3.) memory as a painful continuation of a promise; and 4.) the body as the site of history. These aphoristic ideas from Nietzsche are contextualised to examine the aspects relevant to Yun Ling's character such as her Malaysian Chinese identity, the Japanese occupation of Malaya, and healing through Japanese aesthetics.

EVOLUTION OF YUN LING'S RESENTIMENT

A Malaysian Chinese held prisoner in a Japanese labor camp with her sister, Teoh Yun Ling carries within herself brutal memories of wartime atrocities committed by Japanese troops throughout their occupation of Malaya. During her internment at the camp, she not only lost two fingers and was brutally scarred by the army; but more painfully, lost her sister Yun Hong in a mass murder committed out of desperation by the losing Japanese troops. These tragic memories in the vicious camp aggravated Yun Ling's internalised hatred towards her oppressors and initiated the formation of *ressentiment* against them.

According to Nietzsche, one's *ressentiment* – as a negative and reactive sentiment that is *not* acted – turns creative when it sets forth an “imaginary revenge” against an oppressor, hence giving birth to values (1986, p. 10). In the case of Yun Ling, her internalised loathing against the Japanese, though not acted upon, becomes creative when, after working at the War tribunal, she submits herself to become an apprentice of the Emperor's gardener and carries out an ‘imaginary revenge’ by permeating the imagination and consciousness of her perceived Japanese oppressor.

Ressentiment is embedded in the weak and oppressed whom the German philosopher refers to as the ‘slaves’. Historically abused by the masters because of their inherent weakness, the slaves staged a creatively imaginative revolt against this oppression by developing a value system which judges all actions by the masters as ‘evil’ and their own as ‘good’. According to Nietzsche, there was a ‘slave revolt of morality’ when the values held by the masters – strength, nobility, and power (associated with the Greeks and Romans) – are labeled evil, while the slaves (Judean, Christian) consider their own values of kindness, guilt, and meekness as good.

In this struggle between master and slave morality, *ressentiment* is central to the later ascendance of the slave's good morality because of its symbolic and imagined qualities. In his reading of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, philosopher Gilles Deleuze refers to *ressentiment* as the ‘spirit of revenge’ where, due to the experience of ‘too strong excitation (pain)’ by an individual, a reaction ceases to be acted and instead felt (*sent*) internally and increasingly over time (2006, p. 111). In other words, persistent subjugation towards a person of *ressentiment* leads to the buildup of resentful hatred not avenged through action, but by internalised and imaginary revenge, which denounces the oppressors’ (masters) every action and values as evil.

The imaginary revenge for a person of *ressentiment* involves an obsessive thinking over past suffering deeply embedded within the consciousness and memory; an association which Deleuze summarily describes as:

The man of *ressentiment* in himself is a being full of pain: the sclerosis or hardening of his consciousness, the rapidity with which every excitation sets and freezes within him, the weight of the traces that invade him are so many cruel sufferings. And more deeply, *the memory of traces is full of hatred in itself and by itself*. This is an essential link between revenge and memory (2006, p. 116, emphasis author).

Associating vengeance and memory is a feature of *ressentiment* related to Yun Ling's narrative as a war survivor who is unable to overcome her resentful hatred against her former oppressor. It is through identifying Yun Ling's judgment and unconscious actions, in the novel, that the stages of her *ressentiment* can be explored; for while it is known that the development of her *ressentiment* traces its origin from the atrocities committed by Japanese troops, it is unclear how Yun Ling's *ressentiment* evolves, progresses, and gradually dissipates when she met the Emperor's gardener in the highlands of Malaya.

JUSTICE AS AN INVENTION OF THE POWERLESS

To avenge her loss and suffering, Yun Ling works as a research clerk at the War Tribunal immediately after the war, eventually becomes a prosecutor, and ultimately a judge who sentences and sends Japanese war criminals to their death. This attempt however, to seek justice does not allow her *ressentiment* to dissipate. To take revenge in the name of fairness is, for a person of *ressentiment*, a failed attempt to conquer one's reactive and negative sentiment.

According to Nietzsche, a 'reactive' individual who pursues 'scientific fairness' against oppression through justice is, in fact, farthest from it. Yun Ling – as a court prosecutor with the 'spirit of *ressentiment*' – already takes a false and prejudiced view and hence cannot be expected to fully realise the essence of fairness. For instance, in her initial work as a research clerk at the War Tribunal, she 'convince[s], cajole[s], and threaten[s]' those victims who are hesitant to testify against Japanese war criminals. As she later admits:

I made sure that the cases I worked on were so well-constructed that the war criminal would never get a reprieve... It was not possible to remain detached from my work, naturally. There were times I could not go on reading the documents when I remembered the fear and pain I had gone through (Tan 2012, p. 210-211).

Aside from exercising partiality of judgment, Yun Ling's attempt for justice also becomes a source of frustration since it prevents her from directly exercising minor aggressions against her former oppressors. For Nietzsche, since the slaves are inherently weak, they have to "sanctify revenge under the name of justice"; however, this only results in growing sense of feeling aggrieved. This is because unlike the masters who are "aggressive... stronger and more courageous" when avenging their enemies – the slaves only realise that they are too powerless to harm their oppressors and this rehabilitates "not only (their) revenge but all *reactive* affects in general" (1986, p. 11).

Reactive affect, in Nietzschean sense, refers to the conscious emotional response of an individual which, in Yun Ling's case, is manifested through an indirect form of retaliation towards her former captors. For instance, before entering law school, Yun Ling attends and witness nine court hangings; including that of Captain Hideyoshi Mamuro – a noted war criminal sentenced for ordering the burning of an entire village – whose letter to son Yun Ling withholds for many years. Her actions reveal what Deleuze refers to as the "dreadful feminine power of *ressentiment*: (which) is not content to denounce crimes and criminals, it wants sinners, people who are responsible" (2006, p. 119). Indeed, the letter to Hideyoshi's son, which Yun Ling never delivers for years, becomes a symbol of her frustration towards justice. In failing to realise her vengeance against the Japanese, she takes matters of revenge into her own hands. This act is predictable since, in Nietzsche's assertion, the legal system – because it treats aggression and violence as offenses against the law – leads the "feelings of its subjects away from the direct injury caused by (such) offenses" and, as such, merely achieves "the reverse of that which is desired by all revenge" (1986, p.11).

FORGETTING AS A POSITIVE FORM OF REPRESSION

Inasmuch as Yun Ling tried to move on and forget the past, post-war politics and events around her still become bitter reminders of atrocities in the camp. Forgetting, for Yun Ling, is impossible mainly since her wartime experiences, which "never ceases to hurt", are detained in the memory galvanizing internalised hatred and hostility (Nietzsche 1986, p. 3). For instance, instead of feeling relieved when she passed by a crowd performing rituals to

appease the souls of those killed in the war, Yun Ling only feels a “renewed (her) sense of hatred” for the Japanese (Tan 2012, p. 49). Moreover, even with her capacity to persecute war criminals, Yun Ling admits to feeling “hollow” and “furious”, especially when the Japan Peace Treaty – which halts reparations of war victims from the Japanese government – was ratified.

It is notable that, in these instances, Yun Ling again expresses her *ressentiment*; this time, through reassigning her hatred, not towards her direct enemies, but towards the state – her superiors, and colleagues whom she “insulted” and “quarreled” – so much that she gets sacked from her prosecuting job (Tan 2012, pp. 46-47). According to Nietzsche, this diversion of hatred towards external entities is typical for a person of *ressentiment* who constantly needs “to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself...” and who, more importantly, needs “a hostile external world” in order to trigger its external stimuli for reaction. Yun Ling, who first relies on justice then diverts her hatred to avenge her pains, represents a typical character of a person of *ressentiment* who is never “honest and straightforward with (one’s) self” and who, more importantly, understands “how not to forget” (1986, p. 10).

Nietzsche describes forgetting as a “rather active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression”; for him, “there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness” (1986, p. 1). Indeed, as a person of *ressentiment*, Yun Ling’s life is lived in gloom and melancholy — a fact which she recognises when, upon being advised not let hatred affect her life, she retorts “it is not up to me” (1986, p. 50). In other words, she recognises early on that forgetting is merely a futile attempt to leave herself; since, undeniably all throughout her life, “only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 3). With this, she writes:

I had never spoken of the three years I had spent in the camp to anyone. I tried not to think about it as I went about my days, and mostly I succeeded. But occasionally the memories still find their way in, through a sound I heard, a word someone uttered, or a smell caught in the street (Tan, 2012, p. 13).

Indeed, throughout the novel, forgetting is explicated as the constant companion of memory; quite simply: forgetting erases while memory transforms. But with Yun Ling’s *ressentiment*, her faculty to forget and repress is “damaged and ceases to function” because of pain — a sensation which, for Nietzsche, is the “most powerful aid to mnemonics” (1986, p. 2 -3). It is only in the later years of her life that Yun Ling heads finally towards the path of forgetting. Afflicted by aphasia, a degenerative disease in memory, she writes with disappointment how throughout her life, she spent most of her time “*to forget and now all (she) wants is to remember*” (Tan 2012, p. 309). Forgetting, for a person of *ressentiment*, is ever only possible with time and illness in memory.

MEMORY AS A PAINFUL CONTINUATION OF A PROMISE

As her journey towards healing continues, Yun Ling’s *ressentiment* enters another phase when she decides to create a memorial Japanese garden to fulfill her promise to her sister Yun Hong. In the camp, both taking solace in the memories of their family visit at the lovely gardens in Kyoto before the war. It is through her sister’s fascination with Japanese gardens that Yun Ling is able to retreat into their make-believe world composed of the garden’s serenity and order. These fantasies of beauty allow them to endure and depart, if not momentarily, from their painful ordeal at the camp. As suggested by their family friend Magnus, the dream to create the perfect Japanese garden never leaves Yun Ling as she

pursues to fulfill the promise to her sister, even if it means dealing with the Emperor's former gardener.

The ability to make promises, according to Nietzsche, is what enables man to remember the past and predict the future. With the right to make promises, man is able to acquire responsibilities to honor both his words and actions – to become what Pearson, in his introduction of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, calls a “creature of time”, a creature of memory (p. xxii). Memory, as a recurring theme in the novel, is described in numerous images: similar to “a sandbar, cut off from the shore by the incoming tide” (Tan 2012, p. 25); like “patches of sunlight in an overcast valley, shifting with the movement of the clouds” (Tan 2012, p. 309); or as “shards of ice fracturing off an arctic shelf” (Tan 2012, p. 1). These images of memory signify that it is both fragile and unreliable. But with man's ability to promise, there is an assurance of remembrance which involves an “active desire not to rid of oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real *memory of the will*” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 1).

For Yun Ling, the memorial Japanese garden dedicated to her sister is a site for memory. It represents the pursuance to remember past sufferings they endured in the camp. Failing to honor this promise only awakens the sense of “guilt” (*schuld*), “debt” (*schulden*), and “bad conscience” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 1). The garden, as Yun Ling's object of promise, is the place “where promises were made... (where) memories had to be made for those who promised... and (where) we shall find a great deal of severity, cruelty, and pain” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 5). The guilt of being unable to fulfill this promise ultimately leads Yun Ling to Aritomo Nakamura, the renowned gardener of the Emperor of Japan.

SLAVE-MASTER MORALITY

The relationship between Yun Ling and Aritomo epitomises Nietzsche's conception of the historic struggle between master and slave morality. Yun Ling, with her undeniably deep *ressentiment* towards the Japanese, represents the typical characterisation of Nietzsche's “slave” who is “neither upright nor naive nor honest and straightforward” towards one's self (1986, p. 10). She expresses aspects of *ressentiment*, throughout the novel, by thinking obsessively over her past suffering and feeling a “stab of hatred” for the Japanese gardener whose commands “bring her back to a time where I had been a slave for the Japanese army” (Tan 2012, p. 96).

Aritomo, on the other hand, possesses the morality of the masters; not “poisoned” by *ressentiment* and having a “soul of a higher order” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 4). He characterises master morality through his self-assuredness; attending to his craft and upholding his “upright” character. Though imprisoned too by British troops after the war, Aritomo is not impaired by vengeance and, unlike Yun Ling, he never exhibits “a sign of resentment in him once he had taken (her) on as his apprentice” (Tan 2012, p. 129). More importantly, though aware of Japanese abuses all over Malaya, he keeps himself above those atrocities: “kept out everything that was unpleasant” and “attended only to (his) garden” (Tan 2012, p. 158). Moreover, even after the war, he remains loyal to the Emperor, bowing at his portrait and ignoring Yun Ling as “she looked away in (her) resentment” (Tan 2012, p. 158).

These disparate moralities, between Yun Ling and Aritomo, explicate the state and struggle in their relationship as lovers as well as learners of each other's past. Theirs, it can be said, is a relationship fraught with tension and awareness of each other's respective relations with the past. Yun Ling, conscious of their disparate positions in history, describes their relationship in two ways: both can be viewed as two people imprinting themselves upon each other, similar to “two leaves falling from a tree, touching each other now and again as

they spiraled to the forest floor” (Tan 2012, p. 180) — or they can be seen as two people consciously and cunningly outdoing each other, similar to “two moths around a candle... circling closer and closer to the flame, waiting to see whose wings would catch fire first” (Tan 2012, p. 186).

With these opposing moralities, Yun Ling and Aritomo’s characters predictably clash because of what Nietzsche termed as the “slave revolt of morality”; occurring, as established, when the slaves’ *ressentiment* turns creative to set forth an “imaginary revenge” against the masters. Specifically, Yun Ling’s “creative” revolt against Aritomo begins with her submission to become an apprentice of the Emperor’s gardener while carrying out unconsciously an “imaginary revenge” by permeating the imagination and consciousness of her perceived Japanese oppressor.

HEALING THROUGH JAPANESE AESTHETICS

Suppressing her hatred for the Japanese, Yun Ling works closely with Aritomo, though fraught with bitterness about the past and condemnation of his beliefs. As she and Aritomo continued their work at *Yugiri* – the Garden of Evening Mists, both are not only forced to examine and negotiate their differences, but also to value the learning they acquire from each other. While on one hand, the self-assured Japanese (master morality) within Aritomo is subdued by Yun Ling’s narrative of brutalities; Yun Ling’s *ressentiment*, on the other, gradually dissipates by the sublime effects of Japanese aesthetics taught by Aritomo, before his disappearance in the Malayan jungle.

Understanding each other’s submission and interplay of power requires an examination of their encounters. Aritomo is, notably at first, “uncomfortable” with the idea of building a garden because of what happened to Yun Ling and her sister. In her cunning way however, Yun Ling retorts that this should not bother him, if he were not truly involved in the Occupation (Tan 2012, p. 59). This exchange signifies an invitation of Yun Ling to treat her proposal as a challenge for Aritomo. When her offer is initially turned down, Yun Ling’s *ressentiment* resurfaces against the “bloody Jap” (Tan 2012, p. 72). Aritomo however, eventually agrees to hire her as an apprentice hoping to resurrect the “girl who had once walked in the gardens of Kyoto with her sister”; whom he deep inside believes, is still there (Tan 2012, p. 88).

Aritomo, in saying this, refers to the principles of Japanese aesthetics which cultivates sensitivity and respect for objects and human needs (Saito 2006, p. 85). He idealises, more specifically, that learning the techniques in creating a Japanese garden will enable Yun Ling to feel “insulated from the world beyond its borders” and work towards healing of the human spirit (Tan 2012, p. 224). Though aware that accepting Yun Ling to be his apprentice, is an intrusion from “the world outside”, Aritomo maintains his conviction that art and aesthetic experience settles “the hearts and minds of men that are restless” (Tan 2012, p. 253).

As can be noted in the novel, *Yugiri* – the Garden of Evening Mists – is an amalgamation of Yun Ling’s identity, her past, and position in history. David Slawson, in his book *Secret Teaching in the Art of Japanese Gardens*, discusses three important factors considered by garden designers when creating a Japanese garden: 1.) client’s nature, 2.) nature of the site, and 3.) aesthetic qualities of the composition (1991, p. 126). Yun Ling, as a Malaysian Chinese – dubbed by Malays as the “King’s Chinese” because of their loyalty to the British – finds herself relating to Japanese aesthetics because of its connection to Chinese culture (Tan 2012, pp. 55, 89, 93).

Second, the naming of the garden's pavilion as the *Pavilion of Heaven* – inspired by Yun Hong's favorite poem of Shelley's "The Cloud" – represents the influence of Western poetry infused in reference to the garden. Also, the Japanese garden's is unconventionally located in Cameron Highlands where both sought refuge away from "the problems of the world" (Tan 2012, p. 54). The site being a part of Malaysia too becomes a site of struggle of colonial powers, between British and Japanese forces, with multi-ethnic Malayan society existing in between. Finally, upon imparting concepts of Japanese aesthetics such as *mono no aware* (pathos of things) and *shakkei* (borrowed scenery) to Yun Ling, Aritomo allows Japanese "cultural values to be incorporated in the garden design" (Slawson 1991, p. 124).

Understanding these aspects of a Japanese garden, though initially unknown to Yun Ling, reveals that *Yugiri* itself already exists for Yun Ling, her sister, and the victims of wartime atrocities. With Yun Ling's *ressentiment* however, these aspects of the Japanese garden are never fully revealed and realised since, as a "being full of pain", she experiences hardening of consciousness and her memory is "full of hatred in itself and by itself" (Deleuze 2006, p. 116).

YUN LING'S SLAVE REVOLT

Yun Ling's *ressentiment*, as established, seeks revenge by reassigning her pain towards external entities; this time, towards the famous gardener of the Emperor who "keeps everything above him" the "problems of the world" to attend "only to his garden". Expressing his master morality, Aritomo self-assuredly keeps "everything that was unpleasant" within *Yugiri* much to the ire of a survivor in a brutal Japanese camp (Tan 2012, p. 158). However, through her apprenticeship at the garden, Yun Ling is able to work closely with Aritomo — learning the secrets of Japanese aesthetic and ultimately becoming his lover.

Their relationship, in Ying Ling's description, is likened to "two moths around a candle" that flies rounds around the flame, getting closer and closer to it; waiting "to see whose wings would catch fire first". From this, it can be noted how Yun Ling is aware of the undeniable tension between them while her *ressentiment* builds up inside her. True to Nietzsche's assertion – that *ressentiment* sets forth an imaginary revenge against the object of hatred – Yun Ling's internalised loathing turns creative when she permeates his consciousness and imagination through her apprenticeship at *Yugiri*. Through unconsciously instigating "guilt" and "bad conscience", in particular, Yun Ling is able to stage a revolt against Aritomo's master morality; making him feel guilty because what his countrymen has done to her family.

There are various instances, in the novel, where Yun Ling is able to pervade into Aritomo's conscience through her narratives of brutalities in the camp. Excerpts of their conversation below exhibit some of Yun Ling's subtle retort to remind Aritomo about the past atrocities of Japanese people:

It must have been terrible shock for you, discovering them like that
It's not the first time I've seen dead bodies. I studied his reflection in the glass.
The smell... I thought I had forgotten the smell. But one never does.
(Tan 2012, p. 85).

A woman would not be able to last long as a gardener, said Aritomo
What do you think the (Japanese) guards made us do? (Tan 2012, p. 95).

He took my wrist. Imperial Chinese jade, he murmured.
You should not be wearing it in a place like this
It was my mother's, I said.
One of the few pieces of her jewelry she managed to hide before the Japs came.
(Tan 2012, p. 137)

It means that, from these exchanges, her *ressentiment* has triumphed against the object of its hatred – the external entities she subjected in the move to reassign the pains of her past and instigate guilt. For Nietzsche, the possession of “value of awakening the feeling of guilt in a guilty person” is a form of punishment. Yun Ling’s confessions and angry retorts at Aritomo awaken his “bad conscience” or “pang of conscience” (Nietzsche 1986, p. 14).

Indeed, towards the end of the novel, the triumph of Yun Ling’s *ressentiment* against Aritomo is represented in her dream years after Aritomo disappeared mysteriously in the jungles of Cameron Highlands. Yun Ling narrates how, in the dream, she saw Aritomo in the jungle pathwalk “pushing aside the overhanging branches and vines. Not too far from him, Yun Ling feels she is “pursuing him, quietly, stealthily” while Aritomo allows her to watch his movement. As he turns his body to face her, Yun Ling realises she was carrying his bow, aiming at him. She releases the bowstring without an arrow and yet, Aritomo still falls. It is evident, from this dream, how Yun Ling’s *ressentiment* represents the invisibly sharp arrow that, after its release, caused Aritomo’s ultimate downfall.

BODY AS A SITE OF HISTORY

While seemingly depicting her subjugation through the taboo art of *horimono*, Yun Ling liberates herself from *ressentiment* by making her body a site of her past. In his work examining the role of Nietzsche’s genealogy in history, Michel Foucault in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History* asserts that “the body is the inscribed surface of events” as it reveals “the stigmata of past experience”, including “desires, failings, and errors” (1980, p. 148). For Yun Ling, the body becomes the repository of experiences with *ressentiment*, arising from her captivity at the camp and hounding throughout her relationship with Aritomo.

The body, for Yun Ling, remains the witness of her enslavement from which her *ressentiment* develops. At 19, her body – used for labor during her interment at the camp – endures physical hardship and suffers from slapping or torture by the Japanese “whenever slight offenses are made” (Tan 2012, p. 268, 270). Internally too, her body, along with other women in the camp, stops its function to menstruate, due to stress and destitute conditions in the camp. Furthermore, this suffering deepened when the body, specifically two of Yun Ling’s fingers, is mutilated – scarring her for life (Tan 2012, p. 271).

After the war, Yun Ling’s body, though physically healed from injuries, continues to endure pain. When particularly experiencing fury and “irritability” towards the Japanese, her left hand starts to feel pain, “throbbing in time to (her) pulse” (Tan 2012, p. 72). When it comes to sex, Yun Ling’s body becomes a medium for affirmation of her self-worth. As Yun Ling confesses, she has slept with numerous men – without taking off her gloves which intrigues them – “to convince (herself) that (she) was still physically attractive”. Here, her once powerless body becomes a tool for “asserting influence towards others” (Tan 2012, p. 109).

With the *horimono* inscribed permanently on her body, Yun Ling’s *ressentiment* triumphs — for the act, no less, implies Aritomo’s denunciation of loyalty and ties to the Japanese empire from which his master morality arise. By creating a *horimono*, a taboo art, on a Chinese war survivor, Aritomo demonstrates a condemnation of Japan’s war and its atrocities. As Professor Tatsuji, upon learning about the *horimono*, exclaims:

Imagine: Emperor Hirohito’s gardener; the creator of taboo artwork. On the skin of a Chinese woman, no less (Tan 2012, p. 313).

Aritomo’s decision to accomplish a *horimono* that would reveal “ideas (he) had accumulated for years” on Yun Ling’s body is a provocative act that allows the dissipation of

her *ressentiment* (Tan 2012, p. 287). While the details of the *horimono* depict memories of their relationship at *Yugiri*, it also reveals Aritomo's denunciation of his own nation. In his interpretation of a Chinese myth, the legend of Hou Yi, Aritomo inscribes "an archer" wearing a traditional Japanese *hakama* and shooting his arrow into the sun which, as Frederik observes, resembles the flag of Japan.

As such, this process of doing *horimono*, while replicating the pain Yun Ling has endured, signifies Aritomo's surrendering to Yun Ling's *ressentiment* which ultimately triumphs over his loyalty to the Emperor where his master morality lies. Although the process of this inscription, through *horimono*, awakens Yun Ling's "sudden fury" him, she admits that this rage "subsides for a moment" and after succeeding days, she seems "to enjoy the pain" (Tan 2012, p. 322, 298). As his hands "lingered over the scars from (her) beating", Aritomo resolves – like Lao Tzu writing *Tao Te Ching* before his disappearance from the court – to surrender his thoughts and expertise on Japanese aesthetics to accomplish his final magnum opus before disappearing in the Malayan highlands.

Indeed, in attempting to use the body as a slate for healing and memory, Aritomo perceives his existence to be fixed "in paper and water for eternity" through art; believing that "*the palest ink will endure beyond the memories of men*" (Tan 2012, p. 155). However, his existence – while alive and temporarily rests on Yun Ling's body – becomes the testament on the triumph of her *ressentiment* as she ultimately resolves to destroy the *horimono* after her death (Tan 2012, p. 367).

CONCLUSION

In Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*, as a form of imaginative revolt of the oppressed, is examined to portray the manner in which a wartime survivor copes with atrocious memories and attain justice and healing through Japanese aesthetics. In the novel, the persona of Yun Ling characterises the development of an individual's subdued hatred or *ressentiment* towards her former Japanese oppressors.

Because of this, an examination on the development of Yun Ling's *ressentiment* – from its conception to its dissipation – is explored in different stages. First, *ressentiment* is manifested in Yun Ling's quest to seek justice for Japanese atrocities by becoming a prosecutor against war criminals in Malaya. The idea of justice, in Nietzschean sense, is naturally imbibed in the person with *ressentiment* as powerless individuals are deemed too weak to directly harm their oppressors.

With this, Yun Ling's subdued loathing did not dissipate, but only intensified as she began channeling her hatred towards the people around. This inability to forget the past is related to *ressentiment's* idea of forgetting as a form of repression. To forget is to make an individual leave from himself. Forgetting, according to Nietzsche, is impossible for people with *ressentiment* because, as Yun Ling characterises, pain nurtures the memory.

Since she does not forget, Yun Ling becomes more frustrated and her guilt starts to develop. To act on her guilty conscience, she decides to build a Japanese memorial garden for her sister with the help of the Emperor's former gardener Aritomo. For Nietzsche, the concepts of 'promise', 'debt' and 'guilt' are considered as man's capacities that allow painful remembrance.

At this stage, Yun Ling's *ressentiment* has eventually dissipated because of her creative revenge on Aritomo by rousing his conscience through her wartime narratives. In observing Yun Ling's relationship with Aritomo, Japanese aesthetics played a role in paving way for coping and healing to take place. Through understanding *Yugiri* and other Japanese

aesthetic principles, the reversal of master-slave relationship between her and Aritomo took place.

As a way to completely liberate herself from resentment, Yun Ling allows Aritomo to inscribe *horimono* – a Japanese taboo art of tattooing – on her body. With the past written on her body, she is able to let go of the deep-seated hatred lurking in her consciousness and memory. Thus, tracing the birth and death of *ressentiment* in the novel ensures that Nietzsche's idea remains relevant, especially in analyzing the path of suppressed loathing for individuals with traumatic past.

Yun Ling is able to completely liberate herself from *ressentiment* by going through the familiar process of seeking justice, exhibiting painful remembrance, displaying guilt, and creatively reversing master-slave relationship. As such, tracing the birth and death of one's *ressentiment* contributes to healing past traumas in the present time. In Yun Ling's case, it was Japanese aesthetics – which is lived by the culture she once loathed – that ironically led her to towards the path to freedom.

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