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硕 士 学 位 论 文

谭恩美小说中的东方主义及反东方主义：

华裔美籍作家谭恩美的双重身份

Coexistence of Orientalism and Anti-Orientalism

in Amy Tan's Novels:

Amy Tan's Dual Identity as a Chinese American Writer

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Abstract

Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, in which he reveals the secret of Orientalism. He argues that Orientalism has been deeply rooted in the western world. Under the discourse of Orientalism, the orient is defined as irrational, backward and uncivilized while the occident assumes an image of being rational and civilized. It is through Orientalism that the occident is able to maintain a superior status and further obtains advantages in the field of politics, economy and culture. Amy Tan, born and growing up in America, is inevitably under the influence of Orientalism. Her novels show characteristics of Orientalism, which are full of stereotypical images of Chinese elements. Between the lines, China is reduced to a poor and backward country. However, Tan didn't totally embrace Orientalism. After reconciliation with her mother in her later life, Tan made efforts to get familiar with Chinese culture and accepted her Chinese heritage. As a result, she began to think critically about American society and culture and shows a tendency of anti-Orientalism. This thesis explores the traces of both Orientalism and anti-Orientalism found in Tan's works to better understand her dual identity. This thesis will be divided into the following parts:

The first part summarizes the main points of Edward Said's *Orientalism* to provide a theoretical basis for this thesis. It also gives a brief introduction to Amy Tan and her novels as well as literature reviews. Besides, the significance and methodology of this thesis will also be included.

The second part analyzes the stereotypical images of Chinese elements in Amy Tan's works, such as images of Chinese men, Chinese women, Chinese culture and China itself. In Tan's description, Chinese people, men and women, are either evil, like Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady, or submissive, like Charlie Chan and Lotus Blossom. Besides, Chinese culture is depicted as ridiculous and China is a country always in war. All these images conform to the discourse of Orientalism.

The third part is about the elements that deconstruct Orientalism in her books. In her novels, she includes the depiction of evil western men, which subverts the perfect

image of Westerners. Christianity, in Tan's novels, loses its sacredness and becomes the tool of the west for invading the east. Besides, Tan applies the narrative technique of talk-story which denies the western discourse and enables Chinese people to articulate. Finally, Tan ends most of her books with the integration of Chinese and American culture, which bridges the gulf between the west and the east.

The fourth part is the conclusion which restates the main points of this thesis.

Key Words: Amy Tan; Orientalism; dual identity

摘　要

赛义德在 1978 年出版了《东方主义》。在该书中，他揭露了东方主义运行的奥秘。他认为东方主义在西方根深蒂固。在东方主义话语下，东方是个不理智、落后及野蛮的存在；而西方则是理智和文明的世界。通过东方主义话语，西方得以维持其优越的地位并得以进一步获得政治、经济、文化上的主动权。作为一个美国生美国长的作家，谭恩美不可避免地受到了东方主义的影响。因此，她的小说表现出了东方主义的特点。她的书中不乏对中国元素的刻板描写，这些描写使中国被塑造成了一个贫穷、落后且没有生机的国家。另一方面，谭恩美并没有全盘接受东方主义的话语。在与母亲和解后，她开始努力了解中国文化，因此，在她的小说中又出现了对美国社会及文化的批判。本文探讨谭恩美小说中的东方主义倾向和反东方主义的特点，以便更好理解其双重身份在小说中的显现。基于此论点，本论文分为以下几个部分：

第一部分将对赛义德的东方主义一书进行总结，为本论文提供理论基础。同时简单介绍谭恩美及她的作品和文献综述以及本文的研究意义及研究方法。

第二部分将分析谭恩美对中国元素的刻板描写。这包括对中国男性、中国女性、中国文化及中国的刻板描写。在谭恩美的描述中，不管是中国男性还是中国女性都要么成为像傅满楚、龙女这样邪恶的化身，要么成为如陈查理、莲花这种懦弱的形象。中国文化是愚昧的，中国则总处于动荡的战争中。而所有这些正是东方主义的体现。

第三部分将讨论谭恩美是如何解构东方主义的。首先，她在书中刻画了邪恶的西方人形象，颠覆了西方人完美的形象。再者，作为大多数西方人所信仰的基督教也不再神圣，而是成了西方侵略东方的工具。同时，谭恩美对讲故事叙述策略的运用也颠覆了西方的话语权，使得中国人得以重新发声。最后，谭恩美通过中美文化融合的方式来解构东方主义，填平了东西方间存在的鸿沟。

第四部分将对本论文进行总结。

关键词：谭恩美　东方主义　双重身份

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Introduction

0.1. Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Edward Said was born in Jerusalem, Palestine in 1935 and lived there until 1947 when political tension and conflicts within Palestine increased. He then immigrated to and was educated in Cairo and the United States successively. That diasporic experience enabled him to have a close contact with western mainstream ideology and experience the west's reaction and attitude towards the east. All of these were reflected in his later work, *Orientalism*, which was published in 1978. In this book, by picking up various typical western texts which may be political, historical, philological, archaeological and literary, he analyzes how the western world has imagined and invented an image of the Orient from the 18th century to the present day. "It provided a timely—and controversial—critical overview of the history of Western understandings of [Oriental] culture" (Leitch 1988).

At the beginning of *Orientalism*, Said defines the term Orientalism from three interdependent levels. First, it is an academic designation. "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (Said 2). In other words, the first level of Orientalism refers to a variety of studies related to the Orient. Second, it has a more general meaning related to the former academic designation. "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Ibid). That is, the western scholars take it for granted that there exist distinctions between the East and the West, which they treat as the base for the elaboration of "the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" (3). The third one means "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority

over the Orient" (Ibid). This expounds the power relationship between the West and the East.

Combining these three definitions, Said sets to explain how the West reduces the East to its present inferior position. First, he elucidates that the world is divided into two parts, the West and the East, the relationship between which is not an equal one but one "of power, of domination" (5). Within this unbalanced relationship, it is the West who occupies the superior position, which endows them with the right of discourse. By taking advantage of this right, the West creates an image of the Orient according to its own will and imagination rather than basing on facts and reality. In this creation, the Orient is presented as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" while the West is highlighted as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (40). As a result, the East is reduced to a status of barbarian. But it can do nothing except accepting whatever the West forces on it since it is the "passive reactor" (109).

Later, that image is inculcated in the mind of the Western public. This is achieved by "a created body of theory and practice" and "a considerable material investment" (6). In other words, that created image of the Orient and the Orientals is repeated and emphasized by the western scholars through their writings, which are further defined by Said as the manifest Orientalism. Another definition opposite to this one is the latent Orientalism. Said maintains that the stereotypical image of the Orient will gradually be accepted by the public through repetition. And it will finally turn into a collective notion which is hard to be broken by any individual. This "unconscious positivity" is called latent Orientalism (206). While the manifest Orientalism changes continuously as time progresses, the latent Orientalism remains relatively stable. That is, the Orient keeps being an unknown and strange place for the western public. And finally, in order to maintain a superior position, the West imagines the East as backward, ignorant and irrational.

But unlike Said who clearly realizes the existence of Orientalism and tries to escape from it, Amy Tan has different reactions. When she comes out of her small Chinese home and begins to live in the big American society, she is inevitably

influenced by both manifest Orientalism through reading American texts and latent Orientalism through contacting American people. As a result, she seems to feel confused about her own identity, which is finally reflected in her works.

0.2. Amy Tan and Her Novels

Celebrated as an outstanding writer who is as important as Maxion Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Vladimir Nabokov, etc., Amy Tan was born in 1952 and published her first book in 1989 when she was 37 years old. She began her career relatively late, for taking writing as a profession never fell in her earlier life plan. Her mother, Daisy Tan, who was a Chinese immigrant, regarded only those lucrative jobs as ideal careers. On the one hand, Amy was unconsciously influenced by her mother and never took writing into consideration. However, on the other hand, she attempts to challenge her mother due to their disharmonious relationship. The first frustration she brought to her mother was her transfer from Linfield College to San Jose City College and changed her major from Pre-med to English and Linguistics because of her falling in love with an Italian American, Louis DeMattei, her life-long husband. Later, she transferred once again to San Jose State University where she obtained a bachelor's degree in English and Linguistics and a master's degree in Linguistics.

Working for a short period of time after graduation, Amy Tan continued to pursue a doctorate in the University of California at Berkley, which was stopped by the death of her friend Pete. At the same time, under some mysterious guidance, she became a language development consultant to the Alameda County Association for Retarded Citizens. Unpleasantness caused by some racial misunderstandings brought this career to a close. Later, she changed her job to business writing. She had excellent performance in this field of business, which turned to the acceptance of larger and larger amounts of workload and finally required her to work ninety hours a week. She recalled that "she felt trapped, and [remembered] telling herself every morning how much she hated her work" (Huntley 8). After the psychiatrist's failure to cure her workaholic tendency, she decided to work out a way by herself through writing stories.

That was the beginning of her real writing career. But something more crucial and more significant happened in 1986 when her mother was hospitalized because of angina. It was not until this moment did she realize that "she knew little percent of her" (Tan 2003:358). Shocked and terrified by it, she made a promise to herself that "if my mother lives, I will get to know her. I will ask her about her past, and this time I'll actually listen to what she has to say. Why, I'll even take her to China, and, yes, I'll write stories about her" (Ibid). It was under this promise that her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* was produced.

The Joy Luck Club is made up of sixteen short stories which happen between four pairs of mothers and daughters. Except the stories of the late Suyuan told by her daughter, Jingmei, the other stories are set out from the first person perspective, with the narrative sequence corresponding with the way of playing mahjong in the book. The mothers recall their traumatic past in China and their conflicts with their American-born daughters who narrate their frustration caused by their mothers during their growing up. The relationship between mothers and daughters turns better as the stories develop and climaxes with Jingmei's reunion with her half-twin-sisters who are left in China by their mother. This autobiographic novel with its unique narrative strategies and the bewitching plots not only heals Tan's relationship with her mother but also brings her great celebrity. "With a release date of March 1989, the novel appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list the next month" (Huntley 10). It continued to stay on this list in the following 40 weeks and helped her win the National Book Award for fiction.

There is a prediction that those writers who have succeeded in their first book are doomed to fail in their second one (Tan 2003:325). Due to this prediction, Amy Tan shouldered great pressure when she began the writing of her second book. After abandoning another six unfinished books of "hundreds of pages" (332), she succeeded in the publication of *The Kitchen God's Wife*. She treasured great pride for it and declared that "but the eighth book – eight is always a lucky number – the eighth book is *The Kitchen God's Wife*. And regardless of what others may think, it is my favorite"

(333). Same as the first book, she frames the story with mother-daughter relationships. What differentiates this book from the previous one is that the majority of the stories are concerned about Jiang Weili's miserable past in ancient China. In that part, she criticizes the patriarchal society in China without mercy. Likewise, this book, based on the experience of Amy Tan's mother, Daisy Tan, has enjoyed great popularity among readers upon its publication and appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Sybil Steinberg praised it as "a triumph, a solid indication of a mature talent for magically involving storytelling, beguiling use of language and deeply textured and nuanced character development" (qtd. in Huntley 10).

When Amy Tan was looking for views in China for the movie version of *The Joy Luck Club*, she and her collaborators encountered "a hamlet of pristine scenery and stone-stacked dwellings" (Tan 2003: 251-52). This village that inspired her became one of the settings in her third book, the *Hundred Secret Senses* published in 1995. Perhaps, in order to get rid of the stereotypical mother-daughter relationship which is the major thread in her previous novels, she replaces the Chinese mother with an elder sister. However, actually, she doesn't break her previous mode since that elder sister is also from China and is exotic and mysterious with her Chinese background. The addition of a pair of "yin eyes" increases the sense of mystery and also invites more negative comments. Claire Messud is one of them who assume it as "a mildly entertaining and slightly ridiculous ghost story" (qtd. in Huntley 13). On the other hand, some others appreciate her creative efforts and celebrate that Amy Tan "doesn't simply return to a world but burrows more deeply into it, following new trails to fresh revelations" (Ibid).

After this one, it was six years later that Amy Tan published her fourth book, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, which returns to the topic of mother-daughter relationships. This story begins with Luling's development of Alzheimer's disease. It is at this critical moment that her daughter, Rose, realizes her estrangement from her mother and attempts to reread the manuscripts her mother gave her years ago. Those manuscripts enable her to learn the bitter experiences her mother has encountered in

the past in China and lead to her final understanding of her mother. In this book, the topic of mother-daughter relationships becomes more intensive and more universal, which goes beyond the limits of Chinese-immigrant mothers and American-born daughters but includes mothers and daughters both from China. Wang Lili comments that although *The Bonesetter's Daughter* shares some similarities in content with Tan's previous works, it is creative in the artistic aspects. "As a writer, Amy Tan is mature. She is able to transcend herself" (Wang 278).

In 2005, *Saving Fish from Drowning* was published. This time, she abandons the thread of mother-daughter relationships totally and turns to "discuss a series of social issues like politics and war, global ecological environment, human religion and global mass media" (Zhang 87). However, this change didn't win widespread acknowledgement.

Then in 2013, Amy Tan returned to mother-daughter relationship and published *The Valley of Amazement*. The inspiration of this book originates from a photograph which she encounters in an Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. In this picture, there are several women whose costumes look similar to what Tan's grandmother is wearing in one of their family photos. And those are worn only by courtesans in the past China. Thus, Tan cannot help wondering what her grandmother's real experiences are. The novel begins in 1905 when the protagonist Violet is still young. Her mother is an American who is the madam of a brothel in Shanghai. The story records her gradual alienation from her mother because her mother's indulging in business. Later, her mother leaves China for America without her due to a fraud by her mother's lover. Therefore, Violet entertains a grudge towards her mother. The latter part records Violet's adventure in the courtesan world as well as in a larger background of China, in which she inserts her mother's experiences of escaping from America to China.

Except *Saving Fish from Drowning*, Tan's other five novels all have a dual setting, modern America and war-time China. As a Chinese American writer who was born and growing up in the United States, Amy Tan got most of the information about

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