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**ORIENTALISM IN AMY TAN'S *THE HUNDRED*
SECRET SENSES AND SAVING FISH FROM
*DROWNING***

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ÖZET

Tezli Yüksek Lisans

Amy Tan'ın *The Hundred Secret Senses* ve
Saving Fish from Drowning Adlı Romanlarında Şarkiyatçılık

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Şarkiyatçı kuram, 1990'lı yılların başından itibaren başlıca eleştiri kuramları arasında yer alan post-kolonyel teorinin önemli alt başlıklarındandır. İlk olarak Edward Said tarafından incelenen ve ortaya konan şarkiyatçı teori özellikle Doğu ülkelerinin ile bu ülkelerin kültürleri ve insanların Batı dünyası tarafından nasıl “öteki” olarak görüldüğü ve gösterildiğiyle ilgilenmektedir. Batı'nın Doğu'yu çeşitli olumsuz şekillerde temsil ederek “ötekilemesi”nin en temel sebebi Doğu'yu aşağı göstererek bir zıtlık yaratmak ve böylece Batı ülkelerinin ve insanların her alanda üstün olduğunu kanıtlamaktır. Bu zıtlık yaratılırken, Doğu dünyasına olumsuz önyargılarla yaklaşmakta ve Doğulu imgesine zarar veren stereotipler oluşturulmaktadır. Batı'nın Doğu'ya bu olumsuz bakışı ve yaklaşımı Batı sanatının ve edebiyatının çeşitli dallarında ortaya çıkmıştır.

Amy Tan Amerika'nın dikkat çeken ve çok satan çağdaş yazarlarından birisidir ve kendisi Asyalı-Amerikalı bir yazar olduğunu kabul etmese de, bu edebiyatın önemli temsilcilerindendir. Çinli-Amerikalı olan Amy Tan'ın romanlarında da bir Batılı ideolojisi olan şarkiyatçılığın içselleştirildiği gözlenmektedir. Yazar, romanlarında, Batılı okurlarına Doğu kültürünü ve insanlarını tanıtmış gibi görünürken, aslında Batı'nın Doğu'ya ve Doğulu'ya attığı klişeleşmiş olumsuz imgeleri körüklemekte, Doğu'yu ve Doğulu'yu “öteki” olarak yansıtmaktadır. Amy Tan'ın, Doğu kökenli etnik bir yazar olarak, bir Batı ideolojisini içselleştirmesinin ve eserlerinde de bunu yansıttığının ardında çeşitli sebepler vardır. Bu çalışma, bu sebeplerin incelenmesinin yanı sıra, temel olarak, yazarın *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) ve *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) adlı romanlarında bulunan şarkiyatçı öğeleri göstermeyi amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1) Amy Tan, 2) Şarkiyatçılık, 3) Asyalı-Amerikalı Edebiyatı, 4) Post-kolonyel Teori, 5) *The Hundred Secret Senses*, 6) *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

ABSTRACT

Masters of Art Degree

Orientalism in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* and
Saving Fish from Drowning

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Orientalist theory which has emerged under postcolonial studies has been used by many literary and social critics since the beginning of the 1990s. First analyzed and discussed by Edward Said, Orientalist theory is primarily concerned with how Eastern countries, culture and people are perceived and reflected as “the other” by the Western World. By representing and othering the East in various negative ways and by creating an opposition in which the East is inferior, the West validates its superiority over Eastern culture and its people. In this way, negative biases against the Eastern world and derogatory Eastern stereotypes are also reinforced. This negative gaze and approach towards the East has also emerged in various branches of Western art and literature.

The internalization of Orientalism as a Western ideology can be detected in the novels of Chinese American writer, Amy Tan, who is also one of the best-selling ethnic fiction writers in the United States. However, even though she is a representative of Asian American literature Amy Tan rejects being categorized as one. While introducing Eastern culture and its people in her novels and making them familiar to her Western readers, Tan actually fosters negative stereotyped images attributed to the East and the Easterner. She reflects the East and the Easterner as “the other.” There are various reasons for Amy Tan to internalize such a Western ideology as an ethnic writer with an Asian background. This study basically aims to explore the Orientalist elements in Amy Tan's two novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) and *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) as well as the reasons why the writer employs Orientalism.

Key Words: 1) Amy Tan, 2) Orientalism, 3) Asian-American Literature, 4) Postcolonial Theory, 5) *The Hundred Secret Senses*, 6) *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study on Orientalism in the selected novels of the Chinese-American writer Amy Tan, who is a prominent literary figure in American ethnic literature. This study, which consists of four main chapters, aims to analyse the Orientalist aspects of Amy Tan's two novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning* from different perspectives. Alongside the analyses of her two novels, the study also includes the summary of the basic principles of Orientalism and the examination of the relationship between Amy Tan and Orientalism.

The first chapter of this thesis should be seen as a provisional chapter because it aims to inform the reader basically about the concept of "Orientalism," which is first analyzed and discussed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978). In order to fully comprehend the Orientalist issues in Tan's novels, it is essential to become familiar with the main arguments of Orientalist theory. Moreover, since Orientalist theory shares the basic concerns and aims of postcolonial criticism, the basic tenets of postcolonial theory will also be included in this first chapter.

Orientalist theory is concerned with how the East is represented by the Westerner and how Eastern countries, people and culture are perceived and reflected as "the other." The West creates distinctions and oppositions between the East and its own world. The West uses these oppositions to reflect itself as the 'superior' and the East as 'the inferior.' Promoting demeaning generalizations and clichés about the East is also a significant aspect of Orientalism. The first chapter gives introductory information on these Orientalist assumptions. Most popular Orientalist clichés and stereotypes are also included.

In the second chapter the relationship between Amy Tan and Orientalism is examined. It focuses on how Amy Tan, as a major representative of Asian-American literature and a contemporary best-selling fiction writer, reflects an imperial colonial gaze while writing about China and the Orient. Thus, this chapter mainly focuses on

the internalization of Orientalism, which in the case of Amy Tan, becomes a Western ideology utilized by an ethnic writer. Despite her Chinese background, Tan reflects the East and the Easterner as “the other” and depicts them as “alien” in her novels. This chapter will clarify the significant reasons for Tan to endorse this dominant white gaze. Among these reasons to satisfy the mainstream reader is prominent. To please the Anglo-European reader and sell her novels worldwide, Amy Tan creates “the other” out of her own ethnic background and markets this “other.” The market concern of the writer makes her “decorate” her novels with an Orientalist touch. As an ethnic writer, Tan satisfies the mainstream readers by accepting and fostering white hegemony. Furthermore, this chapter will also show how Tan’s ethnic heritage, which she commodifies in an Orientalist way, is also commodified by the publishers. Tan’s “Chineseness” is presented as an “exotic” aspect of her literary career and it helps her publishers to market her as an “ethnic” literary celebrity.

In order not to be “the other” with a Chinese background in a Western culture, Amy Tan herself “others” the Chinese in her novels; by this way she thinks she can identify herself with the mainstream and construct a Western identity, which is surely more “acceptable” than an “Eastern” identity. However, the effort to get rid of one’s ethnicity in this way results in “self-hatred”, which Sheng-Mei Ma also points out. As will be demonstrated, the signs of “self-hatred” can be traced back to Tan’s own childhood. Chinese-American characters in her novels can be said to be suffering from “self-hatred” as well. The explanations of all these elements in the second chapter are essential for this study. This chapter will enable the reader to perceive Orientalism from a broader perspective and to grasp the issues more clearly while reading the analyses of the Orientalist approach in *Saving Fish from Drowning* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, which are examined in the third and fourth chapters.

In the third and fourth chapters, Amy Tan’s Orientalist approach is analyzed in her novels, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) and *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005). The reasons why these two novels have been chosen is because they differ from Amy Tan’s other novels in the respect that they do not deal with mother-daughter relationships, a theme that she is popularly known for using, especially in

her acclaimed debut novel *Joy Luck Club* (1989). Unlike her other novels, in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the relationship between two sisters is foregrounded. One of the sisters is Chinese and the other is Chinese American and because they are “sisters,” not mother and daughter, the generation gap is not a concern. However, there are many examples of “culture gap,” the differences between Western and Eastern cultures. In addition, we see an American-born sister “othering” a Chinese sister to have an American identity and representing China and Chineseness in derogatory terms. In the personality of the American-born Olivia, the “superiority” of the Westerner is underlined as opposed to the “inferior” Eastern stereotype of the Chinese sister, Kwan. The Orientalist elements that reflect a binary thinking of us/them in the *The Hundred Secret Senses* is analyzed consecutively by the following sub-titles: The Physical Appearance of “the Other,” Association of “the Other” with Animals, Linguistic Exoticism, American and Chinese Concepts of Family, Chinese Food, the Backwardness in China, the “Insanity” and “Gullibility” of the Easterner and the Easterners in Masses.

The fourth chapter deals with the novel *Saving Fish from Drowning*. Rather than a character study, this chapter will scrutinize the significance of the setting and disclose how Orientalism can become a mode of thinking perpetuated through space and location. The setting of *Saving Fish from Drowning* is Burma, a geography that is “peripheral” to the West. Officially called as Myanmar, Burma is an Asian country and it used to be a British colony. The encounter between the “modern” Western tourists and Eastern “savage” inhabitants is the central theme in the novel and the differences between the West and the East are foregrounded. Thus, *Saving Fish from Drowning* is also a substantial work that reflects the Orientalist attitude of the West towards the East and the Easterner, especially from a collective point of view. Instead of a contrast between two individuals, two countries are opposed where the difference between the West and the East are presented in such a way that the West is glorified and the East degraded. In order to disclose this demeaning portrayal of the East, four basic themes have been scrutinized. These are Eastern savagery and backwardness, Eastern food and cleanliness, linguistic exoticism, and the ‘gullibility’ of the Easterner.

To put it succinctly, this dissertation, which consists of four chapters, aims to show that Amy Tan is an Asian-American writer with an Orientalist worldview. I will try to demonstrate this idea through the analyses of her two novels. In order to provide my analyses with a strong base, I will also present introductory information on Orientalism and the analysis of the relationship between Tan and Orientalism.

PART ONE

POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM AND ORIENTALISM

In the Introduction part, it is stated that this study aims to reveal the Orientalist approach in Amy Tan's two novels, *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*. To grasp the Orientalist operations in these works, the aim and the content of Orientalism should be understood on a large scale. However, dealing with Orientalism also requires the clarification of Postcolonial criticism. Because Orientalism has emerged within postcolonial theory and because they have a symbiotic relationship, background information of postcolonial criticism is essential. Therefore, this chapter aims to define Orientalist theory as well as postcolonial theory.

1.1. Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial criticism which aims to show the political, social, cultural and psychological impacts on the ex-colonized has been used as a literary and critical theory beginning from the early 1990s. Postcolonial criticism mainly “focus[es] on the experiences and literary production of peoples whose history is characterized by extreme political, social, and psychological oppression”¹

Postcolonial criticism “is both a subject matter and theoretical framework” as a field of literary studies.² When it is analyzed from the point of subject matter, postcolonial criticism studies the literature colonized cultures produced as a reaction to colonial domination. This can also be defined as “commonwealth literature” and this literature could be written by the colonizers but mostly it has been produced by the colonized or formerly colonized people. Without considering the theoretical framework used, the analysis of any postcolonial literary work may be categorized as postcolonial criticism. A critic does not have to employ the theoretical framework to detect a colonialist ideology in a specific postcolonial literary work, for an innate

¹ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 363.

² *ibid*, p. 365.

postcolonial approach comes forward as a natural reaction due to the literary features of such a work.³

On the other hand, postcolonial criticism aims to detect the political, social, cultural, and psychological operations of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies when a theoretical framework is used. These colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies, which will be explained later in this study, “can be present in any literary text [so] a work doesn’t have to be categorized as postcolonial for us to be able to use postcolonial criticism to analyze it.”⁴

Here, it should be emphasized that this study on Amy Tan’s Orientalism employs this aspect of postcolonial theory under the particular title of Orientalism because the main starting point is that Tan makes use of the colonialist ideologies in her novels. This makes the writer the object of postcolonial criticism. After all, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, one of the novels dealt in this study, is set in Myanmar which is previously known as Burma—the ex-British colony. This novel endows the study with substantial postcolonial material to demonstrate how the ex-colonized is reflected.

Back to postcolonial theory, it derives from “colonialism” which means European domination of the world that started in the fifteenth century. Here, Eurocentrism should also be explained for the sake of clarity and consistency. Eurocentrism takes the European perceptions of culture and politics as the standard in order to create juxtaposition between these standards and so-called inferior cultures. This approach provides a justification for European domination and colonialization. Eurocentric ideology focuses on the idea that European culture and values are valid, proper, practicable and reasonable. Therefore, they should be presented as the norm to primitive, underdeveloped and uncivilized people and cultures. Eurocentric approach accompanied the self-righteousness of the colonizers

³ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 365.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 365.

by depicting non-European peoples as backward and needing European intervention; and they saw this intervention as a “civilizing activity.”⁵

The colonizers imagined that the colonized were nowhere near as close as to the colonizer who were at the center of the world and they perceived “themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper ‘self’; native peoples were ‘the Other,’ different, and therefore inferior.”⁶ Postcolonial critics aim to deconstruct this artificially created justification and they “asserted in their discourses that no culture is better or worse than other culture and consequently they nullified the logic of the colonialists.”⁷

All these conceptions and assumptions which are intended to be disproved by the postcolonial critics are the very base of *colonialist ideology*, also known as *colonialist discourse*, which reveals the connection between the assumed superiority of the West and the language used to convey this assumption. Colonialist ideology based upon the assumption of Western superiority is essentially Eurocentric. Colonialist ideology leads to Eurocentrism, by the same token, Eurocentrism leads to Orientalism. As Said stated, “by the end of the WWI Europe had colonized 85 percent of the earth. To say simply that modern Orientalism has been an aspect of both imperialism and colonialism is not to say anything very disputable.”⁸

1.2. Orientalism

The theory of Orientalism, the core of which is “eurocentrism”, was first analyzed by Edward Said. It is a specific form of othering.⁹ It is “specific” because it is particularly the representation and the othering of the “East” by the Westerners;

⁵ Dirlik, Arif. (1996) “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism.” *History and Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective. pp. 96-118. p. 111.

⁶ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. .p. 366.

⁷ Mansur, Visam. (n.d.). Post-colonialism. www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/4573/Lectures/postcolonialism.html. (March 25, 2008).

⁸ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 123.

⁹ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. .p. 367.

Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”¹⁰ As Said states,

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire ... Orientalism is a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples, and localities.¹¹

However, Orientalism also employs elements that negate the Eastern people and culture, and by this way, constructs a positive Western identity in return. The theory of Orientalism is totally a way of “representation.” This approach provides the West with the authority and initiative to create an artificial occidental point of view of the Orient. The goal of Orientalism is “to produce a positive national self-definition for Western nations by contrast with Eastern nations upon which the West projects all the negative characteristics it doesn’t want to believe exist among its own people.”¹²

Edward Said’s pioneering book called Orientalism tells how the West has perceived the East in cultural, political and historical dimensions throughout history and opens with a quotation of Karl Marx: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”¹³ What is suggested in this quotation is the inadequacy of the East to express itself, and thus leaving the West the responsibility for representation. Therefore, their representation is indirectly the representation of the West because every good and favorable thing, which they are not or cannot be, describes the West. As Todorov also states, talking about the Other is talking about oneself; negating the Other means affirming the Self.¹⁴ This is nothing else but “the colonialist psychology” and “othering.”

¹⁰ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 3.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 202.

¹² Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 367.

¹³ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, n. pag.

¹⁴ Tural, Nilgün. (2002). “Edward Said’in Oryantalizm’i Nasıl okunuyor?”, *Doğu Batı*, sayı: 20, Ankara, Felsefe, Sanat ve Kültür Yayınları. ss. 115-134, p. 116.

At this point, Stuart Hall's explanations on the content and practices of culture are considerably important and lead us to the "representation" concept. According to Hall, culture does not only mean "shared values" in the society but it is also related to the "feelings, attachments and emotions"; Identity searches about who the individual is, what the individual's feelings and attachments are, and thus which group the individual feels s/he belongs to.¹⁵

Culture, employing these questions as the starting point, presents some practices applied by its participants. One of the most important practices is giving meaning. People, objects and events are given meanings by us as the participants in a culture; "We give things meanings by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them."¹⁶ The importance of representation is based on the fact that it "*is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" and meaning "is constructed through signifying – i.e. meaning- producing – practices."¹⁷

In a similar way, the West produces the Eastern meanings; the West *has composed* its own Eastern representations. The meanings attributed to the East are usually nowhere near as authentic as real Eastern characteristics. Throughout the history, the content of the relationships between the West and the East has differed, the situations and events have been various but "each of these phases and eras produces its own distorted knowledge of the Other, each its own reductive images, its own disputatious polemics."¹⁸

What is the East; what is the West, then? Apparently, there are two realms opposing each other. In his article called "Orientalism Reconsidered," Said restates that these realms are not something divine or natural but social and man-made; they

¹⁵ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 2.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 15, 17.

¹⁸ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. xxii.

are just human productions.¹⁹ “Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.”²⁰

By means of the Eastern representations, the West considers the East as an excluded and detached phenomenon. Therefore, in the very essence of Orientalism there lies the fact of “distinction”— “we” and “they.” Said quotes Levi Strauss who mentions the need for the human mind to classify. However, it should not be forgotten that the classification in the mind is “arbitrary”:

... mind requires order, and order is achieved by discriminating and taking note of everything, placing everything of which the mind is aware in a secure, refindable place, therefore giving things some role to play in the economy of objects and identities that make up an environment. This kind of rudimentary classification has a logic to it, but the rules of the logic by which a green fern in one society is a symbol of grace and in another is considered maleficent are neither predictably rational nor universal. There is always a measure of the purely arbitrary in the way the distinctions between things are seen. And with these distinctions go values whose history, if one could unearth it completely, would probably show the same measure of arbitrariness.²¹

Therefore, the distinction between the West and the East is not a concrete reality but made up of arbitrary man-made assumptions. According to Said, these distinctions or differences have a “fictional reality [because] it is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality.”²² To prove his idea, he gives a clear example:

A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call “the land of the barbarians.” In other words, this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making

¹⁹ Said, Edward. (Autumn, 1985). “Orientalism Reconsidered.” *Cultural Critique*. No. 1. pp. 89-107. p. 90.

²⁰ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 5.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 53.

²² *ibid*, p. 54.

geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word “arbitrary” here because imaginative geography of the “our land-barbarian land” variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for “us” to set up these boundaries in our own minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from “ours.” To a certain extent modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively. ... The geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways. Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is “out there,” beyond one’s own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own.²³

The East is always beyond what is known, which makes the East a potential danger for the West. The Orient is a source of fear and danger because one is scared by the unknown. To define the unknown, to make it known and familiar is the best way to dismiss the fear. Therefore, this is one of the reasons why the East is to be defined by the West. If you have the power to define, this is something like creation and the West assumes the role of the creator of the Orient beyond the

European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. ... It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries. ... Secondly, there is the motif of the Orient as insinuating danger.²⁴

Said’s further striking and clear metaphors helps the reader understand what Orientalism is and what it is not. The following quotation linking up Orientalism and theatre is remarkable in order to get another clear idea on the relationship between the East and the West:

Our initial description of Orientalism as a learned field now acquires a new concreteness. A field is often an enclosed space. The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a

²³ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 54.

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 57.

theatrical stage affixed to Europe. An Orientalist is but the particular specialist in knowledge for which Europe at large is responsible for (and responsive to) dramas technically put together by the dramatist. In the depths of this Orientalist stage stands a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world.²⁵

To put it succinctly, Orientalism includes the issues of representation of the East and Eastern people; arbitrary distinction between the West and the East-the Self and the Other; and the classifications. It attains the power over “the Other” by means of “the knowledge of the Other.” Orientalism is a “systematic approach”²⁶ to the Orient which leads to arbitrary definitions, descriptions, some formulations and generalizations of the East and the Easterners who are put into “reductive categories.”²⁷ It is the relationship between the subject and the object, often introducing the misconceptions of “the object.”

If these misconceptions are fixed and become indispensable, they bring “the stereotypes.” Stuart Hall points out the effects of stereotyping which are essentializing, reductionist and naturalizing; “stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” and it “is central to the representation of racial difference.”²⁸ However, to understand these effects and function of stereotyping, a clear definition of “stereotyping” is necessary.

Firstly, stereotypes benefit from “the few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized’ characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them, *fix* them without change or development to eternity”; In this sense, “*stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’*”, which makes the most important aspect of the stereotyping.²⁹

²⁵ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 63.

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 73.

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 239.

²⁸ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 257.

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 258.

Secondly, stereotyping benefits from a “splitting strategy.” What is normal and acceptable and what is abnormal and unacceptable are divided and everything different is excluded and expelled. This is the other characteristic of stereotyping which “*symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong.*”³⁰ So there is always a symbolic border between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘us’ and ‘the Other’. The difference cannot be tolerated; it is exposed to a “symbolic exile.” In that way, the purification of the society is ensured by excluding the Other.³¹

Another important aspect of stereotyping is its tendency to exist where the huge inequalities of power are seen. The subordinate or excluded groups are subjected to the effects of power. In this way, stereotyping has important similarities to Foucault’s power/knowledge and Gramsci’s hegemony notions which is examined in Chapter II. Because stereotyping is a classifying practice and it employs exclusion as a result of classification of “people according to a norm.” This is also “an aspect of the struggle for hegemony.”³² So there is strong relationship among representation, difference and power within stereotyping.³³

What are the most common Orientalist stereotypes and assumptions, then? According to the Orientalist point of view, there are clear-cut differences between the Eastern and the Western cultures and peoples. The function of these differences is to prevent the East and the West from being entwined into each other and assert the positions of these two “distinct” regions. The West has loaded the East with such distinctions, each of which creates a striking opposition. If one needs to categorize these differences, what is revealed obviously is that all the positive traits are reserved for the West and, as a natural outcome of this approach; all negative traits are burdened onto the East. As Tyson points out, no cultural superiority could be shown “if there were no cultural inferiority to contrast with it.”³⁴

³⁰ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 258.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 258.

³² *ibid*, p. 258.

³³ *ibid*, p. 258.

³⁴ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 413.

The first constituent of the Orientalist differentiation is the notion that the Orient is passive and the West is active. The Westerner is the one who takes the action, performs or fulfills whereas the Easterner is the silent one who gives into his destiny. As Said emphasizes, “the West is the actor, the Orient is a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior.”³⁵ The passivity of the East and the activity of the West are the most popular assumption of Orientalism.

Maureen Murdock also points out the same issue from a similar perspective. The arbitrary distinction between the West and the East causes a “polarization” which

... leads one to view the Other as an “it.” The philosopher Martin Buber describes the conflicting ways human beings view themselves and others in his book *I and Thou*. He describes two attitudes: that of I-It and that of I-Thou. The I-It attitude treats the other as a *thing* that is separate from self, to be measured, organized, and controlled; the I-It attitude does not recognize the other as sacred. The I-Thou attitude addresses the other as one and the same as self.³⁶

The relationship between the West and the East is nothing more than the relationship between the “I” and “it” within the Orientalist framework since the West shows itself as “the subject” which means “I” and the East as “the object” which means “it”; anyway, if there is an action, the West does this action and the East is affected by it. This is the summary of their relationship throughout the history and it provides another perspective for the explanation of the “passivity” of the Orient and the “activity” of the Occident.

Second common belief in Orientalism is the non-logical structure of the Eastern culture. This means that a Westerner cannot always comprehend the Eastern point of view and values in a logical framework. In the very essence of the Eastern culture, there are superstitions which are quite senseless and groundless for the Westerners. It is assumed that superstitions, coincidence, fate and luck control Eastern life, which is really incomprehensible for the West. The West looks down on

³⁵ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 109.

³⁶ Murdock, Maureen. (1990). *The Heroine's Journey*. Boston & London: Shambhala, p. 170.

all these because what is superior is free will and the reason of man rather than coincidences and fate.

Mysticism is always associated with the East. According to the West, the monsters, giants, the metaphysical creatures like genies, spirits, fairies and ghosts are inseparable parts of Eastern life. These are impossible to be perceived by Western mind because everything can be explained by the power of reason and science.

Thirdly, the perception of physical appearance and the notion of beauty are also important points that differentiate the East from the West. The Eastern man cannot be desired with his non-masculine body and dark complexion or yellow face. The “sly” and “crooked” eyes are surely an obstacle to be called “good-looking.” On the other hand, the Western man is always desirable with his muscles, masculine appearance, a well-built body and sexual power.

While the Eastern man is thought to be ugly and sexually unattractive, the Eastern woman is generally thought to be sexually attractive with her “exotic beauty.” According to Western mentality, Eastern women are docile, seductive and always ready to serve the Western men sexually; “This is especially evident in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.”³⁷ According to Said, the Orient is associated “with the escapism of sexual fantasy.”³⁸

Uncleanness, laziness and recklessness are also associated with the Eastern man. However, there is another common Orientalist assumption which is as remarkable as these: “the gullibility of the Easterner.” This assumption is popular among the Westerners and fostered by “shallow and comical portrayal” of the Orientals in literature and cinema.³⁹ In contrast to Eastern naivety, the Westerner is

³⁷ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 207.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 190.

³⁹ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 108.

thought to be intelligent and reasonable. Westerners think that an Oriental can easily be deceived because credulousness and stupidity is a part of his personality.

Above all, the association of the Orient with savageness and primitiveness is a really significant and common notion of Orientalism. According to Western mentality, “the Eastern backwardness” is the opposite of “the Western development.” “Civilization” is peculiar to the West because the East is an uncivilized world. The Westerner generally sees “the Orient as a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption” and the East is “a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce.”⁴⁰ “Backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded” are the words that have always been used to describe the Orientals by the Westerner.⁴¹

In this way, the anti-democratic structure of the Eastern world is parallel to the notion of Eastern savagery. Throughout the history, the East has been seen as “the land of the barbarians” which is “lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, [and] barbaric.”⁴² While the West is thought to be the epitome of humaneness with its egalitarian and democratic structure, the East is associated with barbarity and savageness.

As Lois Tyson demonstrates, *the othering* which is “a practice of judging all who are different as inferior” separates the world between “the world between ‘us,’ the ‘civilized,’ and ‘them’— the ‘others’—the ‘savages’”. The ‘savage’ is usually considered evil as well as inferior (*the demonic other*). But sometimes the ‘savage’ is perceived as possessing a ‘primitive’ beauty or nobility born of a closeness to nature (*the exotic other*).⁴³ What Tyson defines as *the exotic other* is a product of an important aspect of Orientalism: Exoticism.

⁴⁰ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 206.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 207.

⁴² *ibid*, p. 54, 150.

⁴³ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 366.

As Huggan points out, “exoticism may be understood conventionally as an aesthetic process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar.”⁴⁴ However, Huggan also states that “in a postcolonial context, exoticism is effectively *repoliticized*, redeployed both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power.”⁴⁵ Exoticism is actually an aspect of “*aesthetic perception*” which makes people, objects and places “strange” and produces “otherness.”⁴⁶

On the other hand, it is also assumed that exoticism has a political aspect, as well. As Huggan affirms, this aspect makes exoticism influential:

Exoticism describes a political as much as an aesthetic practice. But this politics is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification. As a technology of representation, exoticism is self-empowering; self-referential even, insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back (Root 1996: 45). For this reason, among others, exoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power.⁴⁷

Exoticism which means, by definition, “the charm of the unfamiliar”⁴⁸ is a significant aspect of Western perception of the East. Exoticist Westerner admires the East just because of its strangeness and alienness. What makes the East beautiful is the distance. Therefore, the East and Easterner cannot avoid being seen as “the Other” under an exoticist gaze. According to Alden Jones, exoticism in art and literature is nothing more than the representation of one culture for consumption by another.⁴⁹ In other words, exoticism nourishes the clichés about the East on Western minds in a different way. As Tyson states, whether the Easterner is shown as *the demonic other* or *the exotic other*, it does not differ because “the ‘savage’ remains other and therefore, not fully human” in either case.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. ix.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. ix.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exoticism>.

⁴⁹ Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exoticism>.

⁵⁰ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 366.

To put it succinctly, all these attributions to the Oriental are basic and common points of Orientalist gaze at the East. The Western representation of the East and Eastern people is generally based on these invariable conceptions. However, these East-West clichés and stereotypes damage the East and the Easterner due to their derogatory aspects while glorifying the West and the Westerner; all these assumptions designate “the inferiority” of the Orient and the Oriental in Westerner’s eyes while confirming “the superiority” of the West.

In conclusion, to understand the Orientalist operations in Amy Tan’s selected novels, it is important to grasp the Orientalist theory and its aspects. Orientalism, first analyzed by Edward Said, has emerged within the post-colonial theory and specifically handles the Western othering of the Eastern world. As Tyson affirms, “[T]here are many political and economic motives for othering, but the primary psychological motive seems to be the need to feel powerful, in control, superior.”⁵¹ Under the effect of a colonialist psychology, the West represents the East by creating reductive stereotypes that are nourished by popular established assumptions and in this way, there emerges an arbitrary distinction between the East and the West “that reinforces white superiority” and emphasizes the Western power.⁵²

⁵¹ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 403.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 406.

PART TWO

AMY TAN AND ORIENTALISM

2.1. Amy Tan and Orientalism

The issue of Orientalism becomes much more complicated when it is utilized, either consciously or unconsciously, by an Asian-American writer. As a well-known, popular Asian-American writer whose books are highly acceptable among mainstream American readers, Amy Tan introduces us an image of China and Chinese people from an Orientalist point of view of the West in her novels, *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*. She introduces an unknown culture to the reader and makes this “exotic” Chinese culture very attractive and accessible.

Despite being a Chinese-American herself, Amy Tan adopts an Orientalist gaze in *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning* and reinforces the negative image of the East. She creates a totally clichéd and derogatory image of the Orient and the Orientals. By showing the East and Eastern people as alien and foreign, Tan perceives and reflects China from an Orientalist point of view.

Moreover, what is remarkable is Tan’s fostering this vision as an Asian American writer. Actually, Tan is an American-born writer. Therefore, this may make one to question her position as an ethnic writer in Asian-American literature. Besides, Amy Tan never defines herself as an “ethnic” writer. “Tan has spoken out elsewhere against the practice of ethnic labeling, maintaining that although Chinese culture forms the background and provides the settings for her novels, it is not necessarily what she writes about.”⁵³ In her autobiographical book “The Opposite of Fate”, she complains about not being considered as just an “American” writer:

It is hard enough for me to determine what ethnic descriptors I use for myself. Do I refer to myself as a Chinese-American writer, an ethnic writer, a minority writer, a Third world writer, a writer of color? ... If I had to give

⁵³ Huntley, E. D. (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 59.

myself any sort of label, I would have to say I am an American writer. I am Chinese by racial heritage. I am Chinese-American by family and social upbringing. But I believe that what I write is American fiction by virtue of the fact that I live in that country and my emotional sensibilities, assumptions, and obsessions are largely American. My characters are Chinese-American, but I think Chinese-Americans are part of America.⁵⁴

Sheng-mei Ma helps us understand Tan's position in American literature and whether she writes American fiction or Asian-American fiction. He states that Asian-American literature grows out of the stories told by the children and grandchildren of Asian immigrants because these immigrants could hardly ever tell their own stories due to "linguistic, cultural and other barriers."⁵⁵ Tan's answer to a reviewer as a rejection also proves what Ma mentions about the content of Asian-American literature:

"Using the mother to tell of her life in China," said one reviewer "has deprived Tan of the full resources and muscularity of the native English-language speaker." I might have replied to that reviewer, "Exactly, and I did so because my own mother has long been deprived of telling her story, this story, because she lacked those native English-language skills."⁵⁶

In her novels, Tan has made use of the material about China and Chinese people she got from her immigrant mother. Although she denies the labels of ethnicity, her remarks on the background material she uses ironically coincide with Ma's description of Asian-American literature. Due to the content of her works, Amy Tan is a member of Asian-American literature and this makes her an ethnic writer.

Although there emerges a great contradiction between Tan's rejection of ethnic labels and her choice of ethnic content, upon grasping her position in American literature, it seems legitimate for Amy Tan to create novel characters belonging to her own ethnicity. In contrast to her refusal to be mentioned as an ethnic writer, ethnicity operates in the foreground by means of Chinese and Chinese-

⁵⁴ Tan, Amy. (2003). *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*. New York: GP Putnam's Sons, p. 310.

⁵⁵ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Tan, Amy. (2003). *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*. New York: GP Putnam's Sons, p. 311.

American characters and Oriental settings in her works.⁵⁷ Tan defends herself by stating that telling a Chinese-American life is beyond doubt because it is the only one she has lived by now.⁵⁸

However, Ma deals with this choice from a different point of view. In his book, *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, he presents the paradoxical situation of Tan:

While the interracial protagonist, Olivia Bishop, in *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) confesses that “[i]t’s hip to be ethnic” (157), the emphasis falls on “hip” rather than “ethnic.” Opting for the slang “hip”, Tan unknowingly reveals the irony of her status as an ethnic writer. Part of the novel resembles a travelogue set in Changmian, China, a travelogue disguised as yet another “homecoming” to ethnic roots. This journey to the backwaters of China, a journey back in time literally since Olivia revisits her former life at that remote village as a Western missionary around the turn of the century, has more to do with the New Age spiritual concerns in the States here and now than with the exotic, mythologized China. Ethnicity is thoroughly romanticized by Tan because it is “in.”⁵⁹

Ma thinks that Tan’s choice to offer novels based on ethnicity is due to the theme’s popularity, that is, Tan chooses this issue for the sake of her novel’s success in the market. Cultural otherness is a fashionable material in literature so Tan also employs “the global commodification of cultural otherness” and presents ethnicity “as an object of-mostly metropolitan- consumption.”⁶⁰ Here, the term “metropolitan” peculiar to the postcolonial terminology stands for the Anglo-European culture.⁶¹ Then, this is nothing but marketing of cultural otherness for Western audience in

⁵⁷ Amy Tan perpetuates the Orientalist approach also in of children literature, *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994). Although she does not feel responsible for the introduction of Chinese culture to the West, she employs items of Chinese culture and Chinese characters. For further reading see Esra Çoker Körpez article “Revisiting the Amy Tan Phenomenon: Storytelling and Ideology in Amy Tan’s Children’s Story *The Moon Lady*” *Interactions*. Fall Issue, Vol. 16.2. 2007. 87-95; and Sheng-mei Ma’s chapter on *The Chinese Siamese Cat*: Ma, Sheng-mei. *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000. 95-111.

⁵⁸ Tan, Amy. (2003). *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*. New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, p. 305.

⁵⁹ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. ix.

⁶¹ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 366.

Tan's novels, and she makes what is non-Western ready for the Western consumption "in exoticist modes of representation."⁶² She represents the ethnicity embellished with exoticism the contemporary status of which is a global mode of mass consumption: "Reconstituted exoticisms in the age of globalization include the trafficking of culturally 'othered' artifacts in the world's economic, not cultural centers."⁶³

For any writer, choosing a popular and palatable subject for the sake of marketing may be understandable. However, it is still ambiguous why Tan decorates her ethnic novels with an Orientalist vision as "an ethnic writer." Adapting an Orientalist perspective, she makes every character, value and place related to Far East - China or Burma - "available for cultural exploitation."⁶⁴ It is obvious that Tan's employing Orientalism is far more disturbing than Western writers' Orientalism. At this point, Tan's motives for an Orientalist approach to China and Chinese people should be clarified. As Ma asserts:

This concern for the particular kind of market drives the practitioners to identify with or at least acquiesce to the Orientalist perspective, thus following the paradigm of Orientalism in terms of the binary opposition of Self and Other, of subjectivity and objectivity, and most of all, of the power structure inherent in such a dichotomy.⁶⁵

In his book called *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*, Ma adds another argument about ethnic writers and characters and claims that they "are welcome into American society, so long as they complement (or compliment) the mainstream culture."⁶⁶ The literary products of ethnic writers are "under the watchful eye of the dominant culture."⁶⁷ Thus, to be accepted and survive as an ethnic writer, you should foster the hegemony which is the fundamental

⁶² Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. xi.

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 13,15.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. xvi.

⁶⁵ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 17.

⁶⁶ Ma, Sheng-mei. (2000). *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 96.

⁶⁷ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 155.

practice of the mainstream culture.

At this point, a clear definition of the concept of hegemony is essential: Hegemony, mainly defined by Antonio Gramsci, is an idea “that particular social groups struggle in many different ways, including ideologically, to win the consent of the other groups and achieve a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them.”⁶⁸ Particular ideas are more influential than the others in the societies which are not totalitarian, which is hegemony according to Said’s description and he also mentions hegemony as “an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West.”⁶⁹

As a Chinese American writer, Amy Tan also takes part in this “struggle” of the mainstream culture. In this way, the popularity of Tan is intertwined with Orientalism, that is, she presents a picture decorated with popular themes but never damages the “ascendancy” of the mainstream ideology and because when the hegemony is nourished; so is Orientalism. As Said points out, “[it] is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength.”⁷⁰

Under the effect of hegemony, Tan employs “the white gaze at the nonwhite object” which is “constructed on a power structure, with one side viewing and the other being viewed.”⁷¹ Power is one of the key words of Orientalism “whose unremitting ambition was to master *all* of a world” because “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”⁷² This power of the Occident over the Orient derives from knowledge because “knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and

⁶⁸ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 48.

⁶⁹ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 161.

⁷² Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 109, 5.

control” and “knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world.”⁷³

Foucault also believes that every political and social form of thought is “inevitably caught up in the interplay of knowledge and power.”⁷⁴ According to him, “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.”⁷⁵

By means of knowledge, it is possible to rise “above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant.” If one has the “knowledge” of the “foreign and distant”, that is, unknown, it is easier, “to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’ —the Oriental country— since we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as* we know it.”⁷⁶

Hall mentions the productivity of power. According to him, power “produces new discourses, new kinds of knowledge (i.e. Orientalism), new objects of knowledge (the Orient), it shapes new practices (colonization) and institutions (colonial government).”⁷⁷

Tan also creates “the Orient”, makes it knowable and manageable by introducing it in her novels, but she does not describe this culture to make it respectable or understandable, she just makes it “known” because the fear of hegemonic white culture originates from the unknown. If the “Other” is known, it can be controlled, or if you want to control, you should define it. You should put lines between you and “the Other”, so you can also define yourself. “When the racial difference is created, it is rarely neutral and disinterested, but almost always a move for control, resulting in representations of the Other which are *unconsciously*

⁷³ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 36, 40.

⁷⁴ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 48.

⁷⁵ Foucault, qtd in Hall. (1997). p. 49.

⁷⁶ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 261.

skewed.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the Western definition of the East, supported with a negative image to impose control, is called Orientalism. Besides, Orientalism by means of othering helps one to construct a self-identity by distinguishing between “the Self” and “the Other”:

The construction of identity— for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction in my opinion—involves the construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us.” Each age and society re-creates its “Others.” ... In short, the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society ...⁷⁹

One of Tan’s motives to show the Chinese characters in her novels as “the Other” is to construct a white identity; to define herself according to the criteria of the mainstream society. This struggle to participate in the hegemonic culture triggers the feeling what Ma calls “self-hatred”, which is especially revealed in the characters of the novels. Since Tan’s mouthpiece is Olivia in *The Hundred Secret Senses* and “the Other” is Kwan, it is legitimate to mention the same feeling for the writer, Tan herself. As Ma asserts:

Simply put, Chinese Americans frequently take on the white gaze at their nonwhite object. Depicted as born and brought up in the United States, many Chinese American characters in fiction internalize . . . the Orientalist cultural assumptions, which obliterate the differences between Chinese and themselves. Considering themselves, thus, inferior or nonmainstream, many seek to assimilate by adopting the white gaze and by projecting onto China and Chinese immigrants Orientalist—often racist—stereotypes. By so doing, they separate themselves from what they deem to be *true* Other, China and Chinese immigrants, creating the impression that they could identify with mainstream America . . . This divorcing of oneself from one’s ethnicity bespeaks a disguised self-hatred.⁸⁰

The examples of such kind of “self-hatred” start in Tan’s childhood with concern for physical appearance when “she pinched her nose with a clothespin for a

⁷⁸ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 332.

⁸⁰ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 25.

week in the hope that doing so would Westernize her Asian nose. For a time, in fact, she fantasized about plastic surgery that would transform her appearance. But the differences went far beyond facial features.”⁸¹ Then, she was again a child when she got:

ashamed when people came over and saw my mother preparing food. She didn't make TV dinners and use canned foods. She used fresh vegetable and served fish with the heads still on. I worried people would think that we ate that because it was less expensive.⁸²

What also problematized Tan's life in her childhood was a Chinese-speaking mother who “never lost her Shanghai accent and never quite acquired fluent English; and her daughter still remembers classmates' taunts about her mother's Chinese inflected speech.”⁸³

Chinese physical appearance, food and language some of which will be presented as the aspects of Orientalist approach to Chinese people in Tan's novels later in this study are among the points in Tan's life leading to “self-hatred” that emerged in childhood. In her novels, characters also display feelings of self-hatred towards their ethnic roots.

What lies underneath this “disguised self-hatred” is the wish to attain power and apply power to others as well as identity construction:

Chinese Americans reverse their confining, Orientalized roles from the object of cultural practices to the subject supposedly operating these practices. They aim to empower themselves as practitioners rather than recipients of these cultural assumptions. The transformation of the self is, however, an illusion; Chinese Americans are in fact enmeshed even more deeply in the network of power once they try to elevate themselves in this manner. Their effort not only exposes their self-hatred but considerably damages the Other-China and Chinese.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Huntley, E. D. (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 3.

⁸² Schleier, qtd in Huntley. (1998). p. 3.

⁸³ Huntley, E. D. (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 25.

Construction of an identity approved and accepted by the mainstream follows a vicious circle. It starts with knowledge of the Other which derives from power over the weak side, and this knowledge enjoyed by the powerful makes the Other known and controlled easily. This also grants a positive identity construction of the powerful one by eliminating negative traits and loading them onto the weaker part. Therefore, the Self—the mainstream society—gets the power over “the Other”—the ethnic/Oriental etc. Again they use this power to define the Other. By defining the Other, they consolidate their self-identity. Then, this is a never-ending process which is always advantageous for “the powerful.”

To be powerful in the same way and to pass to the mainstream, some ethnic writers like Tan employ the same aforesaid process over the ethnic group they belong to. In this way, they gain acceptance to the mainstream. By becoming the “practitioners rather than recipients” of their culture, ethnic writers like Amy Tan try to reflect the “white gaze.” The ethnic or Oriental images presented by ethnic writers are not questioned and this is the most dangerous part of self-Orientalism like Tan’s. Amy Tan serves the white “othering” ideology as a Chinese American. Since her background is Chinese, the distorted images of “the Orient” she presents are presumed to be true and these are not questioned.

As readers we think what Tan presents about China as real and our knowledge of China; its reality is not preoccupied because “knowledge no longer requires application to reality; knowledge is what gets passed on silently, without comment, from one text to another ... what matters is that they are *there*, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically.”⁸⁵ As Said’s remarks indicate, “knowledge”, being true or not, transforms into reality. The Western reader feels no necessity to differentiate fact from fiction and to verify his/her knowledge. As Said points out “truth, in short, becomes a function of learned judgment, not of the material itself, which in time seems to owe its existence to the Orientalist.”⁸⁶ What is said and written about the Orient and the Orientals ends up being axiomatic because “Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the

⁸⁵ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 116.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 67.

power to *make it true*.”⁸⁷

In addition to the fact that Tan presents her ethnic heritage with an Orientalist approach for the sake of identity-construction and acceptance in the mainstream society, she also commodifies her Chineseness in an exotic way in order to please market demands. At this point, there emerges another remarkable issue: Tan herself and her Chinese heritage are also commodified by the publishers. While Tan markets her ethnicity in her novels, publishers also market her ethnicity through Tan and create a “literary celebrity.”⁸⁸

Graham Huggan examines this phenomenon on Margaret Atwood, who is a Canadian best-selling writer. In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, a chapter specifically written on Atwood and the phenomenon are “about a rather different form of the exotic – celebrity glamour.”⁸⁹ By using Tan’s ethnic heritage, the publishers have successfully created “celebrity glamour” as in the case of Atwood. Like Atwood, Tan has been a best-seller writer in the USA and has received numerous awards since her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, was published in 1989. Her work has been translated into 35 languages, from Spanish, French, and Finnish to Chinese, Arabic, and Hebrew. Her first novel was adapted as a film; her children book, *Sagwa*, has become a TV series shown not only in the USA but also in some other countries such as the UK, Latin America, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and Singapore. Her story, “New Yorker” was performed on stage. In a lot of anthologies and textbooks, her stories and essays can be seen and these are among “required reading” assignments. She has also lectured in many important universities among which are Stanford and Oxford.⁹⁰

As the selective examples confirm, Tan’s literary career is really successful.

⁸⁷ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 49.

⁸⁸ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 209.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 209.

⁹⁰ Barclay, Steven. (2008). Steven Barclay Agency, Amy Tan Best-Selling Author of *Joy Luck Club*. <http://www.barclayagency.com/tan.html>. (April 18, 2008).

Her “skillfully marketed self-image has helped” her to be a “literary superstar.”⁹¹ Apart from the literary achievements, she is a real celebrity: “She appeared as herself in the animated series *The Simpsons*. She performed as narrator with the San Francisco Symphony and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra playing an original score for “Sagwa” by composer Nathan Wang.”⁹²

What is more, her being a “superstar” is supported by her being a member of a rock band, the Rock Bottom Remainers, the members of which are all literary figures including Stephen King, Dave Barry, and Scott Turow. She has served “as lead rhythm dominatrix, backup singer, and second tambourine.”⁹³ In the official website of the Rock Bottom Remainers, you are introduced to the band with these sentences: “By day, they’re authors. Really famous authors. But once a year they shed their pen-and-pencil clutching personas and become rock stars, complete with roadies, groupies and a wicked cool tour bus.”⁹⁴

All these images of Amy Tan that contribute to her literary reputation have been produced by “the global image-making machinery.”⁹⁵ One of the effective components of this “machinery” is exoticism, which is needless to say. Tan’s Chinese heritage is emphasized and alongside her “exotic” characters in her novels, she herself has been depicted as the “exotic.” People are attracted by this detail in her literary character; her own ethnicity is appealing for the reader. Alongside her ethnic heritage which is presented and commodified in an exotic way, Tan’s grasp of the famous feminist discourse also “generates public appeal.”⁹⁶ Besides “a collaboration with the majority culture,” Ma states, “these writers also thrive in the American market as a result of an alignment of their texts with one of the dominant current

⁹¹ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 209.

⁹² Barclay, Steven. (2008). Steven Barclay Agency, Amy Tan Best-Selling Author of *Joy Luck Club*. <http://www.barclayagency.com/tan.html> (April 18, 2008).

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Barry, Dave; Abigail Bender and Roy Blount, Jr. (n.d.). The Rock Bottom Remainers. <http://www.rockbottomremainers.com/>. (December 25, 2007).

⁹⁵ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 210.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 215.

ideologies in the west-feminism.”⁹⁷

Like Huggan, who refers to taking advantage of “Euro-American feminist debates” as a way of achievement,⁹⁸ Ma also mentions “west feminism” as well as ethnicity being used for the interests in the markets. In her article, “Sugar Sisterhood”, Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong also questions the popularity of Amy Tan in her former novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* but because Tan’s attitude and style does not change in her later novels, the ideas of Wong can be used to explain Tan’s vivid usage of ethnicity and feminism in her other novels.

Wong claims that “the white feminist reading public appears to have an unusually keen appetite for mother-daughter stories by and about people of color.”⁹⁹ In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, although Kwan is not Olivia’s original mother, mother-daughter relationship is observed between the sisters; Olivia also states this: “. . . most of the time, I resented her for taking my mother’s place.”¹⁰⁰ In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the relationships of mothers and daughters can also be observed. Therefore, Amy Tan’s popular feminist theme exists in both *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

Tamara S. Wagner’s ideas about Amy Tan stated in her article “Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese Women Writers and the Amy Tan-Syndrome” are also quite parallel to Wong’s. According to Wagner, Amy Tan “feed[s] on a popular demand for ‘exotic’ stories and ‘women’s stories’ that concentrate on a mother-daughter-relationship determined by cultural differences as well as generation gaps.”¹⁰¹ She even uses a term called “the Amy Tan-syndrome” for the other ethnic writers following Tan’s path. However, Wong elaborates her ideas which are connecting to

⁹⁷ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 17.

⁹⁸ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 215.

⁹⁹ Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. (1995). “‘Sugar Sisterhood’ Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon.” *The Ethnic Canon*. Ed. David Palumbo. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp.174-210. p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Wagner, Tamara S. (2002). “Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese Women Writers and the Amy Tan- Syndrome.” National University of Singapore.

<<http://www.scholars.nus.edu/landow/post/singapore/literature/teo/teotan.html>>. (June 01, 2006).

the main issue of exoticism and Orientalism:

I suggest it is neither literary fate nor psychological destiny that has conferred favored status on the Chinese American mother-daughter relationship, but rather a convergence of ethnic group-specific literary tradition and ideological needs by the white-dominated readership—including the feminist readership—for the Other’s presence as both mirror and differentiator.¹⁰²

At this point, the image and operations of Amy Tan intersect with her Orientalist approach and “othering” process. As well as her commodification of ethnicity in her works via exoticism, her Chinese identity, which is a produced one, not natural, is also presented in an exotic way. As Huggan claims for Margaret Atwood, Tan is also “highly aware of herself, and of her writing, as commodity; she is conscious, too, of the role she plays in the image making industry that surround her work.”¹⁰³

In conclusion, Amy Tan’s representations of Chineseness and China are never free from Western prejudice against the East. Tan never accepts the ethnic title before her name. However, her fiction whose material comes from China and Chinese American makes her a writer of Asian-American literature. From an Orientalist vision, Amy Tan fosters the negative images of the East in her fiction; she displays the Chinese as alien under the hegemony of white society. Her aim seems to introduce Chinese culture but she does this through a Western perspective, making China “the Other” against which the West defines itself. She maintains the rigid lines between “the Other” and “the Self” to construct an American identity and to be acknowledged in the mainstream culture. Furthermore, her ethnicity is also a colorful part of her literary fame created by the publishers because her Chineseness is an indispensable exotic touch to her glamorous image in the media. All in all, all these elements contribute to the fact that Amy Tan is an Orientalist Asian-American writer.

¹⁰² Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. (1995). “‘Sugar Sisterhood’ Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon.” *The Ethnic Canon*. Ed. David Palumbo. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 174-210. p.177.

¹⁰³ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 215.

PART THREE

ORIENTALISM IN *THE HUNDRED SECRET SENSES*

Up to this chapter, it has been clarified what the Orientalist approach is and why the Chinese American writer Amy Tan adopts the Orientalist approach in her novels. In this chapter, the reader will see how Amy Tan employs Orientalist items in one of her novels called *The Hundred Secret Senses* and what the aspects of Orientalism in this literary work are. It is assumed that Orientalist notions serve identity-construction on the individual base in this novel. Therefore, what is specifically aimed in this chapter is to show how Orientalism works from an individual perspective.

3.1. An Overall Evaluation

The Hundred Secret Senses is Amy Tan's third novel which is based upon the relationship between two sisters, Olivia Bishop and Kwan Li. Olivia is an American-born, mixed race woman whereas her half-sister Kwan is a Chinese-born who came from China when Olivia was six years old. The story of the novel is narrated from two points of view; one is Olivia's and the other one is Kwan's. Olivia narrates her life, family relationships and her marriage starting from her early childhood when her father dies and continues to the coming of Kwan, to the time she becomes the center of her life. This part can be thought as the present because it is in modern times in the USA. However, the other plot narrated by Kwan finds its setting and time in the last decades of 1800s of China. The story of Kwan is in the form of "ancient Chinese tradition called *talk story* (gong gu tsai)"¹⁰⁴ which is "a folk art form by which characters pass on values and teach important lessons through narrative."¹⁰⁵

In this story, Kwan tells the events happening during the Taiping rebellion in China from the point of her former self, Nunumu who is a young Chinese peasant

¹⁰⁴ Huntley, E. D. (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Foothorap, Robert. (2007). "Amy Tan."

http://salempress.com/store/samples/short_story_writers_rev/short_story_writers_tan.htm. (March 24, 2008).

girl among the Christian missionaries. Actually, Olivia tells what Kwan narrates because the events and people told by Kwan are addressed to Olivia so we read them from Kwan's mouth but by means of Olivia. What is also important is that these two plots are not separate but within each other.

Throughout the novel, there are three main settings due to two different narratives. These are firstly, present-day America of modern times; secondly, China of the previous century; and lastly present-day China where Olivia, Kwan and Olivia's husband, whom she is about to divorce, all go together towards the end of the novel. Among these settings, Amy Tan mostly employs Orientalism in present-day America and China.

In the novel, when the characters are in old China or present-day China, the reader feels that Tan introduces a culture unknown to the American; the reader meets Chinese and Chinese American characters and sympathizes with them especially with one of the major characters, Chinese Kwan. However, Kwan and her Chineseness are victimized in the hands of Orientalism because Tan shows the East and the Eastern people as "alien" and "foreign" throughout the novel.

In her book on Asian American literature, Elaine Kim examines the Chinese representations in Anglo-American literature in early 1900s. In that period of mainstream literature, "... the Anglo-American portrayal of the Asian serves primarily as a foil to describe the Anglo as 'not-Asian' ..."¹⁰⁶ The existence of Asian characters in Amy Tan's novels also underlines the Otherness of the Asian- the difference between the Asian and the Chinese-American. Why Chinese-Americans are associated with Anglo-Americans is quite obvious, because the Chinese-American wants to belong to mainstream America by prioritizing the American over the Chinese, like Olivia does.

As revealed in Chapter I, to construct one's identity, one needs "the Other." The distinction between the Self and the Other is required to define oneself.

¹⁰⁶ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 4.

Difference is necessary to create and distribute meanings; to locate qualities. As Stuart Hall states in his Representation , “difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist ... it is the ‘*difference*’ between *white* and *black* which...carries meaning.”¹⁰⁷ Here the word “meaning” can be interpreted as the meaning of social and cultural status.

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the socio-cultural statuses of the two characters are defined by the difference between them. The negative Chinese images of Kwan displays the supremacy of Olivia’s American self-definition over Kwan’s Chinese identity. Despite being an Asian American, Amy Tan maintains the same tradition of Anglo American literature in which “a common thread running through these portrayals is the establishment of and emphasis on permanent and irreconcilable differences between the Chinese and the Anglo, differences that define the Anglo as superior physically, spiritually, and morally.”¹⁰⁸

Throughout the novel, Kwan’s difference is always foregrounded. Not only is she represented as different from Olivia but also different from the majority. This is not surprising, because the novel gives the sense that Olivia belongs to the majority whereas Kwan belongs to the minority and there is a huge gap between them. As Stuart Hall points out,

people who are in any way significantly different from the majority – ‘them’ rather than ‘us’ – are frequently exposed to [the] *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic.¹⁰⁹

This form of representation is definitely damaging for the one belonging to the minority because s/he is always subjected to the negative conceptions of this binary opposition. This damaging binary opposition works in many ways in *The*

¹⁰⁷ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 234.

¹⁰⁸ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* . Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 227.

Hundred Secret Senses. First of all, “the Orient” is always presented by Amy Tan to embrace what is “non-logical” and “irrational.” Kwan’s mind is always full of superstitions; she constantly bores Olivia with her superstitions by warning against bad luck which seems to be groundless and nonsense for Olivia. Kwan is preoccupied with coincidences and fate. At one point, Olivia even mocks her husband Simon for “acting like Kwan, linking two coincidences and coming up with a superstition.”¹¹⁰

All the negative traits presented as forming Kwan’s character and mind can be extended to the Eastern character in general. They foster the negative image in an Orientalist way, meanwhile attributing the positive ones to the Western character. There are sharp contrasts between the East and the West. Kwan depends on coincidences, Olivia always makes plans; Kwan is preoccupied with the past, Olivia is interested in the present and in the future; Kwan believes in fate, Olivia believes in free will and practical thinking; Kwan thinks that truths can change and opposite things can coexist (yin-yang), Olivia thinks that there are solid, unchangeable truths; Kwan is non-logical, Olivia is sensible.

Kwan’s and Olivia’s differences are similar to the differences between Eastern and Western mentalities. Like the West, Olivia always defines herself through the negative qualities of the East which is personified through the character of Kwan. Thus, the depiction of Kwan fosters a negative image of China and the Chinese.

The rigidity of such the oppositions lead to the constant negation of one particular side. Hall points out how such oppositions lead to one side dominating the Other:

[B]inary oppositions are also open to the charge of being reductionist and over-simplified – swallowing up all distinctions in their rather rigid two-part structure. What is more, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida has argued, there are very few neutral binary oppositions. One pole of the binary, he argues, is

¹¹⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 330.

usually the dominant one, the one which includes the other within its field of operations.¹¹¹

“[A] relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition” is inevitable.¹¹² While talking about oppositions, we always say “white/black, men/women, masculine/feminine, upper class/lower class, British/alien to capture this power dimension in discourse.”¹¹³ Tan presents all the sharp differences in a power framework and shows Olivia-or the Western world- superior over Kwan-or the Eastern world. The binary opposition legitimizes the superiority.

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan’s Chinese character, Kwan represents the Eastern people in general and Olivia represents the Western culture despite being a half-Eastern. These two sisters just “share a father, only that. She was born in China. My brothers, Kevin and Tommy, and I were born in San Francisco after my father, Jack Yee, immigrated here and married our mother, Louise Kenfield.”¹¹⁴ Olivia thinks she and Kwan have nothing in common except for a father. This is the first hint for Olivia’s discriminatory attitude towards Kwan in the very beginning of the novel.

The relationship between these two sisters is like the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. Olivia’s contemptuous attitude to Kwan throughout the novel equals to the Western world’s Orientalist attitude to the Eastern world. Olivia as a mixed-race categorizes herself as the mainstream and her attitude towards her Chinese half-sister Kwan is not different from the white attitude towards Chinese people in general. She adopts the “white gaze” and always puts distinguishing, “othering” lines between herself and her sister to prove her difference and to define her own identity:

Then one of Kevin’s friends, a swaggering second grader whom all the little girls had a crush on, said to me, “Is that dumb Chink your sister? Hey, Olivia,

¹¹¹ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 235.

¹¹² Derrida, qtd in Hall. (1997). p. 235.

¹¹³ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 235.

¹¹⁴ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 3.

does that mean you're a dumb Chink too?" I was so flustered I yelled, "She's not my sister! I hate her! I wish she'd go back to China!"¹¹⁵

Olivia is in a constant denial against Kwan throughout the book; Kwan is an embarrassing aspect of her life with her "alienness": "By the first grade, I became an expert on public humiliation and shame. Kwan asked so many dumb questions that all the neighborhood kids thought she had come from Mars."¹¹⁶ However, the actual embarrassing aspect of Olivia's life is her own Chinese background reflected by Kwan. Her rejection of Kwan is actually the rejection of her own ethnicity. She tries to conform to the mainstream society by forgetting her ancestry but Kwan is a constant reminder of her past. According to her, "The point is, no one would ever guess we are sisters"¹¹⁷ yet this is her fantasy rather than the reality. By breaking the familial connection between them; by dismissing Kwan as a half-sister, Olivia dismisses her own ethnicity as a half-Chinese; actually she does not hate Kwan as she says but she hates her Chinese self. This is exactly what Ma calls "disguised self-hatred."¹¹⁸

Olivia also expresses this feeling of hatred, when the children "pinned down my arms and peed on me, laughing and shouting, 'Olivia's sister is a retard.' They sat on me until I started crying, hating Kwan, hating myself."¹¹⁹ Olivia has negative feelings towards Kwan and herself because a Chinese sister is a sign of her Chinese heritage and she is not able to get rid of either Kwan, or her Chineseness.

While Olivia is trying to make a decision about which surname she will use after the divorce, one of the alternatives is "Yee", her Chinese father's surname. When she is five, her mother changes their surname into "Laguni", the Italian surname of the step-father. After getting married with Simon, Olivia uses "Bishop" as her surname. However, after her divorce, even the suggestion of using her Chinese surname Yee bothers and irritates her:

¹¹⁵ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹¹⁸ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 49.

Olivia Yee. I say the name aloud several times. It sounds alien, as though I'd become totally Chinese, just like Kwan. That bothers me a little. Being forced to grow up with Kwan was probably one of the reasons I never knew who I was or wanted to become. She was a role model for multiple personalities.¹²⁰

Olivia thinks being Chinese is equal to being alien "just like Kwan" and even the idea of this is disturbing; she also accuses Kwan of being responsible for her identity chaos: If she were not in her life, Olivia could have adapted herself to the mainstream culture since there would not be a constant reminder of her real heritage. The novel is full of hints of Olivia's desire to belong to the mainstream white community. However, her ethnic heritage is an obstacle for her and she does not want to carry this obstacle literally with a Chinese surname.

In the United States, ethnicity is a problematic issue and it is difficult to break some fixed assumptions and notions about ethnicity in a community. If one ethnic group is more advantageous than the other, this situation does not change easily. However, in today's globalized world, ethnicity can also become new market of consumptions. This is supported in a conversation between Olivia and her brother on the same surname issue:

"I never liked the name Yee," he confesses. "Kids used to yell, 'Hey, Yee! Yeah, you, yee-eye-yee-eye-oh.'" "The world's changed," I say. "It's hip to be ethnic." "But wearing a Chinese badge doesn't really get you any bonus points," Kevin says. "They're cutting Asians out, not making more room for them. You're better off with Laguni."¹²¹

The children make fun of Olivia because of her Chinese name; the adults segregate her because of Chinese appearance. Due to these reasons, Olivia not only avoids a Chinese surname but also a Chinese sister. The only way she can create a satisfying self-conception of herself is by victimizing her Chinese sister Kwan. She defines her own "American" self by rejecting and despising everything that Kwan represents.

¹²⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 174.

¹²¹ *ibid*, p. 175.

3.2. The Physical Appearance of “the Other”

One of the various ways used by Amy Tan to underline the inferiority of the Asian, or the ethnic, in *The Hundred Secret Senses* is the beauty concept. The ultimate beauty of the white race is indisputable for the Orientalist and Tan never avoids showing that she has the same idea.

Amy Tan uses the issue of “intermarriage” to show the sharp differences between the Eastern and Western cultures. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan fosters the idea that “intermarriage might improve the Asian; the offspring of intermarriages might be taller and handsomer.”¹²² The notion that intermarriage would better the Asian part of mixed-races was common among white people and Tan as a Chinese-American reinforces this thought.

She employs the legal aspect of the issue to back up the ideas on intermarriage. She reminds the reader the laws against intermarriage in the past. Olivia and Kwan’s father was a Chinese man who after his immigration to America married a white girl. In the very beginning of the novel, Olivia states that the only common point she and Kwan have is nothing else but a father “just to set the genetic record straight.”¹²³ What is ironic is that Olivia’s mother thinks her marrying out of Anglo race makes her a liberal because of the laws against intermarriages.¹²⁴ Mentioning the laws against the intermarriage is really meaningful, because these laws were made by white ideology which believed intermarriages spoiled the intellectual and physical purity of white race. This detail on family background is given to sharpen the distinction between Olivia and Kwan; to remind the reader that Olivia has the maternal Anglo blood in her veins although Kwan is fully Chinese.

This seemingly unessential detail of Olivia’s mixed bloodline contributes to the positive apperception of the Anglo race. The very first sight of the Chinese Kwan

¹²² Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 10.

¹²³ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 3.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p. 4.

who is just an eighteen-year-old young girl is told as “a strange, old lady, short and chubby.”¹²⁵ However, Olivia cannot be said to be very happy with her appearance but the following lines about the first meeting of Olivia and her husband Simon explain the fascination with whiteness and Western facial features:

I spotted Simon in a linguistics class at UC Berkeley, spring quarter of my sophomore year. I noticed him right away because like me he had a name that didn't fit with his Asian features. Eurasian students weren't as common then as they are now, and as I stared at him, I had the sense I was seeing my male doppelgänger, I started wondering how genes interact, why one set of racial characteristics dominates in one person and not in another with the same background. I once met a girl whose last name was Chan. She was blond-haired and blue-eyed, and no, she wearily explained, she was not adopted. Her father was Chinese. I figured that her father's ancestors had engaged in secret dalliances with the British or Portuguese in Hong Kong. I was like that girl, always having to explain about my last name, why I didn't look a Laguni. My brothers look like almost as Italian as their last name implies. Their faces are more angular than mine. Their hair has a slight curl and is a lighter shade of brown.¹²⁶

Olivia is unpleasant with her Chinese appearance and feels sorry for not inheriting “the beauty” of her Anglo side because everything beautiful and aesthetic in the appearance of these mixed-race people comes from the White side, never from the Chinese part. What “improves” the mixed race and makes them good-looking is certainly their half-white genetic inheritance. As Hall explains, “The body itself and its differences were visible for all to see, and thus provided ‘the inconvertible evidence’ for a naturalization of racial difference.” The representation of ‘difference’ through physical appearance is a discursive site and it causes the knowledge of that “inferior” races are improved and “superior” races are degraded by way of intermarriage to be reproduced, circulated and fixed.¹²⁷ In her novel, Amy Tan also contributes to the reproduction, circulation and fixation of this white notion.

In a conversation between Miss Banner and Nunumu (the former Olivia and Kwan), Tan also presents the relationship between an Anglo and the Chinese in a

¹²⁵ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 10.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p. 74.

¹²⁷ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 244.

negative way. They are talking about Yiban who is associated with the former Simon since like him, he is half-American. Miss Banner, as an American woman, mentions how a relationship between an American and a person from another race would not be tolerated in the United States in the 19th century:

“Oh! And not with the feeling between a man and a woman—no, no, *no!* After all, he’s Chinese, well, not completely, but half, which is almost worse.... Well, in our country, an American woman can’t possibly ... What I mean is, such romantic friendships would *never* be allowed.”¹²⁸

These words explaining the disapproval of such kind of relationships are nothing but the summary of the white notions and outlook towards intermarriage. The mentality behind this disapproval has been clarified; a romantic relationship between the races leads to marriage and reproduction, and this results in the degradation of “the superior” race whereas it betters “the inferior race.” Therefore, it is impossible for “the superior race” to “allow” such kinds of romantic relationships and miscegenation. This notion has never changed for ages and is still fostered. Briefly, the beauty concept and physical appearance, as well as the results of the intermarriage, are important components of the negative representation of the Other.

3.3. Association of “the Other” with Animals

Another strategy to negate the Chinese image used by Tan is the identification of Kwan with animals. In different parts of the novel, Kwan is associated with various animals. In the very beginning, for instance, little Olivia “would have preferred a new turtle or even a doll, not someone who would compete for my mother’s already divided attention and force me to share the meager souvenirs of her love.”¹²⁹ At first sight, Olivia seems to mention the wish of a little child to have a pet or doll instead of a sister. The relationship between Olivia and her mother is always problematic; the children have never received the necessary attention from their mother and Olivia is afraid of that she will lose even the little

¹²⁸ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 200.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, p. 8.

attention she is getting from her mom upon the arrival of Kwan. Therefore, the desire of the little girl for a pet instead of Kwan seems quite understandable.

However, Olivia's attitude against Kwan never changes; Kwan will never be preferred by Olivia even when she becomes an adult. Kwan is always something undesirable for her; she is like a strange beast with animalistic traits. Olivia's first impression of Kwan shows this very clearly:

This person looked like a strange old lady, short and chubby, not exactly the starving waif Mom pictured or the glamorous teenage sister I had in my mind. She was dressed in drab gray pajamas, and her broad brown face was flanked by two thick braids.

Kwan was anything but shy. She dropped her bag, fluttered her arms, and bellowed, "Hall-oo! Hall-oo!" Still hooting and laughing, she jumped and squealed the way our new dog did whenever we let him out of the garage.¹³⁰

These lines telling the first impressions of Olivia about her Chinese sister will turn into a life-long "othering" of Kwan. From the point of view of a little "American" girl, the appearance and behavior of a Chinese is criticized. Once again she is associated with animals; this time, a dog yearning for attention and affection. The reader should also pay attention to the verbs that Olivia chooses to describe Kwan's behaviors: Fluttering, bellowing, hooting, jumping and squealing, which are the verbs peculiar to particular animals, not used for human beings.

Another image used by Olivia to describe Kwan is a cat but the common point between the images of a new dog and of a cat is Kwan's longing for care, being a poor animal in need of concern and affection, yet never a real human being demanding real connection and communication:

She's like an orphan cat, kneading on my heart. She's been this way all my life, peeling me oranges, buying me candy, admiring my report cards and telling me how smart I was, smarter than she could ever be. Yet I've done nothing to endear myself to her. As a child, I often refused to play with her. Over the years, I've yelled at her, told her she embarrassed me. I can't remember how many times I've lied to get out of seeing her.

¹³⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 10.

Meanwhile, she has *always* interpreted my outbursts as helpful advice, my feeble excuses as good intentions, my pallid gestures of affection as loyal sisterhood. And when I can't bear it any longer, I lashed out and tell her she's crazy. Before I can retract the sharp words, she pats my arm, smiles and laughs. And the wounds she bears heals itself instantly.¹³¹

Kwan's resemblance to different animals is often recurrent in the novel. Kwan is sent to a mental hospital after Olivia tells her mother that Kwan believes in ghosts and frequently speaks with them. Olivia recalls how Kwan looks, "as immovable as a stone palace dog" when they visit her there.¹³² On the very same page, Olivia also tells us about the old beauty of Kwan's long, black hair which she had resembled to a mule's mane, but this time damaged by electroshock treatments:

What I saw paralyzed me with fear. She looked as if she'd been given a crew cut with a hand-push lawn mover. It was as bad as seeing an animal run over on the street, wondering what it once had been. Except I knew how Kwan's hair used to be. Before, it flowed past her waist. Before, my fingers swam through its satin-black waves. Before, I'd grab her mane and yank it like the reins of a mule shouting, "Giddyap, Kwan, say heehaw!"¹³³

In another part of the novel, Olivia describes Kwan as a "five-foot tall...miniature bull" who is always "loud and clashing."¹³⁴

Animal images used for Kwan serve to reflect a negative and antipathic image of the Far East. Underneath such images lies an Orientalist outlook. To understand it completely, *colonialist ideology* should be remembered: "The colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper 'self'; native peoples were 'other,' different, and therefore inferior" and this is the essence of *othering* that sees all the differences as inferior and divides the world between the "civilized" and the "savages", namely, between "us" and "them." The "savage" has no other alternative but remaining other and, so, "not fully human."¹³⁵ Therefore,

¹³¹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 25.

¹³² *ibid*, p. 17.

¹³³ *ibid*, p. 17.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹³⁵ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 366.

animal images identified with Kwan are nothing but supporters of her state as the “other” who will never be “fully human.”

3.4. “Linguistic Exoticism”

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the third remarkable way Amy Tan uses to “other” Kwan is “linguistic exoticism” employed for “comical effect” which Sheng-Mei Ma mentions in the article called “Chinese and Dogs”:

Tan has learned to do three different voices exceptionally well and, moreover, to interweave them seamlessly; the hip, fluent English of the American-born Bishops; the simple, stilted English taken to be literal translation of Kwan’s stories in Chinese; and Kwan’s pidgin, which mangles English for comical effect. Besides, to attribute Kwan’s pidgin to her nonnative-speaker status obfuscates the crux of the problem: the novelist’s white gaze at Kwan. Tan inscribes Kwan with a linguistic exoticism that could only stem from an outsider’s ears, a fact painfully, clear if one compares Kwan’s English...¹³⁶

Kwan’s spoiled English is used to add a comical element to *The Hundred Secret Senses*: “ ‘What you mother father do?’ Kwan scrutinized Ben’s cashmere jacket. ‘They’re both retired and live in Missouri,’ said Ben. ‘Misery! Tst! Tst!’ She looked at me. ‘This too sad’.”¹³⁷ Actually this comical effect has been a white tradition utilized as a humor element also in Anglo-American literature:

The immigrant American’s struggles with English have been a staple of American humor: the Italian organ-grinder, the Prussian martinet, the Jewish mother—all are found in the pages of American literature. In most cases, however, readers know from their own experiences with Jews, Italians, Germans, or Poles that examples they read about or see portrayed on the screen are nothing more than caricatures.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ma, Sheng-Mei. (2000). *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 120.

¹³⁷ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 26.

¹³⁸ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 12.

However, Chinese American literature also embraces the same strategy to imitate the speech of Chinese characters, to convey the same comical effect.¹³⁹ This comical element, this language problem of Kwan is an aspect of Tan's Orientalist strategy. In *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, Ma explains this clearly: "For in Chinese American discourse, the Chinese body and pidgin English are often taken to be indicators of the Oriental's alienness and at times degeneracy."¹⁴⁰ Kwan's "pidgin English" is really one of the reasons that make her "alien" and different from the mainstream or from Olivia speaking English perfectly. Due to Kwan's "pidgin English", the reader is never let to forget that she is "the Other."

With her pidgin English, Kwan's language problem, which is constantly underlined, is shown as the result of her incapacity to learn a foreign language. Despite having been living in America for more than thirty years, she cannot improve her English, "the only change in Kwan's English over the last thirty years is in the speed with which she talks. Meanwhile, she thinks her English is great. She often corrects her husband. 'Not *stealed*,' she'll tell George, '*stolened*.'"¹⁴¹ Here, Tan both emphasizes Kwan's inability to learn the language despite all these years she has lived in America and makes fun of her pride in her erroneous English and her wrong correction.

Elizabeth Kim states that in Anglo-American literature, unlike other immigrant groups, there are two alternatives for Asians when English is in question; one is that their English is bad because they are slow and incapable to understand Western manners and the other one is that their English is so unnaturally fluent that it sounds funny or sinister.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ma, Sheng-mei. (1998). *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 29.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁴¹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 23.

¹⁴² Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 12.

Emphasizing the incapacity of Kwan to speak English well, Tan chooses to show her in the former category Kim describes. This is also apparent in another point which we see Olivia is complaining about the way her name is pronounced by Kwan. Kwan always calls her as “Libby-ah” and she is really upset by that and according to Olivia, this is not a nickname chosen by Kwan for her but the result of Kwan’s inability to pronounce her name properly:

Kwan has never been able to correctly pronounce my name, Olivia. To her, I will always be Libby-ah, not plain Libby, like the tomato juice, but Libby-ah, like the nation of Muammar Qaddafi. As a consequence, her husband George Lew, his two sons from a first marriage and that whole side of the family call me Libby-ah too. The “ah” part especially annoys me. It’s the Chinese equivalent of saying “hey,” as in “Hey, Libby, come here.”¹⁴³

On the other hand, Olivia also feels responsible for Kwan’s bad English because she is not eager to teach English to Kwan. “In exchange, Kwan learned her English from me—which, now that I think of it, may be the reason she has never spoken it all that well. I was not an enthusiastic teacher.”¹⁴⁴ She fools her on the English words for the things Kwan asks. For instance, she teaches the word “barf” for the English meaning of the pear they eat when Kwan wants to learn.¹⁴⁵ Kwan is so naïve that she never questions what Olivia says.

Here, Tan operates the language issue in two ways serving her Orientalist approach. Firstly, by showing that it is too easy to deceive her, she reflects Kwan’s naivety as gullibility; apparently, this is one of the elements that emphasizes Kwan’s otherness. Secondly, she expresses her intention in othering Kwan. She does not want Kwan to speak English perfectly, because if Kwan could do that, one of the barriers distinguishing them, helping Olivia feel as a member of the mainstream society and making Kwan the “other”, would diminish. Olivia can speak the language of whites perfectly and she is on the side of them. However, Kwan cannot speak the language of whites which is superior. For Kwan, as a member of the “inferior” people, this is a privilege but she does not have the right and the ability to

¹⁴³ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 13.

get this privilege. Due to her pidgin English, she is doomed to be inferior forever. By this way, Olivia wants to keep the line between Kwan and herself. This is a perfect way to despise her.

On the other hand, Kwan's perfect Chinese has no importance for Olivia, because Chinese is the language of the colonized people; it is so inferior that it is like an "infection" for her; something she tries to avoid but can not because she gets it unconsciously:

Under "this beautiful American moon," as she called it, Kwan would jabber away in Chinese. She kept on talking while I pretended to be asleep. She'd still be yakking when I woke up. That's how I became the only one in our family who learned Chinese. Kwan *infected* me with *it*. I absorbed *her language* through my pores while I was sleeping. She pushed her Chinese secret into my brain and changed how I thought about the world. Soon I was even having *nightmares* in Chinese.¹⁴⁶ (my emphasis)

To sum up, language is a significant element that Tan uses to mark "Kwan" as "the Other." While she emphasizes the inability of Kwan to speak English well despite all those years, a contrast between the language of the Westerner and the Eastern is created; the Western language is seen "superior" whereas the Eastern language is despised.

3.5. American and Chinese Concepts of Family

Alongside the negative physical, personal and linguistic representations, Amy Tan also deals with the difference between the Chinese and American approaches to the "family" concept for the sake of Orientalist impositions. When "the selves" are studied from the point of family and society, it is seen that there are huge gaps between the American self and the Chinese self. Chinese people have "interdependent sociocentric selves" which "are essentially different from autonomous, egocentric American selves."¹⁴⁷ Whereas individualism is in the center of American society, Eastern societies are "kinship-oriented." For Chinese people

¹⁴⁶ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Lindholm, Charles. (2001). *Culture and Identity*. Boston: McGrawhill, p. 213.

who are shown stereotypically interdependent, there is not “the choice to just change or cancel out their relationships with those in their social world. Therefore, their primary concern would be how to live with each other’s differences and ‘get along’.”¹⁴⁸

When the patterns of family relationships are examined carefully in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, these differences between American and Chinese selves in terms of their family connections emerge clearly. However, the differences in family patterns and the meanings of family for the Chinese and the Americans are not something surprising because each culture has a particular concept of family, which is quite natural and is not in question here. What should be handled is the approach towards the differences and the reflection of these contrasts.

For Kwan, family and family members are in the center of her life; they are really valuable for her, which is a part of her culture. This is also quite obvious in her relationship with Olivia; Kwan shows such great care for her and she is always so considerate. Olivia is her only real relative in the USA and that is also why she is so careful in her relationship. Their getting along with each other is one of her main concerns in her life.

However, the meanings of family are quite different from the point of Olivia. She has no intention to deal with the “differences” and to “get along.” For her, Kwan is a burden and relationship with the other family members is not the central concern in her life. She clearly states that she can never grasp Chinese family dynamics:

Even with constant exposure to Kwan, I don’t think I will ever understand the dynamics of a Chinese family, all subterranean intricacies of who’s connected to whom, who’s responsible, who’s to blame, all that crap about losing face. I’m glad my life isn’t as complicated.¹⁴⁹

Not only does Olivia comment on a Chinese family in a negative way by showing it incomprehensible, but she also points out that she is happy because she

¹⁴⁸ Lindholm, Charles. (2001). *Culture and Identity*. Boston: McGrawhill, p. 214.

¹⁴⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 149.

has not such a family structure, which is Chinese. Olivia explains that her problem with Kwan is not that she does not love her, but she does not want to be as close as Kwan treats her. Closeness because of belonging to the same family is not something she can understand and the following lines extracted from the novel show the contrast between Olivia's and Kwan's attitude towards sisterhood:

I'm not saying I don't love Kwan. How can I not love my own sister? In many respects, she has been more like a mother to me than my real one. But I often feel bad that I don't want to be close to her. What I mean is, we're *close* in a manner of speaking. We know the things about each other, mostly through history, from sharing the same closet, the same toothpaste, the same cereal every morning for twelve years, all routines and habits of being in the same family. I really think Kwan is sweet, also loyal, and extremely loyal. She'd tear off the ear of anyone who said an unkind word about me. That counts for a lot. It's just that I wouldn't want to be closer to her, not the way some sisters are who consider themselves best friends.¹⁵⁰

Olivia also finds it quite inapprehensible that there is no boundary and privacy within the Chinese family. She says that she does not share everything in her life as Kwan does; for Kwan there is no privacy and she can talk about the most private aspects of her own life. She also gives the idea of no privacy in Kwan's family concept with an extreme example, which shows the situation honestly unsympathetic. Kwan tells Olivia about her husband George's body where she has found a "mole, big as my nostril, found on –what you call this thing between man legs, in Chinese we say *yinnang*, round and wrinkly like two walnut?" and she goes on telling that she should examine Georgie-ah's scrotum everyday to be sure whether the mole starts growing or not.¹⁵¹

Olivia's example confirms the "kinship-oriented" Chinese culture in Kwan's attitudes. However, this example is a disturbing one to show that for Kwan, "there are no boundaries among family. Everything is open for gruesome and exhaustive dissection—how much you spent on your vacation, what's wrong with your complexion, the reason you look as doomed as a fish in a restaurant tank."¹⁵² Here,

¹⁵⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 24.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁵² *ibid*, p. 24.

Tan introduces Chinese cultural and social values when the family is in question, she's not totally wrong, but the examples she uses and the tableau she presents is an amusing and at the same time unpleasant one.

What Tan shows as a characteristic of a Chinese family framework is used to make the reader laugh and reflect Kwan as a trouble maker. Can anyone want a sister talking about the mole on her husband's scrotum? This is ludicrous and also something nasty. All these remarks make you believe that this is how all Chinese people are or how living with a Chinese person might be. In short, Tan once again displays the "inferiority" of Chinese values by ridiculing and making fun of them.

3.6. Chinese Food

Chinese food and what Chinese people eat are remarkable points which Tan highlights as an aspect of her Orientalist approach. All countries and all peoples have their own understanding of food and separate cuisines. The taste of the people and the material they use for food cannot be the matter of question. To criticize what people eat in cultural terms, their traditional food and their cooking methods and to represent these cuisine traditions as strikingly primitive or really astonishing are not unintentional practices. Many Chinese practices and meals are reflected in a negative way that makes the reader often disturbed while reading *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

The most obvious examples of negation through food in *The Hundred Secret Senses* are available when Olivia, Simon and Kwan are on their China trip. Simon and Olivia always give strict reactions to what they encounter as food in a frustrated and cynical way. They wear a critical mask which they never take out in China but sometimes soften their critical approach in a desperate way. Because "here is China"; it is not surprising to be surprised constantly.

In the beginning of their trip in China, our group of three comes across a bird market where they really appreciate the beauty of the birds until they hear a very disturbing offer from a local seller on "a snowy-white owl with milk-chocolate

highlights [which] looks like a Siamese cat with wings [and] blinks its golden eyes.” Olivia really loves the bird. The owner offers to sell it for one hundred American dollars. However, it is impossible to take it to the USA.¹⁵³

“Aaah, who’s talking about bringing it back?” the man replies in rapid Chinese. “Buy it today, then take it to that restaurant across the street, over there. For a small price, they can cook it tonight for your dinner.”
“Omgod!” I turn to Simon. “He’s selling this owl as food!”
“That’s disgusting. Tell him he’s a fucking goon.”¹⁵⁴

Olivia tells Simon that she does not believe this and she is going to be sick. However, Kwan fosters their astonishment by saying that she hears the flavor is ordinary. And Kwan buys the bird, which makes Olivia shout at her by asking what she is doing and telling they are *not* going to eat this owl.¹⁵⁵ Actually Kwan’s aim is not to eat the bird but let it fly to make her wish come true. However, her having bought it and even the idea of eating it make Olivia and Simon shocked and disgusted: “ ‘This is insane!’ Simon mutters.”¹⁵⁶ After they learn that she is not going to cook it, they relieve. Nevertheless, the aim of the seller is to sell the bird as a food alternative and this practice remains illogical and abominable according to them, so the reader is also equipped with the same critical approach.

Simon turns back to the bird market “to take some notes on the more exotic ones they’re selling for food”¹⁵⁷ and he “comes bounding back” with a remarkable comment: “Olivia, you won’t believe the things people here consider food.”¹⁵⁸ Neither will the reader.

Later on their trip, our group is in the house of Du Lili who is a local woman, whom Kwan has known since her childhood. Du Lili kills a chicken for dinner in honor of her guests. The chicken killing scene is told in detail; it is really bloody and brutal while Olivia is taking photographs. Simon and she get shocked. Simon’s

¹⁵³ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 215.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 215.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 215.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 216.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 216.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 218.

comment is expectable in an Orientalist framework: “That was fucking barbaric. I don’t know how you could keep shooting.”¹⁵⁹

Olivia’s reply to Simon is quite ironic because she is somehow irritated by his remark and accuses him of being “ethnocentric.” To explain the practice on a logical ground, she makes up that this way of killing a chicken is a tradition something like a kosher process. Simon protests the idea: “Kosher my ass! Kosher is killing the animal quickly so it *doesn’t* suffer.” Olivia still insists on that Du Lili does the killing in “that way for health reasons.” However, when she asks the woman why, Du Lili rejects with a laugh: “After I have enough blood, I usually cut off the head right away. But this time I let the chicken dance a bit ...for your photos! More exciting that way, don’t you agree?” she says in an expectation of “thank you.” Olivia does not translate the explanation of this bloody process for Simon and in a disturbed way, she tells a lie that this is a Chinese ritual of a spiritual cleansing for the chicken.¹⁶⁰

Olivia’s attitude in this conversation is really considerable because, in an unexpected way, she does not directly criticize the action, as always; but tries to have a “logical” explanation while Simon is severely critical. This should never be taken as sympathy, as a softened approach; on the contrary, it is tried to show us, the reader, that there are no logical explanations for what you see in China and you cannot defend the Chinese things even you try harder.

After this violent and bloody action of killing the chicken, Du Lili also adds blood cubes to the stew she is preparing. It does not seem to be edible or suitable for the taste of our “American” tourists. Olivia has a cynical approach as well as her critical outlook: “God! I’m hungry! If I don’t eat the chicken and its bloody broth, what are my other choices? There’s no ham and cheese in the fridge—there’s no fridge. And if I wanted ham, I’d have to slaughter the screaming pigs first.”¹⁶¹ Alongside the primitive practices and material related to food, the absence of a fridge,

¹⁵⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 296.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 296.

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 298.

a so-called sign for civilization and development, underlines the primitive conditions under these local people live in China.

The negative examples of Chinese diet which makes the Western reader almost queasy are abundant in *The Hundred Secret Senses* but one is absolutely striking. The group is having their dinner prepared by Du Lili in China on the same day when the chicken is killed for the meal. Du Lili offers a “bottle of colorless liquor” which she calls a wine bought twenty years ago. After tasting it, “ ‘What is this?’ Simon gasps. ‘I think it just removed my tonsils.’ ‘Good, ah?’ Kwan tops his cup before he can refuse. ‘It tastes like sweat socks,’ he says. ‘Sweet suck?’ Kwan takes another sip, smacks her lips, and nods in agreement.”¹⁶² With her deficient English, Kwan takes Simon’s negative comment as a compliment. “That tasted like shit” Simon goes on after a while but he feels great so he wonders what they are drinking.¹⁶³

So begins the most shocking aspect of the dinner. Kwan explains that it is called “pickle-mouse wine” which is very famous in Guilin. At the bottom of the nearly empty bottle, Kwan says there is a “mouse”, after which the wine is named. When Olivia and Simon do not believe this, they examine the bottle themselves and they see “something gray with a tail.” Instead of being sick, they start to laugh excessively.¹⁶⁴ This reaction shows that they acknowledge that they are in China and they cannot be surprised by anything any more; this is a kind of acceptance of the peculiarities.

On the one hand, the “pickle-mouse wine” shows how underdeveloped the taste of the Chinese people is; their taste is looked down on because their stomachs can tolerate even a “mouse.” Their diet is just an aspect of their primitiveness.

On the other hand, there is one more point which is as significant as the former one. In 19th century’s America, the Chinese workers were known and shown

¹⁶² Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 299.

¹⁶³ *ibid*, p. 300.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 300.

to be rat-eaters. However, this was never a correctly proven belief. In Iris Chang's book called *The Chinese in America*, there is a picture showing a Chinese man eating rat.¹⁶⁵ This is "an advertisement for a pest-control product. Using the popular anti-Chinese slogan of the era ("They must go"), the ad suggests the Chinese not only ate vermin, but were themselves a form of vermin that deserved to be exterminated."¹⁶⁶

This unpleasant "vermin-eating" image of Chinese people naturally emerges in Anglo-American literature in the following years. "The Anglo-American reader was led over 'reeking sidewalks' along which glided 'sphinx-eyed crafty yellow men' or 'moon-eyed lepers,' and peered into those greasy Chinese kitchens where 'cackling cooks' prepared white mice and puppy dog stew."¹⁶⁷ This portrayal of Chinese man presented by the Anglo-American writers in Anglo-American literature in the first half of the 20th century is strikingly the same as the image a Chinese-American writer presents today. Pickle-mouse wine, which is suggested as a part of the diet of the present-day Chinese people by Amy Tan, still fosters the old and unpleasant image of the early Chinese immigrants in America.

In the novel, the signs of the "barbarity" of Chinese people when the food is in question never come to an end. The characters are in the 19th century-China and because it is rebellion period, there is general scarcity of food and the missionary group have to eat whatever their servant find and cook such as "locusts and grasshoppers hatching in the fields ... frogs and grubs and bats." Kwan says that they fried what they caught in oil.¹⁶⁸ This situation is not in present-day China but a century earlier and the kinds of food are "interesting" due to the civil war. However, when white missionaries ask what they eat, the local people tell them it is rabbit, which is actually mouse, for example. Despite the equality of the hard conditions for the Westerner and the local people in China, eating all these insects, frogs and mice is not a problem for the Chinese peasants whereas it would be impossible for the Westerner if they knew the content of the meal. The truth is deliberately concealed

¹⁶⁵ Daniel K. E. Ching Collection, Chinese Historical Society of America, San Francisco

¹⁶⁶ Chang, Iris. (2003). *The Chinese in America*. New York: Penguin Books, n. pag.

¹⁶⁷ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 11.

¹⁶⁸ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 206.

by Yiban and Nunumu, former selves of Simon and Kwan, to save the lives of the missionaries because the Westerner will reject to eat all these stuff and be doomed to starvation if they learn what they eat. The message is clear here: even under the hard conditions, the Westerner never come closer to primitiveness, without compromising his/her nobility.

On the other hand, savageness is shown to be the center of the Easterner's lives by the writer. The reader is again back to China of the 19th century. The poor people subjected to the atrocities of the rebellion gather to listen to the American military leader, General Cape:

... General Cape announced in his curious Chinese that he had asked God for a sign that would be an ever victorious. God sent down the doves. The doves, General Cape said, meant we poor Hakkas would have the rewards of Great Peace we had hungered for over the last thousands year. He then opened the cage door and pulled out the birds. He drew them into the air, and the people roared. They ran and pushed, jumping to catch the creatures before they could fly away. One man fell forward onto a rock. His head cracked open and his brains started to pour out. But people jumped right over him and kept chasing those rare and precious birds. One dove was caught, the other flew away. So someone ate a meal that night.¹⁶⁹

In this quotation, it is also remarkable that a white soldier leads the Chinese natives. Moreover, the major concern is people's hunger and their ravenousness for food. The people do not even care about the fallen and injured man among themselves and they go on struggling to get one of those two birds as if they were in a battle. What they strive for as an alternative food is also quite cynical: the doves said to be sent by God and symbolizing the peace are their potential meal.

3.7. The Backwardness in China

All these elements and examples provide *The Hundred Secret Senses* with firm Orientalist perspective. Alongside these specific negative points with a common base, Amy Tan also presents other various situations to draw a picture of a

¹⁶⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 38.

“backward” China and her “primitive” people. These elements are numerous especially when they are in China as tourists. Examining the Orientals with a white gaze, Olivia and Simon insistently criticize the problematic aspects in Chinese life. All these aspects and their critical outlook underline the Orientalist approach in the novel because the presented picture always lead the reader to think the difference between China and America and to conclude that “China is the symbol of backwardness, but America is the epitome of modernity.”¹⁷⁰

The critical approach to things related to China and to show them underdeveloped start when the group is on the plane before even landing in Guilin, China. Olivia is distrustful of the Chinese air-line which Kwan prefers:

It doesn't help the matters that the Chinese airline Kwan chose for its discount fare has suffered three crashes in the past six months, two of them while landing in Guilin, where we're headed, after a four-hour stopover in Hong Kong. My confidence in the airline takes another nosedive when we board. The Chinese flight attendants greet us wearing tam-o'-shanters and kilts, an inexplicable fashion choice that makes me question our caretakers' ability to deal with hijackers, loss of engine parts, and unscheduled ocean landings.¹⁷¹

Olivia is really prejudiced in the beginning of the trip even before arriving in China and she reflects her discomfort at flying on a Chinese air-line. She also backs up her uneasiness with the unpleasant background of the airline, which disturbs any passenger. She also makes fun of with the uniform of the flight attendants which is openly described as “ridiculous” later.¹⁷² Such kind of images attributed to Chineseness and presented as a comical effect are indispensable Orientalist items in the novel.

Olivia and Simon's observations in China are significant because they have grown up as “the Westerners” and what they utter about China will give the Western reader a rough idea on how China is. For the readers who do not have the opportunity

¹⁷⁰ Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 63.

¹⁷¹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 185.

¹⁷² *ibid*, p. 186.

to go and see Guilin, for example, Olivia and Simon's remarks will draw the picture of the city. So, what kind of Guilin do our "American" tourist introduce the reader? :

Looking up toward cloud level, we can still see the amazing peaks, which resemble prehistoric shark's teeth, the clichéd subject of every Chinese calendar and scroll painting. But tucked in the gums of these ancient stone formations is the blight of high-rises, their stucco exteriors grimy with industrial pollution, their signboards splashed with garish red and gilt characters. Between these lower buildings from an earlier era, all of them painted a proletarian toothpaste-green. And here and there is the rubble of prewar houses and impromptu garbage dumps. The whole scene gives Guilin the look and stench of a pretty face marred by tawdry lipstick, gapped teeth, and an advanced case of periodontal disease.¹⁷³

From Olivia's perspective, this is the description of a Chinese city, Guilin which "is considered to be the pearl of China's thriving tourist industry on account of the natural beauty and historic treasures [and] also an important cultural city with a history encompassing more than 2000 years."¹⁷⁴ Anyway, Simon summarizes the negative observation: "Boy, oh boy," he whispers. "If Guilin is the most beautiful city, I can't wait to see what the cursed village of Changmian looks like." He thinks that "it's fascinating and depressing at the same time."¹⁷⁵ They express their *disappointment* because their guidebook has also suggested Guilin as "the most beautiful place on earth."¹⁷⁶

Guilin, or China on the whole, is reflected to be corrupted, ironically, because of the Western influence of capitalism. This remark should not surprise the reader who will think Olivia claims that the West is responsible for the deterioration in China. On the contrary, she thinks the West cannot be blamed for "exporting" the capitalism because, "It's as though China has traded its culture and traditions for the worst attributes of capitalism: rip-offs, disposable goods, and the mass-market frenzy to buy what everyone in the world has and doesn't need."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 213.

¹⁷⁴ Tina, Ni Hao. (n.d.). Guilin Travel Guide. <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/guilin.htm>. (April 17, 2008).

¹⁷⁵ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 213.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 212.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 213.

On the other hand, Kwan's remark on the Guilin shows the difference in Chinese mentality, since her perspective is nowhere near as negative as Olivia and Simon's comments. Her being so positive about the appearance of Guilin also adds a comical effect because after all these negative descriptions of the city, her comment sounds both funny and pitiful for the reader: " 'Everything is entirely different, no longer the same.' Her voice seems tingled with nostalgia. She must be sad to see how horribly Guilin has changed over the past thirty years. But then Kwan says in a proud and marveling voice: 'So much progress, everything is so much better'." ¹⁷⁸

Olivia presents striking pictures of Chinese people which lead the reader to the depths of despair and emphasize the "backwardness" of China. While they are driving through a village, they see a lot of men and women "in identical white cotton jackets. Next to them are stools, buckets of water, wooden tool chests, and hand-painted signboards." As Olivia cannot read in Chinese, Kwan explains what these people are waiting for to do by reading the signs as "expert haircuts...also each one can drain boil, clip off corns, remove earwax. Two ears same price as one." ¹⁷⁹

Olivia and Simon get really surprised at this "job" and Simon says: "Whew! How'd you like to be tenth person offering to remove earwax, when no one is stopping for the first? That's my definition of futility." While watching them, Olivia feels lucky she is not in earwax removal and she asks Simon what they hope for, if anything. His answer is cynical: "Hey, the sky's the limit—as long as it doesn't rain." ¹⁸⁰ The desperate situation of those Chinese peasants is summarized in such a way by the "American" tourists; they are lucky because they are not among these Chinese people but on the other side, examining them with their white gaze amazed by everything they see and hear. As Simon points out, "... now that we're in China. A lot of weird stuff has already happened, and it's only the second day." ¹⁸¹

When their trip continues, the difficult and primitive living conditions which they react in shock, anger or despair also continues emerging in any moment in

¹⁷⁸ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 213.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 224.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 224.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 259.

China. “Shit, I can’t believe this” Simon says when there is no ambulance and doctor when they see a big accident near the road; he gets really angry.¹⁸² Or when Olivia understands that “there’s *no* bathroom in the house” which they stay, she gets really shocked, “ ‘What I tell you?’ Kwan answers, now grinning victoriously, ‘This China.’”¹⁸³ Hygiene, cleanliness are not the words in Chinese dictionaries according to Olivia. When she wants to learn how one takes a shower or bath around there, Simon answers with an amused look:

“There’s a public bathhouse next to the toilet sack,” he says. “I checked it out yesterday while you were shooting. It has an Esalen-spa charm to it. Gender neutral. One trough, no waiting. But I don’t think anyone’s used it for ages. The water’s kind of scummy. And if you want a warm bath, bring a pail of hot water.” I was prepared for bad, but not incredibly bad. “They use the same bathwater—all day?” “All week, it looks like. God, I know we’re so *wasteful* in the States.”¹⁸⁴

While these lines give an idea about the Chinese understanding of “cleanliness”, the reader do not have to struggle to compare and contrast between China and America, Simon directly mentions the difference of the situation in the USA in a cynical way. Here, the writer emphasizes the savageness in a Chinese village by means of the conversation between the characters.

Moreover, there is no telephone, no fridge in the village (Changmian) they are in. The conditions in this village are like the conditions after a severe earthquake. Kwan brings a bag full of necessary items like “water purifier, a tiny backpacking stove, a small medical kit, an inflatable cushion, resealable baggies, heavy-duty trash liners, a space blanket, and—‘Wah! Unbelievable!’—even more things: a waterproof match holder, a flashlight, and a Swiss Army knife with a built-in toothpick.” Olivia and Simon get really astonished and wonder how she could think of all these. “‘Newspaper,’ Kwan answers. ‘They have article on earthquake, if big one come, this what you need for survive. In Changmian, you see, no need wait for earthquake. Already no electricity, no running water, no heat’.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 227.

¹⁸³ *ibid*, p. 265.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, p. 315.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*, p. 319.

Surprisingly, Simon thinks the people of the village are “sort of lucky.” Olivia wonders why he thinks in this way. Simon’s answer shows that his argumentation is based on the fact that the local people enjoy the real “life”:

“You know, the small community, family histories linked for generations, focused on the basics. You need a house, you get your friends to help you slap a few bricks together, no bullshit about qualifying for a loan. Birth and death, love and kids, food and sleep, a home with a view—I mean, what more do you need?”

“Central heating.”

“I’m serious Olivia. This is ... well, this is *life*.”

“You’re being sentimental. This is the pits, this is basic survival.”

“I still think they’re lucky.”

“Even if they don’t think so?”¹⁸⁶

The discussion between Olivia and Simon presents us two points of view on the village Changmian where Kwan was born and brought up and which is her “emotional and psychological homeland, the native landscape of her lives.”¹⁸⁷ The common point in their opinions is that this village is really far from the civilization. Whereas Simon seems to support this sort of life as real life, Olivia directly criticizes the savageness; she thinks this is “the worst possible thing” in life, not the real life itself; “Life in Changmian now seems futile.”¹⁸⁸ Even if Simon appreciates the simple life in the village, his argumentation is based on primitiveness; he appreciates the primitiveness. Therefore, the real point here is not whether they support it, or not, but, both of them acknowledge the primitiveness and backwardness in China. In other words, it is easily concluded that Changmian, a place in the East, is different from the civilized West due to the absence of the “civilizing” elements. Therefore, the above conversation of the protagonists provides a sharp contrast between the East and the West in terms of civilization.

According to Olivia, who shows hard realism reflected in the photos, which she takes and does not edit, “would give the wrong impression, that *all* of China is this way, backward, unsanitary, miserably poor.” She hates herself “for being

¹⁸⁶ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 322.

¹⁸⁷ Huntley, E. D. (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 129.

¹⁸⁸ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 293.

American enough to make these judgments. Why do I always edit the real world? For whose sake?"¹⁸⁹ These statements uttered by the protagonist are as if Tan's self-confessions. However, the reader should not be confused by the writer, because, this is exactly what she wants to convey: A picture of China far from the Western understanding of life, culture, beauty, food, etc. Actually, Tan gives the impression the protagonist says she avoids. The words of Olivia like self-correction do not help the writer deny the impression she gives to the reader. In contrast, she confirms the Orientalist misrepresentations in China by admitting she has an American gaze which cannot help editing the world. Therefore, it is concluded that the Chinese world must be edited, which means it is wrong, America's is correct. Briefly, there is a Chinese life in need of correction and it is the American who fulfills this mission with critical eyes instantly detecting the faults.

Olivia's remarks after their discussion on the life in Changmian with Simon are also considerable: "And then I think, What's the matter with me? Why do I have to escalate everything into a moral battle of right and wrong? The people here don't care what we think. Let it go, I tell myself."¹⁹⁰ Olivia questions herself why she is led into a distinction between the right and the wrong. Then, she gets angry with her because these people of the village do not deserve to be advocated at the expense of quarrel with Simon. This thought also shows her approach to Chinese people and their "wrong" way of life.

This is not the first time the writer has made her characters express white approach to the Chinese people. In the other plot of the novel which is set in the 19th century China struck by the Taiping rebellion, we are again among the white missionaries. They are really in a difficult situation with no money and no food. They are expecting a boat from Canton to bring money. However, every week, they are disappointed as they see the boat has not come again. The last time they go, they have bad news to hear: the boat will never come because the course of the events has changed, and now the missionaries are in a disadvantageous situation. Upon learning these, the leader of the missionaries, Pastor Amen, has a nervous breakdown, he

¹⁸⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 292.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 323.

shouts: “I hate China! I hate Chinese people! I hate their crooked eyes, their crooked hearts. They have no souls to save.’ He said, ‘Kill the Chinese, kill them all, just don’t let me die with them’.”¹⁹¹ All these rebellious words underline the so-called prejudice against Chinese people, or Eastern people in general, that they cannot be bettered because they do not deserve and appreciate the Western effort or they do not have the capacity to “improve” according to Western criteria.

In another example in China of the 19th century, Nunumu and Miss Banner (the previous Kwan and Olivia) are talking about the life in America and the life in China. Miss Banner, who is an American and lives with missionaries in China, directly states that the former is better. Nunumu, as a Chinese girl, wants to learn the reason. Miss Banner “frowned and searched her mind. I guessed she was trying to decide which of the many Chinese things she loved should be mentioned first. ‘Chinese people are more polite,’ she said, then thought some more. ‘Not so greedy’.”¹⁹² She cannot find anything Chinese to mention as better than the American. Therefore, her answer is hardly found and reluctant. As an American, Miss Banner cannot compare and contrast between America and China when the better points are in question. However, Nunumu waits her to go on hopefully, she “was sure she would say that China was more beautiful, that our thinking was better, our people more refined. But she did not say these things.”¹⁹³ Nunumu is disappointed when the answer she has expected do not come and she wonders if there is anything better in America. Upon this new question, a very long list comes as the answer of Miss Banner:

“Oh ... comfort and cleanliness, stores and schools, walkways and roadways, houses and beds, candies and cakes, games and toys, tea parties and birthdays, oh, and big loud parades, lovely picnics on the grass, rowing a boat, putting a flower in your hat, wearing pretty dresses, reading books, and writing letters to friends ...”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 205.

¹⁹² *ibid*, p. 199.

¹⁹³ *ibid*, p. 199.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 199.

This striking manifestation of the great contrast between America and China deeply affects Nunumu. This distinction between the West and the East is not secretly imposed any more in these lines, but the Western thought dominantly highlights it. The feeling emerged in the Eastern heart in the face of such an opposition is not a secret for the reader to deduce and reveal. Nunumu honestly expresses her feelings upon being face to face with the crude reality that her own country is nowhere near as beautiful and developed as America-the Western world-: “On and on she went, until I felt myself growing small and dirty, ugly, dumb, and poor. Often I have not liked my situations. But this was the first time I had this feeling of not liking myself.”¹⁹⁵

Nunumu’s self-hatred due to the American charms is a tragic situation. Because this is not an individual feeling based on being in the position of “Nunumu”, a poor and orphan peasant girl, but related to being Chinese. Therefore, this conversation is an intended part operating on dual level: Firstly, the aim is to emphasize the difference between America and Chinese in an obvious way and in this sense, to show the former gorgeous while showing the latter miserable. Secondly, by showing Nunumu’s feelings in a clear way, it is aimed to generalize about the sentiment of the Eastern people. The quotation shows that how the Eastern people feel incapable and powerless against the greatness of the West. In short, the magnificence of the Western civilization in contrast to the Eastern backwardness is reflected once again. Even Kwan, in China, says that she has “become too American and now everything I see things with different eyes, everything looking smaller, poorer, not as good.”¹⁹⁶ In this context, to have American eyes means having Orientalist gaze, which Kwan is also aware of.

3.8. “Insanity” and “Gullibility” of the Easterner

As well as the Orientalist misrepresentations in beauty concept; physical appearance and intermarriage; animal images imposed on a Chinese girl; food and Chinese backwardness, so-called “insanity” and “gullibility” are also remarkable

¹⁹⁵ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 199.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 228.

Chinese images represented in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. The gullible and/or insane image of the Chinese is presented in two ways: Firstly, the Chinese protagonist, Kwan is reflected as she is so gullible, fool, illogical and insane. This characteristic is used as a funny element in the novel. Secondly, China on the whole is shown as a place where you can hardly encounter events which are logical and sane or people who are down-to-earth. In both representations, the gullibility and sanity are attributed to being Chinese and in China.

Kwan's being so naïve, so crazy and illogical is a recurrent theme throughout the novel. According to Olivia, "... Kwan is odd, no getting around that. Occasionally it amuses me. Sometimes it irritates me. More often I become upset, even angry—not with Kwan but with how things never turn out the way you hope. Why did I get Kwan for a sister? Why did she get me?"¹⁹⁷ As for Olivia, Kwan's oddity, associated with Chineseness, is sometimes an amusing, sometimes an irritating element throughout the book. Olivia's sentences explain and summarize one of the reasons of Kwan's presence as a Chinese character in the novel. Olivia always mentions how she sees Kwan in this way and supports it with abundant examples from their lives.

For example, when she is twelve, Olivia gives Kwan a Ouija board, which is "a board with letters and signs on it, used to try to receive messages from the spirits of dead people"¹⁹⁸, for Christmas and tells her that she can use it to ask American ghosts how to spell English words and "she patted the board and said, 'wunnerful, so useful'."¹⁹⁹ Upon this, her stepfather gets really angry with Olivia because she is making fun of Kwan. Although Olivia claims that it is just a joke, he thinks it is a mean joke and sends her to her room by banning the Christmas. Then, Olivia "was crying bitterly: How I was being mean to Kwan if she didn't even *know* it? Besides, I reasoned, if I was being mean, which I wasn't, she deserved it, she was so wacko. She invited people to play funny jokes on her. And what was so wrong about having

¹⁹⁷ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 21.

¹⁹⁸ Gadsby, Adam (ed.). (1995) Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Essex: Longman Dictionaries, p. 1002.

¹⁹⁹ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 108.

fun on Christmas?”²⁰⁰ According to Olivia, Kwan really acts “so retarded” as she “growled” later. Therefore, Olivia, or the writer, accepts that Kwan is deserved to be looked down on and made fun of; and she provides Olivia’s life and also the novel with a comical element.

Apart from Kwan’s being gullible and ridiculous, she is also reflected “wacky”, or lunatic. Kwan’s claim that she has “yin eyes,” which means she can see dead people and communicates with them, is in the center of the novel. This is never believed by Olivia despite some good evidences, like Kwan’s knowing every detail about Elza, Simon’s dead ex-girlfriend, without being told anything. Olivia reflects this claim of Kwan as a Chinese peculiarity:

No one in our family talks about Kwan’s unusual abilities. That would call attention to what we already know, that Kwan is *wacky*, even by *Chinese standards*—even by San Francisco standards. A lot of the stuff she says and does would strain the credulity of most people who are not on antipsychotic drugs or living on cult farms.²⁰¹ (my emphasis)

Kwan’s being “wacky” is associated with being either Chinese or drug user. According to Western standards, she cannot be seen normal. For Olivia, Kwan even pushes the “Chinese” limits, “Rationality is undermined by Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values.”²⁰² Most of the things related to being Chinese are reflected as illogical, as the opposite of what is “normal.” Who defines the normal? Definitely the West. Therefore, the Chinese is abnormal just because what they think or do is in contrast to the West. Tan reinforces this belief by means of her protagonist, Olivia’s ideas: “Maybe in another country Kwan would be considered ordinary. Maybe in some parts of China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan she’d be revered. Maybe there’s a place in the world where everyone has a sister with yin eyes.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 108.

²⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 21.

²⁰² Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 57.

²⁰³ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 21.

In the quotation, Tan directly expresses that being irrational is something peculiar to the East. This is clear in the examples of the places where she says Kwan may be seen normal. All these mentioned places are in the East, not Europe or America. As a result, Tan reinforces the incomprehensible mysticism of the East with Kwan's yin eyes and the non-logical structure of the Eastern cultures. As Sheng-Mei Ma states:

By exploiting the thin line between the incomprehensible and the irrational, between the inspired and the insane, between the profound and the pathetic, between "secret senses" and nonsense, Tan is able to hold in double vision the comic Chinese sidekick Kwan, Olivia's half-sister. Although endowed with mystical power, Kwan comes with the age-old baggage of Orientalism, evidenced in her pidgin English and her ludicrous ideas.²⁰⁴

This generalization which is about all Chinese people and China is based on what Kwan thinks and does turns out to be open comments on the irrationality of Chinese people when the characters are in China which is described by Olivia as a country "where I have no control, where everything is unpredictable, totally *insane* (my emphasis)."²⁰⁵

In China, Olivia feels she is "in one of those dreams where the threads of logic between sentences keep disintegrating."²⁰⁶ She quits relying on her logic because reasoning no more works in China. Therefore, she thinks "yin-yang"²⁰⁷ is a way of keeping the mind healthy against all the situations pushing the limits of the reason. However, Olivia gets uncomfortable due to the idea of grasping a Chinese way of thinking: "Why question the world, indeed? Because I'm not Chinese like Kwan. To me, yin isn't yang, and yang isn't yin. I can't accept two contradictory

²⁰⁴ Ma, Sheng-Mei. (2000). *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 117.

²⁰⁵ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 292.

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 276.

²⁰⁷ In Chinese philosophy, the concept of **yin** and **yang** "represents all the opposite principles one finds in the universe. Under yang are the principles of maleness, the sun, creation, heat, light, Heaven, dominance, and so on, and under yin are the principles of femaleness, the moon, completion, cold, darkness, material forms, submission, and so on. Each of these opposites produce the other." Yin and Yang defines both opposing and complementary aspects of any one phenomenon. For further information, see Hooker, Richard. (1996). *Chinese Philosophy, Yin and Yang*. <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CHPHIL/YINYANG.HTM>. (April 28, 2008).

stories as the whole truth.”²⁰⁸ She is disturbed by the idea of being like Kwan. However, the “insanity” never stops following her in China. Gradually, she gets into the stories told by Kwan but she cannot believe that she can believe in these stories: “What the hell is going on? Maybe the water in Changmian is contaminated with hallucinogen. Or maybe I’ve been bitten by a Chinese mosquito that infects the brain with insanity.”²⁰⁹ Why is it “a Chinese mosquito” for Olivia, but not any other mosquito? Because “insanity” is totally associated with Chineseness by her.

Alongside “insanity”, being “unreasonable” is also shown as a part of Chinese way of thinking. Amy Tan presents us a ridiculous “Chinese logic” which is farfetched for the “white” reader. Naturally, we get the message by means of the conversations between Olivia and Simon. For example, when Olivia, Simon and Kwan are traveling to Changmian by a car whose driver is a Chinese man with an American name, Rocky, chosen for tourists. He is getting so fast while driving that Olivia gets scared but they cannot warn him not to speed up in order not to be rude. When Olivia finally feels queasy, she asks him to “pull over ... [to] throw up” but he does not care. Then, “Kwan gives Rocky some advice. He solemnly nods, then slows down. ‘What’d she say?’ Simon asks. ‘Chinese logic. If we’re killed, no payment. And in the next lifetime, he’ll owe us big time.’”²¹⁰ This cynical attitude backed up with the other world is presented as the way which Chinese people understand and is comical for the Western reader.

The Chinese people in China of the 19th century are also reflected as unreasonable and funny as Kwan and Rocky. For example, Nunumu takes giving your whole body to Jesus to be a true worshipper as literally and asks Miss Banner how much she gives. When she holds up her thumb, Nunumu gets surprised because Miss Banner preaches the sermon every Sunday; she thinks “this should be worth two legs at least”²¹¹ Nunumu, Kwan or all Chinese people understands the things

²⁰⁸ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 277.

²⁰⁹ *ibid*, p. 355.

²¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 228.

²¹¹ *ibid*, p. 66.

always literally, with the senses they see, hear, touch, smell and taste. It is as if they did not have mental perception.

As another example, the music box to which the missionaries make the local people listen in the church on Sundays can be given. The song playing on the box is really secular even nasty, but Chinese peasants are told it is a religious song, a carol. So the missionaries deceive them. Anyway the Chinese does not care about the song but the music box; “Some of the old country people asked out loud if the box contained tiny foreigners” and there are “many beggars who thought Jesus was a landlord with many rice fields” just because they can eat a bowl of rice, a gift from Jesus every week.²¹²

All these examples reinforce the excessive naivety, or honestly, gullibility and irrationality of Chinese people. This image is confirmed by Amy Tan throughout the novel, either through Kwan or through the Chinese people in general. Insanity, credulity, and lack of logic in Chinese people take part in *The Hundred Secret Senses* as the Orientalist assumptions. Tan puts the Chinese people into reductive categories to highlight the distinction between the Westerner and the Easterner. The othering is the essence to create the definition through contrasts: if the Eastern people are “insane, credulous and illogical”, this means that the Westerner is “sane, clever and logical.”

3.9. Easterners in Masses

The negative generalizations about Chinese people lead us to the last remarkable aspect of the Oriental approach to China and Chinese people in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, which is the representation of the Chinese in masses without individuality. Chinese people are reflected as the same as each other without any particular characteristic peculiar to their selves; and the message that they are numerous is conveyed in the novel. Said mentions this kind of representation for the Arab: “In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No

²¹² Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 68.

individuality, no personal characteristic or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures.”²¹³

Amy Tan does not present the Chinese in the photos but she draws the same picture in her narration. “Kevin once joked that maybe the Communists sent us the wrong kid, figuring we Americans thought all Chinese people looked alike anyway.”²¹⁴ Actually the Americans think all Chinese look really alike. They are a crowd of identical people and “Americans” among them can be noticed at first sight: “Simon strides off, and I notice how American his swagger looks, especially here on foreign soil. He walks in his own rhythm; he doesn’t conform to the crowd” on Chinese streets.²¹⁵ For Olivia, it is so natural that Simon is not one of the people among the crowd because he is American, someone different from the rest with his individuality.

Because the Chinese people exist in large number, their individual lives are not as important. When Olivia gets on a Japanese car without seatbelt in China, she concludes whether the Japanese think Chinese lives are not worth saving. As another example the Chinese driver Rocky’s complaint about Americans after their reaction to the accident they see on the road can be given:

“You are Americans,” he continues, his voice deep with Chinese authority. “You’re not used to seeing tragedies. You pity us, yes, because you can later go home to a comfortable life and forget what you’ve seen. For us, this type of disaster is commonplace. We have so many people. This is our life, always a crowded bus, everyone trying to squeeze in for himself, no air to breathe, no room left for pity.”²¹⁶

This criticism reflecting the Chinese point of view of the American attitude is surprising because it is as if the writer criticized the “Oriental approach” to the Chinese here. However, this is a tricky remark because in spite of the criticism

²¹³ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 287.

²¹⁴ Tan, Amy. (1995). *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy Books, p. 22.

²¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 216.

²¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 227.

towards the American attitude, Rocky, or a Chinese, does not deny the tragic situation in China. Therefore, this is just a confirmation of Chinese people's way of life in masses.

In conclusion, this chapter aims to show the Orientalist practices Amy Tan uses in her novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Generalized representations of the East and China are stereotyped in the personality of Kwan, the Chinese character in the novel. By "othering" Kwan, the Chinese American protagonist Olivia constructs a "positive" Western identity. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses Olivia's efforts to belong to the mainstream culture and dismiss Kwan altogether from her life. Therefore, in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Orientalism is rendered from an individual point of view, from the perspective of a mixed-breed American who carries Chinese facial features. Olivia tries to form an individual cultural identity by othering Kwan and the Chinese and by misrepresenting them in a reductive way. The writer exposes the Western reader to Orientalist assumptions in terms of beauty concept, intermarriage, language, animal images, family values, food, barbarity and backwardness of China and the Chinese; and Chinese irrationality and insanity; Chinese people are shown in crowds rather than being individuals with personal qualities. In some parts of the novel, the white reader is amused by Kwan's characteristics and behavior shown in a way which the reader assumes that Kwan's peculiarities are directly related to being Chinese. All of the practices, presented pictures and generalized representations in the novel harm China and Chinese due to their derogatory aspect. The popular and common Chinese stereotypes are confirmed once again through Kwan in the novel for the sake of a self-definition of Olivia. Shortly, Orientalist assumptions, abundant in the novel, serve identity construction on the individual base in *The Hundred Secret Senses* differently from *Saving Fish from Drowning* in which Orientalist assumptions serve identity formation on the collective base.

PART FOUR

ORIENTALISM IN *SAVING FISH FROM DROWNING*

The Orientalist approach adopted by Amy Tan has been analyzed thoroughly in the previous chapter on *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Orientalism in this literary work has been studied in various aspects. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the latest novel by Amy Tan, Orientalist conceptions are maintained in a consistent way as they are in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. In the latter, Orientalist reinforcements are suggested from an individual perspective to create a satisfying self-definition whereas in the former they serve a totally civilized and improved Western-identity definition on the collective base. The specific aim of this chapter is to gain insight to the reader about collective Orientalist perspective defining an Eastern country and community in *Saving Fish from Drowning* to prove the superiority of the Western civilization in contrast to Eastern “savagery.” The setting of the novel, which is Myanmar, or Burma as her better-known name, also is suitable to foster Orientalist assumptions since this country was under British colonial rule between the years of 1886-1948.

In the novel, the events revolve around the twelve American tourists who go on holiday in Burma on the eve of the New Year, 2000. The tour, called “Following the Buddha’s Footsteps” is organized by a Chinese lady – Bibi Chen who has been in the United States since her childhood and is a well-known art dealer in San Francisco. She is supposed to be the tour leader but unfortunately short before the holiday she dies unexpectedly and mysteriously. However, she joins the group as a spirit and goes on the tour, which is not cancelled. The group does not know her existence. Since she can see everything, she narrates the story. From the beginning, Bibi Chen is the ghost story teller of the novel.

As for the other members of the tourist group, the reader sees that the writer wants to give the sense of a microcosmic America with them. Among these people, there are, for example, a Chinese-American lady, Marlena with her 12-year-old daughter, Esmé, an African-American lady, Vera; a gay man Bennie; an English TV

star, Harry; a daughter of a wealthy white family, Wendy, etc. These people seem to have no common point in their daily lives but the trip makes them come together.

The group starts their trip in the southwestern corner of China, and then they pass to Yunnan Province in Burma. The central event of the novel is related to the Karen tribe, “the original people of Burma.”²¹⁷ The people of the tribe, hiding in the jungle, abduct eleven of the American tourists because of 15-year-old Rupert, who is among the group with his father Moff. The tribesmen think Rupert as the “Younger White Brother” who returns a century later to save them from the atrocities of the military junta in Myanmar. The group does not understand they have been abducted at first, because the tribesmen do not reveal what they think and do. The American group thinks they are taken to a tourist destination and they get stuck in the middle of the jungle because they believe that the bridge connecting ‘the wilderness’ to ‘the outside world’ has collapsed. The rest of the story is a mutual revelation: both for the tribe and for the American group, they both understand that the reality is not the same as they think. In the meantime, the world wonders where the tourists are and starts searching for them thoroughly; both the Karen tribe and American tourists end up being world-wide celebrities.

Saving Fish from Drowning has substantial material that reinforces Orientalist assumptions and ideas with its setting, characters and its central plot. As a post-colonial country having suffered under the British colonial rule, Burma is directly subjected to the influence of ‘colonialist psychology’ and the “Karen” as a tribe living ‘in the middle of nowhere’ provides the novel with an excellent sample for Eastern “savagery.” The Westerners are there, in that exotic and distant place as tourists. All these elements form a convenient base for an Orientalist approach to an Eastern country and her people.

²¹⁷ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 262.

4.1. Exoticism and Tourist Gaze

‘Exoticism’, which is mentioned in Chapter I, is one of the major components of Orientalist thinking. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, it is obvious that exoticism and tourism are blended with Orientalism. To grasp this combination, firstly the link between the exotic and touristic should be understood.

According to Graham Huggan, there is a remarkable link between tourism and exoticism, which is an apparent fact in Tan’s novel. Both exoticist and tourist discourses have an important share in the production, representation and exploitation of the cultural other.²¹⁸ Because “the logic of tourism is that of a relentless extension of commodity relations, and the consequent inequalities of power, between centre and periphery, First and Third World, developed and underdeveloped regions, metropolis and countryside.”²¹⁹

This logic is also available in *Saving Fish from Drowning*. The subject country of the novel, the destination of the tourists is Burma—a country in the Far East is a luring tourist destination, as one of Tan’s characters Bibi Chen points out it is “rare, remote, primitive and strange.”²²⁰ According to Todorov, “Exoticists cherish the remote because of its remoteness ... The best candidates for the exotic ideal are the peoples and cultures that are the most remote from us.”²²¹ Therefore, distance is an important component of an exotic outlook. This is also a significant element in *Saving Fish from Drowning* as the novel is set in the Far East – China and mainly in Burma.

It is also remarkable to state that geographical conceptions can also serve Orientalist ideology as well as cultural, political and social conceptions. Middle East is known as “Middle” East all around the world and Far East is “Far” East in any place in the world. However, to call these regions “middle” or “far,” there should be

²¹⁸ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 177.

²¹⁹ Frow, John. (1991) ‘Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia’, *October* 57: pp. 123-51. p. 151.

²²⁰ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 43.

²²¹ Todorov, qtd in Huggan. (2001). p. 186.

a center and it is really obvious where the center of the world.²²² The West is the center of the world and geographical knowledge is organized according to its position.

Saving Fish from Drowning with its exotic setting serves not only as a travel guide but also as a good example for showing the relationship between exoticism and tourism. The critics reading the novel also have also pointed out this characteristic of the book. According to Solomon, “Tan provides a great deal of local color and detailed touristic information, including recommended menus. You could plan your own vacation after you read this book.”²²³ Therefore, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, in which the tourists head for the magical touristic Burma, is a suitable literary work that displays how touristic attractions are exoticized:

In Burma, despite the sad reports, it is still quite possible to enjoy what is just in the right hand: the art, first and foremost, the festivals and tribal clothing, the charming religiosity of taking your shoes off before stepping into a temple. That’s what we visitors love, a rustic romanticism and antiquated prettiness, no electric power lines, television poles, or satellite television dishes to mar the view. Seek and you shall find your illusions through the magic of tourism.²²⁴

According to Huggan, tourism nurtures social, political and economic differences, which is a reciprocal process because differences and otherness also foster tourism.²²⁵ Especially, “The appeal of exotic peoples and places constitutes tourism’s staple diet: ‘the product the industry sells is a commodified relation to the [cultural] other’.”²²⁶ Alien, distant, and unknown places like China and Burma are gorgeous objects of tourist consumptions: “That is China ... like that tree, there it is, old, resilient and oddly magnificent.”²²⁷

²²² Mutman, Mahmut. (2002). “Şarkiyatçılık: Kuramsal Bir Not.” *Doğu Batı*, sayı: 20, Ankara, Felsefe, Sanat ve Kültür Yayınları. ss. 105-114. s. 109.

²²³ Solomon, Andrew. (October 16, 2005). “*Saving Fish from Drowning*: Bus of Fools.” www.nytimes.com/2005/10/16/books/review/16solomon.html. (April 25, 2008).

²²⁴ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 147.

²²⁵ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 177.

²²⁶ Frow, qtd in Huggan. (2001) 178.

²²⁷ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving .Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 99.

In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, tourism, as a product of consumption, provides the Western reader with imagined access to the cultural other.²²⁸ As Tan does in her other novels, *Saving Fish from Drowning* gives the Western reader access to an unknown culture and geography which are substantially different from theirs. While doing this, Tan also satisfies them with the superiority of the West.

In the novel, Tan shows the East from the tourist point of view and in this way, she benefits from the relationship between the tourism and exoticism for the sake of Orientalist reinforcements. McConnell clearly explains the symbiotic relationship between exoticism and tourism:

Exoticism's utopian rhetoric serves as tourism's protective smokescreen, allowing the industry to promote and market the myth of innocuous pleasure. Exoticist aesthetics, and the exoticist mythologies from which the tourism industry derives its profits, disguise the real differences they help to cause by appealing to ones of their own imagining. Exoticism and tourism might be seen here as parting company. The former, after all, promotes and perpetuates a mystique of inaccessibility; the latter presents a counter-myth of limited cultural contact. But this myth depends, in turn, on a perceptible need for cultural *distance* – the tourist world maintains itself by pushing onwards 'beyond the frontiers of existing society.'²²⁹

The tourism phenomenon in Tan's novel is also given from an exotic point of view. The exotic point of view is provided through the "tourist gaze" of the characters; their derogatory remarks and the narrative style of the writer contribute to enhance a binary logic where the East is reflected as the primitive Other, which is fascinating and repulsive at the same time. It is assumed that "tourist gaze is mediated through the discourse of exoticism."²³⁰ What the Western tourist wants is to encounter an exotic cultural other. When the Westerner is in the East, s/he wears their tourist gaze and looks at the Easterner and the Eastern country through these lenses. In his book called, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (1990), John Urry points out,

²²⁸ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 19.

²²⁹ MacCannell, qtd in Huggan. (2001). p. 178.

²³⁰ Huggan, Graham. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, p. 180.

Tourist gazes are filters of touristic perceptions – they provide a medium for what tourists see, but also a guideline as to how they *ought to* see. So while tourist gazes are instruments of vision, they may also function as screening devices that restrict or impair vision. Tourist gazes, in short, constitute imperfect barometric records of the diverse ways in which tourists adjust their personal experiences to the requirements of social expectations.²³¹

As pointed out in the above quotation, the tourist group's attitude in *Saving Fish from Drowning*, their remarks are never free from Western conceptions of the Eastern world. They go to China and Burma with certain prejudices in their minds, which affect their personal experiences. They sometimes admire the natural landscape of the East, but, on the whole, the approach is obviously Orientalist and aims to reveal the huge differences between the West and the East. In this sense, Tan's novel comes closer to the colonial novel rather than the exotic novel. Huggan quotes Todorov about the difference and the common point of these types of novels:

The exotic novel glorifies foreigners while the colonial novel denigrates them. But the contradiction is only apparent. Once the author has declared that he himself is the only subject ... and the others have been reduced to objects, it is ... of secondary concern whether those objects are loved or despised. The essential point is that they are not full-fledged human beings.²³²

Said also mentions the issue and states that the Orientalist tries "to reduce the Orient to a kind of human flatness, which exposed its characteristics easily to scrutiny and removed from it its complicating humanity."²³³ Writers with an Oriental perspective present Eastern people and culture in reductive and simplified categories and denigrate them in various ways.

4.2. Eastern Savagery and Backwardness

In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the backwardness of the country and the tribe in the wilderness is the central theme in the novel which Tan uses to despise the Easterner and the Eastern country. "Look at the conditions here" is a popular

²³¹ Urry, qtd in Huggan. (2001). p. 180.

²³² Todorov, qtd in Huggan, Graham. (2001). p. 184.

²³³ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 150.

sentence of the American tourists who are constantly surprised by how China and especially Burma are far from “Western civilization.”²³⁴ In this novel, Tan helps “to support the dominant popular [Western] discourse that other cultures [are] ‘survivals’ or ‘savages’.”²³⁵ The discourse she uses creates subtle ways to legitimize European imperial superiority over the inferiority of an Eastern country, colonized in the past. In Tan’s representations, Burma appears “lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth.”²³⁶ Most importantly, Burma’s being “antidemocratic” is foregrounded because the country is under the rule of military junta and the savageness and antidemocratic regime coincides most of the time.

The absence of the vital things for a civilized life is always underlined. When one of the characters, Dwight, who is “only thirty-one years old” feels bad, he thinks he is going to “drop dead of a heart attack in a weebegotten village *without a doctor* and with *no ambulance* to get him out of there (my emphasis).”²³⁷ This confirms the Western idea in readers’ minds that Burma is so “backward” that finding a doctor and an ambulance is nearly impossible. However, the absence of mobile phones and the internet, which are indispensable signs of the modern life, is also emphasized because they are not allowed by the junta: “Last chance. Once you go into Myanmar, no more Internet. Is not allow.”²³⁸ One of the tourists asks: “How in hell did he get talked into coming to a country that didn’t allow cell phones?”²³⁹ With an emphasis on the absence of the items that are the indicators of a modern life, the backwardness of Burma is also supported by Burma’s being antidemocratic.

Another obvious example mentioned in the novel on the antidemocratic rule of the country is the absence of freedom of speech: “By freedom, Garret, of course, was referring to *American* civil rights, not international law, as he led a befuddled

²³⁴ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 118.

²³⁵ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 196.

²³⁶ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 150.

²³⁷ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 119.

²³⁸ *ibid*, p. 127.

²³⁹ *ibid*, p. 242.

Harry to think. The truth is, Harry had as much right to express his views freely as did any Burmese citizen, which is to say, none at all.”²⁴⁰

In the country, world channels are also not allowed to be broadcast: “The broadcast ban extended to all foreign programs. The approved news was reported on the two government-run channels, and the stories on both had to first pass muster with the Information Ministry.”²⁴¹ All these remind the Western reader of that they live under democratic conditions and how lucky they are because an opposition between the West and the East is created.

Furthermore, the most obvious negative effect of anti-democracy is intersected by a common Orientalist notion: “the barbarity” of the Orientals: “If they treated people that bad over there, imagine what they did to dogs.”²⁴² How the military junta treats the Karen, the people of No Name Place, is one of the central points in the novel. “The military thinks all Karen tribes hiding in the jungle are rebels”²⁴³ and the bridge connecting the Karen to the outside life

... had been brought up every other week, when they needed supplies and felt there was no risk that soldiers were in the area. If the soldiers discovered the bridge, the Karen people would run toward the deep jaws of the mountain and jump in. Better that than to be caught, tortured, and killed. And if they weren't able to kill themselves first, if they were caught by the soldiers, they would gouge out their own eyes so they could not watch the soldiers rape their sisters and daughters, or cut the throats of their mothers and fathers. The soldiers, they remembered, liked to smile when they held the knife to make someone rise or lower, as if they were puppet masters pulling the strings of a marionette to retell one of the old Jataka tales of the Burmans.²⁴⁴

How the military soldiers treat original people of Burma is really bloodcurdling. The atrocities that the Karen are subjected to are constantly displayed throughout the novel. The tribe in the wilderness is savage, which will be analyzed later in this chapter to show the contrast between the civilized West, however, the military soldiers, SLORC soldiers commanded by the military government are

²⁴⁰ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 322.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 333.

²⁴² *ibid*, p. 467.

²⁴³ *ibid*, p. 405.

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 259.

obviously and dreadfully barbaric. The primitiveness of the country, the backwardness is always foregrounded but barbarity and violence accompany the primitiveness of the Eastern people:

They [the Karen people] feared the soldiers most during the monsoons. The rain beat down the thatches over tribe's small verandahs, and they lived in mud and picked off leeches every few minutes. During that season they hung bamboo-lattice hammocks in the trees where they sat and slept. It was then that the SLORC soldiers came. They could approach a whole settlement from behind and catch them on the wrong side of a raging stream, unable to escape except into the water. The soldiers, some of them boys of only twelve or thirteen, would stand on the shore, aim their rifles, and laugh when they hit a target and its arms stopped failing. Sometimes they would toss in a grenade that exploded and sent lifeless bodies and fish floating to the top and then swirling in eddies like lily pads. A few of the people at No Name Place had lost their entire families this way.²⁴⁵

Such kind of scenes showing the barbarity and violence of the military junta is abundant in the novel. It should be stated that this study does neither claim that all these barbaric scenes are imaginary to show the Orientalist approach of the writer nor defend the atrocities of the military junta in Burma. However, the aim is to suggest that the emphasis on the violence of Orientals towards another Oriental group exist in the novel to create the contrast between the Eastern world and Western world; in this way, to make the reader to conclude that the Western world is different from the East in civilization and democracy. The writer gives the sense as if such kind of atrocities just happens in the East. While negating the East, the West is affirmed in the novel due to the created opposition.

Apart from this, Amy Tan also underlines the savageness of the tribe while showing them sympathetic and in a touching situation. However, the existence of a tribe, living in the wilderness called 'No Name Place', in the centre of the novel is not unintentional. The West associates savagery and primitiveness with the East. Throughout the novel, this Western notion is supported by Amy Tan and the Karen tribe embodies the Western idea of Eastern primitiveness: "The people in the lowlands referred to anyone who lived up there as 'people of the jungle.' They might

²⁴⁵ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 260.

have been isolated tribes, bandits, or the pitiful remnants of insurgents, about whom it was difficult to speak, except with a quiet sigh of relief that you were not among them.”²⁴⁶ As Stuart Hall points out, “Identified with Nature, they symbolized ‘the primitive’ in contrast with ‘the civilized world’.”²⁴⁷ The Orientalist discourse in *Saving Fish from Drowning* is structured by a set of binary oppositions; “there is the powerful opposition between ‘civilization’ (white) and ‘savagery’”, which is associated with the Oriental, specifically the Karen tribe.²⁴⁸

When the tourist group arrives in No Name Place where the tribe lives, their reactions are expectable for they are the people coming from the center of the civilization. According to Wendy, one of the Americans, the way the tribe lives is “so *unchanged* ... the twentieth century forgot to come here” and Roxanne, another American tourist, introduces the tribe for her camera recording in this way: “These are the Karen tribe ... As you can see, it’s really primitive here, untouched by the twentieth century.”²⁴⁹

When the group is stuck in the wilderness, they discover that the tribe has a television, which they ironically watch a reality show called “Darwin’s Fittest.” When the group encounters the television surprisingly in the wilderness, they instantly feel comforted and that they are closer to the civilization than they thought²⁵⁰ although the tribesmen are savage outsiders whose world is separated from “the real world” by a bridge made of rope.²⁵¹

The people of the Karen tribe are deprived of everything related to civilization save the television. When American tourists are with them, they are yearning for what they call civilization:

²⁴⁶ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 201.

²⁴⁷ Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, p. 239.

²⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 243.

²⁴⁹ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 401.

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 294.

²⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 259.

First thing when she reached home, Marlena said, would be a long, hot bath. Roxanne said she would run the shower for a sinfully long hour to flush out all the grit that had adhered to her skin. Wendy wanted to get message, a haircut, a manicure-pedicure, and buy make-up, underwear, and socks. Bennie was going to buy all new suits because he had lost nearly twenty pounds. The malaria still came back in waves, making it possible for him eat too much ... Heidi wanted to lie in clean sheets.²⁵²

In tourists' dreams on turning back to their own "world", the reader can easily see how little things they are longing for and how basic things they are deprived of in their uncivilized life, such as hot bath, clean sheets, etc. "They were thinking of the future, the small things, the little luxuries."²⁵³ In the novel, the basic desires of the American tourists which they can meet when they turn back to their countries are associated with the modern world. In this way, an opposition between the wilderness and the civilization is created and it is reflected as the difference between the West and the East. As a result, "the superiority" of the West to the East is once again confirmed.

4.3. The Eastern Concepts of Food and Cleanliness

In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, Amy Tan also supports the notion of Eastern savagery through Eastern food, like she does in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. By reflecting Eastern cuisine and diet as a sign of their primitiveness, Tan affirms the prejudices in the Western minds. First of all, the American tourist group in the novel is quite prejudiced and cynical about the food they eat in China and Burma. In the beginning of their tour, the tourists have a lunch break at a restaurant on the road in China:

"What shall we order?" Bennie asked the group.

"No dog" cried Esmé.

"How about snake?" joked Rupert.

"You don't suppose they eat cats?" Heidi added, and shuddered at the thought.

Miss Rong conveyed this message in Mandarin to the chef: "They don't wish to eat dog, but want to know if you serve the famous Yunnan dish Dragon

²⁵² Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 376.

²⁵³ *ibid*, p. 376.

Meets Lion.” The cook sadly informed her they had had no deliveries of fresh snake or cat recently. But, his wife interjected, they would gladly serve their finest.²⁵⁴

The Chinese conversation between the guide Miss Rong and the chef shows that the tourists’ jokes are true in a way. The “finest” dish the restaurant could serve “turned out to be a bit of something that resembled pork, and might have been chicken, rice twice reheated, and all of it invisibly sprinkled with cockroach legs coated with little microbes that feed of human intestinal lining.”²⁵⁵ The group does not know the ingredients of the meal that is certainly not delicious for Western appetite. Not only is it queasy due to the ingredient but it is also insanitary; the meal they eat there causes them to catch dysentery: “... the dysentery consequences of this *Shigella bacillus* culinary adventure would not be felt for another few days. But the bacteria had already begun their descent into foreign guts, and would wend their ways into intestinal tracts and into bowels.”²⁵⁶ In a couple of days “several members of the group had developed upset stomach, which they thought as the result of high stress from waiting at the checkpoint. But in fact, unbeknownst to them, *Shigella bacillus* had finally multiplied in sufficient numbers to besiege and scour the linings of their bowels. This was the souvenir of the now forgotten meal served at a restaurant on the way to Stone Bell Temple.”²⁵⁷ Then, they have hard days fighting against the illness when they are with the Karen in the wilderness.

The Easterner’s being “dirty and unhygienic” is also a remarkable negative point presented in Orientalist works. A contrast between the East and the West is created in terms of cleanliness. The western idea that the Eastern people are unclean and they live under unsanitary conditions in dirty places is also affirmed by Tan in *Saving Fish from Drowning*. The most striking example is the toilet one of the tourists uses after the meal at the restaurant where they catch dysentery. Harry goes to the toilet:

²⁵⁴ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 69.

²⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 69.

²⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 71.

²⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 178.

He was slightly inebriated, and because the restroom was unlit, he nearly fell into the abyss. Catching himself, he then observed both visually and viscerally the level of hygiene practice in this restaurant. Good God, that hole in the floor that passed as a toilet was only a *suggested* target. It was also evident that quite a number of deathly ill people with bloody bowel disorders had found refuge there. Furthermore, toilet paper was not to be found, nor water with which to wash one's hands. Abominable!²⁵⁸

In one of the chapters of the novel, the writer presents the ideas on the cleanliness of the Eastern people by means of the ghost narrator, Bibi Chen. Here, Tan firstly surprises with positive, praise-like comments on the cleanliness of Burmese people. Because, in a novel written from an Orientalist point of view, the reader should not expect positive representation of the Oriental people, especially in terms of cleanliness like the representation of the Burmese in these following lines:

I have long held the opinion that the Burmese are among the cleanest people in the world. While they may live in conditions that are impossible to keep spotless, they bathe themselves twice a day, often by the river or the lake, for there are no private baths for most. The women wade in with their sarongs, the men in their longyis. The younger children are not fettered by clothes. Bathing is a beautiful necessity, a moment of peace, a cleansing of body and spirit. And afterward, the bather is able to remain cooled through the heat of the day and is dry by the time the cooking fires are lit.²⁵⁹

Amy Tan presents us a picture of the Burmese who like the water, bathing and being clean. She appreciates them for their bathing habits; despite the hard conditions they live in, being clean is a priority for them in contrast to the common Western belief that the Orientals are dirty and unclean people. Although it sounds contradictory, this positive approach of Tan actually serves Orientalism. Because, after the positive representation of the Burmese, there comes the comments on the bathing habits of the Tibetans and the Chinese—the people of two other Eastern country—and these are nowhere near as positive as the comment on the Burmese: “Contrast this to the Tibetans. They bathe once a year and make a big ceremony about it.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 69.

²⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 216.

²⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 216.

For the Chinese, the comment on their bathing habits is similar to those on the Tibetans; the reader is “informed” how Chinese people are far from being clean: “Cleanliness among [Chinese] comrades has become less valued than saving water. I have observed the greasy hair, matted into whorls and cowlicks formed during sleep. And the clothes—heavens!—they are impregnated with months of fried cooking smells.”²⁶¹

While showing the people of one Oriental country—the Burmese—in a contrast image to the derogatory representations of Orientalism, Tan does not change her underestimating attitude towards other Oriental people—the Tibetans and the Chinese. The picture she draws about them affirms the image in the minds of Western reader because Tan gives information on the life styles, daily habits of these people. And the reader can easily believe in what s/he is given. Here, Tan associates the routines and habits of the people, who are said to be observed, with their ethnicity and there emerges a generalization.

On the other hand, Tan presents another generalized image of the people of another Eastern country—the Japanese. This time, she does not claim that they are dirty; on the contrary, she makes fun of their obsession on the cleanliness:

I am not obsessive about cleanliness, not like the Japanese, who soak in a deep tub of near-boiling water. I never did care for that alternative, to be scaldingly clean, your skin sloughing off in your own soup, the rest of you bleached to the bone. Why, even their toilets, are equipped to spray your bottom with warm water and then dry it with wafts of air, so that you might never have to touch that part of your anatomy again. This strikes me as abnormally antiseptic.²⁶²

As a result, on the bathing habits and cleanliness of the Easterner, the writer has contradictory comments. The common point in these comments is the generalizations that are negatively foster the fixed image in the minds of the white reader. Whether the Eastern people are clean or not, their styles are reflected as excessive, not normal. At least, they are not “normal” according to Western criteria.

²⁶¹ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 217.

²⁶² *ibid*, p. 217.

By this way, a common Orientalist assumption is supported and fixed in the novel.

4.4. “Linguistic Exoticism”²⁶³

Another aspect of the Orientalist attitude Amy Tan fosters in *Saving Fish from Drowning* is “linguistic exoticism” which Sheng-Mei Ma puts forward. Amy Tan uses the English language spoken by Easterners to “other” them as well as to create a comical effect as she does in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Pidgin English spoken by the Easterner has double Orientalist effect; firstly, it underlines the incompetence of the Oriental; secondly, it amuses the Western reader. The same approach, which Tan employs on “Kwan” in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, is also revealed in *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

In the novel, the Eastern character Tan chooses to show “alien” through linguistic exoticism is Miss Rong, the local guide for English-speaking tourists: “The more she talked, the worse her English seemed to be. Everyone had hard time understanding her.”²⁶⁴ Ironically, the pronunciation of her name is the same as the English word “wrong” and this is a kind of foreshadowing in the novel, because everything goes “wrong” due to her spoiled English. Her present job—guidance for the English-speaking tourists—and her former job—teaching English—in which she is supposed to have a better proficiency level of English than the ordinary local people intensifies the dose of the comedy and confirms her alienness. It is really natural for the Western reader to think automatically that if the English level of an English teacher and/or a guide is so bad, the Easterners are really incapable of learning languages. The pidgin English of Miss Rong that causes a lot of trouble leads to a generalization of the Easterner’s aptitude for languages. She makes awkward explanations about the local culture, traditions, life style etc. for the tourists and these explanations are naturally misunderstood due to her inability to express herself in English:

²⁶³ Ma, Sheng-Mei. (2000). *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 120.

²⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 67.

Miss Rong struggled to say it [local women's collecting the fallen needles] was for the animals. Everyone assumed she meant that the animals ate the needles, which is not so. In the winter, the animals nest in the needles to stay warm, and in the spring, the Naxi women use the manure-soiled needles as the fertilizer when they plant the new crops.²⁶⁵

Miss Rong's spoiled English is difficult for her to express herself clearly and for the Americans to understand.

Miss Rong's version of English did not help the matters. She was trying to recall which English words meant "east," "west," "north," and "south," and eventually she translated her directions thus: "Descend the shady side, see the temple grotto, ascend sunny side up, return the bus." Of course, such terms are relative to the time of the day.²⁶⁶

It is also the same when the local dialects are in question as well as the Western languages. Because she also does not understand the other local dialects, which she should do as a guide, the result of the instructions given by Miss Rong becomes a disaster. For instance, one of the tourists, Harry Bailey, thinks a sacred shrine of the female genitalia as a urinal on Stone Bell Mountain in China. While visiting there, the tourists break into every sacred place. They create a real mess, which "was her [Miss Rong's] fault. She should have kept them together as a group, explained to them what they were allowed to see. That was her responsibility, her job."²⁶⁷ Although the American tourists behave recklessly, it is actually Miss Rong's incompetence²⁶⁸ that causes the problems; with such spoiled English, she should not work as a guide for English-speaking tourists.

When Miss Rong's pidgin English is combined with her weird appearance, there emerges a caricatured image of an Easterner, which amuses the Western reader:

She wore oversized glasses with lenses so shiny that it was hard to see her eyes. Her hair had undergone a tragic experiment; her sister-in-law, who hoped to work in a beauty salon one day, had subjected her to a permanent, and no matter how much she tried to tame the tightened curls, her hair was a battle of tufts that all jutted out in opposing directions. She wore a drab blue

²⁶⁵ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 79.

²⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 81.

²⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 92.

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, p. 92.

top with wide lapels and white buttons, complemented by matching unattractive slacks.²⁶⁹

Amy Tan presents the Chinese guide, her English, her appearance, even her name in derogatory terms. Decorated with “linguistic exoticism”, Miss Rong is looked down on due to her inability to speak proper English and her dull appearance. These elements add a comical effect to the novel and amuse the Western reader. To present such a caricatured Chinese character is an aspect of Tan’s Orientalist approach. Once again, Tan demonstrates the Easterner as “the Other” through a ridiculous portrayal.

4.5. “The Gullibility” of the Easterner

The most conspicuous Orientalist assumption that is fostered in *Saving Fish from Drowning* is “the gullibility” of the Easterner. Actually the novel is based on this theme and the central event in the novel is nourished by this theme: the reason for the Karen tribe to abduct the American tourists is the belief that Younger White Brother is among them because the tribe was deceived by a white man who exploited their religious belief a century ago. Religion is an important aspect in the lives of the Karen. Actually their religion is an example of syncretism under the effect of colonialism. The tribe has blended the elements of their original beliefs and Christianity, which was introduced by the white missionaries:

This was a renegade ethnic tribe who had no orthodox religion but had accommodated a pantheon over the past century. And so they believed in Nats and witches and green ghosts as both mischief makers and deliverers of disasters. They worshipped the lord of the Land and Water ... They had given thanks to the Crop of Grandmother in the days when they had fields ... And they believed in the Younger White Brother, who had been part of their mythology for hundreds of years.²⁷⁰

According to tribe’s belief, there were three books of Important Writings which contained their stories and provided the tribe with strength and protection from mischief and ill forces. Two divine but unmindful brothers were in charge of

²⁶⁹ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 66.

²⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 271.

protecting the books. However, the books got lost because the brothers put them in a place where wild animals ate them or cooking fire burned them. Since then, the Karen has been waiting for the Younger White Brother who “would bring back another copy of the Important Writings and restore their tribe’s power”, as prophesied.²⁷¹ As a result, it was not difficult for the Western missionaries to introduce Christianity to the Karen, “who readily accepted Jesus and were keen to learn the Bible.”²⁷² The tribe always waited for the pastors, who died from the diseases, to return as a “Reincarnated One.”²⁷³ Finally, the most influential of the Younger White Brother whose reincarnation Rupert is thought to be arrived in 1892. This British man whose name was E. S. Andrews was a real conman. He found numerous people he called “gullible” in this Eastern country. After he deceived many people and earned a lot of money, he murdered a man and escaped into the Burmese jungle.

He was familiar with the Younger White Brother myth. By benefiting from the myth, he also deceived the Karen people living in the jungle. He made the tribe believe that he could protect them against their enemies. The tribe thought he could make them invisible. Andrews made the tribe believe in all these due to a few simple card tricks and with the Bible in his hands; “How convenient he was supposed to be white” so his whiteness is also an important element to persuade the tribe.²⁷⁴ He called the tribe “The Lord's Army”; he became “the Lord of the Nats²⁷⁵.” He seduced the girls of tribe and had “two dozen perpetually virgin wives [and] numerous

²⁷¹ The myth of “Younger White Brother” in *Saving Fish from Drowning* is not completely fictitious. The Younger White Brother who has been waited for ages is a true aspect of the Karen mythology; and he is supposed to return with “Golden Book” or “Book or Gold.” However, Tan has changed the real name of the legendary book into “Important Writings.” For further information see Duane and Marcia Binkley. (April 5, 2007). What's the Baptist connection with the Karen?<http://www.karenconnection.org/What%20is%20the%20Baptist%20connection.php3>. (May 24, 2008).and David Everett. (2008). The Karen of Burma.<http://www.dangerousdaveeverett.com/karenofburma.html>. (May 25, 2008).

²⁷² Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 272.

²⁷³ *ibid*, p. 272.

²⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 275.

²⁷⁵ Nats are spiritual beings of Burma like the fairies in the Western world. However, Burmese people think that the Nats are a part of their daily life. Worship of Nats is older than Buddhism in Burma. People have shrines in their houses, offices etc. and they put offerings for Nats to these shrines to ask them for their blessing and prevent them to make mischief. This practice is more common in the rural areas than the urban areas. The Nats are also believed to have power to change form. For further information see Michael McDonell. (January 01, 1999). “Nats of Burma.” <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1251>. (July 6, 2008).

‘children of the Lord of Nats’.”²⁷⁶ However, one day he suddenly and mysteriously vanished:

At first, no one worried too much. The Lord of Nats had the power of invisibility. He had often disappeared when soldiers of the British Raj came to arrest him for swindling and murder ... But this time, too many hours passed, the hours turning into days, then weeks, then months. No trace of him was ever found, not a scrap of clothing, shoe, bone, or tooth. The Important writings were also gone.²⁷⁷

In later years, the Karen people added mystical details to his disappearance. Some of them claimed that “they had seen him flying with white-bird-angels to the Land Beyond the Last Valley—to the Kingdom of Death, where he would conquer its ruler.”²⁷⁸ However, according to book of Important Writings, he would return. When he returned, the tribe would recognize him “by the three Holy Signs”²⁷⁹, which Rupert is thought to have.

The life of E.S. Andrews in *Saving Fish from Drowning* is a really successful story of fraud with an ambiguous ending. The Westerner abuses the tribe, their faith, their mythology and people. However, in the novel, the Westerner is not depicted as the “evil” man who damages the Easterner. Instead, “the gullibility” of the Easterner is emphasized in this story. Despite his being a fraud, the Westerner is still reflected with his “good” side: It is stated that Edwards also built schools and clinics, and permitted the girls to attend school, which were favors he did for the tribe.²⁸⁰ This information is contradictory to the fact that he was an evil fraud who “could convince a tribe of thousands that he was the Lord Almighty of Nats”; However, to deceive the Easterner was easy for him since “[t]he supply of the *gullible* people in the world was delightfully endless” (my emphasis).²⁸¹

Here, two implications can be concluded: Firstly, the difference between the

²⁷⁶ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p.276.

²⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 277.

²⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 277.

²⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 277.

²⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 276.

²⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 274.

West and the East in terms of development and modernity is displayed. Although Edwards was a disreputable man who deceived the tribe by abusing their faith, he was the one who introduced them to clinics and schools which were vital for the modern and qualified life. These institutions were missing or inadequate in Burma, which is “normal” in an Eastern country. These signs of development were prior to the Western world and a Westerner built them for the Easterner in *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

Attending school for girls was also a sign of modernity and initiated by the Westerner. He “allowed his daughters and eventually all girls to attend school so that they could read and write and do sums.”²⁸² Education is an important aspect of progress, especially education of girls is still a problem in many Eastern countries. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, Amy Tan emphasizes the Western superiority to the East because any Westerner, even a swindler can be beneficial for the Easterner with his distinguished civilized vision.

On the other hand, in this story of the deception, the people Edwards deceived are reflected as if they deserved to be fooled because of their gullibility. Because there are people ready to be deceived, it is normal that there are people who will deceive them. In an “interesting” way, the deceived is the Easterner, the deceiver is the Westerner. So, the gullibility of the Easterner is underlined. The tribe is reflected as too naïve and as Thornton Sully asserts “‘Naïve’ can be either complimentary or derogatory, depending on the intent of the user.”²⁸³ Here, the Karen’s naivety is reflected in a derogatory way because they still did not realize the facts when their “white savior” vanished, and they still thought he flew with the angels.

To present such a fraud story in which the Eastern natives are reflected as credulous is an aspect of Orientalist approach. In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, once again, the Easterner is presented in derogatory terms. It is affirmed that the Oriental can easily be deceived because they are naïve. Because the white man is “superior”

²⁸² Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 276.

²⁸³ Sully, Thornton. (October 16, 2005). *The Magical Mystery Tour*. The San Diego Union Tribune. http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20051016/news_lz1v16fish.html. (May 24, 2008).

to the Easterner and he is more “clever” than the Easterner, it is impossible for the Easterner not to believe in what white man tells them. To assert these assumptions once again in this novel, Tan benefits from the mythology of the native people in Burma. The myth of “Younger White Brother” is not fictitious. However, the Karen have never been deceived by a British man who introduced himself as “the Younger White Brother” and such a deception has never occurred among the Karen people in real life.

In Burma, the Karen tribe was first introduced to Christianity in early 19th century. The arrival of the first missionaries reminded the Karen of “the book of wisdom which in their creation myth the children of Yoa, the Creator God, had received but later lost through carelessness. One day, the myth said, a white brother would bring the book back to his Karen brethren. A number of Karen saw the missionaries with their Bible as the white brother of their myth.”²⁸⁴ In 1828, Adoniram Judson, “an American missionary affiliated with the Baptists,” baptized the first Karen.²⁸⁵ For the most of the people of Karen, Judson was the Younger White Brother and the bible was the Golden Book, the book of wisdom.²⁸⁶

However, Tan presents a fictitious event based on these mythological facts in *Saving Fish from Drowning*. She makes up a story of deception based on the folk history. Thus, she distorts their mythological expectations by presenting a picture in which the tribe is reflected as the puppet in the hands of a white “master.” Not only does Amy Tan add fictional depreciatory details to the history of the Karen but also she provides her novel with a similar image of the Karen people at the present time, in 2000. The Karen were “gullible” and they were easily fooled into the lies E. S. Edwards told them a hundred years ago. However, the Karen are still “naive” while they are awaiting a “white Messiah” a century later. The “gullibility” of the Karen

²⁸⁴ Platz, Roland. (2003). “Buddhism and Christianity in Competition? Religious And Ethnic Identity in Karen Communities of Northern Thailand,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)*, 34, no.3 (Oct.), 473-490.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.* p. 481.

²⁸⁶ Binkley, Duane and Marcia. (April 5, 2007). What's the Baptist connection with the Karen? <http://www.karenconnection.org/What%20is%20the%20Baptist%20connection.php3>. (May 24, 2008).

tribe is still foregrounded when they abduct eleven American tourists, a century later than Edwards' arrival as a "savior."

On the eve of the millennium, the tribe still awaits their Messiah, the Younger White Brother, who will return as the Reincarnated One to save the Karen; to protect the tribe from the cruelties to which they are exposed by SLORC soldiers under the command of the military junta. Rupert, a fifteen-year-old American tourist, is believed to have the signs indicating that he is the Younger White Brother.

Rupert is first seen by a Karen boatman, Black Spot, and his two friends. The signs they believe Rupert has are quite funny for the Western reader. Rupert is carrying a black-covered paperback, *Misery* by Stephen King, to read when he gets bored. He also has a deck of cards given on the plane and he performs simple tricks with these cards. Black Spot discovers the boy as "the Reincarnated One" when Rupert is performing a trick with the cards for two tourists in the group and the locals forms a circle of people and watch him closely:

Three boatmen had been in the crowd, watching. They saw the young man manifest the card. He could make things invisible and make them come back. And he had the Black Book. They knew that book, the Important Writings that the Older Brother had lost, and thereby caused their downfall. They had been waiting for a hundred years to get it back. And finally he had come, the young man with the cards. He was the Reincarnated One, the Younger White Brother, Lord of Nats.²⁸⁷

The signs are indisputable for three boatmen: While Rupert is amusing himself and the village people at the marketplace, he "reveals himself as the savior, selecting the same cards to vanish and reappear as did his predecessor 100 years before him, and invoking the same language. The king has returned."²⁸⁸

These signs seen on a fifteen-year-old American boy ignorant to everything add comical effects to the novel and make the reader laugh. However, for the tribe

²⁸⁷ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 199.

²⁸⁸ Sully, Thornton. (October 16, 2005). *The Magical Mystery Tour*. The San Diego Union Tribune. http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20051016/news_lz1v16fish.html. (May 24, 2008).

these signs are vital, which makes the plot more tragic and shows the tribesmen more naïve:

Tomorrow, Black Spot and his tribal brothers would return home, perhaps for good, because today the course of life had changed. The Younger White Brother was here, and as he promised during his last visit on earth, he would save them. He could manifest weapons. He could make the tribe invisible. They would then leave No Name Place, walk openly without being shot, until they reached a patch of land, the promised land, just big enough to grow the food they needed. There they would live in peace and no outsiders would cause them trouble, and they would cause no troubles to them. Their only desire was to live peaceably among themselves, in harmony with the land, the water, and the Nats, who would be pleased by how much the tribe respected them. It could all happen, thanks to the return of the Younger White Brother.²⁸⁹

The predicament of the Karen tribe due to the military soldiers is striking and all they want is a peaceful life in harmony with nature and Nats. What they wish to come true after the arrival of the “Younger White Brother” demonstrates the “naivety” of the Karen people. However, there emerges a tragic situation due to the absurdity of the signs, which are thought to prove the real identity of their “savior,” and the despair the tribe live in. The signs are amusing; they are farfetched. However, “[t]hese people, now so desperate for any kind of hope, saw what they wished to see, the signs, the promise.”²⁹⁰ The absurdity of the signs intensifies the predicament of the tribe and depicts them more vulnerable and miserable. Because there is a sharp contrast between the ordinary American teenager and the missions he is believed to fulfill, the Western reader feel pity for the tribe’s helplessness and get surprised that the tribesmen can believe in these signs so ignorantly.

However, all these are fictitious, the production of Amy Tan’s imagination. Such a deception has never occurred in Burma, among the Karen. The tribe has never misinterpreted some signs and believed that an American teenager is their Messiah. This fictitious event is used to underline the “gullibility” of the Easterner and to show their misery. These also add comical elements to the novel and amuse the Western reader.

²⁸⁹ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 202.

²⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 266.

On the other hand, the tribe is ironically “clever” enough to abduct eleven American tourists unaware of their own abduction. The tourists are told that they will encounter a special Christmas surprise, a further touristic attraction. However, this is not the tribesmen’s own idea because before leaving the hotel, the guide of the tourist promises to take them to a surprise he prepared months ago. After the tribesmen knock the guide out to make him ineffective, they continue to talk about this surprise which is quite different from the actual surprise. The tribesmen are lucky enough to deceive the Americans because they benefit from their expectation for a surprise. If there were not this expectation, it would be impossible to deceive the Americans. The tourists do not question their “abduction” because the idea of seeing something “exotic” makes them excited.

The tribesmen know that to kidnap only the boy is completely out of question, so they have to take all the tourists except for one left at the hotel to their special Christmas surprise, to the jungle where the tribe lives secretly:

This was exactly what they [the Americans] had been hoping for, instead of endless shops and factories. With each arduous mile their expectation grew. As they shared bottles of water and candy bars, they mused over the possibilities. An ancient city buried in the jungle, the Machu Picchu of Myanmar! Or perhaps a village filled with those “giraffe-necked” women who were so famous in these parts. Or it could be a Shangri-La of such magnificence and splendor that nothing like it had ever been seen, even in the movies.²⁹¹

As a Western tourist group on holiday in the East, the Americans are expecting for a real exotic attraction. This exoticist point of view prevents them to question the situation in which they are; to lead by some local men whose names they do not even know. However, the special Christmas surprise turns out to be their own kidnapping. They are not harmed or treated badly among the Karen. Because they are white men, the Westerners who are thought to have the power to save the tribe.

²⁹¹ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 237.

On the other hand, the tribe wants to be TV stars like the competitors in a TV show in Australia. They want to be like Westerners. For the tribesmen, salvation would come from the white man and if they were like the white men. They internalize the values of the Westerner and they try to perceive the world as white man does. They ironically and hopelessly fantasize “that they might one day have a TV show ... If they had a show, everyone would admire them. And then SLORC would be too ashamed to kill a tribe that was number one.”²⁹² This idea shows the reader again how “naïve” the tribe is to think such a way of salvation. They are not only naïve but also funny; the tribe’s helplessness and gullibility is underlined by this idea of being TV stars.

In the meantime, it does not take much time for the tribe to understand the reality. Black Spot “was feeling very bad for his people. He was ashamed to realize that the boy was not the Reincarnated One. The boy was not the Younger White Brother or the Lord of the Nats. And the ten other people were not his disciples or his retinue of soldiers. They were tourist who had attracted nothing but bad luck.”²⁹³ The white man brings them disaster because they cannot help the tribe in the mystical sense they wish; in real life they just cause the tribe to be recognized by the entire world let alone the SLORC, which is a nightmare for the tribe.

Here, it should not be assumed that Tan emphasizes how the Westerner harms the Easterner. Such an assumption would be just an illusion. There is not a criticism of the Westerner. Moreover, they are reflected as the innocent tourist group trying to learn other cultures. However, they do not really care about the disaster the tribe is led to; the American tourists among the Karen are just “looking forward to hot showers.”²⁹⁴ What Esmé, twelve-year old daughter of one of the tourists, thinks of the people in the group summarizes the general attitude of the Western tourists: “They weren’t really concerned about people, just their stupid trip, whether they

²⁹² Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 295.

²⁹³ *ibid*, p. 414.

²⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 291.

would get their money's worth in this *dumb* country or that *dumb* country (my emphasis).”²⁹⁵

Yet, the Westerners indirectly provide the tribe with the salvation they need. Because the Americans are “valuable”, the entire world seeks for them when they are disappeared. They are shown on TV and so are the tribesmen, who are actually nowhere near as *valuable* as these “Westerners” and the Karen are discovered. Thus, the world learns their existence and predicament and the Westerners give a hand to this Eastern tribe. Although they are the ones who have abducted the Americans, the tribe later forgets this and thanks the tourists as if they came to the jungle willingly to help them: “We thank you for coming. We thank you for bringing us the miracles, for bringing peace to our people, the end of our suffering.”²⁹⁶

The Karen expresses their gratitude to the white men because the white men miraculously do what any Easterner cannot ever do for them. The myth has indirectly fulfilled. The tribe still thinks that one day Rupert “would know who he was. He would remember that before he came, no one knew of the Lord’s Army and their suffering. No one cared. They used to hide, now everyone knew of them. They had been given land. They had a TV show with number-one ratings.”²⁹⁷ All these are as if the proofs for the Karen to know that the Younger White Brother was with them. Finally, they reach what they long for: a peaceful life. The white give them this chance, not their own people, not the Burmese military junta, not the people of other Eastern countries but the Westerners. This omnipotence of the Western world is highlighted in *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

However, the tribe is not clever enough to maintain this peaceful life. They cannot use the chance they have been given by the white properly and in the end they completely vanish and once again this is explained as their own fault, their “stupidity”: “While being transported, a terse military report later stated, the hill-tribe

²⁹⁵ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 98.

²⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 430.

²⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 431.

insurgents, once known as the Lord's Army, escaped and then drowned when they *foolishly* jumped into a swollen river (my emphasis).”²⁹⁸

As a result, the Karen is reflected so “gullible” in *Saving Fish from Drowning*. They could easily be deceived by a Westerner and they are “gullible” enough to believe that a white teenager is their “savior.” The Western reader cannot help laughing at their “stupidity” and feeling pity for the helplessness of the tribe which lives under terrible conditions in the East. There emerges the picture of excessively naïve Easterners in the novel and their naivety is reflected in derogatory terms to make a distinction between the Easterner and the Westerner. Once again, “the Other” and “the alien” is the Easterner with their weird characteristics and cultural aspects whereas the Westerner is the best.

In conclusion, the chapter has tried to show the Orientalist practices Amy Tan comes up with in her novel *Saving Fish from Drowning*. Different from the former novel analyzed in the former chapter, *Saving Fish from Drowning* is far from individuality. In the novel, the Westerner encounter the Easterner in an Eastern country which used to be a colony under the British rule. This encounter results in the confirmation of a lot of Western prejudices and notions on the Easterner. On the collective base, the Westerner is satisfied with a picture depicting the Western “superiority” to the East. *Saving Fish from Drowning* endows the Western reader with a so-called access to an unknown culture and geography which are substantially different from theirs. While doing this, Tan also pleases them with the idea of Western superiority. In the novel, in which the exoticism and tourism are blended, the East is despised while the West is exalted from an Orientalist perspective. While “the remote” appeals the Western reader, they are presented numerous contrasts between the West and the East, in all of which the positive side is always reserved for the West: the backwardness of the East marks the progress in the West; the anti-democracy in Burma points out the democracy in the Western countries; the savagery in the Burmese wilderness is direct contradiction to the Western civilization and modernity. The Easterner is depicted as barbaric and gullible. “Linguistic

²⁹⁸ Tan, Amy. (2005). *Saving Fish from Drowning*. London: Penguin Group, p. 440.

exoticism” is used to show the Oriental as “the alien” and “incompetent.” All the negative Western thoughts on the food and cleanliness of the Easterner are confirmed due to generalizations. And finally Tan does not forget to amuse her “Western” reader through her comical portrayal of the Oriental in *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between the West and the East has evolved and shifted according to the changing social, historical, political and cultural conditions throughout history. These two geographical entities have existed separately having distinctive peoples and cultures unlike each other. However, when the power issue is in question, the West has used these differences to create a contrast between its own world and the Eastern world. By perceiving and reflecting the East as “inferior,” the West has always tried to show the “superiority” of its own world. In other words, the Western world “others” the East, depicts their culture “alien” and “primitive,” shows their countries “distant” and “backward.” This “othering” process which forms a base for “colonialist ideology” has various political and economic motives; however, the basic psychological reason appears to be “the need to feel powerful, in control, superior.”²⁹⁹ This othering of the East by the West is called “Orientalism,” which was first analyzed by Edward Said and has formed the base of this study.

On the other hand, Amy Tan, who is Chinese-American, has been one of the prominent writers in America and due to her ethnic background she uses Asian characters and depicts the Far East in her novels. Since the great success of her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan has been praised for introducing Western readers to an unfamiliar culture and people and using ethnic characters who are Chinese and Chinese American people. However, as shown in this study, her representations of the East are presented in an Orientalist way, especially in her two novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*.

It has become obvious as a result of this study that Amy Tan employs an Oriental outlook in her two selected novels. She promotes white hegemony by showing Eastern people as “the Other” and Eastern culture as “the alien.” Her introduction of Eastern culture and people is under the effect of Western ideologies and never free from Western prejudices. In both of her novels, Tan perpetuates a colonialist ideology that privileges Western standards and norms and denigrates non-

²⁹⁹ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. ,p. 403.

Westerners as the cultural Other.³⁰⁰ This ideology is manifested and supported with binary oppositions that foreground Western traits and values as normative.

The power of literature is huge to reach people and to shape their ideas. As Gayatri Spivak points out, “The role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored.”³⁰¹ With her literary works, Amy Tan also uses this power of literature but she chooses to reach mainly Western readers. To satisfy the expectations of mainstream Anglo-European readers, she does not challenge their worldviews. Tan describes the Eastern world for the West in derogatory terms and she confirms the idea of white “superiority” in her novels. Therefore, the East and the Eastern people are represented in the way the Western reader wants to see them.

An Asian-American writer’s adopting this white gaze, consciously or unconsciously, is very problematic. Despite her Asian roots, Amy Tan undervalues anything that is Asian. By doing this, she manages to market her books to a wide-range audience. As Elizabeth Kim asserts, the story of the East and the Eastern by an Asian or Asian-American narrator holds “a certain appeal for Western readers, though more because of their solipsistic desire for novel views of themselves and for reinforcement of their ideas about Asians than because of interest in social criticism.”³⁰² Therefore, Tan’s Orientalist approach to the East endows her with popularity and success in the market; in other words, she markets “the Other” in her novels for the consumption of white readers.

However, while criticizing Amy Tan for the internalization of Western Orientalist assumptions as an ethnic writer, it is essential to remember that she never acknowledges the labels before her name like “ethnic” or “Asian-American” and she claims that she just writes American fiction. However, due to the ethnic content of her works Amy Tan is considered as an Asian-American writer. And because the

³⁰⁰ Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York&London: Garland Publishing, Inc. , p. 366.

³⁰¹ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (1995). “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffim, eds. (269-272). London and New York: Routledge. p. 269.

³⁰² Kim, Elaine H. (1982). *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* . Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 29.

material of her fiction comes from China, Chineseness and Chinese-Americanness, her novels can be categorized as Asian-American literature. Therefore, this study has also questioned her position in American literature and clarified whether Tan really writes American or Asian-American fiction.

Back to the relationship between Amy Tan and Orientalism, Tan's ethnic identity also explains her Orientalist practices. Amy Tan "others" Asia and the Asian to define herself; the attribution of the negative traits to the Easterner provides her with a positive and superior identity constructed on Western values. This is the same approach of the colonizing societies towards the colonized ones in the past. They confirm their own "superiority" by contrasting it with the so-called "inferiority" of the colonized people and countries.

Furthermore, Tan's ethnic background, which she does not want to accept, is exploited by the publishers, as well. Tan's Chinese background provides the publishers with "an exotic touch," which is an appeal for the readers. The ethnicity is commodified in order to create a glamorous image of the writer in publishing market and Tan's Chineseness contributes to her literary fame because the ethnic stories by ethnic writers are always attractive for Western readers. As Esra Çoker Körpez points out, "one cannot but wonder whether she would have become a hit success if her books were about the matrilineal discourse of white American girls and their mothers."³⁰³

The investigation of Tan's representation of the East in her two novels demonstrates that she glorifies Western culture and people while she looks down on Eastern culture and people. The analysis of *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning* reveals the Orientalist items that are used to reflect the East in derogatory terms. *Saving Fish from Drowning* was published in 2005, which was ten years later than the publication of *The Hundred Secret Senses*. However, this study pinpoints that there are recurring and common Orientalist patterns in both novels.

³⁰³ Körpez, Esra Çoker. (2007). "Revisiting the Amy Tan Phenomenon: Storytelling and Ideology in Amy Tan's Children's Story *The Moon Lady*" *Interactions*. Fall Issue, Vol. 16.2. 87-95.

While *The Hundred Secret Senses* displays the denigratory assumptions about the Orient from the personal perspective of a mix-breed individual, *Saving Fish from Drowning* fosters an Orientalist ideology from a collective base. In other words, the Orientalist approach is from an individual perspective in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. As the study indicates, Olivia, who is Chinese-American, despises her Chinese sister, Kwan throughout the novel; Kwan is reflected as “the Other” in the name of forming a Western identity for Olivia.

Unlike the familial and personal relationship between a Chinese-American sister and her Chinese sister in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, in *Saving Fish from Drowning* a Western group encounters an Eastern community in an Eastern country, Burma. Therefore, this encounter becomes a good example for depicting West and East relations on a larger scale and creating a fuller picture in which peoples and cultures are contrasted on the whole. As a result, in *Saving Fish from Drowning*, “western colonial ideology” is advocated from a collective perspective.

Despite such a difference, the derogatory representation of the East still continues to be the major element of both novels. The Eastern characters and cultural elements presented in both novels do not go beyond Western clichéd images. The depiction of the stereotypes in each novel is a significant aspect of Orientalist strategy; and they confirm and reinforce the “inferior” Eastern image in minds.

One of the common elements detected in both novels is the representation of Eastern life styles, physical conditions and cultural values as backward, even primitive. Especially the existence of a native Karen tribe living secretly in the jungle in the beginning of the 21st century in *Saving Fish from Drowning* contributes to the confirmation of the idea of Eastern primitiveness. In the same way, the trip to Chinese village, Changmian, in *The Hundred Secret Senses* reveals many primitive conditions.

“Eastern savageness” is confirmed in both novels. The people of the tribe are literally “savages” in *Saving Fish from Drowning* whereas Kwan in *The Hundred*

Secret Senses is presented with animal traits. The emphasis on their being “the exotic other” and their “savageness” indicates the inhumanness of the Orientals.

Furthermore, the barbarity associated with the Easterner is highlighted in Tan’s novels by means of Eastern food. What they sell and prepare to eat is perceived “barbaric” such as owls, mice, the meals with cockroach legs. Briefly, the idea that Eastern meals are “queasy” and “unsanitary” and their cooking methods are barbaric is consistent in both novels. In the same way, the bathing habits are presented in primitive and unsanitary conditions and this reinforces the idea that hygiene is a condition that does not exist in the East. Such images mark the inferiority of Eastern cultures.

Moreover, the pidgin English spoken by the Easterner is a conspicuous motif in both novels. The “linguistic exoticism” explained by Sheng-mei Ma, is used to mark the “alienness” of “the Other” and it adds a comical effect to the novels that amuses the Western readers. Both Kwan in *The Hundred Secret Senses* and Miss Rong, the local Chinese guide in *Saving Fish from Drowning* are victimized by “linguistic exoticism” and serve as parodies. Kwan has been in the USA for more than thirty years and Miss Rong is a former English teacher and now a professional guide for English-speaking tourists. Therefore, it is quite surprising that their English is poor. The pidgin English of these characters suggests the incapability of the Easterner to learn the language while making the Western reader laugh at the comical statements. Especially, in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the mastery of English is an important point that underlines the difference between Olivia and Kwan.

In addition, the most derogatory aspect of the Orientalist strategy, which this study points out as a recurrent theme in both novels, is the suggestion of “gullibility” of the Easterner. The Oriental people are represented in a “gullible” way. They are depicted excessively “naïve,” which is not distinguishable from “stupidity.” In *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the people of the Karen tribe are so naïve that due to their supernatural beliefs they can easily be exploited by white men. The novel shows that they have not changed in terms of their “naivety” a century later and they

can believe that an ordinary young American boy may be their promised messiah. On the other hand, in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Kwan is reflected as gullible, illogical and insane person and such aspects of her character are associated with her ethnicity. Thus, there emerges a generalization in which “gullibility” is attributed to all Chinese people. Moreover, in both novels, the “illogical” aspect of the Eastern culture is supported with superstitions that are really meaningless and nonsense for the Western reader.

In conclusion, all these themes serve to reinforce the Orientalist ideology inherent in Amy Tan’s two novels. Although these novels differ in their subject matter, there is a common thread running through both novels. By constructing sharp contrasts between the West and the East, a superior Western image that encapsulates all the positive traits and an inferior Eastern image that endorses all negative ones is created. The alleged “inferiority” of the East provides the West with control, power and superiority. Amy Tan’s novels serve to enhance this Western ideology for they reflect the Orient as “the Other.” In this way, they foster white hegemony. In so doing, they help to create an image of Amy Tan as a popular mainstream writer. However, it is evident that this approach in Tan’s novels damages the East and the Easterner because they are represented in “reductive categories”³⁰⁴ with Orientalist codifications. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*, the ideology of the Westerner, who has tried to prove his ultimate “superiority” for centuries, is so dominant that the reader cannot realize “we are all one” and must “coexist along a continuum of life.”³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 239.

³⁰⁵ Murdock, Maureen. (1990). *The Heroine’s Journey*. Boston & London: Shambhala, p. 170.

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