

Reincarnation: The Orientalist Stereotypes

AMELBERGA VITA ASTUTI

Monash University

In her third novel, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), American writer Amy Tan reiterates the template of her previous two novels, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), in terms of exploring characters that represent the American melting pot. The China plot in this novel echoes Tan's other novels, which appear to 'redeploy ready-made stereotypes' (Wagner 435). Set in the nineteenth century, *The Hundred Secret Senses* is a story about a doomed romance. The novel's framing narrative of reincarnation is told by Kwan, a Chinese girl who moves to America at the age of 12. Kwan, who has 'yin' eyes, meaning she can see and communicate with ghosts, tells the first person narrator Olivia, her half-sister, that in the previous life she (Kwan) was Nunumu, the one-eyed girl who befriended Miss Nelly Banner in 1864. The doomed romance between Miss Banner, an American, and Yiban, a Chinese-American, can only be redeemed by the fulfilment of the love of Olivia (the reincarnated Nelly Banner) and Olivia's ex-husband Simon (the reincarnated Yiban) through Kwan's act of self-sacrifice when Simon is lost in a cave near Kwan's hometown in China.

Tan's use of the reincarnation narrative, represented in the Chinese background of the characters, shows her exploitation of the exotic East, reaffirming stereotypes of Orientalism. Here I use Said's definition of Orientalism, which deals with 'ideas about the Orient despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient' (Said 5). The question that remains to be answered is whether Tan's use of the concept of reincarnation to reinforce Orientalist stereotypes is also to be found in selected Asian-Australian novels that use the concept of reincarnation in their representations of Australia's multi-ethnic society. It would also be interesting to examine how Asian-Australian writers use the concept of reincarnation to explore the individuals' dislocated experiences in relation to their search for identity. In this paper, I explore the symbolic narratives of reincarnation in two novels by Asian-Australian women writers: Indonesian author Dewi Anggraeni's second novel *Parallel Forces* (1988) and Chinese-Singaporean writer Lillian Ng's second novel *Swallowing Clouds* (1997). Each novel deals with a female protagonist who is the reincarnation of a woman who lived centuries ago. Unlike Tan's Olivia, who knows her past as a result of her half-sister's psychic abilities, these characters are each told that they are reincarnated souls by soothsayers on the outskirts of Asian cities. Both writers also use a prologue to introduce these characters' past lives, which then become the overarching premise framing their stories.

By deploying more than one setting for the novel—both move across Asia and Australia—these Asian-Australian women writers establish connections with Orientalism and Occidentalism. In this paper, apart from showing evidence of the writers' portrayals of Occidentalism through their Asian characters, I explore the different ways in which they attempt to represent Orientalist stereotypes, via the theme of reincarnation.

***Parallel Forces* by Dewi Anggraeni: East and West Encounters**

Dewi Anggraeni is the most widely published of eleven female authors of Indonesian heritage in Australia.¹ However, her novels have received relatively little attention from literary critics. Each of Anggraeni's novels is concerned with issues related to the migratory

experience, from countries in Southeast Asia—particularly Indonesia—to Australia (Madsen 110). Her fiction and non-fiction works continually portray ‘the complexities of negotiating cross-cultural differences’ (Madsen 100) and she states in an interview that her work is influenced by her own life (Anggraeni, *Interview*). As an Indonesian-Australian journalist and fiction writer, Anggraeni sustains ‘an intercultural lifestyle that informs her work in a myriad of ways’ (Madsen 100).

In *Parallel Forces*, Anggraeni explores the connections between Eastern and Western cultures which complicate the life of her female character, Amyrra. The novel tells the story of Amyrra and her mother Claudine Dubois, who are gifted with a sixth sense. Narrated by Amyrra’s twin sister, Amyrta, it positions Amyrra as a woman who experiences both Eastern and Western cultures, moving first from Singapore to Indonesia and then to Australia. Apart from presenting the contrasts between these cultures, the narrative also reflects characteristics typical of much diasporic fiction. The title *Parallel Forces* illustrates many of the ideas associated with this theme, including the main character’s double identity, a concern with past and present, her adopted Eastern and Western cultures, as well as her conflicting beliefs between myth and reality. As the story is predominantly about the influential power of the past over Amyrra, who was born into a multi-ethnic family, Anggraeni complicates issues such as identity, place and culture. Through Amyrra’s parents, Anggraeni also explores how an interracial marriage inevitably involves cultural conflict. Thus, even though Amyrra’s incarnation of an Asian princess dominates the narrative, Anggraeni contextualises it within the familiar tradition of Asian diasporic fiction.

One particular focus of Anggraeni’s novel is family conflicts. Apart from presenting the parents’ interracial marriage, Anggraeni explores the conflicts in the relationship between the twin sister protagonists. From this relationship, the novel indicates an important process of so-called ‘sister rejection’, which occurs as a result of several distinct differences between them, particularly in terms of personality and ability (Tucker, *Asian-Australian* 199). Amyrra’s ‘sixth sense’ and her extrovert personality, enable to draw ‘attention and affection from everybody effortlessly’ (Anggraeni, *Parallel Forces*, 6). On the contrary, Amyrra’s twin sister, Amyrta, is described as an ordinary girl who is thus forced ‘to stay in the background’ when Amyrra is present (7). Anggraeni appears to use the sisters’ twin status as another metaphor to illustrate parallel forces as conflicting and complex, particularly in the context of a diasporic experience.

As the novel is set in Singapore, Indonesia and Australia, Anggraeni’s use of the Orientalised princess is intended ‘to establish mythological links’ between the East and the West (Tucker, *Asian-Australian* 203). The presence of a real queen of Indonesia’s old kingdom appears to show that Anggraeni tries to recuperate ‘familiar nineteenth century Orientalist images of Asian femininity to critique such [Western] representation[s] of Asian women’ (Tucker, *Asian-Australian* 177).

The Parallel of the Past

Out of the two novels discussed here, Anggraeni’s *Parallel Forces* is closest to Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* in a range of ways. At the age of nine, Amyrra is told by a middle-aged village woman who she meets in Indonesia that she is the reincarnation of Ken Dedes, an ancestress of the kings of Majapahit, one of the most powerful Hindu-Javanese empires in the history of Javanese kingdoms in Indonesia. Anggraeni employs the thirteenth-century story of ‘a very strong love affair’ between Ken Dedes and her husband’s attendant, Ken

Arok, which ‘ended sadly’ (32). The seer, Bi Piyah, reads Amyrra’s hands and explains: ‘because of the power of their love, in their subsequent incarnations they have always met again, loved again, and ended their affair tragically again . . . And inevitably, you will meet the present incarnation of Ken Arok’ (32). Anggraeni thus complicates the narrative of Ken Dedes’s reincarnation by deploying a contrast between Eastern and Western views and cultures.

Anggraeni presents Orientalism in a way that depicts the stereotypical features of Eastern-Asian cultures constructed by Westerners, as represented by the character Claudine. For example, ‘Claudine didn’t regard [Javanese superstitions]² as weird or primitive, as many Westerners did’ (5). Here, Claudine positions herself as an exceptional Westerner, showing at the same time that Javanese superstitions are a part of Eastern cultures. Given that Anggraeni’s identity is partly Indonesian her Orientalist depiction can be interpreted as ‘self-Orientalism’ in that she, as an ‘embodiment’ of the Orient, expresses a self-conscious construction of images of the East (Mitchell 95). For example, Anggraeni shows how Amyrra and Claudine’s feyness is well received in Asian communities, particularly by their Javanese family. Claudine’s mother-in-law believes that Amyrra is ‘blessed with the sixth sense’ (6), signified by the circumstances of her birth, and that she was born enveloped in ‘a film of membrane’ (5). Her twin sister Amyrra and her father are accustomed to and have accepted their sixth senses, ‘like people [accept] dimples’, because ‘[k]nowledge of something going to happen or happening somewhere else came to them involuntarily, as one remembers something’ (10). Claudine herself has been very humble with her gift as she does not ‘want people to expect too much from [her] in that respect’ (31). The seer also confirms that Claudine is the reincarnation of a French male artist, which she already knows. That the revelation of the reincarnations takes place in Indonesia and comes from an Indonesian seer constitutes a representation of the idea of Orientalism.

Anggraeni portrays a contrast between Western and Eastern cultures through an example of Occidentalism, that is, the images of the West constructed by the East (Carrier 1). Through descriptions of Claudine’s French family in Bordeaux, Anggraeni constructs a stereotypical idea of Western rational thought one that does not believe in the ability of a sixth sense. For example, when Claudine’s ability to see into the future helps her father’s ‘routine crime investigations’ as a police officer in Bordeaux, he considers it ‘tips’ from a genius (6), rather than an innate or exceptional ‘gift’ for predicting such things.

In Singapore and Australia, Anggraeni continues to represent the stereotyped views of the West toward Claudine and Amyrra’s seeing ability. She portrays the family’s American neighbour as finding Claudine ‘different and unpredictable’, which, by not fitting in with the family’s expectations of a positive notion of her ‘special qualities’, reveals a typical example of Occidentalism (11). In Australia, the description of Amyrra’s husband, Winston, also feeds significantly into this stereotype: ‘Despite his Sri Lankan background, Winston is very English in his manners and disposition. All solid logic and nonsense’ (2). In the novel, Sri Lanka is considered a place which is ‘not the other side’ of the world from Indonesia (80) and thus the two countries are portrayed as sharing similar religious and cultural beliefs. In this way, it is apparent that, as a Sri Lankan, Winston is expected to understand Buddhism and its belief in clairvoyance (Gombrich and Obeyesekere). Instead, Winston is described as having an ‘inability to accept [Amyrra’s] nature’ (167). More importantly, this lawyer husband considers Amyrra’s ability to see the future as an illness, for which he claims she needs ‘to see a doctor’ whenever she shares her accurate prophecies (81). Aware that Amyrra is ‘blessed’ with clairvoyance powers as her Javanese grandmother believes Winston is

adamant to relating her ability to illness (6). Whenever he thinks of her act as ‘psychic’, he expects her to change in order ‘to be rational’ (120). The discourse between Winston and Amyrra is another example of Occidentalism that shows how the ‘English’ Winston only believes in ‘logic’, modern science and scientific reason, rather than believing in the ‘special qualities’ of sixth sense (11).

Aside from the concept of clairvoyance, Anggraeni deploys the concept of reincarnation to contrast a Western religion, i.e. Christianity, with Eastern religions, i.e. Buddhism and Hinduism. In an Indonesian setting, a local Catholic priest Father Daniel Sudarma assures Amyrra that God ‘doesn’t recycle’ (41). Anggraeni portrays Father Daniel as having similar notions of reincarnation to that of Winston when he tells Amyrra that ‘reincarnation doesn’t exist. It is nonsense’ (41). The priest elaborates on the Catholic faith when he says, ‘When we leave our bodies, we are reunited with God. There’s no need for us to return!’ (42). Through Amyrra’s Javanese family, Anggraeni denotes evidence of the Hindu-Buddhist influence on Javanese culture as they, particularly Amyrra’s grandmother, believe in reincarnation (Widodo 84-85). Despite doubting that ‘each incarnation would have to go through the same events’, Amyrra’s grandmother demonstrates her belief that Ken Dedes is reincarnated in Amyrra (40).

Anggraeni presents a metaphor of Amyrra’s dislocated identity in the contrasting beliefs about reincarnation between Western and Eastern religions. Given that part of her identity is Javanese and Ken Dedes’s tragic story is found in books on Indonesian history in the thirteenth century, Amyrra is encouraged to believe in the prophecy. However, Amyrra strives to escape from the prophecy which foretells that, as the reincarnated Ken Dedes, she would ‘give birth to a son who would one day kill his stepfather, then be killed by his step brother, [and] that great rulers would be born into her family’ (40). As she is against the fulfilment of the prediction, she takes up Catholicism and receives baptism which makes her feel ‘virtuous and emotionally secure’ (45). She also marries Winston because he is ‘a fairly devout Catholic, serious in nature, and of Anglo-Ceylonese parents’ (80). Amyrra’s conversion to Catholicism is used by Anggraeni to explore Amyrra’s confused identity as well as her attempt at developing a stronger sense of self.

The idea of dislocation is also displayed in Anggraeni’s use of Amyrra’s multiple migration experiences. Having been born in Singapore and having moved to Indonesia and then to Australia, Amyrra has had a dislocated experience of place. On her departure from Singapore to move to Indonesia, the home of her father’s extended family, Amyrra remarks that she does not seem to belong to that place. For her, schooldays in Bandung—the third largest city in Indonesia, located in West Java—are shocking. She feels it is ‘disconcerting’, ‘awkward and crowded’ and even ‘insecure’, with the presence of boys and the students’ lack of discipline (25). However, embracing Catholicism in Bandung, Amyrra finds ‘emotional comfort’ and seems to lose her sixth sense (56). In Melbourne, when she has a vision of her friend’s death, she is aware that accepting Catholicism is ‘no use’ for her since her sixth sense remains and communicates with her ‘from across the oceans’ (81). As her fear returns, she struggles to feel at home and to belong in Melbourne. Amyrra continues to deal with fear wherever she lives. In this way Anggraeni shows how the process of adapting to a new place, Amyrra retains her feeling of displacement.

Anggraeni makes use of Indonesian cultural motifs when describing the places where Amyrra’s prophecy may be fulfilled. Amyrra is told that the meeting will follow the description of a traditional proverb: ‘Tamarind from the mountain and salt from the sea meet

in the cooking pot', which refers to the marriage of lovers from very diverse backgrounds (Atmosumarto 143). Bi Piyah adds the meeting will occur 'in a place where a fan opens and shuts' (33). The prophecy is fulfilled when Amyrra, who was born in Singapore to a French mother and an Indonesian father, meets Sean Devlin, an Irish-Australian, at his wedding to Megan in a church in Australia. The church, which appears in her recurring dreams after meeting the seer, has a 'wedge-like floor plan', like an open fan, and 'its steeple is the closed fan' (108). When she meets Sean, the reincarnated Ken Arok, their cultural backgrounds indicate that this is the fated meeting 'when East meets West' as predicted by the seer (33). Using the proverb, the church and the meeting, Anggraeni delineates the connection between Western religion and Eastern belief.

Amyrra is overwhelmed by the fact that predictions seem to manifest in her life. As Sean himself encourages her intuition with his positive attitude towards them, Amyrra recounts: 'I feel two parallel forces working in me. As a devoted Catholic I don't want the story to proceed, but as an agent in the string of events fated to take place by forces greater than my own, I feel powerless to stop it' (119). After having a brief affair with Sean, who feels 'an obsessive quality in [his] love' for her, Amyrra is reminded of her fight with fate (147). After going to confession at church, she recalls her late father's advice to accept the fact that as a religious person she is 'susceptible to any phenomenon of a spiritual nature' (149). The confession and the recollection appear to liberate her from the burden of her scruples about being able to see the future. Accordingly, her relationship with her husband Winston improves. However, Winston's death, after his discovery of her affair with Sean in the fifth month of her pregnancy with Winston's baby, appears to be 'part of the fulfilment, in her understanding' (193). The fear that she is fated to be the reincarnated Ken Dedes causes her to attempt to kill her baby. Amyrra's brutal force in response to the reincarnation signals an attempt to challenge the recurring tragedy of a previous life, in contrast to the narrative in Tan's novel.

Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces* focuses on the prophecy of reincarnation which allows her to depict complex interactions between Eastern and Western cultures and society. While Anggraeni's Asian female character suffers under the burden of the prophecy and strives hard against her fate, Lillian Ng's Asian woman character in *Swallowing Clouds* does not seem to be concerned with it. Instead, Ng subtly inserts reincarnation into a narrative which displays several elements of Chinese culture and issues of migration.

***Swallowing Clouds* by Lillian Ng: Food Metaphor**

Lillian Ng's second novel, *Swallowing Clouds*, discussed in the remainder of this paper, was published after Ng's award winning novel *Silver Sister* (1994). In his introduction to an anthology of Chinese-Canadian poetry also titled *Swallowing Clouds* (1999), Andy Quan explains that the title comes from 'two simple opposites: swallowing and cloudy heavens, also known as won-ton' (Markotic 8). Such a title 'promises simple comfort, as well as a delicate mixture of broth and meat, noodles and vegetables; a mixture, in other words, for a variety of tastes and preferences' (Markotic 8). Thus, the words *Swallowing Clouds* are strongly associated with food, itself a central motif in Ng's novel.

Ng's use of food in *Swallowing Clouds* has established the novel as a type of erotic narrative associated with food and consumption, as is suggested in its paratexts. Ng deploys the food metaphor in a forbidden relationship between a young Chinese woman, Syn, and a married butcher, Zhu, to suggest the act of consumption of an Other through Zhu and Syn's sex-

games (Morris 504). The metaphor is seen in the act of eating each other's partly chewed wontons, and is then continued by 'the exchange of thoroughly masticated food from mouth to mouth [between the] lovers' (De Castro Lopo 255). Notions of otherness associated with migrant fiction emerge also in the way the Asian female character, represented by food, attracts 'the tourist gaze, the curious gaze of the outsider' (Morris 505). Marketed as an 'erotic tale', sex is an obvious topic because Ng uses the 'style of traditional Chinese Manuals of Love' (De Castro Lopo 255). However, Ng is identified as an Asian-Australian writer by critics, and the topic of sex is not 'the type of narrative the Australian audience expects from a diasporic female Chinese writer' (Tucker, *Beyond* 125). The writer's frequent use of images of 'flesh and meat' and concepts of consumption and eroticism illustrate 'female bodies as a source of male desire and nourishment' (Tucker, *Beyond* 132). Ng's use of the words and expressions such as 'pig', 'pork, and 'drowning in a pig's basket' also alludes to 'the relationship between food and sex, and sex and literature', as well as to 'desire, transgression and eroticism' (Ribas-Segura). Thus, the novel seems to intertwine food and sex through both metaphorical and real-life descriptions. On the other hand, Ng's exploration of food and sex also challenges the Australian (Western) stereotype of Asian women.

If it were not for Ng's overt use of the erotic tale and the food metaphor, her potential depiction of the protagonist's incarnation as an exemplar of Orientalist stereotypes might be overlooked. The graphic love scenes seem to emphasise the prevailing attractions of Asian-Australian fiction, so that a reader can be 'seduced by Ng's sensuous prose and her unusual story' (Steinberg 54). In this way, critics have been concerned that the story encourages 'narrow (and incorrect) perceptions of what Australian readers desire' (Khoo 172). However, the deployment of Chinese cultural elements becomes Ng's tool to convey 'the despair, fear and desolation' of an Asian female (Ng, *Interview*). Ng thus presents the concept of reincarnation in a way that is quite distinct from Anggraeni's.

The Unfinished Business

In a similar vein to *Parallel Forces*, *Swallowing Clouds* employs the concept of reincarnation but now the prophecy is about fulfilling the revenge of a woman. *Swallowing Clouds* portrays the third-person narrator, Syn, as the reincarnation of an adulterous woman who was drowned in a pig's basket in China. Like Amyrra, Syn also has recurring dreams, only this time they depict 'death by drowning' and they take place before she meets a blind male soothsayer in Shanghai (64). Her next role in the mortal world is to wreak revenge on men, as the soothsayer retells the events that led to her drowning in her former life, in 1918: 'Both man and woman were caught red-handed, but only the woman was punished' (67). Informed by her age and horoscope, he foretells: 'You are that ghost back on earth . . . it's your rightful compensation for justice in this life and the one before. Take revenge by taking his money' (68). Like Anggraeni, Ng also uses an old proverb, this time 'Mountains and rivers are easier to alter than a man's or a woman's behaviour', which foretells Syn's adulterous conduct, repeating the actions of her previous life.

Despite similarities with Anggraeni's novel, such as the love affair and the dreams, Syn's narrative does not revolve around reincarnation and her belief in it. In fact Syn appears to doubt the blind soothsayer's power: 'Was it a superhuman perception as compensation for his visual defect? Or was he simply fabricating?' (66). As 'an educated and literate person', Syn feels it is ridiculous to 'believe in a blind fortune teller' (154). In Sydney, she also expresses her doubt to her lover, Zhu, remarking that the reincarnation is 'a likely tale' (28). When she

is first told her future she in her late thirties, and China is in the grip of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and she is experiencing a hard life. There seems little possibility of taking revenge. With these doubts in mind she appears to forget the image of the woman drowned in the basket. In alternating scenes she recounts stories of women drowning to death in the history of ancient China but never relates them to her own fate. For example, she recounts the story of Zhu's great grandfather, who intercepted the punishment of Concubine Pearl who was drowned in 'the ill-fated well' in the era of Emperor Guan Xu, in the Pearl River in Guangdong (75). However, her narrative clearly focuses on details of her erotic scenes with Zhu.

In a similar manner to Anggraeni, Ng also presents images of the West, seen through Syn's viewpoint, via her casting of Western characters. Syn's visit to Beijing with Australian tourists reveals different perceptions on both sides, of the Chinese and the Western cultures. For example, Syn remarks on the differences in how each perceives the Chinese historical buildings, saying she tends 'to look on them as places which represent a purpose, an issue of fate, and not just a monument of architectural or archaeological interest' (4). Her conclusion is supported by the *Canberra Times* journalist, Jim, who comments on the cranes that dominate the city and connects them to a symbol of longevity, a Chinese value (31). The conversation between Jean and Syn also illustrates the importance of a person's name for the Chinese, and how this contrasts with the Australian perspective. Jean explains that the name Jim is 'a very proper name for a male' and is 'just a name', whereas Syn assumes that it must be 'a good name' because two of the tourists are also called Jim (31-32). Syn is quite disturbed when the members of the tour group laugh at her explanation about her own name, which means 'fairy or immortal' in Chinese (255). Though Syn speaks English, she could not see how the sound of her name 'syn' was similar to the English word 'sin'. Indeed, Syn focuses on the meaning of 'fairy' in Chinese. She contemplates how 'fairy' might hold quite different connotations in English and suspects it has 'some sexual innuendo' (255). When Katie asks Syn to take her picture in front of the Ming Tomb and Syn shows her doubt, Katie's response demonstrates the Orientalist stereotype that the Chinese believe in superstitions when she says: 'Do you think a ghost might appear in the picture? No, I'm not that superstitious!' (185).

Not only do the Australian tourists serve as the Western characters in the story, Zhu himself also represents a form of the Western gaze. Despite his background as a Chinese-Australian butcher, Zhu's years in Australia change him so that he becomes more Australian (Tucker, *Asian-Australian* 269). Although he is married to a Chinese woman, he does not develop the old Chinese men's habit of having a concubine. Syn might be seen as his concubine, but he uses her more as 'his backup, the seaworthy boat', part of an investment plan for his daughter (136). When the backup is not needed—as he has secured a better plan with his wife—he leaves Syn.

Ng seems to reiterate Anggraeni's views when she shows the fulfilment of Syn's reincarnation taking place in Australia. Syn had intended to study English, but the events of the Tiananmen Square Massacre change the course of her life in Sydney so that she is without any financial or welfare resources. She becomes Zhu's mistress, and while she is initially powerless in his sex-game, she begins to enjoy it and becomes aware of her selfhood and the security brought to her by being his mistress. Zhu buys Syn a house and other assets in her name to hide them from his wife, KarLeng. When the relationship deteriorates and Zhu returns to his wife, Syn refuses to sign the papers that would transfer the assets to Zhu. She realises that she would remain 'a stranded student with no official national status' (276) and

that the house and other assets are her only support. It is at this point that she resumes the mission from a past life to 'take revenge by taking his money' (68).

Due to her involvement in the protest against the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Syn becomes stranded in Sydney. Through this, Ng implies that Syn is developing a sense of self. This in effect is a form of political exile because in China her name is blacklisted so that she stops receiving any financial support from her country. However, as a result she is eligible to apply for Australian citizenship as offered by the Australian government (305). After living in Australia for eight years and after her changed status, visiting China becomes a moment in which Syn discovers how conflicted she feels. During the visit, she is aware that formerly she had been blacklisted. Therefore, the journey becomes significant as she recounts, 'she had to take refuge and hide behind a façade, travel with a group of foreigners, and be treated like a foreigner' (296). However, she finds security in her new identity as an Australian. In addition, Syn experiences an emotional stasis as Zhu leaves her when she becomes detrimental to his life. However, when she takes revenge, as had been predicted by the prophecy, she feels liberated and is able to become an independent woman with adequate financial assets.

Yet, her Australian citizenship is only Syn's 'façade'. Her inner personality remains Asian, as she was born in the late 1940s and brought up in a period of China's foreign policy which isolated the country from foreign influence. When she is in Australia, she maintains her Chinese culture and she retreats 'within a shell with [her] own kind of people' (33). She moved to Australia in her mid-thirties, by which time the Chinese culture had already become a part of her character, and despite her eight-year stay, she does not change this habit. More importantly, she does not mix with Australians during this period. She socialises solely with other Chinese-Australians, lives among Chinese students; even her English teachers are Chinese. She works in a Chinese nursing home, a Chinese butcher shop and a Chinese take-away restaurant (32). Her life in Sydney is also occupied by her intimate relationship with Zhu, the Chinese butcher, who only speaks to her in Cantonese.

Australia as a Place of Fulfilment

Both Anggraeni and Ng's texts are significant in highlighting the connection between the myth of reincarnation in Asia and its fulfilment in Australian settings. In these novels, both reincarnations are fulfilled in circumstances that differ from those in Tan's novel, where the prophecy occurs in China. These Asian-Australian writers' explorations of how to accomplish the prophecies demonstrate distinctive features of Australian migrant literature. Using both the connection between Asia and Australia and their narrative settings, the writers tease out Orientalist stereotypes of Orientalism and signal the process of cultural assimilation in the West.

The question of whether these writers employ Australia as a site of fulfilment can be addressed through an evaluation of their concepts of reincarnation. While Anggraeni presents Amyrra's use of brutal force to end the recurring tragic story, Ng depicts Syn's revenge for her tragic past life. This contrast between their redemption in Australia and their tragic past lives in Asia is another example of the narrative of 'glorifying the West', presenting Australia as 'a form of salvation' (Khoo 168). Like Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*, which depicts a 'feminist relationship' in the metaphor of sisterhood between Olivia and Kwan (Yu 143), these two novels also employ the writers' feminist perspectives. Anggraeni conveys a sense of female power through the character Ken Dedes as the ancestress of great kings. In contrast,

Ng resists the powerlessness of women, particularly the unjust punishment of the adulterous woman in ancient China, which allows her lover to go unpunished.

The writers' use of real historical characters in the background of the narrative enables the exploration of reincarnation as a common belief in classical Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. The central symbols of these religions are karma and reincarnation (Doniger 5) and their beliefs relate to how Anggraeni makes use of Ken Dedes and Ken Arok's love affair in the period of the Singasari Kingdom, one of the great Javanese kingdoms, which took place in the twelfth century. As the Singasari Kingdom was influenced by Hinduism, it is no surprise that Anggraeni's novel is associated with the idea of reincarnation. Likewise, Ng's novel is set within old Chinese cultural traditions which are based on Buddhist teachings. She uses the real story of women drowning to death and there is the suggestion of Buddhist beliefs in the scene where the drowning woman chants 'the Buddhist sutra' and wishes karma to have revenge (xi). Thus, apart from indicating different positions of women in Asian history, the writers' accounts of this history also demonstrate their attempt to revive and introduce Asian religious beliefs to Australian readers.

The Asian and Australian settings are also used to explore the Asian women characters' search for identity and their experiences of dislocation. The characters' identity formation and dislocated experiences are a result of their movement from Eastern to Western cultures. The narrative of reincarnation also contributes to the process of their new identity. Although the characters' plans do not succeed or meet their expected result, both writers demonstrate that the women eventually gain the liberty to decide the direction of their lives.

Furthermore, the writers' use of the Australian setting seems to reconfirm the common theme of Asian migrant fiction, that Australia is a site of self-realisation and empowerment. On the other hand, both Anggraeni and Ng use the concept of reincarnation and the retelling of ancient stories as a strategic intervention into Australian literature and their 'identity politics' as Asian-Australian writers (Morris 507). The fulfilment of these two ancient Asian stories on Australian land also indicates the intention of these Asian-Australian writers to show Australia's truly multi-ethnic society and its close association with Asia.

Indeed, through the reincarnation of their Asian women characters, Anggraeni and Ng demonstrate their representations of Orientalist stereotypes. Their background as Asian-Australian writers allows them to relate the realm of reincarnation to the re-enactment of the complications of Asian histories, culture and religions, and then contrast them with Australian society and culture. They make use of contrasts to highlight elements of the Orientalist stereotypes in the context of reincarnation. In a way, they share the theme of reincarnation with Tan but they differ markedly in respect to fulfilling reincarnations in Australian contexts. This shows the significance of Australia for these Asian-Australian writers, and particularly their closed connection with it in their migrant experiences.

¹ Based on a guided search on AusLit (www.auslit.edu.au), retrieved on 7 May 2013, Dewi Anggraeni has published 83 works, while other Indonesian-Australian writers average between one and seven works.

² Javanese is the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, located in Java.

WORKS CITED

- Anggraeni, Dewi. *Parallel Forces*. Briar Hill, VIC: Indra Publishing, 1988.
- . *Amelberga Astuti's Interview with Dewi Anggraeni on January 5, 2012*. Unpublished, 2012.
- Atmosumarto, Sutanto. *Learner's Comprehensive Dictionary of Indonesian*. Middlesex, HA: Atma Stanton, 2004.
- Carrier, James G. *Occidentalism: Images of the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- De Castro Lopo, Lisbet. 'Swallowing Clouds'. *Southerly* 58.3 (1998): 255-260.
- Doniger, Wendy. 'Karma and Rebirth in the Vedas and Purāṇas'. *Karma and Rebirth In Classical Indian Traditions*. Ed. Wendy Doniger. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 3-37.
- Gombrich, Richard F. and Gananath Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Khoo, Tseen. 'Selling Sexotica: Oriental Grunge and Suburbia in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds'. *Journal of Australian Studies* 24.65 (2000): 164-172.
- Madsen, Deborah L. 'Asian-Australian literature'. *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*. Ed. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. 105-125.
- Markotic, Nicole. 'Swallowing Clouds'. *The Calgary Straight* 3.106 (2000): 8.
- Mitchell, Tony. 'Self-Orientalism, Reverse Orientalism and Pan-Asia Pop Cultural Flows in Dick Lee's Transit Lounge'. *Rogue flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic*. Ed. Koichi Iwabuchi, Stephen Muecke & Mandy Thomas. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004. 95-118.
- Morris, Robyn. 'Food, Race and the Power of Recuperative Identity Politics within Asian Australian Women's Fiction'. *Journal of Australian Studies* 32.4 (2008): 499-508.
- Ng, Lillian. *Silver Sister*. Port Melbourne: Mandarin Australia, 1994.
- . *Swallowing Clouds*. Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1997.
- Reminick, Joan. *BRIEF: Wondrous Wonton Soup: 3 Picks*. Melville, NY: Newsday, 17 October 2012.
- Ribas-Segura, Catalina. 'Pigs and Desire in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds*'. *M/C Journal* 13.5 (2010).
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Steinberg, Sybil S. 'Swallowing Clouds'. *Publishers Weekly* 246.25 (1999): 54.
- Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989.
- . *The Kitchen God's Wife*. London: HarperCollins, 1991.
- . *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.
- Tucker, Shirley. 'Beyond Belief: Representation and Revolt in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds*'. *Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing*. Ed. W. Ommundsen. Kingsbury, Vic.: Otherland Literary Journal, 2001. 125-144.
- Tucker, Shirley. *Asian-Australian Women's Writing: Literary Re-orientations*. PhD thesis. University of Queensland, 1999.
- Wagner, Tamara S. "'A Barrage of Ethnic Comparisons": Occidental Stereotypes in Amy Tan's Novels'. *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 45.4 (2004): 435-445.
- Widodo, Sahid. T. 'Javanese Names during the Height of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdoms in Java: An Ethnolinguistic Study'. *Kemanusiaan* 20.2 (2013): 83-91.
- Yu, Su-ling. 'Ethnic Sisterhood in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*'. *Fiction and Drama* 15 (2004): 143-155.