

Chapter I: Introduction

Historical Glimpses in Amy Tan's Writings

American-born Chinese novelist Amy Tan's fictional work *The Kitchen God's Wife* resembles her autobiographical elements. She was the fourth daughter of a Baptist minister and a woman who had escaped an abusive husband in China and left three children behind when she came to America. This autobiographical record gets represented in this particular novel. In the novel, there is a fictional character Pearl who is the daughter of Weili, a Chinese runaway woman who escapes to America to be free from her abusive husband Wen Fu. Pearl is the fourth child of Weili. Just like Pearl, Tan is the fourth child of her mother. Wen Fu is very much abusive towards Weili, so was Tan's Chinese father towards her mother. Therefore, this real-life resemblance to a fictional work really amuses the readers. In fact, it raises questions about the nexus between history and fiction.

This thesis has frequently used certain terms like new historicism, historiographic metafiction, history and culture. New historicism refers to the new notion of history. It takes both the process of history writing and literature writing to be same as there can be found the personal traits of the author. Since history and fiction have the same influence of author, new historicism considers history as fiction and fiction as history. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Tan's using of autobiographical, historical and cultural facts stresses the same conception of new historicism. In fact, history is never objective, pure and complete; rather it is subjective, contaminated and incomplete. And, new historicism deals with this new notion of history. Similarly, historiographic metafiction refers to the theoretical practice of postmodern period, which considers postmodern novels as the reflection of history but from the margin. Tan has revealed many marginal aspects in her history cum fictional novel. History, in

this research, simply means the record of past events and incidents. Everything that had happened in the past is taken as historical record. Whereas, culture is the amalgam of social practices in which someone is reared up. In Tan's case, she was brought up in the American culture. However, her mother was brought up in the Chinese culture. Since, the novel is the narration of Weili (Tan's fictional mother), she obviously talks about Chinese cultural practices, customs and traditions.

The historical facts mentioned in this novel also confuse the readers. While reading, readers have to walk through historical events and incidents of China. Exactly, the novel gets influenced by the events from 1910s to 1990s. Major fictional characters like Weili and Wen Fu loiter in the historical upheavals of the then period. Before the Second World War, China suffered from Japanese invasion. This invasion of China by Japan had invited America to the World War. In this novel, readers encounter Japanese forces invading Chinese cities like Shanghai, Nanking, Kunming and so on. Even the Chinese people are found fighting against Japanese forces. Wen Fu, one of the major characters of the novel, takes pilot training under the American general Claire Chennault. This man Claire Chennault was the real person of American history who had gone to China to conduct the pilot training for Chinese people. So, the readers who know the Chinese history more or less get confused by Tan's way of intermingling history in a text. While reading this text, they feel as if they are turning the pages of Chinese history.

Moreover, the fresh description of events that had really happened in Chinese history, the influence of history to the fictional characters, the mentioning of the name of real places, the depiction of typical Chinese words like taonan, Kuomintang and Yangseli problematize the text.

Weili remembers the past in China when Japanese invasion took place. She recounts the incidents of her escaping with her husband from Shanghai to Kunming and Chungking to avoid the Japanese attack. She also remembers the particular event in Chinese history when Britain had closed the Burma Road to China to evade the enmity with Japan. Not only that, Weili narrates the conflict between Chinese Nationalists and Communists during the later part of 1940s. She mentions the names of Chiang Kai Shek and Madame Chiang while remembering the past. Therefore, the series of historical interventions to a literary text force the common readers to raise certain curiosities. Is it not possible to avoid cultural influences in a fictional work? Cannot a writer write without referring to history? Why cannot a writer evade the autobiographical influence to a literary creation? These inquiries turmoil the minds of readers.

However, different critics have approached this novel from various angles. In the book "*Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*", E.D. Huntley comments Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* by excavating the conflicts between mother and daughter. He further writes:

Like Tan's first novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* addresses the relationship----and the conflicts----between a Chinese immigrant mother (Winnie) and her American-born daughter (Pearl). But the true focus of the novel is less on the mother-daughter dyad and more predominantly on the story of a woman who is born into wealth and position in pre-communist China, endures a degrading arranged marriage and the early deaths of three children, lives through World War II, emigrates to America, and successfully creates a relatively

comfortable and stable life for herself in a new country and an alien culture. (80)

Unlike Huntley, Yuan Yuan explores the theoretical implications of the issue of nativity by inquiring into the semiotics of Chinese narratives in his journal article "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan." He remarks:

The "China experiences" presented by Kingston and Tan emerge as narratives of recollection---which means that in their novels they have reconstructed various narratives of experiences in China against the background of American society and within the context of American culture. Their China narratives emerge in the "other" cultural context informed by a complex process of translation, translocation and transfiguration of the original experiences in China. (292)

Yuan is more interested in the multicultural and diasporic exponents. He believes that China narratives in American culture are just the emergence of "other" cultural aspects. However, Judith Caesar views *The Kitchen God's Wife* by combining Patriarchy, Imperialism and Knowledge. He mentions:

Yet Tan, for one, does much more than articulate popular media issues. She causes us to question the very basis of how we know what we know. She creates her own narrative by seeming to affirm popular American assumptions in the formula of the popular novel and then undermining that very narrative in a complex political allegory that questions the basic American (indeed Western) concepts of truth and rationality. (164-174)

Tan's questioning of truth and rationality leads Ceaser to conclude that knowledge is, after all, not objective and pure but the collective output of patriarchy and imperialism. Similarly, in her critical essay "Voice, Mind, Self : Mother-Daughter Relationships in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*", M. Marie Booth Foster analyses the Mother-Daughter relationship by linking it to the self. She opines:

[. . .] In Tan's fiction, the daughter's sense of self is intricately linked to an ability to speak and be heard by their mothers. Similarly, the mothers experience the growth as they broaden communication lines with their daughters. Tan's women are very much like the women Blensky portrays in *Women's Way of Knowing* [. . .]. (207-227)

Despite the wide range of perspectives, none of the critics, however, analyses the reasons behind Tan's using of historical evidences, cultural influences, autobiographical impressions and so on. Thus, the present research contends to justify that a literary text cannot escape the influence of history, culture, society, and autobiography by referring to the new historical notion of a literary text.

New historical notion blurs the boundary between history and text. It considers the process of history writing and literature writing to be the same. Both history and texts are influenced by the personal traits of the writer, his/her individual biography and cultural upbringings. Therefore, Pearl's resemblance of Tan is obvious. Just like Tan, Pearl is the fourth daughter of an American man and a woman who had escaped an abusive husband in China and left three children behind when she came to America. Just like Tan's mother, Weili, the mother of Pearl, suffers from her abusive husband in China. And, like Tan's mother, Weili escapes from China to America and gets married with an American. Whatever Weili narrates, it is the real life experience

of Tan's mother; and whatever perspective Pearl has, it is the perspective of Amy Tan. Therefore, this research hypothesizes that individual autobiography heavily influences the literary writing.

Moreover, this thesis assumes that history has also the extensive role to determine the shape of a literary text. Weili's narration of the past is the real history of China. She remembers the events of Japanese attack on different Chinese cities like Shanghai, Kunming and Nanking. Her recounting of Chinese people's preparation for fighting against Japanese force, Japan's bombing on Pearl Harbour of America, United State's bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in response, United Kingdom's closing of Burma Road to China and Chiang Kai Shek's determination to drive away Japanese from China are the historical facts that get depicted in this novel.

Furthermore, culture, religion, social status and regional background also affect an artistic creation. Tan mentions certain cultural terms like taonan, Yangseli and Ding-ngin. These words remind readers about Chinese cultural practices. Similarly, the names of places such as Shanghai, Tsungming Island, Chungking, and Nanking help readers to know about her regional origin.

Finally, the objective of this research has been accomplished by dividing it into four chapters. In the first chapter, it has introductory information. It introduces the purpose of this research, methodology and textual analysis. The second chapter describes the tool that has been applied to the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan. The third chapter of this research has applied the tool to the text. So, in it, there is the minute analysis of evidences, examples and references in relation to the theory.

In the final chapter, there is the conclusion of whole dissertation.

Chapter II: Methodology

New Historicism: Literature and History

The interdisciplinary theoretical practice that got popularized during the later part of the 20th century is New Historicism. New historicism digs out the historical elements in a literary text. Since new historicism analyses a literary text in relation to history and culture, it is interdisciplinary. The ever-pronounced cliché 'historicization of the text and textualization of history' shapes the boundary of new historicism.

Though there is not the exact date of its beginning, theoretical masters declare 1970s and 80s to be its childhood decades. However, new historicism had got its existence as early as the late 1950s. Basically, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) conceives the fetus of new historicism. In this book, Frye challenges the long practiced analytical trend. Before the burgeoning of new historical criticism, there was the trend of formalistic criticism. Formalistic criticism criticized a literary text in terms of its 'objective totality.' For it, analyzing of symbols, images, metrical patterns and verbal relations used to suffice as literary criticism. Conversely, Frye's trail-blazing work oriented literary criticism towards myth and archetypes, if not historical elements. At least, it dared to bring literature out from the gulf of New Criticism, which paved the way for new historical criticism. This contribution of Frye gets much praise from the mouth of American critic A. Walton Litz. He dictates:

[. . .] Frye was deeply influenced by modern anthropological studies of myth and ritual, which provided a new language for classifying literary works and therefore could counter the New Critical bias against criticism by type or genre. [. . .] That is to say [. . .] his criticism is focused on the structural patterns that unite a large work or bind together many diverse works into a type or genre. (64)

The fetus that was conceived by Northrop Frye got its life at the hands of American critics like Louis Montrose, Stephan Greenblatt and Giles Gunn in the name of "new historicism." It blurred the age-old demarcation between history and fiction, so that, historicization of text and fictionalization of history became possible. Actually, new historicism propounded by aforementioned critics contributed to historicize text. However, the notion of fictionalization of history is credited to French philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, in his essay *The Use and Abuse of History*, views that history is complexly mingled with the personality traits of the historian, immensely moulded by the contemporaneous order of events and society. The subjective biases, hopes and aspirations, passions and fears of the writer get unavoidably reflected in the history recorded. In addition to this, Nietzsche also claims that history is not only the record of 'great' events and incidents, rather, it is the record of crimes, passions and follies too. This expression of personal traits, passions and follies of a historian in history makes both history writing and fiction (text) writing the same, which later on contributes to the notion that 'history is fictional and fiction is historical.' The very notion helps the new historical reading of a literary text. Noticing the change, Louis Montrose expresses, "what have often been taken to be self-contained aesthetic and academic issues are being reunderstood as inextricably linked to other social discourses, practices, and institutions" (392).

This emergent social-political-historical orientation in literary studies is characterized by an antireflectionist perspective on cultural work, by a shift in emphasis from the aesthetic analysis of verbal artifacts to the ideological analysis of discursive practices, and by an understanding of meaning as situationally and provisionally constructed. Being much radical, Fredric Jameson claims that "[. . .]

history is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (82). This radical conception of Jameson textualizes history. According to him, history is not possible to access except in textual form. So, a literary text turns out to be a historical document.

Assisting Jameson, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak opines that "fiction is also historical" and that "history is also fictive" (Spivak 244). Historical fiction is often understood according to binary logic, with tending to privilege either phenomenism or theoreticism. A phenomenist approach assumes that historical literature is a reliable source of information about past experiences, and a theoretical approach argues that "'events' are never not discursively constituted and that the language of historiography is always also language" (Spivak, 242), which simultaneously ratify and resist the production of reliable information about the phenomenal world.

This deconstructionist notion of theoretical fiction is well comparable with new historical conception of meaning of a literary text. New historical conception asserts "meanings" in a text, though multiple. Whereas, deconstruction does not claim any meanings, rather, it understands the phenomenal and the theoretical, the historical and the literary, and the factual and the fictional as "related but irreducibly discontinuous" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 275).

New historicism is not a totally 'new' concept. It follows the same path already set by Marxism, which relates literature to the production of human consciousness and imagination with the material condition of the society in which the writer is born and raised. However, being a little different to this concept, D. G. Myers opines:

In new historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer and end and source of history.

One undeniable side benefit of such a view is that history is no longer conceived as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as a thing wholly prior, a process, which completes itself at the appearance of the work.

[. . .] For the new historicists it is ideology, not history that is prior.

The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture's ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists intact intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore prior to) the work.

(106-7)

For D.G. Myers, history is not the source of a literary text. Rather, it is ideology that gives birth to the texts. Nevertheless, ideology carries history, though not in the classical sense. Actually, history contests with the text in implicit way.

Within the rank of the new historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contributes to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most new historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the new historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms principles, activities and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it is issued.

Similarly, Stephan Greenblatt links an artistic work with the behaviors of individuals and institutions both of which have the relationship with historical background. Clarifying it, Greenblatt writes, "[. . .] if literature is seen only as detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioral codes, a view from a safe distance, we drastically diminish our grasp of art's concrete functions in relation to individuals and to institutions both of which shrink into an obligatory "historical background" that

adds little to our understanding" (Introduction 4). Greenblatt studies the different Renaissance literary writers and their texts, and reveals the fact that all most all the literary texts have nexus with the then history, culture and society. He further writes:

Each of these texts [Renaissance texts] is viewed as the focal point for converging lines of force in sixteenth-century culture; their significance for us not that we may see through them to underlying and prior historical principles but rather that we may interpret the interplay of their symbolic structures with those perceivable in the careers of their authors and in the larger social world as constituting a single, complex process of self-fashioning and, through this interpretation, come closer to understanding how literary and social identities were formed in this culture. (5-6)

One of the prominent new historicists H. Aram Veesser is very much clear in his opinion regarding the new historicism. He lucidly states, "New historicism occupies the shifting ground between history and literature, between true rebellion and unwitting tribute between analysis of the literary text and scrutiny of the critic's troubled self" (Introduction 7). Moreover, He aligns new historicists with poststructuralists and Marxists who (new historicists) "nonetheless search for connections between social structures, literary texts, and their own gender, sexuality, class position, ethnic background, relations to bosses and parents-in short, to their lives" (11).

For Veesser "the world irresistibly contaminates the literary text" (17). He agrees with Greenblatt, Orgel, and Fineman regarding the new historicism. He writes:

Greenblatt, Orgel, and Fineman also disclose the ways [. . .] on which new historicists broadly agree- literary and non-literary texts circulate

inseparably. History and literature have been endlessly juxtaposed before now, but never in quite so insouciant a fashion. When critics obeyed the historian's reigning protocols they pressed the life from their work, [. . .]. New historicism is the first critical movement to ignore the historians' conservative complaints. (16)

Michel Foucault, the historian of otherwise, views everything in relation to power relationship. For him, text, history, truth and knowledge all are discursively formed. These factors are inextricably intertwined to each other. Nothing can be individually separated and studied. Behind the creation of a text, there is the explicit motive of the power holders. For Foucault, text is a discourse that is created to assist the rulers to rule. Through the means of text, rulers legalize their intention. Foucault is highly suspicious of claims to universal truths and knowledge. He does not refute them; instead, his consistent response is to historicize grand abstractions. Regarding this idea of Foucault, Paul Rabinow writes "for Foucault, there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society" (4).

Foucauldian concept of new historicism comes into the surface if text, history, truth, power and discourse are studied together. More than history itself, Foucault is interested in excavating the constituents of history i.e. the genealogy of history. History, according to Foucault, is not the mere records of the fact. More than that, it is the 'construction' of the power holders. History is written from the perspective of power holders. So, Foucault argues that traditional history does not include the 'other side' of the history. The 'other side' refers to what Jean Francois Lyotard calls the 'petty narratives.' However, Foucault opines that history should be restudied by including the aspects that were previously "left over."

Foucault prefers to name 'work' to literary or non-literary texts. According to him, a 'work' is the product of an 'author'. However, the author itself is discursively formed. Therefore, Foucault urges to bring out the historicity of a text while criticizing a work. Being against the New Critical notion of the 'death of the author', Foucault questions:

What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? [. . .] If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a "work"? (*What is an Author* 103)

Through these questions, Foucault indicates that a work is the product of an author, however, the author is an individual who is entangled in the social, cultural and historical forces. Therefore, a work is the expression of socio-politico-cultural elements, Foucault believes. Adding to it, he writes:

The text always contains a certain number of signs referring to the author. These signs, well known to grammarians, are personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and verb conjugation. Such elements do not play the same role in discourses provided with the author function as in those lacking it. In the later, such "shifters" refer to the real speaker and to the spatio-temporal coordinates of his discourse [. . .]. (112)

This 'real speaker' that Foucault talks about is non other than the author; and the 'spatio-temporal coordinates' refer to author's time and place, which is the historical

background. Though indirectly, Foucault accepts that literary writings cannot exceed the history. Hence, history is the backbone for literature.

Since a literary work is a discourse, it is obligatory to study the nature and formation of discourse. Discourse, in a Foucauldian sense, refers to the linguistic composition coloured by politics. In Foucault's own words, discourse is:

[. . .] a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. . . . Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But . . . since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect. (qtd. in Hall 291)

Foucauldian conception of discourse, as the 'production of knowledge' through language, reveals many things about power and politics. First of all, it uncovers the fact that knowledge is not objective and universal but it is 'produced.' It is the production of ruling class. Ruling class produces knowledge regarding different aspects, which work in the society through discourse and texts that, in turn, produce the "effects of truth" (*Truth and Power* 60). However, discourses change according to the change in rulers. Rulers, too, are changed through the use of power. Marginal people who are deprived from the central power revolt against the power holders, which change the rulers. Regarding the changeable nature of discourse, Foucault exemplifies:

In a science like medicine, for example, up to the end of the eighteenth century one has a certain type of discourse whose gradual transformation, within a period of twenty-five or thirty years broke not only with the "true" propositions which it had hitherto been possible to

formulate, but also, more profoundly, with the ways of speaking and seeing, the whole ensemble of practices which served as supports for medical knowledge. These are not simply new discoveries; there is a whole new "regime" in discourse and forms of knowledge. (54)

Similarly, discourse and power are inseparable. Traditionally, power used to be considered as negative aspect. Even Hegel and Marx considered power as vertical and repressive. Whereas, Foucault believes power as not only negative but also creative; and not always vertical but horizontal and all pervasive too. According to Foucault, even the marginal group exercises power through resistance. Linking power with creative aspect, he writes "it [power] traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge [and] produces discourse" (61).

Keith Jenkins, a recent critic, gets more concerned with the textualization of history than historicization of the text. She handles the point that history does not come in the text as that is but it comes in a modified form. For her history is one of a series of discourses about the world. These discourses do not create the world (that physical stuff on which we apparently live) but they do appropriate it and give it all the meanings it has. Interestingly, Jenkins differentiates between history and past. For her, past is what really 'passed' whereas history is what historians recorded. This indicates that history may not only be the record of past events and incidents. More than that, it can be what historians created about past. Therefore, for Jenkins "history is an inter-textual linguistic construct" (9).

According to Jenkins, the world/the past comes to us always already as stories and that we can not get out of these stories (narratives) to check if they correspond to the real world/past because these 'always already' narratives constitute 'reality'. Since there are the many historians so many histories, Jenkins believes on multi-histories.

This is no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a 'narrator'. Unlike direct memory, history relies on someone else's eyes and voice; we see through an interpreter (historian) who stands between past events and our reading of them. In fact, historians cannot be disinterested from the ideologies of their culture. Regarding this nature, Jenkins writes:

For although professional historians overwhelmingly present themselves as academic and disinterested, and although they are certainly in some ways 'distanced', nevertheless, it is more illuminating to see such practitioners as being not so much outside the ideological fray but as occupying very dominant positions within it; to see professional histories as expressions of how dominant ideologies currently articulate history 'academically'. (25)

Moreover, for Jenkins, history is never factually documented in a text since the writers document it with their preoccupied mind. When they go to work they take with them certain identifiable things. First, they take themselves personally: their values, positions and their ideological perspectives. Second, they take their epistemological presuppositions. These are not always held very consciously but historians will have 'in mind' ways of gaining 'knowledge'. Similarly, writers have to bear different pressures, which also assist them to make history a text. In fact, historians tolerate the pressures from publishers regarding wordage, format, market, deadlines, style, and referees. All these factors contribute to make a historical text a literary one. That's why Jenkins defines history in the following way:

History is a shifting, problematic discourse, ostensibly about an aspect of the world, the past, that is produced by a group of present-minded

workers (overwhelmingly in our culture salaried historians) who go about their work in mutually recognizable ways that are epistemologically, methodologically, ideologically and practically positioned and whose products, once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along dominant-marginal spectrum. (32)

Hence, Jenkins too, textualizes history and historicizes text. Furthermore, she also aligns history with power and discourse.

Similarly, the 20th century Middle East critic Edward Said considers a text as a discourse, which is more political for him. For Said, all texts are 'worldly', that is, involved in particular historical situations. In response to the critical movements that have generated aestheticism, the New Criticism, structuralism and deconstruction, each with certain tendencies to separate the text from the world of particular events, Said asks, "Is there no way of dealing with a text and its worldly circumstances fairly? No way to grapple with the problems of literary language except by cutting them off from the more plainly urgent ones of everyday, worldly language?" [. . .] For him, there must be a way, mainly because texts are impoverished if they are cut off and partly because Said's interests and commitments are strongly political. In the essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic", he argues against Derridean deconstruction that texts should be regarded as "speech", for that identifies them with the living beings in particular historical circumstances. But the valorization of speech does not ensure the equality of every voice in the text or even the power of every voice to be heard.

For Said, a text is not the heteroglossia of Mikhail Bakhtin's novel. Rather, discursive situations are more like the unequal relation of colonizer and colonized, for many texts are characterized by a 'self confirming will to power.' This means that the text's voice may dominate or suppress other voices. Such situations are like the world. No amount of theorizing about pure "textuality," intentional or affective fallacies, or poetry for poetry's sake can erase the interrelation of texts and real committed speech: "Too many exceptions, too many historical, ideological, and formal circumstances, implicate the text in actuality, even if a text may be considered a silent printed object with its own unheard melodies" (1220).

Clearly, Said is impatient with a criticism that views the text only as a "silent printed object" (if indeed there really ever has been such a criticism). His criticism is political, involved, and concerned with particular historical situations. It wishes to uncover textual will to power, oppression, and distortion. Criticism, for Said, should always be offered from a position of marginality that he describes as "secular" and "skeptical." It must avoid complicity with the ruling voice of the culture. But it is not disembodied; it is always situated. Similarly, the role of a critic is to excavate the silenced and dominated voices in the text. Explaining it, Said adds, "More explicitly, the critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts. Texts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components" (1222).

According to Said, a critic should hear the dominated, marginalized and displaced voices of text. He takes text as a system of forces which are institutionalized by the dominant culture.

Discussing historicity of a text without citing Linda Hutcheon is just to dig the surface without reaching the deep. Hutcheon, basically, historicizes postmodern texts

in her critical book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. However, she also problematizes history by pointing out its paradoxes and contradictions. To indicate the historicity in postmodern texts, Hutcheon cites Hayden White, who proclaims:

One of the distinctive characteristics of contemporary literature is its underlying conviction that the historical consciousness must be obliterated if the writer is to examine with proper seriousness those strata of human experience which is modern art's peculiar purpose to disclose. (qtd. in Hutcheon 88)

But, White's examples are Joyce, Pound, Eliot, Mann- the great modernists; not postmodernists. Whereas, what the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of significance by which we make the sense of the past. Here, Hutcheon links history with postmodern. For her, the postmodern, then, affects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. This means, there can be no single, essentialized, transcendent concept of 'genuine historicity'. This problematized history is postmodern history which is willfully unencumbered by nostalgia in its critical, dialogical reviewing of the forms, contexts and values of the past.

The new literary history (new historicism) is not an attempt to preserve and transmit a canon or a tradition of thought; it bears problematic and questioning relation to both history and literary criticism. Assisting it, Herbert Lindenberger says:

The new history we are beginning to see these days has little in common with the old- and for an interesting historical reason: its practitioners were nurtured in the theoretical climate of the 1970s, a

time during which the individual literary work came to lose its organic unity; when literature as an organized body of knowledge abandoned the boundaries that had hitherto enclosed it, to an extent even abandoned its claims to knowledge; and when history began to seem discontinuous, sometimes in fact no more than just another fiction. It is no wonder that the scholarship we now pursue cannot take the form or speak the language of the older literary history. (qtd. in Hutcheon 95)

Hutcheon blurs the boundary between history and fiction in her concept of historiographic metafiction. Unlike new historicism, historiographic metafiction questions postmodern fiction. The concept of fiction as imaginary and artistic product is challenged by historiographic metafiction. Since new historicism basically textualizes history, historiographic metafiction historicizes literary texts by problematizing the history. It can often enact the problematic nature of the relation of writing history to narrativization and, thus, to fictionalization, thereby raising the same questions about the cognitive status of historical knowledge with which current philosophers of history are also grappling. Hutcheon clarifies:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (93)

Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by

selection and narrative positioning. And, even more basically, we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present. Historiography and fiction are seen as sharing the same act of refiguration, of reshaping of our experience of time through plot configurations; they are complementary activities. Recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their forces more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. Synthesizing history and fiction writing technique, Hutcheon, in her essay "Historiographic Metafiction: "The Pastime of Past Time"", writes:

History writing was seen to have no such conventional restraints of probability or possibility. Nevertheless, many historians since have used the techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real worlds. [. . .] The postmodern novel has done the same, and the reverse. It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (106)

To wrap up, whether it is Hutcheon, Said, Jenkins, Foucault, Veese, Spivak, Greenblatt, Jameson, Nietzsche or Frye; they all believe that history, culture, social factors, autobiography and religion collectively haunt a literary text. Literature cannot

be separated from history and history itself is a form of literature. For Hutcheon, the process of history writing and literary text writing is the same. Jenkins also accepts this fact; and for Said all texts are "worldly." Foucault enmeshes a literary text with history, power, ideology, discourse and many more. However, 'history is fictive and fiction is historical' for Spivak. Nietzsche believes both history and fiction to be same as both are inflicted by crimes, passions and follies. Greenblatt himself is the beginner critic of literature by aligning it to history and culture, and Northrop Frye overtakes all to free literary works from monotonous new critical reading and searching archetypes and symbols- if not history and culture.

Despite the wide range of new historic spectrum, this research on Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, however, uses the notion of Spivak, Foucault and H. Aram Veesser mainly. Spivak's conception 'history is fictive and fiction is historical' is the key methodological notion for this research. Besides, Foucault's idea of history as the amalgam of 'things that have happened and things that are supposed to have happened' is dominant all over this research. Last but not the least, the perspective of a doubly marginalized writer towards the canonical Chinese history has been analyzed with the help of new historicist spectacles.

Chapter III: Textual Analysis

Revisiting Chinese History in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*

Amy Tan's fictional creation *The Kitchen God's Wife* speaks about the repressed voices of Chinese women of the early and middle twentieth century. Particularly, it is related with the female experiences during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-45). So, its basic contention is to show the double sufferings of Chinese women: primarily by war and violence and secondarily by the Chinese males themselves. Moreover, this novel digs out various historical events and incidents, which raise problems in this fictional work. Every historical change in China influences the life of characters in this novel. So we really face the problems of differentiating fact and fiction in this text.

The problems are nothing but the series of factual events presented in a fictional text itself. In fact, Tan's text is an imaginary construct but the intervention of facts problematizes it. The real description of Sino-Japanese war, the mentioning of real places, real persons and real conflict between Chinese and Japanese convert this fictional text into a historical document. The whole novel is just a narration of war traumas and bitter experiences of a female character Weili. Weili narrates a myth about the Kitchen God, which was (is) very famous in China. Weili tells, "[. . .] from then on, people in China knew Kitchen God was watching them. From his corner in every house and every shop, he saw all kinds of good and bad habits spill out: generosity or greediness, a harmonious nature or a complaining one" (61).

The series of problem comes when Weili remembers her past. She memorizes, "When the Communists came in 1949, he [her uncle] was too scared to run away, too scared to stay. He became so confused he walked with his own two feet all the way to the port at the north edge of the island, and there he sat down to think about his

choices" (72). Obviously, Weili's uncle is a fictional character but his confusion is not a fictional one. It was the real confusion of all most all the Chinese people during this period. Similarly, Weili tries to locate another historical incident. She says, "This was in 4638 by the Chinese calendar, a Horse year, when people stamped their feet and became reckless. By the Western calendar, I don't know. May be it was 1929, maybe 1930 or 1931, in any case, before I met Helen" (79).

The citation of history does not end in these cases only. Moreover, Weili reminds the time when Japanese took over the Shanghai, a city of China. She explains:

When the Japanese took over Shanghai in 1937, my uncle pretended to welcome them to his textile shop. "My own nephew was educated in Japan, now lives in Changsha, married to a Japanese girl." And then half brother took on another life. When the Japanese lost in 1945 and the Kuomintang came back, my uncle said, "My poor nephew, Kun, he was a Kuomintang hero. Died in Changsha." (80)

This is just a historical account of China. This can be proved through the citation of Encyclopedia, which tells:

In an effort to unseat the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek, the Japanese occupied large areas of eastern China in 1937–38. A stalemate then ensued, and Japanese forces were diverted to Southeast Asia and to the Pacific War against the Western Powers and their allies beginning in 1941. Japan's World War II defeat by the Allies ended its occupation of China (1945).
(Encyclopedia Britannica)

Tan's borrowing of aforementioned historical references in the fictional work entices readers to conclude that a writer cannot write a fictional work without referring to

history. To continue to cite the autobiographical references, Tan speaks through Weili "[. . .] I told the U.S. immigration officials in 1953 that Helen was my sister, born to one of my father's other five wives" (84). Similarly, Weili memorizes the particular moment of history when people were suffering from killing, threats and bombing. She desires her husband to die in the war because he tortures her a lot. She narrates, "I was thinking about all those times Wen Fu could have died, should have died: during the war when so many pilots died all at once. When he crashed that jeep and killed someone else. When the Corfirmunists took over and killed the Kuomintang" (98).

Somewhere else Amy Tan has said that Weili is not only a fictional character but she is the representative character of her mother. If Weili is the representative character of Tan's mother; Pearl, the daughter of Weili, represents Tan herself. So, Tan's autobiographical account is manifested in this text. Whatever Weili narrates, it is the story of her mother and whatever Pearl narrates, it is the real narration of her own life. Not only that, the typical Chinese words like 'Taonan', 'Yangseli', 'Ding-ngin' etc. are used everywhere. Similarly, the mentioning of the name of real places like Shanghai, Koumingtang, Tsungming, Zhejiang; real persons like Chiang Kai Sek and real time of happening events confuse readers.

This intervention of factual events in a fictional text is justified only after the citing of new historicism. New historical reading converts a fictional text into a factual one. It excavates autobiographical elements, historical facts, cultural aspects, and religious influences in a text. In fact, new historicism considers the history, culture and autobiography as the obvious issues of a literary writer. No writer can go beyond these facts and write. Therefore, whatever a writer writes, s/he writes about his/her past, autobiography, history, religion and culture. The degree of intervention

of these factors may vary according to writers but a text without the influence of these factors cannot be imagined.

Hence, in the light of new historicism, the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* turns out to be a historical document. The Chinese history is represented in this text. To take an example, Weili says, ". . . the revolutionaries came and threw the Manchus out. That was in 1911, when my mother was just twenty-one years old. No more Ching Dynasty, no more scholar-official job for Gung-gung" (122). Ching Dynasty was one of the dynasties in China but it ended because of the suicide of Gung-gung. Weili continues, "Because everyone said Gung-gung committed suicide, so sorry to see the Ching Dynasty end" (123).

Amy Tan also takes the reference of Confucius to talk about the cultural practices of China. Confucius had given his opinion regarding woman as to what a woman should do and what she should not do. Even Chinese women used to follow what Confucius said. He used to think that a daughter also could care her parents in their old age. Weili's ha-bu (grandmother) was also guided by Confucian principles. But Weili expresses her wonder why they respect him so much? She narrates:

Now my mother's mother, my ha-bu, was a widow, not so rich anymore. She was in no big hurry to marry off her daughter. Her daughter could take care of her into her old age. That's what Confucius would have said. I don't know why everyone always thought Confucius was so good, so wise. He made everyone look down on someone else, women were the lowest! (123)

In fact, Weili was against Confucian principles. According to her, Confucius had made every woman look down. He gave the lesson that women were the lowest creatures. Because of this, Weili was against his teaching. Not only that, Weili was

also against the marriage culture of that time. She memorizes her own marriage history and says:

You see, Wen Fu [her husband] decided he really want to marry Peanut, not because he loved her sincerely- he wanted to marry into her family. And really, he was no different from most men back then. Getting married in those days was like buying real estate. Here, you see a house you want to live in, you find a real estate agent. Back in China, you saw a rich family with a daughter, you found a go-between who knew how to make a good business deal. (164)

Similarly, Tan also brings the historical reference of Madame Chiang, wife of Chiang Kai Sek, to make this text a factual record. Weili narrates an incident during the Sino-Japanese war. She tells, "They [Chinese pilots] would be sent to Hangchow for special training, with congratulations from Madame Chiang on behalf of her husband, the General. Wen Fu said he had to leave in only few days. What could I say? I went too" (202). Weili also revisits her experiences regarding the fight of Chinese people against Japanese invasion. Not only army and police but also all most all Chinese people were unified to fight for their nation. In Weili's own words, "The old revolutionaries, the new revolutionaries, the Kuomintang and the Communists, the warlords, the bandits, and the students – gwah! gwah! gwah! – everybody squabbling, like old roosters claiming the same sunrise" (205). She continues, "Every Chinese person believed the same: that we were about to push the Japanese out of China forever" (205). Again, Weili tells Pearl (her daughter) about the Second World War in China. She speaks to her, "You thought World War Two started at a place in Hawaii with your same name, Pearl Harbor. I tried to tell you, but you were always correcting

me. You said, "Oh, Mommy, That's Chinese history. This is American history." It's true. You told me that once" (213).

Readers create a real picture in their mind when they hear the narration of Weili regarding the Sino-Japanese war. Her narration really takes us to that time when the war actually had occurred. Weili recounts:

[. . .] and then she told us how the planes had flown late at night, toward the Shanghai harbor, swollen with Japanese boats. They were hoping to surprise them. But before they arrived, Japanese planes dropped from the darker sky above – already knew our planes were coming. And it was our pilots who had the surprise, became confused, then hurried to drop their bombs. Such a big hurry! Such a small distance from the sky to the ground. So the bombs fell on Shanghai that night, on the roofs of houses and stores, on streetcars, on hundreds of people, all Chinese. And the Japanese navy – their boats still floated on the water. (236-7)

Nobody considers this extract as the imaginary one. Though it is written in a fictional text, it is a factual record. The mentioning of such events and incidents has converted this fictional work into a historical document. Mei Li Robinson, a critic, finds many actions in this text being intermingled with the history. He writes, "throughout *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Tan interweaves critical events of Chinese history with the fictional experiences of her characters. The historical events are not simply employed to provide color and realism, but are integral influences on the story itself" (11).

The intermingling of facts and fictions furnishes *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Almost every action in the novel is affected by the real events of the then China. Mainly, historical events are represented in the text from 1911. During the last of the

Chinese dynasties, revolution had spread among China's provinces and had brought an end to the Ch'ing Dynasty and the power of the Manchus, which had prevailed for over 250 years. Then, the Chinese Republic was established on January 1 with Sun Yat-sen as president. But Yat-sen resigned very soon in favor of Yuan Shih-k'ai and took the command of the Kuomintang, which he founded in 1905. Because of the ending of Chi'ing Dynasty and the arrival of Republic, Weili's Gung-gung (grandfather) loses his government job and dies in the fictional world. Similarly, another event of 1915 has great importance in Chinese history. This novel, to some extent, is also based on this event. This event is about a treaty between China and Japan, which made Japan dominant in some Chinese places like Shantung, Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia. This treaty has the great role to invite Japanese invasion in China. Exactly, the novel deals with the same issues. Hence, the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* represents the history.

In 1916, Chinese president Yuan Shih-k'ai dies and warlords return to power in many provinces. However, in 1918, Jiang Weili (Winnie), the protagonist of the novel, is born in Shanghai. The next year, Hulan (Helen) is born near Loyang. Sun Yat-sen reorganizes Kuomintang with the support from the Communist party in 1923. But in 1925, Sun Yat-sen dies and Chiang Kai-shek takes over the leadership of Kuomintang. In the same year, Weili's mother disappears abandoning Weili. That's why Weili is sent to live in an uncle's house on Tsungming Island. She attends a boarding school in Shanghai. The Communists call a general strike in Shanghai, overthrowing local warlords. Chiang turns on the Communists, killing thousands. In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek establishes a new Nationalist government at Nanking, challenged by Communists. The Japanese occupy the Chinese province of Manchuria and control two other provinces in northeast China in 1931. Mao Tse-tung creates the

Chinese Communist Republic in Jiangxi province, where millions of Chinese are without means of earning a living. Japan invades and bombs Shanghai but later forced to abandon it. Japan creates the puppet state of Manchukuo from Manchuria. Henry Pu-yi (the "last emperor" of China) is abducted from Tientsin and made Manchukuo's puppet emperor. In 1934, as many as 100,000 Communists under Mao Tse-tung and Zhu De begin the "long march" of 6,000 miles north from Jiangxi to escape the Kuomintang. Perhaps 8,000 survive the long march and arrive in Shaanxi. Mao Tse-tung is chosen as the Communist party leader after the success of the long march.

These events have indirect effect in the characters of this novel. In 1937, the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang join together to fight the Japanese, their common enemy. Claire Chennault retires from the U.S. Army in April to become an air-training advisor to the Chinese government (June). In the novel, Weili reminds an event on which Chennault trains the Chinese pilots. She says, "When we arrived in Hangchow, all the pilots were honored at a big banquet given by that famous American general with a lady's name, Claire Chennault. Of course, he was not famous then, not in the beginning. He was not even a general" (202). The Chinese repel a Japanese attempt to take some bridges near Peking (July). China declares a War of Resistance against Japan, now invading Shanghai (August). Chiang Kai-shek is named Commander-in-Chief of all of China's armed forces. The first offensive air mission over Shanghai (August 14) accidentally kills almost 1,000 civilians. Shanghai falls (November). Capital has been moved from Nanking to Hankow (December). U.S. ships are sunk near Nanking, which falls with enormous destruction and massacre of many thousands. In the fictional world, Weili meets and marries Wen Fu, who joins the air force to become a pilot by the training from Claire Chennault. They move to Hangchow for pilot training, where Weili meets Hulan. The air force flies its

first disastrous mission over Shanghai. The pilots are moved almost immediately to Yangchow and then to Nanking, where Weili and Hulan experience 'taonan' when Japanese planes fly over the Marketplace. They are sent from Nanking on the long trip to Kunming in SouthWest China. Along the way, they hear the news about the destruction of Nanking. Weili says:

The next day, I heard everybody had the same stinking problem. [. . .]
And then Jiaguo [Hulan's husband] came into ther room and told us the news. The Japanese army had invaded the capital city: Nanking was cut off completely. He could not tell us whether people there could not resist, whether good treatment was given as promised. Nobody knew yet what had happened. I thought about Wan Betty, her strong words. Did she bow down to the Japanese? I was sure other people had same kind of thoughts, although we did not discuss our feelings with one another. We were quiet. We no longer complained about our conditions in Kweiyang, not even in a joking manner. (286)

From this extract, one can understand the effect of historical event in a fictional work. Obviously, Weili is a fictional character. But her expression is the real one. She narrates the real event of Chinese history. The historical event of China and its impact on a fictional character confuses the common readers. In fact, readers feel as if they are going through the pages of Chinese history while reading this novel.

In 1938, Chennault sets up an air-training base at Kunming. The capital is moved from Hankow to Chungking. This historical event gets textualized in this novel when Weili narrates about it. Weili says, "They [Chinese soldiers] told us they were on their way to Chungking – to help set up a new capital city – because of what had happened to the old [captured by Japanese]" (294). The Japanese attack China's

industrial heatland in the Wuchang-Hankow area. After five months of battle, the Japanese take Hankow and Canton, the last major Chinese port, effectively cutting China from supplies by sea (October). In the very year, the 700-mile Burma Road is completed as a supply road to China from the railhead at Lashio in Burma to Kunming. In the fictional world, Weili's first child, Mochou, is born dead in Kunming. Wen Fu wrecks his jeep, killing a woman passenger and losing sight in one eye in the same year. Whereas in 1939, Weili's second child, Yiku, is born in Kunming. In the real world, 8,000 people are killed in two days of bombing in the new capital of Chungking, The Japanese are defeated at Changsha, their first real defeat (October). In July 1940, the British Empire closes Rangoon, Burma (under British rule), to incoming Chinese supplies to avoid confrontation with the Japanese. To hear this historical incident from the fictional character, Weili reminds:

[. . .] So it must have been 1940, summertime and unusually warm, which made everyone irritable. That day we learned the British were closing down the Burma Road to make Japanese happy. That day Jiaguo invited the railway official to come to lunch, so he could discuss other ways to transport supplies. That day Hulan bought the food from the marketplace, and she found plenty of bad bargains. (333)

Britain had to focus its military attention on the Germans' gathering on the English Channel. The effect was the same as closing the Burma Road. In October, the British reopen Rangoon, and the Burma Road flourishes again military supplies for China. Whereas in the novel, Yiku dies after abuse by Wen Fu and convulsions from illness. Danru, Weili's third child and first son, is born. During 1941, Chennault's Flying Tigers, an American Volunteer Group, set up headquarters in Kunming. The Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and the U.S. declares War on Japan. Even in the fiction,

the Japanese bomb Kunming repeatedly while Wen Fu and Jiaguo are in Chungking training people for defense and setting up an early warning system. Back in Shanghai, the Japanese take control of Jiang Sao-yen's business. He appears to be a traitor to the Chinese. At a Christmas dance in Kunming, sponsored by the Americans, Weili meets Jimmy Louie, who gives her the name "Winnie." Weili makes her first futile attempt to leave Wen Fu. This intermixing of fact and fiction really amuses readers who take interest on the history also.

In 1944, Japanese get defeated by U.S. forces in the Pacific halt. The Japanese are gradually pushed back in China. At the same time, friction between Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists increases. Regarding this, Weili remembers the past, "The Kuomintang [Nationalists] insisted it was the Communists who were doing these crimes" (406). War has weakened and corrupted the Nationalists, while mobilizing and strengthening the Communists. Weili, in her letter, informs Jimmy Louie, "things have changed in Shanghai, more than you can imagine. I said the Communists were coming, the Kuomintang were already leaving" (496). In the next year, attempts between Nationalists and Communists to settle the differences get failed. The U.S. drops the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, ending the war for China as well as for Allies. Then Japan surrenders (August) to Allies. Because of the end of the war, Weili, Wen Fu, and Danru travel back to Shanghai to her father's house. Soon after, Wen Fu's family moves into the house and takes control of the household. However, war is declared again between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists in 1946. Communists seize territory wherever they can. In the fictional world, Weili and Danru visit the aunts on Tsungming Island and get Peanut's address in the same year. Weili accidentally meets Jimmy Louie; she finds Peanut, and gets final motivation to leave Wen Fu. She moves in with Jimmy. The

open civil war erupts between Nationalists and Communists in 1947. And, in the novel, Weili and Jimmy send Danru north out of Wen Fu's reach. But, Danru dies there in an epidemic. Weili is arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Similarly, Jimmy loses government job because of the civil war and he is ordered to leave China. Therefore, he goes to San Francisco. In 1948, the Communists denounce U.S. aid to Chiang Kai-shek. So, Chiang declares the martial law. On the other hand, Weili continues her term in prison. In San Francisco, Jimmy studies to become a Christian minister.

However, the Communists take control of Peking, Nanking, Shanghai, and Canton and proclaim the People's Republic of China in 1949. Chiang resigns as President. Then, Mao is elected as a Chairman, and Chou-En-lai is appointed Premier. The U.S. consul is also ejected. In our text, newly married to Kuang and expecting his baby, Hulan visits Weili in prison. Aunie Du arranges for Weili's release (April). Weili wires Jimmy, and he tells her to come to the U.S. Before leaving, she tricks Wen Fu into signing divorce papers. He tracks Weili down and rapes her at gunpoint. She escapes and leaves China next day to go to Jimmy in California, just five days before the Communists take over Shanghai and halt emigration.

In the year 1950, the Nationalist government flees to Formosa (Taiwan). The U.S. orders all consulates closed on Mainland China. The U.S. is on the verge of war with China. To avoid the danger of war, Winnie and Jimmy help Hulan and her family gets to America from Formosa in the novel. But in 1964, Jimmy Louie dies, and fourteen-year-old Pearl refuses to accept it. Together, Winnie and Helen open a flower shop in Chinatown, San Francisco in the same year. Then after, Pearl Louie marries Phill Brand in 1975. Finally, the novel ends in 1990. In this year, Auntie Du dies in a bus accident. The family of Winnie gathers for Bao-bao's engagement party

and Auntie Du's funeral. Winnie finally confides to Pearl the story of her life, and Pearl tells her mother about her multiple sclerosis.

Hence, we can claim the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* as the narration of Chinese history from 1910s to the 1990s. No fictional action is aloof from the real historical events. Bella Adams, a critic of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, also accepts the fact that the novel faces the intervention of history. In her essay "Representing History in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*", she writes:

A phenomenalist response to *The Kitchen God's Wife* understands it as representing a particular period in world history, most notably Japan's illegal occupation of China during the 1930s and the 1940s. More specifically, Tan's novel charts the movement of the Japanese military from Shanghai to Nanking, along with its bombing raids on so-called "safe place[s] . . . almost to the edge of China. China's transformation from dynasty to republic(s) is also discussed, as are the internal conflicts that both preceded and succeeded the Sino-Japanese War.

(11)

Like other critics, Adams also repeats the same fact about China that it was invaded by Japanese military force during 1930s and 40s. Along with advancing historical knowledge about the Sino-Japanese War, *The Kitchen God's Wife* is valuable on an ethico-political front. Extermination, together with exclusion from history by Japanese ultranationalists, ensures that these Chinese "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Subaltern, 276-77). Arguably, *The Kitchen God's Wife* takes up this ethico-political task in defiance of Japan's claim that the 'Rape of Nanking' never happened. *The Kitchen God's Wife* lends itself to an unknown, if not a forgotten, history, which includes the rape of Nanking by Japanese:

Raped old women, married woman, and little girls, taking turns with them, over and over again. Sliced them open with a sword when they were all used up. Cut off their fingers to take their rings. Shot all the little sons, no more generations. Raped ten thousand, chopped down twenty of thirty thousand, a number that is no longer a number, no longer people. (295)

The target of this event perhaps owes more to current intervention by Chinese and Chinese American scholars, historians, writers, artists, and computer hackers into the debate about Japan's worst wartime atrocity than it does to a reading of *The Kitchen God's Wife*. This is because Tan's novel does not seem to accord special status to the Rape of Nanking; in slightly more than one page "we learn. . . the news about Nanking" (294). This apparently insubstantial account raises the problem of Chinese history functioning as little more than a "backdrop" (Wong 200). The relegation of the Rape of Nanking to backdrop demands criticism because it inadvertently contributes to the second rape. As brief as *The Kitchen God's Wife* is on what happened in Nanking, this does not necessarily entail the displacement of larger historical issues in accordance with a Cold War ideology that effectively sanctioned holocaust denial. This ideology required the forgetting of Japanese atrocities, a forgetting that the Chinese communist government also perpetrated by isolating itself from the international community, so that the West and its new militaristic and politico-economic ally, Japan, could "better challenge communism in Asia" (Chang 182). It is possible to understand the brevity of the Rape of Nanking in *The Kitchen God's Wife* apart from Japanese, Cold war, and Orientalist versions of Chinese history. The novel as obscuring Chinese history in terms that are ultimately compatible with Orientalism is forcefully argued by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong in "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the

Amy Tan Phenomenon." It is her contention that relegating Chinese history to backdrop "obscures the role of the West in causing the very historical catastrophes" (199) featured in Tan's novel. Yet, Wong obscures *The Kitchen God's Wife* because she leaves unacknowledged its mention of the West's part in enabling Japan's occupation of China. For example, Britain's closure of the Burma Road ensured that the supplies needed to resist the Japanese were unavailable to the Chinese:

And the Americans were just as bad. One day they were bragging how they were our good friends-Our Chinese pals, they said. . . . But the next day we heard the American companies were doing a big business with the Japanese, selling them gasoline and metal for airplanes-the same ones that were dropping bombs all over china. (360)

The fact that *The Kitchen God's Wife* makes explicit reference to the conduct of both the British and Americans during the Sino-Japanese War does implicate West in China's historical catastrophes.

Along with the historical intervention, there is the intervention of culture, autobiography and religion too. Tan has used multiple myths, which remind readers of her cultural background. New historical reading of the novel reveals out those myths as the backbone of a literary creation. For example, Tan narrates a myth regarding the Kitchen God through the mouth of Weili. Weili narrates, "In China long time ago . . . , there was a rich farmer named Zhang, such a lucky man. Fish jumped in his river, pigs grazed his land, ducks flew around his yard as thick as clouds. And that was because he was blessed with a hardworking wife named Guo" . . . (59). Similarly, Tan has used many cultural terms in her novel. Terms like "taonan", "Ding-ngin", "Yangseli" are frequently used. To take an evidence, Weili says, "Both hands moved quickly up and down my legs, and I cried in front of everyone, "Yangseli" which in

common Mandarin means "itching to death"" (74)! New historicism believes that influence of the culture of a writer in his/her text is obvious. So, we take it very commonly. Not only that, a text cannot be located in a vacuum; it should be set in a particular location. And, according to new historicism, those locations are real and worldly. To support this new historical conception, we can cite various examples of the real places from this text. Weili says:

That day we also went to all the places where the best things in the world could be found. To Zhejiang Road, where she said they made the best French-style leather shoes; she did not buy. To Chenghuang Miao, where she said they sold a beauty tonic of crushed pearls. She let me put some on my cheeks, but, she did not buy this either. To Bubbling Well Rod, where she bought me the best American ice cream sundae; she did not eat any; told me it was "too messy, too sweet." To Foochow Road, where, she said you could buy any kind of book, any kind of newspaper, Chinese and foreign too. And there she did buy something, a newspaper, although I do not know what it was exactly, since I could not read. (111)

In this extract, the name of places like Zhejiang Road, Chenghuang Miao and Foochow Road are the real places of China. This impossibility of avoiding real places in a fictional work strengthens the new historical notion that a text is historical.

To wrap up, Weili narrates the Chinese history during the period of Sino-Japanese war. She gives the account of Chinese people who bravely fought for their nation. Moreover, she tells her own experiences during the war. Wen Fu, her husband, travels places to places to fight with Japanese army and Weili follows him. She talks about the traditional Confucian culture of China. There can be found many cultural

terms like Taonan, Yangseli, Ding-ngin etc., which remind readers about Chinese cultural practices. In addition, Chinese history can be found being reflected in characters. Weili mentions about Chiang Kai Sek, his government and his coalition with Communists to fight against Japanese invasion. She also narrates about the Japanese attack in Chinese places like Manchuria, Kuomintang, Shanghai and Shantung. In the same way, autobiographical elements have also furnished the novel. Weili is parallel with Tan's own mother, whereas, Pearl, the daughter of Weili, resembles Amy Tan herself. Therefore, the record of Japan's invasion of China, China's involvement in the Second World War, the real description of the suffering of Chinese people during the war, the mentioning of the names of real places and real people, the influence of Chinese culture help the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* in representing history.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Historico-politico-cultural study of Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* proves the fact that a literary text cannot be separated from history, culture, politics and autobiography. Contextual, cultural, social, religious and autobiographical implications are the backbone of literature. The multiple evidences from this novel stress the same truth. In the novel, Pearl resembles the author herself. Whatever Pearl says is the saying of Amy Tan. Similarly, Weili resembles Tan's own real mother. In fact, Tan's mother had got a lot of suffering from her abusive husband in China. That's why, she had eloped with an American man, of whom, Tan is the fourth child. Even in the fiction, Weili is a Chinese woman who gets a lot of suffering from her own abusive husband Wen Fu. Wen Fu treats her negatively. He gives mental and physical tortures to Weili. Wen Fu forces beats her, orders her to do nonsense activities and also abuses her sexually. Though Wen Fu is Weili's own husband, she, sometimes, desires the death of him. Because of the extreme torturing, Weili leaves Wen Fu and elopes with an American man Jimmy Louie. Pearl is the fourth child of Weili just like Amy Tan.

Moreover, new historical reading of the novel restates that history is the backbone for literature. *The Kitchen God's Wife*, obviously, is a work of art. It is an imaginary construct. Even in this imaginary construction, history seems to have dominant position. Whatever Weili narrates, that is the real past of China. She remembers the Sino-Japanese war of 1937 to 1945 and its effect on Chinese people. She tells about the suffering of common people during that time. She even recounts the protest of Chinese people against the Japanese invasion. Similarly, she gives the true account of America's participation in war after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. Actually, an American general Claire Chennault had come to China to give pilot

training for Chinese men after his retirement from American Army. It was a historical fact. Even in this novel, this fact is recorded. Wen Fu, the husband of Weili, takes training under Claire Chennault. This mixture of history and fiction forces the common readers to conclude that history and literature are inseparable.

In the same way, Weili describes the true suffering of Chinese people during the war. Directly or indirectly, this whole novel is influenced by the Chinese history tentatively from 1910s to 1990s. In addition, Weili's narration of the conflict between communists and nationalists during 1950s, Chiang Kai Shek's conflict with communists and communist's taking over of China under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung hallucinate the Chinese history. While going through the pages of this novel, nobody feels that s/he is reading a fictional book. But readers feel as if they are turning on the pages of Chinese history.

Furthermore, *The Kitchen God's Wife* is also an amalgam of cultural artifacts. In the novel, there are many cultural terms, which introduce readers with the Chinese culture. Weili wants to go against the Confucian culture that teaches women to be docile and meek. Cultural terms like taonan, yangseli and ding-ngin remind readers about the Chinese cultural practices. Hence, this research on *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan proves the fact that literature is the manifestation of history, culture, religion and autobiography. In the same way, the revisiting of Chinese past from a doubly marginalized [from Westerners and the Chinese males] writer reveals the suppression of Chinese women during the Sino-Japanese war period. This fact is justified by the real depiction of Weili, who is terribly tortured by her own husband, Wen Fu and equally by the Japanese terror. Hence, this research, along with Amy Tan, has revisited the Chinese history by revealing out multiple marginalized aspects.

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