

**RATIONALITY, IDENTITY AND CHOICE:  
AN ETHICAL CRITICISM OF DR HAN SUYIN'S  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
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**2018**

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**RATIONALITY, IDENTITY AND CHOICE:  
AN ETHICAL CRITICISM OF DR HAN SUYIN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**ABSTRACT**

When China was completely closed to the Western world between during the Cold War, namely, 1947 to 1991, China-born Eurasian author and physician Dr Han Suyin, who became British citizen and Swiss resident, was among the few who were allowed to visit China. Though controversial, her autobiographical accounts regarding 20th century China was quite notable. Her reconstructed modern Chinese history pointed to the birthing of a “phoenix” namely, China, hinting on a new ethical order in East-West relations. Captured in her six-volume autobiography, namely *The Crippled Tree* series, the East-West conflicts also surfaced in the microcosm of Han Suyin’s family history as well as her own identity search. Autobiographies are traditionally understood as means of self-redemption or self-validation of the respective autobiographers. In the case of Dr Han Suyin, it was an epistemological means to her self-knowledge and self-assertion. Having rejected her maiden name Rosalie, Han Suyin learned later that she was to embrace her dual-ethnicity after all. The adoption of the Chinese pseudonym “Han Suyin” was one of her efforts to reconstruct her new identity. By revisiting the ethical issues in her family saga as well as the experience of the mixed-race individuals, Han Suyin went through the plethora of taboo, trauma, confusion, multiple ethical choices, plenty of dilemmas and a lifetime of soul-searching for a place where she could be home. The entire process of rejecting “Rosalie,” accepting “Rosalie” and thriving beyond “Rosalie” was, nonetheless, the best reflection of her mode of survival in a series of debatable ethical choices. Moreover, her choices were in stark difference when compared with the choices made by her siblings and her Eurasian peers. This thesis chiefly employs Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) in examining the various ethical dimensions in Han Suyin’s autobiographical series.

**Keywords:** Han Suyin, autobiography, ethical literary criticism, identity

***RATIONALITY, IDENTITY AND CHOICE:  
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**ABSTRAK**

Negara China melaksanakan Prinsip “Pintu Tertutup” dan tersisih dari politik antarabangsa dalam tempoh 1941-1991. Penulis dan doktor Eurasian terkenal Dr Han Suyin yang berasal dari Negara China tetapi menjadi warga British dan menetap di Switzerland, adalah antara segelintir kecil yang dibenarkan melawat negara asalnya pada dekad-dekad akhir waktu itu. Walaupun pandangan dalam autobiografi beliau mengundang banyak perbalahan, kisah beliau mengenai masyarakat dan suasana Negara China semasa abad ke-20 tetap disanjung. Selain menggunakan simbol burung “phoenix” yang berlahir semula untuk memberi gambaran perkembangan sejarah moden Cina, beliau juga mengesyorkan prinsip etika baru dalam hubungan Timur-Barat. Dalam siri autobiografi *The Crippled Tree* yang merangkumi enam buah (6) buku, beliau telah meneliti cerita keluarga beliau di samping proses menetapi jati diri. Penulis-penulis autobiografi biasanya memilih bentuk kesusasteraan ini sebagai cara penyelamatan dan penentuan diri. Dalam kes Dr Han Suyin, penulisan autobiografi menjadi cara beliau untuk mencapai pengetahuan diri dan menonjolkan ketampilan diri. Setelah menolak nama asalnya iaitu Rosalie, Han Suyin bernekad untuk menerima hakikat yang tidak dapat dialihkan, bahawa beliau adalah individu dengan dua keturunan. Sementara itu, beliau berusaha menukar jati diri beliau dengan pilihan-pilihan yang sukar. Antaranya, penggunaan nama samaran “Han Suyin” merupakan salah satu cara beliau untuk membina jati diri baru. Semasa menceritakan kisah-kisah kaum kerabat beliau dan individu-individu berketurunan dwi-ras, Han Suyin juga menghadapi pelbagai isu seperti pantang larang masyarakat, trauma, kekeliruan, pilihan etika (*ethical choice*), dilema dan pencarian tanah air beliau. Sesungguhnya, Han Suyin telah menolak “Rosalie,” kemudian menerima semula “Rosalie,” malah melangkah depan bersama “Rosalie” dengan jati diri baru menunjukkan upaya kemandirian beliau, bahkan pilihan-pilihan beliau berlainan dengan individu Eurasian lagi. Teori Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) digunakan dalam tesis ini untuk meneliti pelbagai isu dan dimensi etika yang dipaparkan dalam autobiografi Han Suyin.

**Kata kunci:** Han Suyin, autobiografi, kritik etika (*ethical literature criticism*), identiti

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Soli Deo Gloria.

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## ROMANISATION OF THE CHINESE CHARACTERS

All romanisations in this thesis are applied according to the *Pinyin* System, which was officially adopted in 1979. Throughout the thesis, three forms of romanisations might be detected:

### (a) **Total *Pinyin*:**

For example, “Mao Zedong;” “Chengdu;” “*yang guizi* (foreign devils);” etc.

Besides the text of the thesis, a few references that were only available in Chinese were presented in English along with their original Chinese title [using the *Pinyin* system in square brackets.] For example,

Ren, Yiming and Qu Shijing. (2003). *A Study of Post-colonialism in English Literature* [Yingyu Houzhimingdi Wenxue Yanjiu] Shanghai: Shanghai Yiwu Chubanshe.

### (b) **Partial *Pinyin*:**

For example, “*Chialing* River;” “Uncle *Gao*;” “Emperor Qian Long;” etc.

This type of translation would maintain all proper nouns in partial *Pinyin* alongside their modifiers.

### (c) **Non-romanisation / Direct translation:**

For example, “George Son of Spring (子春);” “Heart of Ice (冰心);” “Little Bottle (Deng Xiaoping);” “River Elegy (河殇);” etc.

This type of translation did not employ the *Pinyin* system, but chose to use an equivalent of the noun or compound noun in English.

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- BS* : *Birdless Summer*
- CNKI : Chinese Knowledge Resource Integrated Database
- CT* : *The Crippled Tree*
- e.g. : (Latin) *exempli gratia*; meaning, “for example”
- ELC : Ethical Literary Criticism
- ed. : “edited by”
- eds. al. : “edited by” (multiple editors)
- et. al. : (Latin) *et alii*; meaning, “and others”
- FLC : Feminist Literary Criticism
- HTD* : *My House Has Two Doors*
- IAELC : International Association of Ethical Literary Criticism
- ibid. : (Latin) *ibidem*; meaning, “in the same place” – to indicate that the reference is from the same source as a previous reference.
- i.e. : (Latin) *id est*; meaning, “that is”
- ISELC : International Symposium of Ethical Literary Criticism
- MF* : *A Mortal Flower*
- Op cit. : (Latin) *opere citato*; meaning, “in the work cited” – to indicate that the reference is cited elsewhere in the body of text, but not the most recent citation.
- PCC : Post-Colonial Criticism
- PH* : *Phoenix Harvest*
- RRC : Reader-response Criticism
- Trans. : “translated by”
- WMS* : *Wind In My Sleeve*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In an age when one habitually frowns on any reference to history, and has little or no understanding of values of times of the past, this thesis refers back with great intention to a notable autobiographical series of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely Dr Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* series. History is a mirror of human society. Sincere autobiographical writings of an earnest autobiographer – however subjective his or her perceptive might be, often offer useful lenses to the problems in the past and provide hindsight to subsequent human efforts or development since then. In such, tracking back times and values of the past actually give the readers a yardstick to measure the heights and depths of human civilisation today. Of the many literary criticism methods, this thesis leans on the Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) as one of the major thrust in the theory of literary critiques. As such, the writer of this thesis is obvious in her aims to employ a reading that objectively examines people, events and the literature via the *ethics* of the era of its setting, so as to yield values for today's readership with reference to values derived from the historical point or setting of the literature.

During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, moral philosophers in the West such as Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty, as well as literature critics like S. L. Goldberg, Wayne C. Booth, David Parker and his colleagues had already been campaigning for a resurgence of ethics in literary criticism during the last two decades of the 20th century. One may notice an “ethical turn” in literary studies in the 1980s with publications such as J. Hillis Miller's (1987) *The Ethics Of Reading* and Wayne Booth's (1988) *The Company We Keep: The Ethics of Fiction* gaining wide attention from among the critics (Yang, 2016, p. 34). Besides, Martha Nussbaum's (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck & Ethics In Greek Tragedy & Philosophy* had also added to the turn of the tides of literary criticism. David Parker's (1994) monograph *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* drew

attention to “the virtual absence of explicit ethical interest in contemporary literary discourse,” particularly due to the damage of the decade-old poststructuralist theory at the time (pp. 4, 32, 195). However, it was not entirely clear whether the ends of some of these propositions were gearing towards philosophical “ethical criticism” or literature per se. Besides, the generalisation of the “ethical interest” made it hard for one to differentiate whether the epoch was leaning more towards the Platonian moral criticism, or the Aristotelian school of literary criticism.

To discern, Platonic moral criticism rejected Homer’s depiction of the anthropomorphic gods. According to him, deity should not err. Thus, wicked gods should never appear in literature. Plato therefore disapproved of free expressions of moral ideas in literature as he could not see the demarcation between the simulated literary world and the real world. Contrary to Plato’s moralism, Aristotle viewed the literary world apart from the real world. He allowed a certain literary world to exist under its unique simulated setting. Aristotle’s ethical criticism was thus, closer to the nature of literature, as it paid attention to the historical and literary context of the literature in view (Nie, 2012, p. 52).

In 2004, Professor Nie Zhenzhao presented a preliminary proposition for ELC, emphasising on an approach that was quite akin to the Aristotle’s ethical criticism. This approach took into consideration of the ethical environment of the literary world, making observations and analyses on the ethical lines and knots that were embedded in a literature. The key areas of discussion were concerning the ethical dilemma of the characters, ethical order or disorder in the story, the corresponding ethical judgment and choices of the characters in the narrative. To recall, in 2010, the ELC approach proposed by Nie took on a firm grounding when there were careful delineations of its key terms. In 1992, he published his landmark monograph, entitled *Thomas Hardy: A*

*Study of His Novels*, which paved the way for his future direction in ethical literary studies. For Nie, the unique disposition of Hardy did not mark him as a pessimist, but rather a “reflective moralist and idealist” who warned his contemporaries against their moral degradation at the turn of the century (Yang, 2016, p. 34).

Nie (2014, p. 3) defined the ELC as “a critical theory that reads, analyses and interprets literature from the perspective of ethics so as to identify the ethical nature and moral teaching function (of literature per se).”<sup>1</sup> Due to the productive and quality works of Nie and his colleagues, ELC has once and again created a little wave of resurgence of ethics-foci in literary criticism, first in China, then among the international circles of literary critiques. In 2012, the International Association of Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC) was officially established. According to Juri Talvet (2014), the aim of the IAELC was:

...to initiate a *new* trend of international literary scholarship that would form a certain counterweight to Western literary studies, which at least since the last quarter of the 20th century have indeed oscillated between two extremes: on the one hand, linguistic-formalistic research (including narratology, cognitivism, language philosophy applied to literature, etc.) and, on the other hand, sociological approaches (discourses on power relations, postcolonial scholarship, gender studies, etc.) (pp. 17-21).

After a decade of proposition of ELC with its unique Chinese slant by Nie, the adherents of the criticism method had been gaining in number internationally. As Nie and his colleagues organised an annual conference whereby hundreds of ELC proponents around the world meet and sharpen their saws, critiques that employ ELC

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<sup>1</sup> The words in brackets were my addition for emphasis purposes. The same practice applies through all quotations of this thesis.

were starting to make their presence in international journals. To list, ELC has been featured in China-based *Foreign Literature Studies*, Germany-based *Arcadia*, and Taiwanese *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*. American-based *Comparative Literature and Culture* had confirmed on publishing a special issue on ELC by end of 2015. Even London-based *Times Literary Supplement* took notice of the method and practice of ELC in its July 2015 issue. The writer of this thesis noticed that since the establishment of IAELC in 2012, the Chinese Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI) had also witnessed the blossoming of at least 533 post-graduate thesis and journal articles, which engaged ELC in their literary critique exercises.<sup>2</sup>

Once the ELC had taken shape, it was said to be uniquely Chinese. There were probably a few legitimate justifications for such a claim. First, Chinese civilisation was stemmed from *ethics* since its onset. It was taught in Chinese classical texts that human beings were distinguished from animals due to man's *ethical* consciousness. In a letter that Confucian scholar Zhu Yixin wrote to Kang Youwei, it was reinstated that ethical consciousness existed before the substance; and that the "consciousness" marked the difference between a man as compared to a dog or a cow (Guo & Wu, 2003, p.26). Besides, Zhang Zhidong, who was also known as "the Last Confucian Officer," stated that, "The essence of five major human relationships and the hundred principles (of humans) were passed on for thousands of years, and there was no dispute about it. A sage is undoubtedly a sage; and China is undoubtedly China because of this (namely, *ethics*)" (ibid).

Next, it was due to the exhaustion of literary theories of the West that the ELC gradually gained prominence among literary critiques in China. If Terry Eagleton

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<sup>2</sup> This statistics was taken on 15 March 2017.

(2003)'s *After Theory* had indeed been true, "the golden age of cultural theory" would have been long past, since there were no new contributors to literary critical theories apart from the old-timers such as that of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jurgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. (Eagleton, 2013, p. 1) Chinese scholar Shang Biwu echoed on Eagleton's proposition and quoted that "'Theory' was over, and we thus return to the pre-theoretical phase, and subject to disappointment." (2014, p. 28) But in the gap of the borrowings of Western literary criticism approaches, Nie's ELC bridged against "the unnatural gulfs between critical theory and literary criticism on the one hand, and elaborating the frameworks, objectives of this critical approach as well as the ethical tradition of literature on the other hand." ELC emerged as a rather commendable approach for the in-depth reading of a literature. Hence, ELC is, though not an entirely new idea, but definitely a plausible new methodology.

Narrative is inseparable from ethics. Without ethical approach to questions of life, the value of aesthetics is compromised. By employing ELC in the study of Han Suyin's autobiographical series, this thesis seeks to bridge against the scarcity of ethical criticism in the study of autobiographies in general, and a near absence of such approach in the study of 20<sup>th</sup> century author Han Suyin in particular. In this thesis, one would discover the attempts to untie the entangled ethical lines and ethical knots in Han Suyin's autobiography, so as to discern her rationality, and the correlation between her ethical consciousness, ethical identity and ethical choices.

## 1.1 Research Background

The purpose of literary criticism is to discover the X factor, namely the secret that makes certain literature timeless and having the worldmaking power. Han Suyin's autobiographical series was chosen as the subject of this criticism due to a few reasons: First, Han Suyin's *insider perspective* regarding China's self-determination in the national identity and formation of modern-day political milieu: Although not the first author to bridge against the gap of the East-West communication during the Cold War era (1947-1991), Han Suyin's autobiographical series seems capable of giving a perspective regarding China's modern political development in comparison to, for example, the literature of the same theme by Nobel laureate Pearl S Buck who "recognized her place in China's past but not in China's present," especially after she left China due to the Boxer uprising. (Han, 1972, p. 231) Han Suyin's ability to articulate her thoughts like a Chinese and from the perspective of locals was partially due to her paternal tie – her father was Chinese. She was also born and raised in China.

Second, *objectivity in subjectivity*: In comparison to Western correspondents who dwelt in China and wrote extensively about the country such as Edgar Snow, Felix Greene, Peter Fleming and Joseph Alsop, Han Suyin seemed to be able to provide a more complete picture of the process of radicalisation and revolution in China. Though a sympathiser of the Red Army, Han Suyin depicted the story from both the Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong's camps.<sup>3</sup> Her reflections over the emotional and physical predicaments of the intellectuals and the emergent "thinking generation" in comparison

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<sup>3</sup> Due to Han Suyin's all-encompassing presentation of all that she had observed and made judgement, her arguments could be quite confusing at times. Simon Leys finds Han inconsistent, that she could be "loyal to Chiang Kai-shek and then to Mao Zedong." He also disagreed that Han could use the difficulty to obtain "definite, hard-core information on what had happened" during that time as an excuse. For details, kindly refer to S. Leys (1980), "The Double Vision of Han Suyin: On the Character of a Trimmer" in *Quadrant*, 24(11), pp. 3-8.

to what was known as the “lost generation” were rather objective in perspective.<sup>4</sup> Han Suyin was sensitive enough to detect the can-do spirit demonstrated by the affected generation who chose not to be “permanently crippled in mind,” but chose to be courageous in moving on from the damaging old ways using their renewed thinking and mental power. It was the people’s power -- a power released by the Marxists; a power that had surfaced occasionally but never triumphed during the ancient dynasties of China. Han Suyin also reported on the “healthy skepticism” of these ones who on one hand were most optimistic about their efforts, e.g., “...In ten years we may have made up our losses, if all goes well;” but could not be entirely sure of what the future entails: “But if one asks these youths what they believe in, they grin and say, ‘We wait and see.’” (Han, 1985, p. 303) Besides, her more objective position on China had enabled her to win over Joseph Alsop during a debate on China matters in a television programme in 1959.

Third, the voice of *humanity and altruism* in changing times: A student of Yenching University, Han Suyin inherited the intellectual legacy of her alma mater but filtered out the agenda of American educators. As observed by Han Suyin, leading American educators in Yenching such as John Leighton Stuart failed to encourage “more understanding between America and China, but (merely gear) towards the hardline policies pursued by the United States and stigmatised by more thoughtful Americans since.” (Han, 1972a, p. 230) Hence, Han Suyin chose to write from the perspective of the local Chinese, identifying herself as one of them even after she migrated and resided in other countries.

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<sup>4</sup> Kindly refer the terms to Han Suyin (1985), *Phoenix Harvest*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Pub, p. 303. The “lost generation” was mentioned also in pp. 104, 250. The “thinking generation” was also mentioned in p. 304.

Conformity and normalisation would be the expectation of any given society towards those who are of the minorities among them. However, for China-born Eurasian physician and author Dr Han Suyin, genuine acceptance of the sideliners and the under-developed should be one of the main commitments in the shaping of the modern global village. Learning from the history of the two World Wars, as well as the civil wars and policy changes in China, Han Suyin had always felt that the people of China should be relieved from the overwhelming famine and poverty – the by-products of warfare. She firmly believed that despite of hazardous political mistakes, if there was a will to rebuild the nation, a promising future could be secured.

A consultant on China appointed by the World Health Organization (WHO), Han Suyin depicted how detrimental the predicaments caused by human disasters were. Unlike natural disasters, human disasters were the worst sufferings of all. In fact, a majority of man's problems were caused by the vices and darkness of human's wicked primitive desires. Among the many Chinese literature types, Han Suyin paid special attention to the "literature of the wounded" (Han, 1992, pp. 32-33) that was produced soon after the death of Premier Mao in the 1970s, depicting the tragic experiences of the cadres and intellectuals during the rule of the Gang of Four. For some conservative ones and those who could not bear to revisit the pains of the Cultural Revolution, minute descriptions of the personal woes of the affected ones were judged as "narcissism" or "obsessive navel cult." But for Han Suyin, such cries of the "wounded" were rather acceptable, for the afflicted needed an outlet to tell of their miseries, without which the process "catharsis" or a much needed breaking down of reticence would not be possible. In her rather diasporic-in-nature writings, Han Suyin had her own woundedness to cry about. Her six-volume autobiography was in its entirety, a record of her pilgrimage of acquiring self-acceptance, achieving inner peace and reconstructing herself from the pit of displacement during those long, trying decades. At the same time, it was also a

condensed history of modern China from the account of Han Suyin. To certain extent, Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* autobiography series adds to the corpus of the "literature of reflection" that emerged in China during the 80-ies and beyond.

## 1.2 Research Question

The research question of this thesis is, "What amounts to Han Suyin's *rationality* in embracing her Chineseness and Communism in China during the Cold War era, bearing in mind that her *ethical choices* were in stark difference than others who shared the same *ethical identity* with her."

In the opinion of the writer of this thesis, one of the overarching themes of rationality in Han Suyin's autobiography seems to be the issue of *legitimacy*. In fact, "legitimacy" should be included as one of the key terms in ELC. Nonetheless, it is a delicate terminology. Social-politically, questions regarding the criteria or yardstick to determine *legitimacy* have always existed. Besides, one may also question the legitimacy of the authority that determines the demarcation between the legitimate and the illegitimate on a subject matter. Politically, *legitimacy* is defined as:

a moral bond between the citizen and the state: to the degree that this bond exists, most members of the polity see their political institutions as morally proper for their society and they feel that there is an obligation to obey the incumbents of those institutions. (Busch, 1974, p. 1)

Socially and culturally, legitimacy is akin to the idea of warranted practices such as "norm" or "custom," which defines the boundaries of one's conduct and choices in a given community. Legitimacy could be affirmed when a person or a matter had been validated by members of his or her community. On the other hand, *illegitimacy* occurs

when a person or a matter violates the acceptable order of his or her community. When most individuals in the community feel morally obligated to comply with a certain convention or a body of legitimacy, they will define and enforce their own sets of social imperatives. In doing so, some would assume the role of custodians of the shared cultures and values, thriving hard to empower certain codes of behaviour among members of the community. Besides, the entire community of legitimacy will knowingly or unknowingly form social stigmas against the discriminated persons. When there are cases of taboo-breaking or illegitimate practices, the misfits may face any form of punishment ranging from physical to emotional sanctioned by the entire community.

Discrimination, hatred and rejection are common reactions against an individual who has accidentally or deliberately challenged the common way of life in his or her community. For instance, during the pre-World War era, single women or the “spinsters” were the odd ones who faced embarrassing social antagonism. Yet another example is the Anti-miscegenation Laws that were not officially executed, but morally and logically supported in order to warn violators throughout the United States before 1967. In extreme cases, people with identities or conducts that are clashing with the community may even face threats of death by their opponents in power.

The history of man is unfortunately filled with such tragedies. Examples include the death decrees issued by Tokugawa Shogunate during the 17<sup>th</sup> century against a sizeable Japanese community that chose to be Christians despite the fact that their lives were at stake, the despicable killings of the African-Americans by the Ku Klux Klan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and many other atrocities. In doing so, the custodians of cultures and society took the issues of legitimacy and justice into their own hands. They openly persecuted the convicted, and were altogether impetuous in committing crimes that they could easily dismiss with their own justifiable arguments. The most logical defence they

had would be the legitimacy of their acts in maintaining or restoring the social order that had always been so.

However, the perception and rightful definition of legitimacy could also be *relative*. While the custodians of a culture had judged that a certain practice or behavioural pattern was illegitimate, the custodian of another culture might have no problem with the same sets of practices or behaviours. For example, the Westerners normally do not observe ancestral worship. In China, however, before the introduction of Christianity and later, Communism, the ritualistic Chinese people would consider a person unfilial if they did not offer prayers with incense at their ancestral altars. Another example, incest might be a legitimate practice in a certain community, but a taboo in most parts of the world.

While the yardstick of legitimacy in general, is determined and measured by one's community; in Han Suyin's case, her subjective convictions in the legitimacy of her ethical search for self-identity and self-asserted choices were the key factors to her survival story. She was able to thrive through adversities against Eurasians in a very troubling time in China during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An in-depth textual examination on her rationality, identity and choice; and their correlation with ethics would yield useful reflections about human life and manner of life, the greatest gains from literary study.

At the individual level, Han Suyin experienced different issues related to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of her very existence, her *raison d'être* as a Eurasian woman. Detailing the murders of her family chef and the death of her second brother in her autobiographies, Han Suyin was actually asking questions of legitimacy, i.e., Why should the "half-brats" be treated like non-humans? Why couldn't they be accepted by their neighbours at their own birth place? Why would a Eurasian baby be denied of

medical attention like other White babies? Culturally and physically, where would their roots be?

At the national and international level, Han Suyin made a case for the legitimate rise of Communist China, supported her arguments with reports of the staunching will of the Chinese people in welcoming the Red Armies and resenting the Kuomintang generals. Han Suyin showed that famine, poverty and the destructions caused by the self-seeking warlords had continually put the country asunder. With many accounts from the lips of her interviewees, Han Suyin presented why the locals supported the Reds despite the political sanctions by the international powers. The self-energising power of the Chinese people paved ways for the promising future of their nation. Between those lines of her autobiographies, Han Suyin popped her question, i.e., was it illegitimate for a people to determine the trajectory of their own modernisation?

Debates regarding whether modern China was on the right or wrong side of history may continue. The discrimination of the “pure blood” against the half-brats – people like Han Suyin – may persist. Han Suyin’s autobiographies, however, point valiantly to the key of survival to diffuse one’s experience of feeling like being hung on a perpetual swinging pendulum: At a time when the *ethical order* of the world is perverse and confused, check one’s *ethical consciousness*, act with *rationality*.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The overall objective of this thesis is to observe, analyse and expound Han Suyin’s *rationality*, or more specifically, her *ethical consciousness* and its correlation with her *ethical identity* and *ethical choices* during an era of intense East-West conflicts, coupled with contesting socio-political ideologies both in China and at the international superpower levels.

More precisely, the objectives of this research are:

- (a) To trace Han Suyin's *rationality* in *The Crippled Tree* series which encompassed the study of her *ethical consciousness* and issue of *legitimacy*;
- (b) To examine what construed Han Suyin's self-knowledge and *ethical identity*;
- (c) To expound how legitimacy was relatively defined and relevant for the respective stakeholders in making *ethical choices* in the world of Han Suyin's autobiography;
- (d) To ascertain the usefulness of ELC in revealing the rationale of man's behaviour in any literature, especially in the context where there was no clear-cut solution to man's problems in a plethora of ethical scenarios.

#### **1.4 Significance of Research**

This research seeks to showcase and leave considerable significance with both the academia as well as the general, non-academic readership. It is confidently said so because 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of radical changes, which marked a century of destructions and reconstructions due to two world wars, ideological clashes, competitions and compromises of the world's superpowers, independent of the colonial subjects, the thriving nationalism movements of the third world countries, and so on.

First, this research will shed light on the benefits of *consulted* autobiography reading. Autobiography introduces one to the autobiographer's own account of himself or herself, along with memories of people and events during his or her time. Autobiographies over the centuries were produced with different intentions, and served different functions. While a reader may make personal connections with the people or events described in an autobiography, or even identifies with the autobiographer at certain points, the observations from the commentaries of autobiographies served as

relevant reminders to keen readers so that their reading experience would be more consulted. Sub-section #1.6.3 of this chapter provides a brief literature review of critiques on autobiographies for further references. It will also show any serious readers what autobiographies could offer, provided that the readers are more informed about the types and functions of autobiographies.

Second, this research will be one of the very few in-depth academic studies on Dr Han Suyin. Han Suyin as a high profile international character, was frequently interviewed and featured by the media. There are many press articles and radio interview records of Han Suyin in the worldwide web. However, solid research articles on Han Suyin are rare. Graduate or post-graduate thesis on her are even fewer. It was interesting that Anglo-American researchers defined Han Suyin as a writer with a cause for the marginalized or the minorities; while Mainland Chinese researchers find her simply a female professional with a heart for making peace between the East-West community. This article will point out a new dimension of the study of Han Suyin, namely her subjectivity on the notion of consciousness and legitimacy, giving attention to ethics, ethical environment and one's subjective use of one's rational will, which are but all key terms of the ELC. Sub-section #1.6.2 of this chapter provides a brief literature review of critiques on Han Suyin, and related research findings including the proposal of the writer of this thesis regarding engaging ELC in the study of Han Suyin's autobiography.

Third, this research will be one of the few literary critique works that employs ELC. At the same time, it also evaluates the validity and practicality of the critical methodology. Stemming from the conceptual framework that was vaguely defined "ethical criticism" by moral philosophers in the 1980s, Nie (2012) perceived the potential of a literary critique methodology named Ethical Literary Criticism. Since

2004, Nie spent about a decade to develop the theoretical framework, key terms and technical applications in selected literary works such as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Italo Calvino's *The Cloven Viscount*, Wu Cheng En's *Journey to the West* and so forth. (pp. 17-32) Besides, he also invited like-minded researchers and scholars to experiment on the application of the methodology into a wider selection of literature, both in the East and in the West. The fundamental concern of the ELC is the ethics of the aesthetics. As Nie purported, if there were no considerable ethical or *didactic* values in a piece of literature, the aesthetics of the work would be compromised and not grounded. Hence, the introduction and application of ELC in this research work shall be one of the best litmus tests of how rich and deep ELC as a method could offer critiques of literature by diving into the subjective world of Han Suyin's extensive six-volume autobiography.

Lastly, the writer of this thesis echoes ELC to suggest that *ethics* and ethical relationships are the core of a literary work and the creative process that produces it. Subsequently, *humanity* is perceived as the essence of any literature of timeless values. This thesis presents and concludes Han Suyin's autobiography as showcasing man as ethical beings, endowed with the rational mind to differentiate and choose between behaving ethically or unethically towards each other. Using Han Suyin's *rationality*, *ethical identity* and *ethical choice* as the foci of the study, the writer of the thesis hopes to showcase that a person with reasonable ethical consciousness and wise use of his or her rational will may assert higher strength in diffusing life's adversities, weed out bitterness and seek no revenge against those who had violated him or her. Not repaying evil for evil, Han Suyin offered her life services for the welfare of all in China, even though some might have resented her and caused harm to her family. The best of humanity was showcased both in her altruistic vision for a more integrated world, as well as her sacrificial actions in fighting poverty and health issues in Asia.

## 1.5 Limitations

A research is limited by its approach and scope of study. Of all other possible authors, the researcher has chosen to conduct a thorough textual study on Han Suyin's autobiographies in order to dive into issues of Han Suyin's *consciousness* in the identification of herself and her ethical choices. The rationale of making such choice for this thesis is delineated in #1.1. Also, as explained in #1.3, the research methodology of this thesis will lean heavily on the ELC.

This research is limited within the parameters of *textual analysis* as it is not possible for the researcher to verify any assumptions and conclusions via personal interviews with Dr Han Suyin before she breathed her last in 2012. Thus, the findings of this thesis will be confined to the meaning of the text derived via literary criticism. The aim of the research will be in line with that of literary criticism, that is, to discover the values of its literary content for the benefit of readers. The data will be derived from the texts and inter-textuality. The arguments are made in accordance with the logical conclusions from detectible ethical knots and lines in the literature. This research is thus different from the data collected via Social Research Method that is conducted by, for instance Zhang Xinghong, editor of *Lianhe Zaobao Supplement*, who was able to conduct personal interviews with Dr Han Suyin for her MA thesis entitled "Han Suyin and Malaya." Zhang also published her research in a book of the same title.<sup>5</sup>

As the ELC is relatively new in use, there is still room for perfection of the methodology. Hence, this thesis is potentially challenged by other critics due to a few necessary refinements in Nie's formulation of the theoretical framework of ELC. Critics

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<sup>5</sup> Singaporean researcher Zhang Xinghong managed to include data from her personal interview sessions with Dr Han Suyin in her MA thesis, entitled "Han Suyin in Malaya." In 2012, Zhang travelled to Lausanne and paid daily visits to Han's residence in Switzerland in order to conduct interview sessions with Han. See "Discovering Han Suyin in Malaya," NTU Alumni News, retrieved on 1 February 2017, <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/Alumni/news/Documents/InaZhang.pdf>.

will quickly learn that in Nie's articulation of his theory, the pre-assumption that the human species evolved from the apes was made without a single doubt. Upon this pre-assumption, Nie built another pre-assumption that in the evolution process of man as a species, there was a phase of *ethical selection*, which was the second stage following man's initial stage of *natural or biological selection*. He said, "*natural selection* allowed human beings to evolve from apes physically." Besides, Nie also hinted on the possibility of humans regressing back to animals, in both behavioural and mental aspects. There is therefore a need for man's *ethical selection*, without which man could not be distinguished from animals spiritually. Thus, borrowing and developing from the terminology of Darwinism, Nie firmly believes that there had been a phase of *ethical selection* for human civilisation to evolve.

While fully endorsing ELC's core terms *animal factor*, *human factor*, *natural will* and *rational will*, the writer of this thesis begs to differ from Nie, as there is no need to insert sociological pre-assumptions into literary theory. In the opinion of the writer, the ELC core terms are best taken *metaphorically*, not literally. The mixing of Darwinian-Spencer's sociological theory into a literary criticism is confusing, not convincing, and invites further unnecessary queries for any empirical support for the assumption regarding the evolution of man. Also, the application of ELC need not be limited to the analysis of rationality versus savagery, dissecting only the problems of incest, murder and regressive human behaviours in the literary world. Without the contestable connection of literary theory with the Darwinian-Spencer's sociological ideas, the ELC would still be rather solid as a method. Its emphasis on ethics-foci, which is akin to the Aristotelian approach, could still yield deep insights when one examines a text regarding the nature of man. Besides, the "a priori" epistemology in the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism, especially of Mencius, that the essence of human beings are *ethical*, marking man as *ethical beings* in contrast with the beasts or the animals,

could still be well-maintained without any unnecessary reference to the idea of evolution. Hence, the ELC is still one of the better approaches to examine the process of *ethical reconstruction* in Han Suyin's extensive six-volume autobiographical series, despite its necessary refinements.

Lastly, it is notable that the research findings may not be generalized to all. Also, the thesis would not be able to answer every question regarding identity and life choices. This research hopes to yield findings which will inspire the readers to make sense of their own ethical identity and ethical choices, given the great example of Han Suyin who thrived through extremely challenging circumstances in life.

## 1.6 Literature Review

Han Suyin's notable work includes but is not limited to autobiography, historical work, essays and novels. Appendix A, "Han Suyin: Life And Years" listed the titles of her publications and the respective year in which they were published. The following is a summary list of her literature according to the respective genres:

(a) Autobiographical series: *The Crippled Tree*; *A Mortal Flower*; *Birdless Summer*; *My House has Two Doors*; *Phoenix Harvest*; and *Wind in My Sleeve*, which cover the story of her family tree as well as the history of modern China from 1885 through 1991;

(b) Historical work: *The Morning Deluge: Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*; *Wind in the Tower: Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution, 1949-1965*; and *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China*;

(c) Essays: *Tigers and Butterflies: Selected Writings on Politics*; *The Creation of a Malayan Literature*; and *An Outline of Malayan-Chinese Literature*;

(d) Novels: *Destination Chungking*; *A Many-Splendoured Thing*; *And the Rain My Drink*; *The Mountain is Young*; *Cast But One Shadow*; *Winter Love*; *Four Faces*; *Till Morning Comes* and *The Enchantress*.

A few aspects need further clarification before the thesis probes further into the core of this thesis. First, there will be a summary of each of the six-volume autobiography, as well as literature review on all the research work regarding Han Suyin's autobiography series, so that one could have a brief grasp of Han Suyin and her literature. Second, there will be a brief literature review on *Autobiography* per se, as it is a unique literary type in the discourse of "How shall we live." Third, there will be a brief literature review on *Ethical Literary Criticism* (ELC), of which the theory, terms and general framework of the criticism, however, will be delineated in #1.7 "Key Terms of ELC" and #1.8 "Theoretical Framework."

### **1.6.1 The Life Of Han Suyin And Her Autobiography**

Han Suyin (1917-2012), or Dr. Chou (Dr. Chow if spelt using the Wades-Giles romanisation system), the legendary writer who set up "Han Suyin Award for Young Translators" of China in 1989, who also received the honor of a sculpture bearing her image erected by the government of Canton of Valais, Switzerland in 2008 (Chun, 2009, p. 4), had always been recognised as a significant cultural envoy between the East and the West (Lu, 2007). Documents about her as a doctor of great medical acumen were few, but Han Suyin was actually so – before her medical career gave way to the full-time writing enterprise.

Besides her glamour of being the writer of the famous novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, which inspired an Oscar-award winning film of the same title, Han Suyin was also a consultant of the World Health Organization (WHO) on China Affairs. As far as

Southeast Asia is concerned, Han Suyin was remembered for contributing her effort to the establishment of the Nanyang University of Singapore, serving as physician in the institution. Besides, memories of her 10-year medical practice in Johor Bahru, Malaysia in the 1950s were also very fresh. Her clinic, Chow Dispensary, was reported to be located at 24, Jalan Ibrahim. (Loh, 2013) Her monograph, *And The Rain My Drink*, depicted the British rule in Malaya during 1952-1956.

A China-born Eurasian, Han Suyin was born to the home of Chou Yentung and his Flemish wife Marguerite Denis, in the Xinyang county of the Henan province, China in spring 1917. "Han Suyin" was her pen name, a pseudonym that stood for "the plain voice of the Han people." She was born Rosalie Matilda Kuanghu Zhou, and later officially registered as Dr. Elizabeth C.K. Comber in the passport, after her second husband's last name.

Han Suyin's Hakka-descent father Chou Wei, or Chou Yentung, was among the first Chinese students from China who furthered their studies abroad. In 1903, while he was studying railroad and mining engineering in Belgium, he met Marguerite, the cousin of the then Belgium Minister of Defense Henry Marguerite. As Yentung was not a believer of Catholicism, Marguerite's devout Catholic family members protested against their marriage. Marguerite stubbornly demanded to marry her Chinese prince by getting pregnant and giving birth to a baby boy. The couple decided to return together to China in 1913 (Han, 1972c, p. 205).

As a Eurasian, Han Suyin received bicultural education from both the East and the West. When she was young, she attended Chinese classes in the morning, and learned English at a Convent school in the afternoon (Han, 1972c, p. 354). Even as a young girl, Han Suyin found herself having deep concern about the widespread famine and death in China. Since then, she had idealistically decided to become a medical doctor so that she

could “save her country.” Han Suyin was so determined to actualise this ambition that she did not take heed of her father’s warning, “It’s very difficult to be a doctor if you are a woman.” At the age of 15, Han Suyin got herself a typist job at Peking Union Medical College, now part of Beijing University. In 1933, she was enrolled into the medical school at Yanjing University for matriculation studies, but felt discriminated against as a Eurasian. Two years later, she furthered her medical education in Brussels, the capital city of Belgium, her mother’s home country. (Han, 1972a, p. 296)

In 1938, after hearing news of China in the shack of anti-Japanese war, Han Suyin abandoned her studies and returned to China. On the home-going cruise, she fell in love with her first husband Tang Pao-Huang, whom she addressed as “Pao” in her autobiography. Pao was an aide-de-camp to General Chiang Kai-shek of the Chinese Nationalist party. Han Suyin and Pao tied the nuptials quickly. Their marriage life was not rosy at all, for Pao was physically abusive. Before long, Han Suyin threatened Pao with her own death so that she could work as a midwife in an American Christian mission hospital in Chengdu, Sichuan. During this period of time, she wrote her debut novel, *Destination Chungking*. Through the connection at the hospital, Han Suyin was able to adopt a daughter by the name of Yungmei. The family then moved to London due to Pao’s promotion as acting military attaché. (Han, 1972b, p. 238) Not being able to withstand abuse any longer, Han Suyin ran away from Pao and pursued her interrupted medical education wholeheartedly in 1945. Three years later, she received her L.R.C.P, M.R.C.S, and M.B.B.S degrees, with Honors in surgery and pathology from the School of Medicine, University of London. (Wang, 1996, p. 232) Pao died in the battlefield a year before her graduation.

Widowed with a daughter, Han Suyin moved to Hong Kong in 1950. She understood her identity as wife of the former Nationalist general would be a great

hindrance for her to be admitted in the getting more “red” China. In Hong Kong, Han Suyin began her housemanship at Gordon King’s Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at Queen Mary Hospital. She discontinued her one-year work contract after being falsely accused of professional negligence, which was actually the doing of a male English gynaecologist. With the help of Gordon King, she moved on to work at the pathology department, under Professor Hou Baochang. Soon, she had an opportunity to become the Head of Casualty. She absolutely enjoyed her career. She said,

Casualty work, though looked down upon by the more snobbish houseman in medicine and surgery, it was for me an occasion for showing talent in diagnosis. Everything came to Casualty. Rare cases of leprosy, lupus, tetanus, enlarged spleens from long-term malarias, syphilis, tuberculous meningitis (mostly children, and very common in Hong Kong), accident and suicides, homicides, fishermen blown up by the dynamite they used for fishing, early cancers and late cancers, pneumonias and jaundices and brain abscesses and the insane... Everything uncanny, impossible and fantastic came to Casualty. (Han, 1982, p. 41)

Within three months of work, she earned herself the reputation of “a medical officer right on the top of the job.” Besides a busy medical practice, Han Suyin had short-lived affairs with *The Times* correspondent Ian Morrison, which inspired her best-selling *A Many-Splendoured Thing*. The relationship ended with the death of Ian while he was reporting about the Korean War. In 1952, Han Suyin left Hong Kong for Malaya and married Englishman Leonard Comber, an Assistant Superintendent in the Special Branch in Malaya. It was a marriage of convenience, out of her need to provide Yungmei with a good home.

In Malaya, she worked at Johor Bahru General Hospital briefly. Then a senior nurse, Mrs Wong, convinced her to open her own clinic on the main street of Johor Bahru, with a pharmacy at the lower level and doctor's room above. When she first launched her clinic in 1953, she received a gift from the Chinese Merchant Community, i.e., a plaque saying "*Hua Tuo is Born Again.*" It was indeed an honour to receive such a congratulatory plaque, for Hua Tuo was a famous Chinese doctor in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century who could cure almost every kind of illnesses. At the same time, Dr Sulaiman, the first male guest to the clinic, warned her that she would not be able to have any patients. He said, "people don't like women doctors" However, by the end of the second month, she already had 40 to 50 patients a day, and that was more than any other doctors in Johor Bahru at the time. One of her patients told her, "I've kept my disease for you to look at, Doctor." (Han, 1982, p. 101)

Triggered by British emergency rule in Malaya, Han Suyin wrote ... *And the Rain My Drink*, condemning the manner British Special Services imprisoned, tortured and killed Chinese Communist sympathisers. In 1956, Han Suyin was invited to attend the coronation of the King Mahendra of Nepal, the Himalayan Kingdom known as "The Land of the Gods." Out of this experience, she wrote *The Mountain is Young*, with the background set respectively in Malaya and Nepal. Han Suyin's trip to Kathmandu, Nepal became a life-changing experience for her, as she met Vincent Ruthnaswamy, a colonel in the Indian army. After securing divorce with Leonard, she married Vincent in 1971.

Following the success of *The Mountain is Young*, Han Suyin's fervour for writing took over her passion in treating patients. She told a journalist in 1958 that she might be a "top-grade, highly paid [medical] specialist," but she was "possessed of a demon" that forced her to write instead of practising medicine full-time (Swaim, 1985). Recognised

for her social and cultural portfolio, Han Suyin was invited as the featured speaker at the inaugural national convention of the US-China Peoples Friendship Association, Los Angeles in 1974.

Her husband Vincent was a reservoir of strength and love. He fully supported her dreams and aspirations. The couple resided in Hong Kong and Lausanne. Given a solid and enriching marriage, Han Suyin became a productive novelist, writer and historian. Before breathing her last at her home in Lausanne on 2 November 2012, Han Suyin managed to publish all six volumes of her autobiographical series. The series was released during 1965-1980 and gained significant attention, especially in the West, as China was completely closed to the Western world between 1949-1970. Often known as *The Crippled Tree* series, Han Suyin's autobiography encompassed *The Crippled Tree*, *A Mortal Flower*, *Birdless Summer*, *My House has Two Doors*, and *Phoenix Harvest*, all of which entailed about a century-old of her family saga as well as the history of modern China from 1885 through 1979. In 1992, Han Suyin released her last addition to the series, namely *Wind in My Sleeve*, which continued her story from 1977 to 1991.

Han Suyin's (1972c) *The Crippled Tree* was not only a memoir of her "crippled" family tree, but also a disturbing record of early East-West encounters from a "Chinese" perspective. The book had two parts. Part I covered the period 1885 to 1913, depicting the predicament of her Belgium mother who found her presence in China a nightmare as she was treated as a "foreign ghost" even though she was married to a local Chinese engineer. Part II delineated the growing pains of Rosalie (Han Suyin's maiden name) during the period 1913 to 1928.

The second volume of Han Suyin's (1972a) autobiography, *A Mortal Flower*, depicted the era between 1928-1938. China failed to appease the foreign powers on one

hand, and unable to cope with her dire poverty on the other. The autobiography repeatedly enunciated the “immortal” beauty of the landscape of China, contrasting it with the “not immortal” leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (p. 41), hinting on the vulnerability of the Kuomintang regime at that time. The last chapter of the book depicted the gorgeously lit up, “immortal flower” in the cathedral of Rheims, contrasting it with Rosalie – probably the embodiment of “a mortal flower” – who vouched to return back to her home country, China, which was on the verge of being run over by the Japanese.

The third volume of the autobiography, *Birdless Summer* (Han, 1972b), documented the period between 1938-1948, with the emphasis on “China-consciousness,” Sino-Japanese war, and Chinese nationalism. The East-West relations became complicated due to the potential formation of a bipolar Communist-Democrat division. Hence, the United States of America was very concerned about China’s political development. Cold War was being formed. During that period, Suyin tried to authenticate her “Chinese” identity via her nuptial ties with a Kuomintang colonel, Tang Pao-Huang; only to realise that her patriotic love for China was sufficed to bind her life with China more than any other ethical justifications.

The fourth volume of the autobiography, *My House has Two Doors* (Han, 1982), recounted the people and events in Hong Kong and Malaya between 1948-1965, an era when the United Nation (UN) imposed embargo against China. Unable to return to China as planned, Han Suyin moved to Malaya. She married Englishman Colonel Leonard Comber, who allowed her to continue her professional practice as a physician in a hospital. Failing to re-enter her homeland China, Han Suyin felt that her life was pulled in “two opposite directions at once”, namely away from and towards love, away from and towards China.” (p. 136)

The fifth volume of the autobiography, *Phoenix Harvest* (Han, 1985), documented the major socio-political development in China between 1966-1979 as well as many of Han Suyin's high-profile international public lectures with the intention to promote the new image of emerging New China. It was a post-Mao era, when the Gang of Four was eradicated. China opened its door again to dialogue with the world. The book depicted the revolutionary power of the people of China who stood together as a nation, wanting a change. As the history of modern China took its new turn, Han Suyin had also celebrated the "self-completion" of her own identity search.

Han Suyin's sixth book in the autobiography series, *Wind in My Sleeve* (Han, 1992), captured the events from 1977 through 1991. The book title was named after a line of poetry that her father had always recited in his strong Sichuan accent: "Only the clear wind filling his sleeves." A woman in her 60-ies, Suyin was contented not being rewarded for her lifetime advocacy for her birth country, but merely catching "only the wind" in her sleeve. The two-track historical developments – both at the individual and national levels – in each volume of Han Suyin's autobiography are as follows:

**Table 1.1: Two-track Historical Developments In Han Suyin’s Autobiography**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Years Depicted</b>	<b>Published</b>	<b>Two track issues (a) Individual / (b) National</b>
<i>CT</i>	1885-1928	1956	(a) “Crippled” family of origin. Difficult childhood
			(b) Concessions. Treaties. National humiliation.
<i>MF</i>	1928-1938	1966	(a) Furthered studies. Quit studies. First marriage.
			(b) Civil war. Warlords. Hope for a unified China.
<i>BS</i>	1938-1948	1968	(a) End of first marriage. Continuation of medical studies. Second marriage.
			(b) Sino-Japanese war. Chinese nationalism.
<i>HTD</i>	1948-1965	1980	(a) Emerged as a romance writer. Relocation to Malaya. End of second marriage. Third marriage.
			(b) UN’s sanction. China closed her door.
<i>PH</i>	1966-1979	1982	(a) Prime of her lecturing and public speaking career. Frequent visits to China.
			(b) Post-Mao. “Public spirit.”
<i>WMS</i>	1977-1991	1992	(a) Published autobiography and historical books.
			(b) UN membership. New horizon. Socialism with Chinese characteristics.

### **1.6.2 Research On Han Suyin’s Autobiography And Her Other Works**

In comparison to press releases and social media posts about Han Suyin, research articles and dissertations are relatively rare. Research work on Han Suyin’s autobiographies are rather scanty. Of the few available, they adopt one of the following criticism approaches: (a) Post-colonialism; (b) Feminism; (c) Narrative Art of Autobiography.

Post-colonial criticism (PCC) deals with traditional colonial discourse, especially that between the coloniser and the colonised, seeking either to subvert it or to modify it. One of the key proponents of PCC, Said (1979), pointed out that the East or “the Orient” was a cultural concept artificially created by the West:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other... the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)... The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilisation and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (pp. 1-2)

The concept of “Orientalism” reduced all of the non-Western world into a homogeneous cultural entity, “the Orient (East),” subjugating to the more progressive, civilised “the Occident (West).” Incorporating the propositions by Michel Foucault, Said questioned the “strong-West” versus “weak-East” mentality which results in the licensing of the West to colonise. As the Occident claimed to have the “knowledge of the Orient,” they had the full control over the naming, defining and conditioning of their Oriental counterparts. For Said, this strong-weak, coloniser-colonised binary relationship, which translates into the “Self versus Other” or “Us versus Them” mentality, is troublesome. Said’s theory of post-colonialism has been widely quoted and employed in modern literary criticism during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this respect, Xuding Wang, Teresa Kowalska, Ren Yiming, Zhang Xinghong and Fiona Lee could be considered as using the post-colonialist approach on the study of

Han Suyin's work. Written in 1996, Wang's PhD thesis entitled "Of Bridge Construction: A Critical Study of Han Suyin's Historical and Autobiographical Writings" was a thorough post-colonialism critic work on Han Suyin. Wang described almost all of the relationships in Han Suyin's autobiographies in post-colonial terms, i.e., Western powers over China; Han Suyin's dominating mother versus her compromising father; the attempts of Joseph Hers to control Rosalie; and so forth. Wang's thesis excelled in the political depictions on Han Suyin's work. But when he framed all relational dynamics with the post-colonial connotations, it overshadowed Han Suyin's personal and inter-personal relational dimensions, which would be better discerned through the lenses of ethics rather than politics. In his other article "The East/West Relationship in *The Crippled Tree*," Wang (2008, pp. 225-240) stated that Han Suyin had to "decolonize" China from the West and the Japanese, in order to restore her lost cultural and national dignity. Wang finds Han Suyin does so through the recreation of both her China and her own life story.

Kowalska's (2000, pp. 21-32) article "Tea, Ivory and Ebony: Tracing Colonial Threads in the Inseparable Life and Literature of Han Suyin" brought attention to the incessant racism endured by Han Suyin throughout her life, which was "to a considerable degree a derivative of colonialism." Kowalska affirmed the good attitude of Han Suyin, who was not having the slightest spirit of revenge even though she had personally experienced and eyewitnessed the most subtle and confounding issues arising from colonialism. Her reference texts include the first five volumes of Han Suyin's 6-volume autobiographical series, namely, *The Crippled Tree*, *A Mortal Flower*, *Birdless Summer*, *My House Has Two Doors* and *Phoenix Harvest*; Han Suyin's romantic novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, Han Suyin's novel about Malaya during the Emergency period, *And The Rain My Drink*; and her socio-political anthology, *Tigers And Butterflies – Selected Writings On Politics, Culture And Society*.

Ren (2003), research fellow of the Literature Studies at Shanghai Academy of Social Science dedicated a chapter on Han Suyin in the monograph she co-wrote with Qu Shijing, entitled *A Study on Post-colonialism in English Literature*. In her journal article “The Marginal Writing That Bridges Across The Europe-Asia Division,” Ren stated that duality of language and culture in post-colonial writings was usually the main cause of conflicts and confusion, hence forming the unique characteristics of such literature. As an observer, Han Suyin wrote about China in the English language, enduring an unbearable loneliness as she wandered between the two worlds. (Ren, 1999, p. 91)

Singaporean journalist and researcher Zhang’s published her book *Han Suyin in Malaya* in March 2016, which was an adaptation from her MA thesis of the same title. The book basically summarised Han Suyin’s intellectual life between 1952-1964, using the framework of the “Role of the Public Intellectual” by Alan Lightman of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The book held the view that Han Suyin’s experience of injustice in Malaya during the colonial period was instrumental in transforming her from a romantic novelist as when she wrote *A Many-Splendoured Thing* into an autobiographer with a serious tone of “Asian-consciousness.” (Zhang, 2016, p. 6) Besides, due to her mixed-race background as a Eurasian, she was not an in-group member of the Malayan upper-Middle circle during that time. During a movie review session about the “Love Is A Many-Splendoured Thing” at Nanyang Technology University (NTU) on 30 October 2015, Zhang delivered a public lecture entitled “Narrative Mixed With Political Criticism: Han Suyin’s Career As Writer and Public Speaker During The Cold-War Era.” Zhang perceived that the post-colonial, post-

Coldwar framework was shaping the ideology of Han Suyin's literature and her teaching.<sup>6</sup>

Lee, a post-doctoral fellow of Cultural Studies in Asia Cluster of National University Singapore (NUS), delivered a public lecture entitled "Coldwar Racial Formation: Han Suyin's Novels on Malaysia and Singapore" at Rumah Gerakbudaya on 25 October 2015.<sup>7</sup> She saw Han Suyin going through a process from "thinking China" to "think universally" when Han Suyin resided in Malaya. Since there were ideological clashes between the superpowers during the Cold war era, Lee concluded that it was quite logical for Han Suyin to write about racial relations and racial formation during that time. Before the public lecture, Lee published an article "Epistemological Checkpoint: Reading Fiction as a Translation of History" in *Post-Colonial Text*, to argue that Han Suyin's semi-autobiographical novel *And The Rain My Drink*, played a role "in re-articulating and assimilating colonial racial tropes into the post-colonial national narrative." (Lee, 2014, p. 18) In the question-and-answer session following the public lecture, Lee reckoned that Han Suyin's work has somewhat fallen out of fashion as today's readership is looking for post-modern and post-racial materials instead.

The Feminist approach on Han Suyin's autobiographies was employed by Helen Buss, Deng Jianhua and Peng Rong. Buss published a 20-page article in *Canadian Review of American Studies* entitled, "The Autobiographies of Han Suyin: A Female Postcolonial Subjectivity." The main thrust of Buss' analysis was Han Suyin's self-construction efforts, i.e., a therapeutic process of constructing herself as a person, as a

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<sup>6</sup> See Zhang's public lecture, organised by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technology University (NTU) on 30 August 2015 at the Auditorium, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, NTU, retrieved on 1 November 2015, <http://www.hss.ntu.edu.sg/Programmes/Chinese/News/Pages/events/A-Many--Splendour-Thing.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> See Lee's public lecture "Coldwar Racial Formation: Han Suyin's Novels on Malaysia and Singapore" on 25 October 2015 at Rumah Gerakbudaya, Selangor to guests and members of the Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD), retrieved on 1 November 2015, <http://sird.gbgerakbudaya.com/cold-war-racial-formations-han-suyins-novels-on-malaya-and-singapore>.

postcolonial *female*. Buss perceived Han Suyin's literature as bringing together "theories of subjectivity, genre, and women's writing." (Buss, 1992, pp. 107-126)

Articles that treat Han Suyin as a female subject had never missed to discuss her difficult marriage, and the chauvinistic experience she endured when she worked amidst male Caucasian doctors. "The Discourse of Race, Gender and Nation State in the Process of Identification" by Deng and Peng (2010, pp. 116-118), for example, dealt mainly with Han Suyin's experience as a female medical intern, as recorded in *Birdless Summer*, the third book in Han Suyin's autobiographical series.

Last but not least, there was also attention on the narrative art of Han Suyin's autobiography. Hu Yong (2015) of Zhejiang Gongye Daxue, in his article entitled "Examining the Narrative Art of Han Suyin's Autobiography, *The Crippled Tree*" depicted the art of discourse, cynicism, and the use of metaphors in Han Suyin's narrative. In Hu's judgment, of all the books in Han Suyin's autobiographical series, *The Crippled Tree* carried the highest literary value (pp. 94-98). Poulsen's (2015) PhD Dissertation, "Figuring Futures: Early Asian American Mixed-Race Literature" examined Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* along with her semi-autobiographical novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing* from the imageries of a crippled tree, island and ocean, in order to discuss her concept of critical cosmopolitan and world citizenship.

Apart from the autobiographies, there were a few research works on Han Suyin's non-autobiographical literature. Fang (2006, pp. 25-29) and Zhuang (2005, pp. 42-46) each wrote articles concerning Han Suyin's female consciousness in her novel *The Mountain is Still Young*. Du's (2012) MA Thesis entitled "The Research on Han Suyin's *A Many-Splendoured Thing* from Feminist Perspective" had a similar approach. Wijayanti's (2005) undergraduate thesis entitled "A Study On Han Suyin's Struggles To

Achieve Her Hopes And The Results Of Her Struggles In Han Suyin's *A Many-Splendoured Thing*” focused on Han Suyin’s life struggles as a female.

Teoh (1994/5), of National University Singapore wrote on the moderation of Han Suyin in her undergraduate thesis, “Between Yin and Yang: Disparate Worlds In Selected Novels By Han Suyin,” which examined altogether four novels of Han Suyin, namely *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, *And the Rain My Drink*, *Till Morning Comes*, and *The Mountain Is Young*. But’s (1999) thesis, “The Other Race: Settler, Exile, Transient and Sojourner in the Literary Diaspora” discussed the transient literary identity in Han Suyin’s *A Many-Splendoured Thing* in comparison to other literature of diaspora.

In China, there are also two non-academic titles on Han Suyin: *The Compilation of Study on Han Suyin* edited by Qu (2001), and *Towards Global Acceptance: The Hakka Literature* authored by X. Xu (2001). In the States, Han Suyin also received attention by Amy Ling (1990) in her book, *Between Worlds: Women Writers and Chinese Ancestry*. In 2017, Nanyang Technology University Singapore launched an anthology to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> year birthday of Han Suyin. The book is a compilation of seven (7) translated articles of Han Suyin and five (5) brief commentaries by different individuals about her contribution in the field of translation of literary works.

### **1.6.3 On Autobiography**

An autobiography is a self-written account about a person’s own life. Varying from biographies, which are accounts of other people about a person, autobiographies are the biographer’s own account. Based on one’s vivid memories of his or her life, significant people such as politicians, social advocates and other high impact personalities produce autobiographies to reveal about the self, along with the autobiographer’s reflections over events and people during their era. Autobiographies could be kept in the

unpublished forms of letters, diaries, journals, memoirs and reminiscences, or eventually, in a formal published form of books.

Autobiographical writing as a literary genre is not without dispute. When William Wordsworth first worked on his autobiographical writings in 1805, it was still “a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself” (Marcus, 1994, p. 11). But by 1850, when Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* was published, readers were relatively acquainted with autobiography as a literary genre.

Autobiographies produced over the centuries have had altogether served four different functions, or overlapping of some of the functions. First, some wrote autobiographies for *educational* or *didactic* function. Medieval priest Saint Augustine chronicled *Confessions*, depicting his spiritual journey in combating stubborn carnal desires so as to shed light on how one’s profound relationship with Creator God and the internalization of the Holy Word might be crucial for wise living. Early feminist thinker Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences, 1815-1897* with an overriding educational aim, namely to showcase women as the equal counterparts of men, presenting herself as a role model of “an ordinary human being,” and not as a wife-housekeeper-mother (Jelinek, 1980, p. 73). Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* argued for the logical and natural right of the majority Blacks in ruling their own motherland, besides assuring that safety and rightful presence of the minority ethnic groups could still be preserved under the concept of South Africa for all people.

Second, autobiographies may serve as the *confessional* function in which one attains salvation as the ultimate meaning of life. St. Augustine’s *Confessions* started the tradition of confessional literature, aiming at setting right the relationship between man and God, thus achieving the purpose of depicting the salvation of one’s soul. The 18<sup>th</sup> century social philosopher Rousseau, at the end of his writing career, wrote *Confessions*

to relieve himself from his lifelong burden of unknown depravities and misdeeds that might “cause one to blush,” insisting that he should be at least credited as a good and honest man. The autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, one of American founding fathers, depicted the story behind his affluent front, namely his underprivileged family background and his tedious attempts to earn a livelihood. By revealing about oneself, confessional autobiographies aim at securing or redeeming the relationship with the other, either with God or man. Thus it is said that confessional type of autobiographical writings seeks for the redemption of oneself.

Third, autobiographies might serve as an epistemological mean to the understanding of oneself and one’s life. Rousseau’s *Confessions* concluded that the influence of dominant female figures during his childhood left an irreversible impact upon his sexual orientation after he attained adulthood. In *My Several Worlds*, Nobel prize laureate Pearl S Buck who was raised in China recorded her confusion regarding her social identity, especially during her adolescence years when she and her family endured the horrendous fear of being expelled from China by the local Chinese. Using the analogy of a “crippled” tree, China-born Eurasian Han Suyin tried to sort out her multiple identity and inconsistencies of life in her *The Crippled Tree* autobiographical series. Epistemological autobiographies aimed at self-understanding, especially for autobiographers who underwent many trials and adversities in life. The process of journaling and writing about one’s difficult passages of life may facilitate self-knowledge and self-acceptance, thus resulting in healing of the self from any bitterness caused by the environment or others in life.

Finally, autobiographies might be employed by some writers as a self-branding platform for self-assertion and to gain public attention. Craving the heroism attained by great men and women of the world, Harriet Martineau’s *Autobiography* branded herself

as a Unitarian, and her political controversial ideas as well-thought theoretical framework that could potentially counter unfulfilling theologies and social structures in her eyes. On another note, Virginia Woolf's self-depiction as a proud member of the elite club Bloomsbury in her *Moment of Beings* might somewhat define her in the self-assertion category, if her autobiographical writings had been published before she took her own life.

At the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, proven frauds of a few autobiography-like novels and memoirs raised the public awareness about the potential misuse of autobiographical materials by certain individuals in order to gain popular readership for their own benefits. For instance, Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchu (2010) retorted in 1992 that her memoir that was published in 1983 expressed a "larger truth" about the suffering of her people, after a reporter for the *Times* revealed that some incidents in her memoirs including the death of one of Menchu's brothers due to starvation were not true. Then, there was also *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years* which sold well in several countries, and was made into a movie *Surviving with the Wolves*, retelling the story of a Jewish girl who survived the Holocaust and wandered around in Europe searching for her lost parents. The truth is, the author Misha Defonseca was neither a Jew, nor had she left her home country Belgium. But Defonseca defended herself, "The story in the book is mine. It is not the actual reality – it was my reality, my way of surviving." And she added, "The *truth* is that I have always felt Jewish" (Ibid). Needless to say, autobiographies, if treated lightly, may water down to become self-assertive memoirs or novels with self-seeking motives by certain authors.

A literary genre of its own, an autobiography is not history-writing or anthropology proper. Depending on its style and structure, an autobiography could be either a narrative or a poetic work, or all at the same time. Though not entirely without

omissions or distortions, autobiographies generally contain truthful accounts of people and events during the time of the autobiographers, thus providing snapshots of “a sort of life.” As subjective as autobiographies could be, they are worth studying, for they offer insights to the understanding of the question “How shall we live?” (Olney, 1972, p. xi.)

No man is an island. A person’s life leaves an impact in the community. Questions regarding one’s past, present and future, the cultures and society where one lives, one’s spiritual quests, and so forth, are usually captured in between the lines of one’s autobiographies. A perpetual theme of human struggles contributes to the birth of notable autobiographies in the literary history, namely, the *ethical choice* of the main character -- the “I” -- in life situations where culture, social structure and family tradition are all at play.

The *self* as a subject of study became essential to the emergent bourgeoisie since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Marcus, 1994, p. 6). Philosopher John Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, suggested that one’s identity existed through time; and that the identity could be defined as the “sameness of a rational being” across time and tide. David Hume, in his extreme skepticism, questioned the existence of a consistent “self” or identity over time. In late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, spontaneity in self-disclosure became prevalent in autobiographical writings (Ibid). Nevertheless, autobiography-writing offered a private space as well as public platform for individuals to explore one’s self-knowledge and self-identity. Leslie Stephen said in his 1881 essay “Autobiography” that the true autobiography “is written by one who feels an irresistible longing for confidential expansion; who is forced by his innate constitution to unbosom himself to the public of the kind of matter generally reserved for our closest intimacy.” Following that, J. Ashcroft Noble expressed that autobiography should allow readers to discover “the secrets of (their) personality” (Ibid). Mary Jean Corbett (1992, p. 11),

Distinguished Professor of English of University of Miami, maintained that autobiography provides avenues for writers to attain “both literary legitimacy and a desired subjectivity.”

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, awareness of the difficulty of knowing or grasping the self became the thrust of the new discourse in auto/biographies. In her essay “The New Biography,” Virginia Woolf claimed that the days of Victorian biography that focused on the robustness of past ages were over (Marcus, 1994, p. 90). The idea of “self-consciousness” emerged, as Virginia suggested there were moments of “being” and “not being.” Woolf’s contemporary Lytton Strachey was instrumental in playing between real and imaginary portraits to showcase the potential of auto/biographies as an art, rather than of science or history.

#### **1.6.4 Research On Autobiography**

Autobiography seems to be one of the avenues for one to explore the consciousness of “self.” German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) who was amongst the first to establish the scholarly approach to autobiographies, concluded that autobiographies are formalisation of self-reflection, in which the autobiographers’ self-conceptions were historically determined (Corbett, 1992, p. 137). For instance, Rousseau’s ideal self matched the ideal of his time, and therefore, his tone of confession was an appeal to his contemporaries for acceptance. He did not want to be judged for who he confessed he was.

Dilthey’s findings on autobiography were primarily included in his *Drafts for a critique of historical reason*, his early collection published in 1910. One of his more recognized works was *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, or in its English translation, *The Structure of the Historical*

*World in the Human Sciences*. For him, autobiographies recorded “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*), which facilitated “understanding” (*Verstehen*), that would give meaning for the past, values for the present and purpose for the future. The reflection on the autobiographer’s own life, thus, helps him or her to make sense of his or her own existence as well as the lives of others. Besides, even though autobiography is not history-writing, Dilthey was concerned about the “structural relationship” between an individual and the history, rather than with the magnitude of a personality as a value in itself (Corbett, 1992, p. 143). For him, every aspect of each life bore historical witness:

The life of a historical personality is a complex of effects in which the individual receives influences from the historical world, develops itself under these influences and then reacts on this historical world. The same sphere of the system of the world is the origin of these influences and the recipient of further influences from the individual. (Rickman, 1976, p. 248)

Following the footsteps of Dilthey, his disciple and son-in-law Georg Misch (1878-1965) continued to engage the study of autobiographies. Lauded for his monumental work *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (*History of Autobiography*), Misch emphasised on his theory of “self-consciousness” or self-awareness (*selbstbewusstsein*) in autobiographies. For him, the history of autobiography is a history of human self-awareness (Corbett, 1994, p. 150). He embraced the idea of unity of author and subject in the autobiography, and suggested that the universal and fundamental “psychological root” of all autobiographies being “man’s need for self-revelation” (p. 151). He said,

... it is of the very essence of human existence that we can raise to the clarity of consciousness that which moves us ‘deep down.’ We live in possession of ourselves, after the special manner of a being conscious of

itself and capable of saying 'I,' or more exactly, as an 'I'-saying person, over against other persons and living beings and the things around us implies that we are aware of our independent existence... Self-awareness gives us the feeling that the impetus of life is a sort of emanation from ourselves. (Misch, 1950, pp. 8-9)

In saying that, Misch's idea of self-consciousness or self-awareness was tied to self-assertion, as his self-revelation carried the nuance of asserting centrality of self.

Existential phenomenologist Georges Gusdorf (1912-2000) offered further perspectives on man's self-knowledge and self-awareness in his articles "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie (Conditions and Limits of Autobiography)" and "De l'autobiographie initiatique à l'autobiographie genre littéraire (From the initiation autobiography in literary genre autobiography)." For him, the inner space of man could be carved out, especially when the soul – in a Christian sense – finds itself through communion with God. Gusdorf held that autobiography as a genre, is limited in time and space, that it is historical and cultural. Both historical consciousness and individualism were essential preconditions for the writing of autobiographies (Misch, 1950, pp. 156-157). He was concerned of the loss or dying state of the interior of consciousness, for autobiography proper would be assuming the task of reconstruction the unity of one's life across time. For Gusdorf, autobiography was a second reading of one's life experience. Interestingly, he proposed that it might be truer than the original experience, because it added to one's experience the consciousness of it, namely, the "truth" of the self or one's life came forth in the second reading, in the retrospective realisation of elements of experience which had made up one's destiny. Without the "second reading," Gusdorf believed one's life would appear unfulfilled or "inwardly botched" (Misch, 1950, p. 158). Hence, the task of autobiography is first of all a task of

“personal salvation... its deepest intentions... a kind of apologetics or theodicy of the individual being.”<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to the suggestion that autobiographies could assist in the healing of one's wounds, Germanist Roy Pascal (1904-1980) and American historian Karl Weintraub (1924-2004) held a more pessimistic view in the study. Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* was one of the prominent works in the field of contemporary autobiographical studies. For Pascal, autobiography proper would be:

...the reconstruction of a moment of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived... But 'reconstruction of a life' is an impossible task... we have to hurry to qualify the above assertions by adding that autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story... in every case it is [the writer's] present position which enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order.” (Pascal, 1970. p. 6)

Likewise, Karl Weintraub saw autobiography as a cultural and literary form which demonstrates temporal scope, interpreting the past from a present standpoint. Weintraub approached autobiographies from the two lines of historical development, namely, the emerging “historical consciousness” in Western culture; and the growth of individuality as a value (Marcus, 1994, p. 167). He found that the historical consciousness was linked to the growth of individuality which began in the Renaissance, which departed from “a static conception of the world towards an understanding of both self and world as process” (Ibid). Focusing on historical figures such as Augustine, Rousseau and Goethe,

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<sup>8</sup> Gusdorf's “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” in J. Olney, 1980, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, p. 39, Princeton University Press.

Weintraub's well-recognised work *The Value of the Individual* argued that the personal crisis enacted in microcosm the historical crisis of cultural transformation. For instance, the ages of crisis made individual doubt and reinvestigate the foundations of his or her self-conception.

The writer of this thesis begs to differ with Pascal and Weintraub in matter pertaining to the critical study of autobiography. Even though autobiographies might be seen as a present recollection of one's past, due to the difference in the ethical norms and moral codes of the past and the present, a critical literary reading should not be from the standpoint of the present day, but from the historical point when the era of the literature was set upon. Pascal held that one's reconstruction of one's past experience would be from a present position. However, Pascal did not pay attention to the difference of the ethical environment between a time in the past and the current time. Any reconstruction of an account of the past using the present day's ethical assumptions would not be accurate. For the writer of this thesis, a careful treatment of a literature would consider the historical and cultural environment when the people and events of the narrative took place. Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC), the literary criticism device employed in this thesis, is to be one of such approaches which examines a literary text at the era the text was set upon.

Since the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics such as Christopher Lasch (1932-1994) and Richard Sennett (1943-current) lamented over the tendency of "narcissistic" preoccupation in the autobiographical writing. Lasch, in his award-winning work *The Culture of Narcissism*, commented that "...Even the best of the confessional writers walk a fine line between self-analysis and self-indulgence... it also allows a lazy writer to indulge in 'the kind of immodest self-revelation which ultimately hides more than it admits'" (Lasch, 1980, p. 16-19). Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* attacked the

“autobiographical culture” of the modern society. He argued that the erosion of a strong public life affected intimate relations and limited the sphere where one could invest oneself (Sennet, 1977, p. 7). Feminist Rita Felski disagreed with the abovementioned. She held that subjectivity, though perceived as self-indulgent narcissism, “is at least partly dependent upon the standpoint from which it is being judged and the context in which it occurs.” (Felski, 1989, pp. 107-108)

On the other hand, there were also discussions whether autobiography was an established genre per se. Laura Marcus (1994, p. 21) held that autobiography showcased human beings as capable of self-reflection. Hence, in comparison to journals or diaries, or memoirs, which are organised in a looser, more chronological structure, autobiography somewhat fulfils a “higher” literary function. Therefore, even though some, like James Olney, hesitated to support the definition of an autobiography as a literary genre, critics like Lejeune and Gusdorf believed that it is an authoritative form of “truth-telling” that is clearly distinguished from fiction (L. Anderson, 2011, p. 5). Founder of the Deconstruction theory, Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, struggled with the borders of a text. For Derrida, it was a question of whether the text of each individual autobiography could fulfil the law of genre, or be included “inside” the genre (p. 9). Poststructuralist Paul de Man questioned the status of autobiography in his article, “Autobiography as De-Facement” as such that an autobiography “always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent,” and that each work could be an exception to the norm, thus not able to provide “an empirical useful way of understanding texts” (p. 11).

One thing was sure regarding autobiography -- as Candace Lang argued, it always was “a historical and ideological construct, an effect of discourse” (L. Anderson, 2011, p. 57). Carolyn Steedman’s (1986) *Landscape for a Good Woman*, for instance,

depicted the autobiographical memories of her father picking bluebells and then being caught and humiliated by the keeper of the forest. Such role of the father did not fit well with the centrality of the father's code of behaviour and status in a patriarchal society. Hence, the memories captured and narrated in an autobiography became "individualised instances of some general truth" to serve as an "interpretive device," namely, a way to examine the relation between individual experience and theoretical issues, based on historical and cultural setting of the time of the incident in the text (p. 104).

### **1.6.5 Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) As A Criticism Approach**

In the Anglo-American world, after the declaration of "the death of God" at the onset of modernity, a specific discourse, namely, literary criticism emerged to fill the need for interpretation of literary work. In the last century, concerns for ethics and interpretation with the deployment of nationalist, imperialist, institutional and pedagogical power were unprecedented (Eaglestone, 1997, p. 10). As of the "epi-reading" approach, namely a reading of the texts that focuses not on its textuality but the original human environment of the words involving speech, character, personality and destiny construed, there were neo-Aristotelians such as Martha Nussbaum, Wayne Booth and the Chicago critics. Nussbaum, for instance, advocated that literature is to be read through a "life beyond the text," offering a "real" presentation of people and situation as a heuristic working through ethical principles (Eaglestone, 1997, pp. 46-47).

However, there are limitations to Nussbaum's approach. Her treatment of the ethical issues of the texts was lacking in the literariness, textuality or the self-reflexive nature of reading and of criticism. "Graphi-reading" offered by the Yale critics or deconstructors paid attention to the exact opposite of "epi-reading" (Eaglestone, 1997, p. 61). The work of J. Hillis Miller, for example, was only interested in the ethics of

reading, not applied ethics. He demanded an ethical act to be very Kantian, in the sense of being free from self-interest and from any influence from the environment. Contrary to the “epi-readers,” Miller’s reading of “The Minister’s Black Veil” emphasised on the “type and symbol” of the protagonist Minister Hooper, and paid no attention to the history of New England. Eaglestone argued that there was blindness in an interpretation of such, which the writer of this thesis strongly agreed, that ethics could only exist in concrete narratives. No narratives could be free from interpretations based on historical understandings. Eaglestone found that the unavoidable use of narrative to embody ethics did not deny history. Instead, it actually “smuggled in historical understandings at a deeper level” (Eaglestone, 1997, p. 77).

In China, the New Literary Movement, also known as the May-Fourth Movement, was not only a movement to promote vernacular Chinese language, but also a movement of new ethics. Nie showed that May-Fourth authors such as Hu She and Xu Zhimo produced literature depicting liberty, freedom and romance (Nie, Su & Liu , 2014, pp. 316-326). The notion of taking “utter concern about one’s nation and people” and the spirit of novelty were among the main propositions of May-Fourth as well. The establishment of International Association of Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC) in China in 2012 had begun a new epoch of Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) in the discipline of literary critiques. All in all, the ELC is capable of providing an altogether new reading experience of literary texts, especially when one reads literature with the post-colonialism, feminist or neo-Marxist labels. ELC, instead of getting political or polarised by those labels, uses lenses that are least divisive when examining the elements of a literature. Also, ELC is extremely revealing when studying the complicated human relationships. Marking literary work as carrier of meaning and ethics, ELC also provides in-depth perspectives regarding the cognition, affection and volition of human beings pertaining to the time and tide in literary texts.

With the critical intent to expound the core element of a narrative, namely, ethics and issues pertaining to human relationship, the ELC proposed by Nie is powerful to expound the cognitive, affection and volition of any character in a literary text. With ELC as a tool, critiques are invited to consider the *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* of a text. Hence, literature is read for its meaning in addition to its aesthetics.

## 1.7 Key Terms Of ELC

This section shall provide a brief definition of each of the key terms employed by the ELC. It will also be the list of references for all related key terms used in the subsequent chapters in this thesis.

### 1.7.1 Ethical Consciousness

*Ethical consciousness* is one's self-awareness and awareness of others in one's social context. The idea is akin to Satre's ontological view of human consciousness as the combination of "Being in-itself" (*en-soi*) and "Being for-itself" (*pour-soi*), as well as the Marxist view on social consciousness that the social dimension of men "determines their consciousness."<sup>9</sup>

However, in ELC, the emphasis of ethical consciousness is in that the awareness is highly related to the *ethical environment* of the subject. For example, given Han Suyin's unique identity as a half-Chinese, half-European female raised in China during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, her resentment against foreign missionaries in China was logical. Her self-

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<sup>9</sup> From preface of "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," by K. Marx, 1859, retrieved on 31 August 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm>. Other quotes include: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness;" and "individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations," retrieved on 5 September 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archieve/fromm/works/1961/man/ch03.htm>.

identification with local Chinese had altogether shaped her ethical consciousness. Han Suyin thus believed in the necessity of the revolution of the people, rather than social transformation via democratic leadership (Han, 1972a, p. 234). Her ethical consciousness was highly identical with the political consciousness of local Chinese during the era. On the other hand, though perceived as a non-Chinese by the locals, Han Suyin's ethical consciousness was contrary to that of the other non-Chinese foreigners raised in China during that era, for example, Pearl Buck, a daughter of American missionaries in China.

### **1.7.2 Ethical Identity**

The *ethical identity* is an objective identity of an individual in relation with other human beings under a given circumstance in an ethical environment. It defines the "core" or "true" self, a determinative of one's precise individualism as defined by his or her ethical environment: What makes X (or X+Y at different life stages) a certain person behave in a certain manner under a certain circumstance, rather than responding in the manner another individual would perform. For example, given the same gender and ethnic background, and in a dismantling Old China environment, what constituted the ethical identity of Rosalie Chou, that she had made all those choices that eventually shaped her into Dr Han Suyin?

In short, the ethical identity is a determinative of a certain individual as perceived and determined during a certain era: What is expected of X as a member of society of that time. For example, who should Rosalie Chou (Han Suyin) be or "ought to be" during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Eurasians were still discriminated by both the local Chinese as well as the Westerners?

### 1.7.3 Ethical Choice

An *ethical choice* is the decision that one makes over all considerable options in solving one's problem. It is made out of one's rational will. It has more than a single determinative: law, religion, cultural practice or one's preference could all be its context and determining factors.

Based on the determinatives, an individual may not be making choices based on morally right or wrong, but of ethical considerations (Velasquez et al., 1988) such as:

(a) The Utilitarian Approach: Which option produces the most good and causes the least harm; e.g., Given Han Suyin's context, she chose to obey her first husband's Tang's instructions to read books of piety and write letters of self-renunciation in order to preserve temporal marital harmony.

(b) The Rights Approach: Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake; e.g. Having experienced – in her own definition – a loveless marriage, Han Suyin decided to break the taboo of Asian society but to initiate legal procedure in order to separate from her second husband Leon Comber.

(c) The Common Good Approach: Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members; e.g., Given the context of the Cold War, Han Suyin sought to present her opinion that the economic reforms by the Communist government was fair for the majority of her people, while the Kuomintang leadership was too corrupted to be trusted.

(d) The Justice Approach: Which option treats people equally or proportionately; e.g., Given the context of war treaties, Han Suyin protested against the exploitations of foreigners towards the locals, especially the number of brothels that mushroomed due to their presence, and their rough treatment of the Chinese coolies (Han, 1972b, p. 348).

(e) The Virtue Approach: Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be; e.g., Han Suyin chose “to be,” rather than “ought to be.” However, Han Suyin also redefined her “to be,” and thus fitted herself into the “ought to be” of her ethical environment. The writer of the thesis will elaborate on this in Chapter Five.

#### **1.7.4 Ethical Dilemma**

An *ethical dilemma* refers to the mental conflict whereby an individual could not resolve his/her problem without making an *ethical choice* between two mutually exclusive options. Such an unsettling situation happens as both options are moral imperatives. To comply with one will violate the other.

The mental conflict of man occurs due to deontological ethics, of which the normative ethical position of the individual adheres to a certain rule or a norm. For example, twice in Han Suyin’s life, she was in a dilemma whether to sail back from Europe to China: the first time was when Nanking fell under the Japanese Occupation, while she was still in the Medical College in Belgium; the second time was when China was undergoing radical movement, while Han Suyin was doing exceptionally well in her medical career in England. For the first dilemma, Han Suyin was at the crossroads of choosing between returning to China to stand in for the country’s needs during the war, or staying back in Belgium to pursue her 5-year medical studies with a scholarship (Han, 1972a, pp. 356-357). The former considers patriotism as its ultimate good, while the latter considers educational opportunity and one’s security as logically and practically good. Both “good”s are equally important, and mutually exclusive. Choosing either of which will cause Han Suyin to lose out the other. Almost like “*déjà vu*,” Han Suyin was in a similar dilemma again a decade later, choosing between travelling back to China to become a contributing member to the radical development of modern China,

or settling in England with a secure medical profession to provide for herself and her foster daughter (Han, 1972b, p. 350).

### 1.7.5 Taboo, Legitimacy And Ethical Order

A *taboo* is a prohibition that is guarded by cultural custodians of a certain community. When a member of a community breaks a taboo – whether religious or cultural, it is seen as violating the “behavioural law” of the community, thus punishable by members of the community.

*Legitimacy* is the acceptable code of behaviour in a given community. Socially and culturally, legitimacy is akin to the idea of “norm” or “custom,” as any behaviour or choices apart from the norm or custom would be questionable and illegitimate, unless the exceptions are accepted by the community. *Ethical order* is the disposition of people or things in relation to each other in a certain pattern, structure or sequence. It gives stability, predictability and desirability in relationships or happenings.

In Han Suyin’s autobiography, quite a number of social taboos were mentioned, for example, mixed marriages, having “half-caste” children from the mixed marriages, breaking of marital vows, sex outside of wedlock, and so forth. When taboos were broken, one would taste the social sanctions or “punishments” from the community, which acted as the custodian of legitimacy. For example, the French doctor’s wife did not welcome an illegitimate or “half-caste” baby, causing the death of Han Suyin’s second brother. When there is a perceived illegitimacy, the status quo or ethical order of society is being disturbed, hence causing disruption, disharmony, and conflicts. Readers of Han Suyin’s autobiography could perceive how the presence of “foreign devils” such as when Han Suyin’s mother and her Eurasian children posed a racial tension in the

remote Chinese villages along the Lunghai Railroad, as the locals had never welcomed other ethnic groups to dwell among them.

#### **1.7.6 Ethical Reconstruction**

*Ethical Reconstruction* may take place after the state of disorder or confusion of one's ethical identity and ethical consciousness. Besides, ethical reconstruction could also happen after the disharmony state of taboo-breaking, acts of illegitimacy or disruption of ethical order.

In her autobiography, Han Suyin used the rebirth of the phoenix to symbolise the massive ethical reconstruction of China after the rifts of radicalisation and modernisation. At the individual level, the life story of Han Suyin itself was also an ethical reconstruction as readers witnessed how she evolved from Rosalie Chou to the worldwide famous diva, Han Suyin.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

The ELC is a literary approach that analyses, interprets and examines literary work through the study of the ethical elements that are embedded in the structure and meaning of any given literary texts. According to Professor Nie Zhenzhao, key proponent of the ELC, this method of literary criticism aimed at tackling “issues concerning the human essence unanswered in Darwinian evolution.”<sup>10</sup> For Nie, Darwin's rationale of natural selection, or the “survival of the fittest” theory, could never piece together a satisfactory explanation about the essence of man. Instead, Nie

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<sup>10</sup> Definition of Nie Zhenzhao regarding ethical literary criticism as a salient choice for new literary studies in “Ethical Literary Criticism: A New Choice of Literary Criticism,” by Z. Nie, 2015 in *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 491(4), pp. 5-19.

proposed that *ethical selection* and *ethical choice*, which were guided by human rational mind, contributed to the advancement of mankind and human civilisation.

Nie understood the evolution of the human species in three stages. For him, man started out as animals, making the same biological or *natural selection* as the animals did. However, man being the apex of the animal species, managed to distinguish themselves from the beasts via their *ethical selection* of the rational mind. Ethics was the essence that differentiates man from beasts. Ethics was maintained via man's continuous and intentional exercises of man's *rational will* over the natural will. *Human nature* or *human factor* thus reigned over animal nature, and that human beings did not regress to bestiality. For Nie, there was yet another stage after the ethical selection of human beings. He said, once humans had learnt to acquire "human nature" and curbed animal nature via ethical selection, mankind would be ready to progress to the next level, namely the *scientific selection*, of which scientific tools and technology could be employed to further the advancement of human civilisation. Nie's ELC borrowed some of its premises from Darwin's evolution theory and Spencer's theory of social evolution, and his understanding of man's positioning in the course of history was rather Marxist in tone. With heavy emphasis on man's rationality and total absence of treatment on man's spiritual factor, Nie founded his ELC on rather materialistic terms.

However, Nie's ELC is highly appealing for literary critics. Although it is areligious in nature, it calls for a firm belief in the redemption of mankind via literary criticism as well as intellectual ways of finding breakthroughs in the various dimensions of human relationships based on its critical study of the people and events in the simulated world of literature. As far as the understanding of the writer of this paper goes, Nie used *ethical selection* in contrast with *natural selection* to describe the engagement of ethics in the volitional activities of human species. *Ethical choice* instead, was employed

regarding man's daily decisions, in which conscious ethical deliberations were involved. For Nie (2012), ethics, coated with aesthetics, was the essence of literature produced by mankind. "The value of world literature is not in its power to entertain, but in its function to facilitate the understanding of human life and society in the light of social ethics" (pp. 3-15).

Under Nie's leading scholarship, ELC has been given a solid theoretical framework with clear, identifiable key terms such as *animal factor*, *human factor*, *free will*, *natural will*, *rational will*, *natural selection*, *ethical selection*, *ethical choice*, *ethical dilemma*, *ethical identity*, *taboo*, *chaos*, *ethical consciousness*, *ethical order*, *ethical environment* and *ethical reconstruction*. To facilitate a quick understanding, the writer of this thesis would categorise all of the ELC key terms in three diagrams:

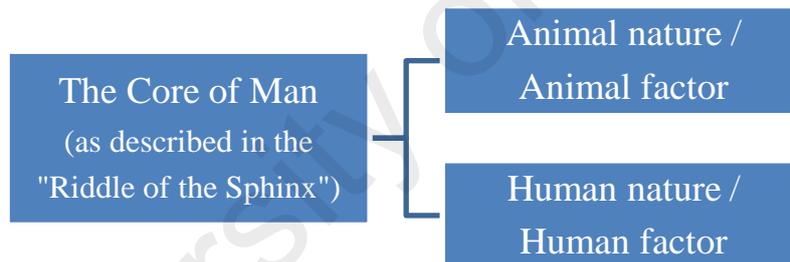


Diagram 1.1: ELC Key Terms relating to the Core of Man or the Nature of Man

The first diagram groups together all the ELC terms that relate to the core or nature of man. Nie, drawing from the "Riddle of the Sphinx" in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 BC), suggested that the core of man consisted of the animal factor (or animal nature) and the human factor (or human nature). In the tragedy, the Sphinx, which was a mythical being with the head of a man and body of a lion, sat at a junction of a road and interrogated every passing traveller, "What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three in the evening?" Many who failed to answer were killed by the Sphinx. It was not so when it was Oedipus' turn. He answered wittily,

“Man.” -- for man crawls on all fours as an infant, walks upright as a toddler until his old age, finally needing a walking stick when the legs fail him.

Nie purported that the essence of the “Riddle of the Sphinx” is the quest of man’s self-discovery. For Nie, humans are progressive and organic beings, exercising their volitional powers to acquire their human nature and discard their animal nature. Where ethics is concerned, one will realise that a man’s *rational will* would always war against his corroding *natural will*. Also, dilemmas and challenges in life would lead one to make choices that have ethical bearings.

Diagram 1.2 shows the two tendencies of man’s volitional actions, namely, yielding to the unchecked, natural will; or the ethical, rational mind.



Diagram 1.2: ELC Key Terms relating to the Volition of Man

If one were simply to yield to one’s natural will and to disregard the consequence of one’s wanton action towards another, one would eventually lose oneself. If one were to exercise the rational will to observe virtues such as justice, temperance, prudence and courage, one would be able to maintain or reconstruct the equilibrium of one’s ethical world. If there were no ethical bearing, there would be no yardstick for one to combat ethical chaos, inconsiderate taboo-breaking, fatal conflicts and confusion of the minds. Hence, how would a man choose? How should we live? – These are the questions that human society would face on a daily basis. The demarcation between man’s natural

choice and ethical choice has great significance in the history of human civilization, whether it will be advancing well, or going down in decadence.

Diagram 1.3 contains all other key terms that Nie employed in the ELC, which pertain to the relationship of one with oneself, and one with one's community.

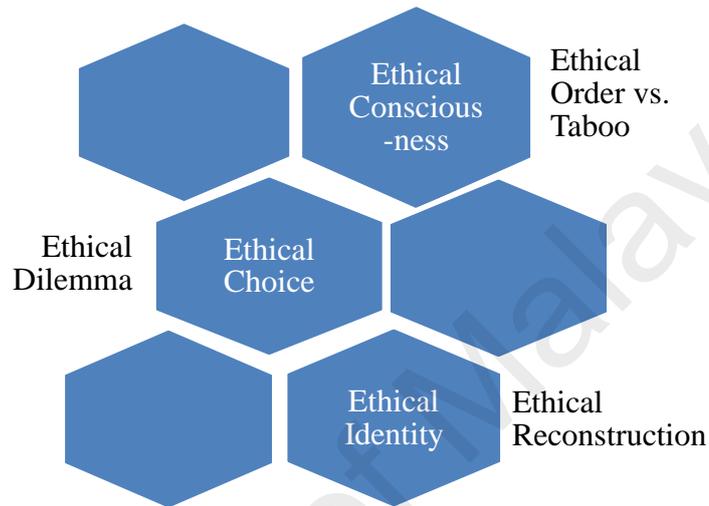


Diagram 1.3: ELC Key Terms relating to the Individual and the Community

The key terms or key concepts are somewhat organically linked with each other. Judging from the openness of the ELC in cross-germination with ecocriticism, philosophy and psychological, the writer of this thesis would not be surprised of the inclusion of any new terms or newly-created terms within the ELC framework in the next decade.

## 1.9 Methodology

This research would be a *textual analysis* of all the six books in Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* biographical series. It seeks to discover and unfold timeless values in literature through close textual observation. Its textual reading shall focus on the

unravelling of the intertwining ethical complexities within the simulated world of humans in Han Suyin's literature.

*Qualitative method* will be employed to determine the nature, characteristics and specifics of the texts of this study. Language and literature are best reflections of human entities and human activities. Qualitative analysis measures "the what" of people and events by means of providing definitions, inferences, type and pro-type as well as analogies. The findings of qualitative analysis would be most conducive to human understanding and application.

Even as Han Suyin described her life and the history of modern China as a swinging pendulum, being pulled towards two opposite directions each time; the core of her autobiography spoke of the role of ethics in one's identity search issues and the subjectivity of a national will. Hence, this thesis employs *ELC* amidst all possible criticism methods to capture the psyche and volitional dimensions in Han Suyin's literature.

### **1.10 Scope Of Research**

Firstly, by defining the subject matters in Han Suyin's autobiography as *ethical consciousness*, *ethical identity* and *ethical choice*, the writer of this thesis differs from Lee (2015), Wang (1996)<sup>11</sup>, and Zhang (2015) who had somewhat highlighted Han Suyin's political voice in the light of the post-Cold War or post-Colonial historical background. The researcher of this thesis begs to differ that, what matters in the study of Han Suyin's autobiography is not any political advocacy that Han Suyin might have

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<sup>11</sup> Wang (1996) framed Han's autobiographical writings under the post-colonial framework in his PhD Thesis, "Of Bridge Construction: A Critical Study of Han Suyin's Historical and Autobiographical Writings" as well as his article (2008) "The East/West Relationship in *The Crippled Tree*" in *Renwen Xuebao of Aletheia University*, 6, pp. 225-240.

made. Her key concerns are but the issue of *rationality*, which she frequently raised in the lines of the autobiography – One day, the world should thrive with human civilisations where there are cultural dialogues, so that “every child has an egg a day” for his or her daily nutrition<sup>12</sup> and every man lives with dignity. Beyond the claims for equality and fraternity between men, Han Suyin wanted a normalised state of living for the minority group and marginalised individuals. Given any time era, any individual should be able to make a rational choice for himself or herself, irrespective of the person’s ethnic or class identity. *Rationality* rests in a sensible heart and sound mind of the person, not by what any biased majority would warrant the person. All in all, the resetting of Han Suyin’s ethical world is the main interest in this research thesis.

Hence, the thesis leans slightly towards readers’ response, but *not* actually engaging Reader-response Criticism (RRC). Proponents of the RRC purport that although a text might be the same for everybody, “everyone responds to it differently.”<sup>13</sup> Holland (1980) stated that literature enabled readers to recreate their identities by allowing them to transact with the text in four ways: defence, expectation, fantasy and transformation. Taking a group of readers of a poem for example, Holland said the common need of readers to recreate their identities would generate both factual questions concerning the poem as well as questions that elicited varieties of personal responses. He stated that “Both objective and subjective responses emerge from a process in which subjectivity shapes objectivity” (Ibid, 144-145). However, since any text one reads is already idea-

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<sup>12</sup> “‘One day each child in China will have an egg a day.’ An egg a day, according to Mama, prevented blindness.” The hopeful wish of Rosalie Chou as in *The Crippled Tree*, 1972, p. 348.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Holland, “Recovering ‘The purloined letter’: Reading as a personal transaction,” in Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds (1980), *The Reader in the Text: Essays on audience and interpretation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, quoted from K.M. Newton (1990), *Interpreting Text: A Critical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Literary Interpretation*, p. 142, New York: St Martin’s Press.

laden, and that its reader is exposed to the persuasion of the ideas in the text, the research methodology will not be RRC, but ELC.

Secondly, this research, though somewhat focused on Han Suyin's subjectivity in her ethical consciousness, ethical identity and ethical choice, does *not* engage Feminist Literary Criticism (FLC). Unlike FLC, which consciously reveals and exposes any references to oppression or discrimination against women in a text, this research yields findings that show that Han Suyin was not a feminist. In comparison to prominent feminist Chinese writers such as Ding Ling, whose famous essay "Thoughts on March 8" protested against the unequal treatment of women devotees of the Communist Party in Yanan, and subsequently lost her editorial position with the *Liberation Daily*, Han Suyin was but a conservative (H. Yu, 1991, pp. 131-134). As reflected in her autobiographies, Han Suyin's reaction to unequal treatment to the males at home or at work was far too matronly. She allowed herself to cry when she was upset, to be vulnerable when she was emotional, to doll herself up when attending a date or a party, and subject herself to a male supervisor in the professional world. When she discovered the selfishness and arrogance of men, including that of her abusive first husband Tang Pao-Huang, she did not suggest to dethrone or decentralise them. In fact, when she narrated on relationships that ran on unequal terms between the genders, her tone was rather sorry than accusing. At times, she even camouflaged her disappointment in a teasing language, or simply suggested a faint picture of how ethical relationships should be in her opinion. Thus, this research will be more interested in the approach of studying the ethical settings in the text rather than probing into any sexist or political ideologies.

In short, this thesis will confine its textual research and criticism within the study of Han Suyin's six-volume autobiography, with relevant referencing to her other work.

The scope of research will stay within close observations of the ethical knots and lines in the literary texts of her autobiography. No RRC or FLC will be engaged, as the lenses of the ELC approach would be most suitable to expound the plethora of ethical issues in her autobiography series.

University of Malaya

**CHAPTER 2: PORTRAYAL OF THE LOST HUMANITY IN HAN SUYIN'S  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

THE WALKING MAN OF RODIN-- *Carl Sandburg, 1961*

“Legs hold a torso away from the earth.

And a regular high poem of legs is here.

Powers of bone and cord raise a belly and lungs

Out of ooze and over the loam where eyes look and ears hear

And arms have a chance to hammer and shoot and run motors.

You make us

Proud of our legs, old man.

And you left off the head here,

The skull found always crumbling neighbour of the ankles.”

Written in the early twentieth century, this poem of Carl Sandburg was inspired by the impressionist bronze sculpture *L'homme qui marche* (“The Walking Man”) that was created by Auguste Rodin in 1878. It presented the imagery of a walking man with sturdy legs and a tall character, St John the Baptist. The poem seemed to suggest somewhat fearful eyesight and wonderful hearing capability of St John the Baptist. However, the sculpture was in actual fact, without a human head, nor two upper limbs. Interestingly, according to its French sculptor, the headless and armless “walking man” was in no way incomplete, for it had captured the most essential element of St John, namely, the dynamic pose of his torso.

While the idea of the presentation of the sculpture is avant-garde, it is rather thought-provoking. Can a man be presented without his head? Perhaps, artistically and

visually, one can identify the form of “a man” as man, even without a head. However, functionally and philosophically, a man without his *head* – the symbol of *rationality* – is not a *man*, but an irrational, non-human being.

On 16 August 2016, it was reported that a 19-year-old student of University of Florida, Austin Harrouff, attacked an elderly couple in their garage, biting off chunks of the face of the dead husband. The student was a member of the Phi Delta Alpha fraternity, and had no prior criminal record. The police believed that his intake of a drug named “flakka” might have caused the student to temporarily lose his *sanity*, having hallucinations, and attacking the elderly couple although they did not know him nor did they provoke him. The police had to release police dogs to subdue the criminal. Harrouff “was making grunting, growling ‘animal-like noises’ at the scene” when the police arrived (Salinger, 2016). This inhumane incident is one of the many human crimes that reflects an unfortunate reality: if man loses his *rational mind* or “the head,” he could turn beastly, behave insanely, and become extremely harmful to human society.

To reflect further, in Spring 2016, Walt Disney Studios had just released *Zootopia*, which attributed regressive behaviour of members of society to identifiable psychotropic drugs. Charted over 1 billion USD box office, this 3D computer-animated comedy movie received overwhelming good reviews regarding its moral messages. Amongst others, the can-do spirit; inclusivism, anti-racism, antibigotry and anti-stereotyping. However, it is interesting that this anthropomorphic movie resolves all irrationality of the crimes by pointing to a culprit: the toxic flowers named as “night howlers.” According to its storyline, the psychotropic effects of the “night howlers” had caused all those already tamed and highly civilised predators to lose their *rationality* and *civility*, resulting in their random attacks on their preys. In the language of Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC), this scenario resembled the act of losing one’s “human nature”

and regression to actions that stem on one's "animal factor." With the *animal factor* and *irrational will* in play, the civets, jaguars, foxes as well as other predators lost their *ethical judgement*, acted out from their natural aggressiveness, thus becoming bloodthirsty villains. They regressed into uncivilized beings, and ceased to function as civic members of a "mammal" society.

One of the key pointers of ELC is the *ethical* selection of man. Man's ethical judgment and functioning will not be present if he loses his "head," or *rationality*. As delineated in Chapter One, man's rational mind contributes to his ethical volition and ability to deliberate, and thus differentiate man from beasts. It is clear by far that the theory of Darwinism about man's natural or biological selection could not offer a satisfactory explanation about the *essence* of man. ELC bridges that gap by purporting that it is man's *ethical selection* and *ethical choice* that marks a human being *man*. Man, guided by the rational mind, could make progress by learning from the consequences of their ethical choices. The advancement of the civilization of the human society is thus possible.

In the theory of karma in Buddhism and Hinduism, a morally questionable human could potentially be downgraded to becoming an animal in the next life. Mankind is thus distinct from the animal in terms of man's unique moral properties. In Islam, Judaism and Christianity, God created the living beings, each according to its respective "type," namely reptiles as reptiles, birds as birds, mammals as mammals, and so forth. During the creation of human beings, God breathed into man's nostrils his spirit. Hence, man is not only distinctive from the other creatures, but also the apex of God's creation, with a *human* spirit and *human* heart, marking humans different from other creatures.

Discarding the religious jargons, the ELC that was proposed by Nie and his colleagues capitalized on the *rationality* of man. Tapping on the idea of Darwinism, the

ELC departs from the five main religions of the world by suggesting an allegory that man came into being from the animals. The evolvement of man from his past, namely the animal stage, makes it necessary for him to shed off his *animal nature* through conscious, rational and ethical choices, so that his *human nature* would be fully operated instead. In other words, man could potentially *regress* to his less desirable, animalistic or non-human nature, if he could not exercise his volitional powers correctly. In the terms of ELC, when one yields to one's unchecked *natural will*, one could be entirely self-seeking on the expense of others. A human being of such is prone to violate the common ethical codes of human society.

One thing is clear here: In ELC, the rationality of man is the demarcation between mankind and the animals. The rational mind should definitely be guarded carefully and persistently. Man's intentional and continuous exercises of the *rational will* over the *natural will* could at least safeguard the ethics of man. The reigning factor in a man would be the *human nature* or *human factor*, rather than the inhuman element – named as the *animal nature* or *animal factor*. Hence, human beings should be conscious about not making animal-like choices or behaving like the beasts.

The text of our study here, Han Suyin's six-volume autobiography, namely, *The Crippled Tree (CT)*, *A Mortal Flower (MF)*, *Birdless Summer (BS)*, *My House Has Two Doors (HTD)*, *Phoenix Harvest (PH)* and *Wind In My Sleeve (WMS)*, was strung together with an overarching theme: "A Hundred-year Search of Legitimacy." This ethical undertone ran across her two-track narrative in her autobiography, both in the narrative of her personal and family story, and in her national account regarding China.

The long years of negotiating on the issue of legitimacy were quite an experience. In her autobiography, Han Suyin documented clearly about her difficult renegotiation for acceptance of her *raison d'être* through continuous reconstruction of her ethical identity.

At the same time, she also presented the precarious socio-economic state of China through those years of radical modernisation very vividly, including the time when China was caught up in a public relations standstill during the Cold War era. Within each volume of the autobiography, the themes of life and death, political ideological conflicts, leadership and power, war and peace, love and commitment, self-assuring hope, patriotism, diasporic dilemma and a plethora of other issues came alive. Han Suyin's autobiographical account of people and events during 1885-1991 had altogether posed a humanistic concern about the *rationality* of happenings and things. When *irrationality* prevailed continuously, the ethical order of society would go asunder. In the wording of the ELC, it would be akin to the metaphorical missing of the human "head" of the Sphinx.

## 2.1 Ethical themes in Han Suyin's Six-Volume Autobiography Series

The *CT* started and ended with the theme of "death." The beginning of the book depicted the *murder* of the house chef. The book ended with rather intense suspension, suggesting that there might be *inhumane executions* of two under-aged Communist suspects. The former was her household matter, but the latter was pertaining to national ideological conflicts. This two-track writing mode, vis-a-vis narrative about Han Suyin's family saga alongside narrative about China, had been rather consistent throughout all the volumes in her autobiography. Sandwiched in between the overall theme of death was the imagery of "crippledness," namely, the *crippledness* in Han Suyin's family saga, and the desperate *humiliation* of China as a result of the inevitable colonisation by various Western powers.

*MF* started with the theme of the "wedding" of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Miss Soong Mei-ling; and ended with the counter-theme of "separation," namely that

between Rosalie – Han Suyin’s maiden name – with her European boyfriend. Their breaking off was not due to the dying love between them, but Rosalie’s determination to return to the pre-war China. The juxtaposition of blissfulness and curses, or switching of hope and sufferings was as the constant phenomena of this volume and all subsequent volumes. *Patriotism* and the national aspiration to “save China” formed the main ethical themes throughout this book. The autobiographer’s disdainful description about the wealth of the Kuomintang leaders in contrast to the high *mortality* rate and deteriorating socio-economic state of China had altogether suggested how wrong things had been.

The *BS* started with Rosalie’s revisit at Marseilles, recounting her mixed feelings as she found her past “self” overlapping with her current *reconstructed identity* as Han Suyin. The book ended with her anxious thoughts and deliberations over her decision to trade her secure career in England for an unknown undertaking in the Far East. While warfare and large-scale destructions were looming in China, Han Suyin asserted her strong will to thrive by means of *redefinition* and *reorientation*. In this book, the end of Han Suyin’s first marriage and the beginning of her second marked the changing seasons of her life. At the national level, the impending Sino-Japanese war had fueled the rise of Chinese nationalism, which energised her people to become a new nation with new power in the near future.

The *HTD* began with Han Suyin’s return at Hong Kong as her transient home in 1949. Not entitled to reenter the Communist China, she had to continue living in several *in-between lands* for the next two decades, until she finally found a permanent address in Lausanne, Switzerland. A widow of an ex-Kuomintang general, yet dreaming of returning to China every single day of her life, Han Suyin’s ethical dilemma escalated at this point. The book is infused with the *paradox of duality*. She fell in love, but her love ended with the demise of her lover. She remarried, but chose to end this second

marriage herself. She was once a follower of her demised husband, who was a leader of the Kuomintang, but now she professed that she had become a follower of Zhou Enlai. At the end of the book, the theme of “death” emerged again: Wang Wanchun, a very congenial and bubbly journalist friend of Han Suyin, had died all of a sudden. Although it was not clear whether Wang was murdered or had committed suicide, Han Suyin believed Wang’s correspondences with her might have endangered him, for he might have been accused of “having illicit relations with a foreigner.” Han Suyin knew it well enough that although she was born and raised in China – a legitimate Chinese advocate, she would be wrongfully labeled and perceived as a “foreigner” like Pearl S Buck, whose writing career was “malicious” towards China (Han, 1982, p. 523).

The *PH* begins with Han Suyin’s recollection of one of the greatest *socio-political setbacks* in the newly formed China, namely, the Cultural Revolution. None could give politically correct justifications of this political upheaval that had caused the lives of many elitists. Neither could Han Suyin. Even the leaders of the country had to shun away from making statements to the public due to their own precarious fire fighting positions at that time. “Endurance” emerged as the main theme here. The ever hopeful and optimistic Han Suyin countered the frustration and confusion of the era with *exaltations* of Chinese leaders such as Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and Kung Peng, who practised servant leadership, leading exemplary lives as dedicated public servants. Nevertheless, Han Suyin’s frequent visits to China gradually earned her the credibility to become a self-appointed, non-diplomat China expert. It also paved the way for her to rise as a highly sought after public speaker on matters relating to China.

The *WMS* rings with the themes of *continual change and challenges* as well as a proud sense of *self-completion*. The book introduced the new political stability of China with the rise of Deng Xiaoping. The beginning of the book paid posthumous respect to

Zhou Enlai, which also marked the end of rule of the Gang of the Four. While the title of the book seemed to suggest an eventual tone of restfulness, Han Suyin documented that mounting tasks of *restoration* were underway. The ending pages of the book were filled with major *national crisis* that China faced in 1991, namely, the big floods in North China that had caused the evacuation of ten millions of people; and the economic slump triggered by the complete disintegration of the Soviet Union, China's biggest trading partner. To counter the mellow tone of these adversities, Han Suyin offered her interview with Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin, who assured that China had always been prepared to face any challenges of that nature. Citing a poem of Robert Frost in the ending lines of the book, Han Suyin seemed to suggest man's will to power and possibility of creating a better future via the power of hope and love. A summary of the enveloping themes and ethical lines of each book is shown as in the following:

**Table 2.1: Themes of Each Book In Han Suyin's Autobiography**

Book	Theme		Passage
<i>CT</i>	The <i>death</i> of the house chef	Beginning:	"Dear Papa, dear Mama, Today I shall not have time to write you a very long letter, because the bandits were here last night, and the cook has been <i>decapitated</i> ." (p. 1)
	Rosalie's experience of <i>crippledness</i> in life	The word "crippled" occurs four times in the book. Only two are quoted here:	"I am nothing if not persistent: persistence is needed when one wants to bare the <i>crippled</i> tree, and study its mishap." (p. 289)  "And now Rosalie was nearly eleven, a peevish, irritable eleven, overworked, overtired, no blossom-fragrant youth but a <i>crippled</i> vigour propelled into the already future though unknown ingrate years that were coming, the years of growing up; and in and out in awkward, ungainly strength that loses before it wins, when the seeing childhood eye and ear abdicate, and this change was terror... Who am I, what am I... why am I as I am... Am I going mad?" (p. 444)

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	Members of the Communist party on the <b>death</b> roll ; Rosalie’s optimistic <b>hope</b> for tomorrow	Ending:	“In front of the East Market there is a sudden scuffle, an uproar, policemen shouting, and dragging a boy, a girl, out of the market into the dim fumous sparse electric light, flinging them into a black car which then drives away...And Rosalie, who is there too, walks away. ‘Perhaps they will be <i>shot</i> tomorrow, I wonder how old they are?’... Tomorrow would find herself, Rosalie, again...” (p. 447)
MF	The <i>elaborate wedding</i> of Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Mei-ling in contrast to China’s state of <i>poverty</i> then	Beginning:	“...Even Rosalie knows about that wedding last December, more than six months ago. Everyone knows... ‘The wedding was a brilliant affair. Everybody of importance was there... It unites the all-powerful leader of the Nanking armies and the family of Dr. T.V.Soong, brother of the bride... fully thirteen hundred person were present... Sir Sidney Barton, H.M. Consul-General, Mr. S. Yada, Japanese Consul-General, Admiral Mark Bristol, Commander-in-Chief American Pacific Fleet...’ Holding the shining magazine, looking at the face of the young woman Miss Soong, now Madame Chiang Kai-shek, so beautiful, with diamonds in her ears, marrying Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the Number One in China, under a huge bell of white roses in December... Rosalie dreams.” (pp. 9-11)
	<i>Patriotism</i> and the people’s aspiration to <i>save China</i>	“Patriot” occurs 30 times in the book	“We were not all Communists, ... but we were <i>patriots</i> ; the call was what we had been waiting for, and from then on all of us began to look towards Yen-an, towards Mao Tse-tung. Though many of us never became Communists, yet we now realized that our only hope to <i>save our country</i> lay in Yen-an, not in Nanking; in Mao Tse-tung, not in Chiang Kai-shek.” (p. 323)

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	<p><i>Separation</i> with her boyfriend to return to <i>pre-war China</i>; Rosalie's anxious <i>hope</i> for tomorrow</p>	<p>Ending:</p>	<p>"Marseilles was cold blustery... The next day I climb on board ship, my cabin is a four-person one, my trunk is stowed away, I have a suitcase in the cabin... The siren hoots, the gangplank is raised, the quay where Louis stands begins to slide away... And so I turn to look, not behind, but forward, at the sea with its slow, passionate pulse – the sea." (pp. 361-362)</p>
<p>BS</p>	<p>Rosalie's self-reflection (<i>Juxtaposition of her past and present</i>) after China established herself as a Communist country</p>	<p>Beginning:</p>	<p>"Standing on the Canebiere of Marseilles in 1967, I re-enter that unsympathetic selfish twenty-year-old girl of deadly ignorance, Rosalie Chou, who stood on this very same spot in 1938, the tears upon her face buffeted by a gritty mistral. Phantom sob, ghostly wind, of a yesterday that chose today, when again the famishing need for a reality beyond the benevolent mummery of success reasserts its raucousness. On the threshold of yet another war, of far larger dimensions, an even more stringent choosing. Today the East is 'Red,' the future has entered our present, has transformed it long before its own advent. The world continues what began in China yesterday. The mistral sings its name and its name is Revolution, World Revolution... Yet another phantom emerges from the welter of the Marseilles street as we – Rosalie Chou of yesterday, Han Suyin of today – stand transfixed, in that small cleft of time where nothing begins nor end. (p. 9)</p>
	<p><i>Rebuild, reconstruct, reorientate</i></p>	<p>The words "build," "rebuild" and "reconstruct" occur altogether 20 times in the book</p>	<p>"The bone-pounding heat of summer and the Japanese bombers left us; the great clefts of the mountains let go of their swollen waters, the sky's dismal glare gave way and the Chialing river sparkled like a new sky... after the summer destruction, there was the hammer sound of rebuilding as new shacks and new houses went up. Inflation also took a new leap; rice was in short supply..." (p. 208)</p>

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	Choosing <i>war-torn</i> “homeland” in the East over the comfort life in host country England	Ending:	<p>“I decided to leave England, to go back in spite of much advice to the contrary... for I had not trained in medicine merely to have a good safe job in England... Miss Rendell, the Director of the Caldecott School, was indignant. ‘There is a revolution, and you want to drag your child with you and throw her into the fires of this hell’... In December 1948, two days after I had terminated my one-year housemanship, I packed, took Yungmei back from the Caldecott, bought with the rest of the money from <i>Destination Chungking</i> two airline tickets, and in early January 1949, we set off for Hongkong... Soon, within five days with all the halts, we would be in Hong Kong, gateway to China. Hongkong, which was Chinese, though a British colony. And there Yungmei would go to Chinese school. And there I would watch, and wait, and make up my mind, for both of us.” (pp. 348-350)</p>
HTD	Choosing to be at <i>the in-between land</i> (Relocation to Hong Kong)	Beginning:	<p>“In that month of grizzled distemper I tossed away the marooning clutch of a career in England, despite the anxious admonitory chorus of friends predicting disaster, and by Christmas of 1948 departed with Yungmei for Hong Kong. In my ears still linger their expostulations: ‘Crazy to cast a child into all this chaos’... I could not explain that even if I could not live in the New China that the Revolution would bring forth, phoenix reborn and the sound of its beauteous wings filling the air for me, at the same time I could not bear to stay, for to stay in England would be to renounce China. The New China might be my executioner, but still I had to go, at least to stand on the threshold, and be both reckless and prudent, and survive. In Hong Kong I would breathe the dust, smell the shift of air from China; ...” (p. 9)</p>

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	The oxymoron of <i>opposites in unity</i> is prevalent in the series	The words “duality” and “opposite” appear five times in this book	“But then perhaps there is no explanation, except that all my life I shall be running in two opposite directions at once; away from and towards love, away from and towards China.” (p. 136)
	Becoming a Communist sympathiser; <i>Death</i> of Wang Wanchun, HSY’s journalist friend, during the Cultural Revolution	Ending:	“Now I realize that Zhou Enlai (Chou Enlai), in that autumn of 1965, was aware that a crisis would take place in America’s foreign policy... With McNamara clamouring that China was <i>the</i> enemy, with McGeorge Bund refusing to shake my hand because I was a ‘Red,’ with even Margaret Mead refusing to talk to me because I was a ‘communist’ – how could I do anything? Nevertheless, through all possible means and all possible people, Zhou hoped to project China as she really was: Edgar Snow had again come to China in 1964, and had had an interview with Mao. It was becoming increasingly hard to keep China out of the United Nations, Zhou remarked. In that year of 1965, China would obtain exactly half the votes in favour of admitting her... And all my life I will be a follower of Zhou Enlai...When I left Peking, Wang Wanchun came to see me off, ‘Write to me,’ said he happily. This was the last time I would see Wanchun. For in 1966, the next year, when I sought him out, I was not allowed to see him. He was ‘busy.’ Wanchun died during the Cultural Revolution... ‘he threw himself out of a window.’ Threw or was thrown?... And now I shall never know.” (pp. 522-524)

**Table 2.1 Continued**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Theme</b>		<b>Passage</b>
<i>PH</i>	<b><i>Confusion</i></b> within and outside China (Cultural Revolution)	Beginning:	“In January 1966 I went to Peking for ten days, because I had been invited to a seminar to be held on China at Chicago University. At least five such seminars were taking place in mid-western cities of the United States that year. I wanted to glean the latest thinking in Peking. I filled a notebook with interviews on China’s policies, on economics, and became thoroughly confused. I was not able to see Zhou Enlai. Little did I then know that the most intense confrontation was occurring at the top, between Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shaoqi; no leaders were therefore available for interviews, and no interview could provide a definitive statement.” (p. 9)
	<b><i>Endurance</i></b> through all setbacks	The words “endure” and “endurance” occur 15 times in this book	“Thus Chou Enlai suddenly transformed their doubts and questionings and their torments into something quite different. Just as the Long March, with its losses and sufferings and agony had been metamorphosed into an epic of human <i>endurance</i> and a triumph, so the wretchedness, the puzzling punishments, acquired meaning and nobility. They were not senseless ordeals, time wasted, never to return; they became part of this creation, the creation of a new and better world. And this was fulfillment.” (p. 237)

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	<p><i>“The Way Of Man”</i>: to live for others and for posterity</p>	<p>Ending:</p>	<p>“Now I really can write a love story. Because China is in the hands of her own people, at last.’ I want to write about love: the love of Heart of Ice for her husband; when they held hands gently going down that dim hotel corridor in Peking together. I want to write about my friend Yeh and his wife, and her long waits in the dark nights by the bus stop... seven years, every day, waiting, not knowing whether he would or would not be on the last bus... I want to write about so many, so many loves; about what it is like to grow young with love when one is old... When calm and lovely death shall come for me, it will add to my treasure trove of love. I shall be one of a goodly company. How can I forget what the dead gave me? Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi and Gong Peng (Kung Peng)... how strong is their whisper in my spirit: ‘None of us live for ourselves alone. That is <i>the way of the beast</i>; <i>the way of Man</i> is to live for others, for posterity.’ And this is what I too have tried to do.” (p. 318)</p>
<p>MWS</p>	<p><i>Restoration</i> of China after Cultural Revolution; <i>Posthumous honour</i> for Zhou Enlai; <i>The rise of a strong man</i> Deng Xiaoping</p>	<p>Beginning:</p>	<p>“January 1977....I stand on the marble bridge facing Tiananmen Square, square of Heavenly Peace, and watch it become awash with colour. Wreaths and garlands of roses, fuchsia, baskets of convolvulus and peonies... In solemn procession the hundreds of thousands come, swarm to lay their offerings, heaping them round the monument to the heroes of the Revolution, in the centre of the square. For there is no stele, no monument, no grave to commemorate Zhou Enlai... Deng Xiaoping. Xiao Ping. Two characters meaning small and even. A name that lends itself to a homonymous pun, ‘small bottle.’ Deng Xiaoping is short, five foot two, square and square-faced, not handsome or elegant, but he is the man the people want, for they identify him with Zhou, and with Zhou's unrelenting struggle to maintain order, to push China forward in her modernisation, throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution.” (p. 1-2)</p>

Table 2.1 Continued

Book	Theme		Passage
	<b>Restoration</b> of socio-political order after the Cultural Revolution	The words “rest” and “restoration” occur 17 times in this book	“But by April it was clear that the Red Guard movement was spent, split into a thousand factions, and that restoration of order was in the hands of the army. The work of appealing to the young to unite, to stop fighting, to operate alliances, and to return to studies, fell upon Chou Enlai.” (p. 75)
	<b>Self-assurance of a nation</b> (via portrayal of a very collected China’s premier Jiang Zemin); Proclamation of <i>the power of keep on loving and hoping</i>	Ending:	General Secretary Jiang Zemin is tired. He has lost a good deal of weight since I last saw him in September 1989. He has been travelling a great deal through the land, and through the flooded areas. He has also been sitting up nights, holding meetings to study that other earthshaking event, the breakup of the USSR. But when I use the word ‘another volcanic upheaval’ he gently corrects me. ‘We were prepared for it a long while ago . . . but not at the speed with which the whole structure disintegrated... I shall reciprocate with a poem by Robert Frost: Ah when to the heart of man Was it ever less than a treason To go with the drift of things To yield with a grace to reason And bow and accept the end Of a love or a season? But I do not accept an end to love, to hope.” (pp. 228-229)

## 2.2 “The Way Of Man” Versus “The Way Of Beast”

Among the abovementioned, the ending theme of *Phoenix Harvest* highlighted a fundamental principle: “The way of Man” should triumph over “the way of beast.” Relating the principle with the sum total of statements made by Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and Gong Peng, Han Suyin inferred that one should always choose the way that matched the dignity of mankind. For her, the distinction of the two ways was clear:

“The way of Man” would take concern of the welfare of others, including the generations yet to be born. On the other hand, “the way of the beast” would function solely upon man’s survival mode, resorting to choices corresponding with one’s selfish gains. The former would operate in ways that ensure the civility of human society, where there was compassion for the weak, and where benevolence reigned. In fact, as an autobiographer, Han Suyin depicted quite a few of the ways of the beast that she had observed. The inhumane cruelty of life, which resembled the ways of the beast encompassed social ostracism against the taboo-breakers; ethical chaos at the superstructure level; painful experience pertaining to issues such as illegitimacy, inequality, lack of fraternity; and so forth.

Perhaps, a comparison between the notion of “the way of Man” in Han Suyin’s autobiography and the idea of “being human” by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate cum famous human rights activist, might be helpful. Using the African concept of *ubuntu-botho*, Tutu (2016) said,

Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it *ubuntu-botho*. It means the essence of *being human*. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognises that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be *human* together.

Researches show that when one hurts or harms the others, he or she will experience erosion of the self-perception, such as viewing the self as *less human* (Bastian, 2013, p. 156). There are a few reasons why one becomes a perpetrator or bully: First, the harmful behaviour of the perpetrator is perceived by all in the community as warranted and legitimate, e.g., in the context of self-defense. Second, the harmful actions of the

perpetrator have no justification other than the one who committed it, thus rejected by members of society as unwarranted and illegitimate.

In Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* autobiographical series, there were ample examples of interracial harms and hurts, even to the extent of murders. Almost in each case that Han Suyin documented, the perpetrators claimed "legitimacy" for their racial bigotry or social crimes against her and her family members.

### **2.3 Taboo-breaking: It Pays To Commit The Forbidden**

Han Suyin recorded many occasions when she and her family violated religious, legal and social taboos. Their taboo-breaking offenses include interracial marriages, elopement, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, premarital sex and extramarital affairs. When they ran against the ethical order and ethical code of behavior that were guarded closely by their community, the social sanctions against them as violators were grave. Han and her loved ones thus paid a high price for breaking the taboos, trading away their honour and respect before their community.

Things should not have been so complicated from today's point of view. However, during the first few decades of the 20th century, it was a taboo for anyone in the West or in the East to foster marital relationships with people of other race. With the exception of her third marriage, namely that with Colonel Ruthnaswamy, the consequence of mixed marriages in Han Suyin's family tree had always been so undesirable. The way things were going seemed to suggest that they were suffering from a perpetual curse. Each time, the interracial marriages narrated in Han Suyin's autobiography -- that of her parents; her brother's; her sisters'; her first and second marriages and her extramarital love affairs -- all eventually ended in misery.

To trace it, the “crippled” family tree of Rosalie Chou started from her not-being-blessed mixed parentage, the union of Hakka Chinese Chou Yentung with his Belgian Catholic lover, Marguerite Denis. Yentung was one of the first few Chinese students who pursued railroad engineering in Belgium. Being a “heathen,” his romance with Marguerite was strongly protested by the Denises. The young couple eloped, and when they returned to the Denises, Marguerite was pregnant and insisted on her decision to marry her Chinese beau. The scandal was hardly tolerated. The Denises declared Marguerite insane and decided to “wash their hands off her.” Yentung was summoned by the Supervisor of Studies and the Chinese Consul, who threatened to deport Yentung back to China (Han, 1972c, p. 197). The couple, however, stood firm with their choice for each other. Instead of negotiating for parental approvals, they chose to elope. Within a month, Marguerite got herself pregnant, and “triumphantly announced it to the family” to demand for their approval for her to marry Yentung. Although it was illegitimate for couples of different religious background to be wedded – Yentung stood firm on his categorical refusal to convert to Catholicism (CT, 198), they managed to find a sympathiser to minister their marriage in a rush. Yentung’s side of the family in Chengdu had to give their unwilling consent for their marriage via a telegram.

Han Suyin’s parents’ mixed marriage had far-reaching repercussions, especially when the couple relocated to Yentung’s home province Sichuan, China in 1913. Marguerite, who gave up her Belgian passport and decided to identify with her Chinese husband in every way — “I want to be a Chinese” (Han, 1972c, p. 204) — gradually finding her Chinese dreams shattered as she was humiliated and scorned by the Chinese locals day in day out. Once, a twelve-year-old boy attempted to humiliate her by urinating on her skirt when she was strolling on the street. To add to this utter humiliation, the unsympathetic locals continued their ridicules outside her courtyard, even after they had witnessed the murder of her chef. As a result, Marguerite never

recovered from her bitter experience of social ostracism and hostility. She aged into an unforgiving, ferocious woman and eventually left Yentung, her Chinese husband, for Europe in 1949 (p. 280). Their interracial romance turned into nothingness, in spite of their unshakeable commitment for each other in the beginning, Marguerite and Yentung spent the rest of their lives in separate ways. Eventually, they were also buried in different continents.

Interestingly, Rosalie (the maiden name of Han Suyin), the strong-willed daughter of Marguerite, repeated the same choice years later: “I want to be Chinese, like you, like Papa” (Han, 1972c, p. 103). At a time when interracial marriages were rare, Rosalie chose to marry Chinese Colonel Tang Pao-Huang, whom she nicknamed as “Pao” in her autobiography. During her parents’ time, interracial marriages were a taboo. During her generation, such cross-cultural unions were still beyond general acceptance by society.

Han Suyin’s marriage with Pao was far from blissful. In fact, it quickly turned into a nightmare, as she had committed a taboo before her marriage: she had had premarital sexual contacts with a German boyfriend during her adolescence. Priding himself as an elite leader among the Chinese middle-class society, Pao could not but see his wife’s taboo-breaking as a shame upon his own name. Even though Han Suyin’s premarital social life might not be known among Pao’s circle of friends, Pao had determined to punish her due to her “impurity” before their marriage. In his perception, a woman who lost her virginity before the wedding night was a woman with questionable virtue. Subconsciously, Pao also transferred his judgment upon Han Suyin’s premarital sex to his contempt for her Eurasian identity.

Indeed, Han Suyin’s biracial identity as a Eurasian woman was least helpful to clear the air about her chastity, for the reputation of Eurasians were normally frowned against in

the conservative environment where she was. Throughout her eight years of marriage with Pao, Han Suyin had to obediently read the ideological books assigned by Pao, keep daily journals to recount her wrongdoings and unchastity, and subject to his severe beatings if she was suspected of having any association with any male, even if it was merely a casual glance or an exchange of social greetings. Besides, Pao had warned her that she should not have a mind of her own, which she “violated” it involuntarily on frequent basis. Despised by her husband Pao, Han Suyin became an easy subject of his frequent abuse, both mentally and physically, eventually causing a withdrawal syndrome in her before he headed for the warfront in China.

Han Suyin’s publication of her first book, *Destination Chungking*, was the last straw before he poured out his utter wrath on her. Still hoping to appease her violent husband, Han Suyin’s self-confidence was totally shattered. But she also realised that her subjugation to him had only reinforced his unjustified abusive behaviours:

But I waited, grappling with myself, waited for the last drop, the event which would finally precipitate me into action... And it came. Pao now demanded that the English edition of *Destination Chungking* should be stopped. He kicked and beat me for days, shouting: ‘Stop it, tell the publishers to stop it.’... (Han, 1972, p. 283)

Immediately Han Suyin sought out her publisher Jonathan Cape for any form of help. Cape asked her, “How long has your husband been cruel to you?” but did nothing to shelter her from abuse (Han, 1972b, p. 284). Not long after, Han Suyin found refuge at her friend Margaret Fry’s residence. Pao, however, figured out her whereabouts and came to Fry’s house with two male nurses, demanding to have Han Suyin taken away to the mental clinic for observation. At first, the male nurses were not aware of the entire situation. Thinking that they were just helping Pao to bring his wife home, they placed

Han Suyin on the stretcher and were ready to bring her from Margaret's guest room. But Han Suyin pleaded with them in tears and repeatedly explained that going to the hospital was not of her own will. The nurses soon realised that it was actually a case of domestic violence and decided to leave Han Suyin alone. Failing his plan, Pao became extremely furious and commanded the nurses to act according to what he said. Owing to the obvious threats Pao had posed to Han Suyin, he was taken away by a police instead. After the incident, Pao tried to use his connection and influenced Isobel Cripps, the president of Aid to China Fund, to persuade Han Suyin to return to him. However, Isobel's visit caused more emotional pain than comfort to Han Suyin. Being an upper class English woman, Isobel told Han Suyin not to identify herself as a Eurasian, "But you mustn't say Eurasian, dear, it's not a nice word." Puzzled, Han Suyin protested, "But I am... I must say it, I am" (p. 286). It was difficult, of course, for Han Suyin to swallow the fact that her Eurasian identity – a result of her mixed parentage – was a taboo in itself.

Widowed with an adopted daughter Yungmei after the demise of her first husband Pao, Han Suyin committed yet another taboo in Hong Kong. She fell head over heels in love with a married man, a dashing white journalist named Ian Morrison. For Han Suyin, Ian was more akin to the soul of an Asian, rather than a Caucasian man who might revel in the white man's burden (Han, 1982, pp. 29-30). There was great respect and sensibility in their romance. However, their relationship was but an extramarital affair, for Ian's lawful Australian wife who was living in Singapore at that time refused to divorce him. As written in Han Suyin's semi-autobiographical novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, Ian, who wanted to divorce his wife, had admitted his dilemma about dismissing his moral obligations towards his children. Polygamy was not permitted by law both in Hong Kong where they were, and in Australia where Ian

originated. Moreover, so long as Ian had not divorced, he was obligated to stay faithful to his legitimate wife and children. To complicate the matter further, Han Suyin was very firm on wanting to return to Communist China whenever possible. Her stubborn choice would naturally exclude Ian in her future plan, for Ian was a war correspondent of *The Times*, the leading magazine of the democratic West. In *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, one of her monologues stated as such:

Don't lie to yourself. You want this man... He's a foreigner, and you are going to China. It will mean disaster, and sorrow. He is married. Don't lose your head now. You cannot afford it. This is not love. It's hunger... Remember, he's a foreigner, , and you are going to China. (Han, 1956, p. 88)

Their affair ended in 1950 when Ian was killed in the Korean war. Even if Ian had lived, their dream to be together was deemed to shatter as Ian was the last man whom Han Suyin could legitimately marry. Considering the ethical environment during the era, if Ian had lived, divorced his wife and married Han Suyin as they both wished, they would be committing yet another taboo, which challenged the public's acceptability of the community where they were. Their interracial union, if it happened, would pose potential social discrimination for young Yungmei, Han Suyin's adopted daughter, who would be identified as one raised by a less than honourable mixed family.

Likened to Han Suyin's autobiography, the same issues of elopement, premarital sex, extramarital affairs, mixed marriages and social rejection against Eurasian kids also appeared in her novels. In *Till Morning Comes* (Han, 1982), Stephanie Ryder discarded her status as daughter of a Yankee and chose to be wedded to Dr Jen Yong, a young Chinese surgeon. Even though her father supported her plan to travel in China, he had

never expected that she would eventually elope with a local. Also, she was warned by her mother that when she had a baby from her Chinese husband, she would be “bearing a cross” her entire life, namely, “the (burden or) cross of having a Eurasian kid” (Han, 1989, p. 302). In *Winter Love* (Han, 1962), the protagonist Bettina Jones “out of curiosity” had committed premarital sex with Andy, a medical student, because he persuaded her to be “a good sport and broad-minded.” Wanting to prove herself not “old-fashioned,” she gave herself to him several times. In *The Mountain Is Young* (Han, 1958), Anne Ford who had always given her husband a cold shoulder fell head over heels for the dashing dam engineer Unni Menon. It was almost cynical that before they started their extramarital affair, Unni said it invitingly, “When were the platitudes of adultery valid excuse for the platitudes of marriage?” (p. 279)

Indeed, Han Suyin favoured the theme of cross-cultural romance above all. *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, Han Suyin’s best seller, featured a love that could find no boundaries between an Australian correspondent and his China-born Eurasian lover who dreamed of reentering China every day of her life. *Till Morning Comes* highlighted the perseverance of true love between an American-Chinese couple through critical warfare and political adversities. *The Mountain Is Young* demonstrated the possibility of a withered English female soul finding abandoned love in her Nepali beau. These three novels depicted Hong Kong, China and Nepal as the respective homes for Han Suyin’s ideals of interracial unions to take place. Her *The Enchantress* and *Four Faces* showcased Thailand and Cambodia as the meeting points where the East and the West met; while *And The Rain My Drink* revealed how the Chinese in Malaya suffered unfairly under the unconcerned Western colonial regime.

It seemed that instead of reinforcing religious, legal and social taboos, Han Suyin chose to remind her readers to love and respect between cultures and peoples.

Regardless of any ethnicity of the protagonists in her novels, Han Suyin would match them with lovers from the “other” people. Capitalising on those scandalous, taboo elements, Han Suyin boldly presented her hope for a unifying love between a man and a woman, irrespective of race and skin colours. In her writings, social norms and rigid moral standards gave way to the importance of true appreciation of a person in spite of his or her racial background. All in all, her advocacies for harmonious living between men, and the need for some balance between the East-West powers were evident in all her writings.

#### **2.4 Chaos: Foreignness Is Deadly**

When a homogeneous group of people decided to uproot any “alien” element among them, their herd mentality could become very dangerous. Chaotic situations such as murder, brutality and bully of the “other” by the community in power were recorded without prejudice in Han Suyin’s autobiography series. In the name of guarding the solidarity of a certain “in-group” people, crimes against their targeted victims could be justified as legitimate. Not only did they not need to feel sorry or apologetic about their hostility towards the others, foreignness was legitimately *deadly*.

When Marguerite, Rosalie’s mother, accompanied her husband Yentung back to the conservative province of Sichuan, she was overjoyed that her Chinese dreams would finally materialise: a Chinese prince, a Chinese pavilion, the beautiful landscape and lovable people. However, while Yentung deeply appreciated her love, Marguerite’s foreignness quickly posed a big problem for the couple after her relocation to China. Marguerite became the target of bully and social ostracism, as she was “ugly and huge” -- a total alien -- in the eyes of the locals in the inland China.

It would not be too difficult for one to understand that during the early 20th century, a sub-urban community in the Southern Chinese provinces perceived their oneness and cohesiveness as a matter of life and death. They took great pride in the authenticity of their customs and the purity of their progeny, as stated by Han Suyin: “The Hakkas say they are the true people of Han Suyin, and that they have escaped degenerate habits brought by foreign rule” (Han, 1972c, p. 25).

Under such mob mentality and moral imperatives, the villagers were ready to commit outrageous group bullying. They would “punish” Marguerite for her mere existence in their territory. One day, when Yentung was away working at the railroad, a bunch of ruthless bandits ransacked the house in which this poor foreign wife and her babies resided. The burglars also decapitated her cook and hanged his head in the garden to showcase their ruthless power. Not only did the local community completely ignore the decapitated head that was left hanging in Marguerite’s garden, their young men, women and children continually mocked and harassed Marguerite on daily basis behind that head-hanging tree. It was grave ethical chaos.

“Enough, enough, ... I have had enough!” Marguerite screamed as the verbal attacks by the Chinese crowd “foreign devil, foreign devil, foreign devil” took its toll on her (Han, 1972c, p. 12). The message was clear in the air: Foreigner, get out of our (Chinese) territory! Totally disgusted by the ridicules of the unsympathetic villagers and in tears, Marguerite wrote to her parents:

Today I shall not have time to write you a very long letter, because the bandits were here last night, and the cook has been decapitated. His head is in the garden, so I have shut the window. The little one is crying with prickly heat, but I cannot get any talcum powder so please send me two dozen tins, it is easy to get in England ... I cannot stand their laughter

any more. They laugh when I cry, they laugh when people are executed, they are *not human* ... I shall force him (husband Yentung) to let me leave today, I do not wish to be killed too... Now they have come for the head, at last, with drummers who are the village rascals beating in front. The widow comes behind lamenting loudly, but I know she does not feel anything because she does not weep; and when she sees me, she stops, stares, puts her hand to her mouth not to laugh. They are *not human*... (Han, 1972c, pp. 11-14)

After witnessing the decapitation of her cook, and the gory head hanging in her garden without getting any sympathy or help, she concluded that the place was uncivilised and inhumane. Twice in the same letter Marguerite exclaimed that the Chinese villagers were “not humans.”

Following that crippling experience, Rosalie (Han Suyin) also recalled the death of her second brother Gabriel Chou due to racial discrimination. Gabriel was the apple of Rosalie’s mother’s eye. One evening, the seemingly healthy baby developed a fever all of a sudden. Even though she knew that non-whites would only be treated by the white doctor during the daytime at the clinic, Rosalie’s Belgium-descent mother decided to take a chance. She tried to seek medical attention for baby Gabriel at the doctor’s residence – a medical privilege exclusive for the whites then. However, her attempt to save her baby was in vain. The doctor’s wife stopped her at the door, “Get out, you and your filthy half-caste brat, get out of my house” (Han, 1972c, p. 304).

Pedigree wise, Rosalie’s mother is a pure white. However, her baby Gabriel is a mixed-blood, a “half-caste brat,” as the father is a Chinese. Life or death of a half-caste did not matter to the arrogant, self-assuming French doctor’s wife. Owing to her unchecked *natural will* that resented any human being who was not her kind, baby

Gabriel was refused a fair chance for medical treatment. The baby died the next morning. During that era, it was a cultural taboo for people of different ethnics to tie their nuptial knots and form families. Babies from interracial marriages were *not* seen as legitimate children, and thus not given the equal right to live like others.

About a decade later, Rosalie was an eyewitness to yet another racial brutality, but this time, her own brother was the aggressor. Rosalie witnessed how her depressed brother George, Son of Spring, beat up a Chinese rickshaw coolie mercilessly. Not only had George kicked and hit the poor coolie violently with a walking stick, he also broke one of the shafts of the rickshaw with his boots. Rosalie was not in a position to intervene. But the effect of the brutality could not be dissolved — a few days after the incident, Rosalie could not help but to throw a terrible tantrum in the street.

What had possibly made George Chou, Rosalie's eldest brother become so aggressive and full of rage? Being a Eurasian who was being sent away to be raised by the extended family, and brought back to China during his young adulthood, George suffered a great sense of disorientation and displacement. In Han Suyin's words, "there was none to care." George had gradually become an outcast socially and emotionally. He belonged nowhere. Thus, acting out his frustration upon a readily available target on the street, namely, the Chinese rickshaw coolie, was easy. But the action in itself could not soothe the deep desperation that was harbouring in his rather disturbed psyche. Moreover, the social alienation and isolation suffered by him could not be legitimately used as an excuse for his villainous behavior. The after-the-event self-realisation that he had harmed an innocent one, acting it out of his disturbed and uncontrolled *natural will* was even more soul-disturbing.

After the incident, Rosalie had to leave her brother for other accommodation arrangements. She noticed George's dire loneliness:

I remember my brother sitting in his chair, staring at the trees outside the balcony of which he was so proud (best room in the pension), refusing to look at me, refusing to look at her (mother). Now I know that through me he had tried to alleviate his loneliness, which no amount of German pension food and efficiency, of Japanese light effects, no amount of enlisting in the Volunteer Corps and kicking the Chinese, could really alleviate; for he belonged nowhere, whatever he tried to do, whether he loved or hated, whether he did one thing or nothing, always, always, he was an outcast, always there would be this great black hole in him, and he was a young man, only twenty-one, all alone, and there was no one to care. (Han, 1972a, p. 31)

Rosalie recognised and identified with that predicament of her brother. However, she would not condone or imitate her brother's behavior to hurt others. Since day one, she had willed herself to wrestle with her emptiness within until she could have a breakthrough. She did not know how and when the battle would be over. Nobody had ever shown her what was the right way to do so, or if there was any right way to do it. An alien could kill or be killed. Foreignness could be deadly. Ethical chaos could be the cause of insanity, unless one fought against it with good courage and great determination.

## **2.5 “Mixtures” And Derogation**

Rivalry and bigotry among different races, ethnics and nations could potentially be very intense and far from being subtle. According to Han Suyin, one of the most hideous assumptions during her era was that the intelligence of one ethnic group differed from the other. People of mixed races had lower brain capacity than people of

pure races. From the books she read during her adolescence, the difference of intelligence between different peoples could even be quantified. The information about the “mixtures” or mixed races was not edifying at all. Han Suyin was totally intimidated by the so-called scientific facts that she came across. In *A Mortal Flower*, she recalled,

... The fear of losing my brain was very strong. I had read a book called *Races of the World* the year before. It began: ‘There are four races in the world; white, yellow, red and black... the white race is distinguished by the characteristic that its BRAIN WEIGHT is the highest; the brain of the average white man weighs one thousand six hundred grammes, that of the yellow man one thousand four hundred, the red man’s brain weighs one thousand three hundred and forty and that of the black man about one thousand two hundred...’ This account was illustrated by pictures, front and profile of skulls; with captions calling attention to ‘width of brow.’ There were a few lines on *mixtures*. ‘Racial mixtures are prone to mental unbalance, hysteria, alcoholism, generally of weak character and untrustworthy.’ ‘Oh God,’ I prayed, ‘don’t let me go mad, don’t let my brain go, I want to study.’ (Han, 1972a, p. 129)

Han Suyin’s accounts revealed to her readers the prevalent derogative ideas during the era. Somehow, many believed that there was a hierarchy of different peoples, that a certain ethnic group had better genes than the other. The worst of all were the mixed races, whose status was lower than any pure bloods. Since the “brain” or cognitive function is one of the most important premises of a human, anyone who is “brainless” or having an undersized brain is actually a “lesser being.” Recording such lingo and mindset of those middle-class Europeans around her, Han Suyin wrote: “... the Chinese were degenerate, their brain capacity lower; (it might be) true that they did not feel

(any) pain (for how they were treated,) and (they) *died like flies* because so it was and so it would be” (Han, 1972a, p. 264).

Today, with the advance of science and further research, one has to reckon that the condescending tone and wrong assumptions during that era that Han Suyin autographed was to be dismissed. It is not true that a bigger sized brain is equated to a higher intelligence of a being. For example, among the mammals, whales and elephants have much bigger brains than humans, but their brain sizes are not indicative of their intelligence over man. There are at least two other factors to consider: first, the ratio of the actual brain mass relative to the body mass matters; next, the connectivity and computational capacity of the brain itself, which involve the complexity of the cellular and molecular organisation of neural connections, or synapses, matter the most (Lechtenberg, 2014). Furthermore, while psychologist such as Michael McDaniel of Virginia Commonwealth University claimed that bigger brains go with smarter people, many researchers concluded that brain size had no implications on the scores of standardised intelligence tests. Related researches include a brain scan study of young children; a study on the correlation between brain size and innovation involving the “Mind’s Big Bang;” and so forth (Bryner, 2016). Also, it was even empirically proven that bilingual individuals have better cognition than others (Vince, 2016).

It was unfortunate that vicious insults and misleading assumptions about Han Suyin’s intellectual capacity had accompanied her through her growing years. For one, Olga Hempel, Han Suyin’s German colleague who was number one in hierarchy among the secretarial staff, labelled Han Suyin as “pig-headed” (Han, 1972a, p. 134). Disagreeing with Han Suyin regarding her plan to pursue higher education, Olga commented: “You’ll never do it, *Eurasians can’t*. They’re *mentally blocked* up there” (Han, 1972a, p. 137). Instead of saving up money for private tuition on Chinese

language and Physics, Han Suyin was advised by her colleagues in P.M.U.C. to spend it on manicures and hairdos. In addition, she had to endure Olga's persistent condemnation about her brain capacity:

“What the hell do you want to study Chinese for, anyway?”

“I want to get on. I want to go to university, I want to be a doctor...”

She snorted, “My dear girl, you're nuts. Real crackers. You won't be able to do it. Even if you tried for ten years. Studying Chinese is already bad enough. But what about the rest? Physics, mathematics and chemistry. *You haven't got the brains.* I've watched you and I know. Why don't you just settle down and give it up? You'll go batty one of these days.” (Han, 1972a, pp. 134, 138)

Han Suyin also greatly disapproved of the sadism that transpired in many of the conversations and minds of the middle-class Whites around her. Being a Eurasian female who was discriminated against both by the Asians and the Westerners, Han Suyin was highly sensitive about any theory of eugenics, condescending remarks against women, or derogatory words against “other” races. She could recall vividly that in one of the most expensive and exclusive night clubs in Brussels, lit with “ghostlike chandeliers,” a man of Walloon nobility was making sadist comments regarding the performers:

“Me, I am all for kicking these Yids in the teeth...”

“Have you heard the joke about the circumcision ceremony?”

“They're apes anyway, just climbed down from the trees...” (Han, 1972a, p. 300)

Besides the Jews, the blacks were also the target of sex and sadism. In fact, the “niggers” had always been a topic of amusement for a certain group of middle-class Whites during that time. Han Suyin took note of an exceptional man though: Minister

Henri Dennis, who was different from the others. Henri's favourite remark was: "Negroes are people (or human beings with brains)... One day they will have machines, industries like us (the Caucasians)" (Han, 1972a, p. 301).

Yet another group being looked down upon during that time was the Chinese. In *A Mortal Flower*, Han Suyin captured a disdainful sexual imagery about the Chinese based on a remark by her education scholarship sponsor, Joseph Hers. It was during the impending Japanese invasion that China became the hot topic among the European elite group. Hers commented: "Don't worry, China is feminine, she has always ended up by absorbing all her conquerors." He had two grotesque sexual illustrations. First, "Like many other foreigners" during that time, he saw China as "the WOMAN, the all-enveloping, soft, weak woman, who actually welcomed rape, welcomed being invaded" (Han, 1972a, p. 189). Next, the violation of China was equated to the defloration of a woman in marriage, like "The Great White Male seeding in the weak, moaning, submissive coloured female." Han Suyin wrote, "And in this he (Joseph Hers) was typical of nearly all the Europeans in China who declared the Chinese 'forever unable to rule themselves, because they are weak, devious, volatile, timid'" (Ibid).

He painted a rather perverse illustration, equating China as a "weak, moaning, submissive coloured female," struggling to survive through subjugation to the stronger nations (Han, 1972a, pp. 188-189). The idea was definitely resented by the Chinese. Writing as an in-group member of the Chinese community, Han Suyin presented the rationality of not entertaining sadism or haughtiness of a people against others. Besides, Han Suyin also did not entertain her *natural will* that potentially harboured hatred or revengeful mindset towards the others. Instead, she exercised her *rational will* in the most sensible manner: "My generation hated the Japanese for what they did,... In 1962, by accepting an invitation to visit Japan, I was also atoning for having hated the

Japanese in the past” (pp. 140-141). Surely, the *rational will* of man is in favour of promoting a good cause and goodwill among all people.

The popularity of such sadism at the macro-level was astonishing, and totally *irrational*. Sadly, the social status of the mixed races was even lower than the ethnic groups being despised. While the Chinese were despised by the middle-Class European elite, the Eurasians were in turn looked down upon by the Chinese. In the microcosm of Han Suyin’s own marriage life with her first husband Chinese general, Tang Pao-Huang, nicknamed Pao, a sort of reversed sadism or sadist interpretation translated into physical, psychological and emotional abuse. The reasons for Pao’s cold treatment and abusive behaviour towards Han Suyin were two-fold: First, Han Suyin was not a pure Chinese, therefore incompatible to Pao’s pedigree (Han, 1972a, p. 78); Second, Han Suyin was not a chaste virgin when married to Pao. Not only did Han Suyin have a premarital sexual relationship, her greatest problem was that she had “defiled” herself with a foreigner, not a Chinese (Han, 1972a, p. 79).

Pao had never accepted the dual-identity of Han Suyin. In the midst of his enthusiasm to promote the purity and highest virtues of the Chinese, he picked on Han Suyin as his greatest betrayal at home, thus deserving severe punishment. In this respect, any suspicious rumors in town that were related with Han Suyin could be his reason to act out in violence against her. In 1940, the second year when the couple was in Chungking, Pao came home one day to question whether Han Suyin’s mother was of Jewish descent. Rather caught in surprise, Han Suyin treated it as a joke. She answered affirmatively: “No, my mother is not Jewish. She is Flemish and Catholic” (Han, 1972a, p. 78).

As the thought of her mother being a Jew made her amused, she went on to tease that she had wished she were a Jew, then she would be more brilliant. Her casual words

triggered off Pao's anger: "What did you say?... You wish to be Jewish? You, you cheap thing, you don't want any face, you don't want any self-respect, you want to be a Jew?" Rolling up his shirtsleeves in terrifying gesture, Pao lashed out on Han Suyin, "Shut your mouth, or I'll beat you to death. You, the wife of a Chinese officer, you DARE to say you'd like to be a Jewess?" (Han, 1972a, p. 78)

As Han Suyin recalled, Pao went on scolding for a good long time. Being influenced by his most recent reader Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Pao concluded that "the Jews were filthy, vicious, sexual perverts" (Ibid). Based on unfounded suspicion, Pao had believed that Han Suyin had some unidentified relations with the Jews, causing her to be impure. He had unjustifiably framed Han Suyin based on a false understanding of her, that she was actually a Jew, and her mother -- as rumored-- a Jew from Poland. He was determined now that she should be chastised and re-educated to undo her "shameful" background.

It was clear that Pao wanted "the foreigner" in her to be thoroughly eradicated, that she would learn to adhere to and practise ethical teachings of Confucius (Han, 1972a, p. 29). Han Suyin was forced to study Chinese philosophical books and books on chastity. On Pao's demand, she had to keep a diary religiously, confessing every single detail of her wrongdoings. When it was so, Pao could use it conveniently to monitor the "improvement" in her thinking (p. 148). The diary, Pao's reconditioning tool over his wife Han Suyin, created a huge phobia in her. It became an object to facilitate Pao's cruelty and *irrationality*. Interestingly, Pao also kept a diary of his own. Before reporting himself to the battlefield in Manchuria, he couriered Han Suyin his diary. Pao's diary was as good as his very presence. Upon receiving his diary, Han Suyin immediately lost her mental balance:

... but the very word 'diary' threatened to upset my mental balance, to send me into gales of hysterical laughter ... I could not afford hysteria, upsets, sorrow, sentiment, memory, regret. Forward, hastening past myself, no time for tears, I must go on... (Han, 1972a, p. 318)

After fingering through his diary, Han Suyin decided to have it burnt over the kitchen stove. Suffered from Pao's frequent mental intimidations and physical punishments, Han Suyin's self-image was like an "overbeaten dog," which trembled "at the sound of a whiplash" (Han, 1972a, p. 201). In *Birdless Summer*, she recounted how Pao would severely injure her just because he saw other males greeting her on the street:

When he was with me, and we walked in the streets of Chengtu (Chengdu), my greatest fear was that we might meet someone from the university or from the hospital who might greet me; and if it were a male doctor or the husband of a patient, such a simple courtesy might be the excuse for another pitiless beating. (Han, 1972a, p. 157)

It seemed that wife beating was firmly ingrained in Pao's psyche, and according to Han Suyin, probably endorsed by the custom of local Chinese during that time (Han, 1972a, p. 200). Whenever Pao was upset with Han Suyin, he would be rough on her, even in the presence of the public. On another occasion, he knocked her head over and over again against the door when she was trying to stop Pao from ransacking into the room of their tenant, Caroline, without any prior notice:

He came towards me and hit me then, knocking my head against the door.  
'You cheap bone-heap, you dare, you dare, you dare tell ME what is private? There is no such thing as private. No one has a right to keep private such disgusting things ... this girl is a communist, do you know it?

And she is in love with a foreigner . . . she has probably had an affair with him. And she keeps his photo, here, in her drawer, she has letters.’ I stood there, my lip was hurting and I would later have a swollen mouth. I muttered, ‘It is not fair, not fair.’ I went upstairs to our room and sat down. I suppose I should have twisted my hands, but to what avail? (p. 202)

All in all, Han Suyin’s account had laid naked the reality and danger of the use of man’s unchecked *natural will*. Once human beings do not engage their *rational mind*, but adhere to their ethical obligations, there is nothing left to tackle man’s irrational acts of arrogance, bullying and harming others. The life of man as such would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short, as warned by philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

## 2.6 Conclusion

If mankind loses its rationality, human beings would lose their essence of being. Allegorically, if the Sphinx were to lose her human head, all that remains would be a body with animalistic instinct, having no human mind, and therefore, would not be able to function ethically. Ethics define the principles and boundaries of human behaviour as well as interactions between people. In the absence of rationality and ethics, human society naturally spirals down to unruliness and chaos. When a man sees a human treats another with indifference and cruelty, it would only signal the loss of humanity, endangering the survival of the human species.

The ethical themes in Han Suyin’s autobiography were rich and far-reaching. Her depictions were all encompassing, and almost exhaustive, including life and death, crippled family relationships, crippled self-identity, national humiliation, unity in wedding, separation with loved ones, war and peace, patriotism and indifference, old

and new, duality in unity, progress and failures, change and grit, destruction and restoration, brokenness, self-completion and others. Even as the “way of Man” should reign over the “way of beast,” Han Suyin’s emphasis on the need of *rationality* or the *human mind* was a timeless truth.

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## CHAPTER 3: THE RATIONAL MIND VERSUS NATURAL MIND

“They are not human... They are not human.” – Marguerite Denis (Han, 1972c, pp. 13)

Those were the cries of despair by Marguerite Denis, Han Suyin’s mother, regarding the adversity and bullies she encountered in the remote area of Sichuan, China during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. From Han Suyin’s “crippling” family saga as well as her own accounts of modern China history in her autobiographies, readers could clearly discern the many emotional scars in Han Suyin and her biological family. However, these demoralising trials had only strengthened Han Suyin’s passion for life. She wanted to thrive more than a survivor. She did it by asserting the will power of her *rational mind*:

I had to do it, to live with myself, to be myself, and to continue growing, where mothers had stopped. I would not be a crippled tree,... At least I would greet the tomorrow I had not made, even if it killed me. (Han, 1972c, p. 18)

### 3.1 Rationality Versus The Natural Mind

For Han Suyin, one of the most practical ways to engage *rationality* was to pen it all down and produce her autobiography. When engaging her past via writing her autobiography, Han Suyin was actually giving herself a chance to comb through her unresolved business, and sort out the ethical entanglements in different chapters of her life.

Still finding it difficult to make sense of all the pains and regrets, Has Suyin had to self-determine and self-motivate – namely engaging the *rational* agencies of her brain, rather than reacting from her natural mind, against those past chapters of her life. In *The Crippled Tree*, she wrote:

And so I'm writing this book, having achieved one thing an Asian will understand, and I think many Europeans too: a continuity between what was and what is, a sense of destiny fulfilled... by the *relentless logic of each day* lived with courage, within the enormous scope that the word 'day' implies... In this book all the records are authentic, the facts as accurate a research could make them. I set them down, since the time may come when it is impossible for such as I to write. (Han, 1972c, pp. 18-19)

Life may throw a person a curve ball at any time, when all things begin to crumble down, leaving one with no strength to fight it at all. The *natural mind* of man operates retaliation and self-gratification principle. It could not wait. It does not consider the consequence of an action. It must appease oneself or feed one's ego by all means, at all times. It entertains the outpouring of one's anger. It ignites one's tendencies to repay evil for evil.

On the other hand, the *rational mind* of man comprehends. It actively engages adversities and conflicts in life by sourcing for solutions that are within the parameters of self-control. One reacts only after careful consideration on the impact of one's action upon all parties who are involved. Under certain circumstances, one might need to exercise grace and forgiveness towards others. Despite all the non-supportive preconditions of her environment, Han Suyin resorted to her good conscience and rational mind each time when she faced challenges. Most of the pains inflicted upon her eventually faded away. And it was only so after she had resolved that the wickedness she endured were but trainings that enabled her to understand life, and understand China "in all her many ambiguities and contradictory facets." (Han, 1985, p. 315)

### 3.2 The Nature Of Man: Good Nature, Wicked Nature?

Young Rosalie Chou (Han Suyin) had learned during her catechism class with Father Clement that extreme political ideologies could potentially make “one kill one’s own father and mother, against the nature, against God, in fact, an intention of the Devil himself” (Han, 1972c, p. 359). Then, when she finally eyewitnessed the destruction of China’s Civil War, she stated, “And now I knew that human nature can perpetrate monstrous crimes while mouthing great moralities” (Han, 1972b, p. 350). From her writing, she seemed to suggest that the nature of man could be “monstrous” at times, but that only happened when one violated the intended nature of human species, leading to crimes and abominations such as patricide and matricide.

The debates about whether the nature of man is good or wicked went back to about 400BC in China. In my Master’s dissertation, which entitled “Civilisation Dialogue: A Comparison between Al-Ghazali and Mencius on the Concept of a Perfect Man,” I presented that the Mencius school of Confucianism would not give any room for an individual to be the “scum” of society, because it was rather unforgiving for them to waste away their natural goodness (Kuek, 2000, p. 54). Mencius’ doctrine of goodness of human being saw goodness as man’s natural gift. He thus advocated for the necessity of education. The school of thought held that one’s goodness could be further cultivated via education, resulting in the perfection of one’s moral character.

Xunzi (298-238BC), on the contrary, stood diametrically opposite of Mencius (372-289BC). Disagreeing with Mencius who perceived human nature as originally good, Xunzi saw the nature of man as evil and incapable of doing good. Thus, there was a need to engage human laws and self-restricting propriety, namely “Li,” to set parameters on human behaviour. For Xunzi, education was the means to instill “Li” within the structure of human society and re-engineer the conduct of its members.

Nevertheless, both Mencius and Xunzi believed in the perfectibility of all men. Both regarded benevolence (“*Ren*”) and righteousness (“*Yi*”) as the supreme Confucian virtues. Both adhered to a humane government and advocated the importance of education and self-cultivation of man. In general, Xunzi was naturalistic, while Mencius idealistic; almost comparable to Plato and Aristotle respectively.

The Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) neither denies the goodness in the nature of man, nor suggests that the original nature of man is evil. Rather, it adopts a *developmental view* of the nature of human beings. The ELC states that mankind went through biological or natural selection, followed by their ethical selection, without which human beings could not be differentiated from the animals. Using the Garden of Eden as an analogy, Professor Nie Zhenzhao, the chief proponent of the ELC, suggested that the essence of human beings was acquired after Adam and Eve ate the fruit of good and evil. Nie’s interpretation would probably not be agreed upon by the biblical scholars,<sup>14</sup> but it is rhetorically logical to establish that man’s acquisition of moral judgement was after the incident when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of good and evil. Nie stated that due to the eating of the fruit of good and evil, man’s intellect developed and were thus able to reflect, infer and make rational decision. Rationality sets mankind apart from the other creatures in the seas, on the land and in the sky.

In fact, rationality is man’s moral currency, and the operational mode of the ethics of man. Rationality governs one’s behaviour in the sense that one has to conform with one’s reason or belief when deciding on one’s action. The *rational will*, or the mind of man makes “a connection between using principles as devices for reaching correct

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<sup>14</sup> According to the systematic theology in Christianity, Adam and Eve sinned against God when they disobeyed Him and ate the forbidden fruit. The essence of man, therefore, could not be acquired through an act of sin or disobedience. The essence of man, should be phrased along the line that mankind was created in the form of man and woman, and acquired the soul or spirit due to God’s breathing into Adam during his creation.

decisions and using them to constrain the influence of undesired or irrelevant factors” (Nozick, 1995, p. 7). Principles bind the way we behave, and they constitute a form of binding. First, they bind an individual to act as his or her principles mandate. Next, there will be a general predictability of behavior of an individual, and thus facilitates one’s social ease and interaction with others (p. 10).

Major proponents of the philosophy of rationality, psychologists Philip Johnson-Laird and Ruth Byrne (2009, pp. 282-287) suggested that human beings are described as rational beings but vary in behaviour as they are limited by various conditioning factors, thus showcasing thought processes and behavioural patterns that are uniquely human and not found in other species of living beings. Recommending the theory of mental models in studying the mental structure of the solution of “if” or probability, Laird and Byrne were convinced that human beings are capable of constructing models of the possibilities to which the premise refer in order to draw conclusions for the possibilities. Hence, the human brains are also able to reject a conclusion if they find a counterexample, meaning when the conclusion does not tally with which the premise holds (Laird and Byrne, 2009, p. 283). The logical form of “If A then B, and if not B then not A” thinking pattern is *rationality* pertaining to human beings, which other living beings might not have had. Even though the question of how individuals acquire and maintain logical thinking in such high order structure remains a mystery, the fact that human beings can reason points to an encouraging fact about mankind – that there is a much cherished asset within a person, namely, the rationality of man.

Two themes permeate the philosophical literature regarding rationality: First, that rationality is a matter of *reasons*. Rationality depends upon “the reasons for holding that belief.” Second, that rationality is a matter of *reliability*. Rationality arises through “some process that reliably produces beliefs that are true, or that have other desirable

cognitive value” (Nozick, 1995, p. 64). To discern, reasons and reliability are both interconnected, as reasons without reliability would be empty, and vice versa. Given the context of customs and norms of a certain society, a person is expected to behave in “rational” manners whereby others could reliably gauge the relationship patterns with the person.

The rationality of the person’s behaviour generally ties back to the reasons of his/her beliefs or convictions. Hence, when one exercises one’s *rational will*, there will be cognitive differentiation, moral judgment and decision about one’s action. Common cognitive activities that reflect the use of one’s rational will include believing the truth, avoiding error and so forth. In the context of human society, conforming to what is believed to be right, and avoidance of taboos are matters of rationality.

Rationality plays a dominant role in determining the ethical identity, ethical dilemma and ethical choice of a person in his or her cultural or historical context. In the process of socialisation, one’s rationality translates itself in one’s capability in reasoning and one’s reliability in conduct. As there are customs and norms of how things are “normally” handled in any community, a “rational” individual is expected to make moral judgements that are acceptable by his or her community, and behave accordingly. While one may suspect that rationality is context-dependent, criteria of rationality is in fact quite universal, as there exists a common reality of the condition of a culture or context through time and tide.<sup>15</sup> It is said so because whether in the past or in the modern day, men infer and make prediction of things in about the same way. Besides, their language of reference is also similar. It seems that there is an independent reality

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<sup>15</sup> From “Some Problems in Rationality”, by S. Lukes, in Bryan R. Wilson ed., 1970, *Rationality*, pp. 208-209, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

which men in the past and present both share. The rationality of man per se is thus, universal (Ibid).

Rationality is applicable to man of all beliefs and in any context. Sixth century Roman philosopher Boethius saw man as beings of a rational nature (*individua substantia rationalis naturae*). St Thomas Aquinas ranked a man as a rational being, and not an “animal.” Unlike other creatures, a man is a master of his own conduct and *reason* governs over his actions. Human acts are performed consciously, freely and purposefully. Human beings are capable of materialising their dreams via meticulous execution of their plans.

Proponents of ELC state that *human nature*, not animal nature, is the essence and fundamental nature of humans. In the language of the psychoanalysts, human nature is consisted of the ego, superego and the id. The rationality or the reasoning aspects of man, namely the ego and the superego, governs over man’s natural drive or sex appeal that is known as the “id.” Even though the Freudians might see sexual instinct as the main drive of man, Ronald Santos and Maybelle Marie Padua contested that fundamentally, man is a rational being, having “the ability to transcend his sexual instincts and determine the ultimate goal of the sexual urge within him.” (Santos, 2007, pp. 78-94)

Psychoanalyst Karol Wojtyla used the term “person” to distinguish man from the animals and other lower living beings. He elaborated that the term *person* “cannot be wholly contained within the concept ‘individual member of the species’” as each man has a particular “richness and perfection in the manner of his being, which can only be brought out by the use of the word ‘person’” (Wojtyla, 1933, p. 22). Wojtyla defined the personhood of man in his ability to reason and make conceptual correlations, which could not be traced in other beings.

In a literary text, rationality and irrationality have often surfaced as the main ethical themes that run through the story. In the language of the ELC, the readers could often detect the interplay of the rationality and irrationality of the main characters in a story. A good novel often reveals the consequences of man's volitional choices. Time and again, the world's great works of literature often serve a didactic purpose in showing the development of human relationships even as the protagonist and antagonist make their respective choices in any given life circumstances. In fact, the rationale of a certain decision or action of the main characters in a text has always been among the top concerns of its readers.

### **3.3 Sex And Rationality: Eurasians Sleep Around?**

Revelations of the tension between man's rationality and sexuality in literature are always thought-provoking. In novels, one may be alarmed by the exaggeration of it; but in autobiographies, the minute description and honest dealings with one's sensual needs are altogether eye-opening and soul-searching at times.

The subject of our study, Han Suyin did not avoid the topic on sex in her autobiographies at all. As she recalled, the Eurasians as "mixed-blood" people were despised by both Asians as well as the Westerners during that time. Seen as sexually loose, they often suffered from low sense of self-respect and being taken advantage of by the "pure" races in the dating game. Wanted to be a Eurasian youth who had high self-regard of herself, Han Suyin sealed a purity vow together with her acquaintance Fredi, that they would both abstain from sex and save it for their wedding bed in due time. Sexual purity was Han Suyin's initial attempt of rationality to combat the negative stereotyping against her. In *A Mortal Flower*, she documented how Eurasians were treated by others on the matter of sex:

... as Eurasians we were expected to be just for sleeping with, and that whatever we did people always brought that up. Sex was supposed to be our availability, and if a Eurasian is seen out once with a boy, everybody assumed she slept with him and immediately that she was available for anyone and everyone. It was different for the Whites, they could do what they liked, got drunk, beat people, smash things, sleep with anyone, no one said anything; they seemed to have a right to do what they liked. And many Eurasian girls were brought up to think that going out with a white man was an honour, and they often did not dare to say no if, at the end of the dinner, he made advances. He just had to say: "Oh come on, you're not being a sport," and the girls felt they had to do it, to show how smart, how modern, how European they were. And also to be taken out again. (Han, 1972a, p. 173)

However, as determined as Han Suyin would like to be, at the age of sixteen, she succumbed to the temptation to have premarital sex. While her own words said that she did it out of a "desperation to learn everything" (Han, 1972a, p. 131), she was actually consciously but unknowingly trading her rational stand for purity with the choice to break the taboo. She gave in to her *natural will*.

After a Christmas party when everyone was "kissing everyone else," Han Suyin decided to manipulate her German acquaintance Otto for her curiosity about sex, although he had reservation to touch her at first. Alone with Otto in his room, Han Suyin had her first experience of sexual intercourse:

"Madli, you are very beautiful."

"Oh no, Otto."

“Yes you are, all the men were looking at you. All of them wanted you tonight, you have so much life in you. You are beautiful, and your skin, it glows, and some day a man will take you and I would like to be that man, Madli, but I have only one leg.”

“But Otto, I do love you, even with only one leg, you are so kind to me, and you understand me.”

“Mein Kind, you do not know at all what love is, Not at all. It is not fair to you. You are much too young.” (Han, 1972a, p. 211)

But she wanted Otto. She argued with him, “I am not a child, and I know, I do know what love is... Oh, for God's sake. Otto, don't make such a song and dance about it. After all, I've got to grow up, to grow up, I've got to know everything” (Ibid).

However, after it was done and when she gathered her thoughts, she reckoned that she had made an unwise choice. There was no mutual love between them, only motions: “... without any feeling about it; only an astonishment, a disappointment... One goes to bed a child, one is expected to rise from it a woman. One expects to be changed. But there is nothing” (Han, 1972a, p. 212).

After that night, she politely assured Otto that it was okay he did not plan to marry her, as she had no plan to marry either. In the later portion of her autobiography, Han Suyin reckoned that her relationship with Otto was born out of his desperation and her “disorientation” (Han, 1972a, p. 242). She knew at her core the stark difference between her one night stand with Otto and the relationship between her sister Tiza and her beau Shawn. As Han Suyin discerned, Tiza's was decent and honourable at all times.

On the topic of sex and rationality, St Augustine's Confessions and Rousseau's Confessions are two classical works that one would not miss out. Written in 397-398AD,

Augustine's *Confessions* was widely recognised as the first "true" and complete autobiography in the Western literary history (Marcus, 1994, p. 2). The thirteen-volume *Confessions* was cherished through ages, giving insights about the inner beings of "the sons of Adam." In the self-portrayal about his wanton sexual misconduct before the age of thirty-two, Augustine presented his identity vividly as "a sinner" who had offended both God and men. He acknowledged one of the clearest pictures of man's *rational will* warring against man's *natural will* as he read the *Holy Bible*:

... but I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon me by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains... For *my (natural) will* was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity... But *the new will* which has come to life in me and made me wish to serve you freely and enjoy you, my God... So these *two wills within me*, one old, one new, one the servant of the flesh, the other of the spirit, were in conflict and between them they tore my soul apart. (Pine-Coffins trans., 1961, p. 164)

Augustine's dilemma was clear. His *natural will* gave in to his lust. An addictive behavioral pattern had been reinforced in him over time, to the extent that he could not win over his carnally rooted "habits" by his free will.

*Free will* was used interchangeably with "natural will" in some of Prof Nie's writings about ELC. However, the term, as discussed extensively by the Protestant theologians such as Martin Luther, Louis Berkhof and others, is a theological laden word. It signifies the power of one's *willing choice* regarding one's life – an ability that is granted by God to men and women, for He has not created human beings with a disability of making their own choices for their own life (Grudem, 1994, p. 330). The

fact that mankind has the *free will* in making ethical choices in their life rules out the idea of fatalism. Men and women are therefore held responsible for their morality. If one does not guard one's good conscience when making choices in life, the freedom to exercise one's free will would not yield good consequences, but the contrary.

When making ethical choices, one resorts to one's *rational will* to execute ethical judgment and relevant choices. Augustine knew that he had a natural choice that he disapproved of, and a rational choice that he would like to make: "From my own experience I now understood what I had read (in the Book of Galatians, Chapter 5, verse 17 of the *Holy Bible*) – that the impulses of nature and the impulses of the spirit are at war with one another" (Pine-Coffins, 1961, pp. 164-165). The persistent dilemma between the flesh and the spirit, as well as the choice between one's *rational will* over one's *natural will* had altogether shaped the framework of this extensive autobiographical work of Augustine: How would one choose when one's fleshly lust is battling with one's clear conscience of one's guilt or shame?

In contrast to Augustine's religious virtuosity of the Medieval era, the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that was published posthumously in 1782 sought to reveal the entirety of his embarrassing private life to the public. Not interested in whatever God's opinion about him in the Last Day might be, Rousseau imagined himself presenting his private life for a fair hearing by other men: "I have displayed myself as I was, as vile and despicable when my behaviour was such, as good, generous, and noble when I was so... So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions" (Cohen trans., 1954, p. 17). Rousseau thus started the shift of the purpose of confessional literature from the reconciliation of man to God to the recovery of one's peace from shameful guilt. He also made extensive connections between the major childhood events in his life and his sexual orientation during his adulthood. Owing to its

subjective, individualistic and sensory character, Rousseau's *Confessions* was also instrumental in crowning him as the father of Romantic Movement.

Most of Rousseau's encounters with women were intense sexual fantasies without actual sexual consummation. Even the one time sex with Mme de Warens was described peaceful and uneventful, rather than outburst of joyful union. Although sexually desiring for his object of "love," he was lacking in self-confidence, thus resorting to masturbation and masochism:

To fall on my knees before a masterful mistress, to obey her commands, to have to beg for her forgiveness, have been to me the most delicate of pleasures; and the more my vivid imagination heated my blood the more like a spellbound lover I looked... So it is that my sensibility, combined with my timidity and my romantic nature, have preserved the purity of my feelings and my morals, by the aid of those same tastes which might, with a little more boldness, have plunged me into the most brutal sensuality."

(Cohen, 1954, pp. 27-28)

As Rousseau recollected, it all started since his childhood, when he felt gratified in being beaten up by his godmother Mlle Lambercier: "I had discovered in the shame and pain of the punishment *an admixture of sensuality* by the same hand" (Cohen, 1954, p. 25). Later in life, Rousseau could not contain his lifetime admiration and sensual want for his patron, Mme de Warens: "How often have I kissed my bed because she had slept in it; my curtains, all the furniture of my room, since they belonged to her and her fair hand had touched them; even the floor on to which I threw myself, calling to mind how she had walked there!" (Ibid)

It seemed that Rousseau was using the idea of “sensuality” to hide his topic of taboo, namely, his obsession in sexual fantasies. Throughout his life, Rousseau suffered from not being able to satisfy his sexual needs the conventional way. His *natural will* yearned for sexual contact with a woman, but his *rational will* forbade him to violate the woman whom he desired, especially when she was either his patron or godmother. To satisfy the whims and fancies of his incest tendencies, he chose to confine himself within the realm of “sensuality.” Although, Rousseau had technically saved himself from crossing the social taboo about forbidden sex, he had to confess that his wild, imaginary brutality in sensuality was “vile and despicable.” It was, by large, irrationality and not practical for a healthy living. Rousseau died a lonely death even though he managed to place himself as one of the great social philosophers in the history of man.

Rousseau’s work greatly influenced Sigmund Freud, who founded the school of psychoanalysis, which promoted many psychological ideas, including the Oedipus complex, sexual intent behind human actions, and so forth. When reading Augustine’s and Rousseau’s *Confessions* side by side, one has to admit that a man has basic needs to fulfill, and those needs are real. Rather than leading a life filled with rationality, it is not surprising that one might resort to make choices made out of irrationality at times. Rousseau justified his self-gratifying masochism using the euphemism of sensuality. His confessions provided a pointer for one of the stubborn problems of the real world, that the business in the bedroom, though seeming not harmful to others, would affect the mind. It takes away the vitality of life.

The disposition of people of different class or ethnic group may waver between *rationality* and *irrationality* on the topic of sex and sadism. Indeed, an examination of one’s mind is very much needed to guide how one views and treats the other, whether it

is in the context of spousal relationship, kinsmanship, within a community, or across racial or national differences. The abovementioned confessions have showcased the ongoing battles between man's *natural will* and *rational will*. Indeed, the fundamentals of the ethics of man are mirrored in the literature of man, especially in the autobiography genre.

### 3.4 Hope And Rationality: A Pathway To Tomorrow

Human beings are able to hope for future. Han Suyin was a writer with a hopeful heart. Unlike Anne Frank who did not survive the Nazi's occupation and thus never had a chance to experience adulthood, Han Suyin lived on until 92 years old. The adversities she faced through her life were many. But she had persistently expressed hope for a better future. The phrase "hope for the future" appears three times in the autobiographical series.<sup>16</sup> The word "hope" appears altogether 214 times throughout her autobiography: 37 times in *The Crippled Tree*; 26 times in *A Mortal Flower*; 38 times in *Birdless Summer*; 47 times in *My House has Two Doors*; 33 times in *Phoenix Harvest*, and 33 times in *Wind in My Sleeve*.

Of all the connotations of "hope," Han Suyin favoured the wise words of Vassar-educated President of Fudan University then, Professor Xie Xide (also known as Hilda Hsieh), who had given shape to what a *realistic* hope might look like: "Hope is a path that needs *constant treading* to keep it a path" (Han, 1992, pp. 53, 214). By means of "constant treading," one is not expected to give up trying easily along the uphill strife. One should be seeing hope even in an entirely "destructive despair," (Han, 1972a, p.

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<sup>16</sup> First time in *The Crippled Tree*, p. 206; second time in *Birdless Summer*, p. 157; third time in *Phoenix Harvest*, p. 25.

306) able to have the vision of bright hope while others declare that there is “no hope.”  
(p. 42)

For Han Suyin, the constant challenges and opposing situations against her and her nation might not seem to settle. However, she could thrive on so long as she chose to hang on with her little strength, and to remain hopeful. She had accepted that there would be a long road before attaining wholeness and rest. Therefore, the entirety of her world would be a continual path of fragments and changes, like that described in the Taoist philosophy, as one’s vulnerability could also be transformed into one’s unbreakability:

For a long time, I would be seeking Verity, like Lao-tze, and finding its fragments scattered, until one day wholeness would be restored. But until then: to know all truths approximate, dependent on a sum of knowledge in constant flux; to accept all situations as unstable, and nothing constant but change; to practise trust and honesty, but demand from others no corresponding or similar virtue; to balance prudent suspicion with trust, to see hope in destructive despair – to pluck good fortune from calamity, and know but one thing surely: that the main stem of the tree of life has always climbed towards the sun of greater awareness, and that no matter how great the persecution is, the blessed verity of life itself will triumph in the end – this, which is the Chinese wisdom of living, inherent in me though I knew if not, was now, in Europe, to grow; by contrast and opposition, to strengthen in me quietly, unknown to myself. (Han, 1972a, p. 306)

One’s tenacity to strive on is derived from one’s rationality. Han Suyin had learnt that “learning to hold on” with one’s will power was crucial (Han, 1972b, p. 68). Wanting to understand the state of the people after the Cultural Revolution, Han Suyin

conducted lots of personal interviews with the local Chinese. One of her interviewees, renowned writer Xia Yan said, “I never lost hope, for I thought of history... through agony and distress, disillusion and betrayal, through injustice and cruelty, I remained cheerful, knowing it was all a part of something larger than myself.” (Han, 1992, p. 35)

A rather similar reflection on the hope for tomorrow was also found in *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* by Rachel Joyce, winner of 2012 UK National Book Award for New Writer of the Year. In the novel, Fry, aged 65, had settled for a simple lifestyle with his wife in Kingsbridge, and would never dream of doing anything extraordinary. However, after receiving a mail stating that his ex-colleague Queenie Hennessy had cancer and was in hospice stage of dying, decided to do his part to comfort her. First, he wrote a brief letter to her, “Dear Queenie, Thank you for the letter. I am very sorry. ~~Yours~~ Best wishes, Harold (Fry)” (Joyce, 2012, p. 16).<sup>17</sup> Next, he left his home, intending to drop the letter in the closest mail box. However, due to distracting thoughts, he kept on walking towards the mail box after another. Before he knew it, he had already made a call to the Hospice and asked Hennessy to “hang on,” for he was on his way to visit her in person.

And so, Fry walked on and on, being encouraged by people along the way, until he actually completed 627 miles, reaching Berwick on the eighty-seventh day after the day he received Queenie’s letter. At the end of the story, Queenie breathed her last, in the midst of a comforting subconsciousness that Fry was also there for her. There was no indication that it was Fry’s promise that had motivated her to live on until his arrival. However, as for Fry, it was definitely the hope of tomorrow that had helped him to attempt such a long “pilgrimage” of the soul, when he reflected on all his past regrets while being continually determined to reach out to Queenie who was on her sick bed.

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<sup>17</sup> The cancelled word was in the original text.

In his book *The Wounded Healer*, famous theologian Henri Nouwen narrated the life story of Mr Harrison, a labourer who lived from hand to mouth, finally died on the operation theatre table as he had no one to care for and was seemingly cared by nobody (Nouwen, 2008, pp. 51-77). He raised a salient point that if only the young counsellor who visited Mr Harrison had made any attempt to instill in him a hope to greet tomorrow, Mr Harrison might have survived the surgery.

To use Henri Nouwen's wording, Mr. Harrison was in an "impersonal" milieu, afraid to die, yet also afraid to live. Facing a human being as such, a counselor or minister who merely applied basic counseling skills such as showing empathy, agreeing and paraphrasing the sharing of the counsellee was insufficient. What Mr Harrison needed was effective intervention that could lead him out of the pit of directionless, self-pity and self-banishment. Mr Harrison needed a companion, another human being who could empower his will to live, so that he would cross over from the impersonal milieu to actively engage himself with any action that greet tomorrow with courage and full anticipation.

Italo Calvino's *The Cloven Viscount* suggested that human beings were comprised of both the "good half" and the "wicked half," and thus capable of creating harmony or destructions to society. The novel is the first book in the trilogy *Our Ancestors* by Calvino. Reviewer Marnie Campagnaro of the University of Padua, Italy commented that all three protagonists in the trilogy, namely *The Cloven Viscount*, *The Baron in the Trees* and *The Nonexistent Knight* were characterised by their "unrest, 'incompleteness', indefiniteness, doubt, confusion, and uncertainty about the future," which typified the archetypal elements of youth (Campagnaro, 2013, pp. 83-95). Besides, Campagnaro also suggested *The Cloven Viscount* was actually not discussing the dichotomy of the nature of man, or whether man was good or bad in the ontological sense. Rather, it could be an allegory that reflected upon contemporary man's existential conditions. Was

Calvino trying to hint that the most pressing issue of the modern man is “his incapacity to reconcile the beast and the angel that are inside the ‘whole man’?” (Bonura, 1972, p. 68)

The story started with the account of Viscount Medardo of Terralba joining the army to combat in a war between Austria and Turkey at the end of the seventeenth century. Being inexperienced, he was unhorsed by the enemy and split into halves by a cannonball that had hit him on the chest. Owing to the accident, Viscount Medardo became two person, namely Gramo the Bad, and Buono the Good. Gramo the Bad was rescued and stitched back together by the army field doctors. Alive and “cloven,” Gramo the Bad had one eye, a dilated single nostril, and a half mouth on a half face. His smile is scissors-like half smile. He recovered fast and was able to return to a castle in Terralba. Traumatized by his being-split-into-half experience, Gramo the Bad turned into a horrifying villain. Mercilessly, he sliced into halves all the beautiful things he came across, namely, frogs, butterflies, melons, mushrooms, flowers, and others. Besides, he also hanged many innocent lives and set houses on fire, including the house of lepers. Like a man who had totally lost the power of rational will, Gramo the Bad was left with an undifferentiating instinct and irrational impulse to kill. The ELC proponent Nie Zhenzhao suggested that with the absence of the goodness of man, there was no self-controlling power within the man. He thus acted in accordance to his irrational will, operating entirely from the primordial animal factor – one of the Sphinx factors in the nature of man, and became an inhumane, cold-hearted one. (Nie, 2012, p. 28)

On the other hand, Buono the Good who was dying amidst a pile of dead bodies was discovered and rescued by a group of hermits. After their intensive care, he survived and managed to return to Terralba as well after a period of time, but living in the forest. Though an altruist, the extreme kindness and generosity of Buono the Good provoked

quite a bit of uneasiness among the villagers. For example, when he tried to advise Adam, a seventy year old Huguenot farmer, not to labour at the expense of his health, the leader of the village Ezekiel quickly intervened and said, “All of us here earn our bread the hard way, brother” (Colquhoun, 1977, p. 277). Even then, Buono the Good was the extreme example of kindness. He assisted the sick, extended his help to the old and the poor, accompanied lost children back to the home, delivered firewood to widows, sent a dog that was hurt by a viper to the veterinary clinic, replanted the fig tree that had been uprooted by the wind, and so forth. All of which were marks of good exercises of man’s rational will.

The competition between the *rational will* and *irrational will*, which were embodied by Medardo’s two halves clashed when the two shared the same interest in a village girl named Pamela. Pamela wedded Buono the Good whom she had loved, but Gramo the Bad challenged Buono to a duel. Pamela’s words did not help to soothe any one of them: “...wicked ideas in evil souls writhe like serpents in nests, and charitable ones sprout lilies of renunciation and dedication” (Colquhoun, 1977, p. 236). Instead, both fought furiously, severely hurting each other until their old wounds were reopened. In order to save their lives, Dr Trelawney decided to sew the two halves together. Hence, Buono the Good and Gramo the Bad were weaved back together as a whole man, the original Viscount Medardo. The viscount and his wife, Viscountess Pamela, shared a happy life ever after.

*The Cloven Viscount* seemed to have pointed out that human beings were not perfect, and thus perfect goodness could not be sustained. However, even if there was wickedness in man, it could also be reconditioned and guided by the *rational will*, in order to maintain a sound personality. In ELC, the principle of using man’s rationality in handling both elements in the Sphinx factors, namely, the animal factor and the

human factor, is perhaps a helpful metaphor for rallying with the reality and anxiety of man's existential issues.

Likewise, while reading the autobiography series of Han Suyin, one would reckon that she was able to strive on due to her conviction and tenacity to want to see goodness beyond wickedness; reconciliation beyond racial segregation; and growth despite oppression. Han Suyin experienced many trials in her life. In her first marriage, her husband Pao turned abusive as he started to accuse her as a bearer of foreign wickedness:

He was intensely race-conscious, and I was the perpetual reminder of a national humiliation which now sought to reassert its pride through an inverse racism... He took it upon himself to reform me, remould me... he was to exercise upon me for years, exorcizing out of me *wickedness*, immorality, foreignness... (Han, 1972b, p. 66)

Pao was indeed fault-finding and ever manipulative towards Han Suyin since then. In fact, he was actually the "wicked" one instead in the eyes of a third party, Margery, who revealed to Han Suyin about Pao's blackmailing of her for a doing that was not of her fault: "But he is mad, your husband is quite mad, he is truly a very wicked man," cried Margery, astonished at his viciousness" (Han, 1972b, p. 287). Contrary to Pao's ill-treatment of her, Han Suyin stayed on, trying to process the possible root issues of all that were getting on them, and on her in particular. She was the type who would handle any problem at its root cause. But in Pao's case, Han Suyin did not manage to change the abuser-abused relationship throughout their eight years of marriage. The fact that Han Suyin was trying all those times for the marriage to work because she was hoping that her attempts would yield some goodness, which might be a catalyst for good changes.

Another account of wickedness was about Madam Chiang Ching or Jiang Qing, Mao's wife who became the leader of the Gang of Four. Madam Jiang was hated for her cruelty in scheming up against those who had derided her, and was subsequently charged for treason along with her associates. A hotel waitress told Han Suyin, "She's the most wicked woman in the world ... we hate her, hate her ... we wish we could boil her alive." (Han, 1985, p. 265) Madam Jiang was publicly denounced by Deng Xiaoping as well. But Han Suyin believed that negativism and denouncement would not help to instil constructive future for China. First thing first. The unity within the Party should come first:

Now he (Deng Xiaoping) referred to Madame Mao as 'the most wicked woman that ever lived.' He outlined the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, mentioned a famine in North Sichuan which I had not heard about... China (however,) could no longer afford the luxury to dawdle, to indulge in political struggles. There must be unity and stability. China must catch up with the West. Much precious time had been lost... (Han, 1992, p. 10)

All in all, Han Suyin's good attitude in handling unpleasant situations also helped her to strive against racial bigotry.

The positive attitude in wanting to see goodness beyond wickedness would also be Han Suyin's basic socio-political outlook. However, this attribute of Han Suyin also contributed to her relatively naive position in political critiques, especially those that related to Jiang Qing and Cultural Revolution. Following her demise in Lausanne, Switzerland on 2 November 2012, Western media suddenly boiled over Han Suyin's indifferent attitude regarding the crimes of Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution again. To name a few, one may refer to Hugo Restall's "A Cheerleader for Mao's

Cultural Revolution” in the Commentary Column of *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 November 2012; Verna Yu’s “Han Suyin loved China but turned a blind eye to its excesses” in *South China Morning Post*, 11 November 2012; and a list of other publications.

### **3.5 Rationality And Community: Inclusivity Versus Exclusivity**

Nobel laureate Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *The Long Walk To Freedom* was one of the most cherished books that spoke great sense in campaigning for the freedom and well-being of a suffering Black majority under a governing White minority. Mandela was considered the “Tata” or the “Father of the Nation.” He received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1993, and became South Africa’s first black President. As the title of his autobiography suggested, Mandela endured a long peaceful strife to liberate the suffering Africans under the highly racist and biased Apartheid laws.

The ethical environment that he was born and raised in was so negative that it had become a precondition that unless a leader was born to topple the Apartheid, the adversity against the majority people in the land would prolong:

To be an African in South Africa means that one is politicised from the moment of one’s birth, whether one acknowledges it or not. An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area, and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends school at all. When he grows up, he can hold Africans Only jobs, rent a house in Africans Only townships, ride Africans Only trains, and be stopped at any time of the day or night and be ordered to produce a pass, failing which he will be arrested and thrown in jail. His life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth, dim

his potential, and stunt his life. This was the reality, and one could deal with it in a myriad of ways... I will devote myself to the liberation of my people; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise. (Mandela, 1995, p. 95)

However, it was notable that Mandela did not choose terrorism, but reason and *rationality* as the chief principle in his liberation philosophy. He also chose mentors and political comrades who would abide by principle of good reasons: "I had come under the wise tutelage of Walter Sisulu. Walter was strong, *reasonable*, practical, and dedicated. He never lost his head in a crisis; he was often silent when others were shouting" (Mandela, 1995, p. 95). J. B. Marks, another Africa National Congress (ANC) party member whom Mandela befriended was described as displaying "cool and *reasoned* leadership" at all times, weathering the most difficult crisis with good thinking and humour. (p. 102)

More specifically, Mandela's rationality laid in his belief and advocacy for a non-racialism policy. He wanted to liberate Africa for all people, coloured or not: "...There were no classes, no rich or poor and no exploitation of man by man. All men were free and equal and this was the foundation of government" (Mandela, 1995, p. 330). In his autobiography, Mandela documented that this equality principle in his political outlook was inherited from the African elders in his village in Transkei:

Recognition of this general principle found expression in the constitution of the council, variously called 'Imbizo' or 'Pitso' or 'Kgotla,' which governs the affairs of the tribe. The council was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations. Chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, all took part and endeavoured to influence its decision. It was so weighty and influential a body that no step

of any importance could ever be taken by the tribe without reference to it.

(Ibid)

Even when he was freed from imprisonment, Mandela took special care in the choice of the place where he would be spending his first night of freedom. He did not want to give a wrong impression to anyone that he would only dwell in a place that “symbolised an open, generous nonracialism” (Mandela, 1995, p. 561). With rationality, Mandela eventually brought forth true liberation for the entire South African community, binding the nation with high solidarity and equality.

Conformity and normalisation would be the expectation of any conventional society regarding the minority groups living among them. However, for China-born Eurasian physician and author Dr Han Suyin, genuine acceptance of the sideliners might be the trajectory for the shaping of modern global village. Learning from the history of the two World Wars, as well as the civil wars and policy changes in China, Han Suyin had always felt upset over the overwhelming famines and poverty – the byproducts of warfares – which deeply affected the quality of life of the common people. A consultant on China at the World Health Organization (WHO), Han Suyin depicted how detrimental were the predicaments caused by human disasters. Unlike natural disasters, human disasters were the worst sufferings of all, as they were caused by the vices and darkness of human’s wicked primitive desires.

In 1958, Han Suyin ended her medical practice after the success of her novel, *The Mountain is Young*. Turning into a full-time novelist, historian and lecturer, Han Suyin also assumed the role of East-West culture envoy at the period of time when China had “not one friend in the world” (Han, 1982, p. 274). She visited many provinces in China, including the interior areas. Even though initially condemned as “agents of American

imperialism (in China)” together with Pearl Buck (Han, 1985, p. 90), Han Suyin was acknowledged as the one who brought the understanding of the West to the Chinese.

Outside China, she was recognised as a non-diplomat advocate for China. The overseas Chinese in America and Canada had regarded her as their earnest consultant especially when Zhou Enlai passed away in 1976 (Han, 1985, p. 279). The BBC rang her up when Jiang Qing, the leader of the Gang of Four, was arrested (p. 293). Owing to Han Suyin’s persistent choice in challenging and reconstructing how things ought to be, she finally had a breakthrough against the curse of life upon her bicultural, mixed-racial and weaker-sex background. She had always promoted inclusivity and altruistic concerns for humanity in all her writings and public lectures. Besides, for her, along with science and morality, unselfishness and serving others — more specifically, “serving the people” — should always be esteemed as the core value of human society.<sup>18</sup>

There was a strong rationale for Han Suyin to emerge as a self-appointed, non-government spokesperson for China. After the end of the First Opium War in 1842, which resulted in the unequal Treaty of Nanjing, the Chinese by and large were awakened by the reality of foreign aggression in their homeland. China’s accumulated wealth were dwindling away. The past glory of China as the Middle Kingdom was fading away. In contrast to the rather luxurious living of foreigners at treaty ports, coupled with their complete legal system; China’s own backwardness and incapability of governance became evident. Furthermore, the disparity of the rich and the poor remained huge. Over time, the ongoing battles between warlords, as well as civil wars

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<sup>18</sup> Han Suyin’s recorded speech in London, “The Thought of Chairman Mao and the Chinese People” delivered in 1972, retrieved on 8 November 2016, <http://gammacloud.org/special-collections/the-thought-of-mao-tse-tung/han-suyin/>.

between the Nationalist and the Communist had only rubbed salt into open wounds of famine and poverty of her people.

Han Suyin's autobiography was filled with her accounts of the looming socio-economy issues in China. One of her reports was regarding child labour and prostitution:

Of the textile mills of Shanghai, 77.2 per cent were foreign-owned, 22.8 per cent Chinese. Woman and child labour was near 85 per cent of the total; the monthly earnings were fifteen (silver) dollars for a male, thirteen for a female, eight for a child (under twelve) working twelve to fourteen hours a day for seven days a week. Though the government had passed labour laws in 1931 they were never put into effect. And all this went on till 1949...The average life-expectancy in China in 1935 was twenty-eight years; in the mills in Shanghai it was far less. No New Life here, and no chastity possible. The mill girls had to please the foremen, and the pimps were always there. (Han, 1972a, p. 264)

In contrast to the helpless underproduction, underdevelopment and unequal distribution of the economy cake, Han Suyin wanted to give highlights on any commendable economic progresses that China had achieved as a people and a nation. For instance, she documented one of Mao's major speeches, which gave clear directions of where China would be moving onwards:

And Mao has made a major speech, in January 1962, which I cannot lay my hands on (not until 1978!), saying it is necessary and indispensable for China's progress to develop democracy, to *safeguard legality*, to create a vigorous and lively political situation in which there is both centralism and

democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind ... (Han, 1982, p. 449)

Han Suyin commented that she was joyful over the fact that China would develop again a legal code that would be functional for the modern era. Her other accounts include the new possibilities of having electricity at suburban areas, increased literacy, and other progresses despite the shortcomings of the Great Leap Forward:

In 1956, the bulk of the Chinese people were still illiterate; the intelligentsia was reckoned at five million, or 1 per cent of the total population. But by 1979 a new intelligentsia has grown up, derived from the sons and daughters of peasants and workers. Even in the hamlets of faraway Szechuan (Sichuan), the young can read and write... (Han, 1982, p. 205)

Han Suyin argued that the progress in China during the first few decades when Communists took over might be underrepresented in the West. She questioned the unwillingness of the world powers to reckon the success of the Chinese Revolution. She teased that perhaps, there would always be “a time lag in understanding the realities of history” (Han, 1982, p. 214).

Han Suyin’s boldness in revealing and reflecting on the China’s issues had offered the readers a far-clearer social portrayal of the emerging modern China. In comparison to Pearl S Buck, who lived half a century before her, Han Suyin’s autobiography seemed to offer more insider perspective of the coming about of China.

Reading the autobiography of Pearl S Buck and Han Suyin side by side, one would be able to piece together unsettling experience of the people in China during the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century through the eyes of Anglo-Saxon Buck; along with the turbulent years of

civil wars, poverty and revolution during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the eyes of China's patriot Han Suyin.

In comparison with China-born Eurasian Han Suyin, Pearl S Buck, daughter of American missionaries in China, chronicled from the viewpoint as a China enthusiast and friendly observer. Buck was very proud of her parents, who had chosen to live meagerly among the local Chinese. They rejected the isolated middle-class lifestyle of the other Whites who lived exclusively behind dividing high walls and iron gates of the foreigners' territories:

...happy for me that I had such parents, for instead of the narrow and conventional life of the white man in Asia, I lived with the Chinese people and spoke their tongue before I spoke my own, and their children were my first friends. (Buck, 1955, p. 20)

...how much I wished that we could be friends, because indeed our hearts were all the same. (p. 65)

However, during her adolescence, Buck learned that her integrated world gradually fell apart into several worlds. During the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, the expansionism of the West caused rapid changes at a few coastal areas of China. As Buck recalled, "France had taken Annam, England insisted upon Weihaiwei, France upon Kwangchow, Germany upon Tsingtao and Russia upon Dairen. These were called 'leased territories,' but actually they were colonies." (Buck, 1995, p. 38)

Owing to the failed diplomacy with the foreign powers, the Empress Dowager of China decided to revenge and support local demonstrations against all the whites in the territory. The label of "yang guizi" (or "yang kwei-tse" in Wade-Giles romanisation system, meaning, "foreign devils") by the locals against Buck and her family made her

heart cringed. She started to learn of various news of racial violence and brutality, "...I remember the faultless summer day when we heard of the first massacre of missionaries in Shantung, and that the little children had been murdered with their parents" (Buck, 1995, p. 37). The family eventually had to escape to Shanghai – "a city altogether unlike any Chinese city" in Buck's eyes, where Buck was sent off to America while her parents remained to serve the Chinese until they breathed their last.

In her autobiography *My Several Worlds*, Buck recalled her troubled mind about the demarcation between people of the different continents. Instead of *exclusivity* of each different nation, her writings probed for a much-needed openness and *inclusivity* between people.

... I grew up in a double world, the small white clean Presbyterian American world of my parents and the big loving merry not-too-clean Chinese world, and there was no communication between them. When I was in the Chinese world I was Chinese, I spoke Chinese and behaved as a Chinese and ate as the Chinese did, and I shared their thoughts and feelings. When I was in the American world, I shut the door between.  
(Buck, 1995, p. 10)

Buck experienced the grievances of the Opium wars, the Boxer rebellions as well as the deaths of missionary families during her youth. She was also not spared from the pain of being uprooted, and thus becoming a bystander of the nation she once called home. However, against man's *natural will* to hate and to retaliate, Buck advocated the altruistic spirit of inclusivism. Even during the Cold War era, when it was dangerous even to openly share one's belief "in the brotherhood of peoples, in the equality of the races, (and) in the necessity for human understanding," she proclaimed that she would adhere to the brotherhood ideal fearlessly until she died (Buck, 1995, p. 432). Although

not a follower of the Communist ideology, Buck showcased the best way in which human's *rational will* could be exercised.

Both Buck and Han Suyin had chosen to advocate for the inclusivity of all people, rather than the hegemony of a certain nation or race. Piecing together their autobiographies, one would realise that interracial relations had always been a teething issue since the beginning of the century. It is thus not surprisingly that the East-West tie during the era was severed by hostility and bigotry, leaving little room for dialogue about equality and mutual respect.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The mind is man's most valuable asset. As the mind is endowed with the ability to reason, it enables man to function as moral beings. With rationality at work, man is able to manage his basic needs such as one's sexual desires, the need for recognition from others, the cravings for power and wealth, and so forth within acceptable social parameters. The rationality of man in itself, provides the means for check and balance, discouraging man from making wicked choices that could cause harm to oneself or the others. When there is goodness amidst wickedness, there is always a hope to cherish.

It seemed that when compared with other classical works, Han Suyin's autobiography did not portray humanity as totally good, half good; totally bad, or half bad. Her depiction of mankind was very much akin to the allegory of the Sphinx in ELC, which to certain extent, suggested that all undesirable human condition could be reversed, so long as the reasoning faculty or the *rationality* of man could be involved in man's volitional activities. Instead of surrendering to the daunting problems and seeing all adversities as predetermined curse of life, she was still willing to greet the future with high hopes. The openness of Han Suyin to embrace all "man-made disasters"

(Wang, 1996, p. 128) that had occurred in her own life or in the history of modern China had together demonstrated her spirit of positivity:

Tomorrow, perhaps, I shall have grown up. Perhaps I can wait till tomorrow. (Han, 1972c, p. 447)

At least I would greet tomorrow I had not made, even if it killed me. (*CT*, 18)

Let's wait and see. (Han, 1985, p. 255)

Tomorrow would come the sea. (Han, 1992, p. 447)

The “sea” in the text was referring to her upcoming family vacation at the seaside of Peitaiho (or Beidaihe in today’s spelling), signifying a long awaited break from all the confusions and frustrations that she had experienced. The ‘hope’ of Han Suyin did not remain a wishful notion. As days went by, she found ways to turn her positive attitude into proactive actions and well-grounded plans in order to trade real efforts for real, tangible success. The life path that Han Suyin had trodden was like that described by Robert Frost in his poem, “a road not taken.” Her rationality in renegotiating for a new ethical identity and new definition of legitimacy with her community was altogether commendable.

#### **CHAPTER 4: HAN SUYIN'S ETHICAL IDENTITY AND ETHICAL DILEMMA**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China encountered foreign powers at her doorstep. “To these one hundred and nine years (1840-1949) belonged the burden of unequal treaties, extra-territorial rights, war indemnities, the concessions, occupation by foreign troops, massacres, and the sacking of Chinese cities” (Han, 1967, p. 21). The Chinese of millennium-old China survived the aftermath of the Opium Wars, as well as the multiple civil upheavals that followed, in the search of a suitable political structure for her modernisation. Beneath some general confusion and the sheer mode of survival, there was also a nagging need for a shared rationality among the people, regarding what was going on, and how the nation and her people should thrive on.

In the midst of the national crisis, Han Suyin who was born and raised in China, experienced her homeland as a race-segregated environment, making her flounder regarding her in-between identity. However, even from an unwelcome bifurcated background, Han Suyin was able to somehow align herself with other minority women writers who were known as “word-warriors,” namely Edith Eaton and Maxine Hong Kingston (H. Yu, 1991, p. 133). However, while Eaton and Kingston were outright feminists, Han Suyin was not. Her autobiography series was speaking from a non-gender-centric, humanity-for-all vintage point. Besides, unlike Pearl S Buck, Winnifred Eaton, Bette Bao Lord, Dr Hazel Ling, Virginia Lee and some other writers who simply evoked China as an orientalist “landscapes of memory” (Ibid); Han Suyin was more interested in the real China, the soul of China, her ethical identity, dilemma and what transpired along her radical path to modernisation.

#### 4.1 Han Suyin's Ethical Identity: "To Be" Versus The "Ought To Be"

One's ethnicity is bestowed upon birth. People were born to be Chinese, English, etc. But in Rosalie's case, she chose to be Chinese. Inheriting two ethnic and cultural backgrounds was both a blessing and a curse for her. While young, she was enrolled in a Chinese school in the morning, and a French convent in the afternoon. At home, her meals would be a European breakfast, a Chinese lunch and a European supper. Occasionally, Rosalie's mother even mixed macaroni and Chinese noodles in her cooking. Yet managing the duality was not easy. Rosalie always felt that she had "another life, a saving otherness which was also self." (Han, 1972c, p. 352)

To deliberate, there are a few key terms pertaining to one's "identity." Identity could be subjective, as in one's self-identity, which might be self-perceived or self-determined; or objective, namely the general identity of an individual coined by one's gender, ethnic or social status. The subjective self-identity is how one chooses to define oneself, for example, Rosalie once perceived herself as a young, ugly biracial girl who had awkward behaviour and unrealistic dreams. However, after she had decided not to allow herself be trapped in her ill-defined identity, she renamed herself as "Josephine," a new subjective identity that would shed all negative connotations and that she could form new self-images and self-determined who she would like herself to be in future. Her transformation from Rosalie Chou to Dr Chou, and ultimately, Han Suyin, was a process of subjective identity choice, coupled with her objective, ethical identity, which will be elaborated in #4.2.

There are at least two ways one's objective identity be defined: First, there is the metaphysical identity; Second, the *ethical identity*. The metaphysical identity identifies what constitutes a person, namely the appearance and general characteristics of a person, or in more technical terms, the body and soul of an individual. It also denotes

whether a person could be identified as the same person at all times: If a person could be X at a time, but Y at another, what makes X and Y the same person? For instance, if Han Suyin was Rosalie Chou at a time, but Dr Han Suyin at another, what made them the same person? As far as the metaphysics is concerned, the same DNA or core characteristics of a Rosalie Chou remained even as she grew up and transformed herself into licensed physician cum famous writer Dr Han Suyin.

*Ethical identity*, on the other hand, defines the “core” or “true” self, a determinative of one’s precise individualism as defined by his or her ethical environment: What makes X (or X+Y at different life stages) a certain person, who would behave in a certain manner under a certain circumstance, rather than like the manners another individual would perform. For example, in Rosalie Chou’s case, what made her persistently pursue her dream to be a medical doctor, while her sister Tiza Chou did not have such an idea at all. Given the same gender and ethnic background, and in a dismantling Old China environment, what constituted the ethical identity of Rosalie Chou, that she had made all those choices that eventually shaped her into Dr Han Suyin? Also, given the same Eurasian background, what differentiated Rosalie Chou from her brother George Chou, who disowned and denounced everything Chinese until the end of his life, while Rosalie considered China as her homeland and the subject of her lifetime advocacy through and through?

On further reflection, the ethical identity of an individual could basically be studied via two dimensions: Descriptively, what are the core traits and values that define Person X, e.g., who was Rosalie Chou at her core? Normatively, what are the core traits and values that should define who Rosalie Chou was. Very often, race, class, age, gender and ethnicity are the basic determinatives of one’s ethical identity in a community. As the saying goes, a leopard cannot change its spots. To a certain extent, these

determinatives play undeniable roles in defining who a person is, and suggesting what core traits and values the person might probably subscribe to. However, one's ethical identity is also determined by the social roles that one assumes. For example, after Rosalie Chou completed her medical education and became a qualified physician, Dr. Chow (Chou), her Eurasian female identity became secondary in her socialisation process. Her patients as well as her social circle would recognise her as a highly sought-after doctor, rather than a Eurasian lady. Also, because of her professional qualifications, any negative preconception regarding her as a female or her "Eurasian" background would automatically be re-evaluated.

The *ethical identity* is a determinative of a certain individual as perceived and determined during a certain era: What is expected of X as a member of society of that time. There was already an objective "ought to be" identity for Rosalie Chou (Han Suyin), as perception of Eurasian young women during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was rather stereotyped. However, by redefining her "to be," Rosalie Chou became Dr Chou, who entirely fitted into the "ought to be" of her environment. Her ethical identity was also reshaped and redefined. As such, the ethical reconstruction of her objective identity resulted in her new ethical identity, which allowed her to play the role of an independent contributor to society, rather than a "loser" at the mercy of anybody. In Poulsen's (2015) language:

Han is invested in *emplacement*, and while (the rejection of) citizenship (with her homeland) limits it, and (her increasingly recognised) world citizenship abstracts it, the environmental potentially offers an inclusive *rootedness*. Han gestures towards a mode of being *grounded* in the present and *not dependent on* racial identity, nationality, or individuality, and

which therefore interrupts the predictive use of Asian mixed-race. (pp. 158-159)

#### 4.2 Rosalie Chou – Josephine – Dr Chou – Han Suyin

Han Suyin grew up as Rosalie the “Wicked-One,” the “half-caste” and with a strong suggestion of her *illegitimate* existence. It was not difficult to understand why she had to reject all the labels that were given by her own mother and others. In order to live a life full of dignity and dreams, she needed to redefine herself. She needed a new ethical identity: “This is Hsinyang in Honan, and Papa is Chinese and Ma is Belgian, and I am Rosalie or so they call me, but really am not Rosalie, *I am me.*” (Han, 1972c, p. 326)

After the demise of her second brother Gabriel, Sea Orchid, Rosalie’s mother Marguerite indulged in alcoholism and was totally unprepared for the birth of Rosalie. Even though Rosalie was her first daughter, Marguerite refused to look at this baby girl after the delivery. Treating Rosalie like an illegitimate child, Marguerite cursed, “Take that half-caste brat away. It is not my child.” (Han, 1972c, p. 304) Marguerite did not attend to the baby for an entire week, so much so that Rosalie was suffering from jaundice and starving from malnutrition. Though the servant tried to feed her with some rice water and diluted condensed milk, baby Rosalie was practically left to survive on her own. “Die, die!” Marguerite indulged in drinking, and kept calling out for the deceased baby, Sea Orchid. Rosalie’s father Yentung finally intervened. On the eighth day of Rosalie’s birth, Yentung slapped her wife, hitting her and putting the baby in her arms, “Are you going to feed her or not? She is *your child.*” (p. 305) It was the first and last time Marguerite had ever been ill-treated by her loving husband in that manner. Subsequently, the mother-daughter relationship between Marguerite and Rosalie became prone to rivalry rather than a loving bond.

Besides being named “that half-caste brat,” Rosalie was also called “the Wicked One” by her birth mother. (Han, 1972c, pp. 371, 322) As Rosalie recollected, “Mama never really forgave her daughter for having taken Sea Orchid’s place. She tried hard to love her, and she did her best, but no one can escape the unconscious, unexplained resentment for which only circumstance is responsible.” The love of one’s mother is one of the basic needs as described in Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Deprived of the love of her mother, Rosalie felt abandoned. She had to thrive on her own. To add to the pain, she could never forget the “Big Hurt,” namely the hurt related to her unwelcome birth. (p. 282) Managing her mother had always been one of the biggest predicaments during her youth. After many failed attempts, Rosalie knew that she would never be able to satisfy her mother. She finally decided not to go on as her mother’s Rosalie. She needed a new identity. When one’s self-identity differed from the ethical identity, it could only be appropriated with the change of the ethical environment. For the time being, Rosalie Chou needed to be patient and wait for such changes to come her way.

Very often, Rosalie fell victim to the pressure of two clashing and non-communicating worlds. She vividly recalled the sheer loneliness while attending Yenching University for an entrance examination in 1933:

I was the only girl in European dress. I stood in a corner and lit a cigarette.

I was alone. No one else stood alone; everyone went about in groups of twos or threes... Suddenly I saw myself, appallingly different, and I wanted to get on my bicycle and ride away, but this could not be done. So I lit another cigarette and puffed furiously. I must have looked so arrogant, puffy because I was so frightened, and fear makes one put on a face, obstinate and defensive. (Han, 1972a, p. 228)

Even before suffering from the agony of isolation and alienation at school, Rosalie had already decided to rename herself. For her, renaming would be the antidote to the curse of her awkward life. A sensitive and sensible girl, Rosalie had always been conscious about the unreasonable “illegitimacy” pertaining to her existence. Rosalie’s full maiden name was Rosalie Matilda Kuanghu Chou. She was named after her grandmother, Matilda Rosalie Leenders, with the variation of having two Chinese names at the end of the string of names. “Kuanghu” was her personal name in Chinese, meaning the “light of the moon,” for it was on the Harvest Festival day that she was born. “Chou” was her last name from her father.

As bicultural as the name may sound, Rosalie rejected “Rosalie” as her name. “Rosalie, who did not want to be named Rosalie, crawled still farther away from the house...” (Han, 1972c, p. 319) Even as a preteen, Rosalie consciously chose to become Rosalie-no-longer. She wanted to be “another, not hamstrung Rosalie.” (Han, 1972a, p. 38) She needed a name that marked the new beginning of Rosalie the doctor-to-be. One day, she had a new name for herself: Josephine.

She, Rosalie, is I, Rosalie-no-longer. I am twelve years old, and I have changed my name. I have changed Rosalie. It is a new name, superseding Rosalie; I want to be another, not hamstrung Rosalie. It is the beginning of being a doctor. (Ibid)

She announced it proudly to the mom, “From today I am Josephine.” But her mother laughed at her, “Why that was the name of my servant, my maid, Josephine.” She was also ridiculed by her sisters Tiza and Marianne, “Josephine, Josephine the servant, your name is Josephine the servant.” (Han, 1972a, p. 39) She was upset, but not crushed. Josephine-Rosalie had developed resilience to adversity at home. She was ready for unkind words and discouraging manners. She would live on. She would assert a new

“she,” a new identity in the forming. “De-naming” was her new found device, an antidote to the curse of her birth and her very existence.

The buoyant spirit of Josephine-Rosalie was necessary for her new belief. Within her, she saw herself sharing a future alongside the nation that she had gradually identified herself with in total — China. During her adolescence, she had been hearing pronouncements of China’s doom, “China is finished,” “This is the end,” “There is no hope for China.” (Han, 1972a, 40) Yet this Josephine-Rosalie would not lose hope regarding China. In fact, she started to assert a tenacity that many others did not have. With dignity and moral courage, she was ready to go against all odds in order to greet the day of light, namely the day of transformation for China, and for herself. Although it took Rosalie a long time to figure out what to fight for, she finally got it altogether. (p. 32)

In her fourth book, *My House has Two Doors*, Josephine-Rosalie had become Dr Chow or Dr Chou, a female medical professional. She recollected how easily she overcame gender discrimination in the medical profession when she first opened her own clinic in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. A male doctor warned her then, “You won’t have any patients. People don’t like women doctors.” Contrary to his stereotyped opinion, Dr Chou’s patients increased phenomenally. Besides getting patients from the city, her fame brought her patients from distant rubber estates, and patients who claimed that they “saved” their illness for her to attend to. (Han, 1982, pp. 100-102) The credibility of her medical expertise built inroads for her to contribute to regional and international health affairs. She was the appointed physician of Nanyang University, Singapore. Before long, she also received the appointment by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be the Consultant on China Affairs.

Through a long period of soul-searching and re-identification of herself, Rosalie was able to reconstruct the ethical order of her world through re-creating herself. Instead of resorting to a victimised mentality or alienating herself from the Chinese community, she took on an active role as a contributing member to China and the Chinese. Rosalie first renamed herself “Josephine,” a name which symbolised her future self, namely a medical professional that would eventually discard all road blocks that had been built against her old self Rosalie. Then, with the completion of her medical studies and housemanship, she materialised her dream to be Dr Chou. While being the top-notch specialist, she pursued an active life of advocating for a positive image of Communist China via international public lectures, while diligently producing novels that romanticised interracial relationships.

Eventually, she adopted a name that characterised who she was most comfortable with: “Han Suyin.” As a writer, Dr Chou took on the pseudonym Han Suyin because her past identity as wife of an ex-Kuomintang diplomat might not be helpful. Literally, “Han Suyin” means the plain voice of the Han people. The family name “Han (韩),” homophone of “Hanzu (汉族),” was deliberately chosen by Dr Chou to project her ethical identity of being a member of the majority Chinese.

The entire process of Han Suyin’s self-denial from being “Rosalie” to self-assertion as “Josephine,” and then, self-assurance as “Dr Chou” and last but not least, self-identification as “Han Suyin” was altogether amazing and inspiring. Her grit and ability to renegotiate her ethical identity, namely her identity as defined by the community that she associated herself with, was due to her unbreakable will that was empowered by great rationality.

### 4.3 Han Suyin's Ethical Dilemma: The Paradox Of A "Two-Door" House

An individual with multiple-defined *ethical identity* naturally would face traumatising ethical dilemma that could not be easily resolved due to the multiple references the individual had to make. To define, an *ethical dilemma* refers to the mental conflict whereby an individual could not resolve his or her problem without making an *ethical choice* between two mutually exclusive options. The situation could be unsettling, as both options carry their respective moral imperatives. Compliance with one will cause violation of the other.

Sophocles' *Antigone* posed a rather good reflection on one of such conflicting imperatives. In this Greek legend, Antigone was Oedipus' daughter, princess of Thebes, who should have known no care. She had two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. Upon King Oedipus' demise, it was agreed that the two princes would each reign for a year. The eldest prince Eteocles took the throne first, but refused to step down after a year had passed. Polynices and his men, therefore, attacked Eteocles. Both brothers were eventually killed in a duel. Antigone's uncle, Creon, inherited the throne instead. As Creon considered Polynices' act an assassination, which had violated the law of the land, he issued a royal edict to forbid any burial of Polynices' remains. Due to Antigone's obligatory love for her brother, she buried her brother, but was caught. Owing to her imprisonment, Antigone committed suicide to end her plight. According to Antigone, she buried her brother out of her obligation to comply with the divine law, or the law of the gods. Thus there was an ethical dilemma of choosing to obey the human law or divine law, written law or unwritten law, or even, as Hegel had argued, the male-oriented law of the city-state, or the female-oriented law of family and

kinship.<sup>19</sup> Antigone chose to observe the latter. She fulfilled the obligation to bury her brother, yet she had to face the fatal punishment for violating the other law.

The narrative of Han Suyin's life was definitely not likened to a straight line. In fact, it was like a constant switch between the past and the present. The past is not left behind at a point of memory, but they could be "back here" anytime, intruding into the current state of the life of a person. What was more bizarre was that the switch was also happening between the two worlds of her bifurcated identity. Since young, Rosalie, the teenage Han Suyin, had already seen her life as a "two-door" house. While others would only understand and perceive her from one perspective, she had always had another identity that they would refuse to recognise:

And my heart shall know what it is not to be one, yet not two, for ever almost, for my *house of life* has *two doors*, and the people that walk into it by one door do not use the other, and everything has to be kept apart from everything else. I alone use both, use all, grasping the keys to both to open and shut my house at will. (Han, 1972c, p. 281)

Individuals of bifurcated background often share a common experience. "What unites them is their place between two worlds that simultaneously claim and reject them, render them visible and invisible." (Ling, 1990, p. 131) Amy Ling's book *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* pointed out that the paradoxical between-worlds condition played significant roles in shaping the respective self-concept and the way they write. To name, their distinct self-reflexiveness is usually notable. (p. 132)

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<sup>19</sup> "Hegel, the Author and Authority in Sophocle's *Antigone*", by W. Conklin, in Leslie G. Rubin, ed., 1977, *Justice Versus Law in Greek Political Thought*, pp. 129-151, New York/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

While renaming might help Rosalie to self-determine her new life direction, she nevertheless, suffered the ethical dilemma of not knowing which world she was in at times. The ideal world where Rosalie had wished she could be left alone and undisturbed was deemed totally surreal.

In Rosalie a fragmentation of the total self occurred, each piece recreating from its own sum of facts a person, each person functioning separately, withholding itself from the other, yet throughout maintaining a secret vigilance, boneless coherence, fragile as the thread that guided Theseus in his labyrinth. Others born like her of two worlds, who chose not to accept this splitting, fragmentation of monolithic identity into several selves, found themselves later unable to face the contradictions latent in their own beings. Consistency left them crippled for the world's incoherence. (Han, 1972c, p. 369)

Unable to live as how she would redefine herself and interact with others in a non-discriminating manner made life rather difficult for Rosalie. The ethical dilemma between getting the things all sorted out and letting them remain contradictory or blurring became her way of life: "In Rosalie the necessity of knowing mutually contradictory truths without assuming any one of them to be the whole truth, became in childhood the only way to live on, to live and to remain substantial." (Ibid) She had accepted the dilemma of seeking things straightened out and living in the "discomfort of always being partly wrong." She had to accept the state of "a cosy semi-blindness" versus the state of confronting every tint of "the pricking clarity of doubt." (Ibid)

The same coping skill of living in incoherence transpired as she became a young working adult at the Peking Union Medical Center (P.U.M.C.):

During those two years I became fragmented into many contradictory selves; and that was very good, that was survival. I resurrect these, incredulous that there should have been so many, so disparate, pulling in so many different directions, but this lack of cohesiveness undoubtedly saved me. (Han, 1972a, p. 130)

Needless to say, Han Suyin's perspective of that "lack of cohesiveness" rather than the urge for stability and security was good for her survival. That being said, Han Suyin's rationality laid on her willing acceptance of irrationality and inconsistency in life. Even as she struggled continuously about her own stability, Han Suyin, being ambitious to be a contributing member of society, had already had the vision of being a leader in her own right at an international arena.

The voracious I, clamorous, all-demanding, made of the pinpoint me a total universe. Yet at the same time there were other urges and demands, I was aware of other lives, other potential me's than the life I was leading and the me I was, and I reached for all I could guess at with savage ardour.

(Ibid)

Little would she know at that point that she would become an apologist for the Chinese Revolution to readers across all continents. Her vision came alongside her concern for the fragmentation of different people who live in the same global village. At the same time, she admitted that she had her struggles. Sometimes, she would even behave in a way that mimicked the bad examples around her:

The world was made into separate watertight compartments impenetrable to each other. But *could not I penetrate them all?* And which one would be more truly mine? When I seemed most adapted to that half-world, so

cheerful and self-satisfied with small conceit, where the Eurasians lived, clinging to the arrogant white world whose dominion and privileges in Asia were never questioned (except by the Chinese, but they did not count in this small half-world of ours), I was already preparing myself to leave it. I would hear, unperturbed, the vilest insults hurled upon the Chinese; but the next day or week, I would insult in turn, blindly, some European or other. Thus I was to make the wife of a Belgian banker and her daughter complain about me to the Belgian Consul; *and yet*, at the same time, I would be impatient and shout at a Chinese coolie. Only in one thing was I steadfast, my indignation at the (invading) Japanese. (Han, 1972a, p. 131)

An obvious ethical dilemma in Han Suyin's life was about the identification and justification of her whereabouts. It had always seemed that Han Suyin was fitted in another place other than her homeland China. She was always in the dilemma that she did not feel right living elsewhere other than the country she was born and raised in. Both second and third volumes of her autobiography series, ended with her ethical dilemma whether to give up what she was pursuing in Europe in order to travel back to China, although there was not much that she could possibly contribute to China with her return. At the closing chapter of *A Mortal Flower*, when the Japanese had invaded Shanghai and was targeting on Nanking, Han Suyin abandoned her medical studies in Brussels University, bid farewell to her grandfather, her boyfriend Louis, the scholarship board and journeyed on a cruise back to China. (1972a, p. 340) She reckoned that it was against all reason and all logic.

Choosing here or there, choosing between the "two ways of life, two selves, two destinies," Han Suyin became frightened that she might not be able to bear with the uncertainty of her future: "Was I right to go? Was I wrong? Would I retrace my steps?"

(Han, 1972a, p. 360) As she reasoned with herself, she was halfway through her medical studies because she wanted to be a doctor to uplift the sick, poor and needy. However, she never knew that her plans would temporarily turn into a “butterfly dream” as the cities of China were falling to the Japanese, and she was incapable of offering any practical help to the situation.

The last chapter of *Birdless Summer* was also a repeat of an almost similar episode. However, this time it was a decade later. Han Suyin had already been married and widowed with her adopted daughter Yungmei. She had been working for a year as a house surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in London. This time, China’s civil war ended with a tornado triumphant revolution of the Communist. China was changing governing powers. The Kuomintang as well as foreigners had to leave for Taiwan and Hong Kong respectively. Han Suyin was in the ethical dilemma again: Return to the East, or remain in England after her housemanship? “...why was I again leaving safety, gentleness, a certain career, and now dragging Yungmei with me – what was I going to? And why this inexorable push to go? And would it once again be the hell? Had I learnt nothing?” (Han, 1972b, p. 349) A related dilemma was that due to her half-foreigner identity, as well as her first marriage to ex-Kuomintang general Tang Pao-Huang, it was predetermined that Han Suyin could not return to China, nor be a citizen of China after 1949. She had to reside in Hong Kong, working at Gordon King’s Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at the Queen Mary Hospital, while waiting for a chance for the lifting of the prohibition for her to return to Sichuan.

There were two tiers of historical development in Han Suyin’s *autoethnography*, one was the individual story during the era, especially Han Suyin’s family history. At the macrocosm, Han Suyin also chronicled the dilemma of her birth country, China. The topic of the Chinese soul surfaced several times in her autobiography. To recapitulate,

Han Suyin first recorded the confusion of the Chinese elites regarding the identity and whereabouts of China and Chinese civilisation in the second volume of her autobiography, *A Mortal Flower*. While non-Chinese intellectuals reminisced about the fading glory of Ancient China which might seem eternal to them, the “westernised” Chinese appeared totally unmoved about the frustrating socio-economic shape of China at that time. The reason being that they, who carried “impeccable accents from Paris or New York,” remained “safe in the International Settlement,” (Han, 1972a, p. 265) did not see what Han Suyin saw, that not only was China underdeveloped, the nation was festured with poverty, labour exploitation, and other teething issues. The future of China was at stake, despite her glorious past. Han Suyin saw how uninformed and unconcerned these elites were regarding China. Their discussions regarding the “soul” of China yielded answers that were “profoundly shallow, (like) a wide stream of murky idiocy, a gargle of myths.” (Ibid)

On the contrary, Han Suyin was in the know of the latest developments of China. As an international student studying medicine in Brussels, she delivered 128 public lectures throughout Belgium and France between October 1937 and July 1938, in order to refute the Western perception that Japan's invasion on China was to “preserve China from Communism.” (Han, 1972a, p. 341) She was recruited by the Committee for Aid to China formed by the Belgians, which sponsored lectures, meetings, film shows, to inform and rally public opinion for China. The Committee was an associate body of the National Salvation League for China that was formed in May 1936.

Han Suyin's patriotic actions were stemmed from her belief that “salvation for China” would have to come from *within*, from the Chinese people themselves. In Mao's language, China's salvation laid on the strength within China, namely the peasantry of China, who occupied 90% of the land. (Han, 1972a, p. 82) The activities of college

students in Brussels alerted the Ambassador. Students were told “to study.” When summoned for a face-to-face session with the Ambassador, Han Suyin asked, “Don’t we want to save China?” In fact, in Han Suyin’s consciousness, China then was “a slave country, everyone’s slave” (Han, 1972c, p. 216). Han Suyin was picking up the legacy of the Chinese Self-Strengthening Movement that had been passed on since half a century ago.

Even in the early volumes of Han Suyin’s autobiographies, Rosalie (maiden name of Han Suyin) recorded a positive attitude that the worst economy could be morphed into a new, welcoming development:

So often I heard China's doom pronounced: ‘China is: finished.’ ‘This is the end.’ ‘There is no hope for China.’ And yet its anticipated death throes became the quaking of new life; the unburied dead hosted the new-born; and we, the semi-blind who sought the light, long deluded by false promises and lying prophets, have lived to see the transformation which in turn transformed us. (Han, 1972a, p. 40)

Another few decades down the road, Han Suyin was ready to dismiss her medical profession in order to become a full-time writer and Chinese apologist. To the anti-communist and anti-Maoist watching Western community, Han Suyin decided to end her state of dilemma but start accepting the rising socialist power in China. She chose to herald the historical correctness of the Chinese Communist Party in securing a radical rebirth of China. She also chose to tone down any voice of condemnation against the Party relating to any of their mistakenly adopted policies. Han Suyin named the radicalisation of modern China as the “World Revolution.” Indeed, the rise of the Communist China was a significant historical reference point in the twentieth century: “Today the East is Red, the future has entered our present, has transformed it long

before its own advent... The mistral sings its name and its name is Revolution, World Revolution.” (Han, 1972b, p. 5)

In 1994, Han Suyin published *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China* as an accolade for Zhou’s vision of technocratic moderation, which was never truly Communist, thus contributing to China’s dream of building “a socialist modern civilisation-state with a Chinese character” through his successors such as Deng Xiaoping. Besides, Han Suyin’s *Morning Deluge* and *Wind In The Tower*, which were her voluntary “hagiographies” of Mao presented as a different voice than the appropriated academic work. Her intention was to make the Communism in China, as well as the entire trying process of Chinese Revolution somewhat “palatable to even her bourgeois readers in the West” (Mayhem, 2012) for the sake of the rising New China.

#### **4.4 The Philosophy Of “Salvation” For China**

Contemporary Chinese literature is imbued with the theme of national self-strengthening. Ever since the weakening Qing dynasty, Confucian scholar Gong Zizhen had foreshadowed the revolution by renewing the reading of Chinese classical texts. Gong’s “New Text Confucianism” had a great impact on his students Kang Youwei, and Kang’s student Liang Qichao, who were key figures in shaping the idea of the “renewing the people” among Chinese youth:

There are two meanings of renewing. One is to improve what is original in the people and so renew it; the other is to adopt what is originally lacking in the people and so make a new people... Our people have been established as a nation on the Asian continent for several thousand years, and we must have some special characteristics that are grand, noble and

perfect, and distinctly different from those of other races. We should preserve these characteristics and not let them be lost... If we wish to make our nation strong, we must investigate extensively the methods followed by other nations in becoming independent. We should select their superior points and appropriate them to make up for our own shortcomings... Thus, how to adopt and make up for what we originally lacked so that our people may be renewed should be deeply and carefully considered. (de Bary, 2000, pp. 289-291)

The notion of remaking a new Chinese people who inherited Chinese core values, and yet are knowledgeable in technical know-how that would make China like the West had finally sunk in and was accepted by all.

Liang was a reformist who believed in a systematic reform of China from all aspects namely, economically, politically, culturally, legally, educationally and socially. Contrary to the Yangwu school of the Self-Strengthening Movement who believed solely on the empowerment of China from the aspects of her arsenal, factories and shipyards, Liang, along with his friend Yan Fu, envisioned to create a new Chinese people via the strengthening of the body, enlightenment of the mind, and renewal of the people's morality. While Yan Fu was vigilant in translating Western literature into Chinese, with the conviction that learning from the West might strengthen China; Liang promoted a completely politically charged literary genre to sharpen the Chinese consciousness. (Li, 2007, p. vii) Nonetheless, Han Suyin was influenced by the notion of the "New People" which originated from the Self-Strengthening Movement just decades before her time. Han Suyin was indebted to her Chinese tutor Teacher Wu, who inculcated the political concerns in Han Suyin: "If you want to learn Chinese, Miss Chou, you must also learn what is happening." (Han, 1972a, p. 155)

Han Suyin's second Chinese tutor was Teacher Wang. Unlike Teacher Wu, who had a passionate concern for the development of China's politics, Wang was a pessimist. However, Wang assigned Han Suyin to read Liang Qichao's "The Pavilion of Iced Beverages," which was a collection of historical, socio-political and literary essays. While Han Suyin was amazed about the huge, "impractical" dream of Liang conceiving democracy for New China, she became a dreamer for a new positioning of China in the international platform. Han (1972a) said,

...Liang was a grandiloquent, well-meaning old man, and in that summer of 1932 his recipes for China sounded uncommonly like Marie Antoinette when she recommended a diet of cakes to her starving peasants. (p. 139)

Han Suyin wanted to achieve her dream for China in practical and attainable ways. She would first work through the constraints of her ethical identity by renaming and defusing the curse of condemnation of her *raison d'être*. She would deal with the painful issue of her fragmented self and incoherence between the ideal world and world in the reality. Through those growing pains, she continually sought for a better understanding and redefinition of her contesting "selves," as well as the yet-to-be-redefined, modernised China.

#### **4.5 Alienation Of China's Youth And National Soul Searching**

Han Suyin's autobiography paid significant attention to the youth of China. Han Suyin was concerned about the debate regarding continuity or discontinuity of Chinese tradition, revolution and her spirit and way of life (Han, 1982, p. 495). In the sixth volume of her autobiography, *Wind in My Sleeve*, she reckoned that China's path to modernisation was not without setbacks. Disagreeing with Ding Ling and other editors

or writers of eminence who adored the success of China's socialist system, Han Suyin pointed out that the issue of youth alienation could be intricate. For her, the disinterest of the youth would be of high priority for policy makers to tackle (Han, 1992, p. 91).

To get everyone's agreement on China's choice to modernisation would be too challenging. To begin with, the process was in itself, confusing. Not all attempts by the Communist government were successful. Han Suyin remarked, "... that immense Chinese pendulum, going right-left, left-right, all through the history of Revolution" (Han, 1982, p. 387). "China's pendulum is swinging... It always overswings" (p. 499). It was quite certain that the youths during the era would find their socio-political climax uncertain and disappointing. The anti-intelligentsia wave and the Cultural Revolution caused the lives of some of China's best brains including Lao She (p. 42). The Great Leap Forward failed, as "the whole point of agricultural mechanisation suffered a defeat" without the backing of sufficient capital accumulation (p. 509). One of Han Suyin's interviewees was Gladys Yang, an Englishwoman who married a local Chinese, who survived the scrutiny from the authorities during the Hundred Flowers, described her journey of reconciling back with herself after suffering the stage of alienation:

I watched myself become other, sprout another me, a personality which no longer suffered alienation. I did, in a way, become someone else, but not altogether; in the end I chose what adapted me and I remain myself...

Now I am able to see things in several ways at once. (p. 398)

In Han Suyin's autobiography, the ability to perceive things from multiple perspectives was one of the coping skills that Han Suyin herself somewhat resorted to. Nevertheless, the young generation during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century had to grapple with their emotional and spiritual agony, which unfortunately was the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Interviewees of Han Suyin said, "We feel a big black hole inside our spirit.

The heart has gone out of us; it is not easy to patch up this vacancy” (Han, 1985, p. 303). Han Suyin’s autobiography noted that defeatism, cynicism and fear of a return of tyranny were looming at the time.

Since the late Qing dynasty, China had never been united. Liang Qichao, Dr Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong had all exclaimed that the divided China was far too difficult to be patched together.<sup>20</sup> But the evolvement of the new concepts of “country” or “nation” (*guojia* 国家), community (*shehui* 社会) and society (*tuanti* 团体) were working out well for China (Ibid, 97). Besides, the main concern of May Fourth literature about how one should live one’s life (*rensheng* 人生), was well-received among the youths (Han, 1985, p. 99).

Reformist Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) and Chinese thinker Qian Mu (1895-1990) had both paid attention to the high suicide rate of Chinese youths in their respective articles. Chen wrote “About Suicide—Change of the Mind and Youth Suicides”<sup>21</sup> while Qian had an article entitled “Lamenting for Sun Yidi” (Qian, 1934, pp. 1-2). Qian alerted the society that youth alienation could cause lives. The anxiety of youths due to unclear life directions and meaninglessness was a great issue. Thus, the philosophy of dedicating oneself for the “salvation” of one’s country should be promoted, as it could give the young lives a direction. As the logic goes, pursuing “salvation” for the struggling nation was actually bringing salvation upon oneself, namely, “*jiu guo jiushi jiu ziji*”.

Wang Fanshen’s article “The Nature of Boredom” pointed out that there was an intricate correlation between youth alienation and the rise of Communism. Both paved

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<sup>20</sup> From “The Nature of Boredom – Ideology and the Politicalisation of Individual Space In Contemporary China (Chenmen de Benzhi shi shenme – Zhuyi yu Zhongguo jindai siren lingyu de zhengzhihua)”, by F. Wang, in Y. Yu, J. Huang, et. al. eds, 2013, *Intellectual History*, 1, p.89, Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi.

<sup>21</sup> From “About Suicide -- Change of the Mind and Youth Suicide”, from D. Chen, in Ren Jianshu ed., 2009, *The Works of Chen Duxie*, pp. 53-68, Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe.

ways for the civil readiness for modern China's social reengineering (F. Wang, op. cit., pp. 86-131). Wang saw how the introduction of the "-ism" and related structural organisation had offered the Chinese youths lenses of rationality to understand the world around and the cosmos within them. Whether one chose to attempt on "saving" China by means of education or via the advancement of science and technology, the rectification of the problems at the macro level would eventually tie to the *raison d'être* and meaning of life of the Chinese youths themselves. When one is able to see one's meaning in life, one would be able to locate one's position in human history. (p. 108) Such was the logic that had motivated many Chinese youths during China's most trying time. "Save the nation, saving oneself" as life's goal was altogether irresistible. Therefore, it was not surprising that the Chinese youths, once identified that Communism and the Communist Party could facilitate possible changes for the welfare of the country and did not hold themselves back from dedicating their lives as party members. Moreover, for some of them, political activities that were motivated by altruism and patriotism naturally weighed more than their uncertain love life or frustrations of other kind. (p. 117)

Concerned about the well-being of China and the future of the nation, Han Suyin asked herself fundamental questions such as, "What is the real Chinese?" and "What is the true soul of China?" (Han, 1972a, p. 265) Her inklings of China were intensified by the unconcerned Westerners and returning Overseas Chinese. They were also trying to give their opinion about the China that they had perceived, but none was serious about the topic. Han (1972a) was unhappy about their attitude of apathy and indifference:

'The real China.' What was the real China? They talked about the mysterious, inscrutable mystery of China, not only Europeans, but the Chinese themselves, these Westernised intellectuals in their long Chinese

robes and impeccable accent from Paris or New York; talking of something impalpable and eternal, and sometimes complaining (because they were safe in the International Settlement) that Chiang Kai-shek did not allow freedom of debate. But soon they returned to the awesome question: 'What was the True Soul of China?' Many and varied the answers, so profoundly shallow, a wide stream of murky idiocy, a gargle of myths... A fortnight passed and my ear began to hurt. (p. 264)

China's overall backwardness during that time posed as a stark contrast to her past wealth. With average life expectancy around 28 years and poor livelihood for local labourers and women at the mills in 1935, Han Suyin was aching over the massive poverty that called for great reforms. In fact, Han Suyin had been ambitious since youth to contribute to China's socio-economic growth in the future:

All she knew was this profound physical disturbance that went on growing and growing in her in spite of herself, something which became so strenuous that she cried out in her mind: 'When I am big I will do something so that there will not be a beggar left in China, and no child will be blind. One day each child in China will have an egg a day.' An egg a day, according to Mama, prevented blindness. (Han, 1972c, p. 348)

Han Suyin did not like how unprogressive China was in the eyes of others. At the same time, she felt her own desperation for not being certain of what constituted the true China. Ultimately, it was not easy to see anything redeeming during that time, as foreign invasions and civil wars had made China really poor, both spiritually and materially. The political direction of the nation was in great confusion as well.

After China lost her self-assumed position as the Middle Kingdom in the world, there was no other option but to source for her own unprecedented path to modernisation. From 1840s to 1940s, China was in chaos. Corruption and lethargy of the Qing governance caused major rebellions such as Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), Nian Rebellion (1851-1868), Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), and Xinhai Revolution, which eventually overthrew the Qing dynasty, leading to the establishment of the Republic of China. The New Cultural Movement (1915-1921), in particular the May Fourth in 1919 introduced the Chinese youths to Western political philosophy, thus giving rise to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by Li Dazhao and his colleagues. In 1949, the Communist overpowered the Nationalist. Mao established the People's Republic of China. The economic experiment of China during the first three decades of rule by the CCP was rough. First, China introduced the adventurous Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), a centralised economy, which was fashioned after that of the Soviet Union. Household agriculture was abolished in favour of collectives. Industrial development was strictly carried out and monitored by the government. Jobs were allocated, and wages were set. Consumer goods were rationed. This "highly centralised non-market, Soviet-type system" did not work for China. (Perkins, 2015) As observed by political economist Dwight Perkins, "enormous amounts of investment produced only modest increases in production or none at all. ... In short, the Great Leap was a very expensive disaster."<sup>22</sup> The famine during 1959 to 1961 caused about 30 million deaths.

After the failure of The Great Leap Forward, Mao had to reinstate his decline in popularity. Hence, he sought to eradicate the elite group and experienced leaders in the

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<sup>22</sup> From "China's Economic Policy and Performance", by D. Perkins, in MacFarquhar, Roderick, J. K. Fairbank and D. Twitchett, 1991, *The Cambridge History Of China*, 15, pp. 483-486, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

various fields who might bring back the “bourgeois element” or capitalism to China. The movement caused the already economy of China to become paralysed. Millions were subject to public humiliation, arbitrary imprisonment, property seizure and so forth. Historical relics and artifacts were destroyed. Legacies of Ancient China were disregarded and condemned. China’s overall economy sank again. After 1960, the government stopped publishing statistical data on economic performance. Analysts outside China found it difficult to piece together any data that leaked out. The gaps in related research were continued after 1979 when new official data were released. (Perkins, 2015, op. cit.)

It would be difficult to understand China especially during the two decades period of almost complete silence between 1960 to 1979, except for the news coverage from within. Han Suyin’s autobiography was able to provide some of those “insider” perspectives of the Chinese leaders. In her meeting with Madam Gong Peng of China’s Foreign Ministry in 1959, she had the “ah-ha” moment reckoning that only from an insider perspective could one understand what was the political temperature in China: “I could not *understand* what I read outside; only when I read the Chinese newspapers and was steeped in China’s own atmosphere did it all begin to make excellent sense. It did not make sense to me abroad.” (Han, 1982, p. 308)

During the Cold War era, it was considered a treason for Westerners to attempt to enter the “Red” China. However, nothing could stop journalists Felix Greene and Edgar Snow to obtain permission to land themselves in China. Like Han Suyin, both were known as China sympathisers who gave a relatively rosy view of the Communist China. However, on the flipside, Han Suyin found other voices that, like her, attempted to present Communist China as a new member of the global village with her own right:

Would we be able, Edgar Snow, Felix Greene and myself, to establish better understanding between China and the Western world, so that China would no longer be considered a threatening, hostile planet on its own? When would China be seen as she really was, neither Heaven nor Hell, but simply a very large country with an enormous number of hard-working, poor people, frighteningly poor, but indomitable in their determination to achieve prosperity and social justice and to get swiftly into the twentieth century? (Han, 1982, p. 352)

Han Suyin's personal meetings with Zhou Enlai made it clear to her about China's own position on the new scenes in the international politics. For example, China's reservation regarding any fruitful outcome from the diplomacy between Soviet's Khrushchev and America's Eisenhower at Camp David in 1959 was based on China leaders' uncompromising allegiance to the fundamentals of Communism. On the subject matter, Zhou told Han Suyin that:

... Peace was concrete, not an abstract proposition, and there was no evidence that there would be disarmament; on the contrary. Compromise must have its limits, but it did not mean selling out the peoples of the Third World (China). If it does, then it is not peace, only submission and servility. We must decide now whether all the peoples of the world have *a right to their national liberation* or whether they will be slaves for a thousand years... on this point we shall never compromise. (Han, 1982, p. 324)

Han Suyin recalled that Zhou's speech gave her another perspective of what the Western journalism had named as "Chinese intransigence." The crux of the matter: there was a rise of new Chinese consciousness. China was now claiming her right to

differ from the Western viewpoint, especially on matters pertaining to her political ideology and new national character.

Han Suyin's autobiography also covered materials that were otherwise silent during the Cold War era. While other materials only reported about China's rifts and clashes at her borders with India and Russia during 1962-1964, it was interesting that Han Suyin named it as the period of China's resurgence in contrast to the label of 1960-1961 as the period of survival. (Han, 1982, pp. 379-402, 432-463) Almost like the saying "where there is a will, there is a way," Han (1982, p. 432) documented that the discovery of crude oil during the Leap as one of the major factors to spur new economic growth. In a hopeful tone she wrote: "In that Summer of 1962 China was resurgent. The hunger and the want of the three bad years, 1959-1961, were going and in the air was promise of a good autumn harvest despite renewed accounts of droughts and floods and insect plagues." (Ibid) Besides, some of the industrial experiment yielded satisfactory results, for example, the steel works at Anshan. (Han, 1985, p. 18)

In her autobiography, Han Suyin also provided rare information about the non-mainstream folks. For instance, she documented contributions of returned overseas Chinese in the rebuilding of China after one of its biggest economic downturn after the Leap. Han Suyin wrote: "Between 1959-1961 almost a million overseas Chinese had returned and been resettled. They had started pineapple, rubber and coffee plantations in south China." However, Han Suyin also made a note that the wealth and showy character of these types would eventually cause them to be one of the targets of scrutiny during the Cultural Revolution in 1966. (Han, 1982, p. 433)

At the closing chapter of *My House Has Two Doors*, Han Suyin journaled some of the signs that she also observed when China's pendulum had "over-swung." In the chapter entitled "Towards the Cultural Revolution: 1964-1965," Han Suyin penned

down her anxieties as she came across denunciations of leaders against youths having “bad habits of bourgeois” elements; anti-intellectual waves against the Soviet’s revisionism; condemnations on aesthetics and material ease per se, and so forth. (Han, 1982, pp. 498-499) Subsequently, The Cultural Revolution was described as the “lowering sky,” “thunder and lightning” as well as “the storm” in Han Suyin’s fifth volume of her autobiography, *Phoenix Harvest*. Han (1985, p. 26) wrote on her anguish in relation to the condemnation of the academia and elites by students, disappearance of all musical instruments (p. 29), “terrorism” of the Red Guards (p. 41) and so forth. Han Suyin recorded how leftist writer Anna Louise Strong who was reputable for her “Letters from China” for American readership, was also appalled by the unbelievable damages that were done to the people. (p. 113) However, even Louise reckoned that there was a price to pay for favourable changes: “Well, no use moaning. I suppose that’s that, we’ve all got to make some sacrifices for a good cause.” (Ibid) While Louise’s statement might be an understatement, another account on Han Suyin by her other interviewee, Rewi Alley, who was a member of Chinese Communist Party, gave a better perspective of how Chinese people strived through those trying years of man-made turmoil: “Well, one thing can be said: Where there’s life there’s hope.” (p. 112) Han Suyin concluded that the people’s will to survive was simply strong enough for them to thrive on.

When prohibitions for new literature were uplifted, new and progressive inklings found the avenues to express themselves in new forms of novels, novellas, short stories, plays and poetry. Despite the differences in political ideologies, Chinese writers such as Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Xia Yan, Ding Ling, Bingxin Heart of Ice, Lao She, and a number of others became the mouthpiece of the common people. The faces of modern Chinese surfaced in modern Chinese literature. (Han, 1992, pp. 50-51) Here, Han Suyin paid attention to a genre known as the “literature of the wounded.” (p. 32) Life could go on

only when the afflicted could recover from their brokenness. One of the ways would be through the process of catharsis via literary means. (p. 33) Han Suyin reckoned the necessity and legitimacy of the literature of the wounded, which would facilitate the soul-searching during the era. Nonetheless, it was a period of time when many lives were sacrificed in the midst of political power shifts due to contradictory ideologies that were happening too unpredictably.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Eventually, Han Suyin discarded her perpetual struggle regarding her dual-identity, but assumed a new identity with a higher calling, namely, seeing herself as a world citizen who was accountable for the peace and harmony for the increasingly diverse global community. As an emigrant from China, Han Suyin's life spoke for many international migrants who found themselves out of the norm when compared to others whose passports had never been stamped. In 1982, at the time when she claimed her identity as a "world citizen" in her book *Phoenix Harvest*, she was one of the 0.06% of international migrants from China. The Chinese emigration number tripled at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Zai, 2004, p. 150)

As there was rapid growth of transnational migrants and as new ideas travelled via the cyberspace day by day ever since 1980s, traditional perception about one's identity needed reorientation. Anthropologist Erich Kolig commented, "In a sense everyone becomes diasporic." Han Suyin's tone in the final chapter of her *Phoenix Harvest* was altogether assuring: Though a Chinese Eurasian in diaspora, she saw her life as a story of a "completed self." (Han, 1985, p. 313) To a large extent, her efforts in securing the world's acceptance of the cultural outliners and irregulars have finally paid off.

## CHAPTER 5: HAN SUYIN'S ETHICAL CHOICE AND ISSUE OF LEGITIMACY

This chapter shall discuss the ethical choices made by Han Suyin in several aspects, namely, her identification of homeland, career choice, change in vocational involvements, and last but not least, her romantic and marital decisions. As delineated in the last chapter, Han Suyin's bifurcated identity and related complexities naturally involve complicated ethical entanglements pertaining to the issue of legitimacy. To examine further, a clarification on *choice* and *ethical choice* would be given here.

### 5.1 Ethical Choice And Issue Of Legitimacy

A Cherokee legend was told as follows: "One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside him, 'My son, there is a battle of two 'wolves' inside us all. The first wolf is Wickedness. It encompasses anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is Goodness. It encompasses joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.' The boy thought about it for a moment and asked his grandfather, 'Which wolf wins?' The grandfather answered gently, 'The one you feed.'"<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that the becoming of an individual is a sum total of the choices the person has made. To facilitate the discussion of this chapter, a few terms relating to a person's "choice" should be clarified here. First, making *a choice* is to decide between two or

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<sup>23</sup> Popular legend of Native American, retrieved on 30 November 2016, <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/TwoWolves-Cherokee.html>. According to an online article, the legend was actually an adaptation of Evangelist Billy Graham's illustrations in Billy Graham (1978), *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life*, p. 92, Nashville: W Publishing Group. In Graham's version, it was an Eskimo tale instead, while the two subjects in the fight were a black dog and a white dog. However, it was not sure whether Graham's illustration was an adaptation of the Cherokee legend instead.

more *options* of direction and action. Second, an individual may make a *personal choice* out of his or her *free will*. The choice that the person makes might be an active choice, passive choice, or reactive choice. So long as the person has not given up his or her right to choose, a choice could be made at the person's will in view of any given situation with multiple options. Next, based on an individual's free will, a personal choice could be *rational* or *irrational*. A rational choice complies with human reasoning, while irrational choice violates reasons and human logic. Then, one should also be aware that under certain circumstances and cultural setting, there is a legitimate decision-making pattern, namely an *ethical choice*, of which individuals are expected to comply and make choices accordingly.

A good example to illustrate these various terms in the abovementioned would be a reflection upon the historic choice that Colonel Astor, one of the passengers of the sinking Titanic, made at a critical deciding moment whether to grab on or to give up his chance of survival. According to the account of survivors compiled by Jay Henry Mowbray, Colonel John Jacob Astor managed to get a spot on the lifeboat filled with women for his young bride who was under the weather. As she was sickly and needing his care, Colonel Astor asked for permission to get into the life boat with her. His permission was granted, because there was still a little room for him to get in. However, as the lifeboat was being lowered and ready to touch the seas, Colonel Astor suddenly sprang to his feet to offer his place for a woman who was running toward the lifeboat. Colonel leaped over the rail to help the woman take over the spot where he had occupied. His poor bride screamed in protest but Colonel had resolved to abide with the "women and children first" principle.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> From "Chapter 9: How Astor Went To Death" in *The Sinking Titanic* (Harrisburg: The Minter Company), by J. H. Mowbray, 1912, retrieved on 20 November 2016, <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/titnchx9.htm>.

The “women and children first” principle was the code of conduct observed during the evacuation of HMS Birkenhead in 1860 and Titanic in 1912. Although it was not officially instituted in the Maritime Law, it has been a general practice across all humanity even today. Women and children are identified as the more vulnerable group at times of danger, especially when rescue resources such as lifeboats or exit points are limited. In the Titanic incident, it would be an *illegitimate choice* if Colonel Astor had insisted to remain on the lifeboat when there was a woman who needed it. He had asked for a spot for himself because he had obligations to accompany his bride who was ill. His rational and legitimate request was granted at first. But as soon as another woman came into the scene, Colonel Astor had to make an *ethical choice* to trade his spot for the survival of the woman who suddenly appeared and needing help. When he leaped over to the Titanic in order to vacate his original spot on the lifeboat for the woman, there was a “dreadful suspense which in a short time changed her (Astor’s wife) from a radiant bride to a sorrowing widow.”<sup>25</sup> Though Colonel’s ethical choice had deeply afflicted his wife, it was both a *rational choice*. His ethical choice was a heroic decision made in accordance to the logic of the entire circumstance.

In the case of the sinking Titanic, the ethical choice of all men seeking survival was clear: They would have to *prioritise* the needs of the weaker group first. Although it was not a moral wrong for any man to rush for his own need of survival, *ethical consideration* based on circumstances denotes that the “Justice Approach” – in this case, the code of “women and children first” – be duly practiced. That was why prior to the Astor’s episode, a man was held back by Major Butt as he was “not entitled” to rush for the lifeboat. Mowbay’s account stated that:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, “Chapter 12: Mrs Astor’s Bravery”.

...In one of the earlier boats fifty women, it seemed, were about to be lowered when a man, suddenly panic-stricken, ran to the stern of it. Major Butt shot one arm out, caught him by the neck and pulled him backward like a pillow. His head cracked against a rail and he was stunned... 'Sorry,' said Major Butt; 'women will be attended to first or I'll break every bone in your body.'<sup>26</sup>

Hence, though not morally wrong, it was not legitimate for the panic-stricken man to get himself a spot in the lifeboat that was filled with fifty women. To be respected by other members of society, one would have to comply with what was considered legitimate. One would have to be constantly making choices to behave within the parameters of social etiquette. In short, an *ethical choice* is one's legitimate choice that complies with the convention or any binding social contracts of a community.

## 5.2 Han Suyin's Legitimate Choice Of Her Forever "Fatherland"

Han Suyin did not really use the term "motherland" or "fatherland" to refer to her idea of homeland, China. The term "motherland" appeared once in Chapter Four of *My House Has Two Doors*, which was used by Premier Zhou Enlai as a reference point for Chinese in diaspora; (Han, 1982, p. 128) and another time in *Wind In My Sleeve*, which was used by Deng Xiaoping as the China-Hong Kong illustration of the "One Country, Two System;" with China being the mainland. (Han, 1992, p. 81) Almost at all times, it was simply to be referred as "China" in Han Suyin's autobiography. However, the writer of this thesis would like to use the term "Fatherland" for Han Suyin's China in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, Chapter 11, "Major Butt Martyr To Duty".

order to showcase the weight of Han Suyin's father in her lifetime patriotism to China, which had probably transpired due to her homesick psyche.

"I wondered what was happening to my father." That was the first thought of Han Suyin when Beijing and Shanghai fell to the Japanese in 1932. (Han, 1972a, p. 338) Though on a tour to Italy with her boyfriend from Brussels University, she was so worried that she could neither eat nor sleep. It was clear that due to her father, Han Suyin had somewhat identified where her *legitimate homeland* would be, although she was yet to reckon it. Through her life, Han Suyin, though studied, worked and finally resided abroad, had always faced the ethical dilemma with regard to where her homeland would be. Besides, was she even in a position to choose where her home would be?

Han Suyin's father Chou Yentung was a diligent bread winner who worked day and night at the railroads, he was never an absentee father. A returning engineer trained in Belgium, Chou chose to serve a lifetime in his birth country China. After relocating to China with his young bride Marguerite Denis, Han Suyin's mother, his life became a plain book: He remained a devoted family man and loyal worker. Being offered an engineer position with the Belgium company to build the Lunghai Railway in 1913, Chou had always been an entrusted worker for his employer. He never complained about his salary, never stole any of the company's stationery, never asked for a pay rise and never filed any complaints with the company even though four of his eight children died in the little towns along the railways. His employer told Han Suyin, "Your father has never given us any trouble." (Han, 1972a, p. 190)

A peace-lover, a devoted husband and father, a cooperative worker. That did not sound like a great profile. However, for Han Suyin, her father was fighter of his own right, as he was not fearful of restoring the portions of railways that were destroyed by

the warlords, members of Kuomintang (Han, 1972a, p. 65) and the Japanese (pp. 212-213). Never a Communist, Chou worked willingly when he was summoned to assist in rebuilding the coalmines in the interiors of China after 1949 (Han, 1982, p. 25). While his wife Marguerite eventually relocated to Europe, and his friend migrated to United States of America,<sup>27</sup> Chou remained faithful to his calling as railway builder in China, the land that he called home. Such were the qualities of tenacity and loyalty shown by the father whom Han Suyin had always adored:

My father was a typical non-hero, whose inner life was ignored, whose outer aspect did not arouse controversy. Wit was his, a humour of speech which kept his chosen friends delighted, and a concealed erudition, a seeking spirit, a love of flowers, a texture of fineness enclosed, a lack of worthlessness. He was not a fighter, as his daughter had to become, although it took her a long time to know what to fight for. His whole life could be embodied in his favourite quotation: "The tree would like to be quiet, but the wind is restless." ... The best friend of his youth had chosen Revolution; and died for it. My father did not. The Empire crumbled, he read the books of the New Learning, and the New Learning found him adaptable. The Revolution came, and he served on the railways, uncomplaining, faithful, unglamorously painstaking... For in 1949 nearly everything in China had stopped working after so many years of war; railways at a standstill, mines gutted, equipment unusable. Father was called upon to help, and he did... There he worked for a year, indefatigable, tireless, as he had never worked before, even in his youth.

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<sup>27</sup> See *A Mortal Flower*, pp. 19-20, by Han (1972a). The son of Mr Poh, Chou's longtime friend, commented that the F.B.I. would have confiscated his father's passport should they discovered that he still had any good connection with the communist China.

And thus became a Labour Hero, without even thinking about it. And then

I knew that I was right to love him. (Han, 1972a, p. 32)

In Han Suyin's memory, the mooncake of Beijing had always been associated with the love of her father. As a family man, Chou had indeed given Han Suyin a memorable childhood. Even in her forties, Han Suyin was still craving for mooncakes of Beijing, as it was the ones that Chou had pampered her with. Han Suyin recalled that even when she was living abroad, Chou would still supply her with the Beijing mooncakes. In Han Suyin's sweetest memory, only Beijing mooncakes could heighten her nostalgia of the white clear moon, and soothed her with the melting-in-the-tongue texture. (Han, 1972a, p. 151)

Besides, though leaving Han Suyin's home education to Han Suyin's mother, Chou was instrumental in introducing her to her life's work when Han Suyin completed her studies at the convent in 1930. Han Suyin was utterly directionless at that time. Neither did she have any suitor to get married, nor was she accepted by the convent to be a nun. Chou gave her the idea of learning typing, shorthand and book-keeping, in order to obtain a job as a secretary. (Han, 1972a, p. 116) At that time, secretarial jobs were the privileged jobs for European and Eurasian girls, but they were trained from schools in Tianjing or Shanghai. Such school was not available in Beijing where Han Suyin was. But Han Suyin's father made connection so that she could learn typing and shorthand from Mrs Hayward, an American missionary teacher. He also bought a second-hand Royal typewriter for her to practice. (Ibid)

Han Suyin could vividly remember the day when her father Chou brought her to P.U.M.C for the job interview. They went to the wrong entrance and were told that, "It's not this gate, this is for the sick. It's the other gate." (Han, 1972a, p. 119) The father and daughter then walked along the high grey outer wall which was guarded by barking

dogs, and finally came to the outer gate of the Administration building gate. At the steps leading to the entrance hall, Chou told the daughter that she had to attend the interview all by herself. After assuring and comforting her, Chou reminded gently, “Try to make a good impression.” (Ibid) The assuring love of Chou was enough to embark Han Suyin into the work force when she was only 14 then. It was at the P.U.M.C that Han Suyin learned of her ability to negotiate for her future. It was through the savings that Han Suyin made from her little stipend from work that she could hire Physics and Mandarin Chinese tutors to prepare her for the entrance examination to Yanjing University. The little step that Han Suyin’s father had done for her eventually opened up a door for the actualisation of her dream to be a doctor one day. The first open door to that dream came quickly when Chou’s boss, Joseph Hers, wrote to him, informing Chou of an available scholarship for Han Suyin to study in Brussels University. The fund was part of the Boxer Indemnity Fund agreed by the Belgium authorities for Chinese youth. (p. 274)

Chou’s role as a significant father figure to Han Suyin had also been made complete with his decorated courtyard that he had planted and laid out perfectly for the family. In Han’s (1972a) description, the flower and fauna in the courtyard were just fascinating:

I return to our first house, the house in the Manchu quarter of Peking, where in the spring the courtyard burst with Judas tree magenta and the lilac was mauve and white. My father had tended the laburnum already there and planted the vine. The vine was the only plant, apart from carnation pots, which my father transferred to the other houses; the lilac and the Judas tree were left behind. Also left behind was a pomegranate tree and a jasmine called seven-mile perfume, and of all the courtyard gardens this one had been the best. I walk to the dead end of the lane and

touch at the street door the two small stone Pekingese-lions, and sit on the two large cubic stones outside the house, blue and polished with sitting. Often the large amah of a house farther down the street came to sit with me on these stones, and we used to talk. (p. 282)

A courtyard filled with the masterpieces of her father had also become the place of solace for Han Suyin during her childhood, where she could find herself totally at rest and received attention from the maids namely the “amahs” from the neighbourhood.

It was thus not difficult to see why Han Suyin had favoured her father over her mother all her life. Nothing made her more upset with her mother Marguerite than when Marguerite left Chou during his illness in 1949. Han Suyin was agitated when she read the letter from her sister Tiza, “Papa was ill when we left, but he's all right now. I think he had some sort of stroke.” She could even imagined that the act of abandonment of her mother was approved by her father, “I could see Papa lying in bed, saying in his low, spent voice, a little breathless, ‘Don't worry, I'll be all right.’” Han Suyin was therefore very taken back when requested by her Third Uncle to be the guarantor for Marguerite and Tiza so that they could relocate to Hong Kong when the Communists were about to claim the entire China from the Kuomintang (Han, 1982, pp. 25-26). She eventually obtained the assistance of the British Consul to have Marguerite and Tiza over for a temporal stay, before they travelled to Italy and finally resided in America with Han Suyin's youngest sister Marianne. Though a favour was granted for the mother, Han Suyin did not need any reason to do anything for her father. The manner she fought for a visa to revisit her father in Sichuan in 1956 was evident of her longing for her beloved father.

During Han Suyin's visit of her father in 1956, she managed to finger through all the old family photographs that Chou had kept in the old trunk which her mother had

brought from Belgium as Chou's bride. She understood that her father would occasionally spread the photographs on his bed and lamented in his loneliness for Marguerite to return to him. However, not only had Marguerite walked out of his life but from Han Suyin's life as well.

In contrast to her estranged relationship with her mother, Han Suyin remained connected with Yentung, her father. In fact, he was the pillar in her psyche, as far as "home" was concerned. The writer of this thesis found that Han Suyin would relate "home" with the idea of one's "family," the "root," as well as "spiritual" rest house. She said, "A man's life begins with his ancestors and is continued in his descendants. My father's life, and after my father my own life, begins with the Family." (Han, 1972c, p. 19)

For Han Suyin, the family, including the extended family, formed the ecosystem for one to thrive in a certain environment. Though having the parentage of a Belgian mother, Han Suyin placed herself in the genealogy of her father and her extended Chinese kins. In *The Crippled Tree*, Han Suyin conveyed from the point of view of her father that it was a mistake of the family to have sent her elder brother to Europe during his early childhood: "Without the Family; there was no place for him in China." She reasoned that when one who had no strong sense of "the family," which referred to both one's biological and patriarchal family, one would have no sense of belonging to a "home." When it was so, one's next generation would also suffer the labyrinth of rootlessness. "...when we took him away, we did not know we were condemning him and his children." (Han, 1972c, p. 277)

Though describing her family tree as "the crippled tree," Han Suyin was fairly proud of her half-Chinese identity, the Hakkas in Sichuan. Han Suyin (1972c) said, "The tree is known by its roots. I had to go back to the *roots*." (p. 17) "Root" was a term that she

used frequently when discussing her idea of “home.” For her, “The future begins yesterday, for the tree as well as for man” (Ibid). One could build one’s life as far as one might want to go, but the reference point would always be one’s origin.

Not being on good terms with her European mother, Han Suyin saw herself more as the daughter of her father, a descendant of the Hakkas. As a Eurasian who endured the awkwardness of being a displaced person in her own birth country, it was rather interesting that she saw a somewhat similar displacement in the origins of her father. Her father’s clan, the Hakkas, was the “Guest People,” namely a sect of displaced peasants who were moving *en masse*, seeking “a roof” over their heads. According to Han Suyin, the Hakkas were migratory in nature, yet they preserved a strong sense of attachment to the land. For instance, they never failed to bury their ancestors on the land they dwelt in. When migrating, they would take along their ancestors’ bones, or ancestors’ clothes or belongings in cases where the bones could not be unearthed. The custom of taking along the ancestor’s bones, as Han Suyin delineated, was probably founded on the idea of land acquisition, so that one could make a claim to their new settlement. (Ibid) The deliberate reference to the etymology and the geographical movement of the Hakka clan reflected an ethical dilemma that Han Suyin faced meaning she would always remain a “guest,” never a host in her own country.

Nevertheless, Han Suyin had no doubt about her self-assurance of her Chinese root. Since the root was defined, Han (1982) would always regard China as her legitimate homeland even when she later married and dwelt abroad. (pp. 37, 197, 202, 433) In this respect, Han Suyin expressed a clearer sense of being “homesick” when she felt that she was missing her locus of comfort. In *A Mortal Flower*, she resented the peaceful life she was enjoying while studying medicine in Belgium. Even the romance with her boyfriend Louis could not fill the vacuum in her heart. “Are you ill?” “Yes.” “What is

it?” “I was homesick.” (Han, 1972a, p. 338) Abandoning her sponsored medical education in Brussels University and travelling empty-handedly back to China seemed like an illogical move. However, the natural and rational state of being “homesick” was enough to show her the next step in her ethical dilemma:

The tranquil years in Belgium were at an end for me, I had to go back to China; to go back against all reason, against all logic... But going back meant giving up medicine, at least for a while, and I so much wanted to be a doctor; but I could not imagine staying six more years away from China. ‘I shall die here of homesickness.’ (Han, 1972a, p. 340)

Leaving behind her ideal boyfriend Louis and withdrawn herself from the medical school that she had been very passionate about, Han Suyin cherished her own courage in making her way “home.” Leaping like those high-spirited Manchurian soldiers who were singing on their high notes, Han (1972a) penned down the song of her heart: “My home is on the Sungari river / There are the most beautiful flowers and trees / The loveliest fields of golden wheat / There is my home.” (p. 274)

Many years later, when Han Suyin became an overseas “Chinese,” she proposed the idea of a “spiritual home.” She started to see clearly that although she had become a citizen of another country, China could remain as her “Fatherland,” and her spiritual home. (Han, 1982, p. 75) China was undoubtedly Han Suyin’s first love, her “only religion” and spiritual reference. While her writer’s and medical consultant’s profile became well-known internationally after the publication of her novel *The Mountain Is Young*, a notion of global citizenship blossomed in her. Her larger-than-life international presence made her roots extend beyond herself. Han Suyin started to call the whole world her home. Yet, China had always been her spiritual “home,” and it would always

be. Han (1982) saw herself as part of the intellectual line of Chinese elites who cared for the “salvation” and well-being of China:

I have pursued my beautiful chimera with Chinese obstinacy; yet I have not ignored or cast away other gifts of living, other lands and peoples... Neither do I forget how much Europe and America, Australia and India, Southeast Asia and so many other lands gave me, enlarging my horizons, until the whole world became my home, until my roots extended and broadened to encompass the round earth... But this book is about the fixed star of my self-completion, the one I had to follow despite hazards... I have been, all unknown to myself, a Chinese intellectual of my generation and of my time. All my reactions, everything I have done, has always been conditioned by this inner prompting of the heart... (pp. 313-314)

### **5.3 Han Suyin’s Legitimate Choice For Her Medical Career**

Han Suyin was more popularly known as Dr Chou between 1949-1964. Her pursuit of the medical career was, in her own words, “an ambition (that) only increased by time and difficulties.” (Han, 1972b, p. 279) During those fifteen years, she worked sacrificially and gave herself heartily to her medical career. To reflect, Han Suyin had always been grateful to Joseph Hers, the Belgian boss of her Father’s Railway Company, who provided financial aid for her to begin her medical education in Brussels, Belgium. Although she did not complete her studies due to her abrupt decision to return to China, the exposure to European medical schools had somewhat paved the way for her second attempt to complete her medical studies in London a few years later.

In *A Mortal Flower*, Han (1972a, p. 192) wrote: “But it is due to Hers that today I am Han Suyin, for he did give me the money that I needed when I needed it.” Without

Hers' persuasion with Han Suyin's parents to let her pursue her medical studies in Brussels University with the Belgian scholarship, Han Suyin would probably be always trapped in the adverse environment that was entrenched in racial-discrimination and bigotry against Eurasian female like her.

In 1935, Han Suyin's father, under the influence of Han Suyin's mother, wrote to Hers to decline her Belgian scholarship for Brussels University. Hers paid a visit to the Chous, and did his best with his persuasion, "I think your daughter had better have her chance, Madame, she has proved her determination to study." (Han, 1972a, p. 274) And their conversation became quite interesting as there was a clash of opinion about what would be the legitimate "vocation" for a young woman like Han Suyin. Han Suyin's mother Marguerite firmly believed that "it is not a vocation for a woman, it is not a life for a woman to be a doctor...A woman must marry and be happy." Hers countered her opinion with a diplomatic compliment, "Madame,... not all women are destined by God to be a happy wife and mother as you are." (Ibid)

Han Suyin found the statement devastating, for she had always been labelled as one whose looks would not qualify her as the romantic interest of any young man. Yet, Hers' words were helpful enough to help with Han Suyin's situation, for her parents were nervous to give her up for anything, marriage or no marriage. When Han Suyin's parents finally accepted Hers' proposal, she got the chance to travel and live abroad, which was definitely helpful for her to reorient and redefine her ethical identity, for the new university campus environment in Brussels was far more accommodative than her little Eurasian circle in China. Ironically, though a Eurasian, Han Suyin's legitimate identity would be one who would represent China there and then. Han Suyin would find that though not everyone was pro-China abroad, she could speak without apology as a true daughter of China.

Two things were certain to confirm the gut feeling of young Rosalie (Han Suyin) that she could be trained as a medical professional one day. (Han, 1972b, p. 152) First, an opportunity for Han Suyin to have an access to reading medical books when she was twelve, finding herself understanding all the contents and able to apply the knowledge she gained in diagnosing the illnesses around her. Second, the awakening heart of humanity in her when she witnessed the dire poverty and medical needs in the neighbourhood during her preteen years.

Rosalie Chou, the then Han Suyin, inherited her first medical books from a deceased doctor by accident. During summer 1928, Han Suyin's father, though not entirely certain of the future of his career in the changing political scenario, decided to take his family for a vacation at the seaside of Peitaiho, or Beidaihe. They stayed with Mrs Glauber who owned a few bungalows, one of which was bought over with remaining furniture and medical books from its previous owner, a doctor. Han Suyin was given all the medical books from the deceased: "I inherit the dead doctor's books, read them between a trance of sea and sand... At the end I know that I, too, will be a doctor." (Han, 1972a, p. 16) There were reasons for such confidence in Rosalie. She could immediately apply the little medical knowledge she had gained via observation of the symptoms of illness around her:

But first I acquire, one by one, the diseases I read about... I begin to scan others for diseases. My sister Marianne suffers from scarlet fever; her arms, bitten by seaside mosquitoes, covered in a rash, denote bubonic plague. It is kindest not to tell her, though I worry as I watch her for the more dreadful bubo to develop... My father, though absent, surely has enlarged tonsils and gangrene of the feet. (Ibid)

Medical knowledge with no passion for people would not yield any good doctors. Rosalie had exactly what it took to make a compassionate and astute medical professional. How her heart responded to the misery and sufferings of people when she was twelve was transpired into an altruist for all humanity during her adulthood:

Coming home from school, passing by the church, one Friday in Lent, I saw again the blind children, standing, sitting, round the church gates. I discerned their rags tied with string... The time had come to announce my decision at home. 'Mama, I am going to be a doctor.' 'Wash your face, you have dust all over you.' The big dust winds of March were blowing, engulfing the city in sand. 'I am going to be a doctor, Mama.' Mama counted the stitches in her knitting. Papa returned from his office, the soup was placed on the table. 'Papa, I am going to be a doctor.' 'A doctor? It's very difficult to be a doctor if you are a woman.' 'She is making up stories as usual,' said Mama. 'I am not dreaming,' replied Rosalie-me. 'I am going to be a doctor... I am going to be a doctor and I will do something, so they won't be blind, they will see.' (Han, 1972a, p. 37)

At twelve, though not understood or supported by her family, Rosalie Chou was determined and knew instinctively that she would be a doctor one day, so that she could relieve pain and bring hope to the sick. The China then that she had observed, was "a world of beggars, moribund continent, carrion land; yet the cadaver refused to perish... its anticipated death throes became the quaking of new life; the unburied dead hosted the new-born" (Han, 1972a, pp. 39-40). She wanted to be a part of the catalyst of change to end all curable pains.

Many years down the road, when she qualified herself to start practising medicine, her dedication and meticulous attitude continued to charge her on as more than just an

ordinary doctor. She paid attention to the differences in clinical condition as compared to book knowledge. She was more interested in total person treatment than what was then practised by Western doctors. She developed her own firm belief in the art of healing, and was especially careful with Asian women and children, in view of their differences from the Western subjects that Western medical sciences were based on:

In January 1948 I qualified, first acquiring the L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. degree, which allowed me to apply for a house job at the Royal Free Hospital. Besides working part-time in the Pathology Museum at Hunter Street I had also followed, during the last six months, courses at the School of Tropical Medicine and Public Health; for I wanted to prepare myself for diseases such as cholera and typhus, plague and leprosy, almost unknown in Europe but which I had seen in China. Later I received the M.B.B.S. degree, with Honours in surgery and pathology. All through my medical studies it seemed to me that other interpretations were possible than those which we learnt and which were delivered with formal seriousness... In internal medicine I was not comfortable with those consultants who saw the whole patient from the standpoint of one organ alone ... I studied attentively Hans Selye's books on stress and psychosomatic diseases, which were now finding acceptance; and I was more and more inclined to feel that a study of 'the total person' was indispensable to good treatment, whatever the complaint... Misconceptions were taught to us, based on partial knowledge. It was stated that acute rheumatic heart disease 'did not exist' in Asian lands; and neither did high blood pressure, because of the rice diet and 'the more passive' temperament of Asians; both these myths have now been abandoned. The incompleteness of many diagnostic judgments worried me. Later, during the fifteen years that I practised

medicine in Asia, among Chinese, Malay and Indian populations, I was to discard a good deal of what I had been taught, having made my own mistakes, due to acting by the book rather than taking more time to see the person in his or her entirety. And mistakes, sometimes leading to the death or permanent crippling of the patient, remain with one, their guilt never dwindles. The mental component of every disease, the long deep roots of illness which reside in behaviour, attitude, reaction to events, in the person's acceptance or refusal to welcome suffering and dismay, failure and sorrow, as essential components of joy and happiness – this struck me as so important in the art of healing; and nowhere more perhaps than in dealing with women's ills, and also with children. (Han, 1972b, pp. 343-344)

When operating her own clinic in Johor Bahru, Peninsular Malaya, Dr Chow or Dr Chou, whom Han Suyin was known as, offered her medical services at the most affordable fees in town:

I charged only three Malayan dollars for complete examination, including urine and blood. Very soon my peculiarity (examining urine and blood; apparently none of my colleagues ever bothered) became well-known and I acquired a fascinated clientele just for that. My colleagues, all men, charged ten to fifteen dollars when they gave an injection. I charged five. I went visiting patients at home for my usual three dollars. It taught me much about actual living conditions. (Han, 1982, p. 101)

Though highly qualified, Han Suyin had struggled all the way since the conception of her medical dream until the years past her housemanship. After working three years in Queen Mary Hospital Hong Kong and a year in Johor Bahru General Hospital, Han

Suyin would have all she needed to open her own clinic in Johor Bahru in 1953. Her legitimacy of practicing private medicine was, however, questioned by the first visitor to her clinic, Dr Ismail, simply because she was a female:

I started private medical practice in Johore Bahru (or Johor Bahru) in the summer of 1953... My first visitor was Dr Ismail, the sole Malay doctor in Johore (or Johor), and also a politician. He would give up his doctoring when independence came in 1957 and become Minister of the Interior. Dr Ismail looked at the shiny new autoclave I had bought. He said kindly, 'You won't have any patients. People don't like women doctors.' By the end of the first month I had twenty patients a day and by the second forty to fifty a day, more than any other doctor in Johore Bahru. (Han, 1982, p. 100)

Nonetheless, Han Suyin continued to run her clinic until 1964. During those years, she was loved, appreciated and very well-respected by all her patients. One of her accolades "STAR OF SALVATION" was given to her in appreciation by a mother whose baby might have died if Han Suyin had not given him intensive treatment.

Being able to visit China almost every year after 1956, Han Suyin had great opportunities to make first-hand assessment of the economic achievements as well as the health conditions of the Chinese. During a radio interview, Han Suyin explained that she often paid attention to the pigs reared by Chinese farmers during her field trips because the condition of the livestock would reflect the living standard of the locals.<sup>28</sup> In one of her visits in Chekiang province, she was very delighted with their lively pigs:

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<sup>28</sup> She made that remark in a 26 minutes 17 second interview by Don Swain for CBS Radio on 24 Jan 1985, retrieved 1 December 2013, <http://wiredforbooks.org/mp3/hansuyin1985.mp3>.

“Never have I seen such splendid-looking, healthy pigs. I congratulate the official who looks after them” (Han, 1985, p. 134). Serving as the Consultant on China Affairs with the World Health Organisation (WHO), Han Suyin’s research works received high recognition, for example her report on “Family Planning in China.”<sup>29</sup> Besides, she had also set up the Han Suyin Foundation and appointed experts to manage it to facilitate improvement of health and wellness in China. Among others, the Han Suyin Foundation had funded scholar exchange programme in 1995 so that a few Chinese scientists could study the efficiency and safety of intermittent intake of iron supplements among Chinese preschool children.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, Han Suyin had proven that it was a *legitimate choice* for her to be a medical professional. She earned herself the right to be a doctor, she qualified herself as an excellent medical student, and she continued to excel in medical practice during her tenure as doctor and physician. She was thus forever recognised as an “early physician in Asia” in *Woman In Medicine: An Encyclopedia* that was compiled by Laura Lynn Windsor.

#### **5.4 Han Suyin’s Legitimate Vocation As China’s Advocate**

Han Suyin started her publications about China because of the encouragement of Marian Manly, her fellow colleague in the hospital in Chengdu. Marian had written quite a number of poems and short stories, but had always been turned down by the editors. But it was through Marian that Han Suyin’s giftedness in writing was discovered. They collaborated to produce Han Suyin’s first book, *Destination Chungking*, which Han Suyin contributed the entire text, while Marian beautified Han

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<sup>29</sup> Her research was listed in the table of content in *Population and Family Planning in the People’s Republic of China*, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> An acknowledgement was made to Han Suyin Foundation and University of Berkeley for funding the scholars exchange programme at the end of the research report of Xu-Nian Liu et. al. (1995), “Intermittent iron supplementation in Chinese preschool children is efficient and safe” in *Food And Nutrition Bulletin*, 6, p. 2.

Suyin's writing with flowery languages that served like "a beautiful veil drawn over events too appalling in their reality." (Han, 1982, p. 56) Although Han Suyin was not entirely happy with how the book was edited, it was the starting point of her vocation as a writer: "...for the business of a writer is to grope and search, in agony and dismay, in despair and in discovery; and whatever was said or done, it was with *Destination Chungking* that I had begun on this long road, not knowing where it led." (Han, 1972b, p. 154)

At first, Han Suyin was still not convinced of her writing ability when she first met publisher Jonathan Cape. She recalled that when she took a glance at the shelves of the publisher that were loaded with the books written by various authors, she thought to herself, "Was I really to take a place among these?" (Han, 1972b, p. 273) But as she told Cape that she felt that she was incapable of writing, not a competent writer, but had always wanted "to be a doctor," he gave her a very assuring encouragement that she should continue writing, so long as she felt inclined to "put things down on paper." (Ibid)

*Destination Chungking* was published in 1942 in America. It did not sell well. The idealised theme of patriotism in the book, however, had earned the appraisal by Chiang Kai-shek. Besides, Dorothy Woodman, Kingsley Martin, J. B. Priestley, Nora Waln, Stafford Cripps and Isobel Cripps and other China Campaign Committee members had all praised the book for its value in promoting favourable image of China to assist them in donation drive for monetary support and medical supplies for China's warfare. (Han, 1972b, p. 154)

Han Suyin's husband Pao was totally upset with the book. Han Suyin's patriotic undertone in the book did not impress him. Instead, he set out his mind to punish Han Suyin for writing a "Communist" book. The abusive husband-wife relationship was

clearly portrayed in Han Suyin's fear, as she was waiting for the outburst of her husband after reading her book: "It was evening, Pao settled down to read; I crept into bed, shivering with dread ... waited, frozen stiff with terror. In the next room, quietly Pao read on" (Han, 1972b, p. 154).

There was a reason to Pao's rage. Han Suyin's book ended with a hymn dedicated to the coolies. Pao, being trained to detect "intellectual subversion," a long tradition of dissent expression that was hidden in literary form of praises, concluded that she was disseminating Communist ideas in the book:

He strode towards me in the bedroom. I heard him come. He pulled the blankets off me. I sat up, shivering, while he started hitting, then he threw me bodily off the bed, kicking me and shouting: 'You are a Communist, your brain is rotten with Communism. This is Communist propaganda. This book... How dare you, how dare you write that one day the coolie, the peasant, will lift his head to read? To lift his head means to revolt. How dare you say the coolie will revolt against us?' (Han, 1972b, p. 154)

Pao used physical violence against Han Suyin to insist that the English edition of *Destination Chungking* should be stopped immediately. Han Suyin had to arrange to temporarily send away her adopted daughter Yungmei along with her babysitter Gillie. Han Suyin then rang up Jonathan Cape for assistance but Cape did nothing to grant the request. He simply showed sympathy, "How long has your husband been cruel to you?" (Han, 1972b, pp. 283-284).

A decade later, Han Suyin published *A Many-Splendoured Thing* under the same publisher again. Malcolm MacDonald, the High Commissioner of Southeast Asia was invited to write the foreword. When Han Suyin met him, Malcolm's personal comment

of the book was, “it's a splendid book. I wish someone would write a book like that about me.” (Han, 1982, p. 86) With the success of this semi-autobiographical novel, Han Suyin continued to embark on her autobiography series, starting with the publication of her first two books in the series *The Crippled Tree* and *A Mortal Flower*, which included both the microcosm of her family saga, as well as the macrocosm of historical trajectory of modern China, complete with Han Suyin's accounts of the power struggles between the Kuomintang and the Communists. Thus, the legitimacy of her ability to write was affirmed by both her publisher Jonathan Cape and Malcolm MacDonald.

The book was further adapted into a Hollywood film entitled “Love Is A Many-Splendoured Thing.” It was a big hit. Han Suyin became popular beyond her imagination. She was lauded for having “dared what was unimaginable,” projecting a ferocious ‘Red’-- Han Suyin with a Chinese blood -- in Hollywood, namely USA-trademark movie. Though neither attended the premiere of the film, nor watched the movie when it was screened for 36 weeks in Singapore, Han Suyin reckoned that she had made it. She received many letters from all over Southeast Asia, with messages of those who wanted to trace relatives in China to opinions about solving amorous entanglements. But for Han Suyin, her comfort was that the success of her book had now legitimately and sufficiently provided for her to foot the medical bills of her ailing daughter Yungmei. (Han, 1982, p. 230)

During the Cultural Revolution, Han Suyin's writing was being challenged again. *The Crippled Tree* and *A Mortal Flower* were denounced as “derogatory to China.” (Han, 1985, pp. 48-49) Han Suyin had to be on her toes to make rebuttals against those fault-finding attacks, which were made merely from the titles of the books. To those questioning why China was likened to a crippled tree, Han Suyin patiently replied that a

tree that withered in winter would definitely revive in spring. It was for the hope of the future that she wrote about the current state of China. As for “mortal flower,” Han Suyin reasoned that while the flora and fauna at present may perish, new ones would mushroom quickly. Han Suyin’s rebuttals did not really save her from criticism. Even the photograph of Mao inside *A Mortal Flower* taken by Edgar Snow showing Mao wearing a pair of patched trousers, was denounced as having a part in the “counter-revolutionary conspiracy” to deride the country’s premier. She, however, managed to survive those criticism and continue her vocation in writing and advocating for China. After all, she believed in the promising future of China although things were still confusing and made her heart cringed. The fact that she was living in Hong Kong placed her at a vantage point of being a legitimate China-observer. (Ibid)

Besides earning great readership for her literature, Han Suyin had also become a productive commentator and public speaker. Owing to her inquisitive nature, extensive knowledge as well as more-than-two-decades experience as an overseas “Chinese” who had lived in Hong Kong and Malaya-Singapore, with first-hand insights of China via frequent “homecoming” visits, Han Suyin was reasonably equipped to speak and comment on almost any given topic, ranging from politics, economy, culture, race and ethnic relations, health, literature and language. But above these, anything related to China was her favourite subject. Being a high-profile guest lecturer at many universities, Han Suyin was also engaged to write for *Life*, *Holi Day*, *The Reporter*, *The New Yorker*, journals of World Health Organisation and many Asian institutions.<sup>31</sup> The legitimacy of her vocation as an advocate for China, which was first denied by her deceased husband Pao, eventually got straightened out as a rewarding future for her. In fact, her vocation developed on a rather grand scale. Han Suyin was but a “plain voice”

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<sup>31</sup> “‘Many Splendored’ Author Speaks At Harbor Forum” in *Palos Verdes Peninsula News*, 8 January 1967. See <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=PVPN19670108.2.30>.

during her era. But her story narrated itself in a very contrasting manner. Surprisingly, it became a clarion voice that was noticeable because of its bold challenge against the *zeitgeist* of the time.

## **5.5 Lovers, Husbands And Legitimate Relationships**

Romance and marriage were delicate areas in Han Suyin's life. She had always been told that she was not as beautiful as her sisters Tiza and Marianne, and that she was "wicked" and "ugly." When Han Suyin attained adulthood, she realised that she was actually fine-looking. In fact, she was being informed by her mates that she "possessed a long-lasting handsomeness of body and feature which was to outlast her sisters." The positive affirmations came years after her adolescence. Hence, during her early adolescence, Han Suyin had believed in her mother's condemnation upon her appearance and the impossibility of her being loved by any man: "Of course you must work hard and be first in school, you WILL never be able to get married, you are too ugly. Look at you, how ugly you are. You'll never catch a man. You'll be lucky if someone marries you for your brains. But men don't like brains." (Han, 1972c, p. 375)

Though considered by her mother and elder brother as an ugly girl when young, Rosalie Chou turned out to be an attractive diva after all. She had at least two serious boyfriends and three official marriages. Consciously or unconsciously, Han Suyin somehow could not offer her heart to her men the way she had loved China. In each of her marriages, Han Suyin's thoughts for China came before her yearnings to be with her man. Her third husband Vincent Ratnaswamy ("Vincent" in her autobiography), in particular, had to endure weeks and months of her absence from home, that she had chosen to travel around, chasing after her "magnificent obsession" to advocate and lecture in favour of China. (Han, 1985, p. 317)

It was interesting that Han Suyin even engaged the idea of communication in marriage to illustrate how China should be treated and regarded by her Western counterparts:

Marriage should be, ‘...and they married and they worked hard at their marriage ever after’ because you have to work hard at a marriage to make it go. But if you get married with the kind of idea that is sometimes spread here, that the other person *must be* as you think *they must be*, otherwise there’s something wrong with them, you’re not going to get anywhere much with your marriage. But if, like the Chinese, you don’t expect them to be necessarily ideal but neither do you expect them to be absolute demons, then you sit down and you talk problems over.<sup>32</sup>

While Han Suyin’s insights on marriage were prudent, it was rather clear that her whole being was all about China. As a result of such obsession, she also paid a price in her marriage. As Han Suyin confided, her man found her more like a “thinking machine” rather than a woman. (Han, 1982, p. 125)

Louis, Han Suyin’s fiance who was also her college mate, faithful companion and the one who swore to wait for her while she left him for China, “I love you so much, I will wait for you ... I did not want to tell you, but I love you with my soul, all my soul.” (Han, 1972a, p. 362) The wholehearted confession of her beau was not sufficient to satisfy her. Han Suyin chose to leave Louis when she heard that Japan was invading China. Though not knowing what type of contribution she could offer her birth country, she became utterly homesick and chose to give up on her medical studies, her

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<sup>32</sup> This text is taken from the transcript of one of Han Suyin’s public lectures in London in 1972 entitled, “Lecture Two: Han Suyin The Thought of Chairman Mao and the Chinese People.” <http://gammacloud.org/special-collections/the-thought-of-mao-tse-tung/han-suyin/>, accessed on 8 December 2016.

prospective husband, and return to China. Instead of returning to a rather safe place such as Kunming in the Yunnan province, Han Suyin chose to be in Wuhan, the central city where the anti-Japanese war was strategised. (Han, 1972b, p. 27) Neither romantic interest, nor the security to have a promising husband could stand between Han Suyin and China, especially when China was under foreign attack. Han Suyin's "extravagant patriotism" and theory of saving China were mocked by her scholarship provider, Hers, who saw no logic in Han Suyin's decision to give up Louis, her grandfather and the promising career upon completion of her medical studies in Brussels University: "... when you do go back you will find yourself a stranger. A stranger. You are Eurasian, not Chinese. Like all émigrés, you want to be more Chinese than the Chinese themselves. God knows whether the Japanese won't have taken all China by the time you get there." (Han, 1972a, p. 357)

Though Louis accepted the fact that Han Suyin broke up with him "for the sake of China," (Han, 1972b, p. 123) he was still truly in love with her. When he was killed in Assam in a flying mission in 1944, he left all that he owned, namely £640 to Han Suyin. (p. 311) But Han Suyin had already been married to Pao. She informed the Belgian solicitor at Belgian Embassy that the money should be given to Louis' sisters instead. And so, the small inheritance of Louis was shared equally by his two sisters.

Another man whom Han Suyin fell head over heels in love was Ian Morrison. After the demise of her abusive first husband Tang Pao-Huang, Han Suyin completed her Bachelor in Medicine and Surgery in London and worked at Queen Mary Hospital in Hong Kong. The romance that Ian showered upon her was an "enchantment" that brought healing to her lonely and deprived soul. (Han, 1985, p. 316) Unlike his father George Morrison, Ian was not a Victorian man. He had trekked in the Gobi desert and excavated the Dunhuang caves. His open-mindedness made him a totally different

White man, who was unlike his hard-core arrogant father as well as other Anglo-Saxon colleagues. Ian did not share the aloof position that the Whites are above Asians, (Han, 1972c, p. 259) nor having the conviction about the White man's burden. Though succeeding his father to write for *The Times*, Ian had an entirely different take on the hegemony of the West. He did not perceive things in the dichotomy of black and white. He did not simply judge matters that he did not understand. He remained sympathetic with regard to the solidarity of Asia and communism in China. (Han, 1982, p. 31) This man had wooed Han Suyin with his love and totally released all her romantic impulses. Any thought of Ian was sweet and tender:

Spring came with honeyed fingers, cloyed us with sweetness; again the magic of resurrection in that fraudulent and so true marvel, the word, adding weight and colour to unreal substance. Lovely spring, seamed with delight, a dazzle we contrived to think perpetual. (Han, 1982, p. 44)

However, Han Suyin knew that they might not be able to retain the sweet moments together, for it would be challenging for them to build a life together: "I never said we had a future together, only at present." (Ibid) For Ian was a married man. His Australian wife and children were residing in Singapore. From Han Suyin's novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, it was known that Ian attempted to divorce the wife, but she did not give her consent. Besides, Ian still needed to fulfil his duty as a father to his children. Even if the divorce was granted, Han Suyin, who wanted to return to communist China, would naturally exclude Ian in her future plan. Ian, after all, was war correspondent of *The Times*, the leading magazine of the democratic West. Hence, the overtone of their courtship, or rather, extramarital affairs, could only linger around their bitter search for a place for both of them. Their unity would evoke questions pertaining to ethics, politics

and society. Their dating spot, the rocky Pier of Hong Kong, was probably the only place that they could savour their romance without prejudice.

It was clear that it was *illegitimate* for Ian and Han Suyin to be together. Their affairs ended in 1950 when Ian was killed during his work assignment to cover for the Korean War. While Ian might remain very special in Han Suyin's memory, Han Suyin did not mourn for him as much as when Chinese premier Zhou Enlai passed away in 1976. In the fifth volume of her autobiography, *Phoenix Harvest*, Han (1985, p. 278) wrote, "even today (four years later) I weep for him, for not even Ian Morrison, nor even my father, have I mourned so long."

Though knowing her first husband Tang Pao-huang – referred to as "Pao" in Han Suyin's autobiography – since young, Han Suyin was first attracted to Pao when she met him during a short vacation she had in England during her college years in Brussels University. Totally uninterested with the Christian gospel preached during an Oxford Fellowship Group, Han Suyin took notice of Pao's cynical words, "We may love our enemies, but we must *fight* them." (Han, 1972a, p. 315) Not only did she love what he said, she found him exceptionally handsome as well.

Born in China and having discarded Catholicism, Han Suyin's life goal was to prosper her birth country China. China was her "religion," as expressed by some of the Chinese intellectuals whom she acquainted herself with. They said, "But this is what has always been: our only religion, our only love, is China, and that is why China has persisted, endured, survived, and is reborn again and again, throughout the millennia." (Han, 1972c, p. 115) A Eurasian born and raised in China, Han Suyin tried to authenticate her "Chinese" identity via her marriage to Pao. In *Birdless Summer*, she wrote, "Pao became the personification of China to me." (Han, 1972b, p. 21) "Pao was

Chinese; engaged to him, I was recognised at last (so I imagined) by China, and it was for China, not for a man, that I had left Europe.” (p. 25)

In the fifth volume of her autobiography, *Phoenix Harvest*, Han Suyin reflected and concluded that she chose to marry Pao because she had a wrong assumption that he would be her life partner and comrade in service of their country China. (Han, 1985, p. 315) While it was true that Pao fitted Han Suyin’s patriotic fibre, he was not the right man for her. After marrying Pao, Han Suyin found out that what awaited her were abuses, belittling and intimidations. In Han Suyin’s language, Pao was a “feudalistic man” who could not accept her past, especially her premarital sex with foreign boyfriends before marriage. Han Suyin’s daily confessions in her journals could never rectify her reputation of being impure in the eyes of Pao. The manner Pao treated Han Suyin was almost psychopathic at times. He gave her orders, but also changed his mind all the times: “‘You must not talk to these people’ ‘I don’t want you to laugh’ ‘you must not look so sad’ ‘You must refuse to dance’ ‘you must dance’ ‘Why don’t you talk?’” and so on and so forth. (Han, 1972b, p. 274) Besides, Pao would not apologise for beating and hitting her, either in public or at home.

At the beginning, Han Suyin thought it helpful to play down on her European disposition. “I was too European, I must learn to become more Chinese. People were talking about me. They called me ‘mixed-blood.’ That could only be saved by the practice of ancient virtues.” (Han, 1972b, p. 48) Han Suyin tried to be Chinese by being virtuous and utterly obedient to Pao. She tried not to contradict anything Pao said, lest she would receive severe physical punishments from him. Whenever she complained that he hit her, he would tell her off that she was not a virgin bride in the first place.

But it was after many years of physical and emotional abuses that Han Suyin finally realised that she had been mistreated all the while. She had to re-examine all her

assumptions about Pao, and the China she had misunderstood: “For China was not Pao, not the cruelty I had witnessed and endured... China was much more than this; it was the people I had seen, carrying their loads, sweating, starving, fighting, dying, the millions and the millions - the Revolution was for them.” It was partially due to Han Suyin’s disillusion with Pao and other corrupted elitists of the Kuomintang’s regime that she started to put hope in Communism in China, that the political agenda of the Reds were more in line with the interest and welfare of the commoners.

Pao had asked Han Suyin to commit suicide in case he died at the battlefield. It was a practice of some conservative Chinese since the Ming dynasty that a chaste widow would take her own life in order to preserve her “purity” solely for her husband, and that it would also accrue virtue to her family. In 1947, Pao died during the civil war against the Communists. Han Suyin did not commit suicide as instructed by Pao. She had not promised him that she would kill herself to earn herself the vain name of being a “virtuous widow.” (Han, 1972b, p. 317) Furthermore, she could not accept the fact that it was in a civil war against the fellow countrymen, and not a battle against invading Japanese that Pao had sacrificed his life. Why should she end her own life for such a cause? (Han, 1972a, p. 164)

Han Suyin’s second husband Leonard Comber walked into her life when he checked a patient into her Casualty department at Queen Mary Hospital, Hong Kong. He was an Assistant Superintendent at the Special Branch in Malaya. Comber was talented in languages, knowing a few languages including Urdu, Hindi and Cantonese. He was learning Mandarin when he was first introduced to Han Suyin. (Han, 1982, p. 60) To make things even better, Han Suyin’s adopted daughter Yungmei responded very well to him. But Han Suyin had to confess to Comber that she did not love him. She told him that if she married him, it was merely with the intention to secure a home for Yungmei.

Han Suyin's confession did not stop Comber from marrying her. Nonetheless, he was concerned that Han Suyin's ultimate dream was to return to China. He asked her, "Are you still thinking of going to China?" Han Suyin replied promptly, "Yes, of course. I'll never give up." (pp. 64-65) They got married after all. It was a marriage of convenience. Not long after joining Comber in Malaya, Han Suyin was offered Malayan permanent residence by the founding father of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman. However, she turned the PR down decisively, for she did not see Malaya as a conducive place for her advocacy for China. (p. 485)

While Han Suyin's medical career and vocation as a writer prospered in Malaya, her marriage with Comber quickly became increasingly difficult to sustain. Comber was a man who had a great quest for intimacy with the wife. Han Suyin, however, was suffering sexual reticence and wanted abstinence. Hence, though Comber might be a man who could provide for a home, he had never been able to woo her heart, for he did not share or understand Han Suyin's longing for her dream home, China.

Before Comber and Han Suyin had a divorce, Han Suyin met Indian Colonel Vincent Ratnaswamy, who would become her third husband later. "Vincent never asked me about China. I just said briefly, 'There is more dust to settle before I make up my mind.... No one else ever left me alone about China; everyone wanted an arbitrary, total judgment; phrases, cliches; they could not understand that verbalising was castration.'" (Han, 1982, p. 237) As a result of Vincent's total acceptance of Han Suyin's idiosyncrasies and ever ready to support Han Suyin's life-dedication to the public promotion of China, he turned out to be the best life partner for her. Han Suyin described him as the good earth in which she could take root and grow. With him, she could find understanding and consensus in silence. With him, she could make travelling plans to China without any questions asked. She wrote, "And so I grew well and young

and beautiful and I said, 'I am going back to China next year, and the next, and the next, until ...' And the earthbound presence of Vincent would keep my feet on earth, and make dreams move and shape words; his absence as potent (even more so) than his presence, but unthinkable if not interspersed with presence." (Ibid) With Vincent, time was relative. He said, "I'll wait for you, whether you come back from China don't come back,... You always with me now, until I die." (p. 238)

All in all, through Han Suyin's three marriages, she experienced the clashes between her idea of legitimacy and that of each of her husbands. Through all her years of marriage with Pao, Han Suyin's total submission to Pao's feudalistic Chinese mentality had only condoned his male dominance and wife beatings. As Han Suyin was not a virgin at marriage, it had "legitimised" Pao's physical bullying in the name of re-educating her on matters pertaining to virtue. (Han, 1985, p. 315) Han Suyin's autobiography confirmed some social issues in 20<sup>th</sup> century China. Besides wife beating, there were also bartering of brides, usury, mistresses-taking by old cadres, rapes and female infanticide especially in the rural regions. (pp. 238, 298) In fact, social researchers had taken notice of the high suicide rate among young rural women. The findings of their research showed that many of these suicides and attempted suicides were not caused by mental illness or economic difficulties but rather, by "impulsive decisions made in the aftermath of spousal or family conflicts, often involving a physically abusive husband, with the added factor of readily available lethal pesticides." (Hershatter, 2007, p. 49)

Contrary to Pao's contempt on Han Suyin due to her "illegitimate" past, namely her sexual contacts with foreign boyfriends before marriage, Han Suyin had always been faithful and loyal to Pao as she had always honoured the legitimacy and sanctity of her

marriage to him. In fact, in Han Suyin's reflection, she was glad that she had remained submissive to him:

I married on a misunderstanding: that Pao and I would serve China together, Then I discovered what 'feudalism' meant. I lived it. For seven years I endured the illogicality, the madness of a feudal mind and its self-torturing angers and its reasoning by symbolism. For seven years Pao tried to 'remould' me... He scarred me forever, deep down in my woman being. I never completely recovered, but today how grateful I am to him, how grateful! For his training so well enabled me to understand China in all her many ambiguities and contradictory facets. (Han, 1985, p. 315)

Another facet of contradictions of perceptions about the legitimacy of marriage was related to mixed marriages between couples of different ethnic backgrounds. Han Suyin recalled that before the end of Cultural Revolution, mixed marriages were still regarded by the Chinese as breaking the taboos and violating social norms. After 1977, however, with Premier Deng Xiaoping's open remark endorsing the eligibility of marriages between foreigners and Chinese, there were increasing public acceptance about mixed marriages. (Han, 1985, p. 237)

When Han Suyin married Pao, she probably did not see it as a mixed marriage, because she was a Eurasian with a hard-core Chinese heart. She was hoping that Pao could further authenticate her Chinese identity, and that they both could serve the country together as children of China. However, when she chose to marry Englishman Comber and subsequently, married Indian Colonel Vincent Ratnaswamy, it was clear that Han Suyin saw mixed marriages as legitimate. Besides, even though Han Suyin prioritised her vocation as the unofficial spokesperson for China above her love relationship, she needed a legitimate marriage. While her marriage with Comber did not

work well, she abided with the law of the land and did not marry Vincent until the divorce with Comber was made official.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

*Legitimacy* is one of the benchmark of man's rationality in the ordering of society. Violating the communal sense of legitimacy would invite undesirable consequences for the individuals who committed it. Han Suyin's autobiography had showcased how she interpreted and negotiated for the reinterpretation of the definition of legitimacy that was held by the community. It was a great lesson to learn from Han Suyin as she had chosen to be forgiving when recounting her experience of injustices committed unto her in the name of 'legitimacy' that was defined by the others. Her wisdom in making rational choices throughout the changing scenarios of her ethical environment was altogether notable.

Though living abroad for most part of her life, Han Suyin had chosen China as her legitimate homeland and "Fatherland." Thus, the men in her life had to be her conduit of love for China, and her lifetime vocation was to be the mouthpiece of China. Her extensive six-volume autobiography and the corpus of her other works had altogether reflected Han Suyin's determination in promoting the goodwill of the emerging Communist China in the eyes of the world. As "a daughter of China" in diaspora, Han Suyin had indeed gone on the second mile in her service to her beloved country of origin, China.

## CHAPTER 6: HAN SUYIN'S ETHICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

“... all my life I shall be running in two opposite directions at once; away from and towards love, away from and towards China.” – Han, 1982, p. 51

As a China-born Eurasian author and physician, who adopted British citizenship and became a Swiss resident, Dr Han Suyin (1917-2012) had extensive first-hand accounts concerning the 20<sup>th</sup> century East-West relations. Given the challenging socio-political scenario of the time, it was a fairly welcoming experience for one to dive into Han Suyin's stories of courageous perseverance in the midst of ethnic and cultural adversities, as well as a certain extent of gender discrimination. At the same time, China was going through radical changes from post-dynastic monarchy to a modern country with a yet-to-be determined political system. This chapter shall recapture the *ethical consciousness* in Han Suyin's autobiography series, both her subjective self-consciousness as well as the objective Chinese consciousness regarding a recreated, new China against the backdrop of unprecedented East-West tensions.

### 6.1 Awakening Of Self-Consciousness: Defusing Perceived Crippledness

Concessions. Treaties. Foreign devils. Humiliation. Not only was Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* a memoir of her “crippled” family tree, it was also a disturbing record of early East-West encounters from a “Chinese” perspective. Even as Pearl Buck (1892-1973) managed to campaign for China via her artistic depiction of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rural life in China, Han Suyin succeeded in presenting pointed arguments about the legitimacy of China's self-conception of her destiny, self-determination and national recreation in view of the unequal East-West relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

China's socio-economy was largely dampened by the series of Opium Wars at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The uprising of Boxer Rebellion at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century triggered protests at grassroots level among the local Chinese. At the time, civilian foreigners were seen as arriving in China with imperial gun powers. Their mere presence in China was disturbing to the locals. The unsaid moral imperative shared among the mainland Chinese was: "*Foreign ghosts, get out from our land!*" The hatred and sentiment against Europeans were intense.

Han Suyin saw her Eurasian family tree as outright "crippled" and "an odd growth." (Han, 1972c, p. 17) She detailed how two unrelated families in two different continents, i.e., the Chous of Hakka origin in Sichuan China and the Catholic middle-class Denis in Brussels Belgium, crossed their paths. The unlikely love affairs of her parents began an East-West union that was utterly frowned against. Han Suyin's father Yentung remained a "heathen" even when eloped with his Belgian bride Marguerite Denis. Having an out-of-wedlock baby and causing the Denis to "wash their hands off," they relocated to Sichuan, China in 1913, and started a difficult family. Their dwelling place was ransacked by local Chinese bandits, causing the death of their cook. Their second baby was refused medical attention by the French doctor, causing the death of the baby boy. Marguerite was always seen as "ugly" and "foreign" by the Chinese locals, and she started to behave according to her label. Yentung, being an ethnic Chinese, never earned comparable engineer's wages like his European counterparts at the Belgian railroad company, and had remained a doormat while at home. Owing to the loss of her second brother when she was in her mother's womb, Rosalie (Han Suyin) was rejected since birth, "Take that half-caste brat away. It is not my child." (p. 304) Marguerite wanted to raise her children as Europeans. But her eldest son, Son of Spring, was hoping to be "all-Chinese,"(p. 412) until he learned later that his Eurasian identity had predetermined that he could not be an in-group member among the Chinese or the Europeans.

Nonetheless, the spirited Han Suyin had learnt that she probably could defuse the perceived *crippleness* of her family. She reasoned that a mutation, or a deviation of the regular had the potential to be more fruit-bearing than the others. She believed in her ability to “continue growing, where others had stopped.” (Han, 1972c, p. 18) She accepted the fact that the “naturalisation” of her Eurasian identity in China might come with a price. Instead of tolerating her label as a “half-caste brat,” she was more akin to rebrand herself. “I would not be a crippled tree, marring the landscape with its own malady. At least I would greet the tomorrow I had not made, even if it killed me.” (Ibid) “For although the tree was crippled, it has gone on living, and who knows but that its fruit shall be sweeter and better than that of any other?” (p. 306)

## 6.2 Han Suyin’s Ethical Reconstruction: Her “Save-China” Consciousness

China was Han Suyin’s birth place and country of origin, “China to me was of course my father and mother.” (Han, 1972c, p. 16) In spite of seeing China as a nation in great desolation, with vivid imageries of the overworked rickshaw coolies, dead babies wrapped in newspapers, and blind beggars clawing and whining; (Han, 1985, p. 314) Han Suyin did not liken China to a hopeless, crippled tree. Instead, even if others might liken China to a withered tree, Han (1985) saw the potential of this withered tree to revive with the coming spring. (p. 48)

The shrewd winter morning frost, intruding like a murderer on the run, had given place to clear sunlight. Ascending light-bodied, furs discarded, I felt like entering the blue sky, so clear the air, free of that fertile darkness, that grey canopy of mist and mildew and sousing rain which encloses the fruitful plain and keeps it green despite the winter, so that the swallow never really leaves. (p. 86)

Defusing the perceived crippledness was Han Suyin's first literary attempt in the reconstruction of the ethical order of her world.

The period between 1938-1948 was an era when there was the rise of "China-consciousness," Sino-Japanese war, and Chinese nationalism. Owing to the ongoing cold war between the Communist-Democrat axis, the East-West relations became rather strained. China was being put on the watch by the international powers, especially in the West led by the United States of America. Han Suyin, who was reading Chinese newspaper under the tutelage of her Mandarin tutor was totally anxious about her destiny, which she was convicted of its connection with the fate of China. Marrying Tang Pao-Huang was one of her actions in response to her own China's consciousness.

The Japanese attack upon Wuhan in 1938 caused a general prediction about China's doom. Han Suyin worked alongside the medical staff of the Red Cross until Pao took her away with him to other war-free zone. Due to the rapid fall of Wuhan, Canton, Shanghai, and then Nanking, Han Suyin had to relocate with Pao to London as the diplomat family of the Kuomintang. In 1947, Pao died at the battlefield in Manchuria during the Kuomintang's onslaught against the People's Liberation Army. (Han, 1985, p. 328) By then, Han Suyin had sailed through her studies, graduated with L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S., and even completed housemanship. Taking Yungmei, her adopted daughter, with her, she made a strategic move to Hong Kong, hoping to be close to her spiritual home, China. By then, she had already foretold about the emergence of the *Red China*, which would rise up "like the phoenix, reborn from the consuming pyres of the massive conflict." (Han, 1972b, p. 350) In her analogy, numerous birdless summers might have been the incubation period of China, but this long-suffering ancient country would soon rise up as a modern nation of new strength.

### 6.3 A Completed Self: “Salvation” Of China, “Salvation” Of The Self

In the larger scenario, China was modernising unsteadily. After decades of warfare and civil upheavals, China found herself at the crossroad between old and new, traditional framework in modern contexts, and materialised dreams of people’s revolution coupled with the baggage of feudal superstructures. All in all, “the monarch disappeared but constitutional government did not supplant it.” (Fairbank, 1968, p. 47) There were effects of famines, but there were also celebrations of successful harvests. Against the daunting uniformity, living conditions improved gradually. The fascinations of the Cultural Revolution were devastating, but it opened ways for self-correcting measurements. Mechanisation of the agriculture was carried out, but it still allowed feudal, small producers’ pattern. Premier Zhou Enlai’s “readjustment” policy took place, and the reigning Communist government examined their mistakes during the Great Leap Forward. Various cities in China started to bustle with life, and China’s report cards were getting better. Han Suyin commented aptly, “...history, whether we like it or not, shrugs off the notions of Good and Evil. Only endurance and success count, alas, for history; and good work well done has an immortality of its own.” (Han, 1982, p. 56) It was now increasingly difficult to exclude the People’s Republic of China from admission into the United Nations. Eventually, China earned her full membership with the United Nations in 1971.

When a nation stood together and wanted a change, the people’s power became revolutionary. There was great empowerment when a people believed that they could re-establish themselves from underdevelopment. There would be less blame regarding imperialism, or any political party. An increasing self-knowledge or self-awareness came forth to be the threshold for people that they may now deliberate and function in

modern ways. This “self” would not oppose the “other.” Rather, it would seek for the mutual-enrichment and cross-pollination with the wider world.

Resembling China to a phoenix reborn from its ashes, Han Suyin cherished the emergence of the “thinking generation” (Han, 1982, p. 303) who would analyse the past of China in retrospective and consider her future in better perspectives. These Chinese youths did not take in Western individualism in total. Their shared mentality was the “public spirit,” which sought to channel all wealth and resources to the collective ends of the nation.<sup>33</sup>

The history of modern China had just taken a new turn, but Han Suyin was already quite contented with her own becoming, and what China as a nation had attained. She cherished her “self-completion,” a process of following the “fixed star”<sup>34</sup> in the universe of people, i.e., China. The Taoist philosophy might best fit her metaphysics, but China was her religion through and through. And this China, a long-suffering nation, had recreated herself -- a new from the old, now presenting herself as an increasing competent partner in the East-West exchange.

Earlier in 1971, President Richard Nixon of the United States flew from Washington DC to Beijing to end twenty-two years of hostility, and fostered the unprecedented USA-China tie. As the years went by, leaders among the first generation of Chinese Revolution passed away one after another. These were those who had created the history of contemporary China via the establishment of the communist Party, defeating the Japanese, overthrew the Kuomintang and completed the successful guerrilla war

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<sup>33</sup> In his study of modern Chinese political thought, Professor Benjamin Schwartz pointed out that Yen Fu (1853-1921), who was instrumental in translating Western classics of liberalism into Chinese, contextualised the Western ideas to suit the socio-political needs of modern China. For Yen, the individual’s “public spirit” was needed to contribute to the wealth and power of the rising nation. See Fairbank (1968), *New Views of China’s Tradition and Modernization*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>34</sup> If it was the star of Bethlehem that had led the magi to the manger of baby Jesus, China was the “fixed star” that Han Suyin followed to complete herself. For the notion of “fixed star,” kindly refer to Han, 1985, p. 313.

strategy and the historic Long March. (Han, 1985, p. 5) Premier Zhou Enlai passed away on 5 January 1976, followed by the demise of Mao Zedong on 9 September. Deng Xiaoping was still in power, but the second generation rose up to continue the pursuit of an improved wealth distribution for the people of China.

Han Suyin saw herself among this second generation, who was in search of “a new philosophy to live by.” (Han, 1985, p. 19) They were bold to face their doubts, eager to learn foreign languages and expand their horizon of thinking. They embraced new values and new orientations, which were natural by-products of the economic reforms. Han Suyin saw the public acceptance of a “generation gap” between the generations as a new sign of maturity of the nation. “... this phrase is a solace; plaster to hide the proliferating ulcer, it accepts the incomprehension, the confusion, the crisis of belief, as if nothing need be done.” (p. 20) Han Suyin had also become well-settled with her Eurasian identity, and projected it as the prototype of a *world citizen*: “... it was an asset, not an inferiority, to be multicultural, to be the world of the future.” (p. 16)

China had already been moving forward with her four modernisations, i.e., the agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence. Above that, there was also a proposal for the “fifth modernization,” referring to the people’s right in voting and selecting their leaders. With the proven change of the superstructure of the state authority, alongside the economic reforms, Premier Deng Xiaoping became the “Man of the Year” at the international platform. His “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Han, 1985, p. 73) became the footnote to the miraculous economic success of China. Even though there was a socio-political setback in 1989 due to the tragic Tiananmen incident, it was a timely self-checking call to the root issue of youth agitation. China would approach democracy on its own term, even though the Western model could be her reference. Nonetheless, China managed to earn her place as a competent player in

the international trade. Resided in Switzerland with her faithful husband Vincent Ruthnaswamy, Han Suyin offered herself as a lifelong cultural envoy for China. She was a happy “pendulum, oscillating, forever swinging back and forth, between China and the rest of the world.” (p. 186)

#### **6.4 Imagery Of A Recreated China: Reborn Phoenix, Fixed Star, New People**

Han Suyin’s autobiography series was permeated with seamless switch of accounts regarding her own life and the historical development of modern China. Though often labelled as a leftist due to her positive coverage of the Mao’s regime, Han Suyin’s accounts of China were still valuable, that Han Suyin’s viewpoint was true representation of the Chinese was testified by the locals. For example, the son of Han Suyin’s father’s best colleague and friend Simon Hua once appraised Han Suyin that, “You are so Chinese in a way... All your reactions and your feelings ... sometimes I feel that it is you who have never left China.” (Han, 1982, p. 373)

The Chinese consciousness during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century swang like a pendulum between iconoclasm towards the cultural heritage of the Chinese past (Lin, 1979, p. 3) and the preservation of any legacy in the Chinese cultural and Confucianism per se. First, preceded by the Self-Strengthening Movement during 1898-1919, the Chinese had already questioned their traditional Sino-centric worldview and assimilated large-scale “new learning” of the West. The movement was a catalyst of late Ching modernisation drive, resulting in the collapse of the imperial system in 1911. (Merle, 2002, p. 13) During the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, young scholars like Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Li Dazhao, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Hu Shih called for a revolt against Confucian teachings. They campaigned for the creation of a *new* Chinese culture with

the emphasis of democracy and science to replace the traditional emphasis in Confucianism.

Following that, the May Fourth Movement sprang forth in Beijing on 4 May 1919 as an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement. During that time, the Western liberal ideologies and democracy, which had always been in the discussion among the Chinese elite during the New Cultural Movement, had now paled in comparison to the necessity for the Chinese to show attitude regarding the humility that China had suffered in the biased terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. As expressed in outbreaks of demonstrations against the terms of Versailles Treaty, the Chinese resented and totally rejected any Western-centricity that would badly affect their solidarity and economy. Imperialism and unfair treaties had taken a toll on them. They were awakened, and would not condone the lopsided international relations anymore. Marxism became the main reference for youth thinkers during that time. Leaders such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao formed the Communist Party of China in 1921. May Fourth thus became one of the first epochs that marked a revolutionary break for modern mainlanders from their past feudalistic mindset.

Indeed, the iconoclastic thrust in May Fourth had permanently shaped the consciousness of Chinese nationalism. Unlike the growth of “nationalism” in the West, Chinese national consciousness did not emerge due to internal historical evolution, but came through the external pressure, namely China’s losing position when confronting the Western powers.

After the sudden change in China’s position, traditional Chinese culture and polity no longer was viewed as the universal model for the world ... there was lacking any potentially viable and powerful alternative system

or symbol that could be resurrected in the name of national identity. (Lin, 1979, pp. 62-63)

Initiated by the Chinese intelligentsia and then strongly mobilised by the mass until 1927, the May Fourth paved the way for the people of China to self-determine their political trajectory, which essentially went towards the leftist. It was a nationalism that came to birth due to iconoclasm, and demanded for change.

However, the Communist had not gained enough power during this time. The ruling regime at this time was the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang's regime strongly opposed the iconoclastic movement. He launched the New Life Movement in 1930s, in the hope to resurrect Confucian teaching, especially the emphasis on individual's role in self-cultivation and good moralism. The movement finally dwindled in 1949 during China's civil war between the Nationalist and the Communist.

Despite all confusion and messiness of the political swings, China underwent three successful revolutions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and had ever since moved on with the daunting task of bringing about a "complete economic, social and political transformation of a giant country encompassing almost a quarter of the world's population." (Cook, 2001, p. 1) The three revolutions in China were: First, the ending of feudalistic dynasty era by Dr Sun Yat-sen in 1911; second, the firm footing of Communist governance by Mao Zedong in 1949; and third, the economic reform that was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. (Ibid)

China's track record was rather amazing, considering that Britain launched its industrial revolution when its population was about 15 million; Japan's Meiji Restoration pursued modernisation involving thirty million people; while the United States and Russia launched their industrial economic programmes when they had about

60 to 70 million population during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. China, from a desperately poor, underdeveloped country which at the same time experiencing exploitations by Chinese wealthy elites and the foreigners, was able to carry out her own “industrial revolution among a billion people.” (Cook, 2001, p. 2) The task was unprecedented. Yet, China did it with her own strength, and within a relatively short period. By the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the People’s Republic of China could already celebrate her 50<sup>th</sup> national day on a high note, accolading considerable economic success and socio-political stability under the steady leadership of the Communist Party of China.

In 1992, Han had published all six of her autobiography series. While describing the intense feelings she had for China that caused her to leave England for Hong Kong in the hope to stay as close to China as possible, Han Suyin used several imageries to attempt for an ethical reconstruction of China’s yet-to-be established standing in the eyes of the world during the era.

First, she used the motif of *a born-again phoenix* to portray this recreated nation:

But I could not contemplate living 'in peace' in England while tremendous China, like the *phoenix*, was being reborn from the consuming pyres of this massive conflict. I could not. At least I would be at the gates, watching and seeing, I would not abdicate, give up, turn my back on China. (Han, 1972b, p. 350)

I could not explain that even if I could not live in the New China that the Revolution would bring forth, *phoenix* reborn and the sound of its beauteous wings filling the air for me...I longed for the absent forest where the new-born *phoenix* would sing, and I would hear its wings beat the air. (Han, 1982, p. 9)

The *phoenix* was an auspicious bird both in the Graeco-Roman and the Chinese reference. The legends typically alluded it to a mythical bird that had the ability to be born again even after being decomposed by the fire. As Han Suyin clearly illustrated, this “*phoenix*” rose up from the messiness of great conflicts. Han Suyin ascribed the notion of an “overcomer” to the new China. In fact, whether one foresaw it or not, China had become an evolving Nation-State, a self-strengthened nation with a say regarding international affairs at the United Nations. In *Phoenix Harvest*, Han Suyin described China during 1976-1979 as the “*phoenix* China.” China was a progressive forward-looking nation then. The nation had wrestled with and relieved from issues of her entangling past such as the Gang of Four, but now moving forth with a clarity of self-knowledge and self-empowerment (Han, 1985, p. 301). But Han Suyin reserved a tint of sorry feeling for all the mistreatments that the people had endured during the conception of this new-born nation: “China: *phoenix* reborn from its ashes; but *the fire has seared us all*, and some of us most grievously. A few scholars and artists are very bitter, because of the wasted years.” (p. 302)

Towards the end of the series, Han Suyin used the analogy of a “*fixed star*” to denote “self-completion” amidst all the *influx of changes*. In *My House Has Two Doors*, she reflected, “... Even then, even in that ecstasy there were other stirrings within me, waiting to be born ... which one of those many MEs would be the forever me? And once that *fixed star* of self-completion was reached, would my bones *at last* become resigned?” (Han, 1982, p. 27) In *Phoenix Harvest*, she said, “But this book is about the *fixed star* of my self-completion, the one I had to follow despite all hazards.” (Han, 1985, p. 313)

Alluding to the satisfactory outcome of her self-completion, Han Suyin probably also saw China as *a fixed star* after all: “Now I really can write a love story. Because

China is in the hands of her own people, *at last.*” (Han, 1985, p. 318) There was a sense of relief and settled feeling in Han Suyin’s tone. She was suggesting that even though the radicalisation of China was confusing and prone to human errors, she had come forth as a stronger nation, rising up in the strength of her much united people. The strong people’s empowerment of her leadership made it possible for China to evolve into a supernation that resembled a fixed luminary in the night sky.

Even as men on earth experience the rising and the setting of the sun each day, the sun in the sky has never blackened out in any day. From the invasions of the Western powers to the settling life at the concessions; from the civil wars to the rise of Chinese nationalism; from a non-UN member to a charter member of the United Nation; and so on; Han Suyin captured almost every single incident amidst the radical changes of China during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wanting to prove that the widely perceived doomness of China was wrong, Han Suyin showcased the success of Deng Xiaoping, the reckoned “Man of the Year” of 1985, and the strength of new China in the international platform.

Though acknowledging that too many changes were occurring too swiftly through the process of the emergence of modern China, which had resulted in much socio-political incoherence; (Han, 1969, p. 29) Han Suyin was positive about China’s future as when everything was “overhauled.” (Han, 1985, p. 301) She said,

‘We can no longer blame colonialism, the outside world, imperialism, the Kuomintang for what has happened,’ say Party members to me. ‘We must interrogate our own souls. The fault is there, in ourselves.’ And this clarity of self-knowledge, this widespread self-awareness, means a great deal to China’s future. ‘Our revolution begins now,’ I say to the Yangs. ‘Self-knowledge is the threshold we have crossed into the future; now we shall have: to think and act in a modern way.’ (Ibid)

Han Suyin saw that a new generation that would accept *change* would be ready for new possibilities. In *Asia Today: Two Outlook*, she wrote, “Time has taken wing, the jet, not the oxcart, is its hallmark. Change is upon us before our minds have accepted that the solid base of our accepted social framework is no longer solid.” (Han, 1969, p. 3)

In Han Suyin’s writing, China was alive as a new nation with “new people.” Using the tree-planting project by Miss Sun, the leader of a handicapped group as an example, Han Suyin demonstrated the imagery of a new people, who did not form during any propagating programme, but due to the birth of a new corporate spirit of “self-help,” “self-respect” and “self-initiation.” (Han, 1992, p. 110) Old shames had died away, a renewed confidence emerged. (p. 16) In short, “as if a new day, bright with promise, is here.” (p. 52) A brief list of all mentioning of “new”s in *Wind In My Sleeve* would present all various new developments that had caught Han Suyin’s attention during her brief visits to China during 1977-1991:

**Table 6.1: All Mentioning Of “New”s in WMS**

<b>Word Study:</b>	<b>Page Numbers in <i>Wind In My Sleeve</i></b>
<i>New</i> generation of leaders	WMS 105, 106, 175, 195
<i>New</i> trust in the government	WMS 183
<i>New</i> people	WMS 87 (4 <sup>th</sup> generation), 95, 106, 152 , 163 (new demands), 152 (new rich entrepreneurs)
<i>New</i> townships	WMS 83, 150, 153, 215
<i>New</i> legal system	WMS 75 (new law), 81 (new contract system), 140, 141
<i>New</i> society	WMS 30 (new healthcare), 82, 85(one-child family), 90

**Table 6.1 Continued**

<b>Word Study:</b>	<b>Page Numbers in <i>Wind In My Sleeve</i></b>
<i>New economy/business</i>	WMS 125, 138, 139, 210, 218
<i>New machinery / technology / infrastructure</i>	WMS 54, 64, 65, 116, 118, 122
<i>New rigour</i>	WMS 16 (new confidence), 20, 49 (new beginning), 52, 110, 120, 186
<i>New international order</i>	WMS 227
<i>New university</i>	WMS 53, 95
<i>New concepts / values</i>	WMS 15, 19 (new philosophy), 20, 32 (new literature), 33, 39 (new paths to explore new ideas), 46 (new poetry), 65 (new panoramas of perceptions), 68, 74 (new images, new sensations), 78, 92, 95
<i>New fashion</i>	WMS 19
<i>New vocabulary</i>	WMS 14 (new themes), 16 (context), 189 (new words, e.g., guitar)
<i>New way of life / sub-culture</i>	WMS 48 (new films), 83 (new TV sets), 93 (new icons), 100 (new hygienically wrapped chopsticks)

### **6.5 Ideals Of East-West Relations: Equality, Respect Of Originality, Continuity**

There were a few reasons why Han Suyin took upon herself to be the cultural envoy and non-government spokesperson on behalf of China. First, China, after all, was the place she was born and raised. China was her “obsession.” Second, she felt that there should be some justice given to the new emerging Communist China, even when the West had yet to accept it. She found that Western media and writers had yet to reconcile with the new China, and yet to have new vocabulary when describing this rising nation.

She was not happy with words such as “bellicose,” “mad aggressivity,” “Russian ultimatum” that had been used:

But all of a sudden the current talk of China's ‘bellicose, mad aggressivity’ somehow rang false. However, no new words had been coined in the Western vocabulary to describe what China was doing. Hence one ‘expert’ even tried to invent a ‘Russian ultimatum’ to China, forgetting that the Moscow press was just as surprised as those in London, Washington and Paris. (Han, 1982, p. 339)

Ultimately, even though Han Suyin herself was not comfortable with certain development of things, Communism and China’s Communist Party had by and large created “a strong, prosperous New China.” (Han, 1982, p. 314) In this respect, at least three themes surfaced as Han Suyin’s consciousness for a better prospect of the East-West relations: equality, originality, and continuity.

*Equality* was probably the most desired core value in Han Suyin’s literature. In *China in the Year 2001*, Han (1967) delineated,

The period of 1840-1949 is characterised by repetitive violence, practised either singly or collectively by the European nations, the USA, and an Asian capitalist power, Japan, upon China. To these one hundred and nine years belong the burden of *unequal* treaties, extra-territorial rights, war indemnities, the concessions, occupation by foreign troops, massacres, and the sacking of Chinese cities.” (p. 32)

From the onset of her *The Crippled Tree* autobiography series, Han Suyin documented the aggression of the Western powers in China following the Opium War. She denounced the “decades of violence” (Han, 1972c, p. 257) by the Imperial gun

powers, especially the wanton looting and burning down of the grand old Summer Palace, that had destroyed China physically and symbolically. China was forced into a state of oppression and desolation. She said,

If today China is Communist, it is the Western Powers which forced her into it; and if the peoples of Asia are beginning to believe that nothing can be achieved except by the power of the gun, it is because that was proved by decades of violence. Everyone is conditioned by experience; our future made before we are born. Today the same lesson is being taught to future generations, the lesson that the gun is sole arbiter in the end, and it is still the West which teaches this lesson. (p. 257)

Han Suyin argued that only Communism would seem promising to deliver the people of China from the pit of socio-economic turmoil. Total denials regarding the unjustifiable invasion of the Western powers over China would be an outright dishonesty to historical facts. Against it, Han Suyin appealed for a legitimate respect and empowerment for China in her *equal* rights to modernise and rise up at her own timing and in her own way. Quoting Dick Wilson, Han Suyin said, “Where China is concerned, we have in the past, formed the habit of ignoring her, ignoring what she really thought and felt. We preferred our own build-up, our own fanciful images.”<sup>35</sup> Han Suyin pointed out that the self-interests of the Western states had conditioned how the East-West relations were handled. Instead, China as a nation-state should be given an *equal* opportunity to get strong and become competitive in the global market.

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<sup>35</sup> It is quite astounding that Wilson’s statement, to certain extent, still applies today to the manner the West regarded China. Dick Wilson (1966), *A Quarter of Mankind*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson quoted in Han Suyin (1967), *China in the Year 2001*. London: C. A. Watts.

Next, *originality* was another cherished value in Han Suyin's literature. In *Asia Today: Two Outlooks*, Han Suyin said that China had not only replaced Japan in economic development, but also became "the first non-white power to grow strong on her own resources and efforts." (Han, 1969, p. 5) She pointed out that China's changing force stemmed "from within," that "the military pacts and policies that were designed to contain this new force cannot do so." Recounting the Taiping and Nian Uprisings (1851-67), the Boxer Uprising (1899-1900), and the Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen to turn the dynastic China into a Republic (1911), she delineated how these movements were *inner-directed* by the power of the people (Han, 1969, p. 7).

Like many other world civilisations, China has always been *original* and powerfully creative. (Han, 1969, p. 47) China's enduring culture makes it possible to remain "China" after having been through the challenges of political ideologies and waves of Western sub-culture. Adapting from the Marxism-Leninism framework, with a careful study of the change in Russia called "revisionism," Mao Zedong spearheaded a new epoch of revolution with "complete *originality*." (p. 485) In contrary to Trotsky's "permanent revolution," Mao decided on change and development by stages. (p. 49) Despite many technical failures, setbacks, and dire predictions from the international observers, the development of China's economy, industry and agriculture managed to thrive on. Nonetheless, Deng Xiaoping's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was an earth-shaking political success. Appreciating China's *originality* would shed light on the interpretation of her socio-political evolvement. Han Suyin pointed out that it was not until China had shown progress in the modern times that people from another side of the globe "began to recognise that there was a Chinese way of doing things, of thinking, of acting," (Han, 1982, p. 339) which might not be as negative as the criticism in the Western media.

Even as Han Suyin strongly advocated for a radical change and progress by the way of revolutions, she remained a firm believer of *continuity*, rather than discontinuity. For her, there must be *continuity* in discontinuity. “The future begins yesterday, for the tree as well as for man.” (Han, 1972c, p. 17) It was clear that Han Suyin cherished the *continuity* of one’s life path,

And so I am writing this book, having achieved one thing all Asians will understand, and I think many Europeans too: a *continuity* between what was and what is, a sense of destiny fulfilled... by the logic of each day lived with courage, within the enormous scope that the word ‘day’ implies.

(Han, 1972c, p. 19)

She highly regarded the preservation of the original characteristics of the respective cultures and ethnicity. A Chinese Hakka by origin from her father, Han Suyin appraised the Hakkas as the true Chinese. She specially mentioned how they maintained their indigenous character and stayed away from any “degenerate habits” from the outside. (Han, 1972c, p. 25) All the more, Han (1972c) also ascribed *continuity* as a welcome aspect of modern China:

In the new peace, order and security come to China today... many were now eager to relate the past to the present, not because the past was good, but because no one can afford to forget the yesterday which gave birth to today. (p. 34)

Uprooting the past was definitely not Han Suyin’s idea. Examining the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, she said,

The young tore up their books or burnt them, trampled into their houses, held kangaroo courts, ill-treated and tortured them... and yet, they have

come through, my generation, sustained by that extraordinary strength which comes from knowing that, in history, it has often been so,... they have been the keepers of China's culture, the bearers of her civilization. Oh surpassing all love is this total absorption, and it has made China what she is. (Han, 1992, p. 23)

For Han Suyin, a sense of responsibility as well as the search for truth laid upon the younger generation. (Han, 1992, pp. 23, 25) To *continue* the history of modern China, those with self-control, a sense of humour and a capacity for forgiveness would be needed. (p. 27) Celebrating the *continuity* of this country with millennium-old civilisation would entail one's open heart in accepting her past history as well as her rebirth in the modern day.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Even as "the world needs the artist who records, with dispassionate compassion," (Han, 1972c, p. 17) Han Suyin played her role of East-West cultural envoy with great enthusiasm. In her memoirs, she aptly defused the perceived crippledness of the East in the eyes of the West, stubbornly instilled hope amidst the deadlock of East-West relations. During wars and instabilities, she wrote profusely about the opportunities for China to reorientate and rebuild. Facing the flooding impact of the Western ideologies and values, she proposed Chinese age-old, all-encompassing Taoist worldview to dissolve and adapt the competing elements. In Han Suyin's account of the recreated modern China, radical changes, dialectics, and the people's will to live was among elements of the evolvment. Her model of East-West relations encompassed three concepts: observe the principle of equality, appreciate China's originality, and celebrate her continuity.

Han Suyin adored Mao Zedong's ethical framework which purported that humanity was "still in its infancy" and thus China had a role in "bringing a much greater contribution to humanity... than they have so far." She said, "The process of the humanisation of man is the one which resists brutality and animality, depersonalisation and the return to barbarism," (Han, 1967, p. 247) Han Suyin saw herself as a faithful narrator that sought to promote peace and understanding. She wanted her writings to help people to evaluate China as she really was, rather than seeing her with biased presumptions. (Han, 1992, p. 232)

I personally felt that due to Han Suyin's personal resentment of Confucianism, she did not provide any positive reference of it when dealing with the East-West relations. Nonetheless, Confucian ethics of reciprocity might be most applicable in the East-West diplomatic policy: "Do not do to *others* what *you* do not *want* it for *yourself*."<sup>36</sup> Negatively, if the West had not violated the solidarity, or cast any unnecessary distrust or resentment with the East, the past East-West relations would not have been coined in postcolonial terms, such as the oppressed versus the oppressor, etc. Positively, if the East and the West abide with the adage, "as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise,"<sup>37</sup> East-West relations in the future would be brighter. Han Suyin's records of how modern China came about clearly explained that China's rise to power was a by-product of her self-strengthening efforts to cater for her own socio-economic needs, not due to any hidden agenda against other powers. While some might resent her leftist undertone, Han Suyin's "insider" mode of writing provided valuable

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<sup>36</sup> The original phrase: "*Ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren.*" See *Analects of Confucius*, XV, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> The quotation is taken from the *Holy Bible*. This teaching of Jesus the Nazareth was recorded in "the Gospel of Matthew," 7:12; as well as in "the Gospel of Luke," 6:31. A similar passage in Luke 10:27-28, Jesus taught his disciples to love their neighbour as themselves. He said, "Do that, and you will live."

information and alternative views for English readers worldwide regarding the making of modern China.

Han Suyin's arguments might not soothe the concerns of those who believed in Samuel Huntington's theory regarding the clashes of civilizations, or American's long-standing fear of the rise of China. Nevertheless, her literary efforts should not be easily dismissed, for her memoirs promoted great sense of self-respect, the genuine love for one's motherland as well as a shared responsibility for the future of humanity: "...this new amplitude reinforced all other loves, made caring for not only China, but all the peoples of the world, coherent, evident." (Han, 1992, p. 6) By campaigning for her beloved China, Han Suyin was actually encouraging the *esprit de corps* and *camaraderie* among world's citizens to treat East-West interactions with better care, especially during the times when biasness easily preceded all sound judgements.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

“The art of life is a constant readjustment to our surroundings.” – Kakuzo Okakura

“Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature’s inexorable imperative.” – H. G. Wells

This thesis, from the onset, seeks to answer the research question, namely, “What amounts to Han Suyin’s *rationality* in embracing her Chineseness and Communism in China during the Cold War era, bearing in mind that her *ethical choices* were in stark difference than others who shared the same ethical identity with her.” After a thorough reading of the entirety of Han Suyin’s six-volume autobiography, namely *The Crippled Tree* series, the writer of this thesis concluded that one of the best approaches to unravel these texts would be via the key terms of ELC, especially “rationality,” which encompassed “ethical consciousness” and “legitimacy;” “ethical identity;” “ethical dilemma;” and “ethical choice.”

Chapter One of the thesis listed down the entire design of the research, namely, the research background, research question, research objectives, significance of research, limitations, literature review, key terms of ELC, theoretical framework, methodology and the scope of research.

Chapter Two discussed why taboo-breaking incidents in Han Suyin’s autobiography were punishable, and foreignness could be deadly; thus pointing out that the *loss of rationality* – symbolised by the “head” of the Sphinx – would mean the loss of humanity altogether.

Chapter Three paid further attention to the crux of the problem of man in notable autobiographies, namely *rationality* versus *irrationality*. It also showcased that when there was goodness amidst wickedness, there would be hope for a better future for mankind.

Chapter Four depicted the *ethical identity*, issues of incoherence and *ethical dilemma* in Han Suyin's life due to both macro and micro environment during that era. While the West might critique the firm attitude of Communist China as "China intransigence," Han Suyin reasoned that despite the ambiguity of the final outcome at the beginning, China had to stay on track in executing her leftist economic reform for the "salvation" of her people. The *paradox* of a "Two-door House" was a clear illustration of the confusion and complications during the time.

Chapter Five narrowed down to the core of Han Suyin's issue of *legitimacy* and *ethical choice*: Why China? Where is her legitimate home? What is her legitimate vocation? What about her puzzling life with three husbands and many lovers?

Chapter Six of the thesis delineated Han Suyin's ethical *consciousness* regarding the perceived "crippleness," morbidity and scrutinising attitudes of those who assumed the mentality of "White Supremacy." She was thus discriminated as a minority individual; and her country of origin China was criticised for having adopted Communism, an unfavorable side of the political axes during the Cold War era.

To recapitulate, Han Suyin (literally, "Plain Voice of the Era") lived a full life of 96 years on earth. Her six-volume autobiography series became the best records of people and events during her time in her own voice. As an individual of the minority group in China, namely, the Eurasians, Han's biracial identity was subject to social stigma and ethical entanglements commonly faced by minorities. Furthermore, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time when foreigners or mixed individuals were loathed by local Chinese due to the aftermath of the Opium Wars, unequal treaties as well as the failed attempts of Boxer Uprising. After 1949, Han as a widow of an ex-Kuomintang officer, immediately lost her right to re-enter China. She practically became a "Chinese" in diaspora, living briefly in Hong Kong, followed by a decade of stay in Malaya, a brief

period of having two homes in India and Hong Kong, and eventually spending the remainder of her life in Switzerland.

Engaging the ELC, the writer of this thesis would like to present the following summary regarding the study of Han Suyin's autobiography: (a) Her renegotiated ethical identity; (b) Her justified ethical choice; (c) Her subjective group rationality; (d) Her perpetual state of ethical dilemma; and, (e) The entanglements of the ethical knots in her life.

### **7.1 Renegotiated Ethical Identity: From Minority To Global Citizenship**

Since young, the easy identifiable of her physical appearance as a Eurasian female gave Han Suyin no room to stay unnoticeable, nor could she make herself an in-group member of the local Chinese social circle. Her autobiography clearly depicted her unavoidable identity issues due to bigotry and rejection from society. While her problem could be discussed from the lenses of "race" and "racism," the writer of this thesis finds the terms "minority" or "minority group" more precise for discussion of Han Suyin's ethical identity.

According to Anthony and Rosalind Dworkin, "minority" as a racial group could be defined by the difference in their number as compared to the dominant group. (Dworkins, 1976, p. 12)<sup>38</sup> The dominant group could be a political dominant group, while the minority might be the sideliners in political strength. Also, "minority" could simply mean a cultural group apart from the main population. The connotation of being a "minority" could take on different definitions in any particular social setting. The

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<sup>38</sup> The Minority Report was a project of University Houston to combine a body of theory on minority-group relations with the individual and personal experiences of minority-group members who were researching about their own people.

Dworkins studied minorities via their four qualities: (a) identifiability; (b) differential power; (c) differential and pejorative treatment; and, (d) group awareness.

Firstly, skin colour and facial features often mark the *identifiability* of foreigners and individuals with foreign parentage. Han Suyin could not forget how “appallingly different” she was from others when she sat for the entrance examination at Yenching University. (Han, 1972a, p. 228) Even a few decades later in 1965, when Han Suyin revisited China, a Chinese cadre still could not accept her due to her foreign appearance and told her with apology: “With a face like yours, any Chinese child would be frightened of you.” (Han, 1972b, p. 76) The remark caused an immediate downcast to Han Suyin’s soul, which she described as strong as death. The imagery of rejection that she had: “the vision of a far city, nebulous smoke, the vision of a corpse on the road.” (Ibid)

Next, *differential power* “implies relatively greater use of resources by one group compared to another.” (Dworkins, 1976, p. 19) Here, the salient group has more power than the less powerful group. A power group might not be the minority, as evident in the history of South Africa. But in normal cases, the majority would have a hold of power, which they exercise upon the minority and create a dependent, “colonial-type” relationship between the majority-minority. In Han Suyin’s family experience, the Eurasians were the weaker ones sandwiched between two salient groups, namely the local Chinese who judged them as “impure” and half-bred; and the European doctors and bosses who would not offer their Eurasian patients or employees quality medical treatment and premium work wages as compared to that for their own. Even when she lived in England with her first husband before World War II, there were condescending labels used against the “half-caste” people: “the Anglo-Indian,” “the chi-chi,” “the not-quite” and so forth. (Han, 1972b, p. 281)

Often, due to their vulnerability as the weaker group in the differential power, the minority groups have to endure *discrimination* or *the prejudicial attitudes* of the majority towards them. Besides, the status of the respective minority group or individual would also determine how they would be treated. For instance, in American history, the treatment of blacks differed significantly from that of native Americans. While the blacks were enslaved due to their potential contribution to commercial gains, native Americans faced systematic extermination (Dworkins, 1976, pp. 20-21). The status difference among the minorities was confirmed by Han Suyin in her autobiography: “The subtle well-ordered differences in status and in pay even among Eurasian, where it depended upon being more, or less, Chinese...” (Han, 1972a, p. 126) Han Suyin pointed out that the contempt for Eurasians was not as pronounced towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout the life of Han Suyin, she experienced different degrees of *differential* and *pejorative treatment* by the others as when her social status changed. As a young lady before entering the university, the then Rosalie (Han Suyin’s maiden name) was “powerless,” subject to the scrutiny and belittling of society. When she entered the medical school in Brussels University, she could not enjoy the respectful social affirmation like her European counterparts. Her Chinese nationality had frequently caused her embarrassment at college parties or casual social gatherings. However, the intellectual environment that encouraged openness of opinion and freedom of speech in European campuses had altogether provided Han Suyin with the courage to showcase her patriotism towards China. Before World War II, she was able to travel trans-Europe to give lectures to different groups of the public in order to lobby for support for China against the invading Japanese via the network of the Sino-Belgian Friendship Association. When Han Suyin earned her medical degree and did her housemanship in Hong Kong, her Eurasian identity had become secondary to her promising professional

identity. After Han Suyin opened her own clinic in Malaya and became very productive in book-writing, her professional qualification as doctor as well as her fame as book writer eventually brought her overwhelming social prestige that she had never anticipated.

Researchers suggest that an identifiable people who are disadvantaged in power would naturally receive differential and pejorative treatment. *Group awareness* among these people will increase as they begin to see the similarities among themselves and the commonality of their fate. (Dworkins, 1976, p. 21) The development of group awareness has been a topic of theoretical interest to social scientists. In Han Suyin's account, however, the group awareness did not help to alleviate her anxieties as a minority and sideliner, nor motivate her to strive for a better life. The small Eurasian community that Han Suyin mingled with when she worked as a typist at Peking Union Medical Center (P.U.M.C) were all about dresses, parties, drinks, husbands, boyfriends, skating, dancing, pony rides and cars. (Han, 1972a, pp. 167-168) Unfortunately, these Eurasian ladies had believed and continuously convinced themselves that they were intellectually deficient. They discouraged Han Suyin from pursuing her medical dream, commenting that Eurasians were "mentally *blocked*." (Han, 1972a, p. 137)

Although it seemed unlikely at the earlier stage of her life, Han Suyin was able to *renegotiate* and *redefine* her ethical identity after she started her medical profession. Discarding her past as a sidelined minority individual, Han Suyin overturned the differential power with the three components of social class that she possessed: education, occupation and income. She thus recreated a self with a new *social prestige*: She had acquired professional qualifications by means of education; built herself a promising professional career; and received significant income both from her medical career as well as the copyright payments from movies adapted from her novels and her other publications. Still a minority, Han Suyin became a prominent middle-class

individual with a voice in society. However, being a biracial and minority individual in any community wherever she went, Han Suyin had to endure a lifetime of *social distance* with the majority group despite her social prestige as a lauded doctor, writer and public speaker.

Han Suyin's public advocacy for China was extensive. Besides producing books on Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai, she also had submitted reports to UNICEF and on "Family Planning in China;" and delivered many public lectures to promote a friendly picture of China. Topics of her lectures include "Yellow Peril Is Now Red" (2 February 1954 at Cathay Restaurant Johor Bahru); "China As I Saw It" (20 November 1956 at University of Malaya); "The Chinese Intellectuals and the Collective Society" (25 January 1957 at University of Malaya); "Medical Problems in China Today" (27 March 1957 at University of Malaya); "Impressions of Recent Visit to China" (7 November 1957 at The Foreign Correspondents Association of Southeast Asia, Singapore); "I Think China's Commune Will Work" (1 June 1960 at Singapore Junior Chamber of Commerce); "The Educational System in China" (19 May 1964 at National University Singapore), "The Many Faces of Asia" (24 March 1965 at University of California, Los Angeles)<sup>39</sup> and so forth.

She had also remained vocal on China affairs on radio and TV interviews, for example, the ones with BBC and French media groups.<sup>40</sup> An individual of the minority in her country of origin, Han Suyin earned herself an entirely new ethical identity: An exemplary global citizen with lauded contributions in promoting understanding between people.

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<sup>39</sup> The public lecture was recorded and accessible via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9upkez7iNI>.

<sup>40</sup> For Jack Webster's interview with Han Suyin, originally aired on 28 January 1985, kindly refer to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQBtAiWMmyw>. For Bernard Pivot's "Interview de Han Suyin" originally aired on 12 December 1975, kindly refer to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwUBZZNWVbA&t=2s>. Both clips accessed on 1 February 2017.

## 7.2 Justified Ethical Choice: Patriotism As Pathway To Self-Completion

After choosing to forego medical practice and turning into a full-time novelist, historian and lecturer in 1958, (Han, 1982, pp. 275, 283, 291) Han Suyin strived diligently to promote the good name of Communist China in the West when China had “not one friend in the world.” Though she could have enjoyed a peaceful life with her man Colonel Ruthnaswamy, she chose to re-enter China, reconnect with her father and Mainlanders from all spectrums of life, including political leaders, journalists, writers, young cadres, university students and people from the grassroots.

Even though initially condemned as “an agent of American imperialism (in China)” along with Pearl Buck, (PH, 90) Han Suyin’s persistence and genuineness finally paid off. She was accepted by the Mainlanders as a returning “Chinese” who brought the understanding of the West to the Chinese. Outside China, she was recognised as a non-diplomat advocate for China, maintaining rather close network with BBC and foreign associations in North America.

Owing to Han Suyin’s *ethical choice* in challenging the “ought to be” yardstick, and reconstructing her “to be,” she finally experienced a breakthrough against the curse of life upon her bicultural, mixed-racial and weaker-sex background. Han Suyin’s international presence includes New York, Chicago, DC, Paris, London, Italy, Phnom Penh, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Algeria, Yugoslavia, New Delhi, Kazakhstan, Outer Mongolia and Mexico. (Han, 1985, pp. 9, 13, 15, 91, 92, 148, 157, 164, 166, 193, 202, 231, 248) In one of her public lectures in London, Han Suyin emphasised the importance of choosing morality and community over oneself. For her,

the modern “putting me first” way of life was erroneous. Instead, she advocated unselfishness and “serving the people” as the core values of human society.<sup>41</sup>

Han Suyin’s self-appointed role to be the mouthpiece for China was, nonetheless, an assertion of her patriotism and sense of nationalism. *Nationalism* forges a group of people to share a belief about a country, “a common heritage, of language, culture and religion; and that its heritage, way of life, and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups.” The shared spirit of nationalism caused the group of people to “believe that they ought to rule themselves, and shape their own destinies, and that they therefore should be in control of their social, economic, and political institutions” (Dworkins, 1976, p. 120).

Upon examining the aftermath of the Opium War and foreign invasions, China’s nationalism was on the rise and became much ingrained within her people. Besides, the “new people” concept proposed by Liang Qichao and other reformists had taken root among the educated middle-class youths. Han Suyin was coached by both of her private Chinese tutors, Teacher Wu and Teacher Wang, who taught her to pay attention to the political development of her country, China. Even when she furthered her studies in the University of Brussels, she engaged actively in lobbying for positive European opinion towards China via her over hundreds of public lectures organised by the Belgian Committee for Aid to China. After achieving a decade of success in her medical profession in Malaya, Han Suyin decided to become a full-time writer and apologist for China. She thus lived the rest of her life doing just that.

Though being singled out from the overall nationalistic movement by the Chinese youths in China, Han Suyin had never shunned away from discharging her self-assigned

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<sup>41</sup> Han Suyin’s recorded speech (1972), “The Thought of Chairman Mao and the Chinese People”.

role as a China's advocate. For her, lobbying for positive international opinions regarding the issue of the rise of Communism in China and "Chinese Intransigence" compensated for her own appeals for public acceptance for her incoherent life as well as her opinionated writings or public lectures. Cherished by reformists or politicians, Han Suyin abided by the principle of patriotism in all her life choices. Though some of the decisions she made were not fully approved by her family members and her scholarship sponsor, her ethical choices were understandable and logical if reflected from the perspective of Chinese nationalism and patriotism. It was not entirely surprising that Han Suyin's visible patriotic gestures later earned herself the good name of being "a daughter of China." To reckon her love for China, Han Suyin was awarded the "Chinese People's Friendship Ambassador" by The Chinese People's Association of Friendship with Foreign Countries in 1996. Besides, famous Chinese writer Yu Qing also wrote a memoir on her. (Yu Qing, 2000, p. 203)

### **7.3 Subjective Group Rationality: "First Person Plural" Narrative**

Researchers have brought attention to a hard-to-be-generalised but worth considering proposition, that a minority female would be "far more likely to define herself by tribal, national or cultural affiliation."<sup>42</sup> It was also remarked that ethnic or tribal subjective group consciousness might outweigh gender considerations. The protagonist in Han Suyin's autobiography exhibited a similar trait. However, instead of speaking from a multi-vocal self (the "I's"), she accomplished it via the voices of many individuals through interviews or paraphrased representations of over one hundred individuals, including renowned writers who were persecuted during the Cultural

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<sup>42</sup> Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography" in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson eds., 1998, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p. 170, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Revolution, foreign correspondents and the common people such as “Miss H,” Mr and Mrs Pei, and so forth. (Han, 1985, pp. 97, 61)

It was debatable whether one could really define a “community” and whether there could be an artificial definition of such, because each individual often participated in a variety of simultaneous and overlapping communities, namely their social, political, linguistics and religious communities. However, the categorisation of “a singular, unified, self-defining community” would be very helpful for group identification and strategic socio-political positioning, especially when there was a confronting authority or majority ruling other groups.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* stated that a nation would be “an imagined political community... Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the *nation* is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6-7) The idea of community, and especially that of the nation, had probably addressed Han Suyin’s deep sense of belonging. China was, therefore, the subject of Han Suyin’s lifetime advocacy work. Though a minority in China, Han Suyin was a legitimate “Chinese.” Her conversation with the widow of Dr Sun Yat-sen, Madam Soong, reflected her ethical identity as one of the Chinese: Madam Soong asked Han Suyin, “You still have not returned to live in China?” Amused by the question, Han Suyin thought to herself, “Did the gracious lady ever forget anything?” But she would answer Madam Soong with grace and tact. She said diplomatically, “I think I can be of service even abroad.” (Han, 1985, p. 55) Han Suyin’s point of reference, namely the “abroad,” revealed that China was her locus of centrality and subjectivity.

Group identification and deep sense of belonging caused her to include the voices of many into her autobiography. The voices are not entirely uniform, or without any conflicting sub-voices. But together, they formed a corporate appeal from the people of

the era. Together, they spoke of an evolving new people of New China, who survived all the self-scrutinising movement and wanted more for their common future. All in all, while these were voices of the many, they were like Han Suyin's own voices, as they facilitated Han Suyin's understanding of her own inconsistencies and complexities. In *Phoenix Harvest*, she wrote that the narrow squint of her half-life paled in comparison to the revolution and "tremendous convulsions" that were happening in China. (Han, 1985, p. 95)

Even though the pendulum phenomenon in China – suddenly left, suddenly right – was altogether confusing, one thing was certain: There was a demarcation between the "Old China" before the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the China thereafter. The new China began with the radicalisation of Chinese thought. In the voice of first person plural, Han Suyin documented the deep resentment of the Chinese people against foreign invaders as well as Chinese feudalism. In Han Suyin's interpretation, feudalism and corruption were very evident in the non-delivering, power-hungry regime led by Chiang. In her logic, communism led by Mao Zedong had proven itself to be seriously committed to the pursuit of national solidarity, with a central government that would systematically restructure China's economy for the sake of a much larger population than ever. She also perceived the socialist education movement as a "deep-reaching, soul-searching" campaign, as the goal for economic reform was collectivism versus individuality. (Han, 1982, p. 493)

#### **7.4 Perpetual State Of Ethical Dilemma: Never A Host, Always A "Guest"**

As if inheriting the Hakka's itinerant nature from her father, Han Suyin had lived in different continents. When her first husband died in the battlefield in China, she was residing in the UK. Not permitted to re-enter China between 1949-1956, Hong Kong

became her transient home until she remarried and relocated to Malaya. After a decade, Han Suyin commuted between Hong Kong and Bangalore, India until she and her third husband decided to reside in Lausanne, Switzerland. In 2008, a sculpture bearing Han Suyin's image was erected by the government of Canton of Valais, Switzerland to duly recognise her prominent achievements in writing and being a cultural envoy between the East and the West.<sup>43</sup> Han Suyin thus, was in a perpetual state of Chinese diaspora, forever a "guest" where she chose to reside, never a host. To recall, Han Suyin was very proud of her Hakka origin:

I told Comrade Chen, since he too was a Hakka, how my family originally went to Szechuan from the district of Meihsien; because Szechuan had been laid waste and depopulated in forty years of war, in the seventeenth century, when the Manchus conquered China. And the Hakkas, always land hungry, always relegated to the worst land and to hilly slopes because they were really refugees, nomads hunted down from north China by the great invasions between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, had heard of available land in Szechuan and settled there. And that is how we were now identified with Szechuan, but also proud of our Hakka origin. (Han, 1982, p. 435)

Owing to the challenging living conditions where they originated, the Hakka, literally, the "Guest People," had always been known as a resilient people. They are tough people who could thrive due to their strong will to conquer and succeed. Han Suyin's father was a great example. While young, Han Suyin had no doubt that the trains would not run if her father was not at his office desk: "Papa has to keep the trains running." (Han, 1972a, p. 10) The railway business had also been prioritised over the

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<sup>43</sup> Don Chun, "Sculpture of Han Suyin Unveiled", [http://www.sinoptic.ch/textes/articles/2009/200904\\_CFAFFC\\_Han.Suyin.pdf](http://www.sinoptic.ch/textes/articles/2009/200904_CFAFFC_Han.Suyin.pdf). Video clips about the inauguration of her sculpture are available on Inauguration du buste de Han Suyin on Vimeo or <https://vimeo.com/43953868>. All media references accessed on 1 February 2017.

comfort of Han Suyin's family: "if love can be measured by vulnerability, my father was vulnerable to my mother, his wife, except in one thing: the railway." (p. 32) Even at a young age, Han Suyin had been aware of the manner her father battled against the constant threats and malicious interruptions of the railroad operations by the warlords, the soldiers, and the war, that her father had "kept the railways running, patching them up, making do." (Han, 1985, p. 313)

Han Suyin definitely inherited the tenacity and spirit of endurance from her dad in pursuing her dream for China. Like father like daughter. Han Suyin's father's unswerving dedication to the welfare of the railway left a lifelong impression upon her. While her mother Marguerite rejected China due to its poverty, her elder brother resented China due to his failure in social assimilation; Han Suyin envisioned a life living for China. She figured that she would never disown China:

... it is from Papa, from being born in China, from all my childhood and growing up there that I have this inescapable passion and obsession with China. In this I have been, all unknown to myself, a Chinese intellectual of my generation of my time. All my reactions, everything I have done, have always been conditioned by this inner prompting of the heart, of which I am only now fully aware. (Han, 1985, p. 314)

Chou Yentung guarded China's railways during his entire lifetime. During the Japanese occupation in Tianjin and Beijing in 1937, Chou was arrested for a few days by the Japanese, but then released and ordered back to work on the railway again. Han Suyin found some of her father's notebooks written in Japanese, for the Japanese had made all the railway staff learn their language. (Han, 1972b, p. 90) Inheriting the legacy of her father to stay loyal to China no matter the circumstances, Han Suyin diligently guarded the goodwill of her "Fatherland" as a non-diplomat individual at an

international level via her pen and her public lectures. “Sometimes I am told that I have sacrificed ‘popularity and success’ by ‘giving up’ writing love stories and novels, writing all too serious books (about China). But I could not do otherwise.” (Han, 1985, p. 316) Because of Chou, her father, Han Suyin had pledged her ever full allegiance to be the mouthpiece for China. For China was her “Fatherland.”<sup>44</sup>

As an advocate for China, Han Suyin had always been a guest wherever she resided. After the World War II, Han Suyin had basically lost her Chinese citizenship. China might be her root, her country of origin and ideological home, but would never be the address that she could call home. Never a host, always a guest – thus was the life of Dr Han Suyin, a Chinese patriot in perpetual diaspora.

## 7.5 Endless Entanglements: Ethical Knots After Knots

In the Greek mythology, King Sisyphus was subject to endless rolling of a huge boulder up a steep hill for eternity, as he had offended Zeus, king of the gods. In Han Suyin’s autobiography, there was a similar notion of *endless struggles* of life of her own, and the looming socio-economic challenges of China.

In and out of the stations, with their lice crawl of cankered beggars and crippled soldiers assaulting the trains, beaten off, returning, the Flood, the *endless Flood of misery* that is China, and the trains grand, going through it lordly. The owl hoots of engines in the winged night, engines eating coal, drinking water, belching white smoke plumes straight like a general's helmet feathers, trains backing like horses, cantering forward with round

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<sup>44</sup> For the writer’s term “fatherland”, kindly refer to Chapter Five, 5.2.

enormous eye. *Endless*, like *poverty*, like *hunger*, the talk of the trains, Papa's life, the family's life, Rosalie's life. Whenever Papa's friends come together, Uncle Liu the Lolo, Mr. Hua Namkwei, they talk of the trains, of the wars that cut the railways, of the money the trains make which goes to pay old debts, and of the Great Strikes of the railways, in 1924, 1925. (Han, 1972a, p. 13)

In its entirety, Han Suyin's autobiography had unfolded an *endless*, laboursome untying of the existing *ethical knots*; the forming of the new ethical knots; and therefore, the untying of the new knots; and so on. The perpetual *ethical entanglements* and the *unending* efforts required to be free from entanglements were rather discouraging. In her literature, this difficult loop could be found in both her life story as well as the national condition of the emerging Communist China. Without grit and resilience, and a hopeful mindset that would always seek out for growth and reconstruction despite any roadblocks, Han Suyin's autobiographical account would not be so intriguing.

Readers of Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree* series could definitely see a perpetual loop in her process of seeking acceptance and affirmation for her self-identity, namely, the process of rejecting herself as "Rosalie," embracing the undeniable existence of herself as "Rosalie," rejecting herself again, and assuring herself again, and so on. She probably found different points of breakthrough by adopting the "thinking beyond Rosalie" strategy, for instance, when she recreated the *ideal* Rosalie with the new name of Josephine; followed by redefining her *practical* self with her professional title as Dr Chou; and decades later, a *completed* self as Han Suyin the "daughter" of China, a hard-core China advocate.

However, although her efforts had earned her some breakthroughs from inferiority complex and insecurities, her experience of not being an in-group member among the

Chinese was going to be a perpetual one: “Not a foreigner ... sometimes a foreigner ... not quite a foreigner ... maybe a foreigner ... a *perpetual* humming bird hover for me.” (Han, 1992, p. 16) Although Han Suyin stated that she would not want that “foreigner-not foreigner” ethical identity to affect her inner peace, she cared very much about it. In *Wind In My Sleeve*, the last volume of her autobiography, a thought teased in her mind when she realised the emotional distance between her and the local Chinese, “Once again, it is the *foreigner* in me.” (p. 122)

## 7.6 Conclusion

This thesis sets out to discover the “X” factor of Dr Han Suyin’s *The Crippled Tree* autobiography series, namely the very element that makes her series timeless and having the worldmaking power. Via the lenses of the ELC, namely, using the key ideas of “rationality,” “ethical consciousness,” “legitimacy,” “ethical identity,” “ethical dilemma” and “ethical choice,” the writer of this thesis has attempted to ascertain the usefulness of the ELC in examining and analysing the ethical knots and lines in Han Suyin’s autobiographic account about herself, her family and her country of origin, China. Choosing China as her “religion,” and with the life-philosophy that “securing the future of one’s nation is tantamount to one’s own redemption,” Han Suyin leaves behind a legacy beyond her time. To certain extent, her rationalization that repositions China as an emerging nation with legitimate rights to modernization resonates well among her worldwide readership.

ELC named the irrational component of man as the *animal nature* of man, while the humanistic or rational component of man as the *human nature* of man. This allegorical categorisation might work well in getting the readers’ attention on the problems of *ethics* and the *ethical relationship* between a man with another. The simple

categorisation of human nature and ahuman or animal nature would not please everybody, of course. One of the potential opponents of ELC would be MacCormack, who advocated for deconstructing the idea of “human” and ceasing the word use “animal” in her recent book *Posthuman Ethics*. Presenting her *ahuman* theory, MacCormack opposed the involving of “animal” vocabulary in the discussion of human nature.<sup>45</sup> Another obvious opponent would be Richard Posner, who opposed ethical criticism, mainly because he believed that immersing in good literature does not transform character. (Posner, 1997, pp. 1-27)

Despite the above opposing opinions that were refutable on their shaky ground within the arguments itself, the writer of this thesis believes in the potential of ELC in becoming one of the most sensible approaches in critiquing literature for current and the coming age. It was said so because literatures that had become classics were normally adored for reasons other than their style of writing or literary devices. Often, it was in their literary revelation of human dilemmas, identity complex, or life crisis and related choices that the readers’ needs were met, in a sense that they could totally relate with the challenges of “how shall they live” in the literature.

Moreover, it was in the simulated world of the literature that one could be tamed to take heed of the ethical nudge whether a certain human psychology or behaviour was an act of a human being. Besides, it was in the ethical context of a narrative that one could reconnect with human emotions such as fear, disgust, grief, relief, sorrow or joy. ELC would be one of the most practical and logical approaches to examine and analyse literary works of human beings, as the core of literature would be none other than the *ethics* of man and the *ethical relationship* in human society.

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<sup>45</sup> From “Patricia MacCormack Talks About Ahuman Theory, Importance of Non-Specieist Ways”, by S. Becker, Daily Nexus, 6 November 2013, Santa Barbara: University of California, retrieved on 15 June 2016, <http://dailynexus.com/2013-11-06/patricia-maccormack-talks-about-ahuman-theory-importance-of-non-specieist-ways/>.

Han Suyin's *ethical environment* did not encourage her to model after her European peers. On the other hand, choosing to be "Chinese" and pursuing the "salvation" of China had probably kept her from emotional vacuum as well as perpetual spiritual displacement. Also, believing in the future of China through turbulent times gave Han Suyin the moral courage to live her yet-to-be-proven life since her adolescent years. Her *rational mind* reaffirmed her *ethical choice* that eventually determined her *ethical identity*, and that she had to choose China and be a true daughter of China:

'But you do know why' (said that other self in me). 'Because you cannot live without China, you dumb so-and so. Maybe you cannot live in China, maybe you are only a Eurasian, a dirty half-caste, as some people say, but you cannot live without China. For without China you die. I simply die, inside of you.' (Han, 1972a, p. 360)

Han Suyin's life was a story of renegotiated *ethical identity* by faithfully embracing "a continuity between what was and what is," (Han, 1972c, p. 19) holding together "all the Rosalies and all the different Rosalies to-be;" (p. 371) yet transforming into a prominent global citizen who made her name in history. As she recollected her life, her old identity – Rosalie Chou – had become a phantom, which stood transfixed with her new identity – Han Suyin – in her prime days. (Han, 1972b, p. 1) China was Han Suyin (Rosalie Chou)'s "religion" and object of her lifelong devotion. In Han Suyin's language, China shall rise like a "phoenix reborn from its ashes" after shedding off its "outmoded postulates." (Han, 1985, p. 302)

Han Suyin's autobiography presented her persistent renegotiation, which resulted in the becoming of her completed self, her "to be." With determination and great courage, Han Suyin challenged the yardstick of conventional expectation of her "ought to be." Because of that, the community that had raised her did not produce some "Rosalie

ought-to-be.” Rather, with Han Suyin’s self-assertion, she managed to become who she envisioned “to be,” namely, Han Suyin. Despite occasional confusion, Rosalie distinctively knew who or what stood in the way for her to become “Han Suyin-to-be.” Painfully, she had to break the friendship with whoever having a different worldview or value system than her, such as her schoolmate Meiling who did not want to have any association with “ugly poor people.”

After qualifying herself as a medical professional cum writer, Han Suyin participated actively in the research work sponsored by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Her childhood dream to wipe out beggars from the streets of China had motivated her to be a sympathiser of China’s Communist government. Hence, to all of her readers or participants of her public lectures, Han Suyin repeatedly posed an appeal that her birth country China did not deserve harsh criticism for adopting Communism, since the model was aiming at eradicating poverty and redistribution of national resources to all of her people. Even during the Cold War, a developing country such as China reserves all rights to find her own pathway to modernity and economic success.

Han Suyin’s six-volume autobiographical series served well as her historical and personal recollections and reflection over the differential issues faced by minority mixed-race individuals during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With China as her main point of reference, Han Suyin also delineated her personal experience with regard to the stifling East-West relations during that time. To reflect, the sum total of Han Suyin’s ethical choices throughout her life had been a stark contrast when compared to her siblings or other Eurasians who tried hard to be Europeans. Her life was puzzling yet logically, an oxymoron of rationality amidst irrationality.

One would have to reckon that Han Suyin’s *The Crippled Tree* autobiography series suggests a reality check on how human beings should relate to each other. In her public

lecture “Race Relations and the Third World,” Han Suyin refuted differential attitude and language used against the “coloured minority” and the weaker group in racial interaction. (Han, 1971) Speaking from her life experience as a medical professional for 15 years, a well-travelled novelist, and a woman who had three husbands – one Chinese, one English and one Indian; Han Suyin felt that she was warranted to speak against discrimination and bigotry towards individuals of the minority. She called it “soul-destroying,” and totally condemned such behaviour as “idiotic archaism,” “of weakness” and “fear of the future.” (Ibid)

In fact, according to biologist and science writer, Professor Scott Solomon, interracial marriage and integration are on the rise. In highly diverse Asian urban cities such as Singapore, the percentage of interracial marriage increased from 7.6% of all marriages in 1990 to 21.5% in 2015. In the States, mixed-race children increased from 1% of all births in 1970 to 10% in 2013. In Latin American countries such as Brazil, the population of mixed-race (identified as the “pardo”) was as high as 43% of the total population according to a 2010 census (Solomon, 2017). Embracing all nationalities and the entire global village as her general concern, Han (1985) said,

... Europe and America, Australia and India, Southeast Asia and so many other lands gave me, enlarging my horizons, until the whole world became my home, until my roots extended and broadened to encompass the round earth. (p. 313)

However, above one’s own issues of consciousness and rationality, ethical identity and ethical choice, Han Suyin’s ultimate concern in her autobiography series was China. She reckoned that her voice mattered in garnering international acceptance for Communist China. As history was “a perpetual resifting of appraisals,” Han Suyin believed that her autobiography would help the world to evaluate China objectively and

practically, as what she really was, namely “a country emerging from a difficult past, and which must find her own way to the future” (Han, 1992, p. 232) via her own choice and means.

To combat her bifurcated background, Han Suyin tried to negotiate for a new identity with more freedom for life choices as she continued earning herself better social status, thus improving her ethical relationship with her community. At the same time, she was also trying to establish a renegotiated standing point for New China at the international platform. Her perpetual state of diaspora did not deter her passion to speak with a group consciousness akin to that of the first personal plural narrative. The opinions and various accounts in Han Suyin’s autobiography might be debatable, but her attempt to document all memories of people and events during her lifetime in an over 10,000 word-autobiography was nonetheless, a commendable realisation of human sense and sensibility.

To summarise, this thesis employs Han Suyin’s *The Crippled Tree* autobiography series as a valid case study of the ELC. Via the lenses of ELC, one is able to read, analyse and interpret Han Suyin’s autobiographical account of the past hundred years from the perspective of ethics and human relations. Han Suyin’s psyche concerning “salvation,” namely, the salvation of her country of origin (China) is the salvation of her own soul, provides insights for readers to understand her unique choice and self-identification as compared to other Eurasians during the Cold War era when Communism and China-sympatisers were frowned against by many.

Theory wise, this thesis accepts the general framework and propositions of the ELC. It appreciates and critically employs ELC’s approach of “epi-reading,” namely a reading approach that takes consideration of the “life beyond the text” when surveying

Han Suyin's autobiography. It also affirms ELC's intent to discover the function of autobiography as a literary genre that serves as a carrier of meaning and ethics.

In this thesis, the writer introduces a new key term to ELC, namely, "legitimacy." It elaborates on the issue of legitimacy and illegitimacy as core concepts in the discussion of the ethical issues embedded in a text. Next, with a slight variation from the theory's original proponent Prof Nie Zhenzhao, the writer of this thesis dissociates the linkages of ELC with sociological Darwinism, and thus replaces one of ELC's key term "ethical selection" with a more neutral term: "ethical choice." Besides, the writer of this thesis also begs to differ with Prof Nie Zhenzhao who uses "free will" interchangeably with one of his ELC's key terms, "natural will." Nie's interchangeable uses of these two terms are highly inappropriate because, as pointed out in #3.3, the term "free will" was a theological laden word used for centuries in Christianity, signifying "the power of one's willing choice regarding one's life." It is thus more suitable to associate the term with "volition" as in Diagram 1.2 of this thesis. Last but not least, supported by the increasing number of literary criticism that engages ELC, namely a potential growth beyond 1000 register at the CNKI web-database within the year, the writer of this thesis holds the position that ELC as an emerging "after theory" criticism of literary work deserves ardent scholarly attention.

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