

Rhetoric of Silence in American Studies

Retoryka ciszy - perspektywa amerykańistyczna

7 (4) 2020 EDITORS: KATARZYNA MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKA, KLARA SZMAŃKO

PI-HUA NI

NATIONAL CHIAYI UNIVERSITY

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7095-7594>

phni@mail.ncyu.edu.tw

It is More than a Bunch of Numbers: Trauma, Voicing and Identity in Jennifer Chow's *The 228 Legacy*

Więcej niż garść liczb: Trauma, głos i tożsamość w powieści *The 228 Legacy* Jennifer Chow

Abstract

This paper explores how Jennifer Chow's *The 228 Legacy* (2013) recaptures the buried hi/stories of the 228 Massacre with a trauma narrative about Silk's deep-kept secrets. It first delineates the evolution of trauma theory and trauma fiction highlighting the significance of articulating trauma and its relevance in healing, hi/storytelling and identity construction. This demarcation shall frame a critical lens to illustrate how Chow innovates distinct insulated narratives on the protagonists to mimic intergenerational ramifications of trauma in the Lu family, to represent their psychological healing and to express the association between silence-breaking, remembering and identity construction. This critical endeavor will also demonstrate that Silk's story of survival promises the survival of hi/story. Thus, the novel proper not only portrays the traumatic impact, a nightmarish "legacy," of 228 but also renders Silk's trauma narrative as the "legacy" to connect with Taiwanese heritage and construct Taiwanese American identities. Given Chow's innovative form and unique themes about trauma and Taiwanese American diaspora, the article situates her novel in the emerging Taiwanese American literature, Asian American literature, contemporary American diasporic literature and trauma fiction.

Artykuł omawia powieść Jennifer Chow *The 228 Legacy* z 2013 r., ukazując związki mało znanej historii masakry 228 z opowieścią o głęboko skrywanym sekretach rodzinnych. Na początku artykułu przedstawiono ewolucję teorii i literatury traumy, wskazując na ich przydatność w procesach godzenia się, utrwalania pamięci i konstruowania tożsamości. Tło teoretyczne pozwala przyjąć analityczny punkt odniesienia w stosunku do tego, jak Chow innowacyjnie łączy pojedyncze wątki narracyjne bohaterów, aby na przykładzie rodziny Lu odzwierciedlić wielopokoleniowy wpływ traumy i przedstawić proces uzdrawiania, oraz pokazuje związki między naruszeniem ciszy wokół traumy, a pamięcią i tożsamością. Analiza wykazuje też, jak historia przetrwania głównej bohaterki – Silk – jest zapowiedzią przetrwania historii społeczności. Powieść nie tylko przypomina koszmar 228, ale także przedstawia traumatyczne doświadczenia jednostek jako element tajwańskiego dziedzictwa kształtującego tożsamości Amerykanów pochodzących z Tajwanu. Przez wzgląd na innowacyjność form narracyjnych powieści Chow, jej dorobek należy uznać za ważny w kontekście literatury azjatycko-amerykańskiej, literatury diasporycznej i literatury traumy.

Key words

Trauma Fiction, Diaspora, Taiwanese American Literature, Asian American Literature
literatura traumy, diaspora, literatura tajwańsko-amerykańska, literatura azjatycko-amerykańska

License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0). The content of the license is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Received: September 26, 2020 | Accepted: November 16, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2020.4.7>

PI-HUA NI

NATIONAL CHIAYI UNIVERSITY

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7095-7594>

phni@mail.ncyu.edu.tw

It is More than a Bunch of Numbers: Trauma, Voicing and Identity in Jennifer Chow's *The 228 Legacy*

“Your dad died in the 228 Massacre.”
“That sounds like a bunch of numbers to me.”
“It’s much more than that.”
---Silk & Lisa in *The 228 Legacy*¹

1. Introduction

The epigraph illustrates the protagonist Silk’s silence-breaking about Tarou Lu’s (Lisa’s father) death during Taiwan’s 228 Massacre² in which about 20,000-30,000 Taiwanese elites were executed by Chiang Kai-Shek’s Chinese Nationalist (the Kuomintang, or the KMT) soldiers following island-wide protest against rampant corruption, exploitation and discrimination and a strong demand for democracy. Besides alleviating tension and alienation in family relationship, Silk’s survival story also discloses to Lisa and Abbey (Lisa’s daughter) their family immigration hi/story, unearths the erased hi/stories about 228, and initiates them to connect with their Taiwanese roots and construct Taiwanese American identity. As Silk remarks to Lisa, 228, like any other genocide, is much more than a bunch of numbers for the victims, survivors, the Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans. This paper aims to explore how Jennifer Chow’s *Legacy* (2013) recaptures trauma as a process with transgenerational impact transmission and represents the buried hi/stories about 228 with Silk’s trauma narrative on deep-kept secrets.

1. Chow, Jennifer, *The 228 Legacy* (LLC: Martin Sisters, 2013), 122. The title shall be shortened as *Legacy* in the following references and further quotations from the same text indicated only with parenthesized page numbers.

2. After WWII, Taiwan was entrusted by the Allied to Chiang Kai-Shek’s Chinese Nationalist force. People in Taiwan were disappointed by Chiang’s regime because of rampant corruption, severe inflation, exploitation and discrimination. On February 27, 1947, the Taiwanese started protesting against the Chinese Nationalist government and demanded autonomy after three officers of the Tabaco Monopoly Bureau confiscated a poor widow’s cigarettes and money, wounded her and killed passersby demanding justice for her. Chen Yi, then governor of Taiwan, ordered indiscriminate shooting at peaceful protestors and civilians on the midnight of February 28 and launched island-wide bloody killing since March 8 when more Nationalist troops sent by Chiang Kai-Shek landed in Taiwan. The term *228 Massacre* refers to the incident from February 28 and the ensuing months-long massacre beginning on March 8, 1947. The Taiwanese holocaust and the ensuing 40-year-long White Terror Reign were the forces that drove people to flee Taiwan for America. Hereafter, the 228 Massacre shall be referred as 228 by following the general reference to the carnage.

Following the introduction, in Section Two “Sound of Silence: Trauma, Voicing and Testimony to History” I will delineate the evolution of trauma theories and trauma fiction highlighting the significance of articulating/inscribing trauma and its relevance in healing, hi/storytelling and identity construction. My demarcation shall frame a critical lens for me to analyze *Legacy* in Section Three “The Story of Survival and the Survival of Hi/Story” and to illustrate how Chow innovates distinct insulated narratives on the protagonists to mimic intergenerational ramification of trauma impact in the Lu family, represent their psychological healing and express the association between silence-breaking, remembering and identity construction. This critical endeavor will also demonstrate that Silk’s story of survival promises the survival of hi/story. Thus, the novel proper not only portrays the traumatic impact, a nightmarish “legacy,” of 228 and its psychological ramifications across generations in the Lu family but also renders Silk’s trauma narrative as the “legacy” for Lisa and Abbey to understand Lu’s life story, connect with Taiwanese heritage and construct their identity. The current study will contend that, within the text, Silk’s survival story serves as a “legacy” for Lu betokening the dead, the absence and the silence of 228 to find voice and fight against forgetting; and, without the text, Chow’s work functions as a textual heritage inscribing counter-memory to defy prevalent metanarrative on Taiwan’s history, fighting with storytelling against historical amnesia about 228 and Taiwanese American diaspora. Given Chow’s innovative form and unique themes about trauma and Taiwanese American diaspora, the Coda shall foreground the novelist’s literary contributions by situating her novel’s place in the emerging Taiwanese American literature, Asian American literature, contemporary American diasporic literature and trauma fiction.

2. Sound of Silence: Trauma, Voicing and Testimony to History

Cathy Caruth and her Yale group are the pioneers in developing trauma theory, which in turn inspires literary studies of trauma fiction. Therefore, I shall delineate the evolution of trauma theory with a focus on the features of trauma, impact and relevance of voicing out in bearing testimony to history and identity construction.

Caruth’s research on trauma illuminates specific features of psychological wounds and the (im)possibility of narrating and representing the unspeakable of traumatic experiences. In *Trauma*, the theorist brings forth the following characteristics of trauma: (a) the nightmare of trauma returns to haunt the survivor and eyewitness; (b) the shock of trauma locks the survivor up with silence because of the unspeakable pains and fear; (c) silence-breaking and listening to the unspeakable are in nature a witnessing of trauma. “[T]he history of trauma” can “only take place through the listening of another” (Caruth 1995, 11).

Caruth's inspiration for the development of trauma literature is most evident in her work *Unclaimed Experience*. First, Caruth observes of "a double wound" wreaked by an overwhelming traumatic event (Caruth 1996, 3). The savagery of the event itself causes the first trauma; the second ordeal derives from the recurrent return of the nightmare to haunt the survivor. That is, trauma never remains silent. It always persistently and horrifically *sounds* in the haunting nightmares. In trauma, therefore, inherently lies *hi/story*. A trauma narrative is a "double telling" that oscillates between death and life (Caruth 1996, 7), and the connection between the two constitutes a testimony to history: "It is the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossibility and necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness" (Caruth 1996, 8). Given that Caruth asserts an association between trauma narrative and representation of history, it suffices to dispel the assumption that Caruth's trauma theory denies the possibility of narrating on a traumatic event and of bearing witness to history.

Besides, in Caruth's trauma theory some critics discern the literary power in articulating silence and representing trauma. Geoffrey H. Hartman argues that trauma theory sheds light on figurative language and symbolic process of narrating; therefore, the critic asserts that literature possessing the aforementioned attributes can represent and bear testimony to trauma. "This leads toward literary theory, because the disjunction between experiencing [...] and understanding [...] is what figurative language expresses and explores. The literary construction of memory is obviously not a literal retrieval but a statement of a different sort" (Hartman 1995, 540). Likewise, Anne Goarzin asserts that literature provides opportunities for the suffocated voice/self to represent, in different ways, the unspeakable about trauma. In Goarzin's view, fragmentary and repetitive narrative structure is a powerful approach to recapture trauma survivor's disintegrated self and haunting memory and give voice to the erased *hi/stories* (Goarzin 2011, 5). Meanwhile, revisionists of Caruth's theory attempt to shift focus onto trauma's social and cultural specificity and the process of remembering. As Michelle Balaev asserts:

Understanding trauma, for example, by situating it within a larger conceptual framework of social psychology theories in addition to neurobiological theories will produce a particular psychologically informed concept of trauma that acknowledges the range of contextual factors that specify the value of the experience. (Balaev 2014, 2)

Contending for the power of storytelling, Balaev advocates that literature is more diffuse and varied than Caruth's classic model to address and represent traumatic experiences.

Dismissing controversy over Caruth's trauma theory, Anne Whitehead demonstrates in *Trauma Fiction* a resonance between trauma theory and trauma literature.

The critic argues that Caruth's notion on the paradox of trauma has inspired novelists to re-conceptualize trauma and shift their attention "from the question of what is remembered of past to how and why it is remembered" (Whitehead 2004, 3). Whitehead contends that further narrativizing traumatic events raises the related issues of politics, ethics and aesthetics because various communities have shown a strong desire to make visible specific historical instances of trauma and to give voice to the oppressed and the excluded. Thus, novelists of trauma fiction employ intertextuality, repetitive and fragmented narrative structure to mimic haunting nightmares, represent traumatic experiences and give voice to the erased hi/stories (Whitehead 2004, 83-88).

Roger Luckhurst's study on trauma and trauma fiction particularly centers on the association between trauma, hi/storytelling, and identity construction. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's view on Auschwitz, Luckhurst asserts the power of a fictional narrative to represent the traumatic memory: "Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and weep" (Ricoeur in Luckhurst 2008, 85). Narratives become a means to "re-figure" our historical condition and to try out the "re-signification" of self that trauma has wrought out in contemporary subjectivity (Luckhurst 2008, 86). Trauma literature accordingly creates a space wherein identity politics – the exploration, expression and affirmation of identity – can find its expression.

The following section will illustrate how Jennifer Chow applies the device of multiple but insulated narratives to mirror the transgenerational trauma impact on Silk and her posterity. The disconnected narratives on the main characters emulate how Silk's silence about the Taiwanese holocaust, repressed emotions and memory have caused estrangement and locked up the mutually alienated Silk, Lisa and Abbey within their respective emotional worlds. The novelist represents the effect of silence-breaking by allowing episodes of interaction, communication and understanding to emerge in the originally insulated narratives, which thus signifies the healing of the traumatized Silk and reconciliation of the alienated Lisa and Abbey. Moreover, the narrative infiltration bespeaks not only the protagonists' reintegration of self but also their connection with family history, cultural heritage and identity construction. As a whole, *Legacy* illustrates that Silk's story of survival generates the survival of hi/story about the Lus' tragedies and traumas, Taiwan's holocaust and the Taiwanese American diaspora.

3. The Story of Survival and the Survival of Hi/Story

In his review of *Legacy*, Bradley Winterton complains that Chow's novel is a historical novel but fails to educate its readers about Taiwan's dark history, whereas the novelist entitles her novel deliberately with 228 pertaining to the Massacre

in Taiwan (Winterton 2013, 11). Covertly as a rebuttal to Winterton's criticism, Anna Wu focuses on Chow's narrative subtlety: "the book is not historical fiction, nor does it really center on 228 itself. Instead, the novel is firmly set in America generations later. In fact, I love the subtlety and yet the pervasiveness of this '228 legacy' throughout the novel" (Wu 2014). Justifying her own depiction of Silk's trauma as a process, Chow explains that

I was inspired to write about 228 after going on a family trip to Taiwan. It was a deeply emotional experience as I heard relatives retelling this dark period in Taiwanese history. [...] I chose to use a subtle writing approach because I was interested in the psychological hurt and hidden effects of 228. I know a lot of people perceive a traumatic experience as a beginning and end in itself, but it really does have more impact than at first glance, and I wanted to bring that to light. (Chow in Wu 2014)

Drawing on the theories of trauma and trauma fiction, the current study asserts that the merit of Chow's novel lies, first, in her innovative narrative form to depict intergenerational transmission of traumatic impact and, secondly, in translating Silk's trauma narrative from a "legacy" of psychological hurt into a narrative "legacy" for Lisa and Abbey to understand the family story, connect with Taiwanese heritage and construct their Taiwanese American identity. Within the text, Silk's silence-breaking constitutes a story of survival, which in turn promises the survival of hi/story for remembrance and identity construction. Without the text, Chow's novel serves as a microhistory and a textual heritage bearing testimony, building counter-memory to defy imposed historical metanarrative and thus fighting against amnesia. Thirdly, Chow inscribes with her novel a unique story about Taiwanese American diaspora and registers the Taiwanese American identity for this underrepresented ethnic group in America.

Chow's novelistic form of isolated narratives on the main characters fittingly bespeaks their locked-up and alienated emotional worlds wrecked by the devastating impact of the Taiwanese holocaust. For decades, Silk has suffered from haunting nightmares of her husband's death during 228, of witnessing their son's butchering in the street by the KMT soldiers, and of two encounters of rape attempt by the KMT soldiers. Nevertheless, Silk keeps silent about her traumatic experiences, Lu's life story and Taiwan's history. What Silk mentions to Lisa is the stark fact that her father died in Taiwan before she was born. Born and growing up in America, Lisa has remained close to Silk albeit suffered conflicts with her mother. Lisa obediently takes Silk's tutoring about the Taiwanese language and culture, but she does not understand why Silk insists that the Lu family members should learn and embrace Taiwanese heritage. Without much knowledge about Lu and her Taiwanese roots, Lisa does not know how to connect with her father and Taiwan.

Unlike her mother, Abbey enjoys learning with her Ah-Mah (meaning “grandmother” in Taiwanese) about the Taiwanese language and culture. An enigma hangs within the Lu family, however. Silk recurrently expresses that she values physical labor rather than intellectual power. Feeling hurt, Abbey has hidden away all her accolades in her locker at school and never shared with Silk her academic achievements. Silence becomes the apparition eroding their bond. Chow’s narrative ploy recaptures their alienated emotional worlds, of which the novel’s first separate narrative on Silk is a prime example. The narrative opens with Silk sitting alone in her bedroom and reminiscing with her memory box while Lisa and Abbey prepare their weekly Taiwanese meal at Silk’s house. The memory box contains objects carrying memories of Silk’s happy life with Lu and paradoxically of her unspeakable pains of loss and fear. Silk recalls her double story of life and death every day reviewing the items one after another. When Lisa calls for Silk to start their Taiwanese lunch, Silk immediately thrusts the box beneath her bed. As usual, Silk wants the box to remain there. Chow’s narrative segment ends here, embodying Silk’s secret emotional world and signaling Lisa and Abbey’s oblivion of the existence of the memory box.

The significance of this narrative device is further manifested in the novelist’s representation of the most devastating disruption in the family relationship – Silk and Lisa’s cold war. Lisa seeks a father figure in her employer Jack Chen, a childless Chinese American widower, and innocently believes that her mother would like to have Jack join their family. Hosting Jack as their guest, Silk is shocked hearing him say that Chinese and Taiwanese are the same. Jack’s ignorant remark triggers Silk’s suppressed memories of traumatic experiences:

With one word [Chinese], the images of the Chinese Kuomintang soldiers from the massacre assault her. She sees the crispness of the men’s high-collar military shirts, the glare of their helmets’ sun symbol, and the thrust of their menacing rifles. All their seeming trappings of order and authority disappeared with every wail of a woman raped. Lucky for her, she escaped that terror by hiding in the locked confines of her home. The one or two times a soldier found her, he left in disgust when he saw her ripe belly. [...] [T]he memory flashes continue. She recalls the piles of detached heads littering her homeland, evidence of the soldiers’ brutality. (49, original italics)

Bluntly repudiating Jack, Silk asserts “*Chinese and Taiwanese people are not the same. If you can’t understand that, then you need to get out of my house*” (49, original italics). Unaware of Silk’s trauma, Lisa starts a cold war with her mother. Chow illustrates their disconnection by narrating Lisa’s and Silk’s different inner thoughts within the narratives designated respectively for them. The narrative on Lisa shows her puzzle and resentment at Silk’s long silence, yet persistent embrace of their Taiwanese roots. As Lisa ponders to herself: “*If you can’t even talk to the living, then how can you connect with the dead*” (42, original italics).

Without hi/stories as nurture, Lisa cannot and does not know how to connect with her roots – her father and Taiwan. Consequently, she simply labels herself “as a pure American, no hyphenated identity for her” (61). The insulated narrative on Silk expresses her hurt feelings and the unspeakable pains. Silk cannot believe that her daughter would side with Jack, a stranger to their family. On the one hand, Silk is right that her daughter does not understand her Taiwanese roots. The Taiwanese heritage involves a complex history and diversified culture with influences from the Aborigines, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese. As Silk reflects, “[w]ith all the sway of those conflicting but splendid cultures, how could a Taiwanese and mainland Chinese person be the same” (63). On the other hand, Lisa is not to blame for her ignorance because her obliviousness derives from Silk’s silence about Taiwan and her traumas – a silence meant to protect her offspring from fear and simultaneously to evade confronting the unspeakable of her traumatic experiences. Chow’s separate narratives betoken Silk’s and Lisa’s dis-communication and sealed emotional worlds.

Besides, Chow’s device of isolated narrative on Silk befittingly conveys her silent sufferings from the haunting nightmares. Stress from traumatic experiences and silence about the pains drives Silk to seek solace in wine. “She even dislikes the giddiness it provokes because what she craves is its oblivion. In the nothingness, she finds liberty. In the emptiness, she can’t relive the ravages of the past or experience the problems of the present” (104). Lisa remains oblivious of her family enigmas until she finds Silk’s memory box when collecting clothes for the hospitalized Silk. Silk’s memory box contains photos of Silk and Lu holding hands, a spray of faded cherry blossoms, love letters, sketches of the young Silk sitting beneath cherry trees, a newspaper clip about Lu’s distinguished achievement in chemistry. Lisa is shocked to learn by the photo in the newspaper that her father is an outstanding scientist rather than as she has assumed a fisherman. With Silk’s memory box, Chow conveys the paradox of trauma. It is for Silk “the container of her memories, the prison for her ghosts” (121). The memory box also functions to kindle Lisa’s quest for hi/story and identification. Responding to Lisa’s question about the box, Silk eventually breaks silence about Lu’s death. When Lisa remarks 228 “sounds like a bunch of numbers to me,” Silk explains that “[i]t’s much more than that” (122). Silk’s enunciation “it’s much more than that” points to what holocaust means. It connotes death, loss, trauma, survival, hi/story and identity construction. On retrospection, Silk regrets that she has erased Lu’s life from the lives of Lisa and Abbey and blocked their connection with Lu and Taiwan. Furthermore, Silk realizes that her story of survival shall promise the survival of hi/story – Lu’s personal history and Taiwan’s buried history: “Revealing the details of her past, she revives not a dull memory in her mind but her husband’s vibrant self” (121).

That is, Silk's storytelling about Lu metaphorically revives Lu for Lisa and Abbey and helps them connect with their grand/parents. At this juncture, Chow makes her originally separate narratives on the main characters saturated with emotional interactions and understandings. This narrative ploy signifies that Silk, Lisa and Abbey reconcile with each other and no longer live in their respective locked-up emotional worlds.

Yet, Silk's journey to heal her traumatized self and give a full account about her traumas is still far from completion. Chow creates a home-coming trip for Silk to address the "etiology" of her spiritual hollowness – the trip to go back to Taiwan, Silk's pride and fear, and to heal her soul. The narrative segment Chow designates for Silk's trip illustrates not a confined world but an integrated one for the three generations of the Lu family. This integration derives from Silk's further storytelling about different places they visit in Taiwan. Devising this home trip for the protagonists, the novelist illustrates how silence-breaking and emplacing help heal the traumatized Silk and simultaneously initiate Lisa and Abbey to connect with Lu and Taiwan.

In "A Space for Place in Sociology," Thomas F. Gieryn distinguishes "place" from "space" and defines "place" as a unique spot in the universe invested with meanings, values, memories, histories, interpretations, representations and identification. "Place is, at once, the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographic spot *and* actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications" (Gieryn 2000, 466-467, original italics). In the same vein, Tim Cresswell remarks that space becomes what place is when it is endowed with meanings. "When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place" (Cresswell 2011, 134-135). Thus, "emplacing" or "place-making" refers to the activities people engage in making meanings, interpretations, representations, storytelling and identification. Various groups of people always emplace a specific place with their memories, histories, values, interpretations, representations and identity construction; and emplacement registers differences, hierarchy and contestation. Therefore, "places are being made, maintained and contested" through people's ongoing place-making (Cresswell 2011, 131). Learning about a place functions as a way of understanding, of seeing connections between people and place. "When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience" (Cresswell 2011, 136). Silk's place-making on this trip guides Lisa and Abbey to understand Silk's attachment and recognize their connection to Taiwan.

On their stop in Taipei, Silk started shaking when she realized that the huge hall they had wandered into is Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall. Silk darted out and expressed her anger at Chiang Kai-Shek whom she held accountable for 228 and her resentment at Chiang Ching-Kuo (Chiang Kai-Shek's son) who still ruled Taiwan with martial law and whitewashed the capital perpetrator as a hero for people to commemorate. Silk's disclosure brings to the fore how the politically dominant group can manipulate history and, with a monument, impose its metanarrative in space. Yangmingshan National Park in suburban Taipei is another example to show why a geographical spot bears hi/stories and meanings. The National Park carries Silk and Lu's personal hi/story. It conveys Silk's good memories with Lu because it was the very place where Lu met Silk for the first time and made her sit for him to draw sketches under blooming cherry trees. Listening to Silk's storytelling and place-making, Lisa and Abbey realize why Silk has kept in her memory box a dried cherry blossom and sketches of herself. On the other hand, the unbearable reality of everlasting devastation is starkly reinforced with recollection of good life. Sitting under the very same cherry tree where Lu drew her first sketch, Silk relives her good time with her husband. She even has an illusion that Lu has come back. Nonetheless, the reflection of her aged-self upon the pond breaks the delusion and brings her back to the cruel reality that her husband is killed in the carnage and her life is consumed by agony and fear. The same geographical spot bears Silk's memories of happiness and nightmares. The Lu family hi/story unfolded in this place creates an opportunity for Lisa and Abbey to learn more about their grand/parents and understand Silk's enduring sufferings of the trauma impact and her resilience.

The most important emplacing Chow presents to narrate personal and collective history is the protagonists' visit to Kaohsiung where Silk and Lu lived before the massacre. Returning to her home in Kaohsiung, Silk finds the two intertwined doves which Lu carved onto the upper left corner of the wooden door. Now, the token of harmony concurrently relates Silk's happy marital life and her loss of peace since Lu's death. The bemoaning Silk cannot regain peace until Lisa and Abbey accidentally find a surreptitious 228 memorial in the park near their house. The wobbly writing on the stone plaque standing behind a clump of bush reads: "We mourn for our loss, the depths of which we can never measure. 02-28-47" (199). For Silk, this clandestine 228 memorial breaks the taboo and defies Chiang's authoritarian regime banning any mention of the carnage. Above all, the stone plaque suggests that some people remember and commemorate the Taiwanese who sacrificed for Taiwan's democracy and freedom in their own way. In this way, the dead are honored and the unspeakable is spoken. However small the secret memorial is in comparison with the colossal Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, this 228 plaque

illustrates place-making and creates in space a counter-memory against the totalitarian metanarrative on Taiwan's modern history. Taking the secret memorial as "the closest thing to a burial Lu will ever receive," Silk tells her husband proudly of her survival and the honor for him: "She longs to speak about her sorrow, her despair, her hurt at the tragedy. Instead, she decides to focus on the most important thing at that moment, reconciliation: 'Lu, I've brought your daughter and granddaughter to see you'" (200). Silk's speech to Lu bears witness to her suffering, misery, resilience and survival.

At the same time, Silk's emplacing of the plaque initiates her posterity to connect with their roots. For the first time in her life, Lisa can talk to and connect with "the dead": "Dad, I'm sorry I never got to meet you. I'm sad I didn't ask enough questions about you when I was a child, but I know that I will never forget you now" (200). As a whole, their talks to Lu, "the dead," signify that Silk survives and their posterity survives too – both physically and spiritually. Spiritually re-integrated, Silk fills up her water container full with "the rich chocolate earth of home" (200). This act signifies that Silk no longer has fear of her beloved Taiwan and means to bring Lu and the earth of her homeland back to America – a gesture of her reunion with her late husband and reconnection with Taiwan. Silk's silence-breaking and place-making of Taiwan eventually heals her traumatized self and allows her to make claims to her survival and identity.

Back in America, Silk takes advantage of The Fairview Fryer Challenge to assert her survival and existence. The Fairview Fryer in Silk's hometown stipulates that any one finishing the jumbo burger "The Fill Challenge" within thirty minutes will get a free shot and his/her photo will be posted on its bulletin board. Fulfilling the requirement, Silk grins because "[s]he knows she will be remembered in Fairview now, no matter how small" (284). Thus, Silk makes claim to her existence, full reintegrated self and self-assertion.

Silk's spiritual survival is further evidenced in her willingness to relate more stories and preserve memories through her offspring about trauma, survival, immigration and self-identification. Her storytelling about the choices and significance of their names illuminates on how the Lus assert their identity and inscribe their life stories with names. For instance, she explains to Lisa why her father, when alive, persisted in being referred to by his family name Lu. For Lu, his Taiwanese first name Tarou – meaning the eldest son – is a bearer of the Japanese influence. And Lu's preference illustrates his longing to remain true to his Taiwanese roots and assert his Taiwanese identity – an identity which has been suppressed by a succession of neo/colonial regimes of the Dutch, the Spanish, the Qing Dynasty, the Japanese and the authoritarian KMT. The names *Silk* and *Lisa* embody a commemoration of their family diaspora and self-identification. Silk tells Lisa that

the soft material looks seemingly fragile but is resilient through rough treatments. Therefore, silk suggests her resilience as she survives various traumatic events, keeps Lu's name alive through Lisa and Abbey and preserves their Taiwanese identity through Lisa and Abbey's Taiwanese American identity. Silk also expounds to Lisa the commemorative significance of the name *Lisa*. Silk names her *Lisa* because the letters LISA resembles USA when squashed together. Thus, Lisa stands for America and connotatively their family resettlement in America. The names *Lu*, *Silk* and *Lisa* as one connote their family history and assertion of the Taiwanese and Taiwanese American identity. Silk's storytelling about naming in their family then initiates Lisa and Abbey to delve further into family hi/story and connect with their roots.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to notice the expression of identity politics in the emerging Taiwanese American literature. It is prevalent for Taiwanese American writers to represent self-identification with storytelling about naming. In Julie Wu's 2013 novel *The Third Son*, the novelist works on the protagonist's name changing from Saburo Togo to Tong Chia-Lin to reflect the imposed identities – Japanese and Chinese identities – upon the Taiwanese people following a series of neo/colonial regimes in Taiwan. In Grace Lin's *Pacy Trilogy* (2006-2012), Lin's autobiographical novels, the protagonist decides to have her English and Chinese names carved side by side upon her chop after she overcomes her confusion, forgoes her long struggle to “whiten” herself and eventually embraces her Taiwanese American identity. Moreover, the novelist uses her Chinese name *Pacy Lin* to make self-portrait in the series while keeping her English name *Grace Lin* as the author's and thus asserts her hyphenated identity as a Taiwanese American. It also can be inferred that the nameless protagonist-narrator and her father in Shawna Yang Ryan's *Green Island* (2016) represents the universal victimization during Taiwan's White Terror reign and simultaneously expresses the ongoing threats to eradicate Taiwan's identity and that of the Taiwanese American community.

Caruth's concept “trace of erasure” can be applied here to justify why Silk's story of survival can promise the survival of hi/story. In “Lying and History,” Caruth argues that Arendt's works on the fundamental relationship between lying in modern politics and total erasure of reality in history foregrounds the possibility to fight against totalitarian regime's organized forgetting and the possibility of another history:

Only by thinking through the possibility of total erasure, Arendt shows us, can we also conceive of the possibility of a decision to witness that itself, as an action, has political and historical consequences – the possibility for a witness from within the world of the lie. (Caruth 2013, 53)

In the same vein, David Middleton and Derek Edwards' notion on "institutional remembering and forgetting" illuminates on how a regime of power works systematically to designate what to remember as truth and what to forget. Paradoxically, it is within the organization of forgetting lies the possibility of subversion and reconstruction:

Then rhetorical organization of remembering and forgetting also provides clues to the social institutional context within which the orthodoxy of the past is challenged so as to change the future. [...] The banning gives clues about the content and context of what it was that was banned. (Middleton and Edwards 1990, 9)

Likewise, Silk's survival story creates a trace of erasure about 228 and Taiwanese American immigration hi/story and attests to the significance of voicing out about the holocaust. After Silk passed away, Abbey decides to research on 228. Yet, Abbey cannot find any book on this subject at her school and Fairview city libraries. The only mention of 228 is a three-sentence-long reference in a British author's encyclopedia *The Comprehensive Modern World History*. This historical lacunae makes Abbey realize that the strict censorship of the authoritarian KMT has almost entirely erased that dark chapter of Taiwan's history. Therefore, Abbey feels strong anger because her Ah-Gung's (meaning "grandfather" in Taiwanese) life story, as well as many other innocent deaths, is obliterated. Determined to keep her grandfather's name alive, Abbey pastes unto the wall of the house her genealogy project with Lu family tree tilted to one side heavy with female names while with her grandfather's name on top. This simple act preserves her memory of her grandfather and keeps his name alive. Thus, it can be argued that Silk's trauma narrative leaves a trace for Abbey to unearth the buried history. The encyclopedia Abbey finds leaves another "trace of erasure" with the statement "*It figures that only a foreigner could write about it [the 228 Massacre]*" (295, original italics). Though the encyclopedia writer does not elaborate on the reality about 228, he does mark the trace of erasure about the atrocity and bears, in Caruth's words, "the testimony to erasure" (Caruth 2013, 53). The enigma inspires Abbey to think about choosing history, especially those of the persecuted and disempowered minorities, as an academic subject for her to pursue; therefore, there arises the possibility of alternative history which would defy the historical metanarrative on Taiwan and redress the lacunae in historiography.

Moreover, Silk's survival story constitutes a microhistory which nurtures and shapes her posterity's identity construction. Whereas Abbey accepts forthrightly her family history and achieves her identification as Taiwanese American, Lisa is struggling to forgo everything reminding her of her parents and Taiwan. Lisa's desire to obliterate her family memories derives from her strong guilt and intense

sorrow about her mother. Therefore, Lisa hides away Silk's memory box. Abbey's family tree on the wall accordingly disturbs Lisa emotionally. As Lisa observes staring at the picture: "*While I've been trying to empty the house of ghosts, Abbey's been trying to invite them in*" (303, original italics). Nevertheless, Lisa knows she should preserve her parents' hi/story, recognizing that her father died fighting for freedom and her mother experienced atrocity and overcome its emotional aftermath. Lisa's longing to forget then metamorphoses into a yearning to create *memento vitae* for her parents. She hammers sturdily a wood frame onto the wall and puts Silk's memory box and Abbey's family genealogy project within it. It can be inferred that the wood frame is a family shrine to commemorate Lisa's parents and preserve memory and history. As she remarks to Abbey, this is "[a] lasting solid wood frame to honor our family history" (311). Later on, when Lisa conducts Silk's burial on Lincoln Vineyards, she pours on her mother's coffin the rich dark earth from Taiwan. This act creates a symbolic reunion of her parents and betokens their embrace of Taiwan. Lisa's eventual affirmation of her family history and self-identification is manifested at the moment when she, washing her hands of the earth, firmly tells herself the clay from her mother's homeland will cling to her: "Its legacy will remain in the memory of her father drumming in her heart, and in her mother's courage coursing through her blood" (315). Evidently, Silk's voicing transforms into an oral history that nurtures and shapes Lisa and Abbey's construction of their Taiwan American identity.

Chow highlights through Silk's trauma narrative the transgenerational ramifications of trauma and illustrates the significance of silence-breaking in exposing atrocity, unearthing buried history and constructing identity. With her voicing out, Silk fulfills what Robert Jay Lifton has termed as "survivor mission," defies institutional forgetting and promises the survival of hi/story about the Taiwanese holocaust (Lifton 1995, 138). By extension, Chow, like other trauma fiction writers, is bearing testimony with storytelling to 228 and its relevant traumas. Within the text, Silk's story of survival promises the survival of the Lu family history and Taiwan's repressed history. Her trauma narrative serves as a narrative legacy to commemorate Lu betokening the dead, the absence and the silence about 228, to find voice and to fight against forgetting. In turn, Silk's microhistory shapes Lisa and Abbey's identity construction. Without the text, Chow's novel represents by words the suppressed hi/story about Taiwan's 228 – both the collective history of the holocaust and the personal story of traumatized individuals. Thus, I contend that the novelist renders her novel a textual heritage bearing testimony, inscribing counter-memory to defy historical metanarrative and fighting with storytelling against historical amnesia about the Taiwanese holocaust and Taiwanese American diaspora.

4. Coda

The inherent paradox of trauma and trauma narrative has posed a challenge to giving voice to the unspeakable traumatic experiences. Gabriele Schwab argues that traumatic writing is “against memory” because the trauma is too painful and unspeakable. But it is also an act “against forgetting” because the trauma, the loss, the unspeakable must be told and thus assert life. To capture this paradox, “[l]iterary writings of traumatic history often resort to experimental forms in order to approximate trauma through the tracing of traumatic effects and their inscription in mind, body, and language” (Schwab 2006, 111). Innovating in *Legacy* the device of strict insulated narratives on the main characters, Chow mimics intergenerational transmission of trauma impact and their isolated emotional worlds. Disconnection between and betwixt narratives represents the transgenerational haunting of trauma and the destructive power of holocaust. Allowing intimate talks and interactions to arise within the originally sealed narratives, the novelist embodies her characters’ reintegrated self after Silk breaks silence about traumas in the Lu family, the Taiwanese American community and Taiwan. Chow’s innovative narrative ploy evidently enriches the narrative inventory of trauma fiction.

At the same time, Chow’s *Legacy* diversifies a canonized trauma discourse. In *Representing the Holocaust*, Dominick LaCapra criticizes a canonization of trauma literature, and suggests a non-canonized reading of canonized texts and an insistence in the importance of marginalized or entirely excluded texts (LaCapra 1994, 21-23). In the same vein, Anne Goarzin denounces classic trauma theory for being Eurocentric and failing to address the traumas in post/colonialism and to encompass “the otherness of the non-white and non-Western subject” (Goarzin 2011, 6). Depicting trauma impact suffered by a Taiwanese American family, Chow’s novel brings to the fore Taiwan’s post-WWII neocolonial context which leads to the Massacre, the ensuing 40-year-long White Terror Reign and the Taiwanese American diaspora. Silk’s survival narrative represents a unique story about the Taiwanese Americans – a minority within minority – which had been marginalized because of Cold War geopolitics and is striving to find voice about their diasporic experiences and boost visibility by the 2nd-generation Taiwanese American writers. With *Legacy*, Chow adds one more precious piece into the newly carved Taiwanese American literary mosaic.

Representing a unique Taiwanese American immigration hi/story and identity, Chow also breaks the Asian American literary canon and presumed monolithic Asian American identity. In “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American differences,” Lisa Lowe cautions against essentializing Asian American identity and rejects a masternarrative of Asian American literature.

But I want to suggest that essentializing Asian American identity and suppressing our differences – of national origin, generation, gender, party, class – risk particular dangers [...] to the extent that Chinese are presumed to be exemplary of all Asians, the importance of other Asian groups is ignored. (Lowe 1991, 30)

Thus, Lowe asserts that Asian American literature should celebrate diverse Asian groups and their peculiarities. To achieve this end, Asian American should de-canonicalize the Asian American literary metanarrative with themes about: (a) generational conflict between immigrant parents who feel a loss of the old culture and fear their children's full assimilation to the American culture, and (b) the filial relation between immigrant parents and their America-born children. Shirley Geok-lin Lim dubs this literary canon as the Gold Mountain tradition. In "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature," Lim argues that Asian American community has become ever changing and heterogeneous. The literary trope of the gold mountain which derives from the history about the early Chinese immigrants from Guangdong Province fleeing poverty and flocking to America during the gold rush has become problematic for the diverse groups within Asian America community. "Many Asian American critics will point out that even the choice of *Gum Sun* [Gold Mountain] as a central trope for Asian American literature is problematic. *Gum Sun* is a Chinese culture-specific figure" (Lim 1993, 151). Thus, Lim suggests that Asian American literature should shift its paradigm from one ethnic literature to a multiethnic product. With her characterization of Silk as a 228 survivor, Chow depicts a unique Taiwanese diaspora and socio-historically specific Taiwanese American immigration hi/story. Besides, her characterization of Silk is different from the immigrant parents canonized in the Gold Mountain tradition. Silk loves America and takes pride in her grand/daughter's integration into the new culture because her adopted country provides them what Lu had died for in Taiwan – freedom and democracy. Apparently, Chow's *Legacy* constitutes a deviation from the canonic Gold Mountain tradition of Asian American literature and illustrates diversity and differences within Asian American community.

Given the innovative narrative form and unique themes about trauma and Taiwanese American diaspora, it is possible to conclude that Chow has achieved multiple literary contributions in giving voice to the underrepresented Taiwanese American community, registering Taiwanese American identity, diversifying Asian American literature and enriching trauma narrative and twenty-first-century American diasporic literature.

References

- Balaev, Michelle.** 2014. "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered." In *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, ed. Michelle Balaev, 1-14. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Caruth, Cathy.** 1995. "Introduction." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, 1-12. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Caruth, Cathy.** 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Caruth, Cathy.** 2013. "Lying and History: Hannah Arendt, 'Truth and Politics' and 'Lying in Politics'." In *Literature in the Ashes of History*, ed. Cathy Caruth, 39-53. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chow, Jennifer J.** 2013. *The 228 Legacy*. LLC: Martin Sisters Publishing.
- Cresswell, Tim.** 2011. "Defining Place." In *Critical Encounters with Texts: Finding a Place to Stand*, ed. Margaret Himley and Anne Fitzsimmons, 127-136. Boston: Pearson.
- Gieryn, Thomas F.** 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (1): 463-496.
- Goarzin, Anne.** 2011. "Articulating Trauma." *Etudes irlandaises* 36 (1): 1-11. <http://etudisirlandaises.revues.org/2116>.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H.** 1995. "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies." *New Literary History* 26 (3): 537-563.
- LaCapra, Dominick.** 1994. *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lifton, Robert Jay.** 1995. "An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, 128-147. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin.** 1993. "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature." *New Literary History* 24 (1): 147-169.
- Lowe, Lisa.** 1991. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *Diaspora* 1 (1): 24-44.
- Luckhurst, Roger.** 2008. *The Trauma Question*. New York: Routledge.
- Middleton, David, and Derek Edwards.** 1990. "Introduction." In *Collective Remembering*, ed. David Middleton and Derek Edwards, 1-22. London: Sage.
- Schwab, Gabriele.** 2006. "Writing against Memory and Forgetting." *Literature and Medicine* 25 (1): 95-121.
- Whitehead, Anne.** 2004. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Winterton, Bradley.** 2013. "Book Review: The 228 Legacy." *Taipei Times*, Oct. 31. <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2013/10/31/2003575800>.
- Wu, Anna.** 2014. "An Interview with Jennifer J. Chow, Author of *Legacy*." Accessed July 18, 2019. <http://www.taiwaneseamerican.org/2014/05/interview-jennifer-j-chow/>.