The Politics of Memory, Diaspora, and Identity in Lillian Ng’s Silver Sister

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Abstract

Silver Sister, a biographical novel telling the unique life stories of the so-called “comb-ups,” represents China as a troubled homeland with turmoil, war, and painful memories. Silver, the protagonist of this novel, as a Chinese comb-up, has mixed and doubled identities as an illiterate Chinese female in diaspora. On one hand, she is imprinted with characteristics of Chineseness. On the other hand, the novel contests the notion of Chineseness by demonstrating the interactive relation between Silver’s personal remembrance and collective memory of common Chinese females at that time. In this essay, it is argued that this novel is more precisely about how traumatic memory transforms Chinese women’s diasporic identity in a global context, instead of only in a journey from China to Australia. Its meaning lies not only on the way of representing trauma and memory respectively, but the way how traumatic memories together with other diasporic memories function on influencing identity politics.

Keywords

trauma, Chineseness, memory, identity politics

Silver Sister as a Memory Text

Memory studies have confirmed that individual memory and collective memory are always contested, compromised, and conflicted. Moreover, memory that is related to traumatic experience of the past plays a significant part in identity formation. In this sense, identity is shaped and reshaped by memory’s ability to link the present with the past to re-stage and heal psychological wounds. Chinese-Australian diasporic literature is a reservoir for examining dynamic relations among memory, trauma, and identity due to particular interests of Chinese-Australian authors in depicting or recollecting significant historical events in China and Australia. Collective memory has been widely accepted as a way of viewing social identity, national identity, ideology, as well as citizenship. However, it is argued here that collective memory is not always the opposite of individual memory. Rather, these two interact and intertwine with each other in the process of diasporic identity formation. In literary interpretations, the act of remembering usually includes both, which means that it is represented that collective memory together
with individual memory can possibly determine the formation of identity. In *Diaspora and Memory*, a book edited by social scientist Vijay Agnew, contributor Anh Hua (2005) claims that,

> Memory analysis is significant to diaspora and feminist theorizing because it can reveal both the inner psychic states of postcolonial diaspora women and men—such as desire, fantasy, repression, denial, fear, trauma, identification, repulsion, and abjection as well as the social state of diasporic communities. (p. 199)

She also adds that memory can trigger “identity formation, the rewriting of home and belonging, nostalgia, mourning and a sense of loss frequently found in diaspora, exile and immigrant narratives” (Hua, 2005, p. 200). Inspired by Hua’s comments, the fact that diasporic literature touches upon memory and belonging is evidenced by the subjects it writes about: stories about migrants—diasporic routes and identity crises. Novels like *Silver Sister* are good examples of showing how memory works in narratives to represent traumatic pasts and a confused present.

As a memory text, *Silver Sister* demonstrates how individual memory differs with the collective memory of homeland history, and this exerts influence on Chinese women’s identity. The most conspicuous examples among Asian women’s writing concerning memory and history are Cultural Revolution stories; as Khoo (1999) indicates, these stories reflect a typical stereotype of “confessional” narratives (p. 164). Through confession, characters attempt to establish their identity in a new country emotionally, if not socially, and by criticizing the country that they left behind, they push their “oriental” way into the national literary circles in the adopted country. In America, Maxine Hong Kingston is acknowledged as a Chinese American woman writer who never experienced that historical period, but expresses doubts about the letters from relatives in China about that special historical period. There are also male authors such as Ha Jin, who portrays detailed personal stories about marriage in that period. Lillian Ng, from the same position as Hong Kingston, attempts to contest homeland national history such as the Second Sino-Japanese War and Cultural Revolution, by narrating her Ah Ma’s life stories in a fictionalized way. Yet, Ng’s perspective is micro rather than macro. Ng is interested in writing about the individual memory of Silver’s diasporic story, rather than using Silver’s story to represent Chinese history in a global vision.

Borrowing light from Halbwachs’s (1992) work, some individual memory contests collective memory, thus impeding or deconstructing the formation of nationalism. As is known to most Chinese people, memory about the Second Sino-Japanese war started by Japan has a huge influence on China-Japan relations, and the slaughter as well as torture of Chinese people has already become part of the collective memory. However, for comb-ups like Silver, who are rootless even within their own country, this knowledge does not construct a collective memory imprinted with a definite nationalism; rather, her memory of the war is personal, painful, and presents disagreement toward nationalism. This indifference toward nationalism also indicates how diaspora transforms individual identity. For example, as Silver travels to Australia and other places, she no longer regards China as her sole and only motherland. Her individual identity has been transformed too from a Comb-up to a modern woman.

(Dis)representing National History and War Memory

In *Silver Sister*, the “micro” perspective for viewing the national history of China primarily demonstrates this transformation. Different from the conventional “grand narrative” approach of telling national history, this book perceives Chinese history, especially war history from a diasporic viewpoint.

History is vague and inaccurate, and it serves as the background for viewing how remembering the past constructs Silver’s present identity as a new Australian citizen. Somehow, unlike other diasporic novels, this book does not perceive China as the entity of a homeland, but only a point where diaspora begins. Silver does not want to enhance her identity as a Chinese, but she is keener on reinforcing her status as a woman in diaspora. Nationalism is silenced, and the story is more involved with life limited to family units. For example, with her other “sisters,” Silver is pushed to go to Singapore for more job opportunities, though this means leaving the Chinese family she is working for and her only living brother. Migration begins when she decides to go overseas for survival. Ng picks up the daily life of diversified Chinese families living during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore to manifest the diversity of “Chineseness” and how the Chinese diaspora has been shaped by war. These elements act as preparation for further plot progression and form a space for growing personal memory. In this light, as Akhtar Rizwan (2013) suggests, “the connection between individual (personal) and collective (public) memory persists for its respective ends and objectives, and as individuals and groups straddle upon each other’s memory, they create a variegated tapestry of the dialectic of power” (p. 65).

Another representation of this dynamics is Silver’s memory of different wars in different periods. Ng’s narratives of war focus on how war influences Silver’s diasporic routes, rather than how Silver’s sufferings criticize the cruelty of war. As significant historical events in each country—namely, China, Singapore, and Australia—wars are understated in this novel to highlight Silver’s individuality.

The war begins at the same time Silver begins to menstruate, as she remembers:

> But the year I started to menstruate, a different kind of disaster struck—war. It was a new threat to us in secluded Lung Sun,
where news from other parts of China filtered through by word of mouth as gossip, announcement, propaganda or hearsay. (p. 16)

The juxtaposition of the start of her menstruation and the start of the war symbolizes the fatal destiny of Silver and her future diaspora. In Silver Sister, two major wars are depicted: The Second Sino-Japanese War in China and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, covering 1931 to 1945, lasting for almost 15 years. The beginning of war is the beginning of bereavement, insecurity, dispersal, isolation, and melancholy. Each wartime experience provokes Silver’s growing up to another stage of life.

During her stay in Singapore, she encounters her second war: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Silver’s memories of the wars are feminine and subjective. National history of war is closely related to men, fighting and death, but Silver’s memory elaborates on how women hide from possible rape and torture and how they manage to support each other, thus making war history a mirror of how Silver as a woman manages to turn into a well-off migrant in Australia:

We worried about the violation of our bodies by the enemy. Time eluded us, we creatures of the night, of darkness, leading a clandestine life. Many months slipped by before we women were gradually persuaded to come out of hiding. (p. 205)

We women came out in our loose clothes, rubbed the soot from our faces, and started to compare our tales of woe. The old inched their way out on their walking sticks smiling toothlessly. Grandmothers with small bound feet hobbled unsteadily, leaning on their grandchildren for support. The barber appeared with his harmonica and I joined his wife and daughters, dancing in the street and singing a local song. (p. 213)

The use of “we” indicates the clear inclination to make this novel a feminist Bildungsroman. Silver together with her women counterparts survive different wars. She becomes a person with a mature mind and a more stable financial status. From a Chinese village to Singapore, Silver utilizes war memory to resist the concept of “homeland.”

Resisting Collective Memory in Homeland

The word “China” appears no more than twice in this book, suggesting resistance to “nationalism” and the influence of collective memory on individuals. This resistance toward “nationalism” and the concept of “home,” as well as to stability itself, is contrasted with frequent depictions of diasporic life. For Silver, life in diaspora has two major concerns: to support herself and support the one she loves. In the first two chapters, she feels relief at escaping from her past, which was filled with poverty, war, and bereavement, while in the third and fourth papers, the past haunts her and makes a constant appearance in her present life, delicately transforming memory and identity. There are several points in the novel where Silver expresses her feelings about leaving, journeys, and “new life”:

The prospect of having a place to stay, a meal and money, filled me with happiness and relief. I was so excited, I didn’t even bother to ask Lee Sao what a “sisterhood” involved. Instead, I burst out with many other questions: when do we leave? How do we get there? Do we go on foot (like the refugees) and how long does it take? Do I meet the girls today? Do we start our journey tonight? Or tomorrow? (p. 23)

I was glad I had left Canton. I felt liberated from the barriers of high walls and hedges. My world had expanded to include sea, sky, hills. A new land and city for me to explore. (p. 131)

I was sorry to leave Singapore, Dawn and Wah, my sisters and our friends. Singapore has been my home for thirty-two years; I’d lived here through war and peace, experienced the changes as it moved from a colony to an independent republic. (p. 251)

And she begins to be aware that she has been in diaspora and her past is a solid past now. She reflects while visiting her previous home in Lung Sun:

My home was just a shell, filled in by other people from another time, another kind of smell prevailed; of earth, manure, and antiseptic. The family Wong Lao and Wong Ma belonged to a past, which only I knew because I had lived in it, shared the sufferings and the giggles of my sisters—real blood sisters. They were all ghosts now, invisible, perhaps they came to haunt this hut at night, their birth place, their birth right. (p. 234)

The above quotations indicate that Silver, after a long-time departed from her ancestral home, has gradually lost the sense of home and belonging to a fixed place. Silver remembers China from the 1910s to about the 1970s, covering dramatic social changes and moving between Chinese village, Canton, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Ng, though not directly addressing the perception of a collective memory of nationalism and national history in these places, by elaborating on how Silver’s diasporic memory fills in the gaps of connecting these places and histories. In China, Silver lives with a poor family with 13 children. One example is that they, “used the fine sand to rub the dirt and grime off the clothes, and the grease off [their] bodies” (p. 8). In Canton, she becomes a domestic nanny and is quite content with her life. She recalls “in those days in Canton, as long as one was willing and not fussy, jobs were readily available” (p. 55) In Hong Kong, her world starts to “include sea, sky, hills” and she claims “a new land and city for me to explore” (p. 131). In addition, in Australia, she lives in a comfortable apartment and is financially well off. Her survival during war and success as a woman migrant are highlighted all through the book.
The way Ng presents Silver’s success is conventional because of her emphasis on individual memory of diaspora and her special concern with how feminist memory works in transforming a woman’s life. However, compared with other diasporic literary works that focus on the construction of collective memory of the national past by establishing an “imagined community” proposed by Benedict Anderson (2006), *Silver Sister* contrasts collective memory of homeland national histories with unique individual diasporic memory and attempts to deconstruct identities based on nationalism or a unified definition of Chineseness. Just as Ien Ang claims, the first feature of “Chineseness” in diaspora is “ambivalence,” and she frequently applies this noun to talk about the awkward situation faced by Chinese in diaspora. To Ang, to be Chinese is an ambivalent feeling and ambivalence exists along with diasporic identity. *Silver Sister* as a diasporic novel and a feminist Bildungsroman deconstructs conventional identity politics based on the consensus on national history and demonstrates the stability of belonging during diaspora.

**From Hunted Memory to Diasporic Identity**

Theoretically, the relations between memory and identity have been vigorously discussed. In addition, many literary scholars of diasporic literature contribute to this question by responding to miscellaneous literary works, such as *Silver Sister*. This novel is engaged in issues of identity by mixing historical narrative with personal narrative. Ng utilizes the representation of diasporic routes to signpost of each transformation Silver experiences. By presenting these transformations to readers, Ng also contests the notion of Chinese cultural identity.

In diaspora, people are involved in traveling, dispersals, and even trauma, through which their identity is not fixed, or even real. Klein cites James Clifford: “Travellers on diasporic journeys are setting down elsewhere and creating their sense of identity in a homeland that exists mainly in memory” (Clifford, 1997, p. 18). *Silver Sister* brings in at least two ways of understanding identity of Chinese women in diaspora: the identity of individuals in relation to memory of the past and the identity of Silver as a member of Chinese diasporic community.

In this novel, two individuals’ identity issues are mainly addressed: Silver Sister’s identity and Kim’s identity. Kim’s identity is blurred because of her relation to Silver and Silver’s identity is decided on the dynamics of present and past. Silver used to babysit Kim when she was little and Kim asks Silver to continue to babysit her kids after her divorce. Silver narrates her past by engaging with the present, and every section of the four parts has a separate dialogue between Silver and Kim, indicating a clear division between what happened before and what is going on now. In the meantime, these discourses with Kim link the two women’s identity, indicating the indispensable relations between Silver, who carries both personal memory and collective memory of her homeland, and Kim, who was brought up with a Western education and imprinted with Western culture, has interests and doubts about the “imagined homeland.” When Silver mentions Kuan Yin with respect, Kim “dismisses it with cynicism” (Ng, 1994, p. 253): “just a gimmick, a camera trick to con people who are superstitious . . .” (Ng, 1994, p. 253). However, for Silver, it is “good, to give alms to the poor, to do good deeds, not to kill and so on. . . .” (Ng, 1994, p. 253). Kuan Yin, to Silver, is the Goddess who brings her a new direction when she vows to Kuan Yin to become a “comb-up.” However, to Kim, this belongs to Asian superstition.

Besides the dialogues incorporated in each chapter, Ng formulates the “doubleness” of Chinese diasporic identities. Silver represents the connection to the past, and her identity is determined by the constant dynamic reference to her pasts during forced diaspora, while Kim’s identity is determined by the community or family bonds to Silver, who reminds Kim of her family history as well as bringing her rich memories of Chinese culture and history. Chinese diasporic identities are interwoven within community and generational memories; thus, Silver’s identity complicates Kim’s identity while Kim’s daily interactions with Silver help her become a more authentic Australian.

In the chapter titled “Village,” several examples demonstrate this identity development by comparing the attitude of Silver at a certain point of present toward Chinese culture in the past. Talking about names, Silver recalls: “I could not keep count of my brothers and sisters, nor did I know their names . . . I was number eight and hence my name was Ah Pah, meaning eight” (p. 5). She continues, “But now I’m known as Silver Sister, a name given to me when I started work at the House of Tang in Canton, when I was fifteen or sixteen” (p. 5). This suggests a further development of Silver’s identity for, in the next part of the book, Silver Sister for the first time has a sense of belonging. When the war strikes, Silver has to leave her home for a place to support herself. The experiences of dispersal give her the chance to meet more people, have a greater income, and reckon on her own identity as an independent woman.

In “Canton,” contrasts between memory and reality are made again to suggest a fluid and dynamic identity formation. By recalling how Uncle Fatty Lee slaughtered a fish to make fish soup, Silver criticizes Chinese people as a “cruel race” because “we prefer live animals to slaughter for fresh meat; we would never, if given a choice, purchase frozen or thawed meat” (Ng, 1994, p. 101). Ng’s conscious insertion of Chinese cultural customs and food culture helps to frame Silver’s “doubled” identity. On one hand, she believes in Chinese medicine and Kuan Yin, on the other hand, she disdains many cultural customs she used to take for granted such as eating fresh fish. The tone of criticism of China suggests Silver’s identity has become inclined to that of a
Westernized and “liberal” woman after coming to Australia. Silver represents those who live in between two cultures and two modes of memories. Silver’s constant revising of her past suggests how memory makes identity in a new environment. Memory is revised and identity is revised alongside. Traumatic memory may bring homesick or resentment, but the fact that memory is in change suggests identity in diaspora is changeable, complicated, and dynamic.

The parts entitled “Hong Kong” and “Singapore” further describe Silver’s life in diaspora, but it is in the “Singapore” section that her identity is associated with Kim’s family history. In Singapore, Silver has to meet lots of challenges including unfamiliar cultures and languages. Her friend Kam has to interpret everything for her to get a job; even Mandarin sounds “just like a foreign language” (p. 241). Silver finds a job as a domestic servant for Dawn’s family, the mother of Kim. There is a considerable amount of description of the family life of Dawn, Nonya, and Baba, which constitutes very vague memories for Kim. Both Silver and Kim understand the feeling of dispersal and loneliness, so that when Kim is pregnant, alone in Sydney, Silver decides to help Kim by flying to Australia. Unlike Silver trying to criticize the negative aspects of Chinese culture and recollect painful memory, Kim formulates identity through a different process. Her Chinese identity is constructed by bits and pieces of stories about China and Chinese culture. She constantly compares Australia with China socially and culturally. She fills in the gaps by imagining a China opposite to the way she lives now. This imagination finally leads her to many travels back to China and many dialogues between Silver and Kim are about the changes in China, the one in Silver’s past and the one in Kim’s present.

According to postmodernists and cultural critics, identities are fluid, unstable, and always under reformation. Hall reminds us that cultural identity has become a matter of “becoming as well as being” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall, 1990, p. 225). In other words, Hall’s notion of diasporic identity is one based on “difference” and “hybridity.” It is “defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity . . . hybridity” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall, 1990, p. 235). Silver’s life in Australia echoes Hall’s conception and consolidates her identity as a woman living in between different cultures and memories. The migration to a different world drives her to improve her appearance, intelligence, and life philosophy.

### A Happy Australian?

Australia, to Silver, is very Western and “differed greatly from the Chinese, their customs, ideas, myths, beliefs” (p. 269). Australia symbolizes “civilization” and “wealth.” To fit into the new society with huge differences from anywhere she has been before, Silver decides to change her look by having her long hair cut and styled. “I wanted to wave my hair like the women in Sydney, to blend in with their style, so as not to embarrass Kim by looking strange or out-of-space with a long pigtail” (p. 249). The act of shedding her past by having her hair styled into short, curly, Western-style hair is painful because she considers her hair “an extension of [her] self, mark of [her] status” (p. 249), since her hair symbolizes her identity as a “comb-up.” She cuts her hair and begins to blur her Chineseness to bond with Kim more closely and to be accepted by the Western society. Australia, like Singapore, is multicultural and people speak different languages. Silver’s identity experiences another transformation through living in between her present Western culture and her past’s mixed cultures.

Unlike the descriptions of any other journey Ng writes, here language with stronger emotions is applied to demonstrate the dramatic psychological change in Silver: “I felt like a caterpillar moulting, shedding my past, and stepping out of my shell into another life” (Ng, 1994, p. 251). This psychological change is added on top of the previous experiences of dispersal and setting off to another place, which to Silver Sister is already a habitual practice of identity transformation. This time, the change will be more dramatic. However, the past comes back to both Silver and Kim, signifying the omnipresence of memory and its power to shape one’s existence against our own efforts or desires.

Silver unconsciously reminds herself of her mother’s labor and miscarriages when she accompanies Kim in her labor, and similarly the topic of losing weight refreshes her memory about the beggars along the road in her village. The memory alerts her to pay attention to something more than basic living, because now she is speaking from a position that is qualified to reconsider her past. She gradually transforms from an illiterate woman into a woman who asks for more intellectual and language skills for self-development to suit her needs when living in a more “civilised” country. For example, Silver once describes the modern way of farming in Australia and begins comparing the Australian way and the old Chinese way:

> It fascinates me to watch the shearing of sheep and Australian methods of farming: the use of machinery, tractors, piped irrigation, greenhouses of controlled temperatures and large trucks with cutters for harvesting and collecting the produce, with only one man in command at the wheel, not an animal in sight to do the plowing. (pp. 11–12)

The diction is vivid and specific because the narrator is using many concrete words and the sentences are lengthy as well as complicated. Although the concepts and thoughts belong to Silver, the voice is uttered by Ng. Paul John Eakin argues that “the self and language are mutually implicated in a single interdependent system of symbolic behaviour” (Ng, 1994, p. 192). As language plays a role in demonstrating the
self, Ng writes herself into the book by mingling simple sentences with complicated ones to achieve an effect of doubleness.

As mentioned before, Kim’s identity is consolidated by her bond to Silver who helps her take care of her new-born baby. The role of Kim opens discussion on various Chinese cultural identities in diaspora. As Chiang summarizes, diaspora is a collective experience, in which the dispersed manage to develop and sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication, such as language, media, or rituals. Although many analyses of Silver Sister, including Chiang’s article, suggest that this is a book on the unique life of Silver, the bond between Silver and Kim suggests a possibility for Chinese women to establish a collective identity outside their homeland. In addition, the “sisterhood” formed by Silver and her sisters is also a symbol for thinking about a paradigm of Chinese community in diaspora. However, Ng’s intention clearly does not focus on the community bonds of Chinese women. What she makes an effort to do is to show the possibilities of different Chinese cultural identity. Silver and Kim are two connected but divergent Chinese women. In this novel, being Chinese is complicated by the fact that Chineseness itself is a hybrid, contested term. As suggested by Hall, “ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak” (Hall, 1991, p. 34). By demonstrating life experiences in different areas of China and countries with diversified cultures, Ng, intentionally or unintentionally, deconstructs what is Chinese and who can be Chinese. When Silver came to Lee Sao for more information about the war, Lee Sao replied,

Who knows? The Kuomingtang and the Communists are Chinese, the Manuchurians look Chinese and speak Chinese and they are all fighting among themselves. The Japanese are the short myopic people but also can be easily mistaken for Chinese.

It’s very hard to tell them apart. (pp. 17–18)

Starting from the war between “Chinese and Chinese,” Ng deconstructs the notion of Chineseness in this novel and suggests that ethnicity is also a term undergoing its formation in certain social cultural and emotional circumstances. In this biographical fiction, representations of diasporic experience are split into two parts: the individual memory of Silver and the collective memory of other Chinese people with diversified backgrounds: her other sisters bounded by “sisterhood,” her brother, Kim’s family and many minimal characters from Vietnam such as May Ly who are called “the boat people.” These characters form a grand picture of the diasporic experience of those of Chinese descent. Although they are all Chinese, Silver has plenty of cultural memories to enhance her Chineseness but Kim has little knowledge about China and Chinese culture, contrasting each other with different opinions on abortion, Chinese medicine, and food culture. Ah Sai represents Hong Kong culture, which is presented as a gray zone of transition between China and the West, while the families of Kim, living in South East Asia for generations, are another segment of “Chineseness.”

Thus, what is constructed as “Chineseness” is at stake, be it in or outside China. That brings the concept of “in-betweenness” to discussions of the novel, given the fact that Silver Sister is about Silver’s cross-boundary journeys in diaspora and goes beyond temporal and geographical space by jumping between memory and the present. I agree with the use of Homi Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” to explain the in-betweenness of the Chinese diaspora and their new places. Silver remains ambivalent, pushed, and pulled as she is between both poles: “[i]n-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present” and future (Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p. 219). Their experiences of “unhome- liness”—Bhabha’s term to describe the “estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world”—are defined by trans-border memories about trauma, chaotic historical moments, and rootlessness (p. 9). This novel creates Silver as a protagonist experiencing “unhomeliness.” With other characters with routes from mainland China, South East Asia, America, to Australia, Silver travels across various cultures and her final settlement does not give her a sense of belonging, so she is always in diaspora spiritually.

In addition, each of places depicted in this novel also indicate typical perceptions of different Chinese cultural identities. Villagers have an unclear perception of who is Chinese and why Chinese are at war with other groups of Chinese. Canton, as a more developed area, has offered more job opportunities and serves as the bridge between poverty and well-being. Hong Kong, as the colony of Britain, is distinctive from inland China, demonstrating a strong hybridity of East and West, a door to Western culture. Singapore, with its large proportion of Chinese population, and mixed ethnicities, pushes the question of Chineseness further away from the distinction between Northerners and Southerners in mainland China to whether a hybrid family with some Chinese descent can be counted as Chinese or whether indeed Chineseness is essentially hybrid. The geographical arrangement of Silver Sister shows the diminishing outline of Chineseness from very strong forms to blurred boundaries.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, Silver Sister merges three features of diasporic literature—trauma, memory, and identity, into one biographical novel, and offers a distinctive way of thinking about Chinese diaspora by displaying the significance of memory and trauma. From the past to the present, memories have naturally changed Silver’s identity and revisiting her past brings her new thoughts on it. However, her happy life in the present still does not validate her identity as a citizen of Australia. On the contrary, she is always emotionally longing for her homeland with all her personal memories of homeland.
culture. A text written on a now remote China and Australia in the 1970s can bring new meanings to the present.

As Chiang summarizes, identity is “mediated by different representations, language practice, memory, fantasy, and so on” (p. 39). Silver Sister covers Chinese diasporas across various countries, through the narration of traumatic individual memories, in which the main character’s “Chineseness” is constructed and reinforced by repeatedly referring to the past, and relies on cultural memories of such things as festivals, food cultures, and medical knowledge. However, as an illiterate woman with fragmentary English-speaking skills, she is rootless in Australia at first, and begins to recall her repressed memory, unleashing the pressure of trauma and constructing a “storied” memory of significant “Chinese history.” Ng utilizes double voices and double perspectives on China’s past, especially the past in the 1910s to the 1970s to help Silver find her individualized identity. Silver finally feels relieved from the trauma and remains Chinese inside her heart and a mixed-self outside because of migration. Memory, trauma, and identity are three features thus of both Silver and the fiction itself, whose conclusion is that only constructing a community in the new place can help one temporarily escape from “emotional diaspora.”

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