



**MEMORY, IDENTITY AND UNSPEAKABILITY IN TRAUMA NARRATION OF
SELECTED NOVELS BY TASH AW AND TAN TWAN ENG**

By

HOU XIA

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2023

FBMK 2023 15

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The literary canon of trauma novels has focused chiefly on the characters' psychological, cultural, and postcolonial contexts. However, more research is required on narrative ways to represent traumatic memory, identity, and reconstruction of identity through modes of narration. Contemporary Chinese Malaysian novelists Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng portray the psychological states of minority communities, especially Chinese Malaysians, during the colonial period from the 1940s to the 1960s. Past research on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works has mainly focused on aspects such as transculturation, colonial concepts of identity, and aestheticism of memory. Herein, my thesis attempts to fill in the gap by examining how trauma is represented by narrative techniques in selected texts and how narration plays an integral role in negotiating trauma. My central argument is that narration plays a crucial role in representing and healing trauma in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's novels. Cathy Caruth's conception of trauma indicates the symptoms as belatedness and repetition of intrusive memories. Toolan's time and space are conducive to representing such nonlinear and circular sequences caused by trauma. Cathy Caruth's expression of "blow to the mind" results in a dissociative identity that is embodied by extreme long-lasting emotions, such as numbness, rage, depression, loss, and helplessness. Toolan's internal focalization and Hogan's affective narration are useful to show the change of emotions reflecting the state of identity. Cathy Caruth's "collapse of understanding" leading to further research on Anne Whitehead's "absence of narrative capacity" will be applied as a way to understand protagonists' unspeakability in the selected novels. Anne Whitehead's conversion of traumatic memory into narrative memory represents the process of recovery from trauma. Astril Eril's modes of whole-text narration will be used to analyze the specific healing process. I analyze Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), *Map of the Invisible World* (2009) and Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007) and *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012) to show how these works demonstrate trauma symptoms through narrative arrangement

and healing of trauma through modes of narration. My thesis shows that a special arrangement of narration is a way of representing the symptoms of trauma. First, discontinuous and circular temporal-spatial structures show the belatedness and repetition of trauma experienced by protagonists in the selected novels. Second, the internal-focalized uneven negative emotions reflect the characters' dissociative identity. My thesis finally points out that the shift from negative emotion to positive emotion proves a Yin-Yang concept of the healing process of trauma, which is the result of the success of telling through modes of narration both of whole text and sub-narrative. However, the failure to tell may result in a constant struggle in the torture of trauma. To conclude this study, I reiterate that narration plays a crucial role in trauma. At the same time, Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng reach a consensus on articulating relationships between trauma and narration.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MEMORI, IDENTITI DAN KETIDAKBOLEHAN BERBICARA DALAM
PENCERITAAN TRAUMA NOVEL TERPILIH OLEH TASH AW DAN TAN
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Kanon sastera novel trauma terutamanya tertumpu pada konteks psikologi, budaya, dan poskolonial watak. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian yang lebih mendalam mengenai cara naratif untuk menunjukkan memori trauma dan identiti dan rekonstruksi identiti melalui mod naratif masih belum mencukupi. Penulis novel China Malaysia kontemporari, Tash Aw dan Tan Twan Eng mencerminkan keadaan psikologi komuniti minoriti, terutamanya bangsa Cina di Malaysia semasa zaman kolonial dari tahun 1940-an hingga 1960-an. Kajian-kajian lepas terhadap karya-karya Tash Aw dan Tan Twan Eng kebanyakannya tertumpu pada aspek seperti transkulturasi, konsep identiti kolonial dan estetika memori. Dalam tesis ini, percubaan untuk mengisi keelompokan dalam kajian-kajian lepas dengan mengkaji bagaimana trauma digambarkan oleh teknik naratif dalam teks terpilih dan bagaimana naratif memainkan peranan penting dalam membicarakan trauma mereka. Hujah utama saya adalah naratif memainkan peranan penting dalam mencerminkan dan menyembuhkan trauma dalam novel Tash Aw dan Tan Twan Eng. Konsepsi trauma Cathy Caruth menunjukkan simptom sebagai kelewatan dan pengulangan memori yang mengganggu. Waktu dan ruang Toolan sesuai digambarkan sebagai susunan tidak linear dan susunan bulatan yang disebabkan oleh trauma. Ungkapan "blow to the mind" oleh Cathy Caruth menghasilkan identiti yang disosiatif yang dicorakkan oleh emosi yang berpanjangan seperti kekejangan, kemarahan, kemurungan, kehilangan dan ketidakberdayaan. Fokalisasi dalaman Toolan dan penceritaan afektif Hogan berguna untuk menunjukkan perubahan emosi yang mencerminkan keadaan identiti. Konsep "collapse of understanding" oleh Cathy Caruth yang membawa kepada penyelidikan lanjut "absence of narrative capacity" oleh Anne Whitehead akan digunakan sebagai cara untuk memahami kata kata yang tidak dapat dilafazkan oleh protagonis dalam novel terpilih. Penukaran memori trauma Anne Whitehead kepada memori naratif menunjukkan proses pemulihan dari trauma. Mod naratif seluruh teks Astril Ertl

akan digunakan untuk menganalisis proses penyembuhan yang khusus. Saya menganalisis *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), *Map of the Invisible World* (2009) oleh Tash Aw dan *The Gift of Rain* (2007), *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012) oleh Tan Twan Eng untuk menunjukkan bagaimana karya-karya ini menunjukkan simptom trauma melalui susunan naratif dan penyembuhan trauma melalui mod naratif. Tesis saya menunjukkan bahawa susunan khas naratif adalah cara untuk mewakili simptom trauma. Pertama, struktur temporal-ruang yang tidak berterusan dan bulat menunjukkan kelewatan dan pengulangan trauma yang dialami oleh watak utama dalam novel terpilih. Kedua, emosi negatif tidak sekata yang ditumpukan secara mendalam mencerminkan identiti disosiatif watak-watak. Tesis saya akhirnya menunjukkan bahawa peralihan dari emosi negatif kepada emosi positif membuktikan konsep penyembuhan trauma Yin-Yang yang merupakan hasil bercerita melalui mod naratif sama ada seluruh teks mahupun sub-naratif. Walau bagaimanapun, kegagalan untuk bercerita mungkin mengakibatkan penyiksaan trauma yang berterusan. Untuk mengakhiri kajian ini, saya menegaskan bahawa naratif memainkan peranan penting dalam trauma dan pada masa yang sama, Tash Aw dan Tan Twan Eng mencapai persetujuan mengenai perhubungan antara trauma dan naratif.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All Glory and Praise are to my homeland China for the prosperity and support that this thesis is completed.

Standing on the threshold of graduation, looking back on the past, I find everything to be vivid and filled with emotion. I could not help but wet my eyes. Four years of a difficult doctoral career was full of laughter and joy. Looking back on my four years as a student, I want to thank many people who have helped me.

First, I would like to express my most profound respect to my beloved supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr. Noritah binti Omar, for her intelligence and love in guiding and inspiring me throughout the journey of my PhD. She has brought me into the door of research and guided me to complete the transformation from a layperson to an explorer. She gave me not only the gradual cultivation of knowledge and ability but also care and love in life. More importantly, she taught me how to behave and do things through words and deeds, which benefited me for life. She is indeed a true scholar and literary critic.

I am indebted to my supervisory committee members, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hardev Kaur and Dr. Ida Baizura binti Bahar. They lit the bright light for me and guided me towards my own future. Under their meticulous guidance, I have successfully completed my thesis. They are indeed examples of true scholars.

I sincerely thank Universiti Putra Malaysia for supporting my studies. I would also like to thank the academic and administrative staff of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication for their facilitation, which made the process of writing more smooth and the completion possible.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to my family, especially to my father Hou Jiaxiu, my mother Yang Aihua, my husband Guo Ziqin, and my son Guo Zheli. Their unfailing love, patience, and understanding give me the warmth and courage to persist in all kinds of circumstances.

Years and difficulties have sharpened me in the journey of writing this thesis; however, they are also the power of being optimistic and enterprising. Thank you.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. (Laub 63)

1.1 Background of the Study

Trauma in Greek means wound of the body, which is a term of pathobiology. However, in contemporary society, trauma, except for bodily hurt, often refers to the psychological “collapse of understanding” (Whitehead 5). Victims comprise “an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation” (Ibid 3); such events may vary from loss of job, change of living or working environment, conflicts with others, bad social relationships, divorce, to natural or social disasters such as earthquake, fire, wars, and holocausts. Trauma is not new; it can be traced back to ancient societies because human beings have not always lived in peace and harmony. If individuals cannot cope with an overwhelming stimulus, they will produce serious, painful feelings, which may damage personal psychology. According to Caruth, such experiences are responses to traumas or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) (DSM-III)¹, which include “shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis” (“Explorations” 3). These terms originated from research on Vietnam War victims, who often re-experienced traumatic events in the following ways: unconscious and representative recalling nightmares, feelings or psychological reactions of hatred, anger, or even physical symptoms such as headache and numbing. They will try to avoid the issues, feelings, or speaking about personal traumas and even related activities, places, and people. Some of them cannot remember what happened after the traumatic events in the numbing state. The victims are reluctant to participate in social activities because they are in isolation, both physically and emotionally. They cannot show love to others and often feel hopeless. Some victims even have extreme physical reactions, such as sleeping problems, irritation, lack of vocalization, concentration, or overactive frightening. Victims will maintain shock refuge and numbness, which is an unconscious experience.

¹ The American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) worked together to diagnose and classify psychiatric disorders and developed the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (DSM). DSM-III was published in 1980, and its classification framework has been revised a lot from the previous two editions. For example, the strict classification of psychosis and neurosis was canceled, the diagnosis category of neurasthenia was canceled, the neurosis was dismembered, and each diagnosis was dismembered. All have set a clear diagnostic standard, which significantly improves the consistency of the diagnosis. In addition, the concept of multi-axis diagnosis is also proposed (but still based on the clinical axis).

Sigmund Freud² is the forerunner of research on such traumatic neuroses. He created the term “compulsion to repeat”³(21) to define the repetition of traumatic situations in dreams, flashbacks, and recalling, which is in a twisted form or disguised memories. If victims are always in such a retreat process, the past is torturing them continually, so the past becomes the present and they are interwoven together. This “fixation” causes traumatic neurosis. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud states that this perpetual recurrence of the same thing causes us no astonishment when it relates to active behavior on the part of the person concerned and when we can discern in him the essential character-trait which always remains the same and which is compelled to find expression in a repetition of the same experiences (21-22). Freud and his followers aimed to spur victims to transfer these unconscious memories into narratives. In this way, these underlying traumatic experiences can be absorbed in consciousness to comprehend them and finally remove symptoms.

Since the 1990s, the research focusing on trauma has shifted from psychological to cultural and racial. Psychologists, literary critics, and historians began to investigate the holocaust in World War II, Vietnam War soldiers, racial discrimination and the 911 Event and so on. Psychologist Caroline Garland⁴ explored traumatic symptoms based on victims’ past experiences, especially childhood and twisted personalities. Judith Lewis Herman⁵ believed that trauma is to repair the social order and heal PTSD. Cathy Caruth pointed out the deference of reaction or “latency” (“Explorations” 7) toward trauma because

² Sigmund Freud (May 6, 1856-September 23, 1939) was an Austrian psychiatrist, psychologist, and founder of the psychoanalytic school. He created a new field of subconscious research, promoted the development of dynamic psychology, personality psychology and abnormal psychology, laid a new foundation for the modern medical model, and provided an essential theoretical pillar for the Western humanities in the 20th century.

³ Repetition compulsion was one of Freud’s cardinal psychoanalytic concepts, explaining the unconscious tendency to repeat a life pattern, and particularly to repeat traumatic experiences. The compulsion to repeat overrides the pleasure principle by forcing the repressed material into the “eternal return of the repressed” (Cybulska 6).

⁴ Caroline Garland published *Trauma Healing* in 1998. It appears that with the increase of traumatic events, the inner world operation and state of the injured needed to be understood. This book is an important work assembled by many scholars at the “Taffisdaq Medical Center”, which is the center of psychoanalytic therapy training, after reflecting on and discussing many years of practical work experience in trauma therapy. In addition to discussing the inner spiritual development of the injured, it also shares clinical psychological dynamic assessment practices, pre-treatment consultation and interviews, and the use of psychoanalytic concepts to share the intervention issues and cases of the injured; the topics involved include trauma and grief, the mental operation of the victimized client, dreams, trauma’s identification process, the impact of external injuries on the inner world, and trauma therapy groups.

⁵ Judith Herman is a top trauma and abuse expert in the United States, a clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and a training director for the Violence Victims Course at Cambridge Hospital. She is also the founder of the Women’s Mental Health Alliance in Massachusetts. Herman was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award of the International Society for Trauma and Stress Research in 1996. *Trauma and Recovery*, written by her, has a clear definition of the source and connotation of psychological trauma: the victim is helpless under overwhelming power, thus forming a feeling of intense fear, loss of control, and threat of destruction. This overwhelming force can be natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons, wars, sexual assaults, and other atrocities. In addition to the direct harm suffered by trauma victims, society is often another source of stress.

humans seldom encounter the impact of trauma at the very moment. However, it will harm victims in the aftermath of catastrophic events. She says:

The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. (Ibid 8)

These theories have been adopted by literature, not only in literary works but also in criticisms. Many famous literary works record or create traumatic experiences, as noted by Degloma:

From the time of Homer's ancient story of the battle between the Trojans and the Greeks, and the times of the *Bible* and Shakespeare, military personnel have been confronted by the trauma of war. Recent books and movies have highlighted the impact of war trauma on veterans of the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War. (Degloma 115)

In ancient Greek mythology, Oedipus' knowing that he married his mother and killed his father is a psychological torture. British novelist Ian McEwan's *Saturday* portrays the destructive impact on the human mind of the 9.11 Event and the War in Iraq. Japanese writer Komatsu Sakyo's *Nihonchinbotsu* describes that earthquakes and tsunamis have caused both physical pain and mental attacks to victims. A common theme in Malaysian novels in English written about the early and middle of the 20th century is that of the British and Japanese occupation and violent riots of Malaya and neighboring countries. The contemporary Chinese-Malaysian writers Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng belong to the same peer group, with almost the same age and similar educational and vocational backgrounds. They studied law on campus and became lawyers after graduation. Years later, they dropped their prominent careers and turned to the pen. Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), and *Map of the Invisible World* (2009) and Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007), and *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012) are introspective novels reflecting internal memories and cosmopolitan novels which maintain broader visions of different countries, such as Malaya, China, Indonesia, Britain and Japan. These novels share similarities in their narratives, language, settings, characters, memories, themes, and trauma. They not only occupy the history of oppression and riots in Malaya and Indonesia in the 1940s and 1950s but also explore more profound psychological disorder or trauma in the central characters, especially teenagers' minds, such as trauma of war, colonial oppression, the death of a loved one, and even domestic violence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Throughout my study, I have identified three main research problems. While ways of representing traumatic memories in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works remain a pivotal research area, they are rarely approached using a temporal-spatial narrative perspective. Some of the most current and dominant approaches to memory in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works include the

duality of postcolonialism, the aestheticism of memory (Poon, 2016) and the non-materialistic ecological memory of the world (Fincham, 2014). Poon argues that memory is embodied with a political and aesthetic nature, which runs the risk of making memory an artistic object so precious and rare as to counter the more avowedly political function of memory— that of bearing witness to history. According to Fincham, although the protagonists' memories are in the context of post-colonialism and violence, the memories of gardens are endowed with a non-materialistic ecological vision of the world. They are able to attain creative freedom with an artistic and emotional embodiment, which is the coexistence of "felt experience" with "the deliberate creation of fictive worlds". There are paradoxes between memory and promise. Memory and mourning are complimentary rather than conflicting. Memory and mourning connect, illustrating the paradox to which Derrida states that memory is as much about the future as it is about the past. The research problems are stated in detail as follows.

Firstly, past studies highlight mainly the issues surrounding the aesthetic, political and ecocritical natures of memory in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's novels. However, the arrangement of discourse time and space on representing features of traumatic memories has not received sufficient attention. Thus far, only Poon and Fincham have analyzed Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works using postcolonial theory and ecocriticism to ground their discussions of the nature of memory. Poon discusses that in the narrative present, readers recede farther back in time as the protagonists share with other characters their traumatic experiences. Other characters encountering the protagonists talk about their stories. In this way, the narrative is constructed to analogously resemble a series of nested Chinese boxes, where stories are embedded in the bifurcated main narrative. Poon proposes the embed of personal histories of suffering and loss in the main narrative. Fincham explores the construction of protagonists' narratives in the relation between humans (traumatic memories) and non-humans (narrative memories), which may achieve ecological balance. Equally, readers are brought to a new level of ecological and historical understanding by the protagonists' bildungsroman, a narrative of triumph over the trauma of political violence and terminal illness. Even though Poon and Fincham have mentioned some narrative features of traumatic memories, they do not discuss in depth the temporal-spatial narrative structure of them by narrative theory.

The study follows the need for an alternative paradigm of memory by engaging critically with the structure of temporal-spatial narratology. Memory relates to double time and space: the specific time and space of traumatic events and the time and space the victims make the recalling. The former corresponds to story time and space and the latter is discourse time and space. Traumatic memories, due to anxiety or terror-caused fragmentation of understanding, may not be expressed in traditional linear time order and are often triggered to return. Therefore, this thesis will argue and demonstrate how discourse time and space is arranged and explore their relationship with traumatic memories.

Secondly, previous studies on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng mainly focus on their Chinese identity and Transculturation. The representatives are two Ph.D. theses written by Tan Chye Sing and Ng Wen Lee. The former is "Resisting Hegemony and Defending Chinese Identity in Selected Novels by Malaysian Chinese Writers". It is to find out how the "theory of hegemony and various types of hegemonies are applicable" (Tan i) in novels of Yang-May Ooi's *Mindgame* (2000), Chong Seck Chim's *Once Upon a Time in Malaya* (2005), Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), and Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007). It does research on how hegemony and its resistance assist us in understanding Chinese identity, especially in the Malaysian context. These novels are selected because they promote Chinese philosophy, culture and history. The latter one is "Transculturation in *The Gift of Rain* and *The Calligrapher's Daughter*", which undertakes the reading of complex interactions between various cultures" portrayed in Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2009) and Eugenia Kim's *The Calligrapher's Daughter* (2010). It deals with traumatic condition, the protagonist's ambiguous identity and devotes particular attention to the complexity of interactions between various cultures, tradition and modernity, and conflicting emotions toward Christianity. According to Ng, this study employs the concept of trans-culturalism, which stresses the transitional process from one culture to another, to examine multicultural depictions in the selected novels. These criticisms are reasonable insofar as they push for a more inclusive and transcultural construction of the Malaysian identity. In an interview, Tash Aw stated that he was willing to integrate his three identities—Chinese by birth, Malaysian by childhood, and British by adulthood. Tan Twan Eng was interviewed by David CL Lim (2017) in response to criticism leveled at the trend of "exoticizing the East". What outsiders find hard to believe others' stories is commonplace. Settings of novels may be "exotic", but ultimately their characters are not; they have the same concerns as any natural person in any part of the world. They want to understand the world, dream, love, and be loved.

Apart from the racial or cultural component of identity, there is also a psychological component that can be destroyed by trauma and result in dissociation, or the separation of oneself or a second self. Internal focalization is one way that identity psychology can manifest itself. The focalizer's perspective will be further examined in the thesis in order to illustrate the self-role trauma's symptom. According to my argument, any type of internal focalization—fixed, variable, or multiple—might help with the description of the psychic state.

Thirdly, other previous studies on the selected novels have mainly focused on the complex cultural context: multicultural conflict and combination, such as issues of legacy and Zen of Japanese Imperialism (Wang, 2019; Lim, 2015), Han racism in Malaysian contexts, cosmopolitan nature of global literary production (Lee, 2019) and postcolonial Gothic entrapment (Denison, 2009). Some other studies concentrate on trauma, such as postcolonial nostalgia, absence and trauma (Saxena, 2020; Hsiung, 2018), relationships and identification between history and fiction (Janoory, Sidik, 2016) and metaphysical meaning and healing of nature to trauma (Zainal, 2009; Leon, 2014). Therefore, the former studies mainly centralize colonialism, identity,

memory, trauma, fiction and nature. For trauma, they just focus on the traumatic symptoms and traumas caused by war (Saxena, 2020) and the absence of father (Hsiung, 2018). There is a gap in the study of interdisciplinary study combining Narratology and Trauma Theory to analyze the selected novels. There is a PhD thesis, "The Representation of Trauma in Narrative: a Study of Six Late Twentieth Century Novels", written by Natasha Rogers, making research on such issue but comparing six other contemporary novels. These six contemporary novels engage in late twentieth-century concerns about the interrelationship between trauma and narrative. These debates emphasize the fact that the medical concept of trauma, and particularly its definition as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is something which has been constructed through discourse." The writer proposes that traumas in literature are not "events"; they are just collective or personal "response" to politics or societies. The relationship between narratives and traumas is in a paradoxical state. Traumas in literacy are created by discourse, but in fact, traumas lack of language, because they are out of ordinary consciousness or understanding, so language cannot express them precisely, which means language creates traumas which cannot be expressed. At least, the narrative is limited, which cannot "encompass the overwhelming nature of traumatic experiences."

Zainal and Leon propose that nature has a healing function, but they haven't noticed the transition from traumatic memory to narrative memory is another way of curing. This thesis argues the importance of "talking cure" and explores the function of telling stories through different modes of narration. Telling stories to oneself or other characters, making comments, juxtaposing of different versions of the past, and even biased perspective may be conducive to healing.

Therefore, previous studies have looked at the themes, especially from a postcolonial lens, mainly focusing on the survival after trauma of the Malayan people of various cultural backgrounds. This study limits its scope to the Chinese-Malaysian writers who deal with the trauma of the Chinese community in Malaya in their works. The study will apply Cathy Caruth's (1996) and Anne Whitehead's (2004) study on trauma and will draw from Michael J. Toolan's (1975) concept of narratology as methodological tools for the analysis of the representation of trauma experienced by Malaysian Chinese protagonists in novels by Malaysian Chinese writers. Their novels are selected because they represent both individual and collective trauma of the Chinese community in Malaya. The study explores the symptoms of unspeakability and dissociation identity and the psychological and cultural factors triggering trauma in the selected novels. Apart from the structural and cultural dimensions of the novels, the study examines the two authors' temporal-spatial discourse and their relationships to trauma, as well as the process of relieving unspeakability and dissociation identity through the narratives in the selected novels. The study also proposes some reasonable narrative modes to overcome the impact of trauma on minority communities, especially Chinese Malayan.

1.3 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng are considered as outstanding writers of Malaysian literature in English. This study focuses solely on the fictional works of Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), *Map of the Invisible World* (2009) and Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007), *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012). There are two reasons for the decision.

First and foremost, one of the factors that influenced the selection of texts was the representation of individual or collective trauma in these texts by minority communities, particularly the Chinese community in Malaya during the early 20th century of colonial rule. *The Harmony Silk Factory* is Tash Aw's first novel of betrayal, with the background of an exotic setting (Malaya) and WWII. Almost everyone in it has suffered traumas. Set on 1960s Indonesia during President Sukarno's drive to purge the country of its colonial past, Tash Aw's second book, *Map of the Invisible World*, tells the story of two brothers named Adam and Johan who were raised by different families in Malaya and Indonesia after their mother abandoned them. It is a page-turning story in which the two brothers are indelibly marked by the past with traumas—and swept up in the tides of history. *The Gift of Rain* is a gripping and moving story about a young man named Philip caught up in the web of betrayals and conflicting allegiances during World War II, set on the lush island of Penang in Malaya. Sixteen-year-old Philip Hutton, the half-Chinese, half-English youngest child of the head of one of Penang's great trading families, feels alienated from both the Chinese and British communities. *The Garden of Evening Mists*, is about Yun Ling Teoh, the sole survivor of a brutal Japanese prisoner of war camp with scars in Malaysia in 1951, who has suffered the trauma of war.

Second, these books share narrative patterns related to trauma and the authors' perspectives on the process of trauma healing. The chosen novels' depictions of trauma share a comparable spatial discourse pattern and chronological discourse order. This similar order and frequency could represent the repetition and belatedness of trauma. These books are similar in that they deal with trauma-related extreme emotions (hatred, betrayal, alienation, numbing), as well as disasters (domestic violence, family member loss, war, riot) that can result in a loss of identity, self, or role. The victims will experience a profound transformation in their sense of self due to cultural or colonial trauma. There is a doubling of the traumatized and original selves. Internal focalization is the method used for all doubling operations. The main characters in each of the chosen novels are unable to communicate to themselves or to others the horrific experiences they have had. Telling the story to oneself, to others, or even to readers can help one recover from trauma. The reconciliation aligns with the two authors' yin-yang notion of equilibrium.

Furthermore, the thesis limits this study to exploring Trauma Theory of Caruth and Whitehead and Narrative concepts of Michael Toolan and Astril Erll. I want to combine Narratology (Michael et al.) and Trauma Theory (Cathy et al.) to

discuss the reason Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng adapt the similar time and spatial structure and find out its relationship with the traumas in their novels. The two writers proposed some reasonable narrative methods to relieve the negative impacts of traumas towards characters in their selected novels. Both of them state functions of remembrance and forgetfulness in their novels through the narratives of memories. Firstly, trauma shapes the narrative. In turn, narrative works through trauma. Narrative is critical to trauma because it is necessary for persons who experience trauma to put their painful events into discourse, no matter if it is in oral form or written form, in order to understand the traumatic events and try to put them into ordinary consciousness. If the narrative has been done, it will become witness to other collectives.

From these viewpoints, it is clear that there is a close relationship between narratives and traumas. Even though narratives sometimes are ineffective in presenting traumas, they can still show some traits somehow. Putting traumatic experiences into discourse can also heal or at least comfort the inner world of individuals and minority communities. The research makes the interdisciplinary study between Narratology and Trauma Theory possible and feasible. I think the interrelationship between narrative and trauma needs to be studied. This is the gap in the research on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the psychological and temporal-spatial features of traumatic memories of the protagonists in the selected novels?
2. Why and how do the protagonists suffer from dissociative identity in the selected novels?
3. How can the protagonists reconstruct their identity and overcome their unspeakability in the selected novels?

1.5 Research Objectives

The study explores the symptoms of repetition of traumatic memories, dissociation identity, unspeakability in telling the catastrophic events, and the psychological and cultural factors triggering trauma in the selected novels. Apart from the structural and cultural dimensions of the novels, the study examines the two authors' temporal-spatial discourse and their relationships to trauma, as well as the process of relieving unspeakability and dissociation identity in the narratives of the novels. The study also proposes some reasonable narrative modes to overcome the impact of trauma on Malaysian Chinese. On the whole, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze protagonists' repetition of memory about psychological and temporal-spatial elements of their traumatic experience in the selected novels.

2. To examine the cultural and narrative embodiment of protagonists' dissociative identity caused by trauma in the selected novels.
3. To explore how protagonists overcome their unspeakability and reconstruct their identity through narration in the selected novels.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this thesis lies in its exploration of narrative representation of trauma. It is significant in its employment of the narrative and trauma theory to analyze Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works. To date, few studies explore how the narrative strategies of postmodern fiction represent both individual and collective trauma based on the combination of trauma theory and narrative theory in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works. Therefore, readers can understand those traumatic experiences' effects on people, especially teenagers in the selected novels. Furthermore, critics studying postmodernist literary forms may enrich their understanding of forms or deep structures well-suited for depicting the traumatic mind and recovery process by exploring this thesis's discoveries in the field of trauma.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Textual analysis will be the primary method to analyze the selected novels. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Michael J. Toolan's narrative concepts will be employed to examine the psychological and temporal-spatial features of trauma. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Michael J. Toolan's narrative concepts will be employed to investigate the cultural features and dissociation of trauma. Anne Whitehead's trauma theory and Astrid Erll's narrative concepts will be used to look into the ways to get rid of the influence of trauma.

The whole research is situated in the framework of trauma and narratives. With the development of Western Psychology, Freudian theory in the 19th century pioneered the psychoanalysis of people who have mental problems in hospitals. In contrast, from the 1990s, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman began to analyze fictional characters who also have mental problems, which is caused by trauma. This first wave of trauma studies generally introspected on the structural dimensions of personal consciousness problems; however, represented by Laurence Kirmaver, Ann Cvekovich, Greg Forter, Michelle Balaev, and Anne Whitehead, the recent modern trauma studies show a new model which combines trauma with narratives in cultural dimensions, such as post-structuralism, culture studies, post-colonialism, gender studies. The primary areas of study for both waves of trauma research are identity and memory. Memory refers to one's inner world of the past with emotional responses, while identity is the perspective or justification of the relationship between oneself and the external world or environment.

Using the perspective of trauma can help us profoundly explore literary texts with multiple meanings. Recently, Narratology, especially Post-classical Narratology has developed rapidly and has become a new approach to analyze contemporary literary works in a broader range of principles and contexts.

As a new study, Narratology appeared in France on the background of Structuralism. It aims to dig out the “universal grammar” of literary texts, called deep structure. It has become an international trend during the 1970s. Tzvetan Todorov⁶ coined the term “narratology” in his book in 1969, which indicates the beginning of the new study. It stems from Russian Formalism, New Criticism, German Morphology and Semiotics, which are all text-centered. Toolan’s *Narrative* (1975) opened up a new way of “narrative syntax”, or the approaches to telling stories from basic linguistic analogies. Narratology was endeavored with new insight and research perspectives based on post-modernism. Mark Currie, in his *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1980), proposed three “shifts” to explain the changes in this period, “from discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics” (Currie 2). As a result, psychological models including trauma study have been integrated with other criticisms, such as Feminism, Marxism, and Narratology. Narrative theorists were interested in the newly established trauma study. Trauma as an aberration of memory can provide abnormal or unconventional ways of narration, which is too hard to be expressed by the victims and witness. Narrative theories try to discover the special narrative techniques or approaches in trauma fiction. Trauma is the content, and narrative is the form; they are closely related as Whitehead says:

Trauma fiction emerges out of postmodernist fiction and shares its tendency to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit. In testing formal boundaries, trauma fiction seeks to foreground the nature and limitations of narrative and to convey the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event. (Whitehead 82)

⁶ Tzvetan Todorov (1939—), born in Sofia, Bulgaria, moved to France in 1963. Since 1968, he has been a researcher at the French National Research Center (CNRS). Todorov is one of the representatives of structuralist literary criticism and the principal founder of narrative theory. His works cover many fields, such as literary theory, intellectual history, and analysis of cultural phenomena.

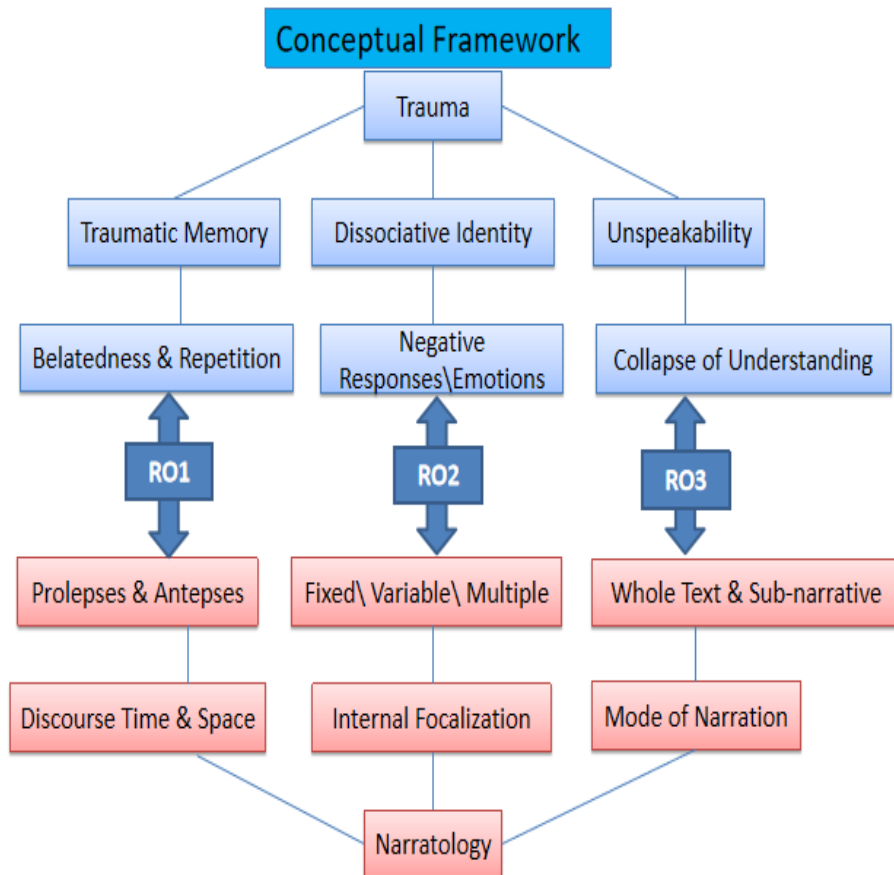


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Trauma

Cathy Caruth introduces trauma as an injury inflicted on a body. In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind ("Experience" 3). Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (Ibid 11).

1.8.2 PTSD

In the world of diagnostic psychiatry, Degloma defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as unique responses because they must be identified for “one to be diagnosed with this mental disorder” (Degloma 105). Since the Vietnam War, experts have shown renewed interest in problems of trauma. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association finally officially acknowledged PTSD, which is the abbreviation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It had been previously called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes. In a literature study, Cathy Caruth states that PTSD is not only as a consequence of war but also the “responses to a wide variety of other experiences, such as rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents, and so on” (“Experience” 11).

1.8.3 Numbing

Numbing is a self-protective organism. When animals, including humans, encounter danger or traumatic events, they will cut the connections of nerves of the brain in order to produce a state without consciousness or feeling of painful experiences, such as significant injuries and damage. Numbing will also bring harm if the victims survive after the traumatic events. They are uncertainty or empty of minds, so their subconsciousness and cognitive system may try to figure out what has happened in later life. Then the lasting remained fragmented images of catastrophes will come back frequently. In literature study, Cathy Caruth demonstrates that trauma is in an “unassimilated” numbing way; “it was precisely not known in the first stance — returns to haunt the survivor later on” (“Experience” 4).

1.8.4 Belatedness

The wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Caruth believes trauma is not locatable in the violent or original event in a victim’s past, “but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature” (“Experience” 4). The traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time that it occurs and only becomes an event at some later point of intense emotional crisis. Anne Whitehead, in her trauma fiction study, believes that Caruth’s understanding of trauma reworks ‘deferred action’ as belatedness and models itself on Freud’s conception of the nonlinear temporal relation to the past (6).

1.8.5 Repetition

Repetition refers to the frequent return of fragmented memories of the overwhelming experiences of sudden or catastrophic events in the various forms of recalling, including nightmares, flashbacks, illuminations, and so on. As Cathy Caruth explains, victims suffer from catastrophes “in a numbed state, only to relieve it later on in repeated nightmares” (“Experience” 11). Because the great terror and anxiety brought by traumatic events may cause absolute numbing to victims, which will later trigger uncertainty of understanding of these events, “a central and recurring image of trauma” (Ibid). Even if the events return in recalling frequently, they cannot be categorized into ordinary consciousness. In order to understand them, they will come back into human mind again and again.

1.8.6 Dissociative Identity Disorder

PTSD has been used in literary studies, as Cathy Caruth has stated, “diagnoses of some dissociative disorders switched to that of trauma” (“Explorations” 3), which includes belatedness, repetition, dissociative identity and unspeakability, and a “pathological symptom” (Ibid 5), not only a symptom to the unconscious but also to history. Morton Prince is the pioneer of the study of multiple personality in his book *The Dissociation of a Personality: A Biographical Study in Abnormal Psychology* (1905). Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), formerly known as Multiple-Personality Disorder (MPD), is also called dissociative personality disorder in some publications. According to DSM-IV-TR⁷, it refers to a dramatic dissociative disorder in which two or more different identities or personality states are displayed in this disorder, in which different identities and personalities alternate in a certain way to control the patient’s behavior.

1.8.7 Unspeakability

Unspeakability, a trope, a particular kind of linguistic expression, is meant to suggest the broad range of meanings potentially associated with this bit of rhetorical strategy (Balaev 24). Traumatic events are too overwhelming to cause the “collapse of understanding” (Whitehead 5) which renders resistance to narrative structures and linear temporalities because they are “unassimilated to associative chains of meaning” (“Explorations” 5).

⁷ The diagnostic criteria for DID in the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Edition IV) (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, DSM-1V) are as follows: A. There are two or more different identities or personality states (each has its own relatively lasting perception, connection, and way of thinking about the environment and itself). B. At least two identities or personality states repeatedly control the patient’s behavior. C. Cannot recall important personal information, the extent of which cannot be explained by usual forgetfulness. D. These disorders are not due to the direct physiological effects of substances (such as temporary loss of consciousness or confusing behavior during alcoholism) or general medical conditions (such as complex partial episodes).

1.8.8 Time

Story time and text time, a kind of artifice is at work, in which we look for a match between the “real-world” intervals and sub-intervals of time that the narrative implies, and our sense of time passing during our experience of reading that narrative (Toolan 49).

1.8.9 Setting

Setting is a narrative that contain a sequence of events involving changes which affect individuals with whom readers can sympathize or identify. The establishment of an identifiable setting is a strong psychological preference in most readers, because they like, in their reading of narratives, to know where they are, and look for clear spatiotemporal indications of just where and when a thing happened (Toolan 103).

1.8.10 Focalization

Focalization is a viewpoint from which things are seen, felt, understood, and assessed, as Bal considers it as a point of view, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether “real” historical facts are concerned or fictitious (Bal 145). This is meant the angle from which things are seen— where ‘seen’ is interpreted in a broad sense, not only (though often most centrally) in terms of visual perception. As Rimmon-Kenan comments, this term does not entirely shake off the optical-photographic connotations that have made its Anglo-American critical equivalent, point of view, problematic (71). Orientation is a usefully more comprehensive, less visual term than focalization and would help us to remember the “cognitive emotive and ideological” (Toolan 68) perspectives. Focalization is divided into external focalization (orientation outside the story, non-associative perspective to plots) and internal focalization (orientation outside the story or character focalization). For the internal one, it may remain fixed, tied to a single focalizer (fixed focalization). It may vary between two or more positions, which are called variable focalization and multiple focalizations.

1.8.11 Modes of Narration

1.8.11.1 Experimental Mode: Face-to-Face Communication

Literary forms that depict history as firsthand experience make up experiential modes. They thus have a close relationship with “communicative memory” and its primary source, which is “the episodic-autobiographical memories of witnesses” (Heinen and Sommer 220). The personal voice produced by first-person narration; approaches to addressing the reader in the intimate manner typical of face-to-face communication; the use of the present tense or of lengthy

passages focalized by the “experiencing I” in order to convey embodied, seemingly immediate experience; and a very detailed presentation of everyday life in the past are typical forms of the experiential mode of literary remembering.

1.8.11.2 Antagonist Mode: Biased Perspective Structure

Literary forms that support one historical narrative while rejecting another are considered antagonistic. The most obvious method of creating an antagonistic mode is “negative stereotyping” (Heinen and Sommer 220). More complex are the use of skewed perspective structures, wherein only the memories of a particular group are acknowledged as accurate, and the accounts provided by individuals belonging to opposing memory cultures are disproved.

1.8.11.3 Reflexive Mode: Juxtaposition of Different Versions of the Past

Readers can always make both first- and second-order observations when reading literature. It provides us with the impression that we are seeing into the past while also serving as a significant platform for critical thought about these representational processes. One medium that both constructs and observes memory is literature. Remarkable reflexive modes are characterized by narrative forms that highlight memory processes and issues. Examples of such forms include direct commentary on memory functions, “the juxtaposition of different versions of the past (narrated or focalized)” (Heinen and Sommer 220).

1.9 Methodology

This thesis is divided into four steps. The first step is how to identify and study the symptoms of trauma and the causes of trauma for each victim. The first symptom is traumatic memory which is identified by the features of encountering victims frequently and intrusively. The second symptom is a dissociative identity which may be observed by the sudden change of emotions from positive (hopeful, curious, active, enthusiastic, happy) to negative (numbing, resentful, regretful, painful, depressed, lonely, emptiness) and longtime sustaining of the negative emotions. The third symptom is unspeakability which could be noticed by the inability or unwillingness to express the sudden, unbearable disasters to others. All of the victims’ traumas are caused by war, riot, violence or loss of family members.

The next step is to spell out the temporal-spatial arrangement and focalization on describing the symptoms of trauma and different modes of storytelling utilized to overcome the aftermath of trauma. I set the niche of my study with three main arguments. Firstly, discontinuous and circular temporal-spatial narrative arrangement may reflect belatedness and repetition of traumatic memories. Secondly, internal focalization is a suitable perspective to show the dissociative identity of victims. Thirdly, narrative may be used to show the unspeakability of

traumatic experiences and the healing of trauma through different modes of story-telling. Based on the selected texts, Philip in *The Gift of Rain* communicates with a Japanese woman. Similarly, Yun Ling talks to two visitors in *The Garden of Evening Mists*. They belong to the experimental mode which emphasizes the face to face communication. In *Map of the Invisible World*, Johan and Adam recall their traumatic experiences in the orphanage in reflexive mode by juxtaposition of different versions of clarity and emptiness. Jasper and Peter in *The Harmony Silk Factory* show the interactions with Johnny in an extreme biased perspective structure of hatred and love so that the text is in antagonist mode. According to the trauma sub-narrative, all of the victims except Johan can use a dialogic trauma narrative. In addition, Peter applies witness trauma narrative, and Jasper utilizes retrospective trauma narrative. They go through the impact of trauma. The failing of telling, like Johan, would never walk through it.

The third step is to specify the chosen characters/victims to be studied and the reasons for the choices. To perform textual analysis, I choose all of the victims in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's selected novels which give a comprehensive vista of the traumatic events of the British and Japanese occupation in Malaya and the Indonesia riot during the period between the 1940s and the 1960s, because on the one hand, the text analysis will be performed on a similar historical and geographical background, on the other hand, it focuses on the similar representation and healing of trauma found in all their selected novels, such as discontinuous order, circular narrative, story space of suffering, discourse space of retelling, internal fixed/ variable/ multiple focalizations to highlight the narrative features of texts. My literary analysis will attempt to explore how narrative represents symptoms of trauma and finally heal victims.

Finally, I conclude the thesis by recapitulating the research problems and research findings and discussing the contributions of this study. My contributions to the present body of knowledge on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's fiction and Chinese-Malaysian literature in English are as follows: Firstly, my thesis explores the dimension of narrative representation of trauma in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works which hitherto remained little studied. Secondly, using narrative theory and trauma theory as a guiding theoretical framework, my thesis opens up an alternative discourse of trauma studies in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works. And finally, I argue that trauma fiction has unique ways of narration as a component of postmodern literature.

1.10 Organization of the Thesis

1.10.1 Chapter One: Introduction

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The present chapter is the introduction, and it is the overview of the study, which includes the statement of the problem, the objectives and significance of the study, the conceptual framework, and the methodology that will be used in this study.

1.10.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two will embrace the literature review and introduces Cathy Caruth's and Anne Whitehead's analysis of trauma and Michael J. Toolan's narrative, both of which constitute the theoretical basis of the study. This will be followed by a review of critical studies on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng to indicate the position of my study about the body of research on these writers.

1.10.3 Chapter Three: Temporal-Spatial Narrative Representation of Traumatic Memory

Chapter Three examines the first symptom of traumatic memories that flashback in protagonists' mind in the four selected novels. I will classify them into four genres: alienation from family, loss of a beloved, war or riot, and betrayal and explore their characteristic in the aspects of trauma theory. After analyzing the structural features of memories, I will focus on the narrative features (temporal-spatial) of memories, both in the aspects of the writers' arrangement and the narrators' recalling. Finally, the relationships between traumatic memories and temporal-spatial narratives will be clearly presented.

1.10.4 Chapter Four: Disclosure of Dissociation by Internal Focalization

Chapter Four investigates the second symptom of trauma which is the protagonists' dissociative identities after their encounter of traumas. The study not only explores the psychological, racial, social, and classical factors which may influence one's mental concept of self but also makes research on the narrative focalization through which the characters show their identity and mental states to readers.

1.10.5 Chapter Five: (Un)speakability and (Un)healing of Trauma Based on Modes of Narration

Chapter Five continues to show the third symptom, unspeakability, that victims suffer from in the selected texts. They cannot express what happened to them the moment the catastrophic events hit them, and even many years later, they cannot remember clearly the whole process or figure out the former realities. Cathy Caruth proposes the importance of healing trauma. She says:

But the study and treatment of trauma continue to face a crucial problem at the heart of this unique and difficult phenomenon: the problem of how to help relieve suffering, and how to understand the nature of the suffering, without eliminating the force and truth of the reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit to us. (Caruth vii)

Therefore, the major job of this chapter is to investigate the detailed healing process of trauma through narrative modes.

1.10.6 Chapter Six: Summary

The final chapter, Chapter Six will contain the conclusion by summarizing the research findings and reemphasizing the centrality of trauma in Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's works. I wrap up my thesis with suggestions for future research on Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng's novels, particularly Chinese-Malaysian Literature in English.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter offers the background of the study in which trauma lies in literary narratives. Chinese-Malaysian novelists Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng portray the psychological states during the 1940s and 1960s. It then highlights some previous studies on the two writers from post-colonialism, trans-culture, aestheticism, and so on. There is a gap between trauma and narratives. Three objectives are proposed, and the significance of the study is presented by pointing out the uniqueness of the study. Lastly, the conceptual framework and methodology adopted to achieve these objectives are explained. This chapter provides the skeleton of the thesis, which the following chapters will further demonstrate in detail.

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