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Echoes of China: Nicholas Jose's Transcultural

Writing in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*

中国回响：尼古拉斯·周思小说《长安街》和《红线》中的跨文化书写

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**Echoes of China: Nicholas Jose's Transcultural Writing
in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread***

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Abstract

Nicholas Jose (1952-) has won his literary reputation as one of the Australian distinguished contemporary writers and is best known for his works on a wide range of issues of contemporary Australian and Asian art and literature. Jose's first-hand knowledge and his immersion in Chinese culture and traditions are charted in his literary journey. Till now, three of his seven novels typically provide a running theme of China, including *Avenue of Eternal Peace*(1989), *The Rose Crossing*(1994) and *The Red Thread*(2000).

The stories of *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread* are set in China. Like a black swan of trespass, both novels transcend western and eastern cultures and bear a vision of cross-cultural understanding, whereas a sense of ambivalence bespeaks Jose himself as well as his transcultural writing. Specific cultural context occasions its corresponding textual reading. In this case, a transcultural way of critiquing attunes more to the cultural complexities of our globalized contemporaneity. Under this framework, this dissertation aims to disclose, describe and underline the complex and always-on dynamics of cultural encounters, transformations, and negotiations.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one starts with a brief introduction of Nicholas Jose and his works, then summarizing the critical reception of him and the two fiction, displaying the originality and organization of the thesis. Chapter two examines the theoretical underpinnings, outlining a brief historical trajectory of the transcultural and proceeding by probing the transcultural literary studies in Australia especially the main points of Italian-Australian scholar Arianna Dagnino's transcultural paradigm in contemporary western literary criticism.

The body part is composed of the next three chapters. It digs Nicholas Jose's nuanced and complicated view of China and its culture by pointing out the edifying moments and his ambivalence presented in the two novels. Basically there are three strategies adopted in his cultural translation—foreignizing, hybridizing and anastomosing. By translating the differences that are foreign to each other and mainly embodied in linguistic and cultural immersion, the gaps of interpretation could possibly be filled. Through hybridizing, the linguistic, literary and cultural interactions of the east and the west actualize the aesthetic

and transcultural effects of mixing, permeating and collision of multiple languages and cultures within literary texts. Also, seen from the wording and purport of his representation, Australia and China (west and east) anastomose extensively and specifically, which composes an idealized dimension of transculturation. Chapter five attributes Jose's writing with dual identity and the convoluted writing context to the sense of ambivalence appearing in him and his transcultural writing.

Chapter six gives a summary of this thesis. The ambivalence is nonetheless edifying, denoting an uncertainty about perceiving China as the absolute other. It is making a wrecking ball demolish the wall between each other and triggering new visions that do originate in Jose's Asian writing. Both books and Jose himself shed light on the mutability of culture. His writing with dual identity demonstrates his commitment to transcending the divergence between east and west to create productive interconnectedness.

Key words: Nicholas Jose; Avenue of Eternal Peace; The Red Thread; transcultural writing; ambivalence

摘要

尼古拉斯·周思（1952-）是澳大利亚文坛名驰遐迩的当代作家，其作品广涉当代澳大利亚和亚洲的艺术和文学。周思将第一手知识和对中国传统文化的浸润记录于自己的文学之旅中，迄今为止，他的七部小说中有三部以中国为主题，即小说《长安街》（1989）、《玫瑰穿越》（1994）和《红线》（2000）。

《长安街》和《红线》都是以中国为故事发生背景。如同越界的黑天鹅，两部小说跨越东西文化，具有跨文化理解的视野，然而一种矛盾心理体现在周思本人及其跨文化写作中。相应的文化语境对应具体的文本阅读，在这种情况下，跨文化的批评方法更适用于当世全球化引起的文化复杂性。在这一框架下，本文旨在揭示、描述和强调文化碰撞、变革和协商中的纷繁复杂与变化多端。

本文共分六章。第一章首先对周思生平及其作品做出简要介绍，然后对周思及其两部小说的文学批评进行了分类总结，并展示了本论文的独创性和论证结构。第二章为本文的理论基础，勾勒出“跨文化”的简要历史轨迹，并探讨澳大利亚的跨文化文学研究，主要是探究整合意大利-澳大利亚学者阿里安娜·达格尼诺在当代西方文学批评中的跨文化范式的要点。

主体部分由第三、四、五章共三章构成。通过指出这两部小说中具有启发性的时刻和矛盾心理的具体体现，来挖掘尼古拉斯·周思对中国及中国文化微妙而复杂的态度。他的文化翻译主要采取三种策略：异化、混杂和契合。通过沉浸中国语言和文化两个方面揭示异质文化的差别，理解的空白得以填补；通过东西方语言、文学以及文化的混杂，文学文本中多种语言与文化交融、渗透和碰撞所产生的审美与跨文化效应得以实现。同时，从两部作品的表现手法和主旨来看，澳大利亚与中国（西方和东方）有着广泛而具体的契合，因此构成了一种理想化的跨文化维度。第五章将周思及其跨文化写作中出现的矛盾心理的原因归结为他的双重写作身份和复杂的写作环境。

第六章对本文进行了总结。周思对中国和中国文化的立场态度尽管矛盾，但具有启发性，表明了他对将中国视为绝对他者的迟疑，其作者动机是制造一个落锤破坏机来拆除彼此之间的壁垒，并触发新的愿景。两部作品和周思本人都阐明了文化的可塑性，其双重书写身份也突显了他致力于超越东西方分歧、创造富有成效的相互联系的决心。

关键词：尼古拉斯·周思；长安街；红线；跨文化写作；矛盾心理

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 A brief introduction of Nicholas Jose and his works

Nicholas Jose (1952-) has won his literary reputation as one of the Australian distinguished contemporary writers and essayists since the early 1990s and he is best known for his works on a wide range of issues of contemporary Australian and Asian art and literature.

Born in London, brought up in Adelaide, South Australia, Nicholas Jose studied at the Australian National University and Oxford University. He is a frequent visitor to Asia, especially to China, where he had worked for five years. He lectured in English literature and Australian studies at Peking Foreign Studies University, Beijing in 1986 and at East China Normal University, Shanghai in 1987; and he held a post as a cultural-attaché to China at the Australian Embassy, in Beijing, for the next three turbulent years from 1987 to 1990, during which his flat in the diplomatic compound was regarded as “The Last Salon in Peking” (Barrowclough 1997). Jose is President of Sydney PEN from 2002 to 2005, Visiting Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University from 2009 to 2010, and now Professor of English and Creative Writing both at the University of Adelaide and Bath Spa University as well as adjunct professor with the Writing and Society Research Center at Western Sydney University. Over the past three decades, he has published more than thirteen books including fictions, short stories, memoir, nonfiction works and so on, among which *Avenue of Eternal Peace* is shortlisted for the 1990 Miles Franklin Literary Award and is filmed as *Children of the Dragon* and *The Red Thread* is translated and published in many countries. Jose has been the recipient of many major awards, including *The Deadly Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Literature*(2008), *Special Award of NSW Premier’s Literary Awards*(2010), *Australian Educational Publishing Awards for Tertiary Scholarly Reference category*(2010). Besides, *The Custodians*(1997), *Black Sheep: Journey to Borrooloola and Macquarie* PEN Anthology of Australian Literature(2002) are shortlisted respectively for *the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize*(1997), *The Age Book of the Year for non fiction*(2003), and *Australian Book Industry Awards for General Non-Fiction*

Book of the Year(2010).

Nicholas Jose is also a major voice in Sino-Australia relations and cross-cultural understanding. Jose's first-hand knowledge and his immersion in Chinese culture and traditions are charted in his literary journey. Till now, three of his seven novels typically provide a running theme of China, including *Avenue of Eternal Peace*(1989), *The Rose Crossing*(1994) and *The Red Thread*(2000), among which the stories of both *Avenue of Eternal Peace*(1989) and *The Red Thread*(2000) are set in China. Throughout the two books, Jose's vagaries of perception and delineation which features each country's imagination of its counterpart leads to an impulse of exploration and discovery as well as transcultural sensibility, and finally fills up the gaps of the ignorance of one another.

1.1.1 *Avenue of Eternal Peace*

Avenue of Eternal Peace, at the first glance, adapts to the conventional tropes of alienated foreigners in Asia. In contemporary time and space, as a viewer and the protagonist, emotionally grief-stricken, Wally Frith, an Australian professor with expertise in cancer, trying to divert attention from his wife Bets's recent death and seek other treatments, goes to Beijing as a visiting professor at Peking Union Medical College. Wally's overt incentive to travel in China is related to his disinterested dedication to the calling of impersonal scientific statistics, which is why he attempts to get in touch with Professor Hsu Chien Lung from the college he visits, whose paper is path-breaking for research into cancer. Unfortunately, to meet the distinguished Professor Hsu turns out as more of a challenge than he has initially expected. And during the search, Wally drenches himself in ordinary life of China only to find it is a mind-boggling riddle. It is a kaleidoscopic story displaying a state of vigorous contradiction, of people, the cities and a moment of history.

1.1.2 *The Red Thread*

Set in modern-day Shanghai, *The Red Thread* adapts the ancient Chinese classic, *Six Chapters of A Floating Life*. It possesses a stylishly structured narrative depicting an appealing romance, in which the lives and fates of two pairs of lovers across the centuries twist and intertwine through reincarnation from the beginning to the end of the story.

The modern tale contains three main characters: Shen Fuling, an American-educated,

principled appraiser of antiquities, Ruth Garret, an Australian artist visiting China, who observantly appreciates the moon-shadow of the orchid and renders it more desirable than the solid object itself, and Han, a glamorous and enigmatic songstress whose existence proves perilously addictive to Ruth. Their lives mysteriously mirror the three roles depicted in the rare, nineteenth-century unpublished manuscript whose final two chapters are lost and which comes up for auction. Yet the dual stories coexist in a polyphonic correspondence as though lives are impacted by the prior script. The plot is molded by seeking the missing chapters to prevent Ruth from following Yun's fate, dying from a life-threatening illness. The earlier tale of Shen-Fu, Yun and Han, works as seduction, warning, prototype and inspiration providing a resting point which counterbalances the impelling force of unfolding lives. In step with Buddhist ideas about secular impermanence, the lovers' life paths eventually diverge and go back on track of their individual "floating" life.

In each, identity, sexual and familial love, and cross-cultural encounters are interrogated and complicated.

1.2 Literature review

According to the bibliographic retrieval, Nicholas Jose and his works have garnered great attention and a number of academic reviews from both domestic and overseas studies. Yuanshen Huang succinctly comments, that *Avenue of Eternal Peace* relatively reflects Chinese mentality and their overly cautious attitude towards Western culture shortly after China's reform and opening up, and that *The Red Thread* attempts to explore the inheritance of Chinese culture in the process of modernization to render the multicultural life in contemporary Shanghai (Huang 415).

1.2.1 Research on *Avenue of Eternal Peace*

Avenue of Eternal Peace, shortlisted for the 1989 Miles Franklin Award, has critically been acclaimed since it was just published in 1989 and book reviews comes forth copiously. As for the scholarship on Jose and this book, studies abroad mainly focus on the

writing motivation and thematic analysis. John McLaren points out in “Courage Against the Lies” (1989), that “western writers have consistently used China as a way of discovering themselves the central figure in the novel Wally Frith does the same” (McLaren 1989: 23). According to McLaren, the book is not only on a man but also about China, a work about human relationships and a study of politics, and it overcomes the problem of writing about foreign culture by presenting the Chinese through the experiences of a visitor trying to come to terms with them; Carolyn Wakeman compliments it a “brilliant novelistic portrait of China on the brink of monumental change” in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1991 (Online). There are other fragmentary but inspiring criticisms on this book. In a book review of its 2008 re-edition where the author re-contextualizes some details via a new postscript, Lyn Jacobs acknowledges that *Avenue of Eternal Peace* is significant for negotiating sites of difference to share finds with tact and discrimination in an era where the people of the world are struggling to exceed the bonds of economic rationalism and political suspicion, and acclaims that Jose nimbly evokes diverse nuances of language to demonstrate the complexities of seeing selves and others (Jacobs 2008). In “An Updated Novel for An Updated China”, a review published in 2009, post-Olympics and when the first Chinese astronaut walks in space, Brian Keenan reexamines Jose’s creating background and deems the new postscript is apt and correct to offer the reader a view of a world where the East-West divide can be bridged, and the novel’s focus on East-West relations and incipient misunderstandings arising from schisms in perceptions of each respective culture remains prophetic and optimistic (Keenan 2009:96).

In China, since the 1980s, an increasing interest has occurred in the translation of Australian literature into Chinese. Works of fiction selected for translation are related to China, either personally or thematically, among which many of Jose’s novels have been translated mostly by Yao Li, including *Avenue of Eternal Peace*(1991), *The Rose Crossing*(1997), *The Custodians*(2000) and *The Red Thread*(2007) (Wang 2011: 52). Jose is widely credited with a mediator of Sino-Australian cultural exchanges. Chinese researchers have done fruitful studies on his works from various angles. Previous explorations on important specific issues are summarized as follows.

First of all, many domestic scholars tend to present an analysis of *Avenue of Eternal*

Peace in a context of post-colonial thought. In the thesis of a study in literary images, “‘China Fiction’ in Contemporary Australian Literature” (2005), Hongmei Zhao argues that Jose represents China and the Chinese as “the Other”, which enhances and enlarges the Orientalist discourse (Zhao 2005). In his doctoral dissertation “Closing up on the Near North—Asia Novels in Contemporary Australian Literature” (2011), Baolin Yang takes *Avenue of Eternal Peace* as an example to explore Australia’s cultural reservation and doubt toward Asia when Australia begins to “embrace” Asia from the 1980s, arguing that the novel indicates the unique mysticism of China and its culture, so it constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to Australia’s attempt to embrace China (Yang 2011). Similarly, Yang criticizes that in spite of its partial authenticity in depicting contemporary China, this book displays China as an exotica and is a combination of imagining China and reorienting Australian identity in “Fictionalizing China in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*” (2016).

Then, in terms of the image of China and the Chinese, Lili Ma in her essay “Conflict and Confrontation: Representing Chinese Women in Australian Literature” (2005) dissects the woman characters including Jin Juan in the novel and digs the author’s China complex (Ma 2005). After many trailblazing but scattered reviews, Yingling Chen writes a thesis “A Study of the Image of China from Nicholas Jose’s Works” (2015) in the light of imagology and postcolonialism.

Besides, speaking of the transcultural writing in this work, Labao Wang and Lili Zhang, in “Nicholas Jose’s ‘Trans-cultural Writing’ in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*” (2016), adopting the “three levels of culture” proposed by Raymond Williams that are the lived culture, the recorded culture and the culture of selective tradition, scrutinize Jose’s cultural translating strategies and discuss the latent reasons. They maintain that Jose’s cultural translation of China in his early transcultural novels breaches a great deal of affinities with what Bill Ashcroft refers to the “transnational” writing in some postcolonial discourse (Wang, Zhang 2016). Also, in his essay “The Treatment of Other Cultures in Transcultural Writing—A Cognitive Semiotic Reflection” (2017) published in *Language and Semiotic Studies* in 2017, drawing on Per Aage Brandt’s cognitive semiotic definition of cultural “sedimentation” as opposed to Raymond Williams’s “analysis of culture”, Labao Wang contends that though the author excavates beyond the “iconic meanings” of the Chinese

culture to expose authorial awareness of its “symbolic meanings”, Jose is dedicated too much to the irresistibly “negative semiosis” of China, in doing so, portraying the complacency of the protagonist/narrator/author towards Chinese culture (Wang 2017).

1.2.2 Research on *The Red Thread*

A formidable undertaking, *The Red Thread* picks up where the classic Chinese love story *Six Chapters of A Floating Life* leaves off. Likewise, it has gained much attention from scholars at home and abroad as well.

In terms of its theme and style, Tom Deveson speaks highly of its writing style and imagination in the *The Sunday Times*. International news magazines like *Publishers Weekly* and *Sydney Morning Herald* have all praised the novel for its unique narrative charm and exquisite design. Michael Thompson-Noel affirms Jose’s position in Aussie literature and regards the love story in *The Red Thread* is “fated love imitates art” (Thompson-Noel 2000). Celeste Heiter is of the opinion that “*The Red Thread* is a wonderfully romantic story, and certainly a plausible, well-crafted continuation of its predecessor” (Heiter 2001). Lyn Jacobs comments that Contemporary Australian writers of fiction including Jose are subverting clichéd binaries like Asian/Australian dichotomies with their transformative power and are using, but also deconstructing cultural myths in “Remembering Forgetting: Love-stories by Nicholas Jose, Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-ming Teo” (Jacobs 2002). In addition, Yu Ouyang suggests that the novel is just conceptualized preaching of interpreting images of preaching, lacking of real sentiments. But he acknowledges the recreation of Chinese classical text from western perspective, which is a bold try of Sino-Australian literary hybridity (Ouyang 2011).

On the part of its studies at home, the basal studies are from two perspectives, namely either the (post-)colonialism or characters and cultural identification, which is similar to studies on the previous book.

In his paper interpreting *The Red Thread*, Jinliang Zhang deems that it is the result of the European appetite for fantastical tales of exotic and distant land, and that though Jose’s special insights introduces Chinese culture to Australian readers, deep-rooted post-colonial narrative consciousness in the author’s mind, his mystification, distortion and

misrepresentation of Chinese culture cannot be overlooked, which resonates with the same old colonial ideologies when the west encounters the east because of Australian culture cringe, as shown in other Asian writing (Zhang 2005). In terms of characters and cultural identification, Jing Wang analyzes Ruth, from whom the equality of both cultures has been displayed to show the hybridity and the enlightenment of Chinese traditions to western culture in her article “The Cultural Identity of the Heroine in *The Red Thread*” (2011). Further, in her paper “The Development of Chinese Women’s Cultural Identity in Nicholas Jose’s Works” (2012), Wang reexamines women characters’ cultural identification including Jin Juan and Ruth. She concludes the change of Chinese women from being humiliated to actively pursuing cultural identification in Sino-Australia culture conflicts roots in cultural hybridity and harmony, which will promote pluralism and tolerance in protagonists’ identities (Wang 2012).

Other fragmentary but inspiring criticisms primarily cover aspects like the writing technique in the novel. Luman Wei explores Jose’s text tactic of postmodern intertextuality in his work and compares *The Red Thread* and *Six Chapters of A Floating Life*. Caiyan Wang scrutinizes the ecological implications about the novel.

What’s more, as for the transcultural studies of this book, based on Harold Bloom’s theory of intertextuality, Lili Zhang explores the adapting process of the book and discusses Jose’s transcultural writing strategy, theme and the cultural stand in her article “Cultural Misreading and Literary Variation: From *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* to *The Red Thread*” (2018).

To sum up, Australian literary compositions concerning China have churned out since the 1990s. In China, affected by Said’s aggressive monograph *Orientalism*(1978), research drawing on postmodernist and postcolonial methods increase exponentially and so do the studies on *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*. Much attention is primarily given to the theme and style in studies abroad on both fiction. Though there are explorations of Jose’s transcultural writing, some do not catch sight of the two sides of the same coin, either falling back on only stressing how the stereotyping functions or endorsing their progressiveness but overlooking its nuanced ambivalence and complicated uncertainty. Others do not investigate the inner reasons for the complexity in Jose’s transcultural

writing.

1.3 Thesis originality and organization

The above critical overview reveals that the study on the two books so far is far from being sufficient and satisfactory. The present thesis enriches and complements the significant contributions made by the aforementioned research to the studies on these two novels as well as the field of transcultural theory in two main respects. First, this thesis provides alternative perspectives into the two fiction. By delineating Nicholas Jose's complex attitude and stance towards China, it manages to root out the hidden causes of this complexity, aiming to promote cross-cultural understanding between both countries. Secondly, through a transcultural lens, it analyzes Jose's unique approach to merging foreign literary texts with Chinese culture as a means of creating a distinctive expression that transcends cultural boundaries, which offers an example of the transcultural paradigm in contemporary literary criticism. This thesis is composed of six chapters, with their main points summarized as follows:

Chapter one starts with a brief introduction of Nicholas Jose and his works, then summarizing the critical reception of him and *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*, displaying the originality and organization of the thesis.

Chapter two examines the theoretical underpinnings. It outlines a brief historical trajectory of the transcultural and proceeds by probing the transcultural literary studies in Australia especially the main points of Italian-Australian scholar Arianna Dagnino's transcultural paradigm in contemporary western literary criticism.

Chapter three digs Nicholas Jose's nuanced and complicated view of China in his transcultural writing by pointing out the edifying moments and his ambivalence presented in the two novels.

Chapter four illustrates the transcultural writing strategies deployed by the author, that are, foreignizing, hybridizing and anastomosing, and how they work effectively in translating China in the contemporaneity.

Chapter five attributes Jose's writing with dual identity and the convoluted writing context to the sense of ambivalence appearing in him and his transcultural writing.

Chapter six gives a summary of this thesis. The ambivalence denotes an uncertainty about perceiving China as the absolute other. And it is making a wrecking ball demolish the wall between each other and triggering new visions that do originate in Jose's Asian writing.

Chapter Two Theoretical Underpinnings

In the age of global mobility, a new type of literature emerging from cultural flows spawned by globalization. Transcultural theories have been deployed and engaged since 1940. Because transcultural fields are receptive to many different cultures, they encourage understanding, rapprochement, and agreement by appreciating not only differences but also commonalities. A transcultural way of writing attunes more to the cultural complexities of our globalized contemporaneity. In this chapter, I present a brief historical trajectory of the transcultural, proceeding by outlining the main points of Italian-Australian scholar Arianna Dagnino's transcultural literary theory.

2.1 An overview of the transcultural

According to *Bridging Transcultural Divides* (2012), a collection edited by Xianlin Song and Kate Cadman, the notion of the “transcultural” can be traced from an early concept of “transculturation” coined by Cuban essayist, anthropologist Fernando Ortiz(1881–1969) in 1940 to expound the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures then existing in Cuba. Ortiz strives to redirect and revise the view that transformation and growth in the active cultural exchange between migrant and sedentary communities operate only in one direction, as represented in the historical idea of acculturation. Since it is indispensable to be fully aware that, cultural exchanges flow either from east to west as well as from west to east or north-south and south-north in the intercultural encounter, so that in the footsteps of Ortiz transculturation occurs and functions bidirectionally in the social activities of things and of people. Ortiz says,

Indians from the mainland, Jews, Portuguese, Anglo-Saxons, French, North Americans, even yellow Mongoloids... each of them torn from his native moorings, faced with the problem of disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation—in a word, of transculturation (Ortiz 27).

Therefore, it is obvious to see the concept of “transcultural” itself growing out of a transcultural case of the colonial Latin American New World. A non-western idea

belatedly gets into domineering western discourse, “with appropriately interrogative intent. It is comparable in this respect to Gayatri Spivak’s use of ‘subaltern’ or Edward Said’s ‘contrapuntal’, or indeed the well-traveled concept of ‘magic realism’” (Jose 2018: 66). Ortiz deems that the history of Cuba is deeply intermeshed with its history of transculturations and the concept of it is essential and imperative to make sense of the history of Cuba as well as America in general. By the same token, probably it is available to elsewhere in the world such as Australia, and to the entire world of globalization.

In 1974, for the first time Ortiz’s concept of transculturation was applied by Uruguayan writer, academic and literary critic Angel Rama to a literary context for the analysis of texts by Latin American writers like Garcia Marquez, demonstrating the dialectical relation between the local and imported/imposed dominant cultures. In 1982, he also pointed out in *Transculturacion Narrativa en America Latina* that while retaining native elements, Latin American writers learned from Western Avant-garde techniques, creating a unique modern Latin American literature which emphasizes the positive role of rural popular culture in Latin American modernization (Bu 2018: 167).

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (an influential study of travel writing), Mary Louise Pratt also adopts and further develops Ortiz’s concept of transculturation within a postcolonial framework. Pratt regards transculturation as “a phenomenon of the contact zone(s)”, “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power”(Pratt 1991); she asserts that if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent themselves over the Others (usually their conquered Others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined Others undertake to describe themselves in response to or in dialogue with those texts.

More recently, Onghena further illustrates that, as far as Ortiz is concerned, the transculturation is a project and a possibility but more than being a final result, through which a new and complex reality comes out, i.e. neoculturation, “a reality that is no mechanical mixture of characters, nor mosaic, but instead a new, original and independent phenomenon”(Song and Cadman 2012:12). In the age of globalization, as Onghena indicates, we are obliged to reexamine these ideas so as to enable us to fathom and reorient

the conceptual frames that we ourselves are operating within.

In addition, when it comes to the word “transcultural”, Nicholas Jose asserts that the ambiguous “Trans-” together with “cultural” indicates “a more fluid, less structured process” which includes “adaptive re-interpretation and contestation” (Jose 2018:68). On the contrary, “intercultural” presents an interaction between equivalent existing cultures that both remain largely unchanged, whereas “transcultural” “allows for imbalance, disparity and transformation (68).” Considering “‘transcultural’ approaches to the practice of reading and writing (67)”, he “champions transculturalism and believes that Australian writing about China should move beyond mere ‘claims to real China’ and arrive at a level of genuine unrestricted freedom in its approach to Chinese culture” (Wang 2017: 42). Jose espouses two related claims that “much of the best, most acclaimed literary writing today is transcultural” and that “such writing encourages us to develop transcultural awareness in our reading, interpretation and critical or writerly response” (Jose 2018:68).

2.2 Transcultural literary studies in Australia

The Sydney based writer Mark William Jackson denotes that “the Australian identity is a combination of all identities, all nations combining into one giant multicultural casserole pot (Online).” Due to this complexity of culture and the typical transcultural nature of Australia, since the beginning of the 20th century, literary studies in Australia have undergone a number of paradigm shifts, the latest of which are transnational and transcultural literary studies. Thereinto, Arianna Dagnino provides the most comprehensive definition of the transcultural in the context of literary analysis in her monograph *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (2015).

Arianna Dagnino (1963-) is an Italian-Australian writer, literary translator and academic researcher, currently teaching at the University of British Columbia. Dagnino receives her PhD in Sociology and Comparative Literature, especially focusing on Transcultural Studies, Creative Writing and World Literature, from the University of South Australia. She is the author of the transcultural novel *The Afrikaner*(2019), an odyssey mixing history, politics, scientific research and adventure in a plot set between Johannesburg, Cape Town, the Kalahari Desert and Zanzibar. And her books on the impact

of global mobility, scientific research and digital technologies include *I Nuovi Nomadi. Pionieri della mutazione, culture evolutive, nuove professioni*(1996), *Fossili*(2010) and *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*(2015), all pitching in the discussion on the socio-cultural influences of globalization, transnationalism, and digital technology (Online).

She concurs with Welsch's concept of "transculturality" and Epstein's notion of "transculture", the transcultural paradigm broadening its range of analysis by transcending the binaries of dominant versus subordinate, mainstream versus marginalized, and colonizer versus colonized cultures which are overstressed by the interpretations of transculturation proposed within a context of postcolonialism like Ortiz and Pratt (Dagnino 125). She argues for a new interpretive paradigm that "may elaborate the traditional discourse of modernity by presenting its multiple 'modes,' steps, and transboundary interconnections in a movement towards an ever-greater complexity of views and cultural horizons" (100), and highlights the significance of a transcultural transforming approach in writing, reading, and critiquing. Because this transcultural lens is good "to capture the changes in society, critical perspectives, and artistic or literary expressions that often lead to a renegotiation of cultural values and to the acknowledgment of wider 'scapes' of interdependence and interconnectedness" (101).

Based on Mikhail Epstein and Wolfgang Welsh's transcultural theories, Dagnino coins the term transculture/ality, a conceptual framework that is,

deployed within a literary context as a mode for individual identity building and, most importantly, as an analytical and critical tool able to capture the interplay between culture, the different modes of (post)modernity, and the works of a globalizing imagination and sense of belonging (see also Hoerder, Hébert, and Schmitt) (140).

Transculture/ality extends and is different from the original notion of transculturalism which is better understood as a new ideological mode of cultural interaction and a reply to cultural homogenisation and fundamentalist essentialism.

Then engendered a main issue that can we think of Nicholas Jose in terms of a transcultural writer? What kinds of elements or factors constitute transcultural writers?

What are the characteristics of transcultural writing?

2.2.1 Transcultural writers

Dagnino maintains that growing migratory flows and transnational mobility, with the addition of economic globalization and the rapid advancement of digital communication technologies catalyze and capacitate brand-new intercultural interactions, transnational social patterns, and neonomadic lifestyles, which generates a new breed of deterritorialized citizens who are more or less educated, more or less well-off and socially advantaged, namely the “neonomads” or “global nomads” (99). These deterritorialized citizens are “thriving in the freedom acquired with and the opportunities generated by the contemporary forms of mobility” (99), among whom there are also culturally and physically mobile transcultural writers. These transcultural writers are less “trapped in the traditional (im)migrant/exilic/diasporic syndrome and are more able instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility now bestow upon them” (100). The vast majority of contemporary literary critical exploration still fastens on (im)migrant and postcolonial writings. But Dagnino and few theoreticians have undertaken the task to shape and standardize the major components featuring transcultural novels. And as she asserts, the same characteristics defining transcultural writers also largely mirrored in their creative outputs.

In a nutshell, transcultural writers are those who have undergone a creative transpatriation process and thus hold a transcultural orientation through their writing (202). Thereinto transpatriation implies “the physical deterritorialization and critical distancing from the nation and from one’s native culture”, also “the first stage in this process of becoming transcultural (121).” Thus the main general characteristics that might define transcultural writers and that to a certain degree demonstrate themselves in their literary creation, are:

- 1) a flexible mental disposition and fluid, metamorphic sense of identity; 2) the knowledge that the process of dislocation and rootlessness of one’s own self can be an intriguing and insightful creative device—a portal towards infinite possibilities of being and of imagining; 3) the development of new ways of

belonging and the lack of imposed/fixed allegiances; 4) a mindset similar to the one developed by their contemporary social counterparts—the “neonomads,” alternatively understood as “global nomads”; 5) a willingness to be “open” to and be “transformed” by the experience of the Other, in this way acting as cultural mediators or intercultural ambassadors; 6) knowledge of other languages recognized as one of the main tools for an enriching and transforming transcultural experience; and 7) a transpatriation process which can be either self-induced or utterly random, as aleatoric as their creative processes (Dagnino 176).

2.2.2 Transcultural novel and its “fuzzy” nature

Dagnino postulates that the writers’ transcultural sensibilities exert an influence on the writing of their transcultural novels and they are apt to:

1) set their novels in more than one country or change the country in which they set their novels for each novel. Furthermore, the foreign settings are not used as exotic stereotypes meant to allure the growing market of global mass fiction or what others call postcolonial exoticism (Huggan; Maver); 2) create characters coming from more than one cultural background and who tend to live transnational lives; 3) display a proliferation of narrating voices and tell a story from “a multiplicity of perspectives” (Stein 257); 4) use foreign words and expressions, thereby creating texts characterized by a mix of linguistic or cultural spaces and promoting a kind of blended or “fusion” idiom, be it English, German, French, Spanish, Hindi, or Chinese. ... and 5) write in a way and express things in such a way that it is difficult for a reader to understand or infer, without knowing anything about their complex biographies, to what nationality, cultural community, or ethnic group they belong (Dagnino 183).

It does not mean that all these elements must appear in the same novel at the same time to be defined as “transcultural”, but she claims they tend to be general features of transcultural prose fiction. Thus she identifies the traits and elements of distinctive transcultural narrative and techniques of representation as follows:

- 1) Multiple foreign settings, not exotic stereotypes.
- 2) Characters with a transnational/transcultural background or experience.
- 3) Plural identities through a plurality of voices.
- 4) Engagement with foreign words or expressions.
- 5) Neither nationally nor culturally identifiable (Dagnino 184-9).

In short, in some ways the transcultural novel blur the boundaries between home and abroad, self and Other, familiarity and foreignness. It must be noted that “a neat categorization of transcultural literature is hardly feasible . . . because categories will always be prone to lose their apparent rigidity and leak into each other” (179). This uncertainty combined with blurred boundaries leads to “the intrinsically metamorphic” and “indistinct ‘fuzzy’ nature” of transcultural novels and writers (179). Dagnino adopts the mathematical term “fuzzy” which describes indeterminate, amorphous. She posits such qualities are inherent in the nature of transcultural novels.

Generally speaking, a transcultural lens might exploit new avenues of literary critical alternatives, critically processing the cultural influence and the creative outputs of global modernity, whose goal is to disclose, describe and underline the complex and always-on dynamics of cultural encounters, transformations, and negotiations. It is a new analytical approach that attempts to get rid of nationalist stances and aggressive dichotomies in the context of post-colonialism.

So far, according to Dagnino’s formulation and articulation, Jose is no doubt a transcultural writer. But rather than clinging, obstinately, to fit him into any kind of defining box, I am prone to draw on the ideas of this new analytical mode to reexamine the writer’s transcultural awareness and the fuzziness of his novels in the following chapters, for “it is an invitation to join an ongoing conversation” (Jose 2018:68).

Chapter Three Jose's Edifying Ambivalence towards China

To forge the transcultural individual consciousness is to release oneself from the jail of a single traditional culture or any newly acquired one. It is “a way of being and perceiving oneself as highly complex and fluid, where apparent ambiguities and transitoriness are not shunned but espoused in favor of movement, mediation, and ongoing transformation” (Dagnino 2015:130-131). In both works, on the one hand, a sense of positive curiosity and humility permeates. On the other hand, Jose's ambiguity, uncertainty and ambivalence seem never disappear. Is this swing of moods edifying? Or adverse? This chapter digs Nicholas Jose's nuanced and complicated view of China in his transcultural writing.

3.1 Edifying moments in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*

Dagnino concurs with Epstein for drawing on Bakhtin's standpoint that every culture is inherently insufficient in itself. Each culture, in view of its natural deficiencies, must cultivate a humble quality, opening to other cultures, rather than being immersed in the pride of self-identification and self-aggrandizement (Dagnino 132). Jose's authorial intention substantiates this quality of humility. In the preface of *Chinese Whispers*, he says, “I began in a state of wonder, and I imagine that the wonder, complicated and deepened by many humbling questions and realisations, will be part of my relationship with China to the end (Jose 1995).”

In *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, the west is portrayed as having met its medical dead end street, attempting to gain refreshingly idiosyncratic insights offered by barely known China. That is why an Australian cancer expert travels all the way to imbibe Chinese methods of treatment. Similarly, in *The Red Thread*, an Australian artist who is passionate for traditional Chinese culture eventually finds her antidote and destination in China. In this

way, Jose assumes an informed and humble attitude towards the Other and fosters this view when he clearly states it in an interview with Lili Zhang in 2014. In this interview, Jose shares some stories behind his novels, talking about transnational literature and Sino-Australian literary interactions. Speaking of his first China work, he adopts some historical documents and hopes to describe the current situation of contemporary China through the experience of the doctor. But after living in China for more than five years, things happen, which has a great impact on his creation. When asked by Zhang that, why Wally Frith, an Australian oncologist goes to China/Chinese medicine to find the answer in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and an Australian artist Ruth who has cancer, expecting to seek treatments in China in *The Red Thread*, and whether to suggest that western civilization has some problems and Chinese culture is the solution, Jose gives his opinion about the original intention of his creation is that Oriental civilization can repair the decay of western civilization, and that the “balance”, “harmony” and “patience” in Chinese culture and thoughts are essentially significant. It is proved that the two civilizations are complementary and live in harmony. Years ago, Chinese medicine was new to the Australians and is now widely accepted. History has witnessed this trend and he is just a little ahead of the time (Zhang 2015).

Secondly, the heroes' sense of growth broadly registers the tough learning process of sojourn in a different culture, of whom the experiences both enable the readers to gain access to the foreign, and trigger a new and enlightening light of perceiving and comprehending Otherness that makes both novels cognitively productive.

Laying eyes on *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, Jose delivers “messages” to the reader about foreigner's different purposes of coming to China, their viewpoints on China and their way of “survival” in China from the words of a group of expatriates. An American woman Dulcia, a script editor with Central TV, like her husband who is “drawn to repressive societies” (Jose *Avenue* 20), offers “the Chinese personal freedom at the end of her Yellow Brick Road” (21) as “an agent of liberation waging a personal campaign to help China” (40). And Clarence, an English Agency photographer mocks people from abroad, merchants, diplomats, missionaries and generals' invalidity and paranoia of their hope to change China with cynicism. With the sketchiest idea of how his grandfather Waldemart

and grandmother Retta stick China so long, Wally deems that their destiny as the Mission bears “all the capability, vanity and pathos of Victorian imperatives” (Jose *Avenue* 97). And there are the Six Foreigns can be classified, given at chapter six: Type One are “the diplomats and embassy types who had opted for China and were neither illusioned nor disillusioned as they battled on beneath a required gloss of optimism and discretion; or those who came to China as to any post;” Category Two are “the journalists who hated no-news no-information China, but loved her because by sheer dint of hanging on they became lone authorities to a gullible world;” the sleekest and most disgruntled are those business operatives, “who, seeking gainful employment in the People’s Republic, found themselves as go-betweens in multinational arms deals or struggling with projects of gargantuan fantasy designed to save the company’s bacon back home;” Number Four are the teachers, “on their wanderers’ passports, expert in anything from artificial intelligence to light opera that was deemed relevant to China’s Four Modernisations;” the Fifth are students and scholars of all kinds, “the lubricating oil;” a sixth category are tourists and transit passengers, short-term visitors who would hear no word against China (47).

However, distinctly separated from the former people, Wally Frith, who holds a relatively optimistic view on China, and who “disliked needless suspicion” (18), suspends his judgment when encountering unfamiliar things in the foreign places. For instance, he allows people to approach him, not feeling suspicious of their intentions. He prefers being with Eagle, commits himself to this trustworthy relationship, and is willing and patient to answer the regular litany of questions of a stranger such as a random local driver, excluding being with “the people from the Medical College who were eager, for their own motives, to act as his guide” (55). But it does not mean Chinese people are all invariably good or bad, just like “the snobbery, pomp, ignorance, wretchedness of Marvellous Melbourne” (99). These comparative moments can be recognized as a spark of cross-cultural understanding, for one built on the identification of a commonality transgresses cultural boundaries. Nonetheless clinging uncritically to collective identity confines one’s capacity to learn about the foreign place and precludes understanding across racial and national boundaries. The hesitation and diversion of seeing with preformed, stereotypical ideas can be detected in both works. The “cultural dominance of vision” is

what Jose tries to shun in his viewing of China (Siegel and Wolff 2002:112). He approaches the country thoughtfully, eschewing a premediated vision and employing a nuanced kind of observation when trying to make sense of its strangeness.

In addition, it is also certain that the boundaries between the self and Other or the west and east are increasingly elusive and fuzzy. For the characters endowed with a cross-cultural background partake in local people's life like all-weather companions sharing weal and woe. In *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, a critical plot-level element is the hero's search for a professor, Hsu Chien Lung whose pre-liberation works about the intersection of Chinese and western medicine may be related to Wally's studies. The practice of medicine comes to serve as a metaphor for cross-cultural encounter and communication. Whereas in fact, Wally's official role to offer advice and share research with his Chinese counterparts is unreal to him, for he never feels committed to achieving anything or leaving an indelible mark on the medical system; and his eventual meeting with Hsu does not wholly reward his medical curiosity. It is the learning about the city and its people that is more meaningful to him. Wally mixes with the people here in similar predicaments, not only including expatriates but also Chinese academics, students, artists, officials and businessmen, feeling no difference between him and them. When surrounded by friends, or when thinking of the quest for the ambitious and creative medical undertaking, he is confident that he is an integral part of the Chinese and China. And *The Red Thread* deserves recognition and acceptance in terms of cultural equality and is associated with discourse of mutual openness. By adapting the Chinese classical literary work *Six Chapters of A Floating Life*, the protagonists include a Chinese man with western education and an Australian woman aspiring Chinese culture. Parochial patriotism never happens with them. The simple beauty and happiness mesmerize both of them regardless of great vicissitudes in life.

This vision connects the visitor to the local community on a humanistic level; both he/she and the people he/she meets, as well as his/her expatriate friends, are valid components of the same system. Medicine gradually and rightfully plays a secondary role as a plot device and metaphor for human relationships and cultural understanding. And the vision in *The Red Thread* casts aside and transcends national and cultural boundaries as

ephemeral and inconsequential.

3.2 Ambivalence towards China

The subject and the object in Derridean terms, the self and the Other are not opposites, but mutually supporting entities. “‘Because of the intervention of *that* otherness,’ this means, as Bhabha remarks, that the subject is ‘always ambivalent’ (Dagnino 164).”

“Australian artists, writers, and intellectuals show the qualities of mind afforded by their position at the periphery—ambivalence, detachment, dreamy longing shot through with skepticism,” Jose wrote in the paper “Cultural Identity: ‘I Think I’m Something Else’” published in 1985 (Jose 1985:340). In the same vein, what is juxtaposed with Jose’s new vision of edifying moments is the sense of ambivalence about China, which bespeaks himself as well as his works. This ambivalent portrait of China epitomizes in the protagonists, in the course of his/her cross-cultural encounter.

In *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, Wally Frith, the central figure in the novel, an Australian professor of oncology, has recently lost his wife to his professional adversary, cancer. And the western methods and lifestyle fills him with dismay. To repair his sentimental loss, ostensibly he goes to China to trace the family tradition and the professional lead only to realize in the end that his quest has been more personal. “He had come grieving to China, and through all its layers—his searching for a treatment, a past, a lost old man, a lover—had been his quest for Bets, for a body to wear her shadow” (Jose 1989: 395). However, living in China as Lao Wai, foreigners are always held at a distance and obliged to negotiate and process the strangeness and inhospitality of the foreign environment now and then. Even when they are on intimate terms with the people and place to have a sense of home, the feeling of alienation still haunts them. They find themselves always an outsider and unable to literally get involved in the lives of Chinese people. No matter how smoothly they speak their language and how arduous their tries to build bonds with the local community, the impassable divide appears to never vanish, marking the visitors’ status as an outsider. Because China’s values and worldview merely build a chasm unsurmountable.

The concepts of insider and outsider are fundamental at so many levels of life.

The language, script and culture are expressions of this separateness, the manifestations of a society that is self-enclosed, hermetic and centred on itself.

The visitor is always an outsider (Jose 1992).

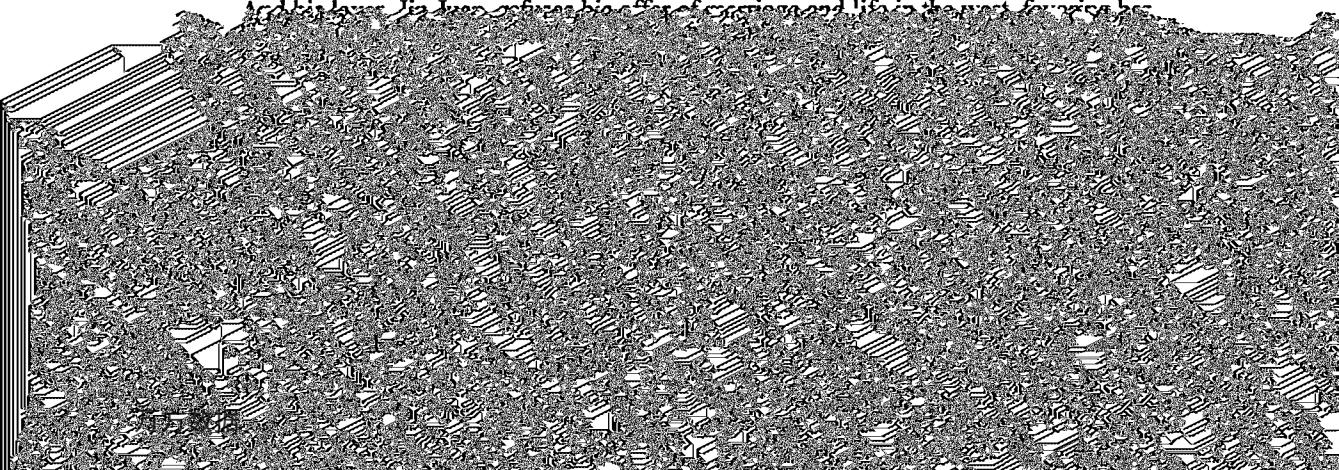
And the disillusionment of Wally accentuates and reaches its climax in the original postscript. At first Wally was an observer during the increasing unrest, whereas “their bravery stirred him, all helpless, naïve and hopeless, but at the core fearless and full of hope.” Wally ran with them when the forces restrain unofficial demonstrations, embracing the fate of people as well as their hope for a more egalitarian future. Yet what he seeks is disillusioned and refused.

He was running with arms open to grasp something that he knew must be there because its absence hurt so much. Charging forward to grab at its hem before it vanished, Wally was like all the crowd who had the conviction stronger than any dream that what they demanded was real and necessary and kept from them by a curtain only. He cried tears of rage. (Jose *Avenue* 390)

His assumed belonging is ironically shuttered and constrained. Shortly thereafter when Wally is about to leave for his hometown, during the farewell meeting at a restaurant, a xenophobic man at the next table keeps insulting Eagle as a pimp selling Chinese women (here implies Jin Juan) because of foreigner’s (Wally’s) US dollars. Wally quarrels with them in comical elementary Chinese. The man jeered in the foreigner’s face, with affront and hostility.

“Throw the foreigner out,” he ordered the boss. “We don’t want foreigners with our women. We are China. My father was skewered to death trying to keep the little Japanese out of our town. My uncle joined the Red Army to throw off foreign oppression. My grandfather was a Boxer for the Emperor. Am I not a Chinese man? Kill the foreigners!” (393)

And his lover, Jin Juan, embraces him as a sign of foreignness and life in the most foreign way



personal equation” (Jose *Avenue* 264) It is actually unpleasant to see the challenges they confront and efforts they exert in order to communicate with a foreign culture seems completely absent from the moment. Ultimately all he has to expect is “the solid routine of work and science” through which “his grief would be turned to loving memory.” For Wally’s time in China is, “the revelations that had turned into nothing, the nôtthings that had become revelations.” China gives him nothing but him back only himself. The grief he takes with him is not only the grief he brought, but merging with larger grief for another love and people. “The dream was disappearing into mist.”(377) And he goes back to “emptiness empty-handed” (377).

“They might just have something important at your place. Ninety-nine per cent unlikely, but you never know. They’re making fools of themselves to protect it, that’s obvious. You better find out what they have, lad.”

Ralph made it sound easy.

“How?”

“Avoid confrontation. Ingratiate yourself with the boss. Ingratiate yourself with the disaffected.”

“Grease up to Director Kang.” (137)

Most disturbingly, as seen in the novel and taking the dialogue above as an example, Jose structures the events of the story to unfold the Chinese, mysterious and good at playing the art (or the tricks) of ambiguity like Mrs Gu and even Jin Juan, and China, “a formless, fluid mess” (84) where “the elderly officials waddled with their unique blend of smugness, vacancy, busy bodyness and undeviating rectitude”(125); all businessmen run sleazy businesses in sophisticated ways and the bureaucratic and academic corruption have already become common practices. It must be noted that some specific moment at which fictional imagination takes place cannot be wholly identified in everyday reality.

So far, seemingly, neither does the ending communicate anything about the cultural baggage that a foreigner coming to China must carry. Although the resulting disappointment is not intended to show China in a negative light, it is regarded as doing just that. Such ambivalence that the author/Wally bears denotes an acute awareness of the gap between his living experience in China and its representation during the whole process.

The novel's power seems more apparent in its ability to highlight the differences between Wally and the locals than its attempt to record the complexities of their interactions. Despite the visitors' profound immersion in Chinese culture, the ending merely shows, that they are still passersby and onlookers, both in the way they acted and in the way people saw them, which reveals only a blunt useless truth about their experience in China.

Further, there is much intersection and interplay between Jose's cultural essays and novels. The ideas formulated in his essays can be applied to explain his fiction, as is shown in "Translating China" from his book *Chinese Whispers: Cultural Essays*(1995). Jose "had been in Peking looking at post-modern artworks with people who at the time lived in unplumbed, pre-modern rooms, artists outlawed (Jose 1992)." And he denotes it is "the wild lifestyle and passionate conviction of some contemporary Chinese poets" (Jose 1992) that are inspirations for the novel *Avenue of Eternal Peace*. In Wuhan, Jose is informed of the story about a bodyguard and security officer. He died in 1991, having lost all faith and hope "he had served with utmost loyalty all his life" (Jose 1992). When he looks at the river and the site of so many critical events in twentieth-century Chinese history, he is "struck once again with the impossibility of encompassing in words such fluid, endless immensity, such length and breadth, such dimensions of folly, tragedy and energy as is China (Jose 1992)." Jose holds reservations about the social system, but recognizes the power and wisdom of the masses.

What is interesting in the new postscript of *Avenue of Eternal Peace* is that, the fates of characters and their relationships mostly progress neatly packaged in a good way, which likewise confirms Wally's faith in China's future and effectively melts the line between medical and social development. As Wally returns to Peking Union Medical College and delivers a speech, he is relieved by the warmth and detects a thriving, more open China, which has to a great extent validated his optimistic belief of a bright future made by the restive masses of China. Wally and Jin Juan stroll around the old and fast-changing Beijing that welcomes the world for the Olympic Games.

Their taxi flew above the old hutong on a clean, new overpass as they took the Fourth Ring Road back to Mother Lin's new flat. Wally and Jin Juan looked down at the low brick walls of yesterday with passive, passing attention,

clasping hands. Their driver turned to them with one of those pasted-on, tip-me-big grins and quipped, “Things just keep on getting better and better.” (Jose 2008)

Everything here in China seems to resonate with an stark optimistic tune, which interestingly occurs in the contrast and comparison of the essay Jose writes years ago.

On the other hand, when we decipher the codes in *The Red Thread*, things are totally different when it little by little reveals contemporary China in a more discernible shape. In this book, instead of a disorganized mess, China is more comprehensive and rapidly developing. Jose sets the story in a multicultural city—Shanghai where assorted people and stories converge, a place possessing both Oriental charm and international temperament, which is closely related to the transcultural background of the protagonists.

The city that enchanted him as a young man has changed almost beyond recognition, yet somehow the atmosphere remains the same, as if some of the ghosts have stayed on. The sunset glow seems to make the wide river melt into the dark coppery sky just as he remembers. Boat lights, vaguely disembodied, make steady tracks. Fairy lights twinkle in scalloped strings along the waterfront as the buildings light up at the end of the working day, the grand old edifices of imperial stone dwarfed by the glass facades of a new economic empire, projecting ever upward (Jose *Avenue* 10).

“Posters for glittering fashions, sleek technology, stern government pronouncements—all jostling for attention and canceling each other (119).” Though foreigners come and the city turns into a popular and noisy trading port, there are still places like temple garden with “water and rock, winding pathways and flights of stone steps overhung with willow fronds and brushed by shrubbery (42).” Though luxurious and dissipated lives are easily found at some corners like the Red Rose Karaoke where Han works, there are still old parts of the city like those run-down houses with rambling attics “divided into a warren of separate apartments” (53) where Shen lives. We can see the status quo of China/Shanghai and also review its past. In spite of its drastic changes, the exclusive cultural deposits of Shanghai linger. And this is contemporary China, a fast-developing nation, with profound historical imprint, but at the same time more

inclusive and diversified.

Besides, Jose's transformation of the tone in his portraiture of the Chinese characters is apparent. For example, Shen is a refreshingly normal youth nurtured by both eastern and western cultures. He was born into a wealthy intellectual family, bearing parents' ardent expectations to become an economist someday as the firstborn son. He goes to American university to learn economics out of familial piety, but the visits to Museum gradually make him realize what his real interest lays so he transfers to the graduate program in art history, which is "vain and selfish" (Jose *Red Thread* 21) in the eyes of his father. And he tries his best to surmount obstacles to save Ruth's life, in pursuit of the fated love transcending spatio-temporal separation regardless of border and race. Neither a willing slave fettered by old conventions, nor following a stereotype routine, he absorbs the essence of both cultures who dares to follow his own heart after floating through a miasma of bewilderment. He is one of the new youth in contemporary China adhering to self-actualization, whose image is no longer limited to western preconceptions in thematic current.

3.3 Jose's edifying ambivalence

In a word, the feeling of ambivalence and its representation is nonetheless edifying. Rather than a feeling of inability to communicate with the foreign culture, it is an ever-changing uncertainty about perceiving China as the absolute other. Even if the challenges of learning the new culture and the hopelessness of being unable to get fully involved in China seem to suggest an insurmountable boundary between the visitor and the culture he/she encounters. Having resided in China for one year, Wally has a solid sense of growing and belonging, from which he refuses to recognize China as the complete other. *Avenue of Eternal Peace* helps us to understand historical events. In doing so, "it contributes to our understanding of both the separateness and the universality of all human experience (MacLaren 1989)." This ambivalence also embodies an informed reservation about representing other cultures. The chasm seems to tell the truth, but the truth is useless because it leaves out so much about how enriching and transformative the author/visitor/Wally's experience and consciousness really are. "The best that one

Australian writer's story can show is perhaps the encounter, the journey, the changes that China brings (Jose 1992)."

In both Jose's essays and novels, it is maybe his humility and self-reflection that make Jose remain self-critic about his depictions of the people and culture encountered in China. Jose is aware of the shortcomings of *Avenue of Eternal Peace* as a transcultural novel. The motif of his creations keeps altering. When this book is republished in 2008, he specially delivers a new postscript, through which rewriting the fate of most characters in the first version reflects the author's new understandings of Sino-Australian cultural exchanges (Wang, Zhang 2016: 100). He admits in an interview that the China themes are various in his works, among which the works he has recently created are closest to his current thinking (Cheng 2005: 131). After all, China's sheer size and heterogeneity are not things people can master within a limited period of time, so one of his essential approaches to learning about China is to examine the knowledge he produces with a more critical and transcultural lens.

Thus the ambivalence about China, analyzed above, denotes his critical attitude. Notwithstanding both the imagination of China's mystery and cliches of oriental exotica at times, Nicholas Jose's works and his edifying ambivalence exert much effort to actualize true affinity and familiarity with China, which to a great extent avoids being tightly encircled by playing navel-gazing national identity politics. He once mentioned that it takes him a long way to get "there".

Chapter Four Jose's Writing Strategies of Translating China

In the context of global cultural interconnectedness and in view of an imperative for cross-cultural understanding, more and more recent works have shown that people try to probe and come to terms with the hybrid nature of culture at the intersection of multiple modernities and varying socio-cultural conditions. Nicholas Jose subscribes to a transcultural writing mode. The concept of transculture/ality is “an individual, existential condition more than some sort of cultural category, ideological standpoint, or literary affiliation” (Dagnino 175). Likewise, each writer has his own transcultural writing strategies. Basically, there are three strategies applied to Jose's cultural translation of China where this sort of edifying ambivalence partakes all the time. This chapter seeks to illustrate the transcultural writing strategies deployed by the author and displays how they work effectively in translating China in the contemporaneity.

4.1 Foreignizing

Just like one of the strategies in translation, foreignizing here means the assimilation and conformation to the foreign language or local culture, whereas it is not used to move the reader away from the target culture but as a means of constructing links between each other by dismantling the ignorance of the self and the Other.

Foreignizing is one of the many strategies adopted by Jose in his cultural translation of China, embodied in his cultural and linguistic immersion. It is widely acknowledged that both novels perform well as textualized living museums whose narrators/author are/is like the affable Mr. Observer guiding readers through China which is inside Jose's field of vision as if he was its most trustworthy docent. Both works cover a broad range of Chinese material culture and intangible culture so as to make the cultural background, living context and spiritual world of all walks of life in China accessible, including the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, temple culture, ghost stories, Tang and Song poetry, antique appreciation, folk customs, Peking opera and Chinese history, etc.

And by foreignizing, Jose does not defamiliarize China but make a wrecking ball level the fence of ignorance in his Asian writing.

Both settings, modern Beijing and Shanghai are mixed with ancient flavors and enveloped by the shadow of the modernization. Both are entangled with the cultural collision between east and west. There are “switched-off neon light, drawn metal blinds and locked doors” on the late-night street, “behind which people sat on chrome chairs sipping fancy drinks, a cart man passed whispering of home to his horse (Jose *Red Thread* 32).” In both works, readers can follow closely in the heroes’ footsteps as well as be the traveler among Chinese mountains and streams, to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Beidaihe, Tangshan, Hangzhou, Taizhou and Shaoxing, to urban corners such as the bar, the wedding site, the teahouse, the compartment on a train, breakfast stands, theaters and auctions. Cultural landscapes of all kinds illustrate that the profound and exclusive culture over thousands of years has penetrated into every corner of China.

He shows the reader with Chinese typical customs. Seen from the opening chapter of *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, he displays the Spring Festival that is a custom and time when people bid farewell to the old and usher in the new year. Wally is awoken by the bursts of firecrackers sound on New Year’s Eve.

All across China, for thousands of miles, as for centuries, the people marked a new beginning by waging war on their besetting demons, firing heaven with the flame powder they had invented. Pao! Pao! Pao! Wally chuckled like a kid. Tonight each spirit made its own spunky defiance (Jose *Avenue* 10-1).

Other folk custom like Tomb-Sweeping Day turns up at the fifth chapter.

Festival of Pure Brightness, a Chinese All Souls Day when, as Jin Juan explained cheerfully, you should sweep the graves of your ancestors and step on green. But the original pilgrimage to dilapidated country graves had given way nowadays to a park visit or even a token stroll on roadside grass (120).

Also, he attempts to present “shrieking Peking opera” by an extract from the ancient tragedy *Snow in Summer*, though it is humorously regarded as “the most impossible things Chinese” (152) to understand, in which the “distortions of voice and rising anxiety of percussive sound became expressive and the nuances of the three performances shaped a

bride's tragedy that was as moving as it was tautly artificial (Jose *Avenue* 154)." Besides, Chinese pleasantries and food like dumplings, Sichuan hotpot and local potent yellow wine have been mentioned as well. Moreover, the reincarnation in Buddhism is the skeleton that runs through *The Red Thread*.

Other emblematic Chinese elements appear in his linguistic immersion. Jose uses Chinese ancient poetry with ease. For instance, when Zhang lets Jin Juan down, her tumultuous emotions are pacified by some lines from the earliest Chinese book of songs:

I had hoped to grow old with you, Now the thought of old age grieves my heart.
The Qi has its shores, The Shi its banks; How happy we were, our hair in tufts,
How fondly we talked and laughed, How solemnly swore to be true! I must
think no more of the past; The past is done with—Better let it end like this!
(163)

He also likes employing allegorical sayings like “as long and stinking as the proverbial old lady’s foot bandages” (337), “Above is heaven, below are Suzhou and Hangzhou” (92) and using Chinese idioms such as “叶公好龙”.

“The old man is fond of dragons,” she said. “It’s one of our sayings. This old guy was a dragon fanatic. He studied them, painted them, filled his house with toy dragons. One day a real dragon popped its head in the window. The old guy died of fright. It means you like the idea of a thing, but you can’t cope with the reality.” (126)

As Dagnino points out that by “adopting any language other than the native one, we are confronted with an extremely laborious conquest—especially if one decides to use it as a new tool for creative expression—which demands an act of great humility (Dagnino 171).” As Brian Castro has claimed,

Language marks the spot where the self loses its prison bars—where the border crossing takes place, traversing the spaces of others. When one speaks or translates Chinese, one metaphorically becomes Chinese; Each language speaks the world in its own way . . . When we translate from one language to another we not only reinvent ourselves but we free up the sclerotic restrictions of our own language. We feel free to transgress, to metamorphose, to

experience the uncanny . . . Other cultures and languages reinforce and enrich us by powerfully affecting and destabilising our familial tongue. We gain by losing ourselves (Dagnino 172).

Yet the ambivalence increases as Jose's claims become more sardonic. In *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, when Wally stands at the bottom of the Palace wall of The Forbidden City, he wonders,

Could this nocturnal wasteland really be the northern capital, navel of the universe, seat of Heaven's Mandate? Was it from here that astronomers threw nets across the sky, imperial gardeners produced blood-red peonies with golden stamens, hieratic opera singers electrified the air, women grew contorted for beauty, and men cut off their balls for power? Reverberated the gong to the limits of the four seas? (Jose *Avenue* 6)

When referring to ancient science and philosophy like Daoism, Eagle/Jose ironically criticizes that modern Daoists are mostly fake at a Daoist temple. "Yesterday's stinking superstition was today's colourful tradition under the Party's magic wand; and the monks, with baggy robes and inturned eyes, performed well (34)." And martial arts, which Eagle had studied as a child are "discouraged as a stinking vestige of feudal superstition" (149). The face of the performer of Beijing opera only yields "no inner life, a being whose lack of human particulars allowed the enactment of a yin-yang fantasy, female passivity and male activeness, mysterious Eastern surrender to determined Western penetration(239)." Besides, Chinese herbal medicine and its rare skill involved in application are depicted as "a dying art that had become commonly nine parts quackery and guesswork" because most "who claimed extraordinary success in its application were liars (258)."

However, instead of simply accepting that China and Chinese is somewhat untranslatable and incomprehensible, Jose moves with ease among the stereotypes, actively engaging with things foreign to him. He assumes translation "can fill gaps of interpretation, making the opaque seem transparent; an illusion, an effect, and for the writer another important and necessary 'liberation,' a way of disowning a text that has become composite, a palimpsest (Jose 462)." By the same token, this ambivalence testifies the development of his cross-cultural sensibility, marking a new self-rediscovery, which enables the

hero/reader to see with new eyes both him/herself and the other. Things that are common for the Chinese become uncommon and even grotesque in foreign eyes. The descriptive details of grotesque tinge the cross-cultural account with a kind of positive curiosity about his transcultural experience, which is not often seen in other Australian Asian writing.

Actually Jose's translating strategy of foreignization is to some extent understandable from putting oneself in his shoes.

The China ... was as strange and blank to the outside world as China had ever been. Emerging from years of revolution, isolation, and chaos after the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao in 1976, and before the reversals that followed Deng Xiaoping's return to prominence in 1978, the economic reforms and 'open door' policies of 1979, China, seen through variously tinted, refracting Western lenses, was unknowable and unthinkable in its otherness. For a writer who wanted to take his imagination to an extreme, even when writing from within his own extreme circumstances, it had possibilities (Jose 468).

4.2 Hybridizing

As Rudyard Kipling writes in his poem "We and They",

Father and Mother, and Me, Sister and Auntie say/
All the people like us are We, /And every one else is They. /And They live over the sea, /While We live over the way, But-would you believe it? --They look upon We /As only a sort of They! ...But if you cross over the sea, /Instead of over the way, /You may end by (think of it!) looking on We /As only a sort of They (Kipling, 1926: 277-80).

A dialectical relation between "we" and "they" is unveiled, generating a paradox whereby divisions also brings out unity. Because both coexist, intermingle and interplay through transculturation. In the same vein, the self and the Other or west and east hybridize in Jose's writing, as represented in the literary form and style as well as both cultures. Thus coexisting with foreignizing, hybridizing is another strategy adopted by Jose.

4.2.1 Hybridized literary form and style

Fixed rules must be followed according to traditional stylistic theories. Holistic thinking habituates us to giving things forms on a set pattern, but at the same time it is a process that stifles complexity and diversity. “The new formulation that lies outside or beyond normative literary form and style comes into being through transcultural moves (Jose 2018:73).” Likewise, it is on the basis of breaking the norms that the hybridized text modes of *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread* are built.

The text form of the novels adapts to the complicated content with a structure like the crystals without flatness, refracting China in different respects. Although *Avenue of Eternal Peace* may not be as rich and typical as *The Red Thread* in form, the polysemy brought by its hybridized text is no less than the latter, as shown in intersections of events of the present and memoirs or diaries of the past. Both novels are keen on reflecting the diversity of contemporary China, adept at depicting the external world as a skein of thread or a ball of string, never ignoring the numerous different factors existing at the same time. So the themes of the novels extend in all directions, just like a lyrebird that is able to simultaneously sing several tunes. What’s more, Jose makes his western modern writing with the addition of ancient Chinese expressions, folk colloquialism, idioms, allusions, songs and so on, which appeals to both highbrows and lowbrows. Just as there is no distinction between elegance and vulgarity in his view. He does not shy away from all the stylistic materials that could be used, traditional, modern, classic or popular. The mixture and collage of various stylistic registers stimulate and communicate respective field, seemingly oddly coexisting, which Jose transforms into his own style, with unique vibrance and energy. Regardless of “the limitations inherent in any categorization, the one relating to transculture/alinity tries to overcome the ethnic, national, cultural, imperial, or religious boundaries imposed by previous categorizations (Dagnino 173).”

In particular, the emergence of *The Red Thread* confirms Jose’s broad sweep of intellectual interests and capability of academic innovation, for this harmonious concept of mixing western literary creation with classic Chinese literature flies its own colors. Jose deems that rather than in a direct way, *Six Chapters of A Floating Life* goes into small pieces, so in some ways it is a very post-modern book even though it was written a hundred years ago. Like an invitation to him as a writer to complete these gaps in the story,

he writes his version of an end of this story. As a result, the characters in the old story come back to life in the present day through a kind of reincarnation. He sets an example of what he calls “transcultural writing” which is more than “cross-cultural”. “Transcultural” means it transcends and creates something new from combination. He says that literature travels and moves, and literature itself is a thread, for it connects through time and space. And the novel’s layout and design reconstitute a special universe and have become unrepeatable record of art. *The Red Thread* is such a valuable file of hybridity. Rather than restoring the original text of the ancient Chinese work bit by bit, Jose recreates it in Sino-Australia transcultural context. The rewriting can be regarded as a play ground, providing a perfect place for the mutual dialogue between the east and the west, the ancient and the contemporary, and tradition and modernity. It enables us to look back at the ancient eastern literature through the eyes of a contemporary western writer and redefine it through the investigation and extension from a transcultural perspective.

Besides, in both works, the writer readily mingles existent facts with fabrication, documentary data with a figment of the imagination, and the contrived and the fantastic idea with modern history. Jose breezily hybridizes his fictionalized narrative with excerpts of the real texts from two centuries ago; with accurate recounts of the real event in history; with the content of posters and slogans affixed on the walls. Yet you will notice, if I may briefly digress, that Li Yao, who did the Chinese translation, omitted translating partial content in order to sidestep its political spectrum especially in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*. Due to the confined space and content, the options, abbreviation, possible recompositions and visual context changes processed by Li in making Jose’s voice heard in Chinese remain to further investigate.

The linguistic and literary interactions of east and west testify the aesthetic and transcultural effects of mixing, and collision of multiple languages within literary texts. As a scholar, Jose’s writing is never boring; as a novelist, his writing is original and never extravagant; as a male writer, he writes sensitively; as a culture lover, he is polymathic, not afraid to get involved in advanced research. Jose’s writing is a kind of mixed art, like a “hodgepodge” in the post-modern sense.

4.2.2 The hybridity in culture

Contemporary Australian writers of fiction have begun adjusting discourses to re-configure embodied cross-cultural experience. They are subverting clichéd binaries: mind/body, male/female, white/black, Asian/Australian dichotomies, testing transformative power through polyvocality, hybridisation, manipulation of agency and transgressing generic boundaries. They are using, but also deconstructing, cultural myths (Jacobs 2002: 9).

It is one of the remarkable features of the two novels that western and eastern cultures coexist and intermingle. The intensity of the use of eastern cultural codes far exceeds the texts of most Australian writers. Jose makes his narrative text collage both cultures, which forms an unprecedented transcultural writing. He performs a balancing act between an unparalleled private vision and the myth weaved from layers of cultural exchanges.

We are given much room to argue that the cultural concepts and spiritual essence permeated in the novels are not as orientalized or westernized. This attitude and stance is obvious in the expectations of characters shaped in both novels—Wally Frith in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, Shen or Ruth in *The Red Thread*, all have western education background, living in modern life; but they always yearn for free spiritual life as well as eastern traditional culture. In particular, Ruth is a hybrid character who straddles two cultures. Shen has a crush on this Australian woman at first glance at auction hall. Ruth paints with technically virtuosity in Chinese traditional style known as exquisite brush. What appeals to her is accidental and fleeting beauty like orchid's shadow on the wall. Her aesthetic taste follows the spirit of traditional Chinese culture. She likes embroidering and eating Chinese congee, sour and salty things just like what Yun eats with her lover Shen Fu. In the end, Ruth chooses a retreat away from the turmoil of the world, living in lands of idyllic beauty, which reflects an ancient Oriental social ideal of seeking a heaven of peace, the philosophical pursuit of returning to nature and simplicity, as well as the general social psychological trend of modern people that is to seek for the true self. Those all reverberate the ethical and moral values of Taoism. For this reason, the image of Ruth contains richer content.

The characters in both works share the same transnational love situation. The gender hierarchies and conservative traditions of the society curtail their freedom of love. Ruth

and Shen are predestined to be in love, whose hearts and souls are bound together by the Old Man and the Moon through the red thread in the last life. While another figure Han sophisticates this love triangle, towards whom Ruth maintains sensual obsession and homosexual orientation. In *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, Autumn, an eighteen boy from a village secretly has a relationship with an English man Clarence. Either Wally and Jin Juan's marriage, or Shen's love of a foreign woman, or Ruth's infatuation with Han, or Autumn's affair with an English man challenges the rules of the patriarchy, which is iconoclastic and deviant in patriarchal system but also stands for the attrition and confluence between the modern and traditional, the east and west. Yet their relationships all survive at last, literally and metaphorically.

Thus two entirely distinct cultures are compatible with each other and the author's attitude towards life surpasses the inherent concept of the east and the west. The cultural and literary discourses of the east and west are not separated into two parts, but could be transcended, fused and mixed together to form an organic whole harboring all characters. All in all, both works are crystallization of the international status quo with cultural openness and diversity under the convergent conditions of native culture and foreign culture, whose profound connotations perform through the secular life of ordinary people. It is the cultural value of both works that is first and foremost the reason why they have been widely welcomed.

4.3 Anastomosing

An anastomosis (plural anastomoses, from Greek ἀναστόμωσις) is a connection or opening between two things that are normally diverging or branching, such as between blood vessels, leaf veins, or streams. Such a connection may be normal or abnormal, acquired or innate, and natural or artificial. The term is applied in medicine, biology, mycology, geology, geography and architecture. As for the wording and purport of what Jose writes, Australia and China anastomose extensively and specifically with branches of the family history and the idea of medicine.

The story in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* alternates with Wally's reminiscence and his grandparents' records. Wally notices connections between China and his home country

when he was a little child through the “brusque memoir” (*Jose Avenue* 47) of his grandfather who serves as a doctor and a Christian in the late Ching dynasty as well as his grandmother Retta’s diaries. “Grandpa teased him with oriental mysteries, ... the voice croaked its summons for the boy to enter the presence of an ancestral spirit.”(49) These myths are a sort of link between Australia and China. And he “liked best the folder of documents kept in the locked drawer, and his favourite thing there was his father’s birth certificate. Jeremiah Columba Frith, in browned copperplate, 8th August 1905, Hangchow.(57)”

And though the searching process is brimming with much ado, Wally’s final confrontation with professor Hsu gradually uncovers intricate details encompassing family histories and unknown source of traditional herbal knowledge. At first, the old man, who cherishes the memories he chose to conserve and is not willing to talk about the past when willfully made oblivion, is reluctant to discuss his work which is widely divergent from the traditional studies but curiously foresees the directions later taken by western oncology. Hsu shows polite disinterest and even the sight of the copies of his old trailblazing papers that have incited Wally’s interest and brought him to China in person does not open a door. It turns out that none of them is the creator of traditional herbal knowledge. Hsu is told about the shaman of Heaven’s Terrace by a young woman with western education, later his wife, who is skeptical but impressed by the “manifestations of ‘force’”(320) executed by a witchdoctor in the area where she has grown up. It is she that holds such an idea of keeping a record of the cases, writing the first papers. Kang gets the reward for ideas he plagiarizes Hsu. Hsu’s work cannot emerge without his wife, whereas she records the deeds of a shaman. So the shaman is probably the source. But he is just a mountain man, one of the masses. In addition, Hsu’s wife comes from Heaven’s Terrace, near Taizhou that may well be the fact that the woman with western education is Peg, Retta’s adopted Chinese daughter. In the last pages of her diary, Retta writes, “I take nothing from this land that I did not bring. My boys were born here, but they are not of here. My Wee One, my strength, my belief, dare I say my husband, my God, my Peg. What I take with me from this land are absences only (323).” On the contrary, the truth drives off in the reverse direction that Retta has left their traces on the land with a sophisticated and wise

mind blending the best of east and west. She virtually plays a positive and constructive role in bridging the two separate and distinct traditions. And those active ideas, research, explorations and famous papers are the result of Peg's work, based on whose drafts Hsu could be able to re-express in the light of new attitudes he was learning at Harvard. And the family connection again exerts its gravitational force, bringing the younger generation back. Having been to the places that reconstructed in family lore and his childhood myth of China, Wally feels obliged to carry on the idea and research inspired by Hsu's work, than "landing back on the solid routine of work and science" (Jose *Avenue* 396). In such a context, the endless bleak and frustrated trajectories of China come to energetic fruition. And in this sense, Sino-Australia transcultural relations can be explained in brand-new angles of visions and ways, and the latent and important significance is excavated.

Besides, an idealized dimension of transculturation takes a highly condensed form in the idea of medicine. Hsu implies the tragedy is that

Chinese medicine and Western medicine were severed from each other. What passed for Chinese medicine, though allegedly the great pride of the people, became an ignorant travesty; and what passed for Western medicine was often crude and behind the times, an application of technique without understanding.
(311)

It results in the present-day reconciliation of eastern and western practice, "where, for instance...the common cold would be blindly treated with a huge shot of penicillin in the bum and a sack of dirty dandelion roots to be consumed as gallons of bitter tea (311)!" Hsu philosophically sheds some light on east and west that they "meet on the common ground...where all doctors meet, in the impossibility of their task", "where they merge...where they can no longer be separated" (312). Instead of in a spiritual funk about how little he has discovered and how few questions have been clarified, Wally, with "a new determination", is "sparking with new questions and devising new experiments to follow up when he got back" (337), even though those old questions remain intact, which drops a hint to us about the light of China's myth will not drain away but keeps imbedded in the mind through unmet curiosity. And in the cultural contact zone where Wally and many other foreigners are trying to make sense of the other, preconceived opinions do not

count that much since huge creative potential is unleashed and reaped through imaginative misinterpretations or misunderstandings, though most of them act like a bunch of old men who are fond of dragons. Jose takes the field of medicine as a utopian space that lies beyond the divides of both cultures, a special space where a unique confluence of cultures, inherent creativity and wisdom coalesce to create literally different things.

Chapter Five Causes of the Ambivalence in Jose's Transcultural Writing

Fiction is a performative site where all convergent conditions can be probed. Generally, we examine and convey the construction of identity basically from a national point of view when reading. Dagnino articulates that for a transcultural analysis, the texts must be read as a product of global dynamics and its accompanying process of modernity, which need us to “transcend the limitations of our ingrained given cultures, biographies, and identities and to look beyond” (Dagnino 1997). And also, so as to better comprehend the expressions of contemporary novels, one must place them within a specific cultural context. Central to the present chapter examines causes of the ambivalence appearing in Nicholas Jose's transcultural writing.

5.1 Australia's ambivalence towards China

What do we want with China? In a more Asia-oriented Australia, what do we want from Chinese culture? I ask these questions in genuine puzzlement. Returning to Australia from Peking in 1990, I discovered how pressing – not to say fashionable – the interest in Asia had become in government, business and the arts. It is too early to guess at the enduring consequences of this wave; but already the ground has shifted from the days, as late as the 1970s, when an interest in China was considered more or less eccentric (Jose 1995).

These words above derive from the preface of *Chinese Whispers*. Jose completed *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread* respectively in the late 1980s and the early 2000s. What happened in those days? What did Australia want with China? Why is an interest in China considered “eccentric” in the 1970s? Why does Australian government, business and the arts take considerable interest in Asia in the 1990s? What has altered between then and now?

“One significant change in the 1950s and 1960s in Australia was its growing awareness of itself as part of Asia, in spite of its antagonism to Chinese and Russian

communism (Ouyang 24).” In Australia, the White Australia policy is stripped after 1965 and the multicultural policy has implemented since the mid 1970s. According to Robert Macklin, the author of *Dragon and Kangaroo: Australia and China’s Shared History from the Goldfields to the Present Day*(2017), it is US preferences that has prevented Australia from officially recognizing the People’s Republic of China any earlier. Australia opened official relations with China on December 21, 1972. Soon afterwards, China began embarking on the reform and market opening in 1978, which unbinds its conversion into the present economic giant. There follows a long period, Macklin says, “of perhaps 35 years when China-Australia relations became closer than ever before (Online).” And since then, China has exerted an increasingly powerful influence on the world stage, transforming the face of Asia and the Indo-Pacific countries as well. Till now, there is, neither allies nor adversaries, but a “comprehensive strategic partnership” with “strong trade and economic complementarities” enhanced between both nations especially since the Liberal government of Australia under former Prime Minister Tony Abbott secured the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement in 2014(Online).

During this period, despite the fact that the Australian strengthening trade links with China is salient, the bilateral relationship swings from side to side and back and forth like the pendulum. Some disputes between the two nations are inescapable, flaring up from time to time. Because there are essential differences between the values of Australia’s democratic system and China’s characteristic democratic centralism, let alone the added layer of cultural and historical complexities, which has generated unavoidable moments of discord. The Sino-Australian relations plunged and worsened rapidly in 1996 to the lowest point since 1989 (Wesley 2005). And all the problems are exacerbated by lacking fundamental awareness and understanding of culture and history on both sides. Besides, the issue of racism continues hanging over Australia. Macklin says, “There has been a distrust of China in Australia for a very long time. Partly, it comes from the racism of Australia’s colonial regime under the British (Online).” China and the Chinese was perceived as the Yellow Peril, the major potential threat to Australia in fictional representation despite of some “attempts to remold popular attitudes towards the Chinese appear in works of fiction by such people as George Johnston and David Martin” (Ouyang

23). So it is not usual of Australian Asian writings to resonate with Western discourse and still appear to endorse the Occident.

The writing context can largely influence the authorial discourse. Does the author conform to the social ideas even if they are of bias? Or calmly change them? These two books of Nicholas Jose are different, but in a good way, whose voice is not espousing nationalism or xenophobia which arouses suspicion, agitation or antagonism. Nor is the voice unreasonable and conservative; it does not sardonically overemphasize China's feudal ethical code or the obsolete spirit which is still in the old dynasty; also, he is not a businessman who is of eagerness for instant success and quick profits in peddling exotic culture. Nor is he a shallow and ignorant cheater. Instead, he has caught a ray of zeitgeist indeed, of whom the two fictions are to a great extent objective and finally manage to sweep away the kind of banal representation of a decadent and inscrutable China which is common in other China novels, thus giving us a refreshing and broad cultural view. How could it not be prophetic and exciting? From this perspective, the two works for China are epoch-making. Since his unique shaping of China will gradually influence the traditional view of Australia. As for reproaching him for innocuous flaws and occasional mistakes in cultural understanding, it must be noted that the absolute perfection is boring without shortcomings. And the most important thing is -- we can see the light in the woods where trees overcast the sky.

It was only after 1978, when China unbarred its door again to the world, that bilateral understanding and studies started to take root, germinate and continuously grow. Positively, the celebrated Gang of Nine, involving Wenzhong Hu, Yuanshen Huang, Zhuanglin Hu, Weirui Hou, Ruiqing Du, Jiaoru Qian, Rijin Long, Guofu Wang and Chaoguang Yang, opened their journey of learning and improvement at University of Sydney. And in 1986, Jose went to China and picked Yu Ouyang up in Shanghai. Nicholas Jose himself and a number of other Australian academics have helped establish centers for Australian studies and "the nodes of cultural contact multiply and networks of dedicated scholars and teachers come into being" (Ommundsen 2011: 85). Then the social interactions between everyday Australians and Chinese people have transformed and fostered better cultural ties.

At this uncertain world, it is still unquestionably better to be closely attentive to the common ground between nations and cultures while putting aside their disputes, whenever and wherever. Both had better endeavor a lot to further much more honest, open and frank exchanges, to promote mutual understanding and for a positive vision of the future. And for the sake of high efficiency and high throughput, Australia ought to try harder to perceive Chinese thinking and its processes of policy-making. Since Australia possesses a pivotal resource, i.e. its dynamic, knowledgeable and active Chinese diaspora and China translators like Nicholas Jose, for minimizing barriers and promoting affinities.

5.2 Jose's writing with dual identity

According to transcultural discourse and practice one can transcend any residual or rigid sense of national or ethnic affiliation by exploring alternative and more encompassing modes of belonging or not belonging. By transposing this attitude into the aesthetic and creative realm, imaginative writers and artists are able to challenge the perceived dominance of ethnic or national forms of identification and the potency of territorial, native, and cultural roots (Dagnino 192).

However, “one may stretch the umbilical cord with one’s native cultural heritage (that is, with one’s personal and inter-subjective historicity), but not eliminate it (Dagnino 192).” Jose writes with dual identity, namely, an Australian writer and a cross-cultural traveler.

5.2.1 An Australian writer

“Whatever else Australian thinkers and writers may do, whatever world problems they may engage with, their work also has a separate dimension of social purpose. They are writing and thinking Australia (Jose 1985: 319).” “Asia is inscribed, positively or negatively, in Australia’s definition of itself, past, present and becoming. Asia is constitutive of Australian imaginary as a (historically) racialised society (Jose 2009).” In this sense, at any rate focusing on Asia, a specific country or region is an essential part of an egocentric journey of seeking the distinctive feature of Australian experience. Almost

all the cultural and intellectual lives in Australia are tied up with the vexed question of national identity, which has haunted Australians since the beginning of this country. Meanwhile, the heated debate about Australia's cultural cringe or cultural snarl lingers on because Australia is still stuck in the predicament of having been "a province of anywhere" as well as of inheriting the colonial legacies of its imperial overlords (Jose 1985: 313).

Jose is, first of all, an Australian writer. He endorses the concept of a continuum of literary tradition. Readers can discern points of connection and derivation between Australian early writers and Jose, even Jose himself acknowledges a link with Frank Moorhouse in his own creation. But the tradition "need not be restrictive or monumental; it can be enabling and in flux. It can also be resisted, broken or defied. It is possible to start again, to make a new tradition, where the larger continuity may only become apparent in retrospect" (Jose 2009). Speaking of the eligibility for the Miles Franklin Award that a book must "present Australian life in any its phases", he deems that trying to translate is one of the phases of Australian life as well. "The process of translation, the journey of mind to make intelligible what we perceive at first to be only dimly part of our world, but which eventually becomes familiar and known, is what we are all about, one way or another, and is surely about all of us" (Jose 1992). So *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread* are ostensibly un-Australian but in essence "Australia" writings, performing a double task of reckoning with the transformations of consciousness through cross-cultural encounters so as to intervene the present and simultaneously disrupting and revalorizing the act of writing on a national theme.

5.2.2 A cross-cultural traveler

Nevertheless, the fact that the world is fluid should not be ignored. "The truths of identity are complex and shifting" (Jose 1985: 318). One's cultural identity is far from being permanently fixed in the past, but an extension of the continuous forces of history, culture, and power. Nor is Jose's identity set and single, and his writing with dual identity undergoes from shading to opening gradually. Drenched in various cultural atmosphere and transcultural interactions, Jose is also a cross-cultural traveler, of whom there is an identity hidden behind an Australian writer that not only enables Jose to get inexhaustible resources, wider perspectives to conceive and present so to speak, and to write beyond the

reach of the general writers who have been living in confinement; and more importantly, this kind of dual identity renders a writer capable of traversing freely between native culture and alien culture, living in an in-between space, finally arriving at “the circulation of cultures beneath and beyond the level of the nation” (Carter 2007: 119).

Jose has been on the road. Brought up in Adelaide, he was born in London to an Australian family whose paternal great-grandfather had been a missionary in China and whose grandfather was born in China. He has lived in Italy twice, got his doctorate in literature from Oxford, become a China scholar, a diplomat, a novelist, and turned into a visiting chair professor at Harvard University and a professor of the University of Adelaide. His luminous second novel, *Paper Nautilus* (1987), is set down in David Malouf’s house in Italy in 1984, and his third novel, three years later, the highly appraised *Avenue of Eternal Peace* (shortlisted for the 1989 Miles Franklin Award) is finished in China. For five years starting in 1986, Jose has stayed in China, serving as a teacher of literature and Australian studies at Peking Foreign Studies University and East China Normal University, then a cultural counselor at the Australian Embassy, Beijing. Jose makes an eclectic, international circle of friends, meeting many Chinese artists, writers and dissidents such as “print-makers in the far north-east, supportive instructors in Wuhan, outspoken critics in Peking and Shanghai, young editors from the south-west” as he travels around China in those years (Jose 1994). He has also learned Mandarin and has even been given a Chinese name “周恩”(to think thoughtfully). Due to his family background, interests and hobbies, he immerses himself in eastern cultures earlier and deeper than the average and has a more perceptual understanding of Chinese traditional culture. These unique life experiences greatly influence his creation. He “fascinates because he carries with him the impression of otherness, a man who’s at home in many different worlds” (Barrowclough 1997), which, then, brings superiority in his writing and that transcultural awareness makes Jose universally acknowledged by readers in Australia, China and worldwide, for those who moving safely on the margins of cultural contact zone contemplate profoundly and insightfully.

Rather than deeply inscribing in a national tradition or canonical representations, it is “the human interest that makes the journey” (Jose 1995). Rather than positioning himself

as a visiting scholar or an alienator from a remote place, just like the foreign characters in his novels, he comes down to earth and is actively involved in the big theater of local life in China. And just like Wally and Routh, Jose is a participant observer in dialogue with the people and culture being studied. Different from the convention of treating China merely as an inscrutable exotica that the heroic traveler sits atop and gazes, he argues for a more fruitful relationship between the self and the Other based on equality, respect, acceptance of difference, and reciprocities. His writing with dual identity demonstrates his transcultural commitment to transcending the divergence between east and west to create productive and positive interconnectedness. Besides, the writers in a modern world, who ride on big waves are open-minded, keeping abreast or ahead of the times. And nongovernmental cross-cultural contact, outside experts and people-to-people exchanges become, in effect, coworkers of positively bilateral transculturation.

Chapter Six Conclusion

A transcultural prism infuses literary creation, criticism and reading with new intellectual energy and inspiration, adapting potential affinities to local conditions and other cultures. That happens with Nicholas Jose's transcultural writing about China.

A sense of ambivalence bespeaks Jose and his transcultural writing, which derives from his writing with dual identity and the convoluted writing context. Jose is, first of all, an Australian writer. Drenched in transcultural interactions, Jose is also a cross-cultural traveler, an identity enabling him to get inexhaustible resources and wider perspectives to conceive and present; and more importantly, by living in an in-between space, this kind of dual identity renders a writer capable of traversing freely between native culture and alien culture. Different from the convention of treating China merely as an inscrutable exotica that the heroic traveler/narrator/author sits atop and gazes, Jose pursues a more fruitful relationship between each other based on equality and reciprocities.

Basically there are three strategies adopted in his cultural translation—foreignizing, hybridizing and anastomosing. By translating the differences that are foreign to each other and mainly embodied in linguistic and cultural immersion, the gaps of interpretation could possibly be filled. Through hybridizing, the linguistic and literary interactions of the east and the west actualize the aesthetic and transcultural effects of mixing, permeating and collision of multiple languages within literary texts. And an unparalleled private vision and the myth weaved from layers of cultural exchanges are obvious in the expectations of characters shaped in both novels. Also, seen from the wording and purport of what Jose writes in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*, Australia and China (west and east) anastomose extensively and specifically, which composes an idealized dimension of transculturation. Both books and Jose himself shed light on the mutability of culture. His writing with dual identity demonstrates his commitment to transcending the divergence between east and west to create productive interconnectedness.

In sum, this ambivalence appearing in Nicholas Jose's transcultural writing is nonetheless edifying. Rather than a feeling of inability to communicate with the foreign culture, it is an uncertainty about perceiving China as the absolute other. Rather than

putting up walls between the allegedly superior traveler and his mediocre counterparts, it is making a wrecking ball demolish the wall between each other and triggering new visions that do originate in Jose's Asian writing.

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