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论 文 题 目

**Representing Traditional Chinese Cultural Elements
in the Postmodernist Context**

**—An Analysis of Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a
Thousand***

**在后现代语境中再现中国传统文化元素
—解读拉丽莎·赖的《千年狐》**

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Representing Traditional Chinese Cultural Elements
in the Postmodernist Context
—An Analysis of Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*

by

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Under the Supervision of

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ABSTRACT

Larissa Lai (1967-) is a well-known Chinese Canadian female writer, critic and university professor. Her literary works explore the relationship of identity, race, culture, gender and sex. *When Fox Is a Thousand* is Lai's first novel and was shortlisted for the 1996 Books in Canada First Novel Award. The novel narrates a legend of a mythologized Fox engaging in spiritual possession of a Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty and a Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong in the current era, and skillfully represents traditional Chinese cultural elements.

This thesis, from the perspective of postmodernism, probes into postmodernist writing techniques of intertextuality, parody, fragmentation, collage, indeterminacy and pluralism in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Intertextuality is embodied by recreating a spiritualized Fox and representing the image of Yu Hsuan-Chi; parody is woven through the ironic rewriting of traditional Chinese cultural tales. Because the Fox, Yu Hsuan-Chi and Artemis Wong narrate their experiences respectively in different space and time, so the literary form, narrative mode, space and time in the novel are all fragmented; meanwhile, the novel collages plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements to enhance the feature of fragmentation more obvious. The plots, language and images in the novel are characterized by indeterminacy to illustrate the pluralism of the theme.

Based on a meticulous analysis, the thesis concludes that, the novel draws inspiration from Chinese mythology and traditional culture with a focus upon historical and mythological female figures; by employing postmodernist writing techniques, it integrates historical and realistic, cultural and mythological connections, and disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and

spiritual strength in Canadian society.

Keywords: *When Fox Is a Thousand*; Chinese Canadian literature; postmodernist techniques; literary representation; traditional Chinese cultural elements

摘要

拉丽莎·赖（1967- ）是加拿大知名华裔女作家、文学评论家和大学教授。她的文学作品主要探讨身份、种族、文化和性别之间的关系。《千年狐》是其第一部小说，1996 年获得“加拿大图书第一小说奖”提名。小说讲述了一只被神话的狐狸分别附体在中国唐代女诗人鱼玄机和当代加拿大华裔女孩阿尔特弥斯·黄身上，由此衍生出的传奇故事巧妙地传达了中国传统文化元素。

本论文从后现代主义的视角出发，探究了《千年狐》运用的互文性、戏仿、碎片化、拼贴、不确定性和多元性等后现代主义写作技巧。小说采用互文性写作技巧，重写了灵性化的狐狸和鱼玄机的故事；采用戏仿的写作手法，讽刺性地改写了中国传统文化故事；小说让主要角色狐狸、鱼玄机和阿尔特弥斯在不同的时空分别叙述自己的故事，其文学表现形式、叙述模式、时间和空间都呈现出碎片化特征；小说还大量拼贴了中国传统文化元素，使其碎片化特征更为明显；小说的情节、语言和人物都具有不确定性，不确定性的多样化也体现出小说主题的多元性。

本论文通过对小说文本的细致分析和总结，认为《千年狐》从中国神话和中国传统文化中汲取了灵感，聚焦于历史和神话中的女性人物形象；运用后现代主义写作技巧，将历史与现实、文化与神话的联系整合在一起，在后现代主义语境中传播了中国传统文化元素；更具意义的是，小说表达了被边缘化的加拿大华裔女性希望挣脱父权制和白人主流文化束缚的心愿，旨在唤起加拿大华裔追溯中国文化渊源和文化精神，在加拿大社会中建构自己的文化身份和精神力量的意识。

关键词：《千年狐》；加拿大华裔文学；后现代主义技巧；文学再现；中国传统文化元素

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Introduction to Larissa Lai and *When Fox Is a Thousand*

Larissa Lai (1967-) is a Chinese Canadian writer, critic, and professor. She was born in La Jolla, California, and grew up in St. John's, Newfoundland. In 1990, she graduated with a B.A. in Sociology in the University of British Columbia. Subsequently, she earned her MA from the University of East Anglia, and in 2006, she graduated from the University of Calgary with her PhD. She is an active committee member of the reading series Play Chthonics at UBC's Green College. She also edited poetry for the journal *Canadian Literature* from 2007 to 2010. She, a Chinese-Canadian, has been cited as an example of "the growing elasticity of Canadian fiction and Canadian identity". From 1997 to 1998 she was the Canadian Writer-in-Residence at the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program at the University of Calgary, and she held a similar position as writer-in-residence at Simon Fraser University in 2006. She was awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council postdoctoral fellowship at UBC in 2006-2007. Lai has twice been an instructor at Clarion West science fiction and fantasy writer's workshop (in 2004 and 2007). She was also an instructor at the original Clarion workshop at UCSD in 2009.

Lai's first novel *When Fox Is a Thousand* was published in 1995, and it was shortlisted for the 1996 Books in Canada First Novel Award. *When Fox Is a Thousand* was republished by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2004, slightly revised, and with a new afterword. In 2002, Lai published her second novel *Salt Fish Girl*, which was shortlisted for the James Tiptree, Jr. Award, the Sunburst Award and the City of Calgary W. O. Mitchell Award. In 2018, she published her third novel *The Tiger Flu*. She also wrote some books of poetry, chapbooks and non-fiction. She has published articles and criticism in such journals as *West Coast Line*, *Canadian Literature*, *The Capilano*

Review, *English Studies in Canada* and *Fuse Magazine*, and several anthologies including *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* and *Bringing it Home: Women Talk About Feminism in Their Lives*. As an out lesbian, she was one of the panelists at Write Out West, one of Canada's first-ever full-scale conferences of LGBT writers, in 1997. Lai's works mainly explore the relations of culture, identity, race, gender and sexuality. In her novels, she draws inspiration from Chinese mythology and culture with a particular focus upon historical and mythological female figures; these historical, cultural, and mythical connections are integrated within a feminist science fiction framework in her novel *Salt Fish Girl*.

When Fox Is a Thousand narrates a legend of a mythologized Fox engaging in spiritual possession of a Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty and a Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong in the current era. The Fox can engage in spiritual possession of people. At first, she chooses Yu Hsuan-Chi, who is the daughter of a herbalist in the Tang Dynasty. After her father gets sick seriously, Yu Hsuan-Chi sells herself to a tea house in order to earn enough money to give her father cure. Then she marries Li Yi, but she lives unhappily. After giving birth to a boy, she elopes with her maid Lu Ch'iao, because Yu Hsuan-Chi loves her. However, Lu Ch'iao finally elopes with her own lover. Unexpectedly, Lu Ch'iao died, and Yu Hsuan-Chi is executed due to being accused of killing her. After the Fox immigrates to Canada, she engages in spiritual possession of Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong, who is confused about her current situation. Her parents were forced to give her up for adoption when she was six months old. Recently, her biological mother wants to meet her. Her friends gradually drift away from her, so she is confused about her identity and future. The Fox tells the experiences of Yu Hsuan-Chi and the history of ancient China to Artemis Wong, therefore through the Fox, Lai disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements.

When Fox Is a Thousand contains many elements, such as history, fairy tales and mythology. This delightful novel cracks open all preconceptions of Chinese Canadian females, gender, sexuality, family, faith, and the flow of time. By employing postmodernist writing techniques, *When Fox Is a Thousand* integrates historical and realistic, cultural and mythological connections, and disseminates traditional Chinese

cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

1.2 Basic Framework and Significance of the Thesis

As a novel bearing postmodernist features and traditional Chinese cultural elements, *When Fox Is a Thousand* successfully combines postmodernist features and traditional Chinese cultural elements together. This thesis analyzes the traditional Chinese cultural elements in *When Fox Is a Thousand* in the postmodernist context. This thesis consists of six chapters, and the basic structure is as follows:

Chapter one introduces Larissa Lai and her novel *When Fox Is a Thousand*. It also outlines basic framework and significance of the thesis.

Chapter two focuses on the studies on *When Fox Is a Thousand* at home and abroad. It also introduces the theory of postmodernism.

Chapter three analyzes the writing techniques of intertextuality and parody exerted in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Firstly, this chapter illustrates the intertextuality of the Fox in the novel and foxes in traditional Chinese history and literary works and its significance. Secondly, it portrays the traditional and recreated image of Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty. Thirdly, this thesis manifests that many stories in *When Fox Is a Thousand* are the parody of traditional Chinese tales. The application of intertextuality and parody in the novel represents its postmodernist features, which assists traditional Chinese cultural elements to be conveyed.

Chapter four demonstrates how Lai employs fragmentation and collage in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. The fragmentation in the novel is mainly manifested in the fragmentation of literary form, narrative mode, space and time. Without fragmentation, traditional Chinese cultural elements cannot be conveyed successfully. By employing the writing technique of collage, *When Fox Is a Thousand* exhibits plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements such as Taoism, metaphysics, foot binding, funeral custom,

the thought of son preference and Chinese female emperor Wu Zetian's experiences to enhance the feature of fragmentation more obvious. The employment of collage makes *When Fox Is a Thousand* more fragmented.

Chapter five probes into Lai's application of indeterminacy and pluralism. This chapter narrates the indeterminacy of plots, which is demonstrated by fragmented plots and the openness of Yu Hsuan-Chi's cause of death. The game of signifier exhibits the indeterminacy of language, and the anonymous Fox represents the indeterminacy of image. The plots, language and images in the novel are characterized by indeterminacy to illustrate the pluralism of the theme.

Chapter six comes to the conclusion of this thesis by summarizing research perspective, research conclusion and significance of this thesis. This thesis concludes that the novel disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

The significance of the thesis lies in its exploration of traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context. This thesis, from the perspective of postmodernism, interprets postmodernist writing techniques in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, namely, intertextuality, parody, fragmentation, collage, indeterminacy and pluralism. This thesis concludes that, the novel draws inspiration from Chinese mythology and traditional culture with a focus upon historical and mythological female figures; by employing postmodernist writing techniques, it integrates historical and realistic, cultural and mythological connections, and disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on *When Fox Is a Thousand* at Home and Abroad

When Fox Is a Thousand has gained prestigious reputation in literary circles of Canada and China. There are plenty of articles, theses and literary works at home and abroad concerning *When Fox Is a Thousand*. This novel has aroused people's interests for its bold and novel content. And more and more writers and critics have conducted in-depth analysis from different perspectives.

Based on the information retrieval on *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the academic studies on the novel are insufficient. Most studies abroad explore gender, sexuality and protagonists of *When Fox Is a Thousand*.

In terms of research on gender and sexuality of *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu tackles transgression in intertextual, intercultural productions and their morphological variations in Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*. In Fu's opinion, *When Fox Is a Thousand* not only inscribes three female narrators' textual and sexual experiences in historically defined representational modes, but goes beyond transgressive normality. Fu also holds the view that the heroines of the book subvert hegemonic laws to create a women-identified utopic site and *When Fox Is a Thousand* concerns history, maternal genealogy and lesbian intertextuality and the like (54-88). Linda Christine Fox's doctoral dissertation "Queer Outburst: A Literary and Social Analysis of the Vancouver Node (1995-96) in English Canadian Queer Women's Literature" analyzes *When Fox Is a Thousand* from the perspective of queer theory. From her perspective, Yu Hsuan-Chi, Fox, Artemis Wong and her friends have homosexual tendencies (Fox 45-86). Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu's doctoral dissertation "Differing Bodies, Defying Subjects, Deferring Texts: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression in Chinese Canadian Women's Writing" contextualizes the discourse of lesbian desire and the fox-femme fatale motif in Chinese

mythology to situate the female voice in cultural disruptions in *When Fox Is a Thousand* (26-73).

In terms of research on protagonists of *When Fox Is a Thousand*, a doctoral dissertation entitled “Translation, Transformation, and Transculturation: A study of Selected Postcolonial Texts” explores the image of the Fox in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. This doctoral dissertation demonstrates that Lai “used the Fox both as an important metaphor and as narrative technique” (Luo 64-77). Jenny Lauren Heijun Wills narrates that “the adoptee figure in *When Fox Is a Thousand* represents the Chinese diaspora and symbolizes strong connections to those ancestral and cultural pasts” (86). Robyn Morris compares Rachel in *Blade Runner* and Artemis Wong in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Morris’ article argues that Lai’s answer in *Automaton Diaries* to Deckard’s well-known question in *Blade Runner*—“How can it not know what it is?”—is a vision of Rachel turning around and looking within and across the differing paradigmatic structures of cinema, literature, art, photography and all its attendant criticism. Morris’ article also explores Lai’s standpoint to the issue that the White regards the Asian female body as a hyper-feminized and doll-like other.

Compared with studies abroad, the domestic research on *When Fox Is a Thousand* is relatively late. The domestic research on this novel mainly focuses on the third space, subject construction and the quest for self-identity.

In regard to research on the third space perspective of *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Xu Wei explores the transgressive characterization of female subject in *When Fox Is a Thousand* from the perspective of the third space in his article which was published in 2013. Xu Wei deems that in recent years, the writing of Canadian ethnic writers is apparently different from traditional writing of ethnic minorities. In a sense, the diversity and experimental features of Canadian ethnic writers’ writing subvert the essential discourse of ethnic identity. From Xu Wei’s perspective, the Fox has the feature of polymorphous fluidity, because she can transform her appearance and travel through time and space. In the third space, heroines break the barriers of time, space and cultures, and then support each other as a whole part, which in a sense touch on maternal genealogy and lesbian relationship. In Xu Wei’s opinion, Lai emphasizes on

the critical discourse of anti-racism, feminism and homoeroticism, and tries to write them into the novel, in order to construct a history of women who are enslaved to western racism and oriental Confucianism. In such context of women's alliance, Xu Wei holds the view that *When Fox Is a Thousand* can be regarded as a book of female genealogy. That is to say, in the genealogical stories which obstruct by language and space, Lai attempts to establish a home which can accommodate mythology, history, and contemporary female simultaneously. Xu Wei's another article which was published in 2012 also analyzes the novel from the perspective of the third space. With three parts of "through" body, "through" text, and "through" history, Xu Wei thinks the Fox's free fluidity outlines the third space, which transcends a series of binary opposite categories such as male and female, orient and occident, reality and text, history and contemporary. In his view, Lai resorts to the Fox's reappearance to construct her unique feminist standpoint. And Lai narrates heroine's experiences in context that transcend the border of body, text, history and gender.

In terms of research on subject construction of *When Fox Is a Thousand*, only Wei Quanfeng has published three articles to probe into subject construction. Wei Quanfeng compares Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum's *Madeleine is sleeping* and Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* to analyze the subject construction of the two novels in her journal article which was published in 2009. In this article, she holds the view that the subject construction is the relentless pursuit in Chinese ethnic writers' works. By rewriting the preceding text, *Madeleine is sleeping* and *When Fox Is a Thousand* carry out the new breakthrough of subject construction. *Madeleine is sleeping* borrows the pretexts of classic fairy tale, which not only subverts the narration of western classics, but also criticizes the cultural rules that suppress the individual. The construction of the same destination of the two works reflects Chinese American and Chinese Canadian ethnic group's poetic surpass to reality. Wei Quanfeng also explores Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* and *Salt Fish Girl*. From cultural regression to industrial criticism, Wei deems that Lai is constantly surpassing the Chinese ethnic group, and revealing the nature of the problem from a wider perspective of the oppressed. This revelation, wrapped in a magical utopia that transcends reality, embodies the political thinking of

the author in striving to surmount binary opposition, and uses the surreal aesthetic nature to sound the alarm for the future of human survival. Wei Quanfeng and Zhao Xiaotao also demonstrate that Lai's rewriting of Chinese myths and history embodies transculturation and subject construction.

Concerning the research on the quest for self-identity of *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Jiang Ying narrates *When Fox Is a Thousand* based on figure-ground theory from poetics. Figure-ground is the conception of psychology which is borrowed by cognitive poetics. According to the theories of psychology, when a person looks at something around him, he would usually regard this thing as a sensible figure; meanwhile, other things become sensible ground. Jiang Ying's article analyzes the narrative features, female characters and Chinese cultural image as Fox and Yu Hsuan-Chi, in order to find out the theme in it, that is the quest for self-identity.

On the whole, the research on *When Fox Is a Thousand* at home and abroad is insufficient. The research at abroad mainly concentrates on gender, sexuality and the analysis of protagonists. The research at home mainly focuses on the third space, subject construction and the quest for self-identity. There are still some limitations in the research on *When Fox Is a Thousand* at home and abroad because there is no literary review on *When Fox Is a Thousand* from the perspective of postmodernism until now. This thesis analyzes *When Fox Is a Thousand* in postmodernist context, which will provide a new perspective for the research on this novel.

2.2 Origin and Development of Postmodernism

According to the definition of postmodernism in Oxford dictionary, postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid- to late-20th century which covers across philosophy, art, architecture, and criticism. Postmodernism marks a departure from modernism. The term is also more generally applied to the post-modernity historical era and the trend of this era (In this case, "modern" is not used in the sense of "contemporary", but only as a name for a particular historical period).

Postmodernism is a concept with different opinions. Famous scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean François Lyotard have written about

postmodernism. American philosopher Daniel Bell and German philosopher Jürgen Habermas have also triggered a debate on postmodernism in European and American academic circles. Fredric Jameson, Ihab Hassan, and other American critics have written books on the relationship between postmodernism and literature and culture, and their artistic innovations. Just like Pauline Marie Rosenau and other scholars summarized the debate on postmodernism, and they said that there can be as many forms of postmodernism as there are postmodernists (Rosenau 18). However, by summarizing the views of numerous important theorists and contemporary thinkers, postmodernism can be basically thought as the product of post-modern society (post-industrial society, information society, the late capitalist society). Postmodernism conceived in modernists' matrix, and tore with it after World War II, and then became a mixed culture ghost, wandering in the field of the whole western cultures (Zhu 362). This cultural trend, which formally appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is regarded as the most influential cultural trend in the contemporary West, because it has an influence on philosophy, sociology, anthropology, religious teaching, aesthetics, literature, art and other fields.

The word “postmodernism” was first applied in the area of literature in the 1930s, and became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. In the mid-1960s, with the inauguration of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, modernity's understanding of reality is challenged and turned on its head by postmodernism, which means “after-modernity” or “just after now”, from its Latin root meaning “just now”. For Derrida and other postmodernists, there is no such thing as objective reality. For these critics, all definitions and depictions of truth are subjective and simply creations of human mind. Truth itself is relative, depending on the nature and variety of cultural and social influences in one's life.

Beginning in the 1960s, American critics such as Ihab Hassan discovered some new traits in literature that were different from modernism and tried to generalize them with “postmodernism”. Postmodernism in literature not only shares the general characteristics of postmodernism but also has its own particularity. There are some representatives of postmodern literature.

In the book *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* which was published in 1987, Ihab Hassan's analysis and perspective on the characteristics of postmodernism in the field of literature won the recognition of the academic circles at that time. In elaborating the differences between postmodernism and modernism, Hassan enumerates all the features of postmodernism that are against modernism: pataphysics or dadaism, antiform (disjunctive, open), play, chance, anarchy, exhaustion or silence, process or performance or happening, participation, decreation or deconstruction, antithesis, absence, dispersal, text or intertext, rhetoric, syntagm, parataxis, metonymy, combination, rhizome or surface, against interpretation or misreading, signifier, scriptable (writerly), anti-narrative or petite histoire, idiolect, desire, mutant, polymorphous or androgynous, schizophrenia, difference-difference or trace, the holy ghost, irony, indeterminacy, and immanence (83-90). Among these features, Hassan believes that the two core principles of postmodernism are indeterminacy and immanence. In the constantly development of American postmodernist novels, the two principles are what make American postmodernist novels emerge a variety of new pattern (a combination of fact and fiction, myths or fairy tale and fiction, novels and poems, drama and letter, fiction and nonfiction, the combination of classic art and popular art, the combination of novel and painting, music, and especially multimedia) and the new discourses (cross-genre ironic discourse, using of direct speech dialogue of narrative discourse, supermarket advertisements, travel advertisements and drug advertisements constitute the narrative discourse of rich market information, the "paradox" discourse interweaves lyric and narrative, praise and complaint. The author's voice casually involved in the narrative constitutes an "intrusive" discourse. The discourses constituted by hypertext computer language.) While the form and narrative techniques of realistic novels and modernist novels are constantly deconstructed by postmodernist novels. Postmodernist novelists creatively use such expression techniques and creation consciousness as intertextuality, irony, playfulness, black humor, meta-novels, language games, parody, pastiche, metafiction, fabulation, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, magic realism, fragmentation, montage and maze consciousness. The application of these techniques

not only makes the postmodernist novelists have their own characteristics, but also provides the theoretical basis and aesthetic criterion for readers to understand the postmodernist works.

The French philosopher Jean François Lyotard cuts into the post-modern study from the crisis of legalization of contemporary knowledge. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is the most influential work of Jean François Lyotard. Lyotard raises the issue of the crisis of legalization of knowledge and proposes the disintegration of metanarratives. Lyotard believes that after the disintegration of the grand narrative, postmodern knowledge begins to rediscover the basis of legitimacy. Lyotard's description of postmodern knowledge reflects the state of post-industrial society and certain social psychology. It captures the characteristics of post-modern anti-system, anti-essence, and diversification, and coincides with Derrida's structural thinking, as well as provides the most important theoretical resources for postmodern discourse.

Another representative of postmodernism is Frederic Jameson, an American scholar who has important influence on Chinese contemporary academic circles. He believes that postmodernism is not a break in history, but a stage of development in capitalist society. Frederic Jameson tries to use the theoretical framework of Marxism to observe postmodernism in his monograph *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. He regards postmodernism as the cultural logic of current capitalism and the dominant culture of current capitalism. Frederic Jameson thinks that the postmodern cultural conditions are as follows: planarization, fragmentation and collage of subject, disappearance of historical sense, aesthetic popularization and the like. The basic features of postmodern culture that is proposed by him have exerted a wide range of influences.

Postmodern literature is characterized by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator; and postmodern literature is often (though not exclusively) defined as a style or a trend which emerged in the post-World War II era. Postmodern works are seen as a response against dogmatic following of enlightenment thinking and modernist approaches to literature. Works considered

postmodern tend to engage with various modes of critical theory, particularly reader-response and deconstructionist approaches, and ways of subverting the implicit contract between author, text and reader (McCaffery 15). Although postmodernism covers a variety of methods, it is generally defined as skepticism, irony, or rejection to the meta-narratives and ideologies about modernism, which often makes readers question various assumptions and enlighten rationality. Therefore, the common goals of postmodern critique include notions of objective reality, morality, truth, reason, language, human nature, and social progress. Postmodern thinkers often remind people to pay attention to the contingent or socially-conditioned nature of knowledge claims and value systems, situating them as products of particular political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies. Therefore, postmodern thought is broadly characterized by tendencies to self-referentiality, epistemological and moral relativism, pluralism, subjectivism, and irreverence. The core characteristics of postmodernism can be stated as follows:

First, it has a skepticism or rejection of grand metanarratives to explain reality. Second, the concept of the self is ever-changing. Third, there is no objective reality, but many subjective interpretations. Fourth, truth is subjective and perspectival, which depends on cultural, social, and personal influences. Fifth, there is no “one correct” concept of ultimate reality. Sixth, no metatheory can be used to explain texts or reality. Last but not least, a text has no “one correct” interpretation (Bressler 99-101).

By employing postmodernist writing techniques, namely, intertextuality, parody, fragmentation, collage, indeterminacy and pluralism, *When Fox Is a Thousand* inserts a number of traditional Chinese cultural elements, recreates the artistic literary images of the Fox and Yu Hsuan-Chi, and combines Chinese myths and history with the reality, thus representing and disseminating traditional Chinese culture in the postmodernist context.

Chapter Three

INTERTEXTUALITY AND PARODY IN THE NOVEL

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, intertextuality is embodied by recreating a spiritualized Fox and representing the image of Yu Hsuan-Chi; parody is woven through the ironic rewriting of traditional Chinese cultural tales. The application of intertextuality and parody enables Lai to better disseminate traditional Chinese cultural elements.

The term intertextuality was first coined by French theorist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, which concept was developed in her study of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogue (Cheng 72). After that, the concept of intertextuality is more and more popular in the literary world. Theorists of all backgrounds have taken up the concept and adjusted, revised and reinterpreted it according to their own understanding and needs. Most of them are French critics such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Gerard Genette and Michael Riffaterre. Intertextuality is the crystallization of the western main cultural theories in modern and contemporary times, which include Russian formalism, structural linguistics, psychoanalytic theory, Western Marxism and post-structuralism.

The definition of intertextuality falls into two categories, respectively in broad and narrow sense. The broad definition is represented by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva; they think intertextuality refers to the relationship between any texts and the sum of the knowledge, codes, and ideographic practices that give meaning to that text, and these knowledge, codes, and ideographic practices form an infinite and potential network. The narrow definition, represented by Gerard Genette, holds the view that intertextuality refers to the relationship between a text and other texts that can be argued for. Gerard Genette recounts intertextual figures include allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche and parody. However, the differences between the broad and the narrow are not what intertextuality theorists themselves have put forward.

That is to say, Julia Kristeva does not need to call her theory as broad intertextuality. For her, intertextuality does not have a difference between the broad and the narrow. Only in the comparison of the intertextuality in the range of the later poetics did the academia feel the need to distinguish the early intertextuality theory from the later intertextuality theory in the broad and narrow sense.

Although different theorists have different views on intertextuality, there do exist common features. Intertextuality refers to the reference and imitation, absorption and transformation of a text to other texts. Any text is a kind of intertextuality, and it has the features of other texts to a certain degree. Intertextuality is to re-read, update, enrich, transfer and deepen other texts. The value of the text is reflected in the integration and destruction of other texts. And intertextual techniques include allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche and parody.

However, this chapter mainly focuses on French theorist Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva creatively came up with the concept of "intertextuality", which is the interdependence of texts, and the interdependencies between the texts and any previous texts. According to Julia Kristeva, a text is not closed and independent; on the contrary, it is a large package, because any texts are the absorption and adaptation of other texts. For Kristeva, "the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity" (66) when we realize that meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated through, or filtered by, "codes" imparted to the writer and reader by other texts. She argues that intertextuality is the replacement of one or more symbol systems with other symbol systems. Through intertextuality, the author not only associates and integrates his text with other texts, but also makes different discourses get transposed, so that the meaning of one text or discourse can be expressed through another text and discourse.

Julia Kristeva does not put forward that intertextual figures include allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, collage and parody. And Zhang Longhai, dean of College of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Xiamen University, has put collage, intertextuality, parody and scattered narration in a parallel position in an article that was published in *Contemporary Foreign Literature*. Many other master theses also use

collage, parody and intertextuality as uncontained items. Therefore, this thesis mainly focuses on French theorist Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality, and put intertextuality, fragmentation and collage in different chapters. This chapter focuses on Lai's representing and recreating of the Fox and Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty. Through recreating their image, Lai disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements to readers.

3.1 Intertextuality of the Fox

The whole story of *When Fox Is a Thousand* is connected by a fox; Lai uses "Fox" with a capital "F" to refer to this protagonist fox. The Fox has possessed Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty and Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong in the current era. The Fox enables traditional Chinese culture and the Chinese ethnic group in Canada to link tightly. The image of the Fox is a reflection of intertextuality and the Fox's image is based on Chinese mythology. Lai noted in her source notes (239) that the Fox's image in this novel is to a large extent influenced by the Chinese novelist Pu Songling's *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai*, which means that the concept of "Fox" is originated from Chinese mythology. Through the intertextuality of the Fox, Lai disseminates positive traditional Chinese cultural elements to readers.

3.1.1 Traditional Chinese image of the fox group

In traditional Chinese mythology, the image of fox group was negative, and they were always thought as crafty, lascivious and ill-disposed.

Foxes are natural animals. However, in fox culture, foxes do not appear in original ecological form. Foxes are exaggerated, transformed and blurred. Foxes also become the carrier of ideas. In ancient Chinese myth, fox totem worship had been popular in traditional Chinese tribes. In the late Warring States period and the Han Dynasty, totem fox changed to a kind of auspicious semiotic omen. Fox worship changed from totem worship in primitive society to auspicious semiotic omens in feudal society. The statements of auspicious semiotic omens were a kind of idealistic destiny view which was proposed on the basis of the theory of heaven and man induction. The statements of

auspicious semiotic omens believed that the vicissitude of emperor and country was connected with the haunt of some auspicious things. If heaven descended auspicious omens, it would indicate the rise of states and the emergence of peaceful times. It was not until Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties that the fox spirit began to personify itself. In the Tang Dynasty, the myth of the fox demon was flourishing, and the fox god was popular. The Tang Dynasty was the first thriving period of fox culture. In the Tang Dynasty, the concepts of fox demon and fox spirit were fully developed. Fox group occupies an important position in the novels of the Tang Dynasty. Due to the development of the concept of the fox demon, people created unique humanization techniques for the fox group by the Tang Dynasty. When the fox group, long loss of divinity and auspicious spirit, haunted people in the Tang Dynasty, it was also worshiped as a divine object. And so there was this complicated situation where fox group was a monster and a god. In the Tang Dynasty, an important content of fox spirit worship was the worship of celestial fox, who was the most powerful fox among the fox spirits. The novel cites a significant passage from the Chinese classic, *Hsuan-Chung-Chi*:

When a fox is fifty years old, it acquires the ability to change itself into a woman. At a hundred it can assume the shape of a beautiful girl, or that of a sorcerer...At that age the fox knows what is happening at a distance of a thousand miles, it can derange the human mind and reduce a person to an imbecile. When the fox is a thousand years old, it is in communication with Heaven, and is then called Heavenly Fox, t'ien-hu. (Lai 88)

After practice, the Fox in *When Fox Is a Thousand* will soon become the fox of a thousand year. In the Ming Dynasty, works about foxes were gradually fewer. In the Qing Dynasty, literary sketches, which were represented by *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*, were popular again. *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* is a great achievement of the fox fairy. The fox spirits in Pu Songling's novel have all the virtues of man and they become good friends of human. They emphasize on friendship and respect the truth, and they are cuter than human beings (Li 20-56). Dorothea Hayward Scott's *Chinese Popular Literature and the Child* points out that foxes have the power of transformation either

into a woman or a man, but most frequently turn into a young and pretty woman whose influence will be evil (35).

In short, although at first foxes were honored by people, as time changes, people's attitudes towards them also changes. In traditional Chinese mythology, the image of fox group was negative, and they were always thought as crafty, lascivious and ill-disposed.

3.1.2 Recreated image of the Fox and its significance

The belief in foxes acting as incubi and debauching men and women has persisted down to the present day, especially in North China. However, Lai revitalizes the fox spirit, and animates it into life and text. To some extent, the Fox in *When Fox Is a Thousand* is out of the stereotype.

Foxes are still marginalized in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. As is the case in *When Fox Is a Thousand*:

Human history books make no room for foxes. But if you talk to any gossip on the streets or any popcorn-munching movie-goer, and they will tell you that foxes have been around since before the first Dynasty. (Lai 5)

In the above citation, not only the whole fox group is marginalized by human, the Fox in the novel is also marginalized, and she claims her difference from other foxes and roams alone in her own liminal territory. As she states in the novel:

When I wrote about the thrill of new life that comes from animating the bodies of the dead, they swept their bushy tails in the dirt in disgust and said they didn't want anything more to do with me. And that is how it happened that I live alone. (Lai 6)

The Fox is not only marginalized by her peers, but also estranges to western cultures. In the first fifty years of the Fox's life, she trapped in an aging dog's body. Her hair started dropping out in clumps when she was about twenty-eight. Even the feeblest rabbits managed to escape her dull teeth. She ate mushrooms and moss and grew as thin as a Taoist ascetic and bald as a human baby. In her fiftieth birthday, she obtained the

ability to change into a woman. But she was given no choice as to what kind of woman. She was given a body discarded by an older fox that had just passed her hundredth year. This body was so deformed and non-durable that Fox could not gain any food. Fox always finds corpses to inhabit, and she has inhabited a female poet's body for more than nine hundred years, off and on. Fox is working towards her thousandth birthday. By her thousandth birthday, only the widest-winged officials of heaven will have any power over her, and then she can truly do as she pleases. No more scholars with priestly leanings who may pronounce her existence unworthy, who will smoke her out by burning charms or setting out cups of poisoned liquor. However, after Fox immigrates to Canada, she is gradually westernized. This is expressed in the following quote:

I know I've become much too westernized. I've relied on the solar calendar for the last three hundred solar years. I have entirely lost track of the moon.
(Lai 186)

In the above quotation, the Fox is gradually westernized. The Fox is also full of gratitude. When she suffers from starvation, she goes to a house. The housewife gives her a warm reception although the housewife herself is destitute. The Fox is very grateful to her, so she casts a spell that makes the basin full of small gold coins. The Fox in the novel is also very warm-hearted, and in order to help a housewife who is abandoned by her husband because of his new concubine, she even attaches herself to her to advise her. Such behavior is dangerous for the Fox because she has not come fully into her powers, and she can maintain the form for only a few hours at a time. However, the Fox does not flinch, and at the risk of being laughed at by her peers to help her. In order to help Artemis Wong find her birth mother, the Fox incarnates as an angel to take Artemis to the East.

Although the Fox's image is different from the tradition, she obtains the traditional praise to the fox group, such as super ability, charming, gentle and warm-hearted; fox group's traditional evil and lustful image is willfully weakened by Lai. This intentional deviation conveys Lai's hope that readers will know outstanding traditional Chinese culture through this novel.

3.2 Intertextuality of Yu Hsuan-Chi

Yu Hsuan-Chi is another important protagonist in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. For Yu Hsuan-Chi's story, Lai noted in her source notes (239) that she takes *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*, *Poets and Murder: A Chinese Detective Story*, *Women Poets of China* and the like as references. Her source notes indicates that she takes plenty of books as references, so she has a solid foundation for traditional Chinese culture. Through the recreating of Yu Hsuan-Chi's story, Lai disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements to readers.

3.2.1 Traditional Chinese image of Yu Hsuan-Chi

In traditional Chinese culture, Yu Hsuan-Chi was regarded as a jealous and vicious talented woman. *Yu Xuanji* (simplified Chinese characters as 鱼玄机; approximate dates 844–868/869), courtesy names were *Youwei* (Chinese characters as 幼微) and *Huilan* (simplified Chinese characters as 蕙兰), was a courtesan and Chinese poet of the late Tang Dynasty, from Chang'an. She was one of the most famous female poets of the Tang Dynasty, along with *Xue Tao*, who was her fellow courtesan.

Little trustworthy information was known about the relatively short life of Yu Hsuan-Chi. She was born and raised in Chang'an, which was the capital of the Tang Dynasty. Chang'an was the terminus of the Silk Road and one of the most advanced cities at that time. Her father read a large number of books, but he never won an official rank, so he poured his heart and soul into his only child Yu Hsuan-Chi. Under the cultivation of her father, Yu Hsuan-Chi was able to recite hundreds of famous poems at the age of five. She began to learn to write poems at the age of seven. By the time of eleven, her works had been passed down among Chang'an scholars and she became a famous little poet. Yu Hsuan-Chi's talent attracted the attention of Wen Tingyun, a great poet who was famous at that time, and their relationship became master and apprentice. Several years later, Yu Hsuan-Chi fell in love with Li Yi (simplified Chinese characters as 李亿), who was an official at that time. Shortly afterwards, Yu Hsuan-Chi married as a concubine to him in Chang'an, and they lived beatifically. However, Li Yi already had

a wife in Jiang Ling, and his wife hated Yu Hsuan-Chi and forced Li Yi to divorce from her. After separating three years later with Li Yi, she chose to become a courtesan and a Taoist nun.

At the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, the emperor recognized the founder of Taoism Li Er (Lao Tzu) as the ancestor, and put Taoism at the top of the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism). Taoism had a high status and enjoyed great privileges. Taoism did not advocate abstinence like Buddhism, and they aimed at comfort and enjoyment. Therefore, there were many scholar-officials became Taoists. In the Tang Dynasty, an important feature of the development of Taoism was the flourishing of the worship of female immortals. It became a trend for women to become Taoists. As a result, a large number of female Taoists emerged and set up a group of female Taoist temples (Sun 364). The social atmosphere in the Tang Dynasty was open, and Taoism traditionally did not shy away from the friendship between men and women, and even regarded this friendship as a means of seeking for immortal or teaching Taoism. In this way, the association of male Taoists and female Taoists was relatively free. Therefore, in Taoist temple, Yu Hsuan-Chi was free, and she versified with many men; therefore, other people thought she was dissolute.

Lu Ch'iao was Yu Hsuan-Chi's maid, who was beautiful and smart. One day, Yu Hsuan-Chi was invited to a spring outing party, when she came back, Lu Ch'iao told her that Yu Hsuan-Chi's lover had been coming, and left because Yu Hsuan-Chi was not here. However, every time she went out, her lover would waited patiently for her return; why he left in such a hurry today. She found Lu Ch'iao was strange, and then she asked Lu Ch'iao to take off all her clothes, and she found there were scratches on Lu Ch'iao's breast. Yu Hsuan-Chi was very wrathful, because she thought Lu Ch'iao had sexual relationship with her lover, but Lu Ch'iao denied it and satirized Yu Hsuan-Chi. However, Yu Hsuan-Chi lost her reason and beat her to death indeliberately. After the panic, she calmed down and buried the body in the backyard. When other people asked about Lu Ch'iao, she said that Lu Ch'iao ran away. In summer, when one of the guests urinated in the backyard, he found a large group of flies gathered on the floating soil under the flowers, and gathered again after driving away. The guest was confused, and

told this matter to his elder brother, a street petty official in Jingzhao Municipality, who hated Yu Hsuan-Chi. After lived several years in Taoist temple, Yu Hsuan-Chi gradually had some savings, which made this street petty official in Jingzhao Municipality exceptionally jealous, so this street official borrowed money from her, in effect, for blackmail. She turned him down without considering the consequences, and he bore a grudge. During this period, the emperor was indulged in extravagance and the imperial court officials were corrupted, and the prime minister and his cronies accepted bribes openly. Jingzhao Municipality was not subject to level by level appeal, where a proven crime can be sentenced to death in court. At that time, Wen Zhang, the head of Jingzhao Municipality, was famous for avarice and slaughter, so other officials in Jingzhao Municipality dared to do evil. In the Tang Dynasty, Taoists had high status, so if they killed their maid, they would just get some punishments, rather than sentenced to death. However, Yu Hsuan-Chi sentenced to death unfortunately because of personal grudge.

In traditional Chinese culture, Yu Hsuan-Chi's life was miserable and she was thought as a jealous and vicious woman. Lai recreates the image of Yu Hsuan-Chi in her novel.

3.2.2 Represented image of Yu Hsuan-Chi and its significance

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the image of Yu Hsuan-Chi is different from tradition. In the novel, Yu Hsuan-Chi's father is an herbalist who runs an herb shop. After the death of Yu Hsuan-Chi's mother, her father begins to go mad. It is unlikely that a marriage will be arranged for her at this rate, so Yu Hsuan-Chi begins to consider alternatives. She asks her father to sell her to a teahouse, because if her father sells her, she will at least be guaranteed a roof over her head, and her father will have another chance with his business, or, at the very least, something to retire on. At the age of sixteen, a well-known teahouse takes Yu Hsuan-Chi because she can write pretty lines. As a rule, she does not sleep with the clients. Since she earns her keep with her poetry and other amusements, the house mother does not pressure her. A few days later, Yu Hsuan-Chi marries Li Yi, whose house is said to have been previously occupied by foxes. On their wedding day, Yu Hsuan-Chi is astonished by the opulence of Li Yi's

house. There are screens printed with ibises, unearthly princesses, and peonies as detailed as though lit from within. There are couches covered with embroidered silk. There are mirrors and carvings of jade and rhinoceros horn. Many servants and attendants hurry about, heaping the table with food. Each dish is arranged in the shape of a fantastic animal, detailed down to wings, claws and eyes. However, Yu Hsuan-Chi's marriage life is not happy. When one of those fancy goblets is missing and elder Li says it is Yu Hsuan-Chi who takes it, Li Yi is not stand up for Yu Hsuan-Chi. Therefore, Yu Hsuan-Chi is angry, she flings the teacup to the ground in disgust and it smashes into white fragments on the stone floor. The following evening Li Yi says if Yu Hsuan-Chi insists on breaking teacups then she will have to content herself with cold water. This plot shows the low status of ancient Chinese women.

One day, Yu Hsuan-Chi dreams of a snake sleeping beneath the foundations of the house turning its face away from the auspicious south. In the morning, she is heaved awake by a wave of nausea. Later, she is told that she is pregnant. She is ordered to lie in bed with the single occupation of tending the cold thing that grows inside her. Her husband assigns his old wet nurse to attend her. Entering the room for the first time, with an armful of fresh linen, the nurse eyes her as though she is already planning to escape. The nurse orders Yu Hsuan-Chi, anew each day, not to leave her bed. As though the creature inside her will drop out the moment she stands upright. As though Yu Hsuan-Chi is a dead thing housing something living. Yu Hsuan-Chi has been lying in bed for four months, rising only to urinate. Therefore, Yu Hsuan-Chi escapes from there for several hours, and when she comes back, she finds there is crumbling wall and a broken gate all overgrown with weeds and the drooping branches of willows. Yu Hsuan-Chi thinks there are foxes at work here. A whole foxes' family are under the direction of the elder Li. It is the only way to explain the strange metamorphosis of the house. On the way back to home, Yu Hsuan-Chi hears a shriek from her belly, and she feels something cold and fish-like turn inside. Later she gives birth to a baby: human in form, clear and soft as jellyfish, with blue veins running through it. Then Yu Hsuan-Chi knows that the whole families of her husband are foxes.

Lu Ch'iao leaves Yu Hsuan-Chi for the acrobat, but gives her a number of pieces

of jade and gold as a parting gift. She sells them and buys a temple, which has been deserted for some time. Local rumor has it that foxes have taken over. Some people say she is crazy. Others say that Yu Hsuan-Chi is enchanted and that is why she wants to move in. In the novel, Yu Hsuan-Chi can do Taoist magic. She is forthrightness. When the Fox incarnates as a beautiful girl to visit her, she asks Fox that what she is. Fox answers her that she is a fox. Yu Hsuan-Chi is not astonished and she invites Fox to drink wine with her. However, she is sentenced to death because of some reasons. In the reminiscence of the Fox, when the Fox visits her again, she smells something strange. The following is a description to illustrate:

I wondered then if you had done something wrong. The smell of another woman's spilled blood soared high on the cool morning air and somewhere far away there were birds. (Lai 149)

In Chinese history, Yu Hsuan-Chi was sentenced to death because she murdered her maid Lu Ch'iao. However, Lai keeps quiet about this matter and let readers to imagine. In Chinese history, the image of Yu Hsuan-Chi is negative, but in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Lai speaks highly of her. In Lai's view, Yu Hsuan-Chi is affectionate and full of responsibility; she dares to stand against unhappy marriage. Such recreating conveys the positive parts of traditional Chinese culture to readers.

3.3 Parody in Traditional Chinese Tales and Its Function

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, parody is woven through the ironic rewriting of traditional Chinese cultural tales. The application of the parody technique can be traced back to Aristotle, which was later promoted by postmodern writers and became one of their commonly used techniques. It is a literary technique with clear intentions and analysis, which has a strong subversive nature.

In the field of modern western literature, the intention of parody changes from respectful worship to biting satire (Hutcheon, "A Theory of Parody" 16), and the scope of parody objects is also expanded, which can be a work, the common style of some writers, or even folk stories, historical documents, biographies of famous people and the

like. Through parody, the author aims to mock the object being emulated, make it exaggerated, ridiculous, and thus achieving the purpose of satire, and then criticizes and denies the traditional historical values and literary patterns. However, parody is not a simple imitation, but a writer grasps a certain feature and distorts it in an innovative way. Through the writing technique of parody, Lai not only disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements, but also expresses her feminist thoughts that Chinese Canadian females should struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy.

3.3.1 “The Cat Mother”

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, “The Cat Mother” is a parody of “The Old Cat”, which is recorded in *Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals*. *Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals* is a collection of mysterious and weird stories in ancient folklore. The author is Gan Bao, a historian in the East Jin Dynasty. There are 454 stories in it. The main characters are ghosts, demons, immortals and so on. Most stories are short in length, simple in plot, fantastical in imagination, romantic in color and have a profound influence on later generations.

“The Old Cat” mainly narrates a story during the Jin Dynasty. A man of Wuxing had two sons, and he often scolded them when they worked in the field. The two young men could not stand their father anymore, so they told their mother, who questioned her husband, but her husband was shocked because he did not know this thing. He realized that some spirit was taking his form, so he advised his sons to draw their swords and kill it, and then the spirit would not appear any more. The next day, the father worried about his sons, so he went to the field. Unfortunately, his sons mistook him for the evil spirit, killed him and buried him. Then the spirit went to their home in their father’s form and prepared a feast in advance to congratulate the two young men. These two young men did not realize their true father had already killed by them until a priest passed the house one year later. The priest said to the sons that their father has an evil aura. When the sons told this thing to the father, he was angry and he asked his sons to drive away the priest. But the priest walked in and began to chant incarnation and the father changed into an old cat which crawled under the bed. After catching the cat and

killing it, they knew that they had killed their own father. The two sons gave their father a fresh funeral. Then one son committed suicide, and the other died of remorse and anger (Gan 311).

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Lai parodies “The Old Cat” in a story named “The Cat Mother”. In “The Old Cat”, the main protagonists are male, such as the two sons, their father and the priest. However, in Lai’s story, all protagonists are female. It has the same story framework with “The Old Cat”. In a village, Fox meets a ghost, and it is the ghost who tells this story to her. “The Cat Mother” has the same background with “The Old Cat”. She and her sister work in the family field, but they do not want to work in the field. They prefer to go to Guangzhou, to work in a factory and own lots of shoes. They often complain about it to their mother, who just sighs and says that women have to resign themselves to their fate. This is something they do not want to accept and they often chide her for being old-fashioned. From this part, we can see Lai’s irony for women’s old-fashioned thoughts to themselves. One afternoon their old mother comes to the field and scolds them with no reason, which carries on for many days. Until one evening, she asks her mother the reason, who is shocked to know that there is evil spirit plagues them. The mother asks her daughters to kill the evil spirit the next time it comes. The next day, their mother is worried about them, so she sets out for the field with fresh barley water in order that they might have a cool drink. However, they mistake their mother for the evil spirit and drown her. When they hurry home to celebrate, their mother is there with a feast already prepared. The spirit cooks well. There is fresh fish at every meal for the next year. The family work hard and live relatively contentedly until a wandering nun pays them a visit the following summer. After the chanting of the nun, their mother drops to the ground in the form of a cat and rushes out under the gap below the black door. Realizing they have killed their real mother, her younger sister jumps into the well and drowns herself, and then she leaps after her (Lai 221-222).

Although there are many similarities between the two stories, the protagonists’ gender and the historical background are different. Protagonists in Lai’s story are all women, and it happens in modern society. In most Chinese people’s mind, women should be resigned to their fate and should not make any resistance. A woman’s ultimate

goal is to marry a good husband. Lai uses parody to criticize such thoughts, and meanwhile exhibits traditional cultural elements. She also expresses her feminist thoughts that Chinese Canadian females should struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy.

3.3.2 *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*

Lai parodies the story in *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* to satirize people's injustice to marginal groups. She neatly conveys traditional Chinese cultural elements and her appeal for marginal groups.

"The Merchant's Son" is a short story written by Pu Songling, a novelist in the Qing Dynasty. This story is included in the 41st article of the original book of *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*. The short story mainly tells the story of a merchant's clever and brave son, who has smashed the evil fox demon with the great wisdom and bravery that ordinary people do not have. The son's mother was haunted by foxes, and her situation became more and more serious. The family could not prevent, finally the mother went insane. The son made up his mind to get rid of the fox. He pretended to play the game which he carefully prepared it, but he only cut off the tail of the fox. Later, he learned that the fox would buy wine. He poisoned the wine in advance and disguised himself as a fox servant. He sent the poisonous wine into the belly of the fox demon, and finally removed the scourge of the two families (Pu 187). The storyline is ups and downs and fascinating, which shows the son's wit and calm. The length of the text is fairly long; the plot is picturesque; the style is fresh, which is full of justice.

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Lai subverts this justice story. The story takes place in the protagonist of the novel, the Fox. The summer the Fox's grandmother is killed by a merchant's son, so her older cousin and her vow revenge. They haunt the merchant's wife and make her vanish and appear in other place. Over the next few days, the merchant's wife wanders about, muttering in a strange language. She walks through closed doors and solid walls as though they are not there at all, even in bright daylight. After a few days, the symptoms become less acute. Fox and her cousin go to haunt her again, this time her cousin's tail is chopped off by merchant's son. After this incident

the Fox is much more patient and disciplined about her schooling, but her cousin is incorrigible. Her cousin returns to the merchant's house without telling anyone and continues to terrorize the merchant's wife. She makes friends with a more established fox family in the neighborhood and becomes drinking pals with the eldest son. Together they bother several families in the district. The merchant's neighbor has a penchant for gambling. Her cousin and her new friend write spells under his pillow. His gambling habit grows more intense. He plays mah jong for seventeen days straight, neither eating nor drinking, until he died of exhaustion.

Similarly with "The Cat Mother", except for merchant's son and his neighbor, all protagonists are changed into female. Hutcheon links parody and female as follows:

Parody—or intertextuality in genera—plays an important role in much women's fiction today, as it seeks a feminine literary space while still acknowledging (however grudgingly) the power of the (male/'universal') space in which it cannot avoid, to some extent, operating. ("A Theory of Parody" 110)

Through parody, Lai not only exhibits traditional Chinese culture, she also appeals fair treatment of marginal figures. It is the merchant's son who kills their grandmother, so foxes begin to revenge. When Fox was young, foxes were the persecuted species in ancient China, and they were thought as a general evil even if they did not do anything evil. People would smoke out of their holes, shoot or poison them at the worst, and the situation became even direr after the invention of gunpowder. The Fox and her sisters are a metaphor of marginal Chinese Canadian females, and such parody expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture.

Chapter Four

FRAGMENTATION AND COLLAGE IN THE NOVEL

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the literary form, narrative mode, space and time in the novel are all fragmented; meanwhile, by employing the writing technique of collage, the novel presents plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements such as Taoism, metaphysics, traditional Chinese customs and thoughts, and other traditional Chinese cultural elements to enhance the feature of fragmentation more obvious.

4.1 Fragmentation

Fragmentation is the artistic presentation of the deconstruction process. Deconstruction is to break the identity and wholeness of the text, the world and some other integrated things, and restore them to irremediable fragments. In the view of postmodernist scholars, discontinuity and fragmentation are the true state of history. The fragmentation in *When Fox Is a Thousand* is reflected in literary form, narrative mode, space and time. By using the postmodernist writing technique of fragmentation, traditional Chinese cultural elements can be skillfully embedded in the novel.

4.1.1 Literary form and narrative mode

The diversified literary form and narrative mode in *When Fox Is a Thousand* are fragmented. The literary form in *When Fox Is a Thousand* is multiple. There are poems, telephone conversations, letters, dreams and the like. When the Fox meets Yu Hsuan-Chi, they makes several poems together. The Fox always reads Yu Hsuan-Chi's poems to Artemis Wong. Artemis Wong and her friends often talk on the phone to each other, so their phone calls come out as conversations. There are also letters in the novel. The Fox writes a letter to Yu Hsuan-Chi, and the alphabets are all in italics in the novel.

Besides fragmented literary form, the narrative mode of the novel is also fragmented. *When Fox Is a Thousand* consists of three narrators, and each of them is

introduced by a small visual icon. The first tale is told by the fox spirit, who is represented by a fox silhouette. The second tale narrates the story of the ninth-century Chinese poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi, or Yu Xuanji, who is signified by the image of a woman in an ancient drooping robe. The third tale narrates by an omnipresent and omniscient narrator, who is identified by a cedar which roots trammels the ground above.

The novel is interspersed with three different narrative voices, each of them following the categories of myth, history and real life to narrate the story. The first narrator of the story is a mythical fox who travels through time and space and waits for her one thousand birthday. The second story is narrated by a Chinese female poet in the Tang Dynasty, who is sentenced to death on suspicion of murdering her maid. The third story is about the life of a Chinese Canadian young girl Artemis Wong in the current era, who redefines her identity through her friends, lovers and community. However, the three stories gradually interweave with each other as their plots develop until they overlap and merge at the end of the novel. During the time and space travel of the Fox, the Fox becomes the dominant narrative voice, and she overlooks everything and realizes the crossing of the above three boundaries.

The novel *When Fox Is a Thousand* was published in 1995, which was the fifth year of the Canadian Asian gay literature movement. This work is also considered to be a successful example of deconstructing traditional novels (Fox 157). This kind of work, which is different from the traditional novel type, makes the work also have changes in the form and contents. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, there are plenty of paragraphs that do not identify the direct quotation dialogues of the speakers. The adoption of direct quotations eliminates the traces of author's involvement, simplifies the readers' cognitive process, draws readers' attention to the conversation itself and highlights the attention to the contents of the conversation, and creates a series of questions for the reader: what happened and why are they discussing this matter. It lays suspense for the story, grabs the readers' attention and promotes the story in the process of setting suspense and answering suspense. At the same time, the lack of corresponding signage of the speakers and the extensive employment of personal pronouns enable readers to have some difficulties in understanding the meaning of the text, so it is possible for

readers to have different interpretations of the novel. To a certain extent, it increases the readability and connotation of the novel.

In the form of narration, on the one hand, the main characters take turns to express their isolated loneliness through self-talk, and on the other hand, the novel moves from fracture to fluency, realizing the overall regression trend of the main protagonists. In the first part of *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the loneliness of the Fox and the misfortune of the Chinese Canadian girl correspond to the intermittent sentences, which show the blockage and depression of individual speaking, and the glass-like isolation between the characters. The communication gap is opened by the Fox, who states, “I have inhabited a Poetess’s body for more than nine hundred years, off and on” (Lai 17) . It suggests the connection between the Fox and Yu Hsuan-Chi, “I got worse when we emigrated to the west coast of Canada” (Lai 5) demonstrates the connection between the Fox and Artemis Wong, thus opening the connection channel. In part two “The Familiar Shape” (Lai 51), the Fox begins to attach herself to Artemis Wong. In part three “Degrees of Recognition” (Lai 125), the Fox is easily trusted by Artemis Wong. In part four “When Fox Is a Thousand” (Lai 201), the Fox and Artemis Wong play chess, cook and drink together, and finally, the Fox satisfactorily shows the prototype and flies to the sky. The literary form and narrative mode of *When Fox Is a Thousand* are different from other traditional novels. Diversified literary form and narrative mode enable the novel to be more fragmented.

4.1.2 Space and time

The fragmentation of space and time is the disordered dislocation of time and space, which blurs the boundary between reality and illusion, the boundary between the past and the present, and the boundary between dreams and non-dreams. The fragmentation of space and time directly leads to the confusion between dreams and reality, thus constituting the chaos of time and space, and restoring the unified and complete space and time into fragments. Only in this way, Chinese mythology and history can be connected with reality.

When Fox Is a Thousand employs three narrators—Fox, Yu Hsuan-Chi and Artemis Wong to narrate their experiences respectively. Their narration intersperses with each other, seemingly messy and unrelated stories twists and turns forward in their narration. The story is narrated in the first person, and the three narrators are also the central characters of the novel. Through their narrations, the three narrators present the panorama of the story truthfully, so that readers can follow the characters in the story to experience the whole event and feel all of them together, and finally reach their own understanding of the story itself. At the same time, readers can come to ancient China through the Fox and Yu Hsuan-Chi. As a fox who can be trained to be a millennium fox, she has lived for approximately one thousand years. During her one thousand years' life, the Fox has lived in China and Canada successively. Therefore, through the Fox's self-statement, readers are able to travel through China and Canada, as well as ancient and modern society. Through the Tang Dynasty female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi's self-statement, readers can know people's thoughts and life style in ancient China. Through Artemis Wong, readers can travel back to the western modern times thousands of years later to know how Chinese Canadians struggle in Western mainstream culture. With the help of the spiritual possession of the Fox, readers can follow the characters in the story travel freely between ancient and modern, oriental and occidental cultures.

The Fox's spiritual possession comes from Chinese fairy tales. Lai once said in her source notes that this novel was deeply influenced by Pu Songling's *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*, in which plenty of stories of the Fox were quoted from *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (239). As a myth, *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* itself is imaginary, rather than real. The interweaving of past and present, reality and fantasy in *When Fox Is a Thousand* makes the story more confusing and difficult to understand. This non-linear narrative and the multi-line parallel of narrative break the traditional way of narrative. This deviation from the routine enable readers to observe the deep meaning behind Lai's unconventional narrative technique. The seemingly messy and vague narrative breaks the boundaries of time, space and history, and increases the readability of the novel and extends the duration of the pleasure of reading.

4.2 Collage of Traditional Chinese Cultural Elements

By employing the writing technique of collage, *When Fox Is a Thousand* exhibits plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements to enhance the feature of fragmentation more obvious. Collage is one of the most commonly employed postmodernist writing techniques. The word “collage” is derived from painting, which refers to a work that contains all kinds of allusions, references, citations, and foreign expressions, or the words, sentences, and paragraphs in different writers’ works. A fine collage is a text. The postmodernists oppose centrality, integrity, and systematicness. By borrowing deconstructive methods, they not only criticize, but also destroy and subvert traditional grand narratives, and then dismantle the central referential function, and advocate the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the text. Modern novelists believe in collages to represent the world and its complexity (Thiher 184), but postmodernist literary collage is different. It is only a lonely collage from beginning to end and from top to bottom. That is to say, it has no connection with each other in space and time, no connection between the whole and the part (Korg 72). As a product of postindustrial society, postmodernist novels transcend, deny and abandon traditional novels and modernist novels, and construct a new set of novel models, such as diversified aesthetic forms, fuzzy and broken meanings and the like, so that the works enter a world of language and symbols. On the basis of deconstructing the forms and techniques of traditional novels, postmodernist writers use collage to put together some discourses and symbols that are unrelated to objects. This method of constructing a unity of irrelevant fragments breaks the rational narrative of traditional novels and often receives unexpected effects.

By employing the writing technique of collage, *When Fox Is a Thousand* presents a number of traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as Taoism, metaphysics, the thought of son preference, foot binding, funeral custom and female emperor Wu Zetian’s experiences. The collage of traditional Chinese cultural elements combines the traditional Chinese culture with the narration, and disseminates traditional cultural elements to readers.

4.2.1 Taoism and metaphysics

When Fox Is a Thousand skillfully collages Chinese cultural elements of Taoism and metaphysics into the novel.

Taoism or Daoism, originated in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period in ancient China, is a polytheistic original religious form that worships many deities. Taoism is a religious or philosophical tradition of Chinese origin which emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao (Chinese Characters as 道; literally: “the Way”, also romanized as Dao). The Tao is a fundamental idea in most Chinese philosophical schools; in Taoism, however, it denotes the principle that is the source, pattern and substance of everything that exists (Pollard et al. 164). The main purpose of Taoism is to seek immortality, to become immortal, and to save lives. The roots of Taoism can be retrospected back at least to the 4th century BCE. Early Taoism draws its cosmological notions from the School of Yinyang (Naturalists), and is deeply influenced by one of the oldest texts of Chinese culture, the *I Ching*, which expounds a philosophical system about how to keep human behavior in accordance with the alternating cycles of nature. Taoism occupies an important position in traditional Chinese culture and develops in the modern world actively.

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Andie’s friend Stephen goes to his home, Stephen and Andie’s father discuss the story of the Laoshan Taoist priest in Pu Songling’s *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*. *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* is a collection of short stories written by Pu Songling, who is a Chinese novelist in the Qing Dynasty. The book consists of nearly 500 short stories. They either reveal the darkness of the feudal rule, or attack the corruption of the imperial examination system, or fight against the feudalism. The book has profound ideological contents. The stories of love theme are the most numerous in the book, which show a strong anti-feudal moral spirit. In some of the stories, Pu Songling’s ideal love is expressed through the love between the fairy fox and human.

In *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*, the story of the Laoshan Taoist priest is famous. In town, there was a scholar surnamed Wang, who was the official family’s child, and since childhood, he had a strong desire to learn Taoist magic arts. He heard that there were many immortals on Laoshan Mountain, so he took his luggage and went to find

the fairy and learned Taoist magic arts. He climbed to the top of a mountain and saw a Taoist temple. The environment was very quiet. There was a Taoist sitting on the futon, whose white hair hanging down on his collar. Scholar Wang went to salute and talked with him. He felt that the ideas of this Taoist priest were very mysterious, so he asked the Taoist to accept him as a disciple. The Taoist said that he was afraid that Scholar Wang were lazy and could not suffer. Scholar Wang replied that he could suffer. The Taoist had many disciples, and they gathered in the evening. Scholar Wang went to see them and stayed in the Taoist temple. In the early morning of the next day, the Taoist priest called Scholar Wang and gave him an axe to let him go with the disciples to cut wood. Scholar Wang respectfully agreed. After a month, Scholar Wang's hands and feet were grounded with thick old daddy. He could not stand the hardship anymore, and came up with the idea of going home secretly. One evening, he returned to the Taoist temple and saw two guests drinking wine with his master. It was already late but they haven't lit a candle yet. The master cut a piece of paper in the shape of a mirror and attached it to the wall. After a while, the paper turned into a bright and shining moon to illuminate the room, and then a guest picked up the jug from the table, and gave the wine to the disciples, and then told the disciples that they could enjoy the drink as much as they can. Scholar Wang thought that how could seven or eight people drink a pot of wine, and it must be insufficient. The disciples were looking for bowls and rushing to grab the drink, for fear that the wine in the pot would dry. However, the crowd continued to fall, and the wine in the pot was not less. Scholar Wang was very puzzled. After a while, a guest threw a chopstick into the moon, and then a beautiful woman floated out of the moon, and less than a foot at first. When she fell to the ground, she was the same as ordinary people. She twisted her slim waist and beautiful neck to dance and sing. The dance was wonderful and the song was melodious. After that she hovered and floated up, jumped to the table and restored to a chopstick. The master and the two guests laughed. Another guest said that he wanted to go to the Moon Palace for a leaving drink, so they three moved the seats and gradually entered the moon palace. The disciples looked up to three people sat in the moon palace to drink alcohol. Their beard and eyebrows were all clearly visible, just like the shadow of a man shining in the

mirror. After a while, the moonlight gradually dimmed, and the disciples lit the candles, and they only saw the Taoist sitting alone, and the guests disappeared. The fruits in the dish on the table still remained there. The moon on the wall was nothing more than a round paper like a mirror. After a month, Scholar Wang could not stand this kind of hardship, and the Taoist priest did not even teach a spell. He could not help himself, and he decided to leave. Scholar Wang begged the Taoist to teach him how to go through the wall. The Taoist taught him and told him to treat Tao with pure heart after returning home; otherwise the spell would not work. When Scholar Wang returned home, he boasted that he met the fairy, and even the hardest wall could not stop him. His wife did not believe it. Scholar Wang imitated the method that the Taoist had taught him. He stayed a few feet away from the wall, running and rushing, but his head hit the hard wall, and he suddenly fell to the ground. His wife raised him, and the big bump on his forehead was like a big egg. The wife laughed at him, Scholar Wang was awkward and angry, and abused the old Taoist was not well-intentioned (Pu 60).

A Chinese Canadian and a Canadian are very interested in Chinese culture, and Andie's father even asks his children to read the English translation of *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*. Through the conversation of Stephen and Andie's father, Lai artfully collages Taoism and *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* into the novel.

Lai also collages the essence of *I Ching* into the novel. The *I Ching* (simplified Chinese characters as 易经) also known as *Classic of Changes* or *Book of Changes*, is an ancient Chinese divination text and the oldest of the Chinese classics. *I Ching* is a prominent representative of Chinese culture. It is vast, subtle and all-embracing, which is also the source of Chinese civilization. Its content covers philosophy, politics, life, literature, art, science and many other fields. After the factory of Mercy's father burns down, with all workers in it, and the government is going to fine them tons of money. Mercy and her mother use three coins which are old kind with the square hole in the middle to predict the future. Six times her mother tosses them, and six times Mercy records the results in a series of broken and unbroken lines on paper meant for telephone messages, with the telephone message pen. She consults her own English-language copy of the *I Ching* and writes the result beneath the hexagram.

There are also descriptions of metaphysics in *When Fox Is a thousand* as follows:

The planet Venus appeared in the daytime for a number of days in a row. The emperor was alarmed and asked the court astrologer what it meant. The astrologer told him it meant a woman would become emperor, taking the place of the sons of heaven. (Lai 162)

According to above citation, the ancient people predicted what will happen according to the track of stars. After Artemis's friend Ming's dead, the Fox goes to the Court of the Underworld to check up Ming's cause of death. There is a judge who has wings on his cap and long gray beard, and he can decide where these ghosts will go.

The novel also refers to the Taoist culture, such as Yin and Yang, Tai Ji, asceticism and vegetarianism. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the Fox can travel through time and space. The Fox can possess human form and she can be immortal when she is a thousand years old; she can communicate with ghosts and gods. In a park in Canada, the ghosts of the murdered men go to the underground magistrate to be judged. These plots are novel, full of metaphysical meaning, which disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements to readers.

4.2.2 Traditional Chinese customs

By employing the writing technique of collage, *When Fox Is a Thousand* exhibits plenty of traditional Chinese feudal ideas and customs. The idea of son preference is particularly prominent in the novel. In ancient China, women could be bought and sold at will. After Yu Hsuan-Chi's father becomes ill, she sells herself to the teahouse for a living. Some wives pay their husbands to buy concubines. In ancient China, women's career was also highly discriminated against. The father-in-law of Yu Hsuan-Chi believes that thieves and actresses are equally disgraceful. When people discover that Yu Hsuan-Chi plays chess, they think it is distasteful, since it is not a very ladylike game.

Lai criticizes the feudal ideology of son preference which embodies her feminist thoughts. In ancient China, women had low status. They depended on their father for

the first half of their lives and their husband or son for the later. The novel begins with a wife who falls out of favor, and she accepts her husband's request for a concubine, and assumes that if she buys him a beautiful concubine, he will spoil her again. But after she buys her husband a plump and charming concubine, she completely loses her husband's love and even servants begin to bully her. Finally she realizes that she is nothing without her husband's love. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, a housewife's husband is too destitute to purchase a concubine, so she steals her dowry back to buy concubine by herself. Artemis Wong's friend Mercy is a Chinese Canadian, whose family have the thinking of son preference. When her younger brother bursts out because he dissatisfies with their mother's dinner, her mother does not look at him, but at Mercy, as if she were somehow responsible for her brother's outburst. However, her brother's outburst is none of her business. When Diane's brother Andie moves out, he is afraid how his parents will look at him. His parents are Chinese, who think the son is the backbone and the future of the family. In traditional Chinese culture, people think the son needs to carry on the family line and they think that of three kinds of ungratefulness to one's parents, the greatest is not to have a male descendant. To see a successful heterosexual marriage and the grandchildren is the sign of filial piety that Chinese parents deserve. This idea is still popular in some parts of China.

In ancient China, women were not allowed to get pregnant without getting married. In the village near the temple of Yu Hsuan-Chi, a butcher's daughter is pregnant without getting married, while the villagers slander that the woman and the pig have sexual relationship, rather than find the real man who makes butcher's daughter pregnant.

A majority of women in ancient China were compelled to bind foot. In order to fit the dainty shoes, a girl's feet had to be break when she was young. The foot binding forces to change the shape of the foot, which seriously affects the normal development of the foot, and the process is very painful. Although it is very painful, it guarantees a good career (Lai 59).

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, there are descriptions of traditional Chinese funeral customs. When Yu Hsuan-Chi goes to her father's funeral, she arrives at the Temple of Shifting Vapours to burn incense and paper money for his soul. In ancient China, people

believed that when a person died, his soul would go to the nether world and live there. If the living person burned paper money for the dead, the dead man's soul would receive the money and spend them in the nether world. In town, Yu Hsuan-Chi buys a large roll of joss sticks and many stacks of paper money, purple, turquoise, yellow, orange and red, and she also buys a whole chicken and a few oranges. In ancient China, people believed that if they put meat or wine before one's tomb, the dead one would receive these foods and then eat them. People need to kowtow and offer incense to their dead relatives.

The collage of traditional Chinese cultural elements makes the readers have more understanding to traditional Chinese culture, and for these traditional thoughts and customs, the author's attitude is to select the essence and discard the gross.

4.2.3 Other Traditional Chinese cultural elements

By employing the writing technique of collage, *When Fox Is a Thousand* presents other traditional Chinese cultural elements. After a series of accidents, Chinese Canadian girl Mercy changes her name to Ming; the word "Ming" is made up of the sun and the moon in the Chinese characters, and she thinks this name represents the light. Ming also tattoos dragon, phoenix, Yin and Yang and the lotus on her body, which show Ming's understanding of the self-identity. In Canada, Chinese Canadians are regarded as "the other", so they feel unfamiliar to Chinese culture, and also cannot be integrated into the western mainstream culture, so they are very confused about their identity. In the collision between Chinese and western cultures, some Chinese Canadians gradually have the wishes to construct their cultural identity and social status.

Besides Chinese characters, when Yu Hsuan-Chi goes to the temple, there are descriptions of lanterns and women's dress and hair in the following citation:

The temple was festooned with clever lanterns, some in the shapes of animals and fish and flowers, some in more conventional styles, with riddles penned elegantly onto the translucent rice paper. Women in dresses that might have been spun from spiders' threads strolled in light, silver and viscous as mercury, hot flowers adorning their hair. (Lai 59)

Besides the descriptions of lanterns and women's dress and hair, Chinese female emperor Wu Zetian is also repeatedly mentioned in the novel. In Yu Hsuan-Chi's teahouse, people talk about Wu Zetian's stories. Lai's depiction of empress Wu Zetian embodies her feminist thoughts. In ancient China, almost every woman could not be an official, and impossible to be an emperor, so the description of Empress Wu Zetian is a reflection of her criticism and resistance to the patriarchal society.

Wu Zetian (624–705) was a Chinese sovereign who ruled unofficially as empress consort and empress dowager and officially as empress regnant during the brief Zhou Dynasty (684-705), which interrupted the Tang Dynasty. Wu Zetian was the sole officially recognized empress regnant of China in more than two millennia.

Wu Zetian was the concubine of Emperor Taizong. However, Wu Zetian did not get the favor of Emperor Taizong, and her status had not been improved. However, during Emperor Taizong's illness, Wu Zetian and Prince Li Zhi began to build their relationships. In 649, Emperor Taizong died, Wu Zetian and some of the concubines who without children entered Ganye Temple in Chang'an as a nun, but she and the new ascendant Emperor Gaozong Li Zhi had been connected. In 650, Emperor Gaozong and Wu Zetian met each other when he went to Ganye Temple to offer incense for the death of Emperor Taizong. The two recognized each other and shared their feelings of missing to each other after separation. Empress Wang, who fell out of favor because of her childlessness, took the initiative to ask Emperor Gaozong to include Wu Zetian in the palace, in an attempt to defeat her rival Consort Xiao. Emperor Gaozong already had this idea, so he agreed without hesitation. In 651, Emperor Gaozong's filial service period was full, so Wu Zetian reentered the palace. Before entering the palace, Wu Zetian was pregnant and gave birth to her son Li Hong after entering the palace. After Wu Zetian returned to the palace, she quickly defeated Consort Xiao and obtained the favor of Li Zhi. In 654, Wu Zetian killed her daughter to blame Empress Wang, causing Empress Wang to be abolished. In 655, Wu Zetian became empress. In 660, Emperor Gaozong had dizziness and could not handle the national affairs. Therefore, Wu Zetian handled the political affairs. In 664, Wu Zetian went to the court and listened to politics with Li Zhi. The two were collectively called "Two Holy Ones". Since then, Wu

Zetian's political experience and influence have further increased. Upon the death of her husband Emperor Gaozong, Wu Zetian became empress dowager and then regent. In 705, Wu Zetian was seriously ill. She was forced to pass the throne to Li Xian. Tang Dynasty was restored, ending the Zhou. For Wu Zetian, there were various evaluations. During the period of Wu Zetian's administration, the country's policy was stable; the military was properly rehabilitated; the culture was revived, and the people were rich. It also laid the foundation for the long-term stable rule of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty. Wu Zetian made great contributions to history. There were also many negative comments for Wu Zetian. At the beginning of Wu Zetian's reign, whistleblowers and merciless officials were popular. Later historians despised her for violating traditional ethics. As a woman, she actually had many toy-boys, which were also called male pets, and she also publicly enjoyed many men, and did not feel ashamed. Therefore, the history books have greatly criticized her actions, swearing at her insidious, cruel, and manipulative. Lai supports Wu Zetian, because she thinks women have the same rights with men.

There are many stories of Wu Zetian in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. On an autumn afternoon, the empress Wu Zetian brought a pear tree branch as she sat in council with her ministers. Since pear trees bloom only in the spring, the ministers all murmured how auspicious it was that spring should come in autumn. But the prime minister said it was because yin and yang were not in harmony, and as the harmony of yin and yang was his responsibility, he should be punished. The empress praised him for his honesty (Lin 6-87). Lai's long descriptions of Wu Zetian's stories present Chinese history and traditional cultural elements to readers.

Fragmentation and collage are both postmodernist writing techniques, and collage makes the novel more fragmented. By employing the writing techniques of fragmentation and collage, Lai presents a mass of traditional Chinese cultural elements, which make readers have a better understanding of traditional Chinese culture and disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements.

Chapter Five

INDETERMINACY AND PLURALISM IN THE NOVEL

The plots, language and images in *When Fox Is a Thousand* are characterized by indeterminacy to illustrate the pluralism of the theme. *When Fox Is a Thousand* disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

To overview western literary theory in the 20th century, the word “indeterminacy” can be directly traced back to reception aesthetics (also known as reader-response theory) and deconstructionism. When it comes to reception aesthetics, “uncertainty” and “emptiness” are the core concepts that must be mentioned. Wolfgang Iser, one of the representatives of reception aesthetics, points out that the uncertainty results from the blank and finally leads to the uncertainty in meaning of the text (Wolfgang 281). In the field of deconstructionism, the discussion of uncertainty is more radical. Roland Barthes, starting with the dispelling of Saussure’s theory of linguistic symbols, points out the break between “the signifier” and “the signified”. He holds that signifier activities turn to other significations before they reach their significations, and that signifier can only be found on the surface of the strata in which it refers. The text itself is only an open and endless symbolic activity, and any meaning is only the instant, rapid generation and rapid disappearance of things in the process of this activity.

Donald Barthelme, father of the new generation of postmodernist writers, also further proposes the principle of indeterminacy by claiming that “My song of songs is the principle of indeterminacy,” which means that “in this century there’s been much

stress placed not upon what we know but on knowing that our methods are questionable” (Davis, Barthelme, and Herzinger 381). Hassan proposes that the basic tendency of postmodernism is indeterminance, which is divided into two aspects of indeterminacy and immanence. Indeterminacy refers to the general will to discard everything in the whole western sociopolitical, cognitive, erotic and individual spiritual and psychological discourse. Immanence means that people have the ability to sum up with symbols. It can gradually get involved in nature and react on itself through its own abstract activities, which more and more directly become its own environment. In Ihab Hassan’s renowned work *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, he gives a definition of indeterminacy as follows:

The so-called indeterminacy refers to the diverse concepts to help describe a complex phenomenon, such diverse concepts as ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion and deformation. (92)

In Ihab Hassan’s view cited above, indeterminacy is one of the fundamental characteristics of postmodernism. He believes that indeterminacy affects knowledge and society. Indeterminacy pervades all our actions, thoughts and interpretations, and it makes up our world (Hassan 18-19). Indeterminacy is a kind of deconstruction to all order and constitutions. It is forever in a tumultuous state of denial and doubt (Wang and Shang 33).

Compared with premodern literature and modernism literature, one of the most outstanding characteristics of postmodern literature is its indeterminacy, which is derived from the dissolution of logocentrism and the dissolution of the deep mode. The indeterminacy of postmodern literature is embodied in four aspects: the indeterminacy of the theme, the indeterminacy of the image, the indeterminacy of the plot and the indeterminacy of the language. It is this indeterminacy that explains the pluralism, language experiments and discourse game of postmodernism literature. The following part will analyze the indeterminacy of the plots, language and images, as well as the pluralism of the theme in *When Fox Is a Thousand*.

5.1 Indeterminacy of Plots

Postmodernist writers regard the indeterminacy of plots as one of the basic meanings of novel writing, and they oppose the logic, continuity and closure of story plots. They also think that in modernism, coherence of meaning, the logic of action and characters, integrity of plots are authors' imagination, rather than base on real life. Therefore, the closed body must be broken and replaced with an open plot structure which full of dislocation. In this way, postmodernist writers will terminate the logic and coherence of the plot, randomly invert the real time, historical time and future time, arbitrarily replace the present, past and future, and continuously divide the real space, thus making the plots of literary works present various or infinite possibilities. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the indeterminacy of plots is embodied by fragmented plots and the openness of Yu Hsuan-Chi's cause of death.

5.1.1 Fragmented plots

In the view of postmodernist writers, the coherence and logic of the plots make it a closed structure. This completely unified structure is not based on reality, because reality is a world full of uncertainty. Therefore, in the creation of postmodernist works, they often break the continuity and logic of the plots through the random reversal of time. In the random replacement of the present, the past, and the future, the reality is split into pieces that are solitary, and these independent plots present multiple or infinite possibilities, so that everything is in indeterminacy.

The plots of *When Fox Is a Thousand* are fragmented. The plots of *When Fox Is a Thousand* are connected by three narrators, who narrates their own experiences respectively. After the Fox narrates her own part of the experiences, there are Yu Hsuan-Chi's stories in the first person or Artemis Wong's stories in the third person. At first, the experiences they narrates have no close connection .

The plots of traditional novels are coherent, complete and logical, while postmodernism subverts these characteristics of traditional novels. The plots of postmodernist novels are open and broken. *When Fox Is a Thousand* is divided into four parts. The first part is "How the Fox Came to Live Alone" (Lai 1), which mainly about

how Fox is excluded by other foxes, how helpless is Yu Hsuan-Chi in her early years and how Artemis Wong disgusts traditional Chinese cultures. The three narrators narrate their own experiences without intersection. The second part is “The Familiar Shape” (Lai 51); in this part, Yu Hsuan-Chi and Artemis Wong always feel familiar to the incarnation or the trace of the Fox. The third part is “Degrees of Recognition” (Lai 125); Yu Hsuan-Chi and Artemis Wong can recognize the Fox, because the Fox meets them separately. The last part is “When Fox Is a Thousand” (Lai 201), in this part, the Fox reaches to her thousandth birthday. She accompanies Artemis Wong and tells Yu Hsuan-Chi’s stories to her.

Throughout *When Fox Is a Thousand*, each of the three main characters narrates their own experiences respectively. Not only are there few links of three protagonists’ experiences, but the relationship of their own stories is also less, because the experiences they narrate are fragmented. This kind of narration makes the plots of *When Fox Is a Thousand* fragmented.

5.1.2 Openness of Yu Hsuan-Chi’s cause of death

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the indeterminacy of the cause of Yu Hsuan-Chi’s death embodies the indeterminacy of its plots. The plots of traditional novels are always coherent and logical, and they are completed in time and space at one go. It is easy for readers to infer from one event to the next. Postmodernist writers oppose the logic, coherence and closure of the plot, and regard the indeterminacy of the plot as one of the key points of creation. They believe that in modernism, the coherence of the meaning, the logicity of the action of characters, and the complete unity of the plot are a closed structure, which is a wishful thinking of the writers, not based on real life, and therefore must be broken. This enclosure is replaced by an open-body plot structure that is full of misplacement.

In traditional Chinese history, it was believed that Yu Hsuan-Chi was executed for whipping her maid to death. The tabloid-style *Little Tablet from the Three Rivers* gave the only purported facts about her life. About Yu Hsuan-Chi’s cause of death, some scholars thought she was revenged by the official (Peng and Zhang 9). Professor Zhang

Chengjian of Wenzhou University thinks that in the tabloid-style *Little Tablet from the Three Rivers*, there are the trace of fabrication about the story that Yu Hsuan-Chi killed Lu Ch'iao jealously. There are two reasons. First, Lu Ch'iao already died, the words before she died were not reliable, because there were only her and Yu Hsuan-Chi on the spot, so how could others know what Lu Ch'iao had said. Second, as Yu Hsuan-Chi's maid, Lu Ch'iao was no more than teenage years at most, but the words she said were justice and strict, which were not like the tone of an innocent young girl. These words do not appear to be made up by the Huang Fumei, who was the author of *Little Tablet from the Three Rivers*, and they were probably the conspiracy statement of officials in Jingzhao Municipality. Lu Ch'iao's words that scolded Yu Hsuan-Chi for her leching were simply the Jingzhao Municipality's serious judgment to Yu Hsuan-Chi. Zhang Chengjian believes that the case of Yu Hsuan-Chi must have a complex background, which has hidden twists and details. The so-called Yu Hsuan-Chi's "jealousy killing" case is an ancient mystery and a never ending wrong (Zhang 58-70).

However, the conditions for the investigation in ancient times were limited, and the evidence for the case was insufficient. Therefore, we cannot know what actually happened at that time. In the novel, the Fox goes to the "western sky" library to investigate the real cause of Yu Hsuan-Chi's death. The Fox finds that there are different reviews about the real cause of Yu Hsuan-Chi's death in history. Some historians believed that Yu Hsuan-Chi was innocent, while others believed that she was the murderer. Instead of clarifying the historical truth, Lai does not answer the question that whether Yu Hsuan-Chi really kills Lu ch'iao. She leaves room for readers to imagine. Lai believes that there is no single truth in the world, and every statement has contradictions and inadequacies. Even her explanation is just a false statement of fact. The open ending of Yu Hsuan-Chi's death challenges the traditional history of China, which embodies the indeterminacy of the plots in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, and it is a typical expression of the characteristics of postmodernism (Morris and Lai, 26).

5.2 Indeterminacy of the Language and Image

In the postmodernist works, language is disordered, fragmented, inflated and

overconfident, with endless games that can be pointed at and no ultimate significance displayed. The characters in postmodern literature show impersonal characteristics, and many characters do not have a name. This part will probe into the indeterminacy of the language and images in *When Fox Is a Thousand*.

5.2.1 Game of signifier

The bloody facts of the Nazi concentration camp and the Hiroshima atomic bombing in the two World Wars made many people realize that what they saw was not a rational world, but an absurd, crazy and unreasonable world. Postmodernist novelists believe that there is no meaning in this dreamlike world. Therefore, they no longer try to pursue the ultimate meaning in their works as modernist novelists, but often use farce to reveal the absurdity of the world. In its farce-like world, the author died because the postmodernist novelists completely give up the subjectivity. In their view, the subjective self is no longer a stable entity; it is fictitious, and at best it is just a statue. Therefore, the subject is not the source of the act, the source of the creation or the source of other forms of expression, but a position in the language. In this way, language becomes the only tool for postmodernists to build this absurd world, and writing is just a language game (Liu, et al. 347).

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, names are so symbolic that the text reads in part like a fable or an allegory. Lai utilizes Judaeo-Christian texts and Greek mythology to establish an allegorical tie between naming and name-changing. The names of the major characters—Artemis, Diane, Mercy, Eden, Saint, Lena—are either coded with Biblical allusion or with mythological associations. Artemis Wong's father is an Asian-studies professor and her mother is a museum curator, Artemis Wong negotiates between identities and roots her identification in a condition of in-betweenness. Fox's comments on Artemis's name point to this Chinese Canadian girl's liminality are as follows:

Her friends call her Art, or sometimes Artless, depending upon the degree of guile she is capable of in any particular situation. You say: A funny name for a Chinese girl. I will correct you. Chinese-Canadian. Make no mistake, because her name is a name that marks a generation of immigrant children whose

parents loved the idea of the Enlightenment and thought they would find it blooming in the full heat of its rational fragrance right here in North America. So here she is, with a good mouthful of a first name to go with the short, crisp monosyllable last—Artemis, the virgin huntress. It's Greek. (Lai 10)

In the above citation, the Fox illustrates that a name is a bridge between the past and the future and “needs roots to tap the water deep below the surface of the earth, to prevent the soul from being swept away by any old tie that happens to wash in” (Lai 231). The name of Diane is the Roman equivalent of Artemis, and they mean the same thing. Artemis and Diane do not come from the same family, but they have the same kind of hair and eyes. Diane does not have many female friends, but she feels so intimate to Artemis Wong even though she hardly knows Artemis Wong. In a bar, Diane and Artemis Wong are recognized as sisters because they look like each other.

Mercy is Artemis's friend. After a series of incidents of her family, Mercy changes her name into Ming, which means bright or shimmering. Ming wears a “black leather jacket, worn soft at the elbows,” and her “black hair was shaved down to within a millimeter of her scalp” (Lai 132). Lai's choice of the name Ming (Chinese characters as 明) is significant, as this Chinese character combines two components: *ri* (Chinese characters as 日), which means sun, and the sun represents masculine. It's another component is *yue* (Chinese characters as 月), which means moon, and the moon represents feminine, thus it is an androgynous coexistence of two genders or sexes. Mercy's changing of name expresses her retrospection for the origins and spirits of Chinese culture.

This kind of game of signifier embodies the indeterminacy of the language. In the postmodernist works, language is disordered, fragmented, inflated and overconfident, with endless games that can be pointed at and no ultimate significance displayed. Through the name changing of main characters, *When Fox Is a Thousand* thoroughly reflects the indeterminacy of language and the exploration of the Chinese ethnic group in Canada to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture.

5.2.2 Anonymous Fox

An important aspect of the indeterminacy of postmodernist novels is the indeterminacy of characters. The following part will analyze the indeterminacy of image, which is showed by the anonymous Fox.

If in realism, the character is human; in modernism, the character is the personality, then, in postmodernism, the character is the image. When postmodernism declares that the subject and the author died, the characters in literature also died naturally. In the works of postmodernism, “people” are no longer the subject of real life, nor the main body of discourse. The characters only become “roles” rather than protagonists, and they are always on the verge of broken life. Therefore, some people have summarized the characteristics of postmodernism as no reason, no origin, no self, no root, no picture and no metaphor. It is this six-nothing that makes the certainty of postmodernist literary image completely dismembered and the characters in postmodernist novels are usually ambiguous (Liu, et al. 17).

The image in *When Fox Is a Thousand* has the feature of indeterminacy. The protagonist in the novel is a fox who can become immortal by exercising for one thousand years. The Fox can engage in spiritual possession of people, so traditional Chinese and western cultures can communicate with each other. However, this fox does not have name; Lai uses “Fox” to refer to this millennium fox from the beginning to end. The Fox is different from foxes in traditional Chinese culture; she only likes Taoist nuns and Buddhist nuns, and prefers to engage in spiritual possession of woman. The Fox is sometimes good and sometimes evil. She sometimes incarnates as an old woman, and sometimes incarnates as an angel. She also masquerades as Artemis Wong’s biological mother, so her identity is indeterminate. However, due to the indeterminacy of her identity, traditional Chinese culture can relate with contemporary Chinese Canadians and make the novel full of postmodernist features.

The anonym of the Fox is a metaphor of marginalized groups as Chinese Canadians. When the Fox is chastised by other foxes for haunting women, the peers blame her for being “different” in the following citation:

Don't you know your actions reflect on us all? If you keep making these visitations, other fox families will talk about us. They will criticize us for not having raised you properly. It would be better if you chose a more respectable occupation, like fishing or stealing chickens. (Lai 3)

The above citation demonstrates that the Fox is not only marginalized by her peers, but also estranges to western cultures. The Fox is anonymous because she represents marginalized groups.

The Fox is the most important character in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, because it is she that connects Chinese and western cultures as a cultural bridge. The Fox approaches Yu Hsuan-Chi when she goes to her father's funeral. The Fox creates a thousand of doves and snakes and incarnates as a woman with a lantern. A few days later, the Fox incarnates as a travelling scholar, who is a man. They play chess and enjoy themselves. Yu Hsuan-Chi always feels familiar with this scholar. When she lights a packet of rose-scented incense, which is the gift of scholar, she remembers the woman with the lantern for no reason. One night, the scholar bathes in Yu Hsuan-Chi's house, and he tells Yu Hsuan-Chi he is the woman with the lantern. Yu Hsuan-Chi bents over the tub and kisses her. A long time later, when Yu Hsuan-Chi walks on the road, she hears sounds like a scrambling of claws into earth, which is a four-legged creature with a lame leg. But when she turns back, she only finds an old woman. When she wants to chase the woman, a wall of thick summer heat hits her in the face and gushes into her lungs, burning her heart and making her eyes tear. When she looks again, the woman has disappeared. When Fox visits her again, Yu Hsuan-Chi has already become a Taoist nun. And her companion Lu Ch'iao has ran away with an acrobat for a year.

On a returning trip to China via Hong Kong, the Fox spots Artemis in the market, and realizes for the first time that her gait is measured and cautious the way the poetess's was nine hundred years ago, when she stepped outside her aging father's gate for the last time. The ones who are born overseas are always obvious. Artemis thinks that as long as she does not speak, releasing a poor accent, or wordless open-mouthed silence, she is safe, invisible. But her eyes betray her terror of being spoken to. She is afraid of China because it is unacquainted to her. The Fox is very interested in her, so

she follows her all the time. In the ferry terminal, Fox haunts Artemis successfully in the following quotation:

Voices flood like water into her ears, displacing air. The steel pole she clutches is beginning to sweat. She imagines long fingers wriggling through her ribcage to grab her lungs and squeeze. A thin breath dribbles out of her lungs and she gasps to snatch it back, but the greedy fingers squeeze tighter and all that goes in are the familiar voices she doesn't understand. She is growing pale. The fingers snake into her belly. Grow double heads. Maybe forked tongues too. (Lai 120)

In the above quotation, the Fox haunts Artemis successfully, which is the first time that they get so close. In a thunderstorm night of a Chinese resort, Artemis Wong is surrounded by the fear of being alone in a foreign land. Fox sleeps aside her and leans gently against her back. Then Fox pulls her hand on her shoulder and gently passes it over her body in a gesture of comfort. Because Artemis does not refuse, Fox put her hand on Artemis's belly and Artemis rolls over and looks at her, with no surprise in her eyes. It is as though she expects Fox to be here, and is pleased. Artemis reaches her hand up behind Fox's head and pulls Fox towards her.

After a period of struggle, Artemis decides to meet her biological mother. However, on her way to meet her biological mother, Fox incarnates as a woman and asks her where she will go in the woods. Then, when she arrives at the house of her biological mother, the same woman Artemis had seen in the woods behind her house. Fox invites Artemis to come in the house. After a long moment hesitation, Artemis comes into the house and finds Fox is celebrating her birthday. The Fox tells her a story between a nun and a fox, which is similar to the things that happen between them. And the end of the story is the two women falls in love and lives happily ever after in the temple. Artemis and the Fox have a number of similarities. They had both seen dead, who made them feel deep sorrow.

In a bus, Artemis Wong meets the Fox, who incarnates as an Asian woman. Artemis feels familiar to her. After Artemis's best friend Ming's death, the Fox accompanies her. They write poems to the poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi, "trying to dream

through what nobody's records could tell us" (Lai 231). Artemis is too sorrowful to take care of herself, and it is the Fox who accompanies and comforts her. The following is an example of illustration:

At least I am here. She clings to me in the night; she aches for my hands to soothe her, my poems to whisper her under the dark. That is what I can do, so that is what I do. (Lai 231)

According to above citation, Artemis not only gets closer to the Fox, but also relies on her. However, they are both getting dirty, and the place smells like a den. The Fox does not mind it so much, having been born into such a place, but it bothers Artemis and yet Artemis refuses to wash. The place grows grayer. Artemis subsists on a diet of scotch and cigarettes, and she has not eaten food in weeks. Artemis is growing yellower and yet somehow she continues to hang on tenaciously. The Fox fears that they will be discovered, because the place reeks now. There is a description in the novel:

I am scared because these are classic symptoms of a fox's haunting. The victim pale and thin with eyes that blaze and hair too lush and thick to be human. It was never my intention to haunt like this. I came for the warmth, for the breath. I came as a friend, to comfort. (Lai 233)

In the above description, Artemis relies too much on the Fox, and places all her hopes and desires upon the Fox. If Artemis still keeps decadent like this, she will probably die. Therefore, the Fox leaves her and Artemis gradually regains her confidence to life.

The Fox in Lai's novel functions as a mediator between two worlds and eras, attempting to give Artemis some connection to her past. Fox arises out of a need to bridge the gap between the contemporary Artemis in Canada and the ninth-century poetess or priestess Yu Hsuan-Chi in ancient China. Anonymous Fox is not only a symbol of the bridge which connects Chinese and western cultures, but also a representative of marginalized group.

5.3 Pluralism of the Theme

In traditional novels, the theme occupies a supreme position in literary creation. It is the soul of the literary works. Its depth directly determines the value of the works and it is also one of the driving forces behind the writers' creation. Postmodernist writers emphasize the arbitrariness, improvisation and patchwork of creation, and pay attention to the readers' participation and creation of literary works (Zeng 11). The crisis and loss of the postmodernist rationality, beliefs, morality and daily life norms are inseparable from the uncertainty of the subject in postmodern literary creation.

The content and form of *When Fox Is a Thousand* are extremely novel. Three narrative voices tell their stories alternately. Metaphysics, feminism, homoeroticism, and the representation and dissemination of traditional Chinese culture are embodied in the novel. Plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements are represented in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. The novel disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

5.3.1 Disseminating traditional Chinese cultural elements

The employment of traditional Chinese cultural elements reflects Lai's intention to disseminate traditional Chinese cultural elements.

As a Chinese Canadian writer, Lai is interested in traditional Chinese culture. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Lai subverts the traditional images of fox group and rewrites the story of Chinese female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty. Through such subverting and rewriting, Lai not only exhibits traditional Chinese cultures, but also expresses her wish to disseminating traditional Chinese cultural elements. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Lai also parodies a lot of western literary classics. The story of Chinese princess imitates the traditional Chinese story "Prince of Persia". "The Cat Mother" is based on the traditional Chinese folk story "The Old Cat". Lai also presents a large

number of traditional Chinese cultural elements by employing the postmodernist technique of collage, such as Taoism, metaphysics, the story of Wu Zetian and Chinese feudal ideas and other traditional Chinese customs, including son preference, binding foot and funeral customs.

The novel draws inspiration from Chinese mythology and traditional culture with a focus upon historical and mythological female figures; by employing postmodernist writing techniques, it integrates historical and realistic, cultural and mythological connections, and disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context.

5.3.2 Retrospecting the origins and spirits of Chinese culture

Artemis Wong, one of the protagonists in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, is an image living on the edge of Canadian culture. Her name Artemis Wong reflects her hollow state between Chinese and Canadian cultures. “Artemis” is the name of the Greek hunting goddess, and “Wong” is a typical Chinese surname “Yellow”, which also represents the yellow race. Her name is mixed with Chinese and Western cultures, but she refuses everything about China, and she thinks the smell of mothballs is the smell of China, and stays away from anything that has the smell of mothball, which represents China in her mind. Her mother has made a point of teaching her to cook Chinese, but she always resists those lessons, because she resents them. Artemis Wong is adopted by her parents who are both the White. Her father is an Asian Studies professor, and her mother is a curator at the Museum of Ancient Cultures. Her parents do not tell her where she was born, because they are afraid she will leave them for her birth mother. She thinks there are too many secrets in her family. Her family has a few Chinese artifacts, and Artemis Wong has a trunk of things that used to belong to her biological mother, because her adoptive mother wants to make sure she is aware of her history.

When Artemis Wong’s biological mother wants to meet her, she refuses because she thinks her biological mother had anything to do with her for twenty years. Why should she be interested? Gradually, Artemis Wong is curious about the origins of her name. She goes to the university library to find her name. She hopes her search can give

a clue to the temperament and motivations of the woman who had abandoned her twenty years ago and recently change her mind (Lai 151).

Artemis Wong is not satisfied with her life in the cracks. She and Eden are men and women friends, but Eden never touches her while they lie in bed, although he takes her for candlelight dinners and invites her to sleep over night after night. He kisses her sometimes in the daytime. Not on the mouth, but on her neck, or along the jawbone. Their relationship is pathological. Eden only recognizes Artemis as his good friend, rather than his girlfriend, because he is a gay. Artemis Wong's former best friend's name is Diane Wong, and they have the same name, just different versions. Mercy is also her crony. Mercy and Diane estrange from Artemis Wong successively without any reason. After Diane leaves her, the only thing of significance leaves is the old blue quilt her birth mother has left for her. It has been fluffed out, neatly folded and left in the window seat. She sits down there. She tugs at the even folds and pulls the quilt around her, letting the smell of mothballs waft into her lungs. For the first time the pungent odor is comforting. Mercy or Ming's cross-naming of herself suggests that she has strong desire to integrate into Chinese culture. As Susanne Hilf points out, "by constructing her identity, by re-inventing herself, Mercy or Ming fights against determining constraints imposed on her from the outside" (32).

At the same time, lesbian friends around her are also facing the threat of violence. Lesbian and the yellow race identity make it impossible for them to live freely in foreign countries, and the oppression of strong mainstream culture makes it impossible for them to relieve.

The Fox and Yu Hsuan-Chi in *When Fox Is a Thousand* are both lesbian images, who become the metaphor of Artemis Wong's identity. The realization of their dreams has placed the hope that Artemis Wong's dreams will come true. So Artemis Wong begins to explore the origins and spirits of Chinese culture by following Chinese cultural symbols. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the Fox successively attaches herself to Yu Hsuan-Chi and Artemis Wong's body, implying the continuation of culture on the individual through history. It eliminates the sense of cultural rupture and identity crisis of Chinese ethnic group in Canada, and paves the way for the Chinese ethnic group in

Canada to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture.

5.3.3 Constructing cultural identity and spiritual strength for Chinese Canadians

As a female writer, Lai excels at describing different stories from a feminist perspective, so there are a large number of female characters in the novel: from the protagonist Fox to her possessed Yu Hsuan-Chi and Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong. Yu Hsuan-Chi's maid Lu Chi'ao, Artemis Wong's biological mother and foster mother, her two important friends Mercy and Diane are all females. The serious imbalance between the proportion of female characters and male characters expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture.

Selecting only female characters and describing their same-sex love embody the intimate relationship between the same gender or between the same groups. Lai once said in her interview that currently Canada is not a multicultural utopia, and it needs to be improved (Morris and Lai 24). When Diane's brother Andie tells her that he is moving in with a guy, Diane feels it is cool, and she does not think of him as any worse or any different (Lai 44). Artemis kisses with Diane. Although every protagonist in the novel has experienced twists and turns, they still renerve and work hard. Just as Fiona Tolan said that female self-seeking is not a linear but a circular process (176). That is to say, the failure of Artemis Wong's same-sex love and Ming's smuggling of drugs is not a failure and their ultimate destination, but it is an indispensable step in their self-pursuit process.

In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, Chinese Canadians have been struggling in Canadian society all the time, and they are confused about their cultural identity, because they cannot integrate into Canadian mainstream society, so Lai aims to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

This thesis, taking postmodernist perspective, explores traditional Chinese cultural elements in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. As a writer living in a postmodern context, Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* has demonstrated obvious characteristics of postmodernism. As a Chinese Canadian, Lai has expressed deep feelings in her novels for traditional Chinese culture. By employing postmodernist techniques, the novel disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

The thesis, firstly, emphasizes the writing techniques of intertextuality and parody exerted in *When Fox Is a thousand*. By analyzing the traditional and recreated image of the Fox, this thesis deems that the Fox symbolizes the transmitter of Chinese culture and history. The Fox successfully attaches to the female poet Yu Hsuan-Chi in the Tang Dynasty and Chinese Canadian girl Artemis Wong in the current era, and then successfully becomes the fox of a thousand year old that is given the ability to communicate with the heaven. The Fox represents the eternal inheritance of Chinese time-honored culture, who is an optimistic symbol of the continuation of Chinese culture and history. The intertextuality of Yu Hsuan-Chi and the parody to traditional Chinese tales present plenty of traditional Chinese cultural elements. Secondly, this thesis illustrates the writing techniques of fragmentation and collage in *When Fox Is a thousand*. Through the writing techniques of fragmentation and collage, Lai presents a number of traditional Chinese cultural elements. The fragmentation of literary form,

narrative mode, space and time enables Lai to insert traditional Chinese cultural elements in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Meanwhile, Lai also presents a series of traditional Chinese cultural elements by employing the writing technique of collage, such as Taoism, metaphysics, foot binding, funeral custom, the thought of son preference and the experiences of Chinese female emperor Wu Zetian. Thirdly, this thesis probes into Lai's employment of indeterminacy and pluralism. The plots, language and images in the novel are characterized by indeterminacy to illustrate the pluralism of the theme. The plots of *When Fox Is a Thousand* are connected by three narrators, who tell their own stories respectively. Only in this way, traditional Chinese culture and history can be connected with reality. In the novel, Yu Hsuan-Chi's cause of death is uncertain; Lai leaves readers sufficient space to imagine. There are games of signifier in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. In the process of naming and changing name of some Chinese Canadians, traditional Chinese cultural elements are disseminated. The image in the novel is also indeterminacy, which is showed by the Fox, who is anonymous, without name and full of fluidity, so the Fox can connect history and reality, as well as traditional Chinese culture and western culture. The indeterminacy of plots, language and image results in the pluralism of the theme.

The significance of the thesis lies in its exploration of traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context. This thesis, from the perspective of postmodernism, interprets postmodernist writing techniques in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, namely, intertextuality, parody, fragmentation, collage, indeterminacy and pluralism. This thesis concludes that, the novel draws inspiration from Chinese mythology and traditional culture with a focus upon historical and mythological female figures; by employing postmodernist writing techniques, it integrates historical and realistic, cultural and mythological connections, and disseminates traditional Chinese cultural elements in the postmodernist context; significantly, the novel expresses the aspiration of marginalized Chinese Canadian females to struggle free from the shackles of patriarchy and the White mainstream culture, aiming to arouse the consciousness of Chinese Canadians to retrospect the origins and spirits of Chinese culture, and to construct their cultural identity and spiritual strength in Canadian society.

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