

Between Two Worlds: Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*

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Abstract: Timothy Mo is an Anglochinese writer who writes much about the experiences that immigrants face in their new country, and how they overcome the problems and culture shocks that come up, as well as how they define their identity. In his novel, *Sour Sweet*, Mo describes how three characters who come from Hong Kong, Chen, Lily, and Mui, with their all character traits live their lives in the United Kingdom. This paper discusses how the three characters respond to their new environment. Because of different character traits and ability to cope with changes, they respond to the culture and society of the UK differently. There is one who holds the old culture tightly without trying to understand the new culture in the new place, there is one who rejects the old culture and adapts the life in the UK in an uncritical manner, yet there is one who tries to find the equilibrium between the old and the new. By showing the flexibility towards the changes and the influence of foreign culture, Mo emphasizes in the need of accommodative attitude and tolerance towards the multicultural reality in this modern world.

Key words: Diaspora, multicultural perspective, Timothy Mo, *Sour Sweet*.

Diaspora in Oxford English dictionary, 1993 edition refers to “any body of people living outside their traditional homeland.” Some writers define diaspora as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homeland into new regions” (Ashcroft 1998, p. 68). One form of diaspora is the movement of people from poorer areas, such as China or India, to the richer and more promising places, like America or Europe.

The diaspora of the Chinese in the UK is closely related to the history of the colonial power of the British empire, especially in East Asia. The Chinese presence in the UK was firstly recorded in a newspaper, *The Morning Chronicle*, dated 27 July 1782, which wrote

that vessels of British maritime trade with East Asia brought Chinese seamen to the ports of London and Liverpool (Pan, 1998, p. 304). After the World War II, the number of the Chinese in the UK was increasing due to good economic growth, which needed a lot of laborers. Gradually the Chinese immigrants entering the UK were not only odd job laborers, but also students, scholars and other professionals as well. This emigration fact contributes a lot to many aspects of life in the UK, including the literary fields.

In 1980s and 1990, literature in the UK did not develop well. Sanders writes that during that period there were no major writers, and the British influence toward the world literature was decreasing. In his opinion, this happened because there were no major ideas on the literary works written at that time, and the dependence of the writers on the content of the novels of the previous period (p. 633). That was why many efforts were done to promote the writing of literary works, and one of them was by awarding Literary Prizes (Strachan, 1989, p. 38).

What is interesting in the Literary Awards program is that the works of the immigrant writers dominated the entries submitted. Those immigrant writers whose works were nominated were Salman Rushdie (Indian immigrant), Kazuo Ishiguro (Japanese immigrant), and Timothy Mo (Hong Kong/Chinese immigrant) (Sanders, 1994, p. 639). This proves that those immigrant writers can write so well in their second language, that is, English, that their works can be considered as the original works of British literature, which can be accepted by British society. Therefore, it can be concluded that the involvement of the immigrant writers propels the development of literature in Britain.

Rusdhie, Ishiguro, and Mo can be said to be among the most well-known fiction writers emerging from their particular generation of immigrants to Britain. Since the early eighties, they have attracted much critical attention by receiving for their respective novels, prizes, or nominations in highly profiled literary competitions such as the Booker and the Whitbread. Yet they are, of course, not unique and without precedent in the sense that they joined a line of earlier twentieth-century writers who have distinguished themselves in Britain despite being foreigners, exiles, or émigrés to Britain. Terry Eagleton notes, for example, that six out of the seven most significant Modernists such as Conrad, James, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, and Joyce (the seventh being D.H.

Lawrence) were not native Englishmen (p. 9). In his book, *Writers in Exile*, Andrew Gurr reaches a similar conclusion about the prominence gained at a later date by a different set of deracinated writers. He analyzes the postcolonial phenomenon whereby ex-colonial writers, still under the culturally hegemonic influence of Britain, have felt the pull of the cultural metropolis (that is, Britain), and have left their culturally marginalized homelands to seek their literary fortunes in Britain. From the study of the novels of Katherine Mansfield, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and V.S. Naipaul, Gurr surmises that the strength of modern English literature lies more in the works of these exiles and less in that of metropolitan writers (p. 9).

TIMOTHY MO AND *SOUR SWEET*

One of the immigrant writers that attracts my attention is Timothy Mo. According to some critics, he is a non-European writer who is successful in changing the intellectual perception of British society in seeing the immigrants as a community that does not have European cultural background (Sanders, 1994, p. 639). In an interview, Mo has claimed that Salman Rusdhie, Kazuo Ishiguro and he himself form "a new kind of 'foreign' writers, different from their predecessors." In his opinion, their immigration to Britain during their childhood/formative years facilitated their early transition and adaptation to British culture, enabling them to write "mainstream English novels" and to deploy "English novelistic techniques." By comparison, previous "foreign" writers (which the article does not mention) neither had "access to British culture" nor did they come to Britain (Mo, "Families").

In his works, Mo often uses the character of an immigrant. Mo notes that, given the fast pace of change in modern life, contemporary novelists are inevitably drawn to the motif of migration as a "myth" of our time. He says that immigrants are "the central myths of the last part of this century" (Mo, "On the Rails"). This is because the migrant condition of "uprooting, disjuncture, and metamorphosis" expresses the turmoil experienced by modern man when he is faced with the many political, social, cultural, economic, and technological upheavals of the late twentieth century. Contemporary novels, thus, tend to reflect "the

loss by the community as a whole of identity, a sense of history, a sense of home” (Gurr, 1981, p. 14).

Mo tries to show how their experiences in their new land are, how they overcome the problems and culture shocks they face, and how they define their identity. Drawing from his migrant background and his personal familiarity with more than one culture, Mo does more than emphasize the urgency to reconceptualize his characters’ individual sense of self in the face of change. Mo also brings to his works multicultural perspectives. In a world where international contact is becoming commonplace, tales of migration written with enhanced sensitivity serve a necessary role of bridging cultural differences and developing a multicultural awareness and tolerance, as Maria Cuoto writes:

The artist of mixed sensibility has an important role in today’s frontierless world where sensibility is no longer closely housed. The strength of the multicultural artist... is that he realizes and conveys the sum of worthwhile experience in terms of interconnecting worldviews. (p. 64)

Through his first three novels, *The Monkey King* (1978), *Sour Sweet* (1983), and *The Insular Possession* (1991), Timothy Mo succeeds in putting his works on the same level of those of world writers (Ross, 1991, p. 475).

One of Mo’s works discussed here is *Sour Sweet*. Among his other novels, *Sour Sweet* is the novel that obviously talks about the daily life of a migrant family, and how each member of the family experiences culture shocks and reacts differently towards British society and culture. In this novel, *Sour Sweet*, which tells us about the Chen family, consisting of Chen and his wife, Lily, and their son, Man Kee, as well as Mui, Chen’s in-law, we can see how Chen, Lily, and Mui face the British society and culture in their own way, although at first they experience culture shocks, which are more or less the same.

REFUSAL TOWARDS NEW CULTURE

At first both the Chen Family and other Chinese groups, like Hung secret society, have few sincere thoughts of assimilating totally into British society. Red Cudgel, the Hung leader, may see the need “to

harmonise traditional aims, methods and organization with the demands of the modern world;” but deep down in his heart, he would rather preserve the old ways (p. 22).

Like many Chinese immigrants before him, Chen regards the UK as only a place to make money. To him, Hong Kong is his true home. After four years in the UK, he thinks he is still a foreigner, a person who does not feel at ease to live there, “But in the UK, land of promise, Chen was still an interloper. He regarded himself as such.” (1). He even hopes that one day he is going back home to Hong Kong, as he wistfully tells his British-born son, Man Kee, when they are taking a walk at the beach.

Chen lifted Man Kee to the eyepiece. “Do you see the ship, Son?” he asked softly. “It is a special ship for people like us, Son. It is very little and very old but that is only strangers see. We know better, don’t we, Son, because it is the ship that will take us back home when we are finished here. It will take you to your homeland, Son, which you have never seen. (p. 155)

Although the Chen family lives in a good flat which English people also want, Chen does not feel that he is a part of the society there.

That English people had competed for the flat which he now occupied made Chen feel more rather than less of a foreigner; it made him feel like a gatecrasher who had stayed too long and been identified. He had no tangible reason to feel like this. No one had yet assaulted, insulted, so much as looked twice at him. (p. 1)

English people appear to Chen as foreign as he does to them and he finds “a reassuring anonymity about his foreign-ness” (p. 9). The Chen family moves in a very limited social circle and refuses to interact closely with English society other than on business terms. They cultivate an ethnocentric attitude, believing that a Chinese can only rely on another Chinese. Chen feels no need to know the English people. For him they remind him that he is a foreigner there (p. 9).

Chens’ hesitation to interact with the natives is also shown when they move to the suburb and establish a new restaurant there. Chen just accepts what the natives there want, although they profiteer, as what Mr. Constantinides proposes. Mr. Constantinides allows Chen to place the menu of his restaurants in the workshop so that drivers and workers there

could order the food from there. Of course Chen has to pay a commission which he thinks is quite high. But since he does not want to create a problem with the natives, he accepts the plan.

Mr. Constantinides could have a menu posted promptly in the garage and have customers take orders from the forecourt. A five percent commission might be appropriate. Even thinking the offer quickly Chen could see the advantages of this scheme lay mostly with Mr. Constantinides. Nevertheless, out of desire not to antagonise the natives, Chen agreed to the plan. (p. 105)

Chen's wife, Lily, also thinks the same way as Chen does. Lily does not want to interact with other people in her neighborhood. With little understanding of Western behavior, Lily remains convinced of the supremacy of the Chinese race. Reflecting upon some teenaged English girls in her shop, Lily is appalled by their cheekiness.

What possible sense of decency and family honour could those reckless girls have? All running together until a scandalous hour. It was after ten o'clock when they came in. No wonder they always get themselves pregnant. And she thought complacently of her own little family. Really, there was no question how superior Chinese people were to the foreign devils. (p. 137)

Lily's opinion about the supremacy of the Chinese race is also shown in her action when she interacts with English people. She often has difficulties in recognizing the English people whom she thinks are the same. That is why she often uses the word "pig" for her customers. This shows Lily's opinion that English people are inferior to the Chinese, the opinion that Lily's sister, Mui, who can recognize some of their customers, disagrees.

But Mui affected to be able to tell even similar-looking individuals apart.

"Sometimes I don't understand you, Lily. Of course I can tell them part. We have quite a few regular costumers by now.

Lily's mouth opened.

"I suggest you look at the English people on the television a bit harder, younger sister," Mui continued in a thoroughly odious and superior manner. "People show their character in their faces.

Westerners just show their feelings in a different way. How would you like it if someone called you a pig?" (p. 137)

What Mui says makes Lily upset, and she is getting more upset when she thinks that Mui does not side with her when they buy a car from Mr. Constantinides, who gives an unreasonable price. It can be seen from the quotation below.

"Really, those foreign devils just try to exploit us all the time," said Lily, on the verge of angry tears back in the kitchen.

"Don't you think we do the same to them?"

Lily could hardly believe this. Mui had just gone too far this time. What a traitor she was to her family! As if they were responsible for anyone but their little group. (p. 147)

Lily's dislike towards the English people is also infected to Man Kee, her son. When she teaches her son to stop a public bus, she reminds Man Kee of stopping the bus the conductor of which is not the White. She said, "Son, make sure bus conductor is black person. Indian person even better" (p. 195). This shows how Lily views the Caucasians in Britain. Although she cannot avoid interacting with them because she runs a restaurant the majority of the customers of which are Caucasians, she tries to insulate herself and her family from further interaction.

In dealing with government officials Chen and Lily show their ignorance on the laws there. This happens because they think that they are just sojourners who are going to leave Britain some day. This can be seen when the Chen family has a problem with the tax problem. He does not care about this; "innumerate Chen had just decided to ignore the whole problem; then it might go away..." (p. 162). Chen even throws the letters, "Then the tax man came. This followed a series of brown envelopes which Chen, inhabiting his fool's paradise, promptly binned." (p. 163).

Lily also takes the same attitude as Chen, her husband, in dealing with the rules and regulation in Britain. She refuses to have a driving license and insurance. She thinks that all these are not necessary as it is more convenient to give some money, in case the police ask her, as seen in the following quotation.

Of course she didn't intend to take anything so mundane as a driving test. And pay all those exorbitant taxes? Not to mention insurance. Mui wasn't happy about this. She reminded Lily of the large fines, the possibility, even of prison. Lily scoffed. "I shall put a little tea money in a plastic folder. That'll be my licence, Mui." (p. 152)

This is proven when a policeman asks her when she is taking a walk with her family, "The policeman rapped on the driver's window. 'Licence please.' Lily unwound the window briskly and passed out her plastic folder. The policeman examined it beneath the level of the window and handed the empty folder back." (p. 159)

The incidents with the taxman and the police officer show that Chen and Lily have the same thinking pattern, the pattern influenced by Chinese philosophy, and without considering the background where they live. Francis L K Hsu writes that in Chinese philosophy, the interpretation of law is determined by people's feeling and situation, not based on the absolute standard. The disputing parties will not seek a lawyer to represent them in court. Rather, they prefer to find a mediator who can help them solve the problem between them (p. 381). Chen and Lily's attitude towards laws in Britain is based on the idea that there are no absolute standards in Chinese philosophy. They do not think they are wrong or breaking the law. They consider themselves as foreigners who are going back home to their homeland, and not as a part of British society. Therefore, they think that they are not subject to British law, as they are not a part of the local community.

Like Chen and Lily. Mui also thinks that Britain is not a suitable place for her although her rejection is not so strong as Chen's and Lily's. Mui also shows her refusal towards British culture. She faces culture shocks for months. She does not want to go out since the first day she arrives there.

Chen picked up Mui at the airport (recognising her from an old photograph), took her on the double-decker airport bus to Victoria, and they went by underground to the flat. Mui had hardly left the house since then, the behaviour which was beginning to disquiet not only Lily but her brother-in-law as well. (p. 6)

Even when she gets sick, she does not want to go to the doctor. She prefers to have Chinese medicine, instead. "Lily had tried unsuccessfully to persuade Mui to go to the doctor. When she dosed her with the patent

remedy, Mui swallowed the revolting mixture with an equanimity that was truly alarming” (p. 9).

During her first week in Britain, Mui never goes out and spends her time by sitting in the kitchen with her back to the window (p. 9). When she is still in Hong Kong, Mui once works with an English bachelor as a domestic helper, so Mui has at least an experience of interacting with English people. Nevertheless, she still faces culture shocks, and she does not know why. “It wasn’t easy to find out what was wrong with Mui. Mui herself didn’t seem to know. She had work with a foreigner before” (p. 9).

Lily tries to persuade Mui to look at the outside, but it is in vain. “She (Lily) had to propel Mui to the net drapes with a firm hand in the small of the back. From this point of vantage Mui clutched the curtains and peered around the edge in a fair approximation of the evasive behavior of one threatened by a maniac sniper on the rooftops” (p. 9). This shows that Mui’s fear toward her new environment is so great that she sees everything is threatening her.

THE TURNING POINT

The problems that the Chen family has are because of their own attitude. They have the tendency towards insularity. They form an enclave amidst English Society. This is not just because they feel alienated in Britain and wish to keep to themselves. It is also because they retain the fundamental Chinese belief in solidarity among family members as a means to advance the group’s social position” (Mo, “Family”), like what White Paper Fan says, “We have no responsibility to outsiders. Our only concern is with building our own power” (p. 181). In Lily’s experience,

... there was no stand-still in life. Families rose and fell. There was deadly rivalry between them. Their members were united against a hostile conspiring world. If one generation didn’t climb, then the next declined, or the one after that; it wouldn’t maintain the level. (p. 7)

Consequently, the basic relationship the immigrant has with Britain, the “land of promise,” (p. 1) and economic opportunity, is viewed largely in adversarial terms, each side looking after their own. The “foreign devils,” that is, the British, overcharge and exploit the Chen family, as

much as the Chen family does the same to their English customers (p. 147).

Within this scheme, the individual has no identity outside the family and is merely an integer of the group. Excited to be able to drive and increase the family's mobility, Lily thinks, "Truly, the individual found real fulfillment and happiness only in his family. Impossible on your own ..." (p. 152). When White Paper Fan strips Red Cudgel of his leadership of the Hung society, he censures Red Cudgel's self-aggrandizement, "Family Hung is greater than any individual, however high-ranking he may be. The individual is of no importance in himself, only in his office. He can be replaced" (p. 260).

Nevertheless, it is the individual's response to different cultural pulls that determines the survival and progress of the migrant family in a new environment. The Chen family seems to demonstrate cohesion and resiliency. Their ability to adapt to life in Britain is described in organic terms:

... the household (that amoeba), presented with change and challenge, shuddered like jelly on impact with the obstacle but jelly-like suffered no damage, poured itself around the problem, dissolved what it was able to and absorbed what it could not. And went on its amoeba way. (p. 228)

However, despite its elastic properties, the amoeba is at the same time impervious. There are limits to which the Chen family is able to prevail over its insularity; this is because each member differs in his/her ability to engage in British society. The threat to its stability and cohesion lie in its individual members' search to come to terms with their migrant identity.

Chen, for example, considers himself as a sojourner, who is going back to Hong Kong, his homeland, some day, although he and his family may not be considered as the member of the community there. Nevertheless, they do not feel as a member of the community where they live now. "The Chens have been living in the UK for four years, which was long enough to have lost their place in the society from which they had emigrated, but not long enough to feel comfortable in the new" (p. 1). Chen even has some prejudices towards other races. "Prejudices instilled since childhood died hard in Chen" (p. 29). That is why he does not want to interact with society where he lives. As a result, he is trapped between two cultures. Actually he does not really understand Chinese culture, and

he does not want to learn British culture, the culture where he lives now, and to interact with the British. "Chen felt at home yet not at home. He had been more comfortable rootless" (p. 135) until he dies.

Chen's death brings great changes to Lily. The problems appearing due to her husband's death make her aware of the reality of life. She realizes that it is impossible for her to go back to Hong Kong. That is why she starts thinking of Man Kee's development, his son, who is going to live in Britain forever. She now realizes the importance of understanding British tradition and culture, as it is impossible for them to isolate themselves from the interaction with British culture and society. Otherwise, this will result in fatal effects.

Lily does not want Man Kee, her son, to be like Chen, who is culturally rootless, not understanding the culture of the old homeland, yet refusing the culture of the adopted one, the place where he lives. She wants her son to understand his cultural heritage, but since they live in Britain, Man Kee should know the local culture. That is why she sends her son to a British public school, yet she feels the need to send Man Kee to a Chinese school. Even Lily celebrates Chinese New Year during Christmas holidays, to accommodate Man Kee's school schedule, and given a turkey to cook for Christmas, Lily is willing to try and bake it in a mud in the northern Chinese style of Beggar's Chicken, Chinese traditional dish. (p. 177-178). She assures herself that "flexibility ... was typical Chinese" (p. 175).

Finally Lily, who at first refuses the British culture, realizes that she cannot be like that forever. The best way is to find the equilibrium between her cultural heritage and the culture of the society where she lives, that is, British culture. By then she feels relieved.

But it was as if a stone had been taken off her and she had sprung to what her height should have been. She thought she had found a balance of things for the first time, *yin* cancelling *yang*: discovered it not by going to the centre at once – which was a prude's way and untypical of her – but by veering to the extremes and then finding the still point of equilibrium (p. 278).

Lily feels the burden has gone and for the first time she feels the equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*. This shows a great change in Lily's personality.

While Lily tries to find the equilibrium in her understanding of Chinese and British cultures, Mui is not like that. Although at first, Mui

is too culture-shocked to do anything except to watch television in a catatonic state (p. 9-10), later on Mui can overcome her initial inertia and begins interacting with the world at large. Television seems to help her.

Television worked better. Suitable programmes began at six o'clock in the evening, starting with the news (a long way from Lily's favourite programme). Mui watched avidly from the start. She developed preferences amongst the newscasters (p. 9).

Mui also likes watching TV serials. "Serials came an hour after the news" (p. 10). Although she cannot understand all the dialogs in the films, Mui can follow the story line.

She watched with a fascinated interest that bordered on a special kind of horror. She was unable to catch more than a few scattered words of the dialogue, which was colloquial, compound with regionalism, and couched generally in a more demotic mode of the language than that which she had heard from her employer. The situations were universal enough, though, and not so far removed from the stock context of Cantonese drama as to be totally unintelligible; although the conventions could be very different. Mui was not able to retain the names of the leading characters but they were nonetheless real to her for that. She gave the characters names of her own devising; Boy, Hairnet, Drinker, Cripple, Crafty, Bad Girl. (p. 10)

This shows Mui's readiness to enter and understand British culture and society. Although at that time she still thinks in a traditional Chinese way, she tries to connect the British cultural elements with the Chinese ones. Mui's interest in British culture grows stronger and stronger. Gradually, she assimilates into the mainstream of British society and begins interacting with the world. It is she who prompts Chen and Lily to talk about opening a family business and begins looking up newspaper ads for suitable premises (p. 79-80). More adept at the English language than Chen or Lily, she can tell Caucasians apart, recognize regular customers (p. 137), obtain more tips from her deliveries to the "aitchegevees" (p. 105), as well as handle the take-away's accounts and deal with the tax authorities (p. 165).

Slowly and systematically, she withdraws from the Chen family to create her own family, causing the “parturition” of the amoeba, that is, the Chen household (p. 277). She has an illegitimate child, probably fathered by a westerner (p. 275). Instead of bringing her daughter back to live among the Chens, Mui leaves her in the care of Mrs. Law, a family friend, ostensibly as a favor to this childless benefactress (p. 203), an attitude which is “not Chinese.”

Mui at last marries Mr. Lo and take her child back from Mrs. Law. She also wants to run a restaurant, but not a Chinese restaurant, like the Chens', she tells Lily, “No younger sister, we don't open a business like here. It's a restaurant. We open a fish and chip restaurant” (p. 272). And what surprises Lily is Mui's decision to seek naturalization. She wants to be a British citizen as she thinks that Britain is her country. She says, “I am taking out citizenship now. Naturalisation. This is my home now” (p. 276).

Mui has really entered the British society and culture. However, like the compliant child she used to be (p. 10), Mui adapts to Britain in an uncritical manner. Her impression of life in Britain is very much influenced by television (p. 80, 104, 152, 159). And the more she is exposed to the world beyond the Chen family, the less she is interested in cultivating her Chinese heritage as a ballast against new values. Satisfied with what the British school system has to offer Man Kee, Mui is against Lily teaching Man Kee the rudiments of Chinese self-defense. She says, “Wicked things you teach him. Nobody should know these things” (234). Mui also refuses to have anything to do with Man Kee's formal Chinese education (236). Thus, as she assimilates into British life, Mui seems less inclined to develop a multicultural identity.

THE PATH OF TAO

The paragraphs above show that each individual responds differently to the new culture in the new country. Chen reveals his commitment to tradition and his resistance to change when transplanted into another culture. He refuses to interact with the society where he lives. Because of his commitment to Chinese culture and resistance to change, he always has a negative view towards the new culture in which he lives, the culture which he thinks is not suitable for him, the Chinese. He

considers himself as a “sojourner,” who is going back home to China, his homeland. That is why he refuses things he considers foreign to him.

On the other hand, Mui acts differently, although at first, she experiences culture shock, she cannot make adaptation to the life in Britain. She learns and internalizes British tradition and culture. Because she thinks that she has been in Britain and does not intend to go back to Hong Kong, she feels the need to accept and to interact with British society and culture. She leaves her old culture and adopts new culture, the culture in which she lives forever.

Chen and Mui are the description of people who are at the two points. Chen is on the initial point and he stands still there, while Mui leaves the initial points. In her efforts to leave it, she abandons all what are there and moves the final point. In Chinese philosophy, they can be described by *yin* and *yang*, finding the perfection and harmony.

Yin and *yang* are the terms in Chinese philosophy that represent “opposed yet complementary principle.” According to ancient Chinese belief, all that happens is said to be the product of these two elements. These two polar energies, “by their fluctuation and interaction, are the cause of the universe” and the “manifestation of all phenomena is seen as a cyclic process, an endless coming into being and passing away, as everything, upon reaching its extreme stage, transform into its opposite” (Schuhmacher, p. 428). And perfection can be attained if there is an equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*, “to reconcile the polarities in order to achieve a balanced way of living” (Chang, p. 5).

Different from Chen and Mui, Lily is the most level-headed in dealing with the contingencies of migrant life. She is successful in achieving the “perfection,” the harmony between *yin* and *yang*. At first she refuses to interact with the society and culture where she lives, but as time goes by, she realizes that what she has done is not right. Committing to Chinese tradition and culture and refusing the British culture do not benefit her. That is why she tries to find a compromise. She decides to find the balance, the balance between *yin* and *yang*, the balance which she finally finds: “finding the still point of equilibrium” (p. 278). She is not like Chen who shows his resistance toward the new culture, and she is not like Mui either, who just accepts the new culture uncritically. She analyzes the new culture and finds what is acceptable. Instead of

capitulating to the authority of either culture, Lily believes that “self-help was the way” to succeed (p. 231). As written by Rothfolk, Lily “analyzes or deconstructs her native culture when it is challenged by the foreign culture, then clarifies values and decides a commitment.” (p. 56). That is why she educates her son in two places simultaneously. Man Kee still studies in public school, but once a week he studies in Chinese school so that he knows his cultural heritage.

Son's schooling, English style, continued on its peculiar bewildering way. Lily rested her faith in his once weekly exposure to Chinese curriculum, as a measured dose of radiotherapy might burn out cancerous growth. (p. 247)

Lily succeeds in accommodating other culture without abandoning her old one, and she tries to find the best for her and her son, and as written by Rothfolk, Lily seems “to walk the path of Tao in England” (p. 63-64). She can accept the differences between British and Chinese cultures, and find the equilibrium between them, and adopt the best in those two cultures so that she can achieve the harmony. She expresses her satisfaction at achieving a balance of *yin* and *yang*. In this case, Lily develops an attitude with multicultural perspectives, that is, openness towards other cultures, flexibility, tolerance, as well as full of understanding. She realizes of various cultures, but that does not mean that those various cultures are conflicting or opposing to each other. In what seems to be conflicting and opposing, harmony can be found, as stated by Taoism.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above shows that each individual, when moving from one culture to another, gives different responses, especially when the new culture is conflicting with the old one. In *Sour Sweet*, those cultures are British and Chinese cultures. Chen shows his strong resistance toward British culture. This can be seen from his refusal to interact with British society, the society where he lives. Chen is on the one end. On the contrary, Mui accepts British culture in an uncritical manner because she thinks that the acceptance benefits her. In this case Mui is on the other end.

Contrary to both Chen and Mui, Lily tries to find the balance between British and Chinese cultures. She applies the principles of Tao,

that is, finding the equilibrium between two different things, the equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*, so that harmony can be attained. She is successful in finding the equilibrium so that she feels that her burden has been lifted up (p. 278), and now she can live better. Lily, in this case, is Timothy Mo's mouthpiece, who voices the importance of the openness towards other cultures, and flexibility towards changes and influences of the new cultures. It is impossible to isolate ourselves from other cultures in a modern and multicultural world. Accommodative attitude, tolerance, and understanding are needed so that balance and harmony can be achieved.

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