

you for giving me an opportunity to listen to you. I will remember you. Sorry. We've cleared everything up. See you next time'.
He took my hand and kissed it, and then turned and strode out without waiting for me to reply.¹⁴⁶

In remarking on her bravery, the official reprises the already well-established theme of European surprise at a Chinese woman who can be 'brave' rather than meek and passive. He is charmed also by her appearance; that it may be admiration for her physical attractiveness and her unexpectedly spirited presentation rather than the quality of her arguments that cause him to 'soften' is perhaps implied in his repeated touching of her, and in particular the somewhat patronisingly courtly gesture of kissing her hand.¹⁴⁷ Thus two of San Mao's three conflicts with authority in Europe have ended not only in her victory but with her being kissed by her erstwhile opponents.

As in her previous encounters with European injustice, 'it is clear who won and who lost'. Now that her battle over and San Mao is proved victorious, she is 'moved' by the attitude of the immigration officer (again suggesting, by placing the encounter on an emotional plane where she is 'moved', that factors other than reason are involved in the situation). While Maria thinks she ought to display more pleasure at her victory, San Mao's concern remains with the other 'envious' and 'sad' detainees; 'I wished everyone could leave', she sighs.¹⁴⁸

But only she is free to go, having shown herself able to triumph over European injustice, bureaucracy and personalities. During her day in detention she has endeared herself to everyone - not by meek 'citizen diplomacy' (which elicited appreciation but not respect, which was easily exploited and which sapped her confidence) but by actively standing up for fair treatment, for others as well as herself, displaying the 'sense of justice' that she claims to be lacking in Europeans. She has won over the immigration official, the policeman (who now gives her the address of the detention centre with the words, 'Write to us when

¹⁴⁶ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 134-135.

¹⁴⁷ This is one of many instances in San Mao's writing of European men finding her attractive. The same official had called her 'a lovely young lady' and patted her on the shoulder earlier in the story; the German immigration official in the story of East Germany referred to above had softened when San Mao smiled a self-consciously beautiful smile ('At that time I was a beautiful woman, and I knew that I was like a spring flower when I smiled - it must move anyone, no matter whom', *Taking the City* p. 235; the East German soldier had stood gazing into her eyes on the station platform; a German student had wished to marry her; a German teacher in Taiwan had planned to marry her; she did marry the Spanish José; a Spanish colleague of José's in the Sahara falls in love with San Mao and leaves the desert (*Stories of the Sahara* p. 248-250). Biographers accept European male interest in San Mao as manifestations of her compelling personality; more general questions of European male interest in 'the oriental woman' could also be raised in this context.

¹⁴⁸ 'You seem sadder now than this afternoon', observed Maria; 'You're really strange - we let you go and you don't seem happy'. Meanwhile the other detainees crowd round to hear the news, pleased for San Mao but still in detention themselves. *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 135.

you get there! We'll remember you! Goodbye!'),¹⁴⁹ Larry, Maria (who, as the only other woman in the story, is a little less easily susceptible to San Mao's charms) - and also the other detainees. From the most unpromising of beginnings, San Mao has conquered and charmed the very people against whom she struggled and argued; again, she has triumphed over the unjust treatment she has received at the hands of the 'west', turning even inauspicious situations into entertaining adventures and personal triumphs, extricating herself from a difficult situation, and winning her new friends.¹⁵⁰

Her final reward is a sightseeing tour; a taxi is waiting to take her to Heathrow, escorted by Larry to 'show you an English evening'.¹⁵¹ At the airport, Larry unloads her luggage and waves aside her attempt to pay the cab fare with a jocular reference to her ambiguous status on English soil: 'You're a guest of the British government', he smiles; 'They'll pay - it's an honour for us'. San Mao's final triumph is her presentation of the day's events in a manner that leaves Larry laughing in admiration - that is, as a game called 'the pig eats the tiger'.

'We have been playing it all day. I was the pig, and the immigration bureau was the tiger. On the surface, it looked as if the pig was inconvenienced for a day, but in fact you were the losers. You carried my heavy cases, you had to stay with the prisoner, you brought food, and typed, and paid for the cab. As for me - I got a free sightseeing trip, I got lots of new experiences, and I made some friends. So, in the end, it was the pig that ate the tiger! Thank you!'¹⁵²

Larry farewells San Mao affectionately¹⁵³ and leaves, still laughing; but even as San Mao waves to him, the sound of weeping alerts her to the presence of another detainee, 'another moving story'. Her own 'moving story', however, is at an end, and she goes off to board her plane.

¹⁴⁹ To the very last, San Mao maintains her composure and her ability to surprise, shaking the policeman's hand and thanking him for looking after her, *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 136.

¹⁵⁰ Having turned the situation to her own advantage, she is now able to use it further by incorporating it into her characteristic narrative of *yuanfen* (the lot or luck that brings people together) and thus investing it with even more emotional value. The policeman remarks that 'We only meet once in a lifetime', and San Mao muses that 'it must have been *yuanfen* that brought us together; who knows how many centuries had to pass before that day arrived? I felt a bit nostalgic and unwilling to part', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 136.

¹⁵¹ The glowing description of the drive to the airport contrasts markedly with the frustration of the detention experience. Larry and the taxi driver both act as tour guides and point out landmarks to her, she 'watched quietly as the beautiful poetic scene outside the window slowly unreeled. It was evening, and people were walking along the green grassy paths, the shops were open for late-night business, there were countless rose gardens; there were horses grazing; the world was peaceful and beautiful - so beautiful it made me sigh. Life is too short! how long would one need to live? I love this world; I never want to die', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 136.

¹⁵² *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 137.

¹⁵³ 'I enjoyed today, please write! look after yourself!', he exclaims, shaking hands and then pulling her hair playfully, *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 137.

Thus concludes Mao's second tale of being wronged and misjudged by Europe and of her own ultimate triumph over wrong through assertiveness, persistence, confounding ethnic stereotypes - and in particular, this time, by being able to charm European men. The first story of overcoming the bullying and prejudice of Europe (played out in student dormitories) ended with San Mao's resolve to be a 'tiger' when faced with the bullying and injustice of foreigners. Here, faced with the immigration bureau 'tiger', she is a powerless 'pig' who can nonetheless get the better of the fiercer beast. Through the skills she has learned for dealing with Europe, the supposedly subordinate 'pig' can not only behave as a tiger but can out-manoeuvre foreign tigers into the bargain.

The pig-and-tiger story closes with a practical caution to readers: 'If you want to play "the pig eats the tiger", don't be too confident; if you have to change planes in London, make sure you buy tickets only for Heathrow, not tickets for 2 airports'. In other words, San Mao can win, but the reader should not count on being able to do so. Not everyone can replicate the combination of resourcefulness, playfulness, charm, wit and attractiveness that enables San Mao to prevail against European authority, bureaucracy and injustice.¹⁵⁴ Through the practice (successful or unsuccessful) of strategies of meekness, citizen diplomacy, assertiveness and confidence, San Mao has learned how to adapt - to create her own personality and strategy for dealing with 'the west'. Chi You and his barbarian hordes are no match for this descendant of the Yellow Emperor who has proved her ability to take on the west and win.

'A faithful daughter of China'

Twenty years later, the nationalistic feeling evident in San Mao's resistance to English 'bullying' in this story has been incorporated by the literary critic Gu Jitang (in the early 1990s) into a larger narrative of patriotic nationalism, which he claims to underlie all of San Mao's writings. This nationalism, displayed in resistance to foreign 'bullying', is taken as a manifestation of San Mao's 'philosophy of struggle'. Other detainees may have believed that 'to talk of reason with English people was a waste of breath', but San Mao 'could not be arbitrarily

¹⁵⁴ As noted above, this story was first published first in November 1973 (in *Shiye Shijie*, Issue 92). When republished in *The Rainy Season Will Not Return*, a few a lines of postscript were added (absent from the tale in its original form - that is, before 'San Mao had become known): 'This month I received 80 letters from readers. Thank you for the interest you take in me - but San Mao has to read, travel, wash clothes, be sick, apply for residency, and go to parties sometimes in order to get social connections. My means of transport is the subway, and sometimes I go on foot - I am very, very busy and happy. So, in ordinary circumstances, I can't reply to you all individually. Goodbye. Thank you all for reading my article', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 137-138. This kind of statement that, despite her popularity, San Mao wanted and needed time to lead an ordinary life, was to be followed by many more pleas to fans for some space and privacy; indeed they were to continue until her death in 1991.

ordered about by foreigners; she would argue strongly on just grounds; she believed that putting up a fight was better than waiting for commands from on high. So she fought in isolation, and struggled with the British Customs people with argument and reasoning'.¹⁵⁵ San Mao's 'philosophy of struggle' was, Gu claims, the result of her years of living abroad and of the many negative experiences she had encountered in foreign countries.¹⁵⁶ He explicitly configures these in terms of an ethnic conflict between San Mao and 'foreign' people: she had had countless situations of 'struggling and suffering, winning and losing' in foreign countries, and from these experiences she formed 'this kind of reason, that is strongly philosophical and incorporates such a clear ethnic standpoint'. San Mao's story claiming her own innocent suffering of injustice in the struggle between Chinese and 'foreign' people is thus incorporated into an explicit narrative of patriotism; further, the outstanding patriotic feeling that Gu finds in San Mao's work is turned into an argument for the quality of her work since patriotism, in Gu's view, is the hallmark of a great writer. San Mao is numbered along with famous names in his eulogy to patriotism in literature:

Every truly great writer is a person full of great love for his/her own motherland, and is boundlessly concerned about the fate of his/her nation and ethnicity. Balzac, Tolstoy, Gogol, Tagore, Gorky, Lu Xun and so on - all of them are like that. If you were to take the concern for the motherland and people out of any of these writers' works, [their writings] would become something that is absolutely not their own. And they would absolutely not be acknowledged by people and by history. So the magnitude of a writer's achievements, the extent of his/her prestige, the value of his/her work is extremely closely related to the connotations of the ideas he/she expresses. Even though talk about love for her motherland and love for her ethnic group is really not apparent everywhere in San Mao's writings, love for her motherland, for her ethnic group and her people permeate it between the lines; even though themes of love for the motherland and love for the people are not very strong in every single one of San Mao's works, there are many works that do express this theme.¹⁵⁷

San Mao's father, Chen Siqing, also claimed that San Mao was strongly patriotic, even remarking that her great love for the Chinese people and their history and culture had nothing at all to do with her own Chinese ethnicity; even if she had not been born Chinese, he claims, she would still have felt the same 'inherent love for the Chinese people'. This comment has been often and eagerly quoted by

¹⁵⁵ Gu praises San Mao for not accepting deportation (even though the deportation was, in fact, to the place she wished to go, which Gu interprets as an indication that the English officials were truly 'looking after her'); after 'suffering through two or three days of detention' she wanted to fight on to 'total victory' (Gu extends San Mao's stay in detention from her own account of twelve hours to 'two or three days'), Gu pp. 54-55.

¹⁵⁶ Gu p. 56. The early 1990s saw a number of popular culture products in the People's Republic of China that stressed the struggles of Chinese people living in foreign countries - for example the television series *Beijingers in New York*, or Zhou Li's popular novel *Manhattan's China Lady* (Manhadun de Zhongguo nüren), Beijing 1992.

¹⁵⁷ Gu p. 109.

writers on San Mao to indicate special qualities of patriotism on her part - despite the fact that she chose to live in foreign countries for more than a decade, which might perhaps lead the reader to believe that she was not patriotic at all. Even though San Mao married a foreigner and lived for a long time in foreign places, claims Gu,

her feeling for the motherland did not weaken but actually became stronger. This is unusual and precious, in comparison with those worthless offspring who forget where they came from as soon as they step on foreign soil, and worship foreign countries even more and complain incessantly - even with curses - about China. San Mao was a faithful daughter of China'.¹⁵⁸

Quoting her own concluding remarks from 'The West Doesn't Know How to Behave', Gu agrees that 'What you can't endure from foreign devils, you must endure a hundredfold from compatriots'.¹⁵⁹ The two Chinese women in the dormitory story may have thought San Mao's behaviour very distant from 'our beautiful Chinese tradition'; but for Gu she is an embodiment of it.¹⁶⁰

As noted by Gu in the passage quoted above, the nationalistic sentiment expressed in San Mao's stories tends to be built up gradually through her narratives rather than presented outright as a statement of belief. 'The West Doesn't Know How to Behave' is, as already noted, unusual in its explicit rhetoric of moral conflict between nations. The story has been much quoted and discussed by San Mao's biographers (most of whom, it might be noted, are mainlanders), who interpret it as proof of some superior quality of Chineseness in her morality and behaviour, and as an expression of her sincere patriotic feeling. San Mao may have chosen to live among foreigners, but she is, according to Gu Jitang

first of all China's San Mao; a product of China's literary tradition, China's broad and expansive spirit, China's soil and water, China's material of everyday life...without the nurturing of China's deep ancient and modern literary education, San Mao would just be a girl with no spirit and no wisdom - and nothing more. Only with this soil, this sun and this water could San Mao become San Mao.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Gu pp. 110-111. When Gu's observations were made, in the early 1990s, anger against the political entity of 'China' (as represented by its government) in the wake of the events of Tian'anmen in 1989 ran high in the People's Republic of China as much as elsewhere; those who left China at that time may well have complained about China with curses.

¹⁵⁹ Gu p. 55.

¹⁶⁰ Gu does not differentiate between official Kuomintang ideas of Chinese national culture and those of Deng era China; as before, political and historical divergences are elided into a timeless virtue called 'Chinese culture'.

¹⁶¹ Gu p. 134. The fact that she maintained her Taiwan citizenship is often cited as an indication of patriotism and her dual citizenship is often referred to, particularly by mainland writers. Further, the rhetoric of battle that occurs throughout this story recurs in a question often cited as being put to San Mao, namely which side she would take if there was a war between China ('her maternal family') and Spain ('the family she had married into'). 'For some people', remarks Gu, 'this is a difficult question to answer, but San Mao replied without hesitation that blood is thicker

The question of San Mao's Chineseness and whether or not it has been tainted or weakened by long residence outside China is raised only in the context of her life in Europe - never in connection with her time in Africa. San Mao's qualities of Chineseness are apparently at risk from European people and culture, and not from African; they may also be intensified by European 'bullying' and 'injustice', while the people she lives among in Africa are presumed, it seems, to be in no position to push San Mao or China around.

'China's San Mao' is also able to transcend political divisions among polities and people that have identified as 'Chinese'.¹⁶² The mainland's claim on her as a 'Chinese' (rather than Taiwan) writer is not least because of her portrayals of moral conflict in which 'Chinese culture' wins.¹⁶³ San Mao represents a noble and good China which can conquer the world with morality, spirit, charm, resourcefulness and humour as well as being able to give to the world through culture, human concern and philanthropic activity. These aspects of San Mao's narratives and their reception will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

For the moment, however, having observed San Mao in conflict with Europe (and winning), I will examine San Mao's stories of playtime Europe. As already noted, San Mao was often to claim in later life that her time living abroad had been serious and purposeful, and that she was never an aimless 'wanderer' or 'vagabond'.¹⁶⁴ True to this claim, San Mao produced very few narratives of herself as a tourist. While living in the Sahara, she visited several African countries but did not produce any tourist accounts.¹⁶⁵ In Europe too, almost all of San Mao's stories are narratives not of touristic experiences but of 'real', 'everyday' life as a resident of Europe and a member of a community with strong personal relationships within that community and responsibilities to it (discussed in more detail in the following chapter). San Mao's European as well as Saharan stories concentrate on encounters with people, with the physical space of her home as an important focus. Out of her total output of stories set in Europe or

than water. Of course she would stand with China. This comment of San Mao's has an unspoken precondition - that is, it would have to be a war in which China is not carrying out a war of aggression, and it would have to be a just national war. This clear ethnic standpoint of San Mao's can be seen everywhere in her behaviour and in her writings', Gu p. 56.

¹⁶² I make no claim here for the Taiwan of the 1990s, in which the Nationalist rhetoric of 'greater China' has less and less currency.

¹⁶³ Thus San Mao's stories move from Nationalist to nationalist; she rejects 'Nationalist' views of how to act abroad, opens up new kind of nationalism whose domain is not governments and their claims on their citizens but a zone of personal assertion in the encounter with institutions and individuals.

¹⁶⁴ *The World of San Mao* p. 129.

¹⁶⁵ San Mao mentions visiting Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Senegal, Dahomey (Benin) and Nigeria, but does not give details of her trips. Though one story is set in Nigeria, it is about José's work conditions and the strange and dishonest people he worked for, and not about touristic experiences.

Africa, only two are travel tales that simply record her experiences as a short-term tourist out to play, detailing where she went and what she saw.¹⁶⁶ Both are set at Europe's peripheries, in colonies of Europe that are also island resorts famed as European tourist playgrounds: the Canary Islands and Madeira.¹⁶⁷ In the major European cities where she spends a year or more (Madrid and Berlin), San Mao does not describe visits to famous landmarks or trips around the town; likewise, although she may refer to holidays in various countries, no descriptions or details are given of her adventures in these places.¹⁶⁸ Significantly, worshipful writing about famous buildings or scenes in Europe - so common in writing about Europe by visitors - is almost entirely absent from her work.¹⁶⁹ Even in San Mao's two stories of tourism her characteristic narrative of personal involvement, concern and responsibility pervades the personal encounters described.¹⁷⁰ Ros Pesman has suggested that what tourists tend to seek in Europe is more 'a cultural past' than 'a practical present' (which 'can prove upsetting when it intrudes into the tourist experience in the form of poor people or dirt').¹⁷¹ San Mao may indeed seek (and write into being) a cultured European past, but she is also attentive to

¹⁶⁶ The story of San Mao's trip to Segovia one Christmas has been excluded as a tourism story on the grounds that she went there in order to visit a friend (Jaime, José's brother) rather than for the sake of seeing the city. Her account of her trip focuses upon the artists' community of which Jaime is a part - the house they live in, their art work, their gallery and shop. At the end of the story they invite her to stay and become part of their community, but she declines. Apart from the two European travel stories discussed here, San Mao later published a book of travel stories (*Over the Hills and Far Away*) - but these stories relate to Central and South America, not Europe or Africa, and are therefore outside the scope of this thesis. Discussing that collection, biographers Cui and Zhao note that it was San Mao's only travel literature collection, in contrast to her 'Saharan period' where the 'scattered travel accounts' of the Canaries and Madeira were collected with other types of stories; *Over the Hills and Far Away*, they suggest, is a more polished work than her accounts of Madiera or the Canaries; she is no longer 'an innocent girl travelling and having fun' but 'quite a mature woman tasting a life of travel with the soul', Cui and Zhao p. 252.

¹⁶⁷ Both are settler colonies of European colonial powers that are largely populated by people from, and still under political and cultural domination of 'the European 'mother' country (the indigenous inhabitants being considered to have been obliterated in the settlement process); the international identity of Madeira and the Canary Islands at the present time is solely that of the colonising power.

¹⁶⁸ San Mao mentions visiting France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Poland and other eastern European countries; biographers also list trips to Scandinavia among her holiday destinations.

¹⁶⁹ As described, for example, in the work of Shirley Foster and Maria Frawley. Such views date from at least the time of the Grand Tour. San Mao's rejection of this model may be connected with nationalistic pride; as an ancient civilisation, China should not feel inferior to Europe in historical or cultural terms. Having been brought up in Taiwan, San Mao may well have partaken of the common fantasy that the mainland was a treasure-house of monuments, relics and well-preserved ancient buildings and cultural sites.

¹⁷⁰ Discussing the Madeira and Canary stories examined here, biographers Cui and Zhao note that the style of her travel literature was the same as that of her other stories; and as they are all 'basically documentary accounts, her travel stories and other stories are very similar, Cui and Zhao p. 252.

¹⁷¹ Ros Pesman also points out (in the context of Australian woman tourists to Europe) that they tend to travel within 'the isolated, sanitised furrows of tourist land, a place of museums, hotels, shops and restaurants' and to 'display little interest in the politics and problems of the societies through which they move', Pesman p. 109.

the practical present; indeed it might be suggested that she attempts to integrate the two to create European dreamlands of culture, civility, freedom and peace in which she herself, even as a transitory presence, has a role to play. Moreover, in her travels to 'tourist Europe', whether travelling alone or as part of a group, San Mao portrays herself as a model tourist, whose behaviour on her tourist trips her compatriots may wish to emulate.

Europe as play

San Mao's two tourist narratives were written while San Mao was living on Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands (having already lived in Spain, Germany and the Sahara); thus her trips to Madeira and to the other islands of the Canaries are travels from one tourist playground (which is, however, the site of her everyday life) to another.

The record of San Mao's exemplary tourism begins with research.¹⁷² Just as her initial preconceptions of and feelings about Europe were formed in part by European novels and her longings for the Sahara were initiated by her reading of *National Geographic*, purposeful reading about her holiday destination, Tenerife, creates fantasies in her mind, connected with the golden apples of Homer's *Odyssey*:¹⁷³ She is still reading about Tenerife on the ferry as she and José travel across from Gran Canaria, 'sighing with the beauty of the legend' as she gazes at the 'mist-enshrouded island in the distance', and reluctant to be brought back to reality. Intent on finding a dream world of beauty, she proceeds to create one both for herself and for her readers, 'wandering around looking for the mystic land of legend' despite the transformations of modernity.¹⁷⁴

The invocation of a 'dream world' is constant throughout San Mao's tourist stories of the Canary Islands. There are two kinds of dream experience: that of refined, cultivated places where architecture, culture and people are characterised as mild and genteel, and that of bleak, desolate places. San Mao is able to enjoy

¹⁷² She asks everyone she knows to lend her books about the other islands, and has soon amassed contributions from her community: 'the old man in the post office, the doctor's wife, the neighbour's child's teacher and the son of the concreter who works at the airport, *Crying Camels* p.159. She passes on information to her readers about land areas and populations of various islands, and finds a way to link the Canaries with Taiwan, noting that Taiwan fishing boats dock at Gran Canaria and Tenerife, *Crying Camels* pp. 161-163.

¹⁷³ Before I came to these lovely islands, I always fantasised...that this was a beautiful island: blue waveless sea on every side and the famous mountain in the centre towering into the mist, with villages and fields scattered at its feet. Clear blue sky, set off by winter snow on the peak...under the influence of the book, I persisted in imagining that it should be as described there, *Crying Camels* p. 163.

¹⁷⁴ One of San Mao's books about the Canaries claims that the islands are the place invoked by Homer 'where the mild breeze blew in the winter, whose beauty lured him across the sea', and that 'the mystical island in the bosom of the sea' where the golden apples of Greek legend were hidden was Tenerife. Ckeptical José points out the skyscrapers and chimneys, but San Mao maintains her dream of the legendary golden apples, *Crying Camels* pp. 160-161.

and find interest in both, pursuing scenery, 'local colour' and human interactions in both 'cultured' and 'wild' environments; the two types of tourism alternate in these stories of travelling around the Canary Islands.¹⁷⁵ As well as an interest in local colour and characters and the characterisation of her holiday destinations as dreamlands, a sense of involvement, a concern for local people, taking pleasure in small everyday occurrences and encounters, and a focus upon small aspects of local culture (rather than upon monumental objects of art or history) are important recurring themes in San Mao's tourist narratives.

The first type of tourism ('cultured' tourism) is experienced on Tenerife. When San Mao and José arrive there, they find Carnival in full swing with loud music, streetside stalls, a procession of floats, bands and dancers, and surging crowds of people in fanciful costumes. San Mao is excited by the 'wild blood and enthusiasm' of Tenerife's people, and is particularly 'moved' by the audience's joyful participation in the street parade (in that 'audience and dancers became one' and people are still partying in the streets long after dark). She too enters into the celebrations, turning herself into a 'red-haired madman' by means of a red wig and looking around for children to scare. When a child points out 'the Chinese person with red hair!' San Mao assumes 'a strange voice' to say that she is really just wearing a Chinese mask. Throughout this incident, she is (as usual) mirrored in the eyes of an appreciative crowd, who laugh appreciatively and watch as the child reaches out wonderingly to touch the 'mask'. In the midst of Europe at play, San Mao's own spirit of playfulness holds its own - and thus charms Europe once again.

What 'moves' San Mao on the island of La Gomera is not celebration but the sense of desolation of this 'forgotten' island whose young people have left in search of work and where few tourists venture.¹⁷⁶ As in the story of the detention centre discussed above, San Mao draws on a narrative of fate bringing people together (*yuanfen*) that has appointed experiences for her; tourism is presented in

¹⁷⁵ It might be suggested from her descriptions of urbane charm and desolation, story-book farm and rugged landscape, that there is a correlation between the wildness of natural landscape and a supposed absence of culture; this will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

¹⁷⁶ The environment is bleak ('no market to speak of...no shops, no restaurants, no supermarket and no fun atmosphere', 'few people and fewer cars', only three streets and an old church) and graffiti bemoans the lack of a cinema on the island, *Crying Camels* pp. 169-70. A visit to a church becomes an opportunity for new emotional connections: first with an old grave, which leads San Mao to ponder the significance of her own presence in La Gomera ('As for me, a Chinese, why was I crouching by her coffin so many years later, quietly thinking about her? I explain it as *yuanfen*, the mystery of fate; it confuses me and I cannot comprehend it') and then with the local priest, for whom she feels compassion at the lonely life she feels he must lead, *Crying Camels* p. 171.

emotional terms with herself as an empathetic seeker of emotional connection with the place and its people, being 'moved' when she finds it.¹⁷⁷

Even in inauspicious 'forgotten' places San Mao is able to uncover local colour. Attracted by a pair of unusually large castanets hanging outside a shop, she goes in to ask the price,¹⁷⁸ whereupon the shopkeeper picks them up and begins to sing and dance. 'The old woman was wonderful', sighs San Mao, 'she came out dancing and singing at once, and stood dancing alone in the doorway... It was lovely'.¹⁷⁹ The shopkeeper wrote both words and music herself; the song is

full of content: marriage, harvest, death parting, quarrels, love, a young woman doing embroidery.

I listened spellbound; I forgot the time and forgot where I was, as I saw the old woman's stories floating by one by one. Her voice was beautiful and bleak...the genuine emotion was obvious; it was folk-style.¹⁸⁰

Indeed 'folk feeling' abounds in this encounter, where kinship, folk festivity and 'rough' cultural forms combine in this song written by a local 'character' for a family wedding.¹⁸¹ San Mao asks if the poem has been written down, but the woman shakes her head: 'I can't write; how could I copy it? it's all in my head'. San Mao is disappointed:

she would die one day, and her poem would be lost. What a shame. The problem was, were there other people like me who valued her ability? Maybe not even she realised her own worth.¹⁸²

The tourist San Mao presents herself as sensitively recognising the real 'folk' and valuing local culture. As a cultural outsider with access to a cosmopolitan urban culture that the islanders presumably do not all have, San Mao applauds 'folk' colour, is saddened by the possibility of its passing - and fears that no one else is as able as she to appreciate the true worth of this local authenticity.¹⁸³

Later, in another scene of 'local colour', San Mao is introduced to the famous whistling language of La Gomera and the spectacle transports her to

¹⁷⁷ *Crying Camels* p. 171. For further discussion of San Mao and *yuanfen*, see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

¹⁷⁸ San Mao loses interest when she discovers that they are not hand-made; see 'San Mao Goes Shopping' for a discussion of San Mao's interest in hand-made things.

¹⁷⁹ *Crying Camels* p. 172. For a discussion of the question of souveniring 'local colour', 'authenticity', 'handcrafts' and 'characters', see 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

¹⁸⁰ *Crying Camels* p. 173.

¹⁸¹ For an account of San Mao's interest in the 'folk' and their culture, see 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

¹⁸² *Crying Camels* pp. 172-3.

¹⁸³ Her concern for tradition and for the woman's song does not, however, extend as far as offering to help transcribe it. Having demonstrated that she is sensitive enough to appreciate it, she does not need to take any further interest.

another 'dream world'.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the island's young people are not learning the whistling language; like the castanet woman's song, it will die along with those who know it. Again, San Mao takes the position of the knowing outsider, empathising with the practitioners of folk traditions and recognising the value of traditional culture; she also has ideas for improvement, imagining the potential for turning cultural value into exchange value by exploiting the whistling language as a tourist attraction.¹⁸⁵ Her tourist experiences in La Gomera are thus based on human interaction and an appreciation of local specialties of all kinds, and are not reliant on the presence of approved 'sites' to visit.

Her next destination, La Palma, is presented as an idealised beautiful, cultured and civilised Europe where architecture can be equated with goodness:

The town was...very refined, lovely ...[with] many old buildings, wooden balconies and window boxes, all full of flowers. Lots of pure white doves were flying around the cathedral square, and the old bell tower was covered in ivy; there were no tall buildings...each straight and fine window gave you a feeling of peace and loveliness. You could smell the fragrance of culture; the women on the streets even walked gracefully.¹⁸⁶

The 'civilised' architecture is reflected in the conduct of the people, whose kindness 'seemed to me to be a miracle'.¹⁸⁷ Outside the town, where 'the peacefulness and happiness of the people is like the fragrance of flowers in the air', lies yet another dream - indeed the definitive dream, an idealised rural utopia, a countryside scene described in terms of a storybook Europe from a children's

¹⁸⁴ San Mao has heard that, on La Gomera, people can communicate across the island's mountain valleys by means of whistling, *Crying Camels* pp. 168-9. In the village square, two local men demonstrate for San Mao. One asks San Mao what message she would like him to convey through whistling; she asks him to order his friend to sit down, stand up again and dance. The whistled commands are given, the friend obeys each one. 'José and I didn't dare believe our eyes. We laughed happily; it was like a dream - people in a dream speaking the language of birds', *Crying Camels* p. 175. This time she demonstrates her gratitude to the performers of local culture by inviting them for a drink, and this time the locals are presented as sharing her concern about a declining aspect of their culture, lamenting that the whistling language is slowly disappearing because the younger generation 'won't learn it properly', *Crying Camels* pp. 175-176.

¹⁸⁵ Thus the language could be saved from dying out and the young people could get their cinema from the proceeds, *Crying Camels* p. 176. The guardians of the tradition themselves, however, seem unaware of any such marketing possibility in their culture. San Mao presents them here as not having thought of it - not as having thought of it and rejected it - and she does not discuss her idea with them or even voice it. Having gained from La Gomera, and seeing herself as having something to offer in return, she does not offer it. Having been 'moved' by her experiences, she is ready to leave.

¹⁸⁶ *Crying Camels* p. 177.

¹⁸⁷ The bus-driver is a particular exemplar of affable kindness: helping passengers with their luggage and advising caution with fragile items; passing on messages, lottery tickets, newspapers and food to the inhabitants of the villages they pass through; comforting the animals stowed in the luggage compartment; and making sure San Mao and José sit at the front for the best view, advising them to add an extra layer of clothing as the bus climbs to higher altitudes, providing a commentary on the sights, and driving off the route to stop and show them the national park. The other passengers are characterised as kind too, as none of them complain about the delays and the deviations from the route, *Crying Camels* p. 179.

tale such as San Mao would surely have encountered in the illustrated European children's stories of her youth.¹⁸⁸ The associations that the scene calls to her mind, however, are not those of children's literature but those of European art¹⁸⁹ and Chinese history. The La Palma countryside merges with the real 'home' of San Mao's own dreams, a China she has never seen or remembers only faintly from early childhood: 'in the Jiangnan area of China it must be like this too!' The ideal image of a kind of 'willow pattern' country, the quintessential China of the imagination, full of blossoms and peace, this dream China has become conflated with a European farm scene.¹⁹⁰ Thus Europe is brought close for Chinese readers.¹⁹¹ 'So this is where the people escaping the Qin ended up' cries San Mao, referring to the well-known Chinese utopian story of the peach blossom spring which, once found and left again, is lost forever.¹⁹²

The people of La Palma (influenced, as noted above, by their civilised surroundings) are 'made of sugar', 'as sweet as honey', manifesting this goodness in public politeness and generosity to San Mao. They are so kind, indeed, that 'you felt you had come home';¹⁹³ thus the goodness of the people as well as the scenic tranquillity makes the island a 'home' (a 'China') for San Mao, where she claims she might well choose to spend her old age.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ San Mao describes a scene full of apricot blossoms, with a pretty white house with red tiled roof, silky green grass, grazing animals, an old woman feeding chickens, a light mist and a sense of 'rural peacefulness', *Crying Camels* p. 180.

¹⁸⁹ Namely a painting in a Gran Canaria gallery; she describes herself as 'gently walking into the dream painting', 'Everyone's home in their dreams', she sighs, 'should be like the one in the picture', *Crying Camels* p. 180.

¹⁹⁰ Such a scene is reminiscent of the nostalgic Nationalist dreams of China - of tranquil and beautiful landscape, great historical sites and ancient buildings, refined manners and 'definitive' Chinese culture - that began to be shattered in the late 1980s and early 1990s once travel to the mainland became possible for residents of Taiwan.

¹⁹¹ What both images have in common in San Mao's imagination, helping to span the geographical gap, is timelessness: 'Time has stopped here', she sighs: 'this plain must have been this way for 10,000 years, and it would not change in the next 10,000'. Notions of timelessness themselves, like the beauties of dream landscape, lead San Mao's fantasies back to China:

¹⁹² The *shi wai taoyuan*, a peach blossom spring outside the ordinary world, was a vision of a Utopia supposedly found by a fisherman on the Han River (not in the Jiangnan region). This is not the only peach blossom spring reference in San Mao's writings; she finds another peach blossom utopia in rural Taiwan (see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'); and biographers refer to her house in Gran Canaria as a site for the peach blossom utopia, Cui and Zhao p. 207. But even Utopian peace can be broken; San Mao's dreams in the rural La Palma scene are shattered by a madwoman who violently accosts her and José, pulling their hair. San Mao explains her fear of the woman's bizarre behaviour as resulting from her (San Mao's) having been 'cursed with evil' in the Sahara; evidently only evil of a supernatural nature is conceivable amid the peace and timelessness of this emotionally heightened landscape. Africa is suggested as the source of evil for this idyllic landscape. La Palma's beauty and goodness, however, are sufficient to cancel out the behaviour of the madwoman/witch, *Crying Camels* pp. 181-182.

¹⁹³ *Crying Camels* p. 182. They give directions pleasantly when asked; a worker in the banana fields gives her his banana harvesting knife (complete with scabbard) when she admires it; and children gather to wave and call goodbye as the boat carries San Mao and José away from their La Palma holiday.

¹⁹⁴ *Crying Camels* p. 182.

After the tamed beauty of La Palma, the apparent epitome of the civility and culture of the human world, San Mao is also moved by Lanzarote, an island of bleak grandeur and 'severe beauty', of volcanoes and sombre colours, with no 'man-made adornment'. It is another kind of 'dream world', 'a dreamscape from a surrealist painting', 'a bleak poetic dream, a very literary dream, dim and lonely, as if in another world',¹⁹⁵ again apparently deriving much of its emotional power from its connections in San Mao's mind with images from European art. There are none of La Palma's urbane, ornamented European dwellings here; Lanzarote's houses are not at all 'refined or beautiful'.¹⁹⁶ San Mao 'really fell in love with this bleak and beautiful island', again seeking out local culture by conversing with elderly locals and 'listening to their ancient stories and legends'.¹⁹⁷ Lanzarote may be harsh but the 'characters' are colourful - and San Mao can appreciate their colours as well as the more obviously charming colours of La Palma.

On the island of La Graciosa life is even more difficult for the locals, who (unlike the cultured inhabitants of more refined island landscapes) are presented as simple, generous and hardworking peasants who must struggle hard for their living. They entertain San Mao with both cultural and material pleasures, and the 'simple life' on La Graciosa is another 'paradise' for San Mao.¹⁹⁸ Again experience is transformed by European cultural fantasy and art;¹⁹⁹ and returning home to Gran Canaria is like 'the dazed and confused moment of waking from a dream'.²⁰⁰

In this tourist account, San Mao presents herself as an exemplary traveller in several respects. She does research in advance; but she is not focused upon approved 'sites', preferring to present herself discovering small pleasures, ordinary places and unassuming people for herself; she does not spend all of her time shopping;²⁰¹ she can enjoy all kinds of scenery and all kinds of culture; she

¹⁹⁵ *Crying Camels* p. 183. The Sahara was also likened to a surrealist painting (see Chapter 6).

¹⁹⁶ *Crying Camels* p. 185.

¹⁹⁷ *Crying Camels* p. 185. Behind the bleak beauty of Lanzarote, notes San Mao, lie centuries of human suffering; piracy, massacres, slavery, epidemics and almost extinction of the indigenous people. The people are not made of sugar here; ceaseless labour has been required to 'meet the challenge of the natural environment' and make it productive enough to sustain life', *Crying Camels* p. 184

¹⁹⁸ 'Catching prawns and making 'simple salad with local onions and tomatoes....there are paradises everywhere in this world; God has not abandoned us', *Crying Camels* p. 188.

¹⁹⁹ Eating the sweet potatoes provided by the local people, she recalls van Gogh's famous painting of potato eaters: 'It was our good luck to be people in a painting here' (p. 187), though in the painting potato eating symbolised hardship and poverty rather than idyllic rusticity.

²⁰⁰ They are 'momentarily disorientated and helpless, emptiness in our hearts', *Crying Camels* p. 188.

²⁰¹ Though souvenir shopping does not form a major part of San Mao's tourism stories, her published collection of souvenir stories, *My treasures*, makes clear her interest in shopping and in various kinds of souvenir. See Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

has a positive attitude to the local people and is eager for interaction with them; she is open to new things and new experiences; she has an eye for 'local colour'; and she appreciates nature and tradition. A traveller with these qualities, her stories demonstrate, is able to make friends and to be looked after by local communities; further, culture and dreams combine to produce for her experiences that are almost other-worldly.

San Mao's tourist trip to Madeira is presented in similar terms of emotion, dream, 'characters' and charm.²⁰² Funchal abounds in 'authentic' and 'traditional' things (flowers, fruits, tiles, lace, cobblers' shops, saddle-makers)²⁰³ and none of the hallmarks of international modernity (no department stores, cinemas, advertisements, record stores, traffic lights or nylon shopping bags).²⁰⁴ This makes the town, for San Mao, 'very natural'; it has a 'lively human atmosphere and peaceful hidden beauty, a kind of beauty already lost in the 20th century and very hard to find'. Just as in La Palma, the sense of time standing still interacts with beauty and goodness to create a dream world; as in La Palma, San Mao feels at home; again as in La Palma, she makes an explicit connection between the physical appearance of the town and the behaviour of the people, suggesting that the civilised environment makes the people happy and good.²⁰⁵

In Madeira as in La Gomera, San Mao builds an anecdote around a 'character' in a shop and an object that is not purchased: an elderly vendor of clay figurines refuses to sell San Mao the item she wishes to buy, as tradition dictates that they be bought in sets of four (one to be placed on each corner of the roof of the house) and San Mao insists that she only wants one.²⁰⁶ The old man will not

²⁰² Indeed Madeira has made a good impression before she has even left the airport with its atmosphere that is, she claims, unmistakably Portuguese because the customs and immigration formalities are so relaxed and the officials are smiling, *The Tender Night* p. 144. The town of Funchal is characterised by 'two or three-storey European-style buildings...half-moon shaped doors...wooden lattice-style windows...very thick wooden doors, with gold keyholes...dim hanging lamps...deep mysterious halls, an ancient atmosphere...no asphalt roads...just stone cobbles with no moss....a cathedral, 3 or 4 squares, and a long dyke along the sea'.

²⁰³ *The Tender Night* p. 147.

²⁰⁴ *The Tender Night* p. 147. For a discussion of modern tourist preferences for the 'authentic' and 'traditional' see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

²⁰⁵ 'This kind of little town can't have people with angry faces...everyone looks happy. It makes you feel that you are in a home away from home, and you don't feel any of the pressures of a big city', *The Tender Night* p. 147.

²⁰⁶ The shop is piled high with red clay figures - pigeons, angels and laughing children - and in a demonstration of the honesty of Funchal's residents, the old proprietor has to be fetched from another street where he is playing chess. San Mao chooses an angel figure; the old man picks up three more and begins to wrap them together. 'I only want one', she protests; 'No', he replies, 'four together'. After some argument, he leads her upstairs to the roof and points to the red-tiled houses below them; she realises that the figurines are used on each house to decorate each corner of the roof, *The Tender Night* p. 149.

allow it. 'I had never seen a lovely shopkeeper like this before', remarks San Mao; 'he didn't want money, he wanted tradition'.²⁰⁷

She is delighted also by the packaged 'tradition' on display in a heritage village, supposing that it 'still maintains the style of the immigrant forefathers'. Again the ambience is that of a children's storybook Europe;²⁰⁸ and again as in La Gomera, San Mao has ideas for improvement, suggesting that its tourist potential could be developed through folk art performances and souvenirs - thus adding the very thing whose absence had so delighted her in this piece of 'traditional' Europe: commercial gain.²⁰⁹ San Mao longs to stay and become part of this dream world.²¹⁰ The modern urban nostalgia for the more peaceful, innocent life that is imagined to exist in the countryside and in the past is an image familiar in discussions of travel and tourism,²¹¹ and San Mao continually expresses this ideal of tourist happiness in her stories of the Canary Islands and Madeira. Places where she imagines 'tradition' to reside are characterised as dream worlds, removed from and superior to real life. As noted above, she does not write of tourist dreamworlds in any of the famous tourist cities she visits in Europe; her tourist dream is represented as a small-scale, personal and interactive experience rather than the archetypal tourist experience in Europe of communing with famous art works, monuments and historical sites.

Despite the suggestion (noted above) that tourists might pollute the dream world with their vulgar ideas, San Mao's own presence there as a tourist is presented as concerned and compassionate, understanding of and sensitive to

²⁰⁷ 'That is against tradition', the old vendor declares; 'We have never sold them singly'. When San Mao explains that she wants to put it as an ornament on her bookshelf, he replies, 'No, you can only put these on the roof. You're messing it up!' 'OK', capitulates San Mao, 'on the roof. One' But the vendor is adamant: 'If you won't buy the set, there's no point talking about it.' *The Tender Night* p. 149. For further discussion of 'tradition' in San Mao's souvenir buying see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

²⁰⁸ The houses have 'thatched roofs sloping down to the ground' and 'little narrow doors'; they are 'brightly painted' like 'houses made of cake in a fairytale'; and the residents too form a part of the ambience, watched by the tourists as they grow their crops and tend their animals, *The Tender Night* p. 162.

²⁰⁹ San Mao notes the irony in this position, dismissing her own idea as the 'vulgar' speculation of an outsider - for the residents themselves, assumed to be as storybook-perfect as their surroundings, are 'part of nature', uncontaminated by vulgarity from outside. The precious thing is that this is just my own idea. People in this village are not as vulgar as me; the tourists do not pollute them. Here, the little flowers have bloomed on the thatched roofs for a long time...in this place heaven and mortal beings are not distinguished; people are just part of nature', *The Tender Night* p. 162).

²¹⁰ 'Longing and nostalgia to return to the countryside pierced my heart. They could live in this paradise all their lives, but I could only stay there for a few minutes; why were they living so peacefully in my dream, while I had to be chased out?', *The Tender Night* pp. 162-163. San Mao expresses her nostalgia for a Taiwn rural scene in similar terms (see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'). The utopian dream expressed in most detail in her writings is a longing to win the lottery and buy a farm in Paraguay, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 243-256.

²¹¹ Dean MacCannell and John Urry, for example, have discussed the search for the 'authentic' in societies, classes and cultures other than one's own.

local people. Again San Mao's behaviour is contrasted with a 'west' that does not know how to behave, namely the other (Spanish) members of her tour group. San Mao is the only one who takes an interest in Madeira's landscape; only she listens attentively to the informative commentary provided by the guide; and only she cares about the local people's livelihood. The others, meanwhile, screech in mock terror at every bend in the road and do not appreciate the view;²¹² despoil the countryside by picking the flowers planted in public places;²¹³ are reluctant to participate in the downhill sled ride intended as the highlight of the excursion;²¹⁴ and fail to tip the local men for their hard physical labour pulling the sleds with ropes to slow them down and stop them.²¹⁵ The men are soaked through with sweat, and San Mao is embarrassed at the great effort that they have had to expend on the tourists' behalf; she and José not only tip them but thank them and apologise for the trouble they have been put to (and again San Mao thinks of a way to improve conditions for them).²¹⁶ San Mao waits for her fellow-tourists to thank the sled-pullers, but not one of them does.²¹⁷ She notes to her readers that:

This kind of travelling game builds one's own momentary sensory pleasure upon other people's hard labour. I always feel a bit regretful afterwards - but if you don't let them pull you, doesn't that mean that they can't even earn their bread?²¹⁸

Thus San Mao presents herself as a responsible and caring tourist, concerned about the impact of her activities upon the local people - and in this respect quite unlike the other Spanish tourists in her group. Even in the cultural

²¹² *The Tender Night* p. 155.

²¹³ Flowers have been planted all over the island to enhance the attractiveness to European tourists of an island without beaches, modern cities and ancient monuments, *The Tender Night* pp. 155, 160-161.

²¹⁴ The tourists descend from a church on the top of a hill by three-seater sled-like conveyances woven from willow branches and set on wooden runners. Two local men hold the 'sled' steady with ropes on either side then let go and jump on behind, jumping off again if required to slow the sled by pulling on the ropes.

²¹⁵ The other women are so nervous that the two local men who operate the sled are obliged to jump off and slow it down by running alongside pulling back on the ropes. San Mao is concerned about their gigantic effort and urges them to jump back on - but one woman begins screaming again, so they carry on running and pulling, 'almost horizontal' with the effort, *The Tender Night* pp. 157-158. They continue to pull the sled back to maintain a slow pace. When they reach the foot of the hill, San Mao is 'moved' by their kindness and their resulting exhaustion.

²¹⁶ San Mao suggests that, to reduce their hardship, the sled-pullers could be stationed at intervals down the mountain instead of travelling with each car; they could check the momentum of each car as it approached, and then let it go again to be slowed down again momentarily by the next pair of pullers, *The Tender Night*. p. 160.

²¹⁷ San Mao wonders how much they receive of the sum each tourist has paid for the tour, thinking about the families they must be supporting, and pondering the inadequacy of tipping them as a reward. Giving a tip doesn't count as encouragement, but all we could do to thank them was give them [money]', *The Tender Night* p. 158.

²¹⁸ *The Tender Night* p. 159.

dreamland of playtime Europe she remains involved and interested in the life of the place and full of concern for the people.

It is in this spirit that she takes it upon herself to educate and improve the Taiwan tourist. Having set an example in her own tourist tales, she goes on to produce an explicitly didactic story about good and bad travel behaviour. Titled 'Love Them or Hate Them - People From Home', the story begins with the admission that, when embarrassed or offended by the behaviour of other Chinese she has encountered in foreign countries,²¹⁹ she has pretended to be Japanese in order to distance herself from them.²²⁰ Drawing upon the kind of nationalistic rhetoric seen in 'The West Doesn't Know How to Behave' (in which every Chinese person is to be a virtuous representative of their country and thus enhance its reputation as a nation of courtesy and righteousness), San Mao claims to write out of a deep love for all Chinese people and for the reputation of 'China'.²²¹ In the light of her descriptions of her own tourist activities, her advice on how to behave correctly among the Europeans may be regarded as an injunction to behave more like San Mao herself.

The compleat tourist

Soon after the prohibition on international tourism that had been in place during Taiwan's period of martial law was lifted in 1986, San Mao tells us, she read a Taiwan newspaper article about Chinese tour groups; and the observations it contained about their 'strange behaviour' tallied with her own observations. With 'anxiety and patriotism' surging in her heart, she resolves to write some warning words to compatriots who will soon be 'bearing the name of Chinese people' all over the world.²²² 'The world' apparently means Europe here (all of San Mao's

²¹⁹ *Rear View* pp. 127-145.

²²⁰ *Rear View* p. 129. San Mao begins the story by recounting her horror in discovering that, in order to distance himself from embarrassing behaviour on the part of Japanese tourists, a Japanese friend habitually pretends to be Chinese. San Mao herself has often practised a similar strategy - but in reverse: shifting the blame for questionable behaviour of her own by saying that it was someone Japanese (an example was seen in Chapter 2, in the story of Sahrawi bathing) but it has never occurred to her that the good name of China could be sullied in the same way. However, sighing that 'I can't keep saying I'm Japanese forever', she presents her instructions to compatriots, *Rear View* p. 130.

²²¹ *Rear View* p. 131. San Mao's wish to instruct her compatriots about acceptable behaviour in Europe leads to an argument with José, which inverts the usual rhetoric of Chinese national solidarity in the face of 'foreign' criticism: it is San Mao who wishes to take the initiative and criticise, and José who pleads with her not to wash dirty Chinese linen in public. José would rather 'endure' the embarrassment and 'give way' than confront the 'ugly Chinese' tourist assertively and directly; and this, as we have seen above, is the kind of behaviour that has been presented by San Mao as 'Chinese breeding'. He is unable to convince her, however, and she insists on writing her homily to Taiwan tourists, *Rear View* p. 132.

²²² *Rear View* pp. 129-30.

injunctions to tourists are Europe-based)²²³ and 'China' would presumably mean Taiwan.²²⁴ She makes it clear at the outset that her criticisms are of the people who travel to Europe in tour groups; individual travellers (including, of course, her own relatives and friends who have visited her in Europe) are not perceived as a problem.

The first in San Mao's list of sins committed by Taiwan group tourists is one of omission: lack of research prior to the trip. San Mao herself, as we have seen, likes to read about a place before she travels there; and this preference is reiterated as an injunction to compatriots.²²⁵ San Mao has

met many compatriots who have come to Spain after travelling in Europe and...their impressions of the places they've been to are very confused, they can't express any insightful feelings about places, and a few don't even know where they are located geographically; this is of course because they rush around too enthusiastically, an inevitable result of seeing things superficially from a distance. But if they read quietly at home before coming, then although there isn't enough time to digest while travelling it would be supplemented by the preparatory reading they had done in advance.²²⁶

Though some of the blame for this lack of appropriate response to Europe is laid upon Chinese tour guides,²²⁷ the individual tourist is not exempt from blame. Even if the guide had given adequate explanation of the historical significance of important European sights, San Mao suggest, the 'flock' would probably still clamour for shopping trips rather than cultural activities.

Not all compatriots think this way, San Mao is quick to add. It is a matter of social class: 'this indifference to culture...does not represent other intellectuals I have met'.²²⁸ Most of the incidents of embarrassing behaviour San Mao cites

²²³ The cultural knowledge born of several years of residence in Europe evidently qualifying her to instruct others on how to behave among the Europeans. There are no instructions for how to behave in Africa or anywhere else.

²²⁴ The question of San Mao's impressions of and attitudes towards compatriots from the mainland is interesting but obscure; 'China' is consistently used to mean 'Taiwan', and San Mao does not explicitly discuss mainland people at all in the texts discussed here, which were written at the time when there was virtually no international tourist travel by citizens of the People's Republic of China.

²²⁵ 'My own way of travelling is to read first, look at maps, and once I have understood the situation in the place I want to go to, then I go there... I have discovered that travelling this way I gain much more than just going to a foreign country and rushing about at random with no idea at all', *Rear View* p. 133.

²²⁶ *Rear View* p. 133.

²²⁷ One, for example, had announced to his group that they would be visiting 'the countryside' when in fact the destination was 'Spain's most famous ancient city', Toledo. If the guide does not know the 'historical and cultural background to the sites', then the tour group members will not have the appropriate 'feeling and response' to 'the great painter El Greco's famous paintings, the incomparably beautiful architecture of the old city, coloured ceramics, gold artefacts' and many other things that should, in her opinion, have 'moved' them, *Rear View* pp. 133-134.

²²⁸ The right social class - the educated - supposedly knows how to behave and is capable of responding to Europe in the proper manner. 'It is most unfortunate', she continues, 'that knowledge and wealth often don't go together. People who have made lot of money aren't necessarily well brought up - but most of the people who spend massive sums on fares are those

are based on misunderstandings; some she accompanies with a description of the reaction of the locals; many have led to racist argument and racial tension; and all are a source of embarrassment to the Chinese woman who has made her life among the Europeans. They include: playing loud drinking games and singing loudly together in public places;²²⁹ stealing hotel ashtrays; refusing to tip;²³⁰ damaging fruit in shops by pinching it to see if it is ripe enough; paranoia about being cheated;²³¹ bad behaviour on aeroplanes (not complying with safety regulations and refusing to pay for drinks on a flight); laughing at the misfortunes of others (specifically, at a non-Chinese person who fell down an escalator); and not using toilets appropriately. These failures in the areas of human relations and public hygiene are, from San Mao's point of view, poor representations of 'China'; the whole nation (and specifically herself, as a visible and long-term resident of Europe) is impugned when group tourists do not represent China as they ought. She herself may act appropriately, but the good effect of her own courtesy and righteousness can be spoiled by others.

After listing this catalogue of wrongs, San Mao goes on to describe the behaviour of good and deserving tourists. Her exemplars are members of her own family, and in her account of what they did and did not do in Europe there is another clear message for those wishing to learn how to be good tourists - and also a clear message about the value of her own superior knowledge and experience. It has been noted that reverent worship at the shrines of European high culture is conspicuously absent from San Mao's stories - but it is the salient activity of San Mao's elderly uncle and aunt when they visit Europe.²³² They 'move' her with their interest in and appreciation of European art, their lack of

people'. As if in response to the implicit snobbishness of her own remarks, however, she hastens to add that the types of behaviour she condemns are as likely to occur among government delegations as fishermen; the salient feature is travelling in a group, which 'intellectuals' are apparently less likely to do. The suggestion that those with the means to travel are in the wrong social class echoes an earlier anecdote in which upper middle-class San Mao wryly remarks that the people one finds in Taiwan restaurants are those without proper training in good behaviour. When San Mao's family are distressed by the level of noise in a Taipei restaurant, her young niece remarks that at the kindergarten she attends, children who make a noise aren't given anything to eat. San Mao sighs, 'How is it that people who went to kindergarten don't go to restaurants?' *Rear View* p. 132.

²²⁹ Thus causing alarm among Europeans who cannot identify the shouting as good-humoured, and therefore become anxious lest they become violent, glaring at them with anger and dislike before leaving in disgust, *Rear View* p. 132.

²³⁰ San Mao's own experiences of tipping are contrasted with her Taiwan compatriots' non-tipping rudeness: she herself hands a tip to the bellhop who carries other people's suitcases when they do not. She claims to be remembered consistently by the staff in the hotel in which she regularly stays in Madrid simply because she tips them, *Rear View* p. 135.

²³¹ San Mao tells the story of a compatriot who was overly suspicious of people's motives, constantly worrying, 'Is there a mistake? Is he cheating us? Are you sure? Did the taxi go a roundabout way just now?' *Rear View* p. 139.

²³² As noted above, although 'the love of art' is an important part of San Mao's public persona, her accounts of Europe very rarely include references to art and never describe visits to galleries, paintings, 'great buildings' and their architecture (in contrast to much travel writing).

interest in buying 'foreign things', their lack of fuss about food and drink, and - most of all - their humble deference to her own knowledge when they ask her to interpret and explain European sites to them.²³³ Chinese tourists such as these are welcomed by San Mao, and also by Europe, represented by a taxi driver who expresses admiration for these exemplary tourists, praising 'these old Asian people' for their 'mild manners' - or, in other words, their 'Chinese meekness'.²³⁴

'There are lots of compatriots like them at home', she continues; 'why don't more of them come?' Unlike the experiences of 'so many compatriots who just want to buy Spanish leathersgoods', her relatives' European experiences are, it seems, made meaningful and pleasant by two vital things: their own humble behaviour and the superior knowledge and experience of San Mao, their guide. People such as these are evidently fit participants in the dream world of tourist Europe, welcome to share the treasures of its landscapes, people, art works and fantasy. San Mao herself may reject meekness as a strategy, but she appears to value it in her compatriots when they visit Europe.

San Mao's homily to the intending tourist concludes with an invocation of common Chineseness - an apposite conclusion for a discussion that began with the 'Chinese breeding' of 'The West Doesn't Know How to Behave':

the things I've written above all occur within any ethnic group, not only Chinese - but what flows in my veins is not the blood of other ethnic groups, and what I care about most is my own compatriots and my own nation. I sincerely beg my countrypeople to have self possession and self regard when you travel abroad, to conform with local customs in a new country, and on no account to overlook basic courtesy....Perhaps in Taiwan you are you and I am I, and when we pass on the street there is no feeling between us at all; but when we leave our own home, please do not forget that there is just one name that we all have in common: 'Chinese people'.²³⁵

This claimed love for the motherland and for all compatriots is, according to the critic Gu Jitang, the hallmark of a great writer (as noted above). San Mao advocates being a self-consciously positive representative of 'China' and 'the Chinese people' through appropriate moral values, and making a good impression abroad - in short, practising 'citizen diplomacy'. At the beginning of the chapter, we saw San Mao enacting values of meekness and endurance, but coming off the loser until she had understood the limitations of 'citizen diplomacy' and learned

²³³ They ask and she explains the 'origin, design, construction and history of historic sites', *Rear View* p. 140, and with her explanations 'the dead history, geography, politics and customs of Spain became alive'; 'that really was', she reminds us, 'the secret of travelling a long way and reading lots of books'.

²³⁴ San Mao translates the driver's approving comment for her relatives, and is 'moved' by her uncle's reply (presented as a wise aphorism, a declaration of common humanity: 'We are all people; everyone is connected. As long as human beings have love in their hearts, people from everywhere are the same'), declaring herself happy to translate such a peaceable exchange, *Rear View* p. 140.

²³⁵ *Rear View* p. 145.

more successful ways in which to behave among the Europeans. Both her experiences in conquering European institutions and individuals in student dorms and airport immigration and her tourism in dreamland Europe are built into anecdotes for the instruction as well as the entertainment of all compatriots. Having suffered as a 'coolie' or servant, having been exploited and wronged by Europe and triumphed, San Mao is qualified to instruct others in how to behave in foreign lands. In San Mao's narratives, going abroad involves a self-conscious sense of being Chinese as well as a set of carefully accumulated values that bring her success in Europe; she has learned how to practise a true 'citizen diplomacy' in which her courtesy, righteousness and understanding really do win respect for 'China' from Europe, and thus going abroad involves some new, self-conscious sense of being Chinese.

For San Mao as a tourist in Europe, these values are central; for San Mao as a long-term resident of Europe, they are only a beginning. In the Europe of real, everyday life, as San Mao establishes herself as a member of a community, she consistently presents herself as an example among the Europeans by virtue of her caring and compassion for those around her. Just as in the Sahara, she passes beyond the initial phase of arrival and coming to terms with the strangeness of life in a new land, and begins to write herself into a place in that new society and to find ways to identify and belong. The Europe of first contact was a testing ground for appropriate Chinese values; the Europe of play and dream was a site for tourist harmony and understanding; the Europe of everyday life (discussed in Chapter 5) is a place of obligations and responsibilities, of deep personal relationships, of love, friendship, work and family.

Chapter 5: Europe's daughter-in-law¹

In the Sahara, after an initial phase of touristic excitement and exultation in the differentiation of herself from the locals, San Mao had begun to seek ways to be a part of her desert community (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). Her narratives show her attempting to become 'close' to the people and to make her presence felt among them, contributing things she felt they lacked and thus making her mark upon the desert and its history.² As a new arrival in Europe, she showed herself to be a 'conqueror', differentiated from Europeans, and as an exemplary tourist, qualified to advise other Chinese/Taiwan people on how to behave appropriately in Europe (see Chapter 4).

San Mao's other stories of Europe encompass a wide range of subjects. Two involve work experiences in Europe. In the first, San Mao grasps a private business opportunity for exporting leather jackets from Spain to Taiwan and thence to Japan. The enterprise is a failure - not because of San Mao's lack of business experience or indeed any other fault on her part, but because Spanish people, she claims, are just too lazy to get the job done. They take siestas; they work too slowly; they do not have 'the business acuity of us Chinese'; they have no 'money-making spirit'; in short, the way 'the Spanish' do business would make anyone 'die of anger'. 'Is there anyone as lazy as Spanish people?' San Mao asks herself.³ The deal falls through, as the

¹ The title was chosen for its connotations both of the subservience supposedly inherent in the relationship of daughter-in-law with her husband's family in Chinese tradition, and the proprietorial nature of the relationship that has been imagined between nation and daughter-in-law (the title 'China's daughter-in-law' having been used to describe 'foreign' women who married Chinese men in the mid-late 1970s in the People's Republic of China after almost ten years in which contact with most of the rest of the world had been minimal).

² Most notably for the role she claimed to play in the struggle for Spanish decolonisation of the Western Sahara, see Appendix 2, 'San Mao Makes History'.

³ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 161, 168, 162, 169. The business enterprise begins when San Mao's friend 'Mr Mei' confides in her about his business worries: namely, a consignment of leather jackets that has proved unexpectedly difficult to sell. He has no more credit and the manufacturers are asking for goods to be returned. It occurs to San Mao that she could perhaps take over the deal and make some money, and she contacts a friend in Taiwan about selling the garments to Japan. She then finds out the manufacturer's address and goes there to offer a deal; the manager tells her that he will be happy to deal with her (thus abandoning his agreement with Mr Mei, to Mei's great annoyance). Things do not work out as San Mao had hoped, however; First, there are no finished goods to hand; second, none of the relevant documentation for the goods is available; third, when she returns to collect samples and documents, she finds not only that nothing is ready but that the manager is relaxing in a café instead of working on the deal. Throughout the story San Mao presents Spanish management and workers as slow and lazy, and herself as efficient and frustrated by their inefficiency. The Taiwan contact blames San Mao for the delays; the goods are still not ready; and San Mao's contact at the factory disappears on a business trip and no one else will take any responsibility for making sure that the leather jackets are made. San Mao attempts to get the better of her Spanish business partners by putting off helping them when they receive a letter in Chinese

Taiwan contact has had enough of waiting, and San Mao is indignant on behalf of, as she puts it, the 'orientals' who have shown 'a lot of tolerance' in putting up with Spanish procrastination and inefficiency.⁴ In the second story of work in Europe, San Mao answers an advertisement for 'a beautiful oriental girl' to promote Coty perfume in a Berlin department store, hires a suitably 'oriental' costume in tight-fitting, embroidered silk that gives her 'a certain mysterious air' and is given the job of smiling at customers and spraying them with 'some new perfume with a fake oriental mystery name' in the Kaufhaus des Westens. Cringing at the thought of being seen by anyone she knows, San Mao spends ten days standing all day, with only a twenty minute break every four hours, and struggling to memorise the names and locations of goods in the enormous store so that she can direct customers (a task made especially difficult by the Christmas rush and San Mao's limited command of German after only 3 months' study).⁵ Though San Mao may not have profited from the business acuity she assumes all Chinese people to possess (thanks to southern European 'laziness'), her 'oriental woman' act is a great success. Despite the difficulties of the job, San Mao earns enough to go travelling and to spare her father from taking on extra law cases to support her life in Germany. Cui and Zhao's biography suggests that San Mao gained from the job in terms of confidence as well; when describing her job application she had modestly stated that 'I knew that I didn't meet the standard required in the newspaper ad at all'⁶ (in other words, had not thought herself beautiful enough), and 'being chosen for the job proved a truth: that she was indeed a beautiful Oriental girl'.⁷

These two forays into work took place early in San Mao's acquaintance with Europe (6 months after her first arrival in Spain, and 3 months after her first arrival in

and ask her to translate it ('My mind isn't working today; I won't be able to read Chinese until tomorrow. Tomorrow will be fine, goodbye,' *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 170), but is deflated when the letter turns out to be a confirmation of their contract. San Mao types 'a rude word' on the factory office typewriter and stalks off. This is the end of her business dealing (although she states that she is keen to try again when one of her readers solicits her help in selling 'a beautiful piece of handcraft' in Europe, the outcome of this attempt is not stated), *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 157-174. Spanish 'laziness' is compared not only to Chinese acuity but also German precision. When José takes San Mao to see his worksite in the desert, which boasts the longest conveyor belt in the world at the time (transporting the ore more than 100 kilometres from the mine to the wharf for loading), she is impressed. 'Heavens!' she exclaims, 'this is a James Bond movie, and I am the evil oriental woman...Who set up this great project?' 'Krupp, the German company', replies José glumly. San Mao responds with the words, 'I don't think the Spanish could have created such an amazing thing', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 236-237.

⁴ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 73.

⁵ *Rear View* pp. 153-156. The experience, she claims, left her hating department stores.

⁶ *Rear View* p. 153.

⁷ Cui and Zhao p. 97.

Germany respectively). There are passing mentions of a number of other jobs: as a tour guide in a resort,⁸ interpreting for Taiwan delegations in Europe and working for a trade magazine,⁹ teaching English in a primary school and working in a secretarial job in a consulate in Gran Canaria.¹⁰

For the most part, however, her remaining stories of Europe are stories of her life as a housewife in the Canary Islands. She describes her daily walks and the colourful characters she meets on them; her elderly neighbours in Gran Canaria (discussed in Chapter 6); a visit from an itinerant flower seller (discussed below); the woman who cleans in the apartment block where San Mao and José live in Tenerife (also discussed below); her passion for collecting stones from the beach and painting them; her dreams of winning the lottery and buying a farm in Paraguay; the young Japanese man she makes friends with; finding the grave of a Chinese person in St Lazarus cemetery in Gran Canaria, and wondering about his life; 'witches' or faith healers in the Canaries; and visits by relatives (José's family, and San Mao's cousin's husband).¹¹

In addition to these, there are several stories about people who are in need and to whom San Mao extends help. This chapter will suggest that these stories may be regarded as forming a pattern, creating an image of a caring and compassionate San Mao and a Europe that is in need of the qualities she can bring to them. The chapter returns, therefore, to the themes of 'belonging', closeness, reciprocity and the provision of assistance where things are seen to be lacking that were noted in the context of the Sahara, and discusses them in a European context. It will seek to demonstrate that San Mao's involvement with Europe (like her involvement with the Sahara) progressed in like manner from a relationship of strangeness to a relationship of belonging, in which her own presence - a self explicitly marked as Chinese and female - is therapeutic, beneficial and even necessary to the local people.

The 'civilising' aspect of her life in the desert was manifested in her medical, educative and transport contributions to the lives of neighbouring Sahrawi, and in Europe, she involves herself again in these same aspects of life. There are, however, significant differences in her presentations of these activities in Europe and in the Sahara. As we have seen, her activities of caring for the Sahrawi were motivated by her own quest for play and amusement, by the lack of social service provided for them

⁸ According to Cui and Zhao, San Mao worked in Majorca, Cui and Zhao p. 95.

⁹ *Rear View* p. 132.

¹⁰ These are both disputed by Ma Zhongxin, supposedly on the basis of interviews with people in Gran Canaria who knew San Mao.

¹¹ These stories are collected in *Diary of a Scarecrow*, *The Tender Night* and *Rear View*.

by the Spanish government, and by the 'backwardness' on their part which supposedly left them in need of her help. In caring for the Europeans, the fun motive is occasionally present, but is less prominent than in the Sahara. As in the desert, government agencies are seen to be lacking; Swedish and German embassies, and Spanish health and transport systems do not provide the service that is needed.

The chief difference between San Mao's stories of caring for Sahrawi and caring for Europeans is to do with what is perceived to be lacking in the character of the people among whom San Mao is living. In San Mao's European stories, there is no narrative of childishness and superstitious 'backwardness'. San Mao's European communities do not lack progress and maturity but warmth; they need her to care for them because they are apparently too cold and unfeeling to care for each other. Such a characterisation of Africans and Europeans fits neatly into the prevailing generalisations with which the world is often divided: of urban modernity breaking down bonds between people and leading to indifferent, uncaring societies; of places characterised as 'backward' preserving something of the communal responsibility and concern that is believed to have existed in the past and to have been lost in processes of modernisation; and of stereotypes of 'western individuality' versus an assumed 'collectivity' in non-western societies.

There are other differences too in the expression of San Mao's 'mission' to help and improve in Africa and in Europe. First, while the recipients of her neighbourly acts (lending household items, or providing medication or transport) in the Sahrawi were, on the whole, a nameless mass of humanity, in Europe they are specific, named individuals with their own stories. Second, whereas San Mao presented herself assisting Sahrawi when they seemed too 'childish' or 'irresponsible' to help themselves (for example, providing household goods for them), there is no overt questioning of adult status or competence on the part of Europeans. Third, her medical assistance to Sahrawi and European takes different forms. To Sahrawi she provided pills and other treatments for their diseases, unimpeded by the limitations of her medical knowledge; in the case of her European neighbours and friends, however, her assistance is expressed not as 'witch-doctoring' but as the willingness to provide compassionate support through para-nursing activities, financial assistance or practical household aid, even when personal sacrifice is required. Among the Europeans she does not play 'doctor games' but assumes a serious role in the lives of people who are seriously ill, and also tends to the dying. Likewise, her education exploits take forms in Europe that are different from those in the Sahara: in place of a generalised urge to improve frivolous neighbouring desert women en masse by

teaching them to count, she involves herself in individual European lives to teach them about aspects of Chinese culture.

In both Africa and Europe, the common theme is that San Mao presents herself as having something - indeed much - to offer, and as teaching by example, showing those around her the way to health and peace. Thus, despite the differences in their manifestations, the underlying narratives of play, concern, responsibility and 'mission' in San Mao's stories of Europe are in fact very similar to those of her African stories. The final message of San Mao's stories of caring for Europeans is about how valuable she is to them, and how much they appreciate her. Europe, it is implied, needs San Mao's Chinese culture and 'breeding', her compassion and her abilities - and she is loved by them all for her (Chinese) goodness.¹²

Unlike San Mao's relationship to Africa, her relationship to Europe is one of literal kinship by marriage, as she becomes by virtue of her marriage to José a 'real' European daughter-in-law. There is apparently no question of her becoming 'Africa's daughter-in-law'; it might be suggested that Africa might not be considered an appropriate 'mother' continent for San Mao, or that San Mao (or 'China') might not submit herself to the service of Africa as she does to Europe.¹³ San Mao's narratives of Europe touch explicitly on the literal connotations of the daughter-in-law's relationship to the husband's family (the expected humility, the tireless service, the lack of appreciation, the suffering of injustice at the hands of the mother-in-law and so on). Considering San Mao's self-presentation of service, duty, concern, compassion and self-sacrifice for others in her European community, I will suggest that she shows herself acting out the virtues of a metaphoric daughter-in-law within the larger 'family' of Europe as well. First, however, I will discuss San Mao's literal familial relationships with Europeans: José and his family.

¹² As noted above, though theoretical literature of travel has much to say about narratives of improvement and 'civilising missions' (and I have drawn on some of these narratives in preceding chapters), such analyses are largely devoted to self-representations by travellers from a European 'centre' to places and peoples constructed as 'peripheral' and 'less civilised'. The experiencing subject is usually European (sometimes American, occasionally Australian), and the theoretical standard subject of 'normal' active behaviour of travel, observation and record has been European. The experiences and self-representations of a non-European subject in Europe (such as San Mao) naturally suggest a somewhat different configuration of the world order to that espoused by European travellers, in which Europe does not necessarily take first place and is not necessarily the standard to which 'abroad' is compared.

¹³ The desert, it will be recalled, was a 'dream lover'; Europe can provide a husband. Marriage to José, however, is seen to link her with Africa as well as Spain through the colonial relationship of Spain and the Western Sahara, and to establish her in the annals of the Western Sahara (as one of the first non-Sahrawi couple to marry there, see Chapter 3).

José

From the moment San Mao introduces José in the first sentence of her first story of the Sahara ('The Restaurant in the Desert'), he is explicitly marked as non-Chinese: 'Unfortunately', the tale begins, 'my husband is a foreigner'.¹⁴ José's foreignness and San Mao's Chineseness are invoked throughout this and other stories;¹⁵ and of course his Spanishness played an important part in her life as well as her writings, allowing her to reside in the Sahara (making possible her stories and hence her popularity) and providing her with ties to Europe as an 'insider' in a European family rather than simply an 'outsider' from Taiwan. Thus the person of José binds the 'fantasy' of her Saharan stories to the 'reality' of European family life, citizenship and travel.¹⁶

As Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, the idea of 'cultural harmony through romance' is a common image in colonial writing about foreign lands, associated with 'the mystique of reciprocity'.¹⁷ The image of San Mao's relationship with José as symbolic of the relationship of reciprocity between stereotypes of China and Europe, though fanciful, is nonetheless instructive: it is the relationship of an older woman with a younger man (or an older, subtle and self-consciously refined culture and a bolder, plainer younger one which wishes to dominate, in which the junior partner believes himself to be in charge but is gently and continually outwitted by the senior

¹⁴ 'Unfortunately, my husband is a foreigner. So addressing my own husband inevitably has something of the flavour of discriminating against outsiders; but because there are big differences between the languages and customs of different countries, there are many areas in our married life where we cannot communicate', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 19.

¹⁵ José likens her to Sun Wukong (see Chapter 2); he tells her that 'You Chinese are really mysterious' (*Stories of the Sahara* p. 47) and addresses her as 'Madame Butterfly' (in the incident when San Mao claimed that the spectator of Sahrawi bathing was a Japanese woman and not herself, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 102); and San Mao refers to herself as the 'yellow wife' (*Stories of the Sahara* p. 47, 23). José's own character, note San Mao's biographers Cui and Zhao, 'belonged to Spain', as he was 'rough and warm', Cui and Zhao p. 88.

¹⁶ In *Stories of the Sahara*, José features prominently in every story. Even if he is not a principal player in the narrative, the format of the story generally includes an introductory scene of domestic life or conversation with him and another conversation or domestic scene in conclusion.

¹⁷ The usual context or 'standard model' is the European traveller-subject marrying a 'foreign' spouse. Pratt suggests that transracial love plots imagine European supremacy being guaranteed by 'affective and social bonding', so that the exploitation of labour ('a fundamental dimension of colonialism') disappears into a narrative of romantic love, Pratt p. 97. While the gender inversion and the non-colonial relationship between Spain and Taiwan would suggest that Pratt's model is inapplicable to the marriage between San Mao and José, there may be some suggestion of 'supremacy' on the part of San Mao/Taiwan/China that attracts Europe to form marriage alliances. In the 'transracial love plots' discussed by Pratt, the non-European female partner is silent; here, of course, the narrative is from that party, though discourses of her own exotic beauty, service and devotion are not absent from San Mao's account of her alliance with José. San Mao's narratives (and biographies) suggest that José pursued San Mao, waiting for her patiently and faithfully for six years; Ma Zhongxin suggests on the basis of interviews that San Mao relentlessly pursued an indifferent José.

one).¹⁸ The Chinese woman demonstrates a 'collective' caring for all around her; the 'westerner' favours 'individuality' and prefers that they should keep to themselves and not be too closely involved in the lives of others. Further, San Mao demonstrates herself prevailing both through action and inaction. Such references to stereotype are not infrequent in San Mao's stories; not only is José portrayed as the great love of an epic life but also as the male 'western' foil against which San Mao's 'Chinese' female behaviour stands out in relief.

José features in all of San Mao's Saharan stories and most of her stories of Europe.¹⁹ According to her own and biographers' accounts, San Mao and José married in the Sahara in July 1973;²⁰ six years later, in September 1979, José died in a diving accident.²¹ In San Mao's descriptions of their life together, she portrays herself as a tireless cook, housekeeper and companion for José, making a home where he may do as he pleases, where his friends are welcome, and where he need not take part in the running of the household.

San Mao presents the story of her relationship with José as an extraordinary love that transcended age and cultural differences, endured separation and continued after José's early death.²² They first met when he was still at high school and, according to her account: he fell in love with her at first sight and wished to marry her; she told him there was no future in such a relationship because of his youth; he announced that he would wait six years for her (four years' university study and two

¹⁸ Though this division of roles is an observable pattern, it is not entirely consistent. José is sometimes presented as a stern, disapproving father figure bemused by the playful, quick-witted childlike San Mao (for example when San Mao offers to cut his hair and he runs away; she follows him to the barber's shop and is such a pest that he tells her to go away, which she agrees to do only if he will give her money *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 89-90). Sometimes San Mao is an indulgent quasi-mother manipulating her childish husband (as in the story 'Beardie and me', *Crying Camels* pp. 221-234). There are also frequent references to San Mao and José playfully hitting each other (for example *Stories of the Sahara* p. 23, 25, 102, 146) and chasing each other (for example *Stories of the Sahara* p. 54).

¹⁹ He is also the main subject of the stories collected in *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?*, a collection published in his memory after his death. Only San Mao's latest tales of life alone in Taiwan and her earliest stories (before she met José) do not feature him.

²⁰ San Mao's biographers Cui and Zhao note that Picasso (the object of San Mao's early romantic fantasy) died while 'San Mao was in the desert preparing to marry another Spaniard', Cui and Zhao p. 58.

²¹ José is believed to have died on 30th September, 1979, in a diving accident off La Palma in the Canaries.

²² The story of San Mao being forced by the Taiwan writer Qiong Yao to promise not to kill herself in despair after the loss of José is well known. In addition to producing a book of essays as a memorial to him (*How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?*), San Mao wrote of visits to José's grave, claimed to have contacted his spirit through mediums, and used photographs of him to discourage later suitors (*The World of San Mao* p. 168). It has been claimed that after his death 'San Mao was still living for José' (*The World of San Mao* p. 161), and after her own death there was speculation that she had killed herself in order to be reunited with him in the afterlife.

years' military service) then return to ask her to marry him again; they parted amid a rare and beautiful snowfall in a Madrid park.²³ Biographers add further details: San Mao continued her travels, to Germany and the USA; she returned to Taiwan and prepared to marry a German there; he died unexpectedly shortly before the marriage was due to take place; and San Mao returned to Spain to heal her broken heart. Back in Madrid, San Mao meets José again; he is now in his early twenties, handsome, and still committed to her - and the six years in which he promised to wait for her have now elapsed. San Mao claimed that, though José had waited faithfully for her, she was less committed to a relationship with him. According to her account, he took a job in the Sahara in order for her to fulfil her dream of living there, and she was so 'moved' by his willing endurance of desert hardship for the love of her (as noted in Chapter 2) that she finally agreed to marry him.²⁴ As José never visited Taiwan, and none of San Mao's friends or relations (with the exception of her parents) ever met him, the veracity of San Mao's narratives of romance with José has often been questioned - to the point of claims that José never actually existed.²⁵

The historicity or otherwise of José is not my concern here, as this work deals with San Mao the textual creation rather than the historical person and life of Chen Ping/San Mao.²⁶ San Mao's biographers Cui and Zhao have noted that 'San Mao and José were the most successful of the "characters" that San Mao created';²⁷ and it is as a 'character' that he is examined here. Whatever the 'truth' of the story of San Mao and José, her representations of him and her relationship with him are an important component of her legend. Other suitors, most of them European, also appear in her

²³ See *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* pp. 130-134, Cui and Zhao pp. 87-91. José lived in the same apartment building as friends of San Mao's, and she met him on her first Christmas in Spain. According to San Mao's account he was 18 at the time; Ma Zhongxin claims that he was only 14.

²⁴ Cui and Zhao suggest that San Mao's attachment to José was a direct result of her loneliness in the desert; 'San Mao, the oriental princess of Madrid, was not proud any more', Cui and Zhao p. 133.

²⁵ Perhaps the most persistent pursuer of disproof is Ma Zhongxin who, in his book *The Truth About San Mao*, claims to have interviewed members of José's family and of the Chinese communities of Madrid and Gran Canaria to discover that: San Mao had falsified José's age as well as her own, to make the age difference between them smaller; San Mao had relentlessly pursued him (rather than being pursued by him); José did not attend university as San Mao claimed; he had already spent two years in the Western Sahara on military service and had signed a contract to return there to work for Fosbucraa before meeting San Mao again after the six-year absence; he agreed to help her visit the desert, as he was already living there; once her non-renewable visitor's visa had expired he agreed to marry her so that she could stay there longer; their stay in the desert lasted only a year; and once they had moved to the Canaries he chose to work long-term on La Palma island rather than live on Gran Canaria with San Mao.

²⁶ In his quest for the historical San Mao twenty years later, Zhang Yun notes that he believes in the existence of José but has no opinion one way or the other on the romantic story of his patient courting of San Mao.

²⁷ Cui and Zhao p. 151.

stories (the Spanish classmates who serenaded 'the Chinese girl' under her dorm window;²⁸ the Japanese classmate who showered her with gifts; the doctoral student who brought her lunch every day; the German trainee diplomat who wished to marry her but who treated her too indifferently;²⁹ and, most romantically, the East German border guard who gazed into her eyes and told her she was beautiful),³⁰ creating the strong impression that San Mao is extremely attractive to European men³¹ - and indeed to European families, who would welcome her as their daughter-in-law.³²

In addition to these, biographers introduce a cast of male characters with whom San Mao supposedly fell in love or even married; their accounts differ but combine to record a number former lovers.³³ Although San Mao's romantic history includes relationships with Chinese and Japanese men, it is Europeans upon whom biographers seize with greatest interest and indeed whom San Mao herself wrote most about. Biographies of San Mao are unanimous in presenting José as the great love of her life; most biographers, in fact, construct her life retrospectively as a series of unsuccessful

²⁸ *Rear View* p. 152. 'At that time singers of love songs would come to sing below the dorm window at night; among them there would be one singing for the Chinese girl, Echo'.

²⁹ The German boyfriend is a self-disciplined, focused and unromantic character who spends most of his time on his thesis. The little time he spends with San Mao is taken up with study-related activities - testing her German and making her read articles on politics and economics. San Mao gives up on the relationship when he chides her for not spending enough time improving her German to the level she will need to be a German diplomat's wife, *Taking the City* pp. 229-230. He does indeed become a diplomat, San Mao tells us, and is assumed to be the German ambassador who hosts her on her tour of Central and South America described in *Over the Hills and Far Away*, though this is not explicitly stated.

³⁰ *Taking the City* pp. 228-242.

³¹ Others include José's colleague in the Sahara who keeps sending her flowers and then quits his job to return to Spain when he realises there is no future with San Mao (*Stories of the Sahara* pp. 248-250), and the Greek man she meets while travelling who could have become her lover if she had not run away, in a scene reminiscent of San Mao's first story, 'Autumn Love' (*Over the Hills and Far Away*). According to Cui and Zhao, San Mao 'became an oriental princess' when she went to Europe and 'many people pursued her', Cui and Zhao p. 105.

³² There is a German family who want her as daughter-in-law (see the title story of *Taking the City*) and a strange elderly German in Tenerife who schemes for her to marry his son, accosting her as she walks past his apartment block to urge her to marry his son, promising that she would become rich if she did so, *Rear View* p. 65-66. The childless American couple who wish to adopt San Mao to take care of them in old age (serving them as a daughter or daughter-in-law would supposedly do) was noted in Chapter 4.

³³ They include: Liang Guangming (with whom she fell in love in her early twenties at Culture University); an artist whom she reportedly married in the early 1970s only to find that he was married already; a middle-aged German professor in Taiwan whom she planned to marry in 1972 but whose sudden death prevented the the marriage; an artist-designer whom she reportedly married in Taiwan after José's death; the elderly songwriter Wang Luobin, whom she went to visit in his home in Xinjiang in 1990 but who supposedly spurned her advances; and a mysterious Englishman identified as 'O'Sheal' (to whom she apparently claimed to have become engaged to a few weeks before her suicide). For details see the three biographies of San Mao and Ma Zhongxin's book *The Truth of San Mao*. In addition, to these there are some shadowy figures from the early stories written by Chen Ping, before she became 'San Mao', collected in *The Rainy Season Will Not Return*, whom some believe to have been San Mao's lovers in her teens (see *San Mao Speaks to You Softly*).

passions but which reached glorious fruition with José.³⁴ None but José was, supposedly, good enough for San Mao; only he was fated to be her perfect complement and companion. Her own silence on the other marriages she is reputed to have made reinforces the legend of José as the only man it was her true destiny (*yuanfen*) to marry;³⁵ biographers have suggested early prescience on San Mao's part that she would marry a Spanish man,³⁶ and have also endeavoured to create connections between San Mao's and José's backgrounds, childhoods and personalities to suggest commonalities that would link them together.³⁷

Biographers and San Mao herself present her relationship with José as a 'transgressive' one in terms of both San Mao's seniority (by at least 8 years) and their different ethnicities. It was transgressive both for José's family (who had supposedly hoped for him to marry a local woman and settle down nearby) and for San Mao herself, whose stories suggest an awareness and exploitation of the 'exotica' factor of a foreign marriage. Stories of 'international marriage' held a certain interest for Taiwan (and, later, mainland readers) for whom, at the time when San Mao's books first appeared, encounters with 'foreigners' were relatively rare and personal experience of relationships between Chinese and non-Chinese was rather unusual³⁸ (though it should be noted that their marriage was considered unusual in Spain as well).³⁹ There are many references in San Mao's stories to José's beard as a symbol of his exotic 'difference'.⁴⁰

³⁴ Biographers show great interest in San Mao's 'love history', constructing as real 'love' her early fascination with Picasso and a crush on a boy at school, and attach great importance to the failure of her 'first love' at Culture Academy.

³⁵ Towards the end of her life, San Mao claimed that many men had pursued her, wishing to have affairs with her or to marry her, but that she had refused them - both because she was reluctant to break up their homes and because no one could love her as José had, *Funü zazhi* Feb. 1991). She also created controversy by advocating that women should have a 'weekend lover' rather than marrying, (lecture for *Funü zazhi*, June 1987).

³⁶ Cui and Zhao record that at the age of 13, San Mao dreamed that she would marry a Spanish man, Cui and Zhao p. 13.

³⁷ Cui and Zhao also do their best to find commonalties between San Mao and José, in that both failed classes at school and both began to 'dream of love' at 13 (San Mao dreaming of marrying Picasso and José longing for a 'black-haired, black-eyed oriental girl', a Japanese wife).

³⁸ Especially on the mainland in the mid 1980s, contact with non-Chinese people was relatively rare, few knew 'foreigners' and marriages between Chinese and 'foreigners' attracted a great deal of interest.

³⁹ San Mao notes that when she and José went travelling in Spain, they would often encounter suspicion in guest houses, where the proprietors would not believe that they were married and would refuse them double rooms. San Mao would be asked for her residency documents as well as ID, whereupon the proprietor would exclaim, 'It didn't seem so! It didn't seem so! but you are married after all', *Crying Camels* p. 225.

⁴⁰ San Mao refers to him as 'Beardie' (*Da huzi*); she notes that his beard makes him as handsome as the actor Toshiro Mifune (*Stories of the Sahara* p. 241), and there are numerous references to it throughout San Mao's early stories (he gets soapy water in his beard, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 25; he cuts his beard for their wedding then sweat runs into it in the heat, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 38, 40).

Much has been written about San Mao and José, and much more could be said here if space permitted.⁴¹ Readers seem to perceive José as a romantic figure with a legendary love for San Mao;⁴² biographers too present him as 'warm, forthright, ruggedly romantic'.⁴³ The Taiwan academic Hu Jinyuan has even suggested that readers saw San Mao's characterisation of José as a criticism or indictment of Taiwan men who are not 'romantic' like him.⁴⁴

Though readers have tended to respond positively to the José of San Mao's representation, there is much in his personality that is not particularly appealing. Many of his negative attributes are tinged with male stereotype; indeed the character flaws San Mao describes on José's part make a polar opposite to her own 'feminine' qualities of kindness, concern and communication and her carefree, romantic persona. José is depicted as often silent, morose and unsociable;⁴⁵ he will not talk about things that upset him;⁴⁶ he is not good at expressing his feelings (thumping tables in frustration⁴⁷ and not unwilling to fight);⁴⁸ he is given to shouting rather than speaking;⁴⁹ he can be rude and taciturn;⁵⁰ is often angry, short-tempered⁵¹ and

Dikötter notes the importance of beards in his discussion of historical Chinese accounts of western people, Dikötter pp. 13-14, 158.

⁴¹ All biographies of San Mao discuss José at great length. According to Cui and Zhao, Josemaria Quero Ruiz was born in 1949 in Andalusia, where his parents had olive groves; they moved to Madrid not long after. The third of eight children, with 2 older brothers and 4 older sisters, José, they claim, did not receive much parental attention or love and was not a 'good, ingratiating child', Cui and Zhao pp. 87-88.

⁴² In many private conversations, readers and former readers of San Mao's stories have told me that they loved the character of José in San Mao's stories and had dreamed of marrying a European man with a beard just like José, a man who was, in one reader's words, 'rough but with a loving heart'. Cui and Zhao note that in Spain José was just an ordinary engineer but 'in his wife's home country, China, he was loved - he was the hero of San Mao's works, written about as honest, kind, a real man'. Even though he did not know Chinese and could not read her stories, they continue, 'he often said proudly that his wife was a wonderful writer...San Mao put her love into her writing, and readers were infected with it. After his death, many, many people mourned him, which shows how moved they were by San Mao's writing', Cui and Zhao p. 88, 151.

⁴³ Cui and Zhao p. 88; they characterise him further as 'honest, kind, almost foolish', p. 151.

⁴⁴ Public lecture, Taipei Women's Bookstore, June 17, 1995.

⁴⁵ Indeed his famed love for the sea and for diving is explained in terms of escape from human social contact: 'I can understand why José chose undersea engineering as a career. José loves the sea, loves that world under the sea where there are no people; he always says that in the world he is lonely but in the sea he is happy', *The Crying Camels* p. 187.

⁴⁶ 'He usually talks a lot, it's very tiresome, when there is really something the matter he won't talk', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 31.

⁴⁷ *The Crying Camels* p. 113, 138.

⁴⁸ *The Crying Camels* p. 113.

⁴⁹ In the first few stories in which he makes an appearance, that is the first three stories in the *Stories of the Sahara* collection, almost every utterance is described as loud or shouting (*Stories of the Sahara* p. 31, p. 34, 48); he even 'roars' at her, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 141.

⁵⁰ *Stories of the Sahara* p. 114.

⁵¹ San Mao does not dare tell him that the neighbours in El Ayoun have chipped the whitewashed walls of their house lest he lose his temper, *Crying Camels* p. 249.

subject to fits of pique;⁵² he is impatient and hates to wait⁵³ and can be ungracious and ungrateful.⁵⁴ He leaves all of the domestic labour in their home to San Mao,⁵⁵ expects quick and efficient service from her in looking after him⁵⁶ and is offhand in response to her provision for his comfort and leisure.⁵⁷ When their car arrives in the Sahara, he monopolises it and apparently does not wish her to drive it - though it is she, of course, who painstakingly cleans it.⁵⁸ San Mao describes him as 'contrary', and tells of outwitting him with little tricks - while he himself continues to believe that he has the upper hand:

Beardie is a person with a very strong contrary streak. If his wife tells him to go east, he goes west; tell him to wear red and he will certainly wear green. If I make rice porridge he wants boiled rice instead; if I make him something sweet, he says something savoury would be nice. Being contrary in this way at home is one of his big amusements...I can vouch for the fact that if we got married again and the judge asked, "José, will you take San Mao for your wife?" what would come out of his mouth would be his usual word: "No".⁵⁹

⁵² *Stories of the Sahara* p. 31.

⁵³ *Stories of the Sahara* p. 134.

⁵⁴ After a fishing expedition, José is angry with San Mao for cooking noodles when he would rather have something else; he refuses them rudely and stalks out of the house, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 156.

⁵⁵ She describes him expecting to be waited on with food, not picking things up and creating mess; even when she is ill he does not bother with housework but waits for her to recover and do it, *Crying Camels* pp. 228-229.

⁵⁶ 'Bring on the food! I'm starving' he calls out when he comes home from work, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 20-21. San Mao explains that he 'grew up in a traditional home that valued boys and not girls, and all these years his mother and sisters have, both consciously and unconsciously, treated him as a child emperor. Clothing, a tidy bed and meals have all been provided for him by willing female slaves', *Crying Camels* p. 223.

⁵⁷ Before setting off for her evening stroll, San Mao does all of the housework, prepares coffee, bakes a cake for José and brings food and drink for him as he sits watching television or reading the newspaper. Later she tells him jokingly that if one day she should not return from her walk she will have left food for him in the fridge; he does not listen and responds only with a grunt. San Mao wonders if he would be able to open the fridge and find the food she has left for him, *Rear View* pp. 63-64, p. 73.

⁵⁸ *Crying Camels* pp. 67-68. 'When I went to town I still had to brave the burning sun and walk, and often we argued about the car. Some mornings I would hear him furtively driving off and I would rush out after him in my nightie, already too late', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 69-70.

⁵⁹ *Crying Camels* p. 228. 'As for José', San Mao remarks elsewhere, 'I understand his character very well. He is a hot-blooded man with a strong rebellious streak, and the only way to deal with him is to give him the liberty to be a free husband. When he goes out, I put enough money in his pocket; when he brings friends home, even in the desert, I do my best to make good food to entertain the guests; if he goes out at night and doesn't come home, I don't say a word of reproach when he comes back; if by chance his conscience should make its presence felt, and he wants to wash the dishes for once, I kneel down at once and polish his shoes for him. Because I secretly want José to become 'my' husband', I do absolutely everything according to him. And because José is a person who has to resist everything, then as soon as I liberate him to rush out and charge around like a wild horse, he falls into the trap and does the opposite. The more freedom I give him, the more he doesn't want to be free, and as time goes on he has become 'my husband', still believing in his heart that his strategy of 'resisting the wife' has been successful. We are both secretly laughing up our sleeves; we both

At first, she remarks, 'I saw through his reasoning, and whatever I wanted him to do I'd say the opposite and he would unknowingly do exactly what I wanted'; as time goes on, however, and he becomes aware of her strategy, 'whatever I said...his manner would be uncooperative, stubborn as an idiot, and often sneering and self-satisfied - "Heh heh! I've won!"'⁶⁰ Proud of her 'husband-training plan',⁶¹ San Mao expresses impatience with women who do not understand, as she supposedly does, the tricks of dealing with capricious male natures.⁶²

José is described as handsome (like the bearded Greek god Neptune)⁶³ and attractive to women.⁶⁴ He is a diver by profession (and, San Mao claims, an engineer - though this has been disputed by Ma Zhongxin). He is a keen outdoorsman and hunter who loves sailing, diving and spear-fishing. He is portrayed as practical and capable, and San Mao is proud of his capacity for hard work⁶⁵ and his mastery of a range of stereotypical male handyman skills⁶⁶ - especially when he puts his practical skill to use to make objects to delight her.⁶⁷ Though he likes to present himself as unfriendly and inhospitable, he will put himself out for other people when they need help.⁶⁸ 'This strange person', remarks San Mao, 'scares you when he raises his

have what we were after, and the basis of a happy home is very stable because of this', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 120.

⁶⁰ *Crying Camels* p. 228.

⁶¹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 120.

⁶² *Diary of Scarecrow* pp. 230-231.

⁶³ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 135.

⁶⁴ San Mao notes that José had never had any difficulty finding girlfriends before they married; she tells the story of the young Sahrawi woman Mina who hangs around and keeps inviting him to her home under the pretext of asking him to repair things for her. San Mao adds that 'One day this beautiful mirage got married at last, I was very happy and gave her a big piece of dress-fabric', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 132.

⁶⁵ José works day and night, hardly taking time off for meals, scolding San Mao for letting him sleep and without taking a day off: 'if José didn't work, his mind wouldn't be easy, so he carried on continuously knocking and hammering on the roof...Hours passed, and the sun was overhead; I put a wet towel over José's head and oil on his bare back. Blisters appeared on José's hands...The sun beat down like molten metal, so that earth and sky spun around before my eyes...José didn't say a word; he was like Sisyphus in the Greek myth, pushing his stone. I was very proud of having a husband like this. In the past I had seen only love letters and things that he had written; only today did I meet a new José', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 233-234.

⁶⁶ Among them carpentry, electrical repairs, building with fibre-glass and plastic and concreting. José builds furniture for their house in the desert and constructs a roof and a wall on the house, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 128-129. San Mao, meanwhile, takes care of feminised activities such as cooking and sewing.

⁶⁷ Jewellery out of spare bicycle parts, a lamp made of wire, a beaten metal plate. These items are listed in *My Treasures*, discussed in Appendix 3. Cui and Zhao take José's work on San Mao's behalf and his gifts to her as more proof of a deep, fated love, reminding the reader of San Mao's narratives in which José brings her items he has found while diving, gives her a camel skull as a wedding present, makes furniture for her, Cui and Zhao pp. 23-24.

⁶⁸ As already noted, San Mao presents José as the electrician, carpenter and concreter for their neighbours in El Ayoun, *Stories of the Sahara* p. 131. In the Canary Islands he continues to act as handyman for the neighbours (for example fixing a washing machine, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 226).

voice, but in fact his heart couldn't be better'. He is also endlessly generous to his unmarried male colleagues in the Sahara (though it is, of course, San Mao's domestic labour which makes his generosity and hospitality possible)⁶⁹ and likes to work alongside them in handyman activities at home.⁷⁰ He is characterised as honest to a fault, therefore easily deceived and (as noted above) unable to keep up with San Mao's quick wits.⁷¹ He is also (as noted) presented as something of a spoilsport, disapproving of her fun (such as when practical José is worried about the possible negative consequences of her 'doctor games' in the desert). Unlike San Mao, he is sceptical of the paranormal.⁷²

After the initial story of José's six-year wait for her and his romantic notion that they have exchanged their hearts,⁷³ San Mao's depiction of the relationship between herself and José is for the most part studiously unromantic.⁷⁴ Just as she was later to

He also, like San Mao herself, gives people lifts in their car. In the seaside suburb of Gran Canaria where they live, there is no bus service. San Mao notes that sometimes as they are washing the car a neighbour on her way to town will come over to chat; San Mao will always whisper to José that they could give her a lift some of the way and José will refuse directly, 'Sorry, I can't take you, just walk and then hitch a lift'. San Mao reproaches him after the neighbour has gone, and he replies, 'Walking is good for the health, and anyway she talks too much - I don't like her, so I won't take her'. But in cases of necessity (illness, accident, birth or death) neighbours knock on José's door in the middle of the night and he immediately and willingly gets up to drive them to hospital, not returning until the following day, *Crying Camels* pp. 232-233.

⁶⁹ José's single male colleagues in the Sahara live in a Fosbucraa dorm, and regularly visit José and San Mao's home for some home-cooked food and friendly warmth. San Mao notes that, whenever they visit, she takes special pains to entertain them; she would 'think up every possible way of giving them fresh fruit and vegetables and would make sweet and sour ribs. In this way José made several very good friends. These friends didn't just eat and leave; when their mothers sent them ham or sausages all the way from Spain, they would never forget to ask José to bring some home to me after work', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 248. Thus San Mao not only makes a home for José but also helps create a pleasant community for his Spanish colleagues at Fosbucraa.

⁷⁰ 'Sometimes when José has time he arranges with his friends in the neighbourhood to mess around on the roof together, or crawl around under the car, yelling. Painting the house, fixing walls - sometimes when he has nothing to do he likes to think of himself as a great concreter or carpenter. I hear him singing heartily out in the fresh air... The happiness of a man together with his friends...should not be cut off. Who says a husband can only be happy when he is with his wife?' *Crying Camels* p. 231.

⁷¹ For example, in the bathing story outlined in Chapter 2, José is unable to invent a fiction and looks 'stricken' while San Mao gaily fabricates a story, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 101-102.

⁷² For example in the story of the cursed necklace (discussed in Chapter 3).

⁷³ When San Mao returns to Spain from Taiwan after her German fiancé's death and resumes acquaintance with José, she tells him that her heart is cracked, whereupon he suggests that they should exchange - her cracked one for his heart of solid gold, *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 138.

⁷⁴ The question of romantic love in San Mao's works is an interesting one that deserves more discussion than there is space to give it here. Her earliest stories (published before she became 'San Mao') mostly centre on romantic relationships, and she was an avid reader of the romantic novels by the queen of the Chinese love story, the Taiwan novelist Qiong Yao (*A Horse For You* p. 206). Though romantic love is not the major focus of her later work, biographers give this aspect of her writing a great deal of attention. They also dwell at great length on questions of romantic love in her own life, including childhood fancies and early crushes (Picasso, boys at school and so on) as serious loves of San Mao's early life, hinting at the 'volcano' of her emotions being active early in her life.

de-romanticise her travels, claiming that she was simply living an ordinary life and fulfilling her appointed roles in foreign countries with no romantic ideology of wandering, she presents a de-romanticised view of her life with José, stressing that they are ordinary people⁷⁵ with ordinary lives,⁷⁶ who had an unromantic wedding⁷⁷ and have an unromantic relationship in which they maintain relatively independent lives (José referring to their home as being less like a 'home' than 'a little co-ed dorm'). In this respect, San Mao suggests, they are an unusual couple, with an unusually 'open' marriage.⁷⁸ Biographers Cui and Zhao concur, using the term 'open marriage' to convey that 'they didn't limit each other, but liberated each other's actions

In her own writing about José, serious romantic scenarios give place to irony and playfulness. For example, she describes their decision to marry thus: José asks her, 'How much money do you want your husband to earn?' She replies, 'If I didn't like the look of him, I wouldn't marry him if he was a millionaire; if I liked him, I would marry a multi-millionaire...' 'What if it was me?' 'Then all I'd want is enough money to be able to eat enough'. He thought for a while then asked, 'How much do you eat?' I replied very carefully 'Not much, not much - and I could eat less', *Crying Camels* pp. 221-222. She states also that 'Beardie is not a romantic person'; he displays none of the attributes that her book on body language says a lover should display. His unromantic behaviour is highlighted in connection with a book on romance in marriage (from San Mao's description and examples, the book is likely to be Marabel Morgan's *Total Woman*), in which the author advises women to dress up in costume every day to meet their husbands on their return from work, to give them 'a sense of freshness and novelty' - 'one day as an Arab slave girl, the next day as a pirate, and the day after that as an angel with wings; then the day after that you can become a witch. Only in this way will your husband's face be full of happiness and pleasure when he comes home; all the way home he will be thinking about the past few times and wondering what lovely outfit his darling will have on today'. San Mao describes 'the strange book' to José, suggesting that any man confronted with an angel one day and a pirate the next would run away; without looking up from either his meal or the television, José absently mutters, 'Pirates? I quite like pirates'. He remains oblivious to the ensuing angry glares and accusations of not listening, *Crying Camels* pp. 226-228.

⁷⁵ 'If you ask me to write about what kind of person Beardie is, I can't actually write anything special. There are tens of thousands of people with beards in this world, and they all look much the same from a distance, and there are so many of the one who is called 'me' that you can't count them all, so all I can write is an ordinary account of our everyday life at home, there's nothing new and interesting about it', *Crying Camels* p. 223.

⁷⁶ Before they went to the Sahara and married, for example, San Mao writes that they amused themselves in very ordinary, homely ways: playing baseball together in front of José's house, wandering round second hand markets, making snowmen and sitting on a bench over a subway vent to keep warm on winter nights, *Crying Camels* p. 222.

⁷⁷ San Mao notes that 'We married without the usual vows and sweet nothings of lovers', *Crying Camels* p. 222, and describes a simple wedding to which both she and José wore their everyday denim clothes and sandals, walked 40 minutes to the desert to get there, and at which the court personnel were more moved than the participants, described in *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 29-42. This unromantic presentation evidently caught the imaginations of biographers, who all remark upon the unromantic wedding.

⁷⁸ San Mao characterises their relationship as 'brotherly', and observes that both she and José appreciate solitude, maintaining careful boundaries and not intruding upon the other, wandering around their home doing their own thing and occasionally bumping into each other, *Crying Camels* p. 230. San Mao also reflects that she and José do not match the model of a 'good' 'traditional' marriage but are close to the model for 'bad', 'unsuccessful' ones. 'Talking of "open marriage", you could use that word of our life, and I would be quite satisfied. There is no better definition to seek,' *Crying Camels* p. 234.

and spirits'.⁷⁹ There is obvious tension between San Mao's rhetoric of separateness and respect in her relationship with José and the conservative sexual politics of her presentation of them in 'traditional' gendered roles (José as breadwinner, and she herself labouring at home to create a domestic haven and leisured space for him, allowing him to 'keep' the independence she manufactures for him).⁸⁰ Indeed San Mao notes that she was always careful not to earn more than José, maintaining the fiction of dependence for fear of injuring his manly self-respect.⁸¹ This tension has earned San Mao the title of 'old-fashioned new woman'.⁸² She did not claim to be 'in the feminist movement'⁸³ and admitted that she had always been inclined to value men over women (*zhongnan qingnü*);⁸⁴ on the other hand, she notes also that she was never the 'worthy wife, good mother' (*xianqi liangmu*) stereotype⁸⁵ - and she was certainly regarded by readers as an independent, unconventional woman for the life she described in the Sahara Desert.

Many of San Mao's views about marriage and how wives should behave are expressed in the lengthy story of José's friend Miguel and Betty, the woman he marries.⁸⁶ Unlike San Mao, Betty is a lazy housewife and a less than competent cook; she does not make enough effort to provide sufficiently lavish hospitality for her

⁷⁹ Cui and Zhao p. 133; they suggest, however, that José was the main beneficiary ('José kept his independence after marriage'). San Mao's use of the term 'open marriage' seems more to do with behaving in a polite and undemanding manner towards José, but Cui and Zhao appear to interpret it to mean a tolerance of other relationships, and suggest that San Mao's marriage was not as 'open' as she claimed it to be. They cite the story of Mina, the beautiful young woman in the Sahara who would dress up and come seeking José, whereupon San Mao would urge him to 'think of her as a mirage'. Despite the irony of San Mao's presentation of the anecdote, Cui and Zhao take it to indicate that San Mao's marriage is not really 'open' and that she herself is only 'open and tolerant' in certain circumstances, Cui and Zhao pp. 133-135.

⁸⁰ 'Rationally speaking', she notes, 'most men are sent out to earn money, and the woman stays at home and cooks', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 117.

⁸¹ San Mao wrote that she always wanted to defer to José's manhood by not earning more than him; this was confirmed by an associate of San Mao's interviewed by me in 1995.

⁸² Pan p. 97.

⁸³ *Crying Camels* p. 223. She notes, however, that while she does not claim to be a feminist and José claims not to have any excessive male pride, these statements may not be true in practice.

⁸⁴ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 124.

⁸⁵ *Crying Camels* pp. 223-224.

⁸⁶ At the beginning of the story, Miguel is as close to José as a brother; they did military service together, work together and have shared interests. When José goes to live in the Sahara, he finds a job for Miguel too. Miguel will not allow his girlfriend, Betty, to suffer the hardships of the desert so she remains in Spain. When San Mao leaves the desert and settles in the Canary Islands, José and Miguel stay in the Sahara to work, spending weekends in the Canaries; Miguel still does not think he has amassed enough money or status to give Betty a comfortable life, and still does not encourage Betty to join him. One day San Mao receives a letter from Betty expressing the 'pain and helplessness' of her long separation from Miguel; she shows the letter to Miguel and encourages him to marry Betty quickly. Miguel leaves for Spain to propose to Betty, and San Mao finds a house in their suburb for her to live in and Miguel to visit at weekends, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 109-116.

husband's friends;⁸⁷ she is parsimonious;⁸⁸ and she fails to make herself attractive, keeping her hair in rollers, always wearing an old shirt, and allowing herself to put on weight. Worse, she is clinging, possessive and controlling, and her behaviour has, in San Mao's view, diminished Miguel into nothing more than her passive shadow, a mere cipher who has lost his identity and personality, a husk called 'Betty's husband'.⁸⁹ San Mao's own philosophy of 'allowing' José to be independent and of manipulating his 'contrary' nature, on the other hand, has supposedly preserved José's personality intact. When she is asked by a Taiwan magazine to contribute an article on 'My other half', José objects that he is a whole in himself and not half of anything (with which San Mao wholeheartedly agrees, adding that she herself is whole too).⁹⁰

San Mao's skills in cooking, housekeeping, hospitality and careful manipulation of familial relationships are demonstrated not only with José but with his family as well. A long and humorous story describes San Mao's first visit to José's parents after their marriage; it is somewhat reminiscent of 'The West Doesn't Know How to

⁸⁷ As San Mao and José had extended regular hospitality to Miguel for years, San Mao expects a dinner invitation to his new home, but it is three months before Betty invites them in return. They arrive for lunch to find that Betty is not yet up; she asks them to go home and return later; when they return there is still no food prepared; and San Mao notes disapprovingly that it is Miguel who is doing the household laundry. San Mao and José are chagrined to discover how little food Betty has prepared, and San Mao is also disapproving that Miguel leaps up immediately after the meal to wash up. Continual comparisons are made to her own hard work to entertain José's guests by cooking lavishly and washing up. On the way home, José thanks San Mao 'because you don't just give your husband enough to eat - you don't forget to feed his friends as well'. San Mao plainly expects that Betty will look after Miguel and Miguel will take no part in domestic work, and she feels 'apologetic' towards Miguel for having encouraged him to marry Betty, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 117-120.

⁸⁸ Even when José resigns his job in the desert because of the dangers in the desert, Betty is reluctant to 'allow' Miguel to quit because she wishes to save for the future. 'Is having no savings more to be feared than losing your husband?' wonders San Mao. As José cannot find further employment, he and San Mao spend their time fishing and start eating only one meal a day; even so, Betty asks for much of the fish they catch and they regularly pick her up to take her shopping. When Miguel returns from the desert Betty feeds him nothing but 'the simplest of baked fish'; though he is reluctant to return to the Sahara, Betty insists; when José and San Mao arrive to take him to the airport, Betty does not accompany them to see Miguel off; she even takes possession of the money Miguel was planning to take with him. 'But I can't get on the plane without a cent', he protests; 'I'll be there 7 days; you can't not give me any money!' 'Your dorm provides board and meals', replies Betty; 'what do you need money for?' San Mao objects to many things about Betty: her bourgeois plans for the future (the block of flats they would live in, what colour wallpaper she will buy for the bedroom); her lack of effort with her appearance; her dominion over Miguel's pay packet and her parsimonious ways, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 121-124.

⁸⁹ Betty constantly refers to Miguel as 'my husband'; and when they go out walking she insists on clinging to him with both hands and is angry when he wanders away. When he meets José, he simply lowers his head and 'listens to Betty speaking for him'; so diminished is he, suggests San Mao, that he does not even cast a shadow any more, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 125-126. The story ends with San Mao telling José that 'Miguel's gone; he died the day he married Betty'. 'So who', asks José, 'is that man standing there?' 'His name isn't Miguel', replies San Mao, 'he is called Betty's husband', *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 127-128.

⁹⁰ *Crying Camels* p. 222.

Behave' in that it is based on a rhetoric of enmity. In the European dorm, the adversary was 'devils' who did not treat San Mao well but who were conquered in the end by her assertiveness; here, the adversary is 'the enemy of the mind', the mother-in-law, who does not treat San Mao well but is won over by her persona of thoughtfulness, service and domesticity - in other words, by her perfection as a daughter-in-law.

The story is addressed to all daughters-in-law, who are likened to the biblical Eve as temptresses who have lured the beloved son away from home.⁹¹ José is characterised as the biblical Peter, failing to support San Mao against his mother and thus denying her three times. The mother-in-law herself is not a benevolent mother like Mary the mother of Jesus or a merciful being like Guanyin⁹² but an enemy ('your mother-in-law hates you with all her heart...there's no mistake, she hates you; she is Enemy-of-the-Mind No. 1')⁹³ against whom the daughter-in-law must employ her most subtle strategies to prevail. San Mao herself is implicitly cast as Jesus - serving others, suffering, misunderstood, wrongly judged.⁹⁴

Dear Mother-in-law

For the first six months after her marriage in the Sahara, claims San Mao, she was already a dutiful member of José's family and a perfect daughter-in-law at long distance, writing to her parents-in-law every week as well as taking exemplary care of their son.⁹⁵ Her mother-in-law has not written a word back. When José announces that they are to visit his parents at Christmas,⁹⁶ San Mao begins to consider her strategy for dealing with her mother-in-law, the 'most dangerous enemy' of any daughter-in-law: 'a formidable person who hates you to death...full of brilliant

⁹¹ Any readers who are loved by their mothers-in-law are told that they need not read on, as San Mao's experiences have nothing in common with theirs, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 35-36.

⁹² *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 35.

⁹³ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 38.

⁹⁴ As noted in Chapter 3, San Mao herself is characterised as Jesus in *The World of San Mao* (though as a saving rather than suffering figure). Earlier in the story, San Mao constructs José as Jesus, noting that when she told her parents of her marriage, her father replied, 'like the Christian heavenly father, "This is my beloved son. Obey him"', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 33.

⁹⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 35. Her father-in-law, on the other hand, did return her letters and 'loved me as he loved José', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 35. It should be noted that San Mao was known to José's parents before she married him in the desert.

⁹⁶ 'It's nearly Christmas', he says, 'we should go home and see mother'. 'Which mother?' asks San Mao eagerly, 'yours or mine?' 'Ours', replies José, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 36. The son returns happily to the bosom of his family, she notes - but the daughter-in-law is full of dread, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 38.

tricks'.⁹⁷ There is no freedom for the daughter-in-law under the enemy's roof, warns San Mao; 'she has a grudge against you but won't tell you, so you must make your own hypothesis and look carefully for evidence';⁹⁸ 'there are traps everywhere' and the daughter-in-law must be 'wary and never careless'.⁹⁹ However perfectly she behaves, the hapless daughter-in-law will never gain her mother-in-law's favour. All she can do is acknowledge the 'crimes' she has committed against her husband's family by 'abducting him' and marrying him, and prepare herself for combat against the 'enemy of the mind'.¹⁰⁰

The cleanliness and neatness of the mother-in-law's home is evidence of the enemy's 'first class combat skills',¹⁰¹ and the competitive exercise of domestic skills is San Mao's major battle strategy. The skills and strategies developed for dealing with European bullying in Chapter 4 are not called upon here, where the enemy is a family member who has the power to influence José and his relationship with San Mao. Rather than asserting herself against the enemy, she chooses a position of outward humility and service ('Chinese meekness') while inwardly maintaining a mocking and satirical attitude - and prevails gloriously.

Since any failure on the part of the daughter-in-law to abase herself within the family will be an advantage to 'the enemy', she must exert herself to the utmost in order to outdo her mother-in-law in concern for the family and domestic labour. She must get up first in the morning and 'clean the house thoroughly and beautifully';¹⁰² she must sweep floors, make beds, shop, clean the kitchen, cook, serve the meals and wash up, bring in the washing and do all of the ironing.¹⁰³ She must not take a siesta as others in the family do; after her day's labours, she must leave her husband and his mother alone together and not attempt to join in their conversation;¹⁰⁴ and she

⁹⁷ *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 38-39. At the outset of the story, San Mao hints at difficulties and disharmonies in José's family apart from her own conflict with the inimical mother-in-law, suggesting that José's parents are not sympathetic people to whom one would wish to tell things (unlike her own parents). Of their 5 married children not one had discussed their plans with them - possibly, San Mao suggests, because they are too strict, conservative and autocratic, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 34.

⁹⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 40.

⁹⁹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ 'The original sin was mine; how could I blame her for hating me?' sighs San Mao, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 51. The guilty daughter-in-law, she advises, must begin by saying, 'Father, mother, I have done something very wrong that I must apologise to you for. Please forgive me'. She must note the importance of saying 'I' and not 'we', as 'their son has been abducted, he is innocent', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 39.

¹⁰¹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 40.

¹⁰² She must get out of bed the minute she hears her mother-in-law stirring in the morning, and immediately take up cloth and broom and 'do it all first', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 41.

¹⁰³ *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 43, 31.

¹⁰⁴ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 43.

must on no account antagonise her mother-in-law by expressing the wish to go out and have some fun.¹⁰⁵ The daughter-in-law should also be prepared for her husband's partiality towards his family and neglect of her.¹⁰⁶ All she can do is accept it and devote herself to serving them all.

The decisive battle takes place over Christmas dinner, when her mother-in-law invites the extended family (thirty-seven people)¹⁰⁷ to a Chinese meal, to be cooked by San Mao: 'This year it's the new bride's turn to cook Christmas dinner. We want sweet and sour pork, stir-fried vegetables, chicken in soy sauce'.¹⁰⁸ Here is the ultimate test both of San Mao's service to José's family and of José's loyalty to San Mao. José fails; he 'changes his name to Peter'¹⁰⁹ and denies her three times: first by accepting without protest his mother's promise of a Chinese banquet cooked by San Mao single-handedly for 37 people;¹¹⁰ second by refusing to help her with the shopping as it is 'women's work',¹¹¹ and third, by celebrating with his family and taking no notice of her after she has toiled all day to produce their Christmas meal.¹¹²

San Mao herself does not fail. The Christmas dinner task, she states, is to be welcomed by the daughter-in-law with happiness, for it is 'an opportunity to display your strength before the imaginary enemy' with extreme service, self-denial and humility.¹¹³ She cooks all day while the rest of the family take their ease, then serves them with a lengthy procession of dishes.¹¹⁴ When at last her father-in-law expresses

¹⁰⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 42-43. She should also avoid any display of either affection or criticism towards her husband.

¹⁰⁷ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 44. The whole family is delighted - except, of course, the unfortunate daughter-in-law.

¹⁰⁹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 4

¹¹⁰ José does not even look up from the detective story he is reading when his mother promises that San Mao will cook a Chinese banquet for everyone; only then, she notes, does the daughter-in-law realise that 'before the cock crows your beloved husband will deny you 3 times, just like Peter the disciple of Jesus', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 45.

¹¹¹ San Mao gets up early to shop for 'this whole army of people'; she asks José, who is still in bed, if he will come and help her carry the huge quantities of food she must buy. 'You go', he replies, 'men don't go to market', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 45.

¹¹² 'Don't forget', San Mao reminds herself and other daughters-in-law, 'that the Bible says that Peter made 3 denials, and then after cockcrow his conscience awoke and he wept. And Jesus looked at him lovingly, and didn't curse him. So don't you curse either; José will go and weep too. Daybreak hasn't come yet!', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 47.

¹¹³ 'The game isn't over yet... You can't see who has won until it is over; don't give up yet... where else is there such an opportunity to display your strength before your imaginary enemy? You are not weak; you are no less capable than her. This is a good chance to deflate your mother-in-law and show your own mettle - and if you don't go on the offensive this time, when will you? ... your physical weakness is temporary, but your spiritual victory will be eternal', *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁴ 'The food is on the table at last, dish after dish. 36 people are all eating happily and sociably. You, the newlywed, have been forgotten, of course', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 47.

appreciation and toasts her with champagne, the daughter-in-law must show no pleasure and take no notice. On the contrary, she must collect up the dirty dishes and withdraw modestly to the kitchen to wash up - for the mother-in-law 'has worked hard all her life with never a word of praise from your father-in-law, and today he's praising you!'¹¹⁵

Yet even after having gloriously surmounted the ordeal of Christmas, there is no reward or rest for the daughter-in-law. San Mao would like to visit her former house-mates in Madrid, but she cannot absent herself from José's family for even a single afternoon without causing offence.¹¹⁶ The booking for San Mao and José's return to the Sahara is altered without San Mao being consulted;¹¹⁷ and each female family member in turn (4 sisters and 2 aunts) demands that she teach them how to cook Chinese food. The remaining time in Madrid, therefore, is spent giving cooking lessons.¹¹⁸ San Mao is still awaiting the time when José, like Peter, will repent and weep bitterly - but he does not.¹¹⁹ On the contrary, he adds further insult to the injury of his three denials by chiding her for failing to appreciate his family:

'They love you so much, more than I ever expected, and you're still not satisfied! Look, they eat that mush you make every day, and they don't utter a word of complaint - and now you are repaying their goodness with evil, you woman without a conscience!'¹²⁰

José's unreasonableness and ingratitude will supposedly meet retribution (after 'Peter' has repented, he will be martyred by crucifixion)¹²¹ but his mother's must simply be endured - such as when she hands San Mao a Spanish cookbook as a late Christmas present,¹²² with the words, 'You must learn to make western food too. José is very thin; you have to give him local [Spanish] food at the proper times'.¹²³

The provision of food, a significant arena for the battle between daughter-in-law and enemy throughout the story, is at the centre of San Mao's final display of moral superiority based on humility. Observing the increasing sadness of her 'enemy' at the

¹¹⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 47-48.

¹¹⁶ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 48.

¹¹⁷ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 49.

¹¹⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 49.

¹¹⁹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 49.

¹²⁰ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 50.

¹²¹ 'Peter, Peter, don't forget - you'll die a cruel death crucified upside down in days' to come', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 50.

¹²² San Mao, of course, has given her mother-in-law a beautiful Saharan bedspread in time for Christmas; this is marked down as another victory to the daughter-in-law: 'you got in first and showed your strength', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 50.

¹²³ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 51. San Mao feigns gratitude for the gift: 'Don't forget the details of your foreign politeness! When you have opened it in front of her, praise it to the skies and thank her as if you're terribly moved', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 50.

prospect of José's return to the Sahara, she suggests to her that José should treat the whole family to lunch at Madrid's best seafood restaurant (paid for, of course, with San Mao's own money).¹²⁴ The family gathers in the restaurant accordingly, producing 'a perfect picture of family harmony' - with the exception, of course, of the 'grey-faced' daughter-in-law.¹²⁵ As they all eat plentifully of the expensive seafood delicacies, San Mao thinks sadly of the new clothes she could have bought but will not be able to afford because of the expense of this meal.¹²⁶ In a final triumph of virtue, however, she remarks that the exchange is far from unequal, for she has gained José as her part of the bargain.¹²⁷

When at last it is time to return to the Sahara, San Mao feels a rush of guilt; seeing the 'snow and ice' in her mother-in-law's face, she remembers that she herself is, after all, 'the criminal who came into the Quero home'. To her astonishment, however, her mother-in-law falls upon her with tearful embraces. 'Daughter!', she cries in a voice trembling with emotion, 'come back soon! The desert is too harsh! Your home is here! I misunderstood you; now Mum loves you!'¹²⁸ As José prises them apart San Mao finds herself weeping. 'I had finally killed my enemy of the mind', she concludes.¹²⁹

This story has been interpreted by San Mao's biographers as a narrative of 'the oriental woman'. San Mao, they suggest,

wanted to take the opportunity of being with her parents-in-law to dispel the strangeness of the whole family towards her by means of the gentleness and meekness of an oriental woman.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ 'Mother, while we've been here at home you have been working too hard. Why not let your son take you out to eat seafood today? Father, brothers and sisters - the whole family can all go out, would you like that?' As José's parents are not very well off and rarely go out to eat, they accept with delight. San Mao notes the importance of making the offer sound sincere - which can be done by pretending that she is talking to her own mother and not José's, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 51-52.

¹²⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 52.

¹²⁶ '...imagine carefully, the new clothes you wanted...are now all here on the table, and they are eating your new clothes - a button, a zip, a piece of red cloth, a sleeve, and now they are eating a belt', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 52.

¹²⁷ 'Add it up: your mother-in-law carried your good husband for 9 months, and gave him his body and life. How much money did she spend slaving for 20 years or so to bring him up?...Look at José again. Just by buying this table full of seafood, you get this lovely young man. Is this paying, or is it earning?' *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 52-53.

¹²⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 55.

¹²⁹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 56. San Mao's parting gesture is to give some of her clothes to José's sister (this too is seen as an exchange - if San Mao were to die, leaving an orphan child, perhaps José's sister will take care of it. She notes that, when she and José arrived from the Sahara, no one came to the airport to meet them, and José's family do not assemble when they leave either. No one offers a lift to the airport; and José's father goes for a walk rather than seeing them off, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 54.

¹³⁰ Lu, Yang and Sun p. 249.

When her mother-in-law discouraged her from going out in the evening,¹³¹

she did not argue; she exhorted herself again and again to be docile, polite; those are the virtues of an oriental woman...she gave a thorough display of the virtues of an oriental woman.¹³²

San Mao wins over her mother-in-law by enacting virtues of filiality, thoughtfulness, service and concern within her European family. The ironic tone of her narrative of 'combat' with the 'enemy' on the battlefield of virtuous housewifery and feminine subservience suggests a self-consciously humorous view of these virtues and of herself as the perfect daughter-in-law - but in the end sentiment prevails. Despite the distance between herself and her mother-in-law they are both shown to be moved by genuine emotion as they part.¹³³

Thus the narrative of 'oriental woman' is added to 'faithful daughter of China' (discussed in Chapter 4). The latter won respect from a generalised Europe through assertiveness; the former wins familial love through gentleness.¹³⁴ The figure of the suffering daughter-in-law at the hands of her mother-in-law offering filial duty towards her husband's family is a familiar theme in Chinese literature. Indeed San Mao's story of 'the imaginary enemy' refers to classic books of instruction about appropriate female and familial behaviour - but only to reject them as counter-productive.¹³⁵ It is, rather, the literature of adventure and battle that she recommends to daughters-in-law as useful sources of strategies for dealing with mothers-in-law.¹³⁶ Yet her battle strategy is not one of aggression but one of service. Outwardly she displays 'Chinese meekness; and female familial virtue; inwardly she is assertive and confident. She explicitly chooses meekness from a position of strength: she is the equal of her 'enemy' and will not be cowed by her; she never lets her get the upper hand; she beats her at her own games (of housekeeping and familial duty); she wins

¹³¹ When San Mao asks permission to go out with José for a while, her mother-in-law replies that she has been out that day already - apparently perceiving no difference between a night out with José and grocery shopping, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 44.

¹³² Lu, Yang and Sun p. 250.

¹³³ The only duty that San Mao does not perform for José's parents is provide them with grandchildren. In later stories, San Mao hints at not having been able to conceive; biographers likewise suggest that she was prevented from motherhood by gynecological illness.

¹³⁴ It might be noted that Gu is a PRC writer, while Lu, Yang and Sun are from Taiwan.

¹³⁵ *The Classic of Filial Women* (Xiaonü jing) and *Zhu Xi's Family Instructions* (Zhu Xi Jiali, referred to as Zhuzi Jiaxun by San Mao), *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 41.

¹³⁶ For example, Sunzi's *Art of War*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (the classic of battle strategy) and *The Water Margin* (a story of outlaws). San Mao also refers to *The Journey to the West* (in which the monk Xuanzang and his companions journey to India to bring back Buddhist sutras, encountering all kinds of supernatural difficulties on the way) and *The Story of the Stone* (a classic novel of life in a large household characterised by corruption, scheming and deceit, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 41).

her admiration and affection; and she is magnanimous in victory. A later story of José's family - when they come to visit San Mao and José in the Canary Islands - continues the theme of unreasonable behaviour on the part of José's family, and shows San Mao continuing in her unstinting labours on their behalf.¹³⁷

In her initial encounter with Europe, San Mao noted the importance of not being 'an undefended city'. The same notion is invoked in the encounter with José's mother: 'As a guest in your mother-in-law's house, do not be a city without defences. Even though you are a guest, do not forget that you are also a daughter-in-law'.¹³⁸ The references to citizenship, discussion of crimes, reference to herself as a lawyer's daughter who knows how legal systems work and invocation of parental advice in the 'imaginary enemy' story are also reminiscent of the earlier story;¹³⁹ and there is even a hint of the diplomacy theme in her reference to José as 'the head of foreign affairs'.¹⁴⁰

San Mao characterises her method of dealing with her mother-in-law as 'overcoming hard by soft'¹⁴¹ - that is by showing a greater level of humility and virtue. In later stories of Europe - written after she had left the desert and was resident in the Canary Islands - San Mao displays a similar way of interacting with the Europeans around her, placing her concern and practical care at the service of her European neighbours. The humorous tone of the story of 'battle' with the mother-in-law is abandoned, and San Mao's 'softness' is shown without irony to overcome European 'hardness' again and again. In Chapter 3, San Mao's playful philanthropy

¹³⁷ After the story of the Christmas visit to the 'enemy of the mind', José's family reappear when they descend upon San Mao and José en masse as soon as they have settled in the Canary Islands. With no thought for the inconvenience, his parents, siblings and their children come to stay; San Mao and José have themselves only just arrived in the Canaries and have no source of income, but they are expected to provide hospitality for this large group of relatives whose only interest is duty-free shopping. As in the earlier story, San Mao cooks and cleans for them, drives them where they wish to go, and entertains them, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 157-186.

¹³⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 41.

¹³⁹ 'Because I grew up in a family that was involved with the law, I learned young; I have seen every kind of criminal behaviour. In addition, my parents - both first class virtuous people - often warned me, 'When you're dealing with people outside, value yourself and reflect upon yourself...think about other people's situation, and only thus can you be a good citizen of the world'...After marriage I often examined myself, made criticisms of myself and enumerated in detail the crimes I had committed as daughter-in-law of the Quero family. Adding them up, it was amazing - civil, criminal, theft, fraud, avarice, abduction, abuse, damage, obstructing the family and so on, all these unforgivable crimes', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 37. In the earlier story, 'My experiences in Europe', she repeatedly asks the custodial policeman to tell her what crime she is supposed to have committed (*The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 124); threatens to sue the immigration bureau (p. 124); reiterates that she is not a criminal (p. 126); and proudly announces that she comes from a family of lawyers (p. 134).

¹⁴⁰ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 36.

¹⁴¹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 48.

towards Sahrawi was discussed in connection with 'civilising missions'. As she cares for old, young, sick, impoverished and distressed people in Europe, demonstrating a more comprehensive range of virtues that win not only the respect but also the affection of Europe, San Mao could be said to be enacting a superior 'civilisation' among the Europeans - a Chinese civilisation, characterised by a series of 'Chinese virtues' which San Mao brings to Europe. These encompass 'traditional' Confucian virtues such as appropriate behaviour and etiquette (*liyi*), kindness (*ren'ai*), filial respect (*zhongxiao*) and a sense of shame (*lianchi*), and their more modern counterparts of warmth (*reqing*), attentiveness (*zhoudao*), consideration (*titie*), charitableness (*enci*), forbearance (*renrang*) and magnanimity (*huoda*).¹⁴² They are also the virtues of 'the nation of courtesy and righteousness' (*liyi zhi bang*) that citizens of the Republic of China were to practise and which would distinguish 'Chinese culture' and win it respect from the world (noted in Chapter 4). In addition, they are the qualities of 'spiritual civilisation' (*jingshen wenming*) promoted by government campaigns in the People's Republic of China through the 1980s and 1990s. San Mao displays 'excellent character' (*youliang pinde*) in all respects; her stories show her abounding in that quality that many individuals in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s (when San Mao's books appeared) articulated as disappearing in their own society: the feeling of warmth between people (*renqingwei*); and her narratives of 'Chinese civilisation' in Europe also encapsulate what was regarded as 'appropriate sentiment' (*qingdiao*).

Thus the stories of San Mao's behaviour in Europe can be regarded as fulfilling official ideals of conduct for both Taiwan and the mainland and exhibiting 'Chinese virtue', ancient and modern - not only to the obscure and supposedly 'backward' people of the Saharan sand dunes but also to the powerful political and cultural world of Europe. San Mao constructs the Europeans around her as being in need of help, and herself as providing it. Just as in the Sahara, she creates a narrative of helpfulness, of supplying what is lacking, of presenting a good Chinese example of charitable and 'civilised' behaviour. The playful irony of San Mao's stories of ministering to Sahrawi needs is, for the most part, gone.¹⁴³ Caring for Europeans is a more serious affair, with San Mao's persona as heroine unambiguously enacting virtues of service, goodness and self-sacrifice and perfecting the humaneness and

¹⁴² I thank Geremie Barmé for his help in compiling this list of virtues.

¹⁴³ Ironic passages such as her claims not to want to get to know her neighbours and her remarks about the uselessness of elderly people (as in *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 93-108, where her words are contradicted by her actions) are the exception here.

charity that should distinguish a 'true daughter of China' and an 'oriental woman'. In other words, San Mao brings the skills of a Chinese daughter-in-law to Europe.

A European community

Most of San Mao's stories of caring for Europeans are set in the Canary Islands, where (as noted above) she and José settled after fleeing the Sahara.¹⁴⁴ In her Gran Canaria community, most of her neighbours are northern Europeans, elderly and very well off, who have retired to the island to escape the cold northern winters. San Mao's claimed mastery of several European languages enables her to be 'at home' in this northern European enclave in a colonial territory of Spain, communicating freely in German and English as well as Spanish. Indeed, it is suggested, San Mao belongs there in a way that Spanish José does not; she presents him grumbling about the 'foreigners' in the Canaries who don't speak Spanish (a Swedish landlord, a Danish 'district officer', a Finnish carpenter)¹⁴⁵ with whom San Mao can communicate and he cannot. 'What a joke', he expostulates; 'these people are living on Spanish territory and they dare go without learning Spanish! How arrogant!...it's as if I'm living in a foreign country!'¹⁴⁶ Their neighbourhood, he complains, is 'a colony of blonds' where the strange inhabitants have the temerity to ask him why he does not speak English;¹⁴⁷ and he is not displeased to learn from his Spanish compatriot at the post office that the postman refuses to deliver letters to the district where he and San Mao live because 'there are so many foreigners'.¹⁴⁸ San Mao stands up for the members of the 'foreign' colony who are denied mail delivery,¹⁴⁹ and the post office man assures her that she will get proper Spanish service as 'your husband is one of us' (*tongbao*).¹⁵⁰ Characterised thus as not 'one of us', she wonders aloud how 'there could be such an unpleasant foreign race in the world' that

¹⁴⁴ They settle first in a seaside suburb of Gran Canaria. After a month there, José has not found work and returns to his old job in the Sahara, spending weekends with San Mao in Gran Canaria; soon after, however, he resigns (because of the dangerous situation in the desert and the fact that San Mao is injured in a traffic accident) and returns permanently to the Canaries (*Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 93-108). Some time later they move to Tenerife, and shortly before his death they live briefly in La Palma. As in the desert, she devotes considerable effort to the creation of a tasteful domestic space around herself in the Canaries - and, as with her El Ayoun home, the decor of her beachside house in a quiet suburb in Gran Canaria has become part of her legend.

¹⁴⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 93-94.

¹⁴⁶ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 94.

¹⁴⁷ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 95.

¹⁴⁸ The mail is sent to the 'district office'; residents can sort through it there and pick out their own, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 94.

¹⁴⁹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 95.

¹⁵⁰ 'Don't worry, even if you didn't have a PO box we would bring your letters to your house. Your husband is one of us (*tongbao*), we only deliver letters for compatriots', *Diary of a Scarecrow*.

could scorn foreign tourists in such a manner: 'If you hate foreigners, Spain will starve'.¹⁵¹ It is not tourists who are the problem, however; it is those who dare to stay long-term:

'If tourists come for a while and then leave again, that's fine, of course. But in places like where you live, foreigners come and form into a district; they stay for ages and don't leave. That's what I can't stand'.¹⁵²

San Mao distances herself from Spanish 'anti-foreign' attitudes not only by her argument with the clerk but also by her actions in serving her community. A long-term 'foreign' resident such as herself may be regarded with suspicion by Spanish 'locals' in Gran Canaria, but proves a valuable presence among the other Europeans who surround her. San Mao thus serves again as a bridge between locals and expatriates. In the Sahara she moved between and formed links between natives and colonisers; in the Canaries she takes on the same function for expatriates and locals.

Unlike her Sahrawi neighbours in El Ayoun, her Gran Canaria neighbours are people with education, with a wide range of choices about their lives, and with the financial resources to live wherever they like. As noted above, her caring behaviour towards these European neighbours is contrasted not with childishness, irresponsibility and ignorance on their part (as in the Sahara) but with coldness, selfishness and a lack of concern for others. In many cases, the behaviour of her neighbours in the Canaries backs up her assertion in 'How the West Was Won' that northern Europeans have cold natures (noted in Chapter 4).¹⁵³ The giving is almost entirely on San Mao's side - and thus - just as in the desert - reciprocity does not eventuate.¹⁵⁴ It is it is perhaps precisely this failure of reciprocity, this one-sided giving, that establishes her superiority to the community around her. In Chapter 4, as noted, we saw San Mao rejecting strategies of servility and then of aggression as ways of dealing with European people; now, her behaviour is apparently based on a choice to serve, to be full of neighbourly concern and actively involved whenever people around her need help. By taking initiative to look after those who need help, she establishes herself as a moral being who does what is right, even at considerable inconvenience or expense to herself - and thus she wins by means of service. Thus 'Chinese breeding' is perfected through San Mao's compassion and practical help to her European neighbours, friends and acquaintances.

¹⁵¹ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 95.

¹⁵² *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 95.

¹⁵³ Spanish people, it will be recalled, were constructed as warmer and more caring.

¹⁵⁴ The things that San Mao claims to have received from Europe (namely examples of certain qualities she feels are worthy of emulation) will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The neighbours in San Mao's immediate community are portrayed as particularly in need of care. 'Most of the people living in our district', notes San Mao,

are old or disabled. Their foreign houses may be pretty but they have no relatives here. Old northern Europeans come here to retire, and young wives bring their children and live alone here - their husbands are often working in Europe and never come back.¹⁵⁵

Becoming involved with her neighbours and taking part in community activities, San Mao helps address the problems of isolation and loneliness in her community. There are parallels with the Sahara here. In El Ayoun, San Mao provided things that her neighbours did not receive from any other source - things which either the government did not provide for them or they were prevented from taking by their supposed conservatism, superstition and foolishness. In Gran Canaria, San Mao likewise provides things that are unavailable from any other source - which the government does not provide for the 'foreigners' living in their midst (such as a bus service)¹⁵⁶ or market capitalism has left people without (such as affordable health care), or which people are prevented by infirmity or language barriers from taking. She also aids those living among the rich who are poor.

In the desert San Mao criticised systems that disadvantaged certain sections of society (for example the Spanish condoning of slave-owning); in the Canaries she expresses her disapproval of a system that discriminates against non-Spanish residents. Yet the 'foreigners' who are left without government services in the Canaries, unlike the Sahrawi in the desert, know how to take adult responsibility and help themselves. San Mao praises their community efforts to arrange mail delivery, sweep the streets, organise entertainment and so on. But although the community of Europeans in San Mao's suburb can pull together for the common good - that is, where personal as well as communal benefit will result - it will not act to help those who are disadvantaged. This leaves San Mao as sole benefactor to those around her who suffer; others in this community of Europeans (who, like the Europeans of the German dorm, apparently lack 'a sense of justice') would rather not become involved.

Thus San Mao again presents herself as a helpful and caring asset to her community in a foreign country, a civilising presence willing to be involved with others and to address herself to their needs - for medicine, knowledge and transport.

¹⁵⁵ *Diary of a Scarecrow*. Thus the standard family model for Europeans in San Mao's community is a 'dysfunctional' one, with absent fathers; Sahrawi families in the desert were also perceived as 'dysfunctional' for their marriage customs.

¹⁵⁶ San Mao's narratives disagree about the availability of bus transport; she states that there is no bus service to her suburb, but on another occasion gives a lift to her neighbours ('an old German couple') to save them waiting for the bus, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 100.

As noted, the aspects of play and fun manifested in San Mao's 'mission' to the 'exotic' Sahrawi are largely absent in her stories of ministering to this European community. Instead, San Mao takes on a quasi-familial sense of responsibility, sacrificing herself for other Europeans just as she did for José's family and serving every generation: older relatives, her own peers and younger siblings - and even pets.

The stories of her involvement in the lives of Charlie, Daniel, Chris and Paloma show San Mao caring for the sick, extending practical care to them when no one else will, and thus showing herself behaving rightly and virtuously in her European community.¹⁵⁷

Charlie

There are analogies between the story of Charlie and the story of the slave in the Sahara. The object of San Mao's concern is again a man with whom there are communication difficulties so she cannot converse freely, to whom no one else is willing to show kindness, and for whom she does her best in a difficult situation. Again, however, circumstances destroy what she has tried to establish (the slave is sold; Charlie dies). As in the slave story, an explicit contrast is drawn between San Mao's kindness and the indifference of everyone else around her.

Charlie's story ('Death of a stranger') begins with San Mao and José's arrival in their new house in Gran Canaria. The house next door is shut up and apparently empty, but after some time they discover that an elderly Swedish man is living there behind the closed curtains and windows. His name is Charlie; he is isolated by illness and by the fact that he knows no Spanish or English (he and San Mao communicate in German, which he understands but cannot speak). This 'scary Swede', a 'devil-like old man', has little to recommend him; he is 'about several centuries old, with lots of wrinkles; he stinks and his place is a mess, and he is lame'.¹⁵⁸ Yet San Mao finds herself indignantly defending this unappealing old stranger against the negative judgments of a Danish neighbour:

'Ah! That's old Charlie, he's been living there for almost 2 years. He doesn't have anything to do with anyone'.

'He can't walk' I gently contradicted this middle-aged Danish woman.

'That's his business. He could get a wheelchair'.

'His house has so many steps, he couldn't get down them in a chair'.

¹⁵⁷ It might be noted that San Mao's self-presentation as a serious, caring citizen of the world community takes place at the time that European countries had chosen to recognise the People's Republic of China rather than the Republic of China, and Taiwan lost the Chinese seat in the United Nations to the People's Republic of China.

¹⁵⁸ *Crying Camels* p. 204

'San Mao, it's none of our business. I get annoyed when I see someone pitiful like this. What can you do for him? And we're not a charity...He could go into an old people's home in Sweden, but he insists on setting his sights on this island where he doesn't know anyone'.

'It's not cold here. He has his reasons', I said in argument, then left.¹⁵⁹

The indifference shown by the Danish woman here is echoed by other Europeans throughout the story; indeed European indifference becomes an ongoing theme. Meanwhile, however, San Mao is worried that there is no sign of life from next door and wonders 'how he sustained his invalid life'; she decides to take him some food and check how he is. She is appalled by the squalid and filthy condition of his house (described in some detail), and finds that the old man's mind is confused and he is unable to recognise her. San Mao takes immediate charge of him and his affairs: she airs and cleans the house¹⁶⁰ and, finding a roll of Swedish banknotes under his pillow, offers to open a bank account for him and administer it on his behalf. Though the old man nods, San Mao cannot be sure that he understands as she counts his money and promises to cook for him and air his house regularly. In addition to his mental confusion, the old man has a badly festering ulcerated foot. José suggests that they notify Charlie's family of his poor state of health (assuming from a photograph by his bed that he has five sons and possibly still a wife); though San Mao does not believe that his family would care ('If his family were willing to look after him, he wouldn't be here'), she decides to visit the Swedish consulate the following day to arrange for them to be contacted. Even as they speak, flies gather on Charlie's injured foot as if 'eating a slowly rotting corpse', and he begins to weep. It is clear to San Mao that he must be taken to hospital, but she does not wish to take any further responsibility for him. Deciding that Charlie's compatriots in the area will be best able to help him, she seeks out a neighbouring Swedish woman.

Having explained that Charlie is old, ill and alone, and that language difficulties prevent her from giving him all the help he needs, San Mao asks the other woman to visit him and find out if he has health insurance or any relatives who could come and look after him. The Swedish woman calmly refuses. 'Oh. That's nothing to do with me', she says; 'Go into town and ask the consul. I don't know what I could do to help',¹⁶¹ and with that she closes her door.

¹⁵⁹ *Crying Camels* pp. 204-205

¹⁶⁰ She sweeps the floors, throws away 'the mountain of empty food tins' and opens the windows to remove the smell that 'almost made me sick'. She also notes the unpleasant stains on his mattress, the lack of sheets, and the piles of ragged clothing, *Crying Camels* p. 206.

¹⁶¹ *Crying Camels* p. 208.

Rebuffed by Charlie's compatriot, San Mao approaches the local 'neighbourhood officer' for help. He too declines to become involved:

'I was just pushed forward by everyone to be responsible for the neighbourhood. I don't get paid! You should go and see the consul about this kind of thing. I can give you the phone number.'¹⁶²

San Mao calls the consulate forthwith, but they too prove disappointing:

'Madam, if your Swedish neighbour is old and sick, that's not the consulate's affair. Our officials can fix the documents only in cases of death - but we can't attend to him now. We are not a charity'.¹⁶³

Thus San Mao's concern for her elderly neighbour is rebuffed at every turn. The Swedish woman does not know what she can do (even though San Mao has explained what she can do and has explicitly requested her to do it); the neighbourhood officer is reluctant to assume extra duties; and the consulate also refuses assistance. Though San Mao (like the Danish neighbour and the consulate) is 'not a charity', she remains the sole source of help for the old man.¹⁶⁴

Later she discusses Charlie with José and an English neighbour. Even José is becoming annoyed with the subject ('Actually, I don't want to get involved at all. We aren't related to him; why should we take responsibility for him?') but San Mao insists that they must look after him:

'José, I don't want to look after him either - but if no one does, what will happen to the poor old man? He will slowly rot to death. I can't watch someone quietly dying next door to me and just carry on with life as usual'.

'Why not? You shouldn't mind other people's business'. The English woman...smiled at us.

'Because I am not a cold-blooded beast'. I glared at the middle-aged woman slowly.

'OK! You young people - you are still children. When you are over 50 you will think the same way as I do'.

'Never! Never!' I was almost in a rage.¹⁶⁵

Thus San Mao presents herself as standing alone among the 'individualistic' northern Europeans (English, Swedish and Danish) in her concern for the dying man in their midst. No-one else will help. 'At that time', relates San Mao,

¹⁶² *Crying Camels* p. 208.

¹⁶³ *Crying Camels* p. 208

¹⁶⁴ The following day she finds him in bed clutching his money and his passport, from which she learns that he is seventy-three years of age. 'Why had he been abandoned by his family to die on this island so many miles away?' she wonders as she airs his house and feeds him, *Crying Camels* pp. 208-209.

¹⁶⁵ *Crying Camels* p. 209.

when neighbours saw us they would quickly turn away. I knew that they were terrified - afraid that we would involve them in the Charlie affair. We would greet each other politely and then pass on without a word.

We had suddenly been turned into neighbours who were unwelcome and who weren't sensible.¹⁶⁶

Finally San Mao decides that Charlie must be taken to hospital, and that she must take him herself. She dresses him and locks his house; José carries 'his almost dried and withered body' to the car, and Charlie mutters his thanks to them over and over again. At the hospital, where the doctor insists that the leg must be amputated without delay, San Mao is asked to sign the consent form. She is hesitant - particularly in the light of the substantial surgery fee - and asks Charlie if he has any relatives who could take responsibility for him.¹⁶⁷ With tears in his eyes, Charlie murmurs, 'I..I don't have a wife; no, we live apart...the children don't want me. Let me die.. Let me die'.¹⁶⁸ After a moment's pause, San Mao cries, 'Charlie, keep on living! Your leg will be amputated this afternoon, OK?' The operation duly takes place, and San Mao and José pay the surgery fee out of his money.

The following day when San Mao and José visit Charlie in hospital. His wound is still festering and he appears to be unconscious; when San Mao rushes to find help, the nurse - like most of the other Europeans in the story so far - seems reluctant to assist him, touching him roughly and impatiently and complaining that 'That old man stinks to high heaven'.

Despite the doctor's assurances that he will soon recover, San Mao remains concerned about Charlie. She visits him in hospital every evening, checks up on his empty house during the day and picks out an electric wheelchair for him to buy. When he is to be discharged, San Mao prepares his house for his homecoming,¹⁶⁹ and she and José are suddenly filled with happiness and hope as they drive to the hospital to fetch him. He is not in his room, however; his empty bed has been neatly made and the ward is 'clean as a dream'. Charlie, they discover, has died; and the

¹⁶⁶ *Crying Camels* pp. 209-210.

¹⁶⁷ 'Charlie, the doctor wants to amputate your leg. You'll die if he doesn't; do you understand? Do you want us to send a telegram to Sweden to tell your family to come? What relatives do you have?', *Crying Camels* p. 210.

¹⁶⁸ *Crying Camels* p. 211. The doctor urges San Mao to talk him round ('If we don't amputate, the infection will kill him, it already stinks like this. Talk him out of it'), but she feels she cannot extend any false hope that his world could change for the better: 'What could I say to this person who had nothing? Could I tell him that when his leg was amputated everything would change? What absurd reasoning could I use to keep him in this world, in which he had already lost all hope? I wasn't any relation to him; what compensation could I give him? I didn't create his loneliness and pain; I couldn't give his life meaning', *Crying Camels* p. 211.

¹⁶⁹ Changing his bed, tidying up, sprinkling perfume everywhere and picking a bunch of wildflowers for him, *Crying Camels* p. 213.

nurse who informs them is devoid of any interest or compassion, concerned only that his hospital bills should be paid.¹⁷⁰

Though the story closes as San Mao and José set off home without him, the tale of San Mao's concern and European coldness is not complete without Charlie's funeral (with which the account of his illness and death begins). Although it precedes them in the narrative sequence, it is the culmination of the many instances of European indifference that have built up through the story. No one attends the funeral except San Mao, José, a reluctant priest and the Swedish consul; the consul and the priest are at first gaily unconcerned then embarrassed and perfunctory; the ceremony is over in less than two minutes, preceded and followed by awkward silences; and apparently no attempt has been made to consult Charlie's relatives;¹⁷¹ the consul and priest leave hurriedly after the ceremony, and the only human warmth is provided by San Mao as she places flowers from Charlie's garden upon his coffin. Having taken Charlie to hospital, cleaned his house, paid his bills and packed his belongings after his death for the consulate to return to his family, San Mao performs her final act of kindness by staying by the coffin until it is sealed up within the graveyard's concrete wall, and discharges her final responsibility by paying the concreter his fee.¹⁷²

The catalogue of European coldness and indifference that began with the Danish neighbour (who thought Charlie should not have come to the Canaries in the first place) and included the Swedish neighbour (who claimed that there was nothing she could do), the neighbourhood officer (who did not want extra work), the consulate, the English neighbour (who dismisses San Mao's social responsibility as immaturity) and the rough and impatient nurses, ends with the uncaring consul and priest. Even José professes consistent reluctance throughout the story to be personally involved, and helps Charlie only at San Mao's instigation and insistence. It is only because of San Mao's concern that the old man does not die alone in his house. Though she is not able to save his life, she is the sole provider of warmth and humane assistance to him amid a cold community of uncaring Europeans. She presents herself as unafraid of stench and infection, willing to undertake housework chores for someone she does not know, happy to provide him with food, trustworthy with his money, generous in giving her time to him, thoughtful in preparing a pleasant welcome for him at home, and faithful in paying respects to him after his death. In short, San Mao performs the

¹⁷⁰ *Crying Camels* p. 214.

¹⁷¹ The priest invites San Mao to sprinkle holy water over the coffin; when she asks whether or not that was the wish of Charlie's family, he simply shrugs with the words 'Yes and no', *Crying Camels* pp. 197-198.

¹⁷² *Crying Camels* p. 200.

tasks of a filial daughter-in-law towards this elderly man with whom she has no kin relationship - who is indeed a stranger to her - and whom she does not even necessarily like.¹⁷³ Proper kin relationships are, it is suggested, eroded by European 'individuality', and European institutions do not take up the slack. The filial responsibility is shouldered by San Mao alone.

The respect and concern with which she describes herself behaving towards Charlie is a perfect example of the courtesy and righteousness that (as noted in Chapter 4) should be characteristic of 'China'. Just San Mao's 'citizen diplomacy' failed to attract respect and regard from Europeans in Germany, her virtue is unrecognised and unapplauded here; indeed her neighbours are shown actually chiding her for her willingness to assist Charlie (which they perceive as 'childish') and shrinking from her in fear of being involved. Again northern Europeans have proven themselves 'cold'. Yet San Mao persists in her virtuous concern for the old man. In the dorm story she won by casting aside the virtues of endurance and giving way; here she prevails through patience, self-sacrifice and service, demonstrating a clear moral superiority over the callous Europeans who surround her. This is the true service of the daughter-in-law figure, working selflessly without reward, serving and caring for the family to which she has come to belong. As in the encounter with her mother-in-law, her own 'softness' provides a shining contrast to European 'hardness'. A sick, elderly man is the beneficiary of the daughter-in-law of Europe; she alone will offer concern to those who are not her actual kin.

Daniel

The story of Daniel and his family displays similar features of the San Mao persona. This time, the daughter-in-law is caring not for the older generation but for a suffering child and tending his dying mother. Daniel is the eleven-year-old son of a Swiss couple in a neighbouring street, who works selflessly day and night to care for his dying mother, Luce, and his drunken, abusive, wheelchair-bound father.¹⁷⁴ As

¹⁷³ 'Do you like him?', asks José. 'I couldn't say; I never thought about it', *Crying Camels* p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ San Mao meets the boy Daniel first, and then is invited to tea to meet his mother, who is seriously ill with liver cancer. 'The smell of illness' pervades their house; the woman's body is swollen and she has difficulty moving; she expresses the hope that San Mao will visit often as 'we don't really have any friends'. Daniel's father is 'coarse' in his speech, throws things at his son and yells at him with increasing violence. Though San Mao has a good impression of the mother, she does not particularly warm to Daniel, who seems strange, silent and not particularly likeable. Her admiration for him grows, however, as she learns more about his life: he rises at 6 am and does not go to bed at midnight; in addition to a full day at school (doing his homework at lunchtime) he is responsible for all of the family's shopping, cooking, laundry and housework; he looks after the family's dog and 13 cats; he keeps hens and tends the garden; he helps his father to and from his wheelchair; he massages his mother and bakes cakes for her. In short, 'his time was strictly

Daniel's housework and nursing duties combined with his schoolwork leave him little time to himself, San Mao assists him when she can - cooking for his mother and sitting with her, and taking over Daniel's chores - and arranges outings for him with José.¹⁷⁵ She is astonished to learn that Daniel is adopted (having evidently assumed that an adopted son would not display such filial devotion) and is greatly impressed by his assertion that it makes no difference to his relationship with his parents whether he is adopted or not. She herself, of course, has no kin relationship to any of them but nonetheless generously offers her concern and practical assistance to the family. The biblical overtone of San Mao's invocation of a mustard seed (to describe her own sense of smallness in the presence of this 'giant' of compassion) adds to the air of moral approbation with which the boy is described.¹⁷⁶ The child himself is good, taking responsibility for a person with whom San Mao plainly feels he has no 'real' relationship - just as she herself does. Though San Mao claims to have learned from the child something about gaining from experiences of giving, her stories of her own caring and compassion for those around her establish her own goodness as akin to - or even greater than - Daniel's; her supportive care of Daniel and his family further enhances her persona of goodness.

Despite San Mao's care, Daniel's mother dies.¹⁷⁷ As in the case of Charlie, she cannot prevent death (or indeed improve the character of Daniel's father). In the Sahara, San Mao the 'witch-doctor' may have been successful in curing everyone, but European malaises are less tractable. Nonetheless, she has again shown willingness to give her time and assist in practical tasks for the sick, while also supporting a child in difficulties - whether or not she personally warmed to them as individuals.¹⁷⁸ As in the story of Charlie, other neighbours did not help; only San Mao offered the concern, compassion and aid that was needed.

allocated, and he didn't get enough sleep. He had none of a child's fun', *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp 261-268.

¹⁷⁵ She offers to provide food for Daniel's mother and help when she can ('I can't come every day, but I'll help whenever there is a problem'); from time to time she takes over Daniel's chores so that the child can take a break to see the movies and eat out with José - but José complains that Daniel is too preoccupied with his home situation to enjoy himself, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 267-269.

¹⁷⁶ *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 272-273.

¹⁷⁷ She dies in the night, and the following morning, Daniel sits with her all night. He arrives at San Mao's house to tell her the news; he has not yet told his drunken father. After instructing José to make the necessary arrangements with the mortuary, San Mao goes with Daniel to break the news to his father, *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 270-271.

¹⁷⁸ She notes that Daniel is not a particularly likeable child, and though she has no liking for his father she devotes as much time as she can spare to sitting with him after his wife's death. 'He was always drunk; when he came round, he would weep without ceasing. I preferred the drunken stupor', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 272.

Chris

A further example of San Mao's humanitarian concern and assistance is found in the story of Chris. Chris is an impoverished, middle-aged German who strikes up conversation with San Mao in a photocopying shop one day.¹⁷⁹ After a number of chance meetings, Chris invites her to his home, where she meets his landladies, two very elderly Chinese Indonesian sisters.¹⁸⁰ All three are extremely poor, the landladies dependent on meagre pensions and Chris with no apparent means of support.¹⁸¹ San Mao becomes a regular visitor, cooking for them and making sure that there is always enough food in the house.¹⁸² Again San Mao cares for two generations; again European social welfare institutions prove inadequate and San Mao helps to take up the slack.

One morning San Mao receives a distraught phone call from one of the Guo sisters, asking her to come quickly because Chris is ill. She hastens to help; she summons an ambulance; she accompanies him to the hospital; she assists with his treatment in the emergency room, sitting with him all through the night to apply ice-cubes to his burning skin. Through the night there is no sign of the doctor; like the nurse in the story of Charlie, this European medical professional is portrayed as indifferent to patients, making San Mao's concern and practical assistance even more necessary.

Chris is diagnosed with pneumonia.¹⁸³ He remains in hospital for a week, during which time she visits him daily; she also looks after the Guo sisters.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ This story takes place in Tenerife, where San Mao and José move to after Gran Canaria. Chris's attention is caught by San Mao's Chinese manuscript, and he engages her in conversation about it. He is described as somewhat unkempt; and though there is kindness in his eyes there is something of the madman about him. She learns that he has published a book on personality testing based on choices of shapes and symbols, and has developed a method for treating eye complaints through exercise, *Rear View* pp. 205-214.

¹⁸⁰ The Guo sisters (who had migrated to the Netherlands after Indonesian independence and thence to the Canaries to escape the cold) both seem to San Mao to be over 90, and they are plainly dependent on Chris. San Mao's first visit to Chris's house takes place when she complains of eye trouble and he claims to be able to cure it. He lives in a tiny room crammed with magazines and unpublished manuscripts, on top of an old and dilapidated house; San Mao is disturbed to see how poor and cramped his living conditions are, *Rear View* p. 219.

¹⁸¹ San Mao assumes that he supports himself through his publications, though judging from the meagre and run-down nature of his clothing and his habitation, she perceives that this was 'not much of a living'. Later she learns that Chris's book provides him with no income at all, as so few copies have been sold. 'Can't you publish the profound psychological stuff?' asks San Mao - but after many attempts Chris can no longer afford the postage charges of submitting them again, *Rear View* pp. 221-233.

¹⁸² *Rear View* p. 222. San Mao feels 'at home' with Chris and the Mrs Guos: 'that home was more like home than my own'.

¹⁸³ Both San Mao and the doctor are surprised that Chris should have contracted such a serious case of pneumonia so in so temperate a climate. One day, while delivering food to the Mrs Guos, she

Without hesitation she promises the hospital that she will take responsibility for paying his fees; when a thorough search of his room yields no health insurance documents or even a bank passbook, San Mao not only pays the substantial bills for Chris's medical treatment (borrowing money from every source she can think of to do it) but also upholds his ailing self-respect by pretending that the money she uses to pay is actually his own.¹⁸⁵ As in the story of Charlie, she appeals for consular help; but, like the Swedish consulate, the German consulate refuses.¹⁸⁶ Chris has no other friends and no family.¹⁸⁷ No one but San Mao will assist this impoverished household in their difficulties, and her assistance is both comprehensive (financial, medical, practical) and tactful.¹⁸⁸

Once recovered, Chris sees through San Mao's fiction about the money for his hospital treatment and visits to thank her. For the first time he talks about his past, confessing that, as a new psychology graduate in Germany in the 1940s, he had participated in the torture of inmates of concentration camps as 'psychological experiments'.¹⁸⁹ Now he longs to atone somehow for his crimes.¹⁹⁰ The story of his evil past serves as a contrast with and intensification of the goodness of San Mao's humane assistance to him. When she has learned that he has 'cruelly ruined another person's life just for the sake of research interest', San Mao feels no 'disgust' towards him - his own self-disgust, she suggests, being sufficient - but this is the last time they meet. Chris sends her a letter enclosing his repayment of his hospital fees and acknowledging her undeserved kindness to him as 'yet another cross for me to

discovers the truth: he has been spending several days a week hauling ice from refrigerator vans to hotels, *Rear View* p. 229.

¹⁸⁴ The two Mrs Guos seem frightened without Chris, and San Mao takes over his protective role. She is astonished to discover, when she collects their pensions from the post office, exactly how little money they have to live on, *Rear View* p. 226.

¹⁸⁵ She tells Chris that she has sent one of his unpublished book manuscripts to a publisher in Taiwan on his behalf. The publisher, she lies, has sent a handsome advance for a soon-to-be-published translation, *Rear View* p. 230.

¹⁸⁶ Like the Swedish consulate, they will act if one of their nationals dies but not before, *Rear View* p. 227.

¹⁸⁷ When San Mao asks if he has any family, he replies only, 'The Mrs Guos', *Rear View* p. 232.

¹⁸⁸ As noted, San Mao is careful to bolster Chris's 'self-respect'. While a narrative of self-respect may underlie her medical assistance to Sahrawi women (ie that they might lose self-respect by consulting a male doctor) this is not made explicit; rather, their reluctance is cast as backwardness and superstition rather than 'self-respect'. Indeed (as noted in Chapter 2) San Mao mocks Sahrawi 'self-respect' in her story of borrowing, presenting their utterances of the phrase 'You hurt my pride' as humorous and childish.

¹⁸⁹ Specifically, a prisoner who was already 'as weak as a skeleton' was shut up in a dark and soundproof room for a month without sound or light; no one spoke to him, and he was given food at irregular intervals so that he lost any sense of time. He went mad as a result, *Rear View* p. 232.

¹⁹⁰ In a quasi-religious gesture of atonement, Chris has 'given up everything to live in poverty' and to care for the elderly Guo sisters, supplementing their meagre pensions with what he can earn, *Rear View* p. 233.

carry'.¹⁹¹ His burden of guilt and sense of unworthiness again underscores San Mao's care and concern - and her innocence. San Mao's kindness and good example in Europe is extended even to the archetypal representative of evil in the modern world, the Nazi war-criminal; the virtuous Chinese daughter-in-law cares even for the black sheep of the European family.

Paloma

The story of San Mao's care for Paloma occupies a category to those outlined above, as Paloma is not a new neighbour or acquaintance but a close friend from Sahara days.¹⁹² Nevertheless it adds further to the image of an unselfish, loving and caring San Mao applying herself to the easing of difficulties, the comfort, consolation and practical assistance of Europeans whose lives intersect with hers. Paloma is a keen home-decorator and baker of cakes, 'too sensitive to be a career woman';¹⁹³ she has two young children; and she has become lame and blind through a mysterious debilitating illness.¹⁹⁴ Her husband, Jaime, tells San Mao that the illness is 'a problem of longterm depression' arising from the fact that he is unemployed.¹⁹⁵

San Mao visits Paloma and her family in their Spanish mountain village, reassuring and comforting first with promises of happy times together and then with practical help.¹⁹⁶ The story of San Mao's stay in Paloma's beautiful home in the

¹⁹¹ San Mao's charitable impulses towards Chris do not cease, as she considers what kind of work would be more suitable for him than ice-hauling - but this time she does not act upon her good ideas, simply waving to him next time she sees him in the distance and calling 'Goodbye', *Rear View* p. 234.

¹⁹² Paloma and Jaime do not appear in San Mao's stories of the Sahara, even though Jaime was, San Mao later states, a witness at her marriage to José in El Ayoun. Like San Mao and José themselves, Paloma her family left the Western Sahara when it ceased to be a colony of Spain. Jaime had had difficulty finding work, and they had moved from place to place, arriving in the Canaries in 1980. 'Imperceptibly, Paloma and Jaime became my family', notes San Mao, 'and we always spent festivals together. At that time, most of our Sahara friends were scattered; they all, like me, loved that land dearly, and when we got together there was a kind of nostalgia and sadness that we could all understand. And in the years after leaving the Sahara, everyone's life had got more difficult. Jaime hadn't had a regular job for years; their life was hard', *Taking the City* p. 202.

¹⁹³ *Taking the City* p. 208.

¹⁹⁴ San Mao learns of Paloma's illness on a visit to the Canaries in 1982, and flies to Spain immediately to visit her, *Taking the City* p. 203.

¹⁹⁵ An administrator, Jaime has been unemployed for two years, *Taking the City* pp. 204-205. The strain of living on social welfare and the burden of witnessing Jaime's failure to find work has supposedly been too much for Paloma's nervous disposition; Jaime tells her that doctors have found no physical causes for her blindness and paralysis, *Taking the City* p. 208. Mentions of Paloma's illness in the story are skeptical, and San Mao patiently does her best to make Paloma feel better and encourages her to greater effort, trying to make her share visual pleasures, to trick her into admitting she can see or walk, to test her reflexes, and to treat her with an alternative healing technique of walking on stones, *Taking the City* p. 213.

¹⁹⁶ *Taking the City* p. 206.

beautiful village (described as an idyllic haven of rural beauty and peace, another European 'dreamland')¹⁹⁷ is an account of her self-consciously taking care of the family. She organises the shopping; cooks and washes the dishes; discourages Jaime from carrying Paloma, in order to make her try to walk; looks after Paloma's two sons; mends their clothes; cleans the kitchen and bathroom; and, when she departs she leaves a gift of money for the family.¹⁹⁸

Her presence with them and her actions during her stay are portrayed as valuable and therapeutic. She is able to inspire the wan Paloma to want to have a good time, entertaining her with amusing anecdotes, supporting her so that they can take walks together, empathising with the loneliness of village life, and keeping away neighbours whom Paloma would rather not see.¹⁹⁹ As her visit progresses, Paloma's condition improves accordingly - from frightened and completely immobile, to a situation where she no longer needs to be carried all the time but can actually manage to drag herself several steps, and even begins to see light and shapes. Indeed the whole household responds to San Mao by becoming more relaxed,²⁰⁰ and, as well as shouldering the burdens of the household and aiding Paloma's temporary recovery, she establishes close relationships with Paloma's two friends in the village²⁰¹ and supports the community in their fire-fighting efforts when a forest fire breaks out.²⁰² San Mao portrays herself as bringing enthusiasm, happiness, practical concern and help to Paloma, her family and her community, and to have some measure of healing to Paloma. Unfortunately, the beneficent effects of her presence depart with her when she returns to Taiwan.²⁰³

Caring and compassion

¹⁹⁷ *Taking the City* p. 203. The houses in the village - which is remote, peaceful and surrounded by pine forests - have white fences and pitched roofs, with cows and horses grazing nearby. Paloma's house is adorned with 'beautiful trees and wildflowers' outside and artworks inside, *Rear View* p. 210.

¹⁹⁸ *Taking the City* p. 216, 222-223.

¹⁹⁹ *Taking the City* p. 218.

²⁰⁰ *Taking the City* p. 217. Though Paloma is still anxious and fearful for the family's future, shouting and locking herself in the bathroom on one occasion, San Mao's presence is presented as calming.

²⁰¹ A mentally disabled youth called Johnny, and Benny the priest. San Mao provides a sympathetic ear to Benny as well, when he tells her that he had been forced by his to go to seminary when he was very young as his family was poor, *Taking the City* p. 215.

²⁰² She joins with the village women in beating the fire all night, *Taking the City* pp. 219- 221.

²⁰³ *Rear View* p. 225. San Mao had apparently hoped to help Paloma after she had left, as she collected her birth data in order to have her fortune told back in Taiwan. A postscript to the story tells of the family's moment of hope when Jaime finally secured a job, and its ending when he lost the job again; Paloma's condition had worsened as a result and she was readmitted to hospital.

As we have seen, San Mao's caring concern is extended to suffering people in a number of very different situations: an elderly man dying alone and untended in a foreign country; a child looking after a dying mother and disabled father, while also enduring his father's ill-treatment; a man with a guilty past who is suffering hardship and illness and can never feel that he is a worthy human being again; and a kind and loving mother whose insecure circumstances have ravaged her health so that she cannot care for others as she has always done before. San Mao gives assistance, support and compassion to Charlie, Daniel, Chris and Paloma - and also to those who depend upon them and who too are in need of care and concern (Daniel's parents, Chris's elderly landladies, and Paloma's children). The recipients of her concern are not necessarily those with whom she has close emotional ties; the daughter-in-law's sense of responsibility and kindness extend to all who need it. Though Paloma is a friend, the others are simply people from her suburb or whom she has seen around town. She tells also of her kind behaviour towards a Norwegian stranger who approaches her on the Gran Canaria wharf to beg for money to buy a ferry ticket; after her initial reluctance based on mistrust of his unkempt appearance and suspicions that he might be a con-man, she gives him a larger sum than he had asked for.²⁰⁴ Her caring extends even towards a bird: Antony, the pigeon mascot of the dorm in which she lives when she first arrives in Spain. Her very first European story tells of her looking after Antony during the winter vacation, when everyone else goes away on holiday. Only she is there to care for Antony - feeding him, changing the dressing on his broken leg, protecting him from her landlady's cat, playing music to him, and

²⁰⁴ He persistently begs San Mao for money for his ticket, claiming that he has been the victim of a con-trick and has no access to his money until he returns to Tenerife; in a now familiar pattern, he has asked his consulate (Norwegian) for help but they refused to lend him the fare. His requests become more extreme: he pleads to be allowed to stow away in her car, and offers to work for her in return for the fare. She continues to move away; he continues to follow. 'If you will help me', he pleads, 'I will never forget you. 200 pesetas isn't much, but my happiness is in your hands.' 'Of course it isn't much', replies San Mao, 'but, my friend, what do your difficulties have to do with me?' At that the man gives up and begins to walk away; and San Mao is ashamed of her reluctance. For the price of 'a soft drink or a pair of stockings' she is 'refusing to hold out my hand to someone who is suffering'. Having ignored and refused him several times, she cannot in the end bear the possibility that he might truly be in need after all: 'If the tramp was telling the truth and I wouldn't help him to cross, could my mind be at peace? could I live the rest of my life without regret?' She is filled with compunction and guilt for having almost failed to help. True to her persona of caring and concern, she gives him more than he has asked for, enjoining him to get a good hot meal as well as buying his ticket. 'God forgive me', she says to herself, ashamed, 'this person really did only need a boat ticket...how could I have tormented this soul who was truly in need of help?...That night I had added extra torment to someone already suffering'. Throughout the story, the man is persistent in targeting San Mao and not the other people around the wharf; this is perhaps intended to suggest that San Mao is observably kind and charitable, and even someone who does not know her can instinctively identify her as someone compassionate, who will be willing to assist, *The Tender Night* pp. 169-187.

taking him out in his cage with her when she goes walking ('we Chinese have always taken birdcages out onto the streets').²⁰⁵

The stories discussed above combine to portray a San Mao who is kind, caring and willing to inconvenience herself in the service of others. They also display a constant theme of coldness on the part of the Europeans around her, who allow such situations to occur and are not willing to help. Only San Mao proffers the help that is needed to Charlie, Daniel, Chris, Paloma, the stranger on the wharf and Antony the pigeon. Even José lacks her immediate willingness to help, and is portrayed as following her lead. Her occasional expressions of reluctance only serve to highlight the self-sacrificing virtue of her compassionate care. The bringer of medical care to the people of the Sahara brings medical and other practical care to Europeans, and as in the desert San Mao provides an example of 'civilisation' and morality in Europe. Biographers magnify her aura of goodness by hinting at the personal financial costs of San Mao's caring at a time when José was unemployed and their household income was supposedly minimal.²⁰⁶

As noted above, the narrative of play that characterised her Saharan stories has been superseded by a more serious tone of concern.²⁰⁷ All of her desert stories, with

²⁰⁵ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 104. Even when San Mao asks for assistance, no one else will look after Antony (indeed when she asks an Austrian classmate to help, he will not even discuss the bird, instead pestering San Mao to go out with him). She spends her whole vacation sitting at home with Antony, venturing out with him only to buy food supplies. She grows to love and depend on him as her only friend; even when the vacation ends and they both move back to the dorm, she continues to rely upon him for companionship. All of her caring for the bird is undone, however, by her Spanish classmates. When springtime comes, they let Antony out of his cage to be free - and San Mao is heartbroken. The following day she finds his dead body in the garden and weeps again for her own inability to protect him, *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 100-107 (first published in 1968, in *Lion-cub Literature*, Youshi wenyi 174). Thus San Mao's earliest European story is of her own humaneness and sense of responsibility, contrasted with irresponsible behaviour and lack of concern on the part of the Europeans around her. The creature San Mao loves most suffers as a result of European indifference; though she has done her best for him, she ends up reproaching herself for not being able to do more. Though I am not suggesting any direct correspondence between her kindness and attachment to the pigeon and her later concern for and service to European people, her persona of compassion and practical assistance is clearly established at the very outset of her European adventures.

²⁰⁶ Cui and Zhao note that, although San Mao and José were financially poor at this time (José being unemployed for more than a year), 'their habitual kindness did not change. They took fish to Miguel's family. Old Charlie was living next door, with children who didn't care about him, just sitting at home and waiting to die. San Mao and José couldn't bear it; they looked after him, and gave him a send-off when he died. Daniel was suffering a child; San Mao was moved by his filiality in looking after his mother, and looked after the old couple who had been devastated by the demon of illness', Cui and Zhao p. 161. In San Mao's own narratives, it is generally she herself who takes the lead in caring for the community, while José is presented as initially reluctant but willing in the end to go along with her own charitable impulses.

²⁰⁷ As also noted, the carefree provision of drugs and improvised treatment in the Sahara has been replaced in Europe by practical service (help with housework or provision of food) and financial assistance. San Mao does not capriciously treat European patients herself, committing them instead to medical science;

the sole exception of the story of the slave, saw San Mao's civilising activities crowned with success; in Europe, however, her ministrations cannot necessarily avert disaster. San Mao cares as much as she can, but Charlie dies, Luce dies, Paloma does not recover, and Antony dies. Her care is sufficient for the Sahara, but many European ailments are beyond its reach. The implicit message is that European indifference is too strong even for San Mao's care to overcome, and European problems cannot always be solved by her. Indeed she is explicitly critical of the social indifference that takes the form of medical insurance systems that deprive those who cannot afford it of medical care - drawing on arguments of 'individuality' to suggest that people will suffer if they do not conform:

This rotten hospital, almost US\$200 per day, not including medication and emergency fees.

Cruel society! If the people living in it don't follow docilely along its tracks, and comport themselves according to its rules, they get a lash of the whip. Better to be dead than to have no health insurance! Who told you not to be obedient?²⁰⁸

In the Sahara, San Mao's 'patients' were reluctant to consult doctors or go to hospital, and she provided treatments for them; in the Canaries, they cannot afford to, and she organises the money to pay for them. Although the specific manifestations may differ, San Mao in Europe (as in the desert) presents herself bringing health and peace to those who are suffering world - even though there may be limitations on the efficacy of her concern.

There may be some gender and class differences in San Mao's behaviour towards Europeans. Most of the recipients of her self-sacrificing care - and the subjects of her stories of concern - are male.²⁰⁹ To the middle-class people around her in suburban Gran Canaria and Tenerife, she offers filial concern, and she suggests in passing that her relationships with workers in shops and hotels are cordial or even affectionate. Yet in her two stories devoted to women making their living in non-middle-class occupations (Maria, the cleaner in her block of flats, and the itinerant flower seller), the tone is unsympathetic. The women appear as dishonest, bullying and unreasonable; they are, San Mao claims, much richer than they pretend to be, and yet they try to manipulate San Mao and her friends by claiming to be poor.²¹⁰ In

²⁰⁸ *Rear View* p. 227.

²⁰⁹ Charlie, Chris, Daniel, and the young Japanese man Mori to whom she provides food and friendship (but fails him in the end, being too unwell and then too preoccupied to help when he needs her most, *The Tender Night* pp. 217-240.

²¹⁰ Maria's stories of hardship (having to support an elderly mother, an invalid husband and four children) are supposedly untrue; according to José, the mother and husband are fraudulently receiving over-generous social welfare benefits, and their two oldest children are wage earners; moreover, Maria and her family live in state-subsidised accommodation. Also according to José, Maria's husband

short, they are difficult for an honest, kind and straightforward person like San Mao herself to deal with; they end up getting the better of her simply because they do not have her level of integrity.²¹¹ San Mao is too kind to put Maria in her place, reluctant to embarrass her by asking her to leave; 'because I was such a civilised person, I couldn't say it')²¹² and too honest to be proof against the wiles of the flower-seller.

spends much of his time at the local wineshop drinking and treating his friends - while José can only afford to drink there very occasionally. All of this adds up into the familiar narrative of the virtuous middle-class losing out to unscrupulous welfare cheats. San Mao wonders why José does not seem to get the bountiful state benefits that support Maria and her family in such supposed luxury; José tells her it is because his company works from contract to contract and workers do not belong to any union. Thus José's supposed poverty, a result of privatisation and non-union labour, is constructed as a consequence of superior integrity, self-reliance, and affiliation with professionals instead of state agencies, *The Tender Night* pp. 242-268.

²¹¹ Maria is presented as ugly, lazy (refusing all kinds of the household tasks San Mao expects her to do) and inquisitive (inspecting San Mao's possessions), gossiping, rude and over-familiar (taking over in San Mao's home, addressing her with intimate rather than polite pronouns and verb forms, and refusing to call her 'Madam'), asking for or even pilfering her things (pot plants, clothes, shoes, magazines, cosmetics, chewing gum), spreading rumours that San Mao and José are not married, and then of José bringing other women home when San Mao is not there, and asking for lifts home in San Mao's car. Though José likes to think of Maria as a servant, San Mao presents herself as willing to treat her as an equal - but in practice she is annoyed by Maria's own assumptions of equality. Arguments with the management office of the apartment block fail to dislodge Maria from her position at first; when she is finally dismissed she is presented as profiting from the dismissal, receiving generous severance pay and unemployment benefit, then finding a new job and continuing to receive her benefit. Like Maria, the flower seller is presented as intruding rudely upon the life of San Mao and José - a life that is again described with hints of the peach-blossom utopia. Other itinerant vendors are 'simple country folk'; 'some were simple and honest, some were sly; some rich and some poor; but they still did business the same, and it was also very convenient for me; there was no need to drive into town to buy food'. San Mao's experiences with the flower-seller, however, change her mind about itinerant vendors forever, causing her to hide and refuse to open the door when they call. The flower seller gains sympathy by claiming to have walked a long distance to San Mao's neighbourhood, but has a car waiting; she tricks San Mao into buying a potplant, charging an exorbitant price; when the 'plant' turns out to be no more than some leaves stuck in soil, she assures San Mao that the roots will grow if the plant is properly cared for, then offers San Mao a plant with roots for double the price. Later the same day, José is taken in and buys another 'plant', which again proves to have no roots; San Mao's neighbour is deceived by another of her tricks (the vendor asks for a deposit, to be refunded if the plant dies - then pretends that the deposit had been a partial payment and that, as the plant has died, she will waive the rest of the payment). Her next trick is to offer San Mao a small free plant; when it blooms healthily, San Mao is duped into buying another, more expensive plant. Finally, José is forced to buy another of her plants when she comes to their neighbour's door while he is there fixing the washing machine; weeping, she tells the neighbour how poor she is, then offers her a small free plant, claiming it is the same as the plants she 'always' gives San Mao and José. The neighbour plainly believes San Mao and José have been exploiting a poor old woman, and José feels obliged to buy a plant to prove that this is untrue. San Mao thus paints an unsympathetic picture of the only two women other than her friends to whom she devotes a whole story, who are described as pretending not to be rich (or certainly not as poor as they might seem), lazy and deceitful; and they compare badly in moral terms with their male counterparts, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 209-228.

²¹² *The Tender Night* p. 250. Maria is a source of disagreement between San Mao and José. José states that 'with that kind of person, you just have to go along with them', while San Mao questions, 'Why? I am her equal; why should it be me going along with her?', *The Tender Night* p. 251. Both San Mao and Maria draw upon a narrative of 'equality' when there are tensions between them. One day San Mao can bear it no longer and tells Maria not to come back; an argument ensues, in which Maria mutters that 'When the Communists get elected, this kind of thing won't happen any

Unscrupulous people take advantage of her because she does not know how to behave less pleasantly. 'Maybe Maria saw through me', suggests San Mao, 'and knew that I had no way of dealing with her, so whenever she had a problem she came to look for me with complete assurance'.²¹³

The contrast between San Mao and these Europeans is as clear as that between herself and the cold, uncaring neighbours, and it is expressed in physical as well as moral terms. Both San Mao and Maria are astonished to discover that they are the same age. Maria is 'coarse-looking' and fat, and her face is worn with care (married at 16, she has four children as well as a job that demands physical labour). As in the Sahara, San Mao's slenderness is presented as good, and is implicitly connected with other positive attributes;²¹⁴ she is distinctive for her thinness as well as her moral virtue in Europe as well as in the desert.

Education

San Mao is not only a dutiful and compassionate daughter-in-law to the European family, sacrificing her money, labour and time to help the elderly, the young and the sick; she is also its tutor in matters of refined knowledge and culture. The provision of basic education to the neighbouring women in her home (noted in Chapter 3) was part of San Mao's 'civilising' in the Sahara. The women were portrayed as reluctant - indifferent to the importance of counting, to money, or even to knowing their own ages. Among the Europeans, San Mao's educative mission is a cultural one: she takes upon herself the duty of instructing them in various aspects of Chinese culture. Unlike the Sahrawi woman, Europeans are eager to learn; indeed San Mao's instruction to them is entirely in response to their requests to learn about her culture. If Sahrawi were construed as 'empty' and in need of the basic, practical, culturally unspecific instruction San Mao could bring them, the Europeans, already 'full' of education, come to her for the extra cultural refinement she can impart.

more...We are equal; why should I work for you?' 'Because that's how you make a living', replies San Mao; 'it is part of your job; it isn't a question of equality'. 'So rich people can make poor people work for them?' argues Maria. San Mao counters, 'Doesn't José work for someone too? We work for our money as well!' 'He makes more than I do', is Maria's response. 'Why don't you go diving and see how hard it is?' replies San Mao. Deciding that 'you shouldn't haggle like this with a person who has no knowledge', she does her best to avoid Maria thereafter, *The Tender Night* pp. 256-257.

²¹³ *The Tender Night* p. 261.

²¹⁴ Complaining that that God is unfair, Maria 'struck her fat body angrily and sighed'; San Mao remarks that God is entirely fair, and that Maria is paying the price (and reaping the benefits) of having four children. 'But what about you?' replies Maria: 'what about you? What price are you paying?' she asked me fiercely. 'Everyone's choices are different, that has nothing to do with you', *The Tender Night* pp. 254-255.

Her friendship with Chris (noted above) begins because of his interest in Chinese philosophy. He is a deep thinker, trained in psychology, author of many learned manuscripts (as yet unpublished) that are 'too profound' for San Mao to understand;²¹⁵ and it is the passion of this highly educated man for Chinese philosophy that leads him to initiate conversation with San Mao. He asks if she understands the *I-Ching* and *fengshui*;²¹⁶ he is excited to discover that she has studied philosophy at university ('Chris loved Chinese philosophy');²¹⁷ and he questions her eagerly about Chinese customs and culture:

I'd really like to talk to you about the East, because I am writing an article that involves the thought of some Chinese philosophers...Tell me, why have Chinese women never had any status at any time - at least in your old society that's how it was, right?²¹⁸

Chris's enquiries encompass two rather stereotypic aspects of uninformed 'western' notions of China, based on the idea of a mystical exotic and a sense of Chinese social backwardness (not dissimilar, it will be noted, from San Mao's own ideas about Sahrawi society). San Mao is quick to dispel both of his preconceptions,²¹⁹ and their philosophical discussions continue: 'we'd sit and drink tea and talk about Confucius, Laozi and Zhuangzi'. When San Mao tires of philosophy she introduces another topic assumed to be of interest to a European foreigner: Chinese food.²²⁰

This is not the first time that Europeans have looked to San Mao for instruction about Chinese philosophy. When she was preparing for her driving test in the Sahara, her lessons in the highway code were transformed into Chinese lessons for the instructor. Described (not without irony) as 'a very cultured man', he is much more interested in learning about Chinese philosophy than in teaching San Mao the road rules, and at her very first lesson he 'asked me politely to teach him about Chinese culture. I taught him, and drew a few characters and explained them to him'. At the second class, he shows her an exercise book in which he has been practising the characters she taught him.²²¹ Like Chris, he wants to learn from San Mao about

²¹⁵ *Rear View* p. 230.

²¹⁶ *Rear View* p. 207..

²¹⁷ *Rear View* p. 212.

²¹⁸ *Rear View* pp. 209-210.

²¹⁹ 'not all Chinese people understand' the *I-Ching* and philosophy, *Rear View* p. 207; 'in most Chinese households with any education, women's place has always been greatly respected', *Rear View* p. 211.

²²⁰ I liked to talk about ways of cooking tofu and rice, these topics and experiences were much livelier', *Rear View* p. 213.

²²¹ When he asks modestly for her opinion ('Have I written them OK? do they look right?') he is delighted with her response, a common Chinese politeness which he evidently interprets as a serious statement: 'You write them better than I do', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 192.

Confucius and Laozi, and she introduces Zhuangzi too; such is the eagerness of this European to learn about China that the purpose of the lesson (to make sure that San Mao knows the highway code) is quite forgotten.

In the desert, San Mao's status as sole and authoritative representative of Chinese culture was reinforced by her tastefully decorated home, much admired by Europeans; where, amid Chinese objects contributed by family and friends in Taiwan, she practised calligraphy²²² and cooked Chinese food. Her homes in Europe have been characterised in a similar way.²²³ In her interactions with Europeans, as we have seen, food features prominently. She impressed José's boss in the Sahara with her Chinese cooking skills; José's colleagues flocked to taste her cooking; food was a subject of conversation with Chris; and she cooked for José's extended family, for Charlie, for Daniel's mother, for Chris after his illness, and for Paloma's family. It is also an area in which San Mao provides tuition for Europeans. A neighbour asks her to teach her to make sweet and sour pork ribs;²²⁴ and each of José's sisters demands Chinese cooking lessons (as noted above). Thus San Mao brings into her European family Chinese cultural knowledge from the kitchen as well as the worlds of literary art and philosophy.

Transport

In El Ayoun, San Mao would stop her car to pick up people walking by the roadside (noted in Chapter 3). Likewise in Gran Canaria, driving to and from town,²²⁵ she stops to pick up neighbours on foot. As with the provision of medical help, transport is offered to Sahrawi as a general mass but to known European individuals. As in the desert, she stops to pick people up in her Gran Canaria suburb if they are old, or if they are young;²²⁶ if they are carrying things; if the sun is hot (or - unlike the Sahara - if it is raining);²²⁷ and, just as in the desert, 'my car', she sighs, 'was rarely not full'. San Mao's desert narrative of responding to fellow-sojourners in the midst of wilderness, and of creating human encounters through the provision of transport and thus making life colourful and worthwhile, is replaced in Gran Canaria with an ironic

²²² *Stories of the Sahara* p. 69.

²²³ A visitor to San Mao's home in the Canaries describes it in great detail as 'a beautiful Spanish-style house' decorated in her own inimitable style, flooded with sunlight and full of tasteful objects and antiques, beautiful 'as a dream', Cui and Zhao pp. 207-208.

²²⁴ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 219.

²²⁵ As in the desert, San Mao lives some distance from the town centre, and drives there every morning to shop and to go to the bank and post office, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 96.

²²⁶ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 97.

²²⁷ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 97.

narrative of 'bad luck', expressed in jocular complaints about the 'worthlessness' of her elderly neighbours (who are described as 'old rubbish').²²⁸ While the provision of lifts in the desert was presented as simple human kindness, the ironic account of the provision of lifts in Europe suggests that such behaviour is that of someone too foolish to fight against her own generous nature.²²⁹ As noted above, San Mao and José are believed to have been in financial difficulties at that time; the fact that they could afford to own and run a car is taken by Ma Zhongxin (claiming to have interviewed members of the Chinese community in Gran Canaria) as proof that San Mao was actually relatively wealthy, possession of a private car being supposedly an extremely unusual thing at that time. Whether or not economic hardship is involved, San Mao presents herself as generously offering lifts to anyone from her suburb who might need one, and thus caring for members of community, in particular those who are elderly. Transport systems are shown to have failed the elderly residents of San Mao's suburb, and the dutiful daughter-in-law places her mobility at their service.

With the elderly Europeans San Mao establishes some measure of reciprocity. In return for her provision of transport they invite her for walks and to parties, and they transform her ideas about old age (discussed in Chapter 6). The ultimate reciprocity of San Mao's European experiences, however, is the quasi-familial relationships that she claims to enjoy with several European families. The remainder of this chapter will discuss San Mao's narratives of the families by whom she has, she claims, been accepted as a daughter.

Going home to mother

So far this chapter has taken as its metaphor the filial behaviour of the daughter-in-law to her husband's family to represent San Mao's caring behaviour towards the Europeans around her. Her virtues of humility, service, patience, compassion and kindness - the virtues of the 'oriental woman' - contrast with European coldness. Her self-conscious 'oriental beauty' is as appealing to Europeans as her virtues.²³⁰ Her attractiveness to European men has been noted, as has the wish of a German family to welcome her as a daughter-in-law. San Mao describes their affection towards her

²²⁸ *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 98.

²²⁹ Indeed, in order to keep the neighbours at a distance and to discourage the kind of relationships that had made her life worthwhile in El Ayoun, she claims to avoid getting into conversation with them and does not let them know her address - largely because old people are, supposedly, no fun and no use, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 97. Her story about what the elderly European people have to offer her will be discussed in Chapter 6.

²³⁰ Biographers note the importance of her Chinese appearance in her success with European men: 'San Mao was an Oriental princess with black eyes and black hair', Cui and Zhao p. 85.

when she visits at Christmas and is welcomed by the whole family with gifts and embraces: 'Of course, that was the feeling of coming home to mother'.²³¹ She did not, as they had hoped, marry the son, but the familial feeling apparently remained; after the death of the mother, San Mao laments, 'I had no maternal home in Germany to go back to now'.²³²

This notion of the 'maternal home' is expanded in a story titled 'Going home to mother', in which San Mao enumerates the European families in which she has come to belong. In these families she is not so much a daughter-in-law (who must serve and endure) as a treasured daughter of the house, who may do as she pleases and is welcomed with true and unconditional affection, and where she does not have to expend her own labour or money. The daughter 'has more sense of security' than the daughter-in-law; 'she doesn't do any housework at all, and is very free and easy about meals. That is the difference between your own home and your in-laws' home'.²³³ In the years in which San Mao been far away from her real maternal home, there is always someone who 'wants me to have their home as my own'; this fate (*yuanfen* again) is presented as a matter in which San Mao herself has no choice: 'it is the loving hearts of other people; I, of course, have no choice in the matter'.²³⁴

San Mao's alternative 'maternal homes' are all in Europe. Most are in relatively romantic settings, and in all of them she is affectionately welcomed as a quasi-family member. One is the parental home of her friend Paloma (whose own family San Mao would later care for, as noted above) in Spain. Every summer Paloma and her family return to her mother's home in a mountain village, and one summer San Mao accompanies them.²³⁵ She feels comfortable among the family, enjoying their old

²³¹ *A Horse for You* pp. 59-60

²³² She describes her arrival at their home one snowy Christmas, where the whole family is waiting for her with gifts and embraces: 'Of course, that was feeling of coming home to mother', *A Horse for You* p. 59-60. She is beloved of each family member equally, and addresses the mother as 'Mother Maria'.

²³³ The title, "Going home to mother' (*Hui niangjia*), is the phrase for the return of a married woman from the household of her husband to her parents' home. The list of her alternative 'maternal homes', places and families that San Mao can consider as her own includes the home of San Mao's uncle and several European families, *A Horse for You* pp. 56-57. The story of San Mao's 'maternal homes' is introduced with a fantasy of returning to a rural home in Taiwan, a story she likes to tell to European friends who have no knowledge of Taipei. She describes a scene full of trees and bamboo, with fields of flowers and paddy fields, an old Chinese-style house, an old well, a narrow path through the fields, watermelons, the family's water-buffalo, evenings full of the scent of flowers, the flickering of glow-worms, and the sound of frogs - a storybook scene worthy of the storybook or dreamland Europe discussed in Chapter 4. San Mao's listeners are enchanted until she admits that the scene is from Chinese books and not her real life in Taiwan where her home is in 'a grey apartment block', *A Horse for You* p 55-56.

²³⁴ *A Horse for You* p. 60.

²³⁵ (the same house, presumably, to which Paloma and her family withdraw after her illness - though what becomes of her own parents is not clear)

slate-roofed house and their peaceful lunches in the garden under the apple tree. She returns to Madrid only because 'it was not my real mother's house' and she does not not feel quite the ease of a daughter there - even though, as noted above, Paloma is San Mao's 'family' after the death of José.²³⁶ The familial caring is part of a relationship of reciprocity, in which San Mao returns to Paloma the kindness initially shown to her (San Mao's caring for Paloma and her family in return was noted above).

Her friend Marisa's house is another 'maternal home' for San Mao. She feels free there; she can sleep late; she is 'spoiled' by Marisa's husband and waited on by her children, who call her 'auntie'.²³⁷ Though Marisa is only two years older than San Mao, she treats her with motherly affection; 'This is also the feeling of going home to mother', states San Mao.²³⁸ Another offer of a 'maternal home' comes from elderly Swedish neighbours in the Canaries. Retired doctors, they are concerned about San Mao's health; and constantly urge her to 'Treat our home as your own mother's house, come every day'.²³⁹

One of San Mao's fictive 'maternal homes' belongs to a member of her actual European family by marriage. He is an uncle of José's in southern Spain, and San Mao is his particular favourite; over and over again he asks her to come and live with his family, and 'sincerely wanted to consider me as a daughter' - but she declines, afraid of burdening him and conscious that she could not be happy without her independence.²⁴⁰ In this home San Mao feels 'the happiness and ease' of going home to mother - but after the uncle's urging her to join the family permanently she ceases to visit him, thus maintaining the independence that seems to have been so difficult for her to establish from her own family.²⁴¹ In her mother-in-law's home, by contrast, she will stay a night or two in passing but no longer.²⁴²

²³⁶ *A Horse for You* p. 57, *Taking the City* p. 202.

²³⁷ 'This kind of situation is not often seen abroad, where they don't use fictive kinship names; we are an exception', *A Horse for You* p. 59.

²³⁸ *A Horse for You* p. 59.

²³⁹ *A Horse for You* p. 61. As in the story of the uncle noted below, San Mao is at first happy with their concern, but when they start to be too persistent in their invitations and solicious concern she ceases to be pleased.

²⁴⁰ *A Horse for You* p. 57-58. San Mao describes the uncle's home as yet another idyllic setting, among the olive groves of Andalusia: the olive picking, the fine food and home-brewed wine, the bunches of flowers 'like in a movie or a painting', the evenings filled with storytelling, the long nights spent talking 'girl talk' with a cousin. 'The happiness and ease "going home to mother" fare truly to be found in a foreign country, at the uncle's home, *A Horse for You* p. 58.

²⁴¹ This theme reappears in later stories written after her permanent return to Taiwan, where she complains about her mother's 'smothering' concern for her. The present story ends with San Mao at her mother's home in Taipei; she describes her mother waiting for her at the airport, weeping when they meet, seeming frail and needing to be supported by San Mao. 'Under my mother's shade I

San Mao's story of her many 'maternal homes' anchors her firmly in a European world of familial care, welcome and reciprocity. Having cared for Europeans as a daughter-in-law, she is accepted in return as a daughter. The Europeans of this story wish for more than just friendship with San Mao; they offer quasi-familial attachment. As in the Sahara, San Mao showed herself 'belonging' through reciprocity in her El Ayoun community, providing help and receiving fun, interest, an 'exotic' life and acceptance from the natives - and in particular, from the noble and heroic nomad family who welcome her as a quasi-daughter (discussed in Appendix 2). In Europe too, San Mao shows herself 'belonging' - in communities and in families - and, as in the desert, becoming a part of it simply by choosing to and claiming to love it. There is, however, a difference of degree in her projects of 'belonging' in Europe and in the Sahara. In the desert, she asserted her belonging with one family; in Europe, several families claim and welcome her.

She is even welcomed by a modern alternative to the traditional family, a community of artists in which Jaime, José's elder brother, lives. San Mao describes a visit to Jaime's community (when she returned to Spain from Taiwan in 1973, before she goes to the Sahara)²⁴³ and is charmed by the group of young people from various countries living together in a picturesque old house, practising various creative arts and exhibiting their work in their own gallery.²⁴⁴ They are apparently free from obligation to 'real' family; though one has a newborn baby with him, two others have left children elsewhere in order to be free to concentrate on their art.²⁴⁵

become young again, and have lost the ability to protect myself; and this feeling, this mother-love, the safety of this home, removes all of my defences against the world and against myself, *A Horse for You* p. 61-62

²⁴² *A Horse for You* p. 58.

²⁴³ The story was first published in January 1975, in *Women's World* (Nüxing shijie) 4.

²⁴⁴ The story stresses the informality of their lives. San Mao does not know Jaime's address, but easily finds out where he lives by enquiring in a café; as there are no lights on in the house, she stands outside and calls his name, whereupon someone tells her to come straight in. The door is not locked; the house is full of art and atmosphere; a large sign proclaims 'Everybody's home'. The description of their house is reminiscent of later descriptions of her own house decoration - indeed it may have inspired the decoration of her legendary house in the desert (she describes a big room flooded with light and fresh air from its many large windows, yellow curtains, mattresses spread with coloured fabric and piled with colourful cushions, a sheepskin on the floor, a little round table, teacups, wall-height bookshelves and many books, dried flowers and potted cactus, candles, pretty coloured bottles, decorative stones and shells, paintings, sketches, little sculptures, 'strange pictures from magazines' - 'all kinds of things, like a second-hand stall', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 199-200.

²⁴⁵ When San Mao asks Francisco where his wife and child are, he takes her over to the window. 'What do you see?' he asks. 'Light', replies San Mao. Francisco explains, 'Everyone has to have light in their heart. My light is my art and my lifestyle, but my wife wanted me to give all this up, so we parted. It's not a question of loving her or not loving her. Maybe you can understand'. 'I do', affirms San Mao. Just then Jaime comes in and asks what it is that San Mao understands. 'We are talking about values', San Mao tells him, *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 206.

The other artists all welcome San Mao with pleasure. The community is 'a mini United Nations'²⁴⁶ - Jaime, Francisco from Uruguay, John from the USA, Ramon from France, Eduard and his baby daughter, Ursula from Switzerland, Spanish Enrique, and two others who are away travelling. San Mao notes that none of them resembles any of the others in any way; 'each one had own distinctive style.'²⁴⁷ Only one thing was the same: there was a very peaceful attitude in their actions. That was extremely clear'.²⁴⁸ As they quietly go back to their occupations (reading, painting, craft work, listening to music, doing nothing, and making Chinese tea for San Mao), she is pleased that no one expresses any curiosity about her.²⁴⁹ She is impressed by their hard work on their art (despite their hippie appearance),²⁵⁰ the fact that they eat with chopsticks, and their hospitality - even though, she assumes, they do not earn much. José arrives, then two more more unexpected guests, and all are warmly welcomed. 'This really was "Everybody's Home"', she exclaims.²⁵¹ San Mao involves herself in the life of the community, helping them transport their artworks to their gallery-shop, buying nappies for the baby, minding the gallery - and, as usual, cooking.²⁵² One of the absent members of the community, Adela, returns and greets San Mao with a kiss, saying, 'Welcome, welcome! Jaime has said you have been cooking these past couple of days. I want to try your good food'.²⁵³ San Mao is pleased: 'The people here were all natural and unselfconscious like this and accepted all guests in this way. I was very moved by their spirit. And they weren't people with money; it is unusual to be like this'.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁶ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 200-201.

²⁴⁷ San Mao describes the artists in some detail - the goatee beard, the African dress, the black trousers with pink spots - and her appearance in turn is approved as 'like an American Indian woman'. She also notes the fact that they are sitting on the floor or on giant cushions rather than chairs, *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 200-201.

²⁴⁸ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 202.

²⁴⁹ As I expected, no one asked me 'Who are you?' 'What do you do?' 'Where are you from?' 'How old are you?' and other such boring questions...it was as natural as if I had been born there. No one even asked me, "How long are you staying?" It was strange', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 201.

²⁵⁰ Rising at midday, San Mao finds the artists at work in their studios throughout the house. 'Last night I thought you were non-working hippies', she exclaims. 'God, if we are hippies, you are shit!', replies Enrique amiably. Jaime explains, 'We are a group of people who live in our own way. Call it whatever you like'. San Mao is chastened; 'I felt ashamed of my superficiality; they obviously didnt like the word 'hippie', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 203.

²⁵¹ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 203-204.

²⁵² *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 203-204. The women of the community appear to do the domestic work; San Mao does the cooking and Ursula washes pots in the kitchen while the men work on their art.

²⁵³ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 205.

²⁵⁴ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 205. San Mao enjoys plaiting Enrique's long hair, listening to music with everyone at night, and going for long walks. 'Ursula and I became good friends', she remarks, 'and it was the same with the others', p. 206.

The artists are equally impressed with San Mao. After a few harmonious days together, Jaime invites her to stay and join them:

Will you come and live here? We have lots of empty rooms. Everyone would welcome you...you've been a painter; why not try again? We could go to the gallery and sell your works. *This is your home.*²⁵⁵

Though drawn to their lifestyle and 'moved' by the invitation, San Mao declines, unwilling to 'lay aside the past order of my life' and give up her life in Madrid. She promises to come again in summer; 'As you like', replies Jaime, 'you're welcome any time; think about it'. San Mao lies awake pondering:

'In that home where there were no nationality or age divisions, I felt settled for the first time; for the first time I did not have the feeling of being a wanderer'.²⁵⁶

Leave she does, however, amid much sadness. The artists farewell her with embraces, with promises of gifts or loans,²⁵⁷ with regret that she has not yet met Laura, who is still away travelling, with talk of her next visit, and with a final playful snowball fight on the way to the station. Though San Mao does not feel like a wanderer in the artists' household, she nonetheless chooses to return from this dream world - in which she had encountered a new kind of acceptance and freedom - into her own everyday world, in which she was to recreate this hospitality, ease and human feeling for herself.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ 'zher cai shi ni de jia', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 206.

²⁵⁶ *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 206.

²⁵⁷ Ursula promises to make her 'a little Indian calfskin dress' and Eduard loans her 'a beautiful leather bag', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* p. 207. There is a contrast here with José's family, who consumed the money with which San Mao was planning to buy new clothes.

²⁵⁸ Despite the talk of return, she has decided that she will not do so. 'I knew I wouldn't go again...those 7 days had flown past like a dream, but I still couldn't lay down the heavy burden of the world. I wanted to go back into that life in which could not face my self and was not true to my self. "Goodbye, I'll be back next summer for sure" - as I stood on the train waving, I called out the promise that I couldn't keep, as if by way of a guarantee to them and also a guarantee for my own happiness again. But happiness is always distant and unreachable, like waiting forever for the blue bird that never comes', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 207-208. The world of the artists is a superior world, a 'dream', in which (by contrast with her usual world) San Mao can settle peacefully, can face herself and be true to herself - and in which she truly 'belongs' - but she has not yet had enough of the worlds of travel, study and challenging new experiences. She was soon to travel to the Sahara, to marry José and to begin a new life as 'San Mao', one of the most famous and loved Chinese writers of her generation. The tension expressed in this story was to characterise much of San Mao's life: between the wish for withdrawal from the workaday world into a haven of peace and happiness (away from the search for fame and wealth) and the urge to be plunge into the world, involve herself in society and worldly concerns. Perhaps related to San Mao's apparent depressive condition of hyper-sociability and activity alternating with withdrawal, this tension is observable in many aspects of San Mao's life (for example the wish not to be recognised in public, and the insistence on wearing clothes that would identify her as 'San Mao') and has been noted by biographers. Biographers later constructed her life in the desert as a manifestation of the former and her life in Europe as the latter.

More than ten years after San Mao's visit to the artists' community - after her desert years, after her marriage to José and after his death in a diving accident - San Mao produced her longest and most detailed account of a European surrogate family, the family of her friend Rachel in Switzerland.²⁵⁹ Rachel, she claims, is 'like my own family',²⁶⁰ and San Mao also has close relationships also with Rachel's husband Otto and their two adult children, Geni and Andrea - indeed she cannot say whether she is primarily the parents' friend or the childrens'.²⁶¹ She also has a close relationship with an adjunct member of their household, Geni's boyfriend Daniel - the same Daniel whom San Mao helped deal with his dying mother and abusive father in Gran Canaria many years before (discussed above), who is now studying in Switzerland.²⁶² San Mao's visit is at both Rachel's and Daniel's insistence; everyone in the household is excited about her visit, and the scene is set for an emotional familial reunion before she arrives.²⁶³

The story of San Mao's stay with Rachel and her family shows her completely integrated into a European family, accepted and loved by every family member. In Rachel's home, San Mao is unambiguously the recipient of familial care, and not the provider of it; this is thus perhaps the most welcoming household in all of San Mao's stories apart from San Mao's own. The visit takes place after the death of José, and this European family is shown caring for her in her grief. José's family, on the other hand, do not care at all; according to San Mao's account, they have no compassion for her, they dispute what is left of José's property, and do not even seem particularly grief-stricken at the loss of their son.

In her visits to other European homes, including (indeed especially) José's family home in Madrid, San Mao presents herself as central to the life of the family while she is there, by virtue of what she contributes to it (housekeeping work, money, concern). In this Swiss family, however, she is central because of their love and concern for her. True reciprocity with Europe is achieved as this family looks after

²⁵⁹ Having first visited friends in Madrid, Florence and Vienna (and demonstrated how easily she fits into Europe and is at home there through her mastery of European languages and network of loving friends), she goes to Rachel's home in Basel.

²⁶⁰ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 46.

²⁶¹ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 63.

²⁶² San Mao notes that 'One year, Daniel's mother died in the Canaries, and we all helped look after his father in his wheelchair. Rachel's family moved to the Canaries a few days later, *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 60.

²⁶³ The whole family is excited when San Mao phones from Lausanne; she finds herself weeping when Daniel addresses her; Basel is full of her friends (Ursula, Michael, Tibor) but San Mao does not wish to see them as it is not long since José's death, wishing rather for solitude, *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* pp. 46-48.

San Mao as one of their own. From the time when Andrea, Geni and Daniel meet her at the station with tearful embraces²⁶⁴ (José's family, she is careful to remind us, did not), to the warm homecoming scene, to the impulsive trip to France for the day with the younger generation, to the visit from another old friend from the years in the Canary Islands,²⁶⁵ the pleasant and peaceful mealtimes and evenings chatting over glasses of wine in the lamplight, to her departure, every member of Rachel's household expresses concern and affection for San Mao, urging her to remain with them as part of the family. Moved by their warmth, she stays longer than she had intended.

Rachel's home is Storybook Europe again, set in an idyllic dream world of peaceful scenery and cultured beauty.²⁶⁶ 'How could this be an ordinary person's house?' asks San Mao as they arrive at Rachel's home; 'It was where angels lived!'²⁶⁷ As in the Europe travel stories, the people are as angelic as their surroundings, and San Mao basks in the concern of European friends who love her:

I could never resist Rachel's loving and concerned manner. When she saw the look on my face she understood and was so sad. Her clean and simple clothes, her gentleness and speech were all powers that comforted me; an angelic glow on her face shone on me.²⁶⁸

San Mao's stay with them is not a visit, asserts Rachel; rather, she has 'come home'.²⁶⁹ Here San Mao is a true 'daughter': Rachel looks after her solicitously (plying her with food and drink for her, patting cushions for her, lighting lamps for her); Geni, Andrea and Daniel address her as 'sister'; Otto greets her with the words, 'You've come home! that's good. It's good that you're back', repeating it 'as if I had

²⁶⁴ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* pp. 57-58.

²⁶⁵ Tibor had lived in the Canaries for many years. A former primary school teacher turned second-hand dealer, he is (like San Mao) a keen scavenger for old 'treasures', *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* pp. 73-75.

²⁶⁶ The town, Rachel's house and its physical surroundings are described in some detail. San Mao describes Swiss houses 'covered in flowers', with 'real character'. Rachel's house is 'like a dream, lit up to welcome us home'. San Mao notes the apple tree, the red and white checked curtains at the kitchen window, the warm atmosphere and comfortable chairs, the old wooden furniture, the gleaming windows with their gauze curtains patterned with white lotus leaves, the hanging plants, the dim glow of lamps, the 'simple, elegant wild flowers' and candles, *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* pp. 62-63.

²⁶⁷ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept* p. 61. In early stories San Mao gained European approval for the taste and comfort of her home; here, towards the end of her years in Europe, she herself bestows approval on Rachel for her beautiful home and Swiss housekeeping skills. The physical warmth of the house complements the kindness of the people: though the weather is cold and wet, the house is centrally heated and an open fire provides an atmosphere of extra warmth as San Mao is plied with food and cups of tea, p. 63.

²⁶⁸ As San Mao weeps in Rachel's embrace, Rachel soothes her, 'It's all right, it's all right. It's good that you have come. Now I've seen you I can be at ease, thank God', *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept* p. 62.

²⁶⁹ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 62.

always lived at his home'.²⁷⁰ The photograph of San Mao and José prominently displayed on the bookshelf reinforces the notion that San Mao 'belongs' there.²⁷¹ San Mao praises Rachel's housekeeping, cooking skills, attentiveness and hospitality, stresses the concern of Rachel and Otto for her (Otto's expressed in pleasure at her presence, with smiles and clinking of glasses, and Rachel's sad and thoughtful), and muses that if she had been born a child of this household - if she were their real rather than fictive daughter - she would never want to leave home.²⁷²

The European family's loving concern for her (in which generations unite to care for and include her) is expressed in a gift that is configured by both sides as a familial token with some heirloom significance. Rachel takes off the brooch she is wearing and gives it to San Mao; San Mao protests:

'Keep it for Geni! A keepsake like that!'

'You are part of our family too. Take it', Rachel said.

Without another word I put the old brooch carefully into my bag.²⁷³

The gift of jewellery cements San Mao's place in Rachel's family - just as a gift of jewellery in the desert confirmed her inclusion in the family of Aofeilua and Bassiri (see Appendix 2, San Mao Makes History). With stories of such gestures of inclusion from families on two continents, San Mao presents herself as truly 'at home' in the world, valued and accepted by Africans and Europeans like their own daughters.

When San Mao announces that she will soon be leaving Basel and Rachel's family and moving on - to visit a member of her 'real' family who lives in Europe -²⁷⁴ they urge her to stay. Her place is with them, they suggest, unless she is returning to her real maternal home in Taiwan. San Mao maintains, however, that her home by the sea in the Canaries is the best place for her, asserting (as in her other 'maternal homes') her need for independence and, after José's death, solitude.²⁷⁵ Before she leaves, Otto urges her to 'come back if things don't go well';²⁷⁶ plans are laid for the fun they will have together when she returns to them next time; and the sorrow of parting is described in sentimental detail.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁰ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 62.

²⁷¹ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 62.

²⁷² San Mao asks if Andrea will be moving out soon, 'as other young people do'; when Rachel replies that he doesn't want to, San Mao sighs that, 'If I were her child, unless I was going abroad, I wouldn't be able to bear to leave either', *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 66.

²⁷³ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 76.

²⁷⁴ San Mao is planning to visit her cousin, a musician, in Vienna (mentioned in Chapter 4), whom she has not seen for 13 years, and his wife whom she has never met, *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 73.

²⁷⁵ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 72.

²⁷⁶ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 76.

²⁷⁷ *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept?* p. 77.

Thus San Mao leaves this European family, and returns to her natal family.²⁷⁸ Her final European family story cements San Mao into a relationship of care with Europe that is - in this case at least - mutual. San Mao is not only a giver in Europe; here she is the recipient of concern and comfort when she herself is in need of it. She receives it from every member of the household equally - and one of them was the recipient of her own compassion and concern a decade or so earlier. The sought-after reciprocity is gloriously achieved here, in this warm familial situation, and it forms a striking contrast to the treatment she claims to have received from José's family.²⁷⁹ Throughout San Mao's stories there is an implicit suggestion that 'family' is where you find it - it is not confined to relatives, or 'compatriots' - and San Mao finds it in Europe. She not only enters a European family by marriage, but is also accepted into a daughterly relationship by several surrogate families. In these latter families she is always welcome; she 'belongs'; and affective kinship makes for closer relationships than kinship by marriage. Serving as a daughter-in-law or being accepted as a daughter, her involvement with Europe is more thoroughgoing and more serious than her involvement with Africa. Her playful 'mission' in the Sahara is largely replaced by narratives of humble service and familial affection in Europe, and she presents herself as truly 'belonging'. To leave the reciprocity of the community of Europe is her own choice; she is not compelled to leave for external political reasons, as in the Sahara, but moves on as and when she wishes.

She is so much a part of Europe, indeed, that European friends explicitly consider her to be one of them. One commentator cites a conversation between San Mao and Marisa, when San Mao is living in Europe and about to leave for a holiday in Taiwan. 'You won't go marrying a Chinese man, will you', says Marisa, 'or I'll never be able to see you again'. 'But I am Chinese!' replies San Mao. Marisa stares at her in astonishment: 'But from the first time we met I have felt that you were Spanish!' The writer goes on to say that her Swedish friend Fritz probably thinks of San Mao as Swedish; 'strange', he muses, 'how is it that San Mao is like a citizen of the world?'²⁸⁰ The world, it will be observed, is a European one - and San Mao unites northern and southern Europe by her quasi-membership in both. 'Citizenship'

²⁷⁸ Visiting her cousin, stopping at her house in the Canaries, and then returning to settle permanently in Taiwan - though not to live in her maternal home.

²⁷⁹ As noted above, San Mao tells of being constantly inconvenienced by José's family - cooking for them at Christmas, putting herself out for them when they insist on visiting them in the Canaries, and claiming that José's mother disputed José's will (wanting to prevent San Mao from gaining anything from his estate, haggling even over small personal items such as rings and showing no warmth for San Mao at all).

²⁸⁰ *The World of San Mao* p. 175.

was, it be recalled, a theme in San Mao's stories of her first arrival in Europe, in the context of a Chinese/Taiwan citizen creating informal ties with European countries. After years of involvement with Europe and stories that focus upon her contribution, participation, and acceptance, San Mao has come to 'belong' - as a 'citizen' (both literally and metaphorically), a daughter-in-law, and a daughter. The usual pattern, it will be noted, is reversed: only after becoming a daughter-in-law and a citizen - and a widow - does San Mao earn her position and gain her apparent birthright as a daughter.

Chapter 6:

The World as We Know It

Chapters 2-5 have considered San Mao's narratives of herself in foreign countries: arriving, at play, participating, caring, and being accepted. The ultimate message of the stories discussed so far would seem to be that San Mao is at home in the world,¹ and that her place there as a Chinese/Taiwan woman encompasses the right to play, the right to care and the right to belong. Like the 'social exploratresses' of the 19th century discussed by Pratt, San Mao in her narratives emplots 'quests for self-realization and fantasies of social harmony';² indeed her own self-realization brings harmony to those around her on two continents.

As has been demonstrated, she seeks to 'belong' in Africa and - even more - in Europe. She creates a textual world in which the Africans of her imagination and the Europeans of her imagination provide not only a site but also a foil for the practice of her own virtuous self, and she shows herself mirrored in their grateful and admiring eyes. It is a world in which the San Mao persona is created and flourishes, a world in which for San Mao (like Isak Dinesen) 'it comes naturally to be myself',³ whatever that textual 'self' may be. It was a world which many readers, it would appear, wanted to believe was 'true' at some level. If, as noted in Chapter 1, travel narratives 'create places rather than discover them',⁴ what then are the characteristics of the world that San Mao creates for her readers to know?

First, it is a world that is claimed by San Mao to be that of her own experience. San Mao's status is that of the person on the spot, the eye-witness, and the things which she records for readers have the immediacy of an eye-witness account. This is presumably one factor in the initial acceptance of San Mao's stories on the part of some readers as containing, at some level, some kind of truth or knowledge about the world.⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, the notion of an impartial and authoritative witness dispassionately transcribing the world has long ago been refuted, and the idea that 'the "world" has an order which we simply have to

¹ This sense of internationalisation is reflected in San Mao's language, in which syntactic structures often mirror European language sentence patterns, translated European-language idioms abound, and there appear to be many more 'western' cultural references than Chinese.

² Pratt p. 168.

³ Horton p. 5.

⁴ They 'construct...places from selective perceptions, from unequal weight given to various themes and the manner in which all these are then placed in relationship to each other....[it is not a question of what is seen] but what is selected to be of significance...what they chose to comment on and in what order', Bishop p. 40.

⁵ I thank Zhang Yanyin for her account of her own reading history of San Mao in the mid 1980s in China, where she and her friends read San Mao's stories for 'information' and 'knowledge' of the world, even though they perceived them as 'novels' and not as fact.

transcribe in writing' is untenable.⁶ All experiences of the world are structured by preconceptions, observations and judgments conditioned by gender, class, age, family circumstances, education, experiences of the world and so on as well as individual interests, prejudices and attitudes. The acts of selecting, editing and narrating - even of supposedly lived experiences - will inevitably draw upon narratives of the author's life, history and culture to structure the world as he or she experiences and describes it. Although (as I have argued in Chapters 2 to 5) the perceptions of an individual writer from Taiwan describing a world of Africa and Europe have much in common with other narratives of the world by people in different times and places (and in particular those who share San Mao's gender and class), Chinese ethnicity and culture have often been explicitly invoked in the narration of San Mao's adventures (by herself and by others) to explain or expand her observations of the world. Her presence in Africa and Europe, her interactions with African and European people, and her encounters with cultural practices that are new to her are all presented against a background of behaviour and values that are accepted as 'Chinese'. These elements - the immediate, 'eye-witness' account, the particular selection and presentation of events, people and emotions, and the self-conscious sense of being 'the Chinese person' in foreign lands - functioned to give San Mao's readers (mainly Chinese women) a picture of a character similar in many ways to themselves, and with whom they could identify, a female Chinese self in a world beyond their experience.

Of course my own selection and presentation here of samples from San Mao's stories is structured by my own preconceptions, observations and judgments conditioned by my own gender, class, age, family circumstances, education, experience of the world and so on, as well as individual interests, prejudices and attitudes. 'My' San Mao will be very different from the San Mao who would be presented by another writer after reading the same source material of San Mao's stories (and indeed differs in many respects from existing Chinese-language biographies and analyses of San Mao). I do not claim an authoritative reading of San Mao and her world; other readings of this author and cultural phenomenon can only enrich our understanding of her, her world and the world of her readers, and are to be welcomed.

San Mao's African and European writings, moreover, provide useful material for analysing the intersection between imaginative literary writing and theoretical international relations. As Phillip Darby has noted, these two fields, although they may take different forms and employ different kinds of language, often share common themes and interests. Like any other kind of writing,

⁶ Mills p. 10.

imaginative literature has not only 'an ideational value that is located in the conversation between text and reader' but also 'an instrumental value when it is related to its cultural context and to material interests'.⁷ It has already been suggested that San Mao's narratives are not simply trivial stories of a romantic and free-spirited individual roaming around the world, an innocent child playfully picking up stories, identifying herself with the powerless, as biographers have tended to accept on the basis of her stories. Following Darby, they may be analysed in terms of the 'material interests' as well as the 'cultural context' of their production. These may relate to the position of Taiwan as an unrecognised quasi-state in the 'family of nations'; or to the position of China as (at that time) an economically poor but history- and culture-rich entity which claims to have much to offer the world but to be undervalued by richer and more powerful states; or to a resurgence of nationalistic feeling based upon the notion of a virtuous mode of behaviour, whether this be an ancient civilised politesse or a modern system of social interaction such as the New Life movement or citizen diplomacy; or simply to the assumption that 'China' (through San Mao) has as much right to make the world as anyone else has. Based on the texts of San Mao's 'desert period' discussed in Chapters 2 to 5, I offer the following observations about the world as San Mao has constructed it.

The old world

As noted in Chapter 1, the world of San Mao is, for the most part, an 'old' world, consisting of Europe, north Africa and the fringes of Asia. The writing of her 'desert literary period' discussed here - her most popular work - is concerned with Africa and Europe, but even considering San Mao's writing as a whole, the 'new world' is less present than the old. A few scattered stories and one collection discuss her experiences in the USA; a monograph is devoted to her travel observations of Central and South America,⁸ and she translated a travel account of Mexico from English into Chinese;⁹ but the writing for which she is famous, and which has been reprinted most often, is her stories of the Sahara and Europe. Despite its proximity to Taiwan, Oceania does not seem to exist for San Mao; Southeast Asia, though she notes in passing that she has travelled there, receives very little attention; Japan hardly features;¹⁰ South Asia exists only in occasional

⁷ Darby p. 2. My thanks to Vanessa Voss for bringing Darby's book to my attention.

⁸ *Over the Hills and Far Away*, Crown, Taipei 1982. Observers have noted that this book is largely a list of encounters with people who find San Mao fascinating and a description of how much everyone loves her wherever she goes (public lecture by Hu Jinyuan, Taipei Women's Bookstore, June 17, 1995).

⁹ *In the Twinkling of an Eye*, from 'Travels to Mexico' by Barry Martinsson SJ.

¹⁰ A young Japanese backpacker, Mori, is the recipient of San Mao's care amid the stories of her concern for her European neighbours, *The Tender Night* pp. 217- 240. San Mao encounters Mori

references to airport stopovers. A number of later stories discuss her home, childhood, family, teaching experiences and life in Taiwan;¹¹ and her 'motherland' of China becomes a destination and a subject only in the late 1980s, when the ban on travel by Taiwan citizens to China was lifted. This later work, however, did not capture the attention and loyalty of readers as her African and European writing had. Thus the world of San Mao in her heyday - and the world in which her readers took the greatest interest - seems to map onto the 'old' world, as it has historically been imagined to exist by Europe.

A world of colonial power

San Mao's travels (from Spain to the Western Sahara to the Canary Islands to former Spanish colonies in the Americas) are facilitated by colonialism. Though she may be a critic of colonialism, she is also a beneficiary and occasional defender of Spain's colonial rule in Western Sahara (as noted in Chapter 5 and Appendix 3, 'San Mao Makes History').¹² Spain, it might be noted, had taken no part in

at his jewellery stall in a temporary streetside market in Tenerife. He offers her a discount on the basis that 'We are both orientals', but she does not accept it so as not to reduce his profits; again Chinese food brings people together as she invites him to a home-cooked meal. He seems 'friendly and sincere. not inferior or superior', and San Mao notes the neatness and cleanliness of his clothing. As he knows very little Spanish, Mori communicates with San Mao in writing, through Chinese characters. When San Mao discovers that Mori usually subsists on nuts and fruit and rents a bed in a dorm, she feels that her own life is excessively luxurious in comparison and begins taking food to his stall for him. As he starts to learn more Spanish and gets to know the other stall-holders, she gradually stops visiting him. Time passes; San Mao moves house and becomes absorbed in other interests. Suddenly one day she remembers him; the market is no longer there, and she is anxious about him. Then she becomes ill for some time. After she has recovered, she goes to Mori's hotel to ask about him - but he is long gone. When the market finally reopens, another stall-holder tells San Mao that, some months previously, Mori's money and passport had been stolen along with all of the goods on his stall. He had tried to contact San Mao, but could not locate her; he had waited by his stall for her to come, but she had not. Once the market season had ended, he had been unable to get a work permit; he had been arrested and spent time in jail, then had contracted hepatitis and been in hospital. Now, however, he is back running his market stall. San Mao feels ashamed of having forgotten him at a time when he needed her and trusted her to help: 'when he put all his trust in me...I had casually forgotten him...Did he hate me? He should have hated me, but now today when he looked at me there was no hate, just dimness and exhaustion. That made me even sadder', *The Tender Night* p. 235. Some time later, Mori comes to visit with a friend, to thank San Mao and José for their concern and say goodbye. San Mao's feeling of guilt evaporates in her happiness that Mori has found a friend, and they part affectionately. This is the closest encounter with Japan in San Mao's stories. Although she grew up in a Japanese house in Taipei and enjoyed much Japanese literature (Akutagawa Ryunosuke being a particular favourite), she rarely mentions contact with Japanese people. In her story of Mori, she portrays the young Japanese man and herself linked together by a sense of shared 'Asianness'.

¹¹ She also translated two accounts by the Jesuit priest Barry Martinsson of his life and missionary work among Aboriginal people in Taiwan, *The Song of Lanyu* (Crown, Taipei 1982) and *The Story of Qingquan* (Crown, Taipei 1983).

¹² It is far from clear in San Mao's accounts of Spain and the Sahara that she has any quarrel with 'colonialism' as such. She is not unwilling to identify herself with Spain's political position in the Sahara, voicing support of Spain and a belief that the Sahrawi are unfit to govern themselves. Though some of San Mao's biographers claim a strong anti-colonialism stance on her part, it is more the personal difficulties that resentment against the Spanish in the desert cause for her than the principle of colonialism itself that is specifically identified as the problem. San Mao does express criticism of colonialism (see Appendix 2, 'San Mao Makes History'), but her fantasies of

European quasi-colonial involvement with China; and its government in the 1960s gave recognition to Taiwan rather than the People's Republic of China, thus allowing San Mao to reside there.

The quasi-colonial relationship between China and Taiwan may be an underlying factor in San Mao's understandings and configurations of colonial relationships. San Mao, though a 'daughter of China' born on the mainland, had grown up in Taiwan; moreover, she had lived among other mainland emigrants or exiles whose relationship with Taiwan had much in common with that of colonial officials in a colony. Narratives of struggle against colonialism have been invoked by mainland scholars to discuss San Mao's supposed ability to form bonds with colonised Sahrawi people on the basis of shared suffering under colonial rule (discussed in Appendix 3, 'San Mao Makes History'), but San Mao's status as a member of a colonising elite at home brings ambiguities into this reading that are not acknowledged.

Earlier chapters have suggested that San Mao's writings about Africa seem to share some features with the colonial narrative - and that these features are present also in her writings about Europe. Though these ideologies are present in her writing, her judgments do not consistently follow the historically racist assumptions in much Euro-American travel writing, namely that Europe, supposedly the home of culture, learning and sophistication, was somehow 'full' and Africa (read as backward, poor, uneducated, inferior) was 'empty'. The experiences she claims to have had in Africa and Europe may be different, and at some level Europe may be constructed as 'cultured other' and Africa as 'barbaric other', but these distinctions are ultimately flattened out to make the two continents equivalent sites for the performance of San Mao's own Chinese female virtue. Her implied mission of civilising and helping underlies her writings of Europe as much as of Africa; her wish for reciprocity likewise permeates both her European

belonging in the desert tend to edit out the colonial structures that allow her to live there and whose collapse forces her to leave. As noted in Appendix 2, biographers of San Mao are at pains to convince the reader that she and José were, in Sahrawi eyes, quite unlike other people identified with the Spanish rulers, even though their presence there was dependent on Spanish domination of the territory: 'In El Ayoun, very few Spanish people lived in districts where the Sahrawi lived. White people were aristocrats of the desert. San Mao and José, living among the Sahrawi and mixing with them, developed feelings for them...But in the eyes of the average indigenous person, they were still colonisers. When the political tidal wave surged, it brought possibilities of harm to the kind young couple every day', Cui and Zhao p. 156; 'Even though José was Spanish, and San Mao was José's wife, they not only didn't act like bosses and bully the local people but also made numerous local friends and found many ways to do good works for the locals. They cured their diseases, helped them get some education, helped them buy scarce goods at the Spanish official store, and blended in with the Sahrawi people', Gu Jitang pp. 71-72. Though the picture given here is of San Mao using her shopping privileges for the Sahrawi, it is actually Spanish friends for whom she records having bought extra goods at the military welfare store, *Crying Camels* pp. 44-47. See Appendix 2, 'San Mao Makes History' for further discussion of these issues.

and African writings; and, though they may take different forms, her urge to belong and her sense of having successfully achieved this status 'belonging' are common to her self-representations in both Europe and Africa.¹³

San Mao found or invented incidents, 'characters' and experiences in both Europe and Africa to transform into material for her narratives, and thus made a living in the world. These exploits were made possible by patriarchal family systems: the relative affluence of her lawyer father made it possible for her to study and travel in Europe (supported by a monthly allowance), and the Spanish citizenship of her husband gave her access to Spanish colonies and territories and other European nations. They are structured also by her Chinese ethnicity, which made her (according to her own account) an exotic 'outsider' in Spain. Her position in the desert was more ambiguous. She identified with Spain, Sahrawi or China/Taiwan as she chose (discussed in Appendix 3, 'San Mao Makes History'), but was apparently identified by Sahrawi as one of the Spanish.¹⁴

Parallels might be suggested here with Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, an Argentinian traveller and writer in Europe and Africa in the late nineteenth century whose narratives have been discussed by Mary Louise Pratt. Sarmiento, Pratt contends, could be a 'real European coloniser' in Africa, merging into a racist colonial system as a 'master' rather than a subject, whereas in Europe he was considered an 'inferior' because he was from a colony of Europe and not a European.¹⁵ Like Sarmiento, San Mao could be 'a real European coloniser' in Africa (and could choose to accept or reject the role). Her 'foreignness' had quite a different meaning in Europe from Sarmiento's, however. Unlike the Argentinian, she had no European colonial origins to preclude her from being regarded in Spain as fully equal;¹⁶ on the contrary, she could claim membership in

¹³ San Mao's writings both uphold and contrast with the kind of thinking that Frank Dikötter has suggested informed attitudes towards 'the west' in the Republican period, with 'an artificial relationship of opposites' resulting from the use of 'the west' as a consistent standard of comparison for 'China' (exemplified by Chen Duxiu's categorisation of the 'fundamental' differences between them: the West as individualistic and China as communalistic; the West as utilitarian, and China as ritualistic; the west emphasizing struggle and China preferring tranquillity, Dikötter p. 127).

¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 2, San Mao's landlord Handi includes her in the term 'you Spanish people'.

¹⁵ Pratt pp. 190-193. The world, notes Pratt, 'becomes simpler for Sarmiento when he goes to North Africa' and can identify unambiguously as one of the colonisers: 'Here, and perhaps only here, does he get to be a European pure and simple, and a colonialist', Pratt p. 192.

¹⁶ As Pratt has noted, 'For colonies to lay claim to their mother countries...even a purely verbal claim implies a reciprocity not in keeping with colonial hierarchies', Pratt p. 190. Sarmiento, as a colonial subject, 'lacked a discursive authority or a legitimate position of speech from which to represent Europe', Pratt pp. 189-190. It could be argued that San Mao was already part of a colonising elite of mainland KMT affiliates; equally, it could be argued that, having grown up in Taiwan at a time when official - and San Mao's own familial - discourses focused upon the authority of a Chinese motherland and the supposed inferiority of Taiwan as a peripheral province, San Mao may have had some guilty sense of being 'provincial'.

an 'ancient civilisation', explicitly claiming European interest in aspects of China's ancient culture (the Chinese writing system and Chinese philosophy, noted in Chapter 5). Thus San Mao presented herself bringing 'old culture' to the part of the world that considers itself the definitive centre of 'culture':¹⁷ bringing history to a place with history; civilisation to a place with civilisation; values to a place with values; dignity to a place with dignity; and self-determination to a place with self-determination.

She can also be likened to Dinesen and Schreiner in Horton's analysis: not imagining herself to fit easily into either of two available categories, she could represent herself as one or the other or, indeed, as both. As Horton has suggested, 'Self-defined as both not European and not African, [Dinesen and Schreiner] take pains to construct themselves as not *not*-European and not *not*-African either...they are not white/not black, not colonial/not not-colonial...If we consider their lifeworks in toto, it becomes abundantly clear that living on the slash became their line of flight from construction of gender, race and nationality they found too confining'.¹⁸ San Mao too was able to present herself as inhabiting 'the slash' between European and African, colonial and native, beneficiary of colonialism and opponent of it, bold adventurer and home-maker.

A personal rather than a political world

In San Mao's world, politics rarely intrude. San Mao's stay in Spain during the Franco era coincided with student demonstrations against the regime; they are referred to in only the briefest of terms as the occasion for a longer than usual winter break (classes in all institutions of higher education being suspended and the Easter holiday beginning early). San Mao takes no interest in the demonstrations at all ('as a foreign student', she remarks, 'it was better not to ask')¹⁹, not even mentioning what they might have been about. Likewise, her stay in the desert began shortly after the Polisario Liberation Front had begun its guerilla activities against the Spanish administration, advocating an independent Western Sahara. San Mao's stories of her photography and fishing trips and of her home and her neighbours take place amid the calls for Spanish decolonisation

¹⁷ And indeed as a place that has maintained its culture, history and civilisation unbroken from antiquity, without a 'Dark Age' such as Europe had supposedly experienced.

¹⁸ Horton p. 28

¹⁹ The demonstrations are mentioned only in passing in the story of Antony the pigeon. Just before exam time, 'the student movement began. Sometimes they were obstreperous; at 1 pm when classes finished, they got involved in fights between students and the police. Some girls in the hostel would come home every day soaked through, saying, "Bad luck; I was too slow. Soaked again! I'll be getting a cold, for sure". They talked about demonstrating as if it was as natural as going into town for a soda'; 'sometimes I didn't understand it at all', *The Rainy Season Will Not Return* pp. 97-98. San Mao's surprise is not surprising, given that she grew up under the strict martial law conditions of Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s in which she grew up.

and the contending claims of Morocco and Mauritania for the territory; yet there are few traces of this political unrest in San Mao's narratives. Political questions are relegated to two only stories; and in both they are packaged in a personalised and romantic form, making political events into dramas of individual love and death with a focus upon San Mao as experiencing subject, in which she herself plays a prominent role (these two stories are discussed in Appendix 2, 'San Mao Makes History').²⁰

The world of San Mao's stories is also a world in which 'others' are brought close and shown to be human: likable, vulnerable, absurd, in need of assistance. John Urry has noted the function of international travel in producing 'international familiarisation' or 'normalisation',²¹ and San Mao's narratives show these processes in action and produce them for readers. For the reader of her stories, participating vicariously in the experience of international travel and foreign societies in the form in which San Mao has represented them, the 'exotic' is made familiar.²²

It is also a world in which San Mao experiences hardship. There is no dichotomy in her stories between Europe as a place of wealth and comfort and Africa as a place of difficulty. She tells of material lack in the Sahara (because in the desert environment the convenience and variety of consumption she expects is absent) and financial difficulties in Europe (because her father's allowance from Taiwan was insufficient for the high German cost of living, or because her husband was unemployed in the Canaries).²³ Despite her financial constraints, San Mao is still able to visit wealthy nations with high costs of living, such as

²⁰ Occasional glancing references are placed in other domesticated contexts - such as the mention of the visiting photographers in the story of San Mao's home decor (discussed in Chapter 2).

²¹ Urry, *Consuming Places* p. 166-167.

²² As noted, San Mao is 'at home' with both the urbane and the 'primitive', making both her own and uniting them in her own person. Other elements present in San Mao's world are the supernatural and the relative absence of religion on both continents. In Africa she encounters the mysterious pendant, flying saucers and a cursed neighbour in the desert; in the Canaries she discovers mystical healing practices. Islam tends to appear only in relatively light-hearted contexts (such as when San Mao variously contemplates having given alcohol to a goat owned by a Muslim; tells her landlord he is a bad Muslim for wanting to raise her rent; and expresses doubt about the existence of flying saucers, met with the words 'Muslims are not allowed to lie' and 'I believe in Allah, but those things do exist'). The relative absence of the Catholic church in her narratives is also, perhaps, surprising (nuns feature on one occasion, as guardians of Shayida's child, see Appendix 2, 'San Mao Makes History').

²³ San Mao could be said to be rich in a place of poverty and poor in a place of plenty. Despite her claims that Sahrawi around her are rich and that José's salary is not enough, San Mao is a car owner and has a large amount of money in the bank in the Sahara. In Germany, she stresses her material difficulties - subsisting on bread and water, wrapping her worn-out boots in plastic bags held on with rubber bands as protection from the snow then thawing her frozen feet on the classroom radiators, and casting covetous eyes upon the array of goods in department stores that she cannot afford to buy, *Taking the City* pp. 230-232. Her position in Europe would be familiar to many Chinese immigrants struggling to make a life in countries where living is expensive; her position in the Sahara, however, is alongside the colonising power. Marriage to a Spaniard, despite his relatively lowly status in the desert, places her in a class of colonial privilege.

Germany and the USA, as well as the 'third world'. In both Africa and Europe, 'China' may experience hardship but transforms and overcomes it: to create beauty, earn approval and give to those around her.

A world in need

It is a world which needs what San Mao can offer. Moreover, it lacks conform with stereotypic discourses of 'African' and 'western' problems - 'ignorance' and 'backward' customs, and lack of concern for family, excessive individualism and breakdown of community respectively. As a representative of China, San Mao brings to the world 'civilised' customs and familial and community concern, setting a positive example and giving assistance; and she is valued in return for the 'civilising' qualities she embodies in the world.

It is a world also in which San Mao is shown as competent. She knows what to do, and she acts when action is needed. This narrative of competence may be related to San Mao's childhood experiences of difficulty at school, shutting herself in at home and expressing feelings of loneliness and inferiority. The adult San Mao not only organises her own life but also cares for others, demonstrating personal competence in both practical and emotional spheres.²⁴ In both Europe and Africa, her competence is needed; 'China' supplies what is lacking.

A welcoming world

It is also a world in which San Mao is *personally* welcomed and accepted, establishing relationships of reciprocity and even quasi-familial affection wherever she goes. As noted, San Mao lived in expatriate communities in two places of relatively long-term residence abroad: in Western Sahara (in the Spanish community) and Gran Canaria (in the northern European community). These two experiences are constructed in rather different ways, however. In the former, San Mao claims to have lived alongside the 'natives' rather than with the other Spanish people - that is in a community with less material privilege than the expatriates, among people regarded (by herself as well as by other Spaniards) as 'backward'. In the Canaries, on the other hand, she lives amongst people from the world's wealthiest nations. Both communities, it is suggested, need and admire her; and she is equally at home in both.

In both places, moreover, Spanish people are supposedly reluctant to deal with non-Spanish people - whether they be rich or poor, an indigenous majority or an immigrant minority. The negative attitude of the Spanish post office clerk in Gran Canaria toward foreign residents was noted in Chapter 5. In El Ayoun, the

²⁴ I thank Xiong Fan and Christine Sun for their helpful discussion of this aspect of San Mao.

other Spanish Fosbucraa wives regard Sahrawi with disgust; they will not visit Cemetery District, where San Mao lives, for fear of catching something (noted in Chapter 2), and they are unable to appreciate Sahrawi hospitality (noted in Chapter 3). San Mao, however, is good to all: to Spanish in the Sahara, and to Sahrawi; to northern Europeans in the Canaries, and to Spaniards. Furthermore, she is accepted by Sahrawi, Spanish and northern Europeans alike. Though Spanish communities might despise Sahrawi or discriminate against Scandinavians, they are shown welcoming San Mao. She is equally beloved of 'cold' northern Europeans, 'warm' Spaniards and 'primitive', 'natural' Sahrawi. The exceptional closeness which San Mao claims to have established with her community²⁵ and with individuals who welcome her as a 'daughter' creates an impression that she is exceptionally at ease and in place, in Africa and in Europe.²⁶

It is a world that admires San Mao, that wishes to be her friend, that recognises her kindness, her wit, her spirit, her goodness, and her attractiveness as an 'oriental woman'. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that San Mao functions as a metonym here: through her, it may be Chinese people as a whole who are presented as rare, remarkable and special in the world of Africa and Europe. If this world wanted what San Mao ('China') could offer, and stood open to San Mao (China), then readers too might imagine themselves participating in the world in similar ways.²⁷

²⁵ She presents herself as known and loved wherever she goes. In Tenerife, for example, supermarket checkout workers, shopkeepers, bank managers, doctors in the local clinic all know her by name; she is welcome to take her book manuscripts to the clinic and spread them over the table to collate them, and she is willingly given a loan by a bank manager out of his own pocket (whereupon she kisses him). 'When you are at home', notes San Mao, 'these things are convenient' (my italics), *Rear View* pp. 228-229. Likewise in Madrid she embraces the hotel doorman (*Taking the City* pp. 203-204); and by presenting herself in similarly demonstrative, affectionate relationship with traders around the world, creates an impression of being accepted and 'at home' wherever she goes (see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping').

²⁶ Strangely, the only community that she does not seem to present herself as unambiguously part of is that of people of Chinese ethnicity in Europe (or Africa). She does not go out of her way to mix with them (noted in Chapter 4) - indeed she is wont to suggest (either implicitly or by omission) that they did not exist and that she was always the only Chinese person in her community. Ma Zhongxin interviews a number of Chinese residents in Madrid and the Canary Islands who, he claims, knew her; none is mentioned at any length in her stories. The only exception would appear to be the two elderly Guo sisters, who appear to be the only named Chinese associates of San Mao's in Europe; and part of their narrative function is to facilitate the presentation of San Mao communicating with them in European languages. As with Charlie, the elderly Swedish man next door, San Mao can communicate through German; they reply in Dutch (they also understand, but do not speak, Spanish), *Rear View* pp. 216-218. The only other named Chinese person San Mao finds in Europe is buried in a cemetery in the Canary Islands, see *A Horse for You* pp. 65-71.

²⁷ Chen Xiaomei has discussed another 'world' created for Chinese readers (this time in the early 1990s) which mainland readers also appeared eager to believe in. Zhou Li's book *Manhattan's China Lady* (Manhadun de Zhongguo nüren, Beijing 1992), categorised by Chen as 'autobiographical fiction', was another 'exotic story of international success' (Chen p. 197). It is a first-person narrative of a Chinese woman living in 'the west' who becomes successful - not in terms of emotional success like San Mao but in financial terms, fulfilling the 'American dream' after a difficult life in China during the Cultural Revolution years. Though the political

A world that cannot bully 'China'

It is a world that, try as it might, cannot dominate San Mao. Though Spanish people may try to treat her as a coolie and Spanish authorities may suspect her of all kinds of wrongdoing; though German bureaucracy may regard Chinese people as pliant, duplicitous and willing to suffer; though British immigration authorities may regard Chinese as both spineless and potentially criminal, intent on illegal migration; San Mao resists them all and proves victorious. With resourcefulness, persistence and charm, she stands up for Chinese honour, shatters 'western' stereotypes and establishes 'China' as an equal - and indeed a winner - in every conflict.

A world that is San Mao's by right

It is a world in which San Mao herself is freely at play, and has an unquestioned right to be. Like the 19th-century English travel writers, whose right to be wherever they chose 'is presented as self-evident',²⁸ San Mao too assumes a naturalness and rightness to her presence in the places she visits, and a right to be a part of whatever society she may wish to associate with.²⁹ San Mao shares the notion that Sally Price has articulated as the confident 'western' belief

backgrounds and settings of the *China Lady* and San Mao are quite different, some of the appeal for readers may have been similar; public discussion of the book ascribes its attraction for readers to its 'success story of a single Chinese woman across the oceans', its 'intimate remembrance' of her arduous journey and 'its inspiring emotions of Chinese national pride and a longing for the motherland', Chen p. 158. Zhou Li, like San Mao, was accused of fabricating her stories (chiefly by Chinese residents of the place where the book was set). Chen notes that the author is 'self-complacent about a Chinese supremacy over others in the West', while at the same time the I-narrator consciously acts...as a subordinate in western hierarchical society', Chen p. 160. This contrasts with San Mao's apparent position of 'world citizenship' in which, as a self-conscious and proud representative of China, she behaves morally and unselfishly in 'the west' and demonstrates her superiority through her caring and service. Chen concludes her discussion of *Manhattan's China Lady*: 'By narrating a personal story that highlights her seduction of a western man and her conquering western culture, the Chinese female protagonist of this "autobiography" has captured a Chinese readership that, against the constraints of both its own national government and theorists in the west, aspires to "western" experiences, surely not as the "really are" but as they are imagined by the Other, an Other who rightly understands and uses "the West" for its own theoretical and pragmatic interests', Chen p. 166. Though Zhou Li's narrative of the Chinese person 'making it' abroad may have little in common with San Mao in the way the heroine envisages 'making it', this analysis by Chen of Zhou's appeal would seem equally applicable to San Mao.

²⁸ Mills p. 22.

²⁹ San Mao's presentations of both herself and her world can be viewed in terms of other features outlined by analysts of female colonial narratives. Mills lists several roles adopted by the narrative figure in such narratives ('the bold adventuring hero of male travel texts', 'the nurse/doctor, the invalid, the philanthropist, the angel in the house and the caring mother and wife', Mills p. 22), and all of these are observable in San Mao's writings as she adventures in the desert, brings healing to others even though she suffers ill-health herself, brings cleanliness and education, embodies goodness and positive moral values, and creates a peaceful and warm home environment for José.

that 'the world is ours'³⁰ This world is San Mao's also in the sense that, in a narrative of her own making about places that are unfamiliar to readers and where most of the inhabitants do not read Chinese, she may impute any kind of behaviour at all to the natives without fear of contradiction. In addition, as an outsider, far from the social constraints of her home society, San Mao could present herself flouting conventions, which (as Pesman has pointed out) do not press so heavily on a person who is not 'locked into kin and neighbourhood networks, into ascribed identities and roles.'³¹

In his discussion of modern travel, the sociologist John Urry has suggested that the 'right to travel' has become a modern 'marker of citizenship' (at least for those affluent enough to sustain it), based upon a notion that 'people should be able to travel within all societies as tourists', with 'rights of movement across and permanent or seasonal residence in whichever society they choose to visit as a stranger, for whatever periods of time'. A modern person, Urry proposes, 'is one who is able to exercise those rights and who conceives of him or herself as a consumer of other cultures and places'.³² In terms of this type of 'citizenship', San Mao is truly a 'citizen of the world'; indeed Urry's definition of the modern 'aesthetic cosmopolitan' (which entails a belief in the right to travel anywhere and consume in all environments; curiosity about all places; openness to other peoples and cultures; willingness to move outside the usual ambit of the tourist; ability to reflect upon different societies; and a self-reflexive ability to 'interpret tourist signs' and perceive the ironies in tourism itself)³³ is an apt description of the San Mao of the stories examined in the preceding chapters.

³⁰ Price p. 23.

³¹ Pesman p. 70.

³² Distinguishing this from 'conventional conceptions of citizenship based upon the notion that rights were to be provided by institutions located *within* territorially demarcated nation-states', Urry describes a 'novel kind of "consumer citizenship"' with four main features: citizenship as 'a matter of consumption, (rather than of political rights and duties); the notion that 'people in different societies should have similar rights of access to a diversity of consumer goods, services and cultural products from *different* societies'; the idea that 'people should be able to travel within all societies as tourists and those countries that have tried to prevent this, such as Albania, China and some Eastern European countries in the past, have been seen as infringing the human rights of foreigners to cross their territories'; the assumption of rights of movement across and permanent or seasonal residence in any society one may choose to visit as a stranger, for whatever periods of time. Thus 'citizenship rights increasingly involve claims to consume other cultures and places throughout the world.' Urry's conception of this cosmopolitanism is an explicitly 'western' one: 'Everyone in the 'West' is now entitled to engage in visual consumption, to appropriate landscapes and townscapes more or less anywhere in the world and to record them to memory photographically. No one should be excluded except for reasons of cost. To be a tourist, to look on landscapes with interest and curiosity (and then to be provided with many other related services) has become a right of citizenship from which few in the "West" are formally excluded', Urry, *Consuming Places*, p. 165, 176. The case of San Mao attests to the extension of this concept of 'citizenship' beyond 'the west'.

³³ Urry, *Consuming Places* p. 167.

Her world also incorporates other elements of middle class modernity, ideologies shared internationally that have in the past been theorised (like Urry's 'elite cosmopolitanism') as somehow exclusively characteristic of a 'west'.³⁴ These include the suspicion that 'real' life might be found elsewhere (in other classes or cultures); the urge to see the 'backstage' (the 'unrehearsed', informal, private side), not only of places but also of people's lives (which, of course, gradually becomes for the long-term resident part of his or her own 'real life');³⁵ the valuing of 'experience' as a category, and of travel as an important 'experience';³⁶ and the urge to 'belong' - especially when one's sense of 'belonging' at home is evolving along with the changes that modernity has brought to every society.³⁷

A hierarchy of cultures

As already noted, San Mao's world has several points of intersection with the world of the female colonial narrative, and these features are observable not

³⁴ Sally Price has categorised the set of ideas that may once have been considered to be 'western' but whose influence pervades middle class thought all over the world as 'small-w western', Price p. 3. The notion of a 'west' is a far from useful concept, having been, along with notions of gender, class and the nation (as Stuart Hall has pointed out) 'staged and stabilized by industrialization, by capitalism, by urbanization, by the formation of the world market, by the social and the sexual division of labor, by the great punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private; by the dominance of the nation state, and by the identification between Westernization and the notion of modernity itself', Hall in King (ed.), p. 45.

³⁵ Dean MacCannell has identified the search for 'authenticity' as a response to 'the generalized anxiety of modernity', MacCannell p. 14.

³⁶ Porter has suggested that in the work of writers of travel accounts there is a tension in 'reconciling the call to pleasure in a foreign land with the demands of duty emanating from home', and that this has been influential in the notion of travel as 'self-consciously an end in itself, in a way that is often difficult to explain fully in terms of pleasure', Porter p. 10. As noted above, San Mao's writing is not unambiguously classifiable as 'travel' writing, but it is certainly the case that the experiences that San Mao sets forth for her readers are not an unambiguous matter of 'pleasure', connected as they are with service and self-sacrifice. Discussing the middle class notion of travel as 'improving', Chris Rojek has suggested that modern leisure and travel experiences have been identified with 'the business of "self-making"', as 'spheres of activity in which self-realization could be pursued in a more authentic way than in work and family life', Rojek p. 6. For centuries - from the aristocratic travellers of the Grand Tour to the bourgeois tourist of the 19th century to the modern traveller - foreign travel has been regarded as 'adding refinement and maturity to the personality', as well as being 'a status asset' and 'an enjoyable and exciting experience', Rojek p. 120. This is certainly how San Mao's travel experiences have been constructed, both by herself and her biographers.

³⁷ San Mao's narratives of a self in interaction with others illustrate what Anthony Giddens has identified as the reflexivity of modernity. Identity, he suggests, is to be found in 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' by integrating events occurring in the external world and sorting them into the ongoing 'story' about the self, p. 54; San Mao's narratives of identity could be regarded as an exemplary working out of a 'modern' self, p. 54. Being 'true to the self' is connected to this 'active process of self-construction', supposedly bringing fulfilment in 'a sense that one is "good", "a worthy person"'; here again San Mao's example is instructive of this aspect of modernity, Giddens p. 79. In her stories, the sense of 'personal integrity' of the author 'as the achievement of an authentic self, comes from integrating life experiences within the narrative of self-development', p. 79. San Mao's work also reflects features of modern life characterised by Giddens as the primacy of 'lifestyle'; the 'pluralisation of lifeworlds'; and 'the prevalence of mediated experience', p. 81-85.

only in her narratives of Africa but those of Europe as well. San Mao sets up a comfortable and stable home base amid foreigners on both continents; devotes herself to social harmony; purposefully enacts philanthropic projects; identifies things that are lacking, and addresses herself to the provision of these; and self-consciously takes it upon herself to bring health and knowledge, and thus to 'civilise'. As also noted, in San Mao's world, her virtue is needed; and, if that virtue is to be considered specifically 'Chinese virtue' as her biographers suggest, then the world needs what 'China' has to offer. Both Africa and Europe, in their different ways, are constructed as lacking - and San Mao (or 'China') is constructed as supplying what they do not themselves have.

Though the details of San Mao's involvements and relationships in Africa and Europe are different,³⁸ I have suggested that, in some sense, she flattens out the two continents as equivalent spaces for the practice of her own persona through play and caring. Coming from neither the European 'metropole' (that is the 'centre' from which colonialism is exported) nor a colony or former colony of Europe,³⁹ San Mao produces a world view that does not replicate those that are familiar to us from European-language texts. Although notions of 'inferiority' and 'superiority' may underlie her work (and certainly inform biographical and critical comment on it), they are not explicit. Wherever San Mao goes is a site equivalent to others as a space for her own persona and activities.

It might also be suggested, however, that conventional notions of cultural hierarchy are nonetheless implicitly present in San Mao's world. As noted, San Mao's travels bestowed upon her an increased store of cultural capital, expressed in terms of linguistic competences, knowledge of cultures other than her own, the apparent ability to make decisions and live independently, and the amassing of varied 'experience' as a virtue in and of itself. The act of travel in general bestows some measure of cultural capital, but there are differences in the level of capital according to which places have been visited and for how long. San Mao spent several years in European societies, and months or years in the Sahara. If travel is to be recognised as self-improvement, there is a qualitative difference in the 'improvements' imputed to African and European travel; the European history and 'civilisation' that have become international knowledge through centuries of imperial expansion and linguistic hegemony are to be unambiguously admired by

³⁸ Though both Africa and Europe supposedly need and welcome her, it might be suggested that San Mao presents herself as being successful as a giver in Africa (in comparison with Europe, where her good offices are often to no avail) and that in Europe she is more successful in being 'received' by communities and families.

³⁹ Though European colonialism has had an indirect effect upon Taiwan (it having been a Dutch and Spanish colonial territory in the 16th and 17th centuries), San Mao's own world is not shaped by direct experience of being under European colonialism.

the non-European traveller, while the history and culture of Africa, so often constructed as a story of loss, is a less triumphal experience to witness and experience.

Given the cultural hierarchies that still prevail in many areas of modern life and thought, it is no coincidence that San Mao learned several European languages but no African ones, and studied European art (while admiring the 'primitive' spirit of African art). She worked in Europe, but does not talk of working in the Sahara; claimed to have studied in Europe, but does not study in Africa; and, of course, married a European and not an African man.⁴⁰ In the Sahara she 'conquers' from a position of superiority; in Europe she wins from a position of humility and service. It seem unlikely that the two positions would be reversed.

Lessons of experience

San Mao states that she has learned lessons from living in both Africa and Europe. Her claim to have discovered a new sense of greed from the abundance of fish on the Western Sahara coast was noted in Chapter 3, along with her new understanding of the importance of luxury amid the material poverty of the desert and her heightened appreciation of the true value of the comforts of home. A visit to the National Hotel in El Ayoun brings a further lesson about the desirability of material comfort.⁴¹ Elsewhere, as she marvels at her pleasure over 'a few empty crates' (out of which José will make furniture for their home), San Mao suggests that desert has taught her the exact opposite lesson as well: that is, to be happy with simple things.⁴² Indeed references to photographs are enlisted to demonstrate the changes San Mao has undergone: after gazing at pictures of herself taken in urban social situations (at the opera in Berlin, or in a Madrid café),⁴³ she drops them on the ground 'as if they were garbage', discarding her European life and European high culture in favour of what the desert offers.⁴⁴ She is, she claims, like a dead body whose soul 'had already ascended to the tower from whose

⁴⁰ Would-be imitators of San Mao who sent letters to her magazine correspondence columns seeking information about travel ask her about travelling to travel to Europe, not Africa; how to stay indefinitely in Europe, not Africa; how to study European languages, not African ones.

⁴¹ 'We had learned only one thing from living for a long time in the desert: even the tiniest piece of enjoyment of material life brought our spirits boundless satisfaction and raised us to a higher plane...I was a very happy person that evening', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 140-141.

⁴² This lesson, she claims, has changed her completely: 'I had changed...after 3 months of living in the desert, the me that I used to be had disappeared without my noticing', *Stories of the Sahara* p. 229.

⁴³ When San Mao implicitly equates mental or emotional changes with physical ones here, she does not consider the physical scars inflicted upon her by the desert (as in the case of José, noted in Chapter 2). Rather than presenting the 'after' picture, she is struck by her own beauty in the cultural settings of the 'before' pictures.

⁴⁴ Though European social and cultural events are still, of course, available to her in the desert, in the form of parties at the National Hotel.

height it looks back towards home, and was looking back in disappointment at a lover'.⁴⁵ Urbane Europe has been replaced in her affections (for the present at least) by the Sahara, a new and austere 'dream lover' who demands a certain degree of asceticism but at the same time provides untold natural riches.

San Mao is preoccupied with the question of material things soon after her arrival in the desert, noting her embarrassment in wishing to have furniture in her home and asking José why they cannot be more like the indigenous people of the desert who live happily without it.⁴⁶ 'Poor civilised person! She cannot escape these useless things!'⁴⁷ Thus possession of objects is taken as a mark of civilisation, the absence of material possessions being supposedly a kind of superior moral choice (rather than a matter of economic necessity or a concomitant part of a nomadic lifestyle).⁴⁸ This 'civilisation' is also suggested to be a matter of social class, and is equated with 'complexity'.⁴⁹ As we have seen in chapters 2

⁴⁵ *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 231-232. The image of the lover is not a new one here; the desert too has been configured as a lover (discussed in Chapter 2). No photographs from Taiwan are invoked in this story of the worthlessness of her past life; it is European culture and sociability that is replaced in San Mao's life by the desert. Yet though she may discard the world of the photographs as 'garbage' that has been devalued by her Saharan experiences, it was, of course, Europe that made her presence in the Sahara possible (by providing her with language skills, connections, and a right to reside there). There is irony in her configuring of both her European life and her Saharan lives as lovers, rejecting the first to embrace the second, as it is the real-life José who is her link with both and who makes possible for San Mao her long-term acquaintance with both.

⁴⁶ 'Why do we have to make furniture? Why can't we be like the Sahrawi and sit on mats all our lives?' *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 230-231. San Mao also ruefully notes her desire for a washing machine and a car.

⁴⁷ *Stories of the Sahara* p. 242.

⁴⁸ San Mao apparently characterises people who do not have many material possessions (in this case, the desert nomads) as morally superior. This fits with the consistent idealisation of nomadic people in modern Euro-American cultural constructions that has been noted by Caren Kaplan: 'Throughout Euro-American modernity, nomads, bedouins, and other mobile tribes have been geographically located outside metropolitan locations...or on the peripheries of metropolitan locales...These romanticized figures are always positioned in colonial discourse as closer to nature, purer or simpler, and near to vanishing. Within this context, the nomad participates in the discourse of the "other", signifying the opposite of of Euro-American metropolitan modernity...The nomad as a metaphor may be susceptible to intensive theoretical appropriation because of a close fit between the mythologized elements of migration (independence, alternative organization to nation-states, lack of opportunity to accumulate much surplus etc.) and Euro-American modernist privileging of solitude and the celebration of the specific locations associated with nomads: deserts and open spaces far from industrialization and metropolitan cultural influences...While the "dark continent" signals Africa's imbrication in imperial modern culture's self-construction, the blinding white spaces of the desert present another opportunity for Euro-American inventions of the Self. From Isabelle Eberhardt to Jean Baudrillard, from T.E. Lawrence to David Lean, the philosophical/literary trek across the desert leads to a celebration of the figure of the nomad - the one who can track a path through a seemingly illogical space without succumbing to nation-state and/or bourgeois organization and mastery. The desert symbolizes the site of critical and individual emancipation in Euro-American modernity; the nomad represents a subject position that offers an idealized model of movement based on perpetual displacement', Kaplan p. 66, p. 90.

⁴⁹ 'I often analyse myself; it is very difficult to get out of the class that is assigned to you from the minute you are born. To a Sahrawi, my home had nothing in it that was necessary; but as for me, I couldn't escape this shackle. I wanted the environment around me to be as complex as it had always been before', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 241.

and 3, San Mao constructs Sahrawi people as 'simple'; though she may desire to partake of their 'simplicity' (and, according to biographers, succeeded in doing so), this is an ambiguous state in which San Mao would apparently lose some measure of her 'civilisation' and 'complexity'.

The idea that 'civilised' people need more things than people they regard as 'uncivilised' is perhaps implicit in the story of Sahrawi borrowing, where San Mao shows herself to be always provided with all necessary material objects (discussed in Chapter 2) and in the story of her 'nest-building', in which she equips and decorates her home with items of superior taste that other desert homes do not have (also discussed in Chapter 2). Sahrawi borrowing, as well as being supposedly an symptom of their childish disorganisation, is perhaps also intended to indicate a lack of 'civilised' awareness of what they ought to possess. The connection between things and civilisation is made explicit in the case of a Sahrawi man who works for the Spanish as a hospital employee, who refuses to eat with his fingers after Sahrawi custom because he has been 'baptised into civilisation'. He looks to San Mao to provide 'civilisation' in the form of western eating utensils, sending his son to her house every mealtime to borrow a knife and fork for him to eat with.⁵⁰ The 'complexity' of San Mao's home sets her apart from the Sahrawi as a person of 'civilisation'; the decor of her home sets her apart for Europeans as a person of good taste (discussed in Chapter 2). Learning not to need to consume⁵¹ - and the 'lesson' of hardship - is, claims San Mao, a vital part of the experience of living in the desert. As she tells the Spanish Fosbucraa wives, 'If you don't experience hardship in material life when you come to the Sahara, it is a loss to everyone in terms of experience'.⁵²

In Europe, the lessons San Mao claims to have learned are less to do with material possessions than with attitudes to life. For example, when arriving in Tenerife at Carnival time (discussed in Chapter 4), she is enchanted by the spirit of the crowds as they throw themselves wholeheartedly into the enjoyment of the parade and street festivities. She contrasts the 'innocence' of their lack of

⁵⁰ After several days of this, San Mao buys a knife and fork and hands them to the child, telling him not to come again. Two days later he reappears, saying that his mother has put their own new knife and fork aside to keep, and he has been sent to borrow from San Mao again, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 127-128.

⁵¹ A few years later, thinking back to her life in the Sahara, San Mao reiterates the lessons it taught her about material things: 'A few years ago I went to the Sahara desert. That waste land gave me a boundless enlightenment; my longing for material things became less and less, and my clarity of mind became brighter every day. Later, even though I left the desert and came back into the bustle of society, I had lost my affinity (*yuan*) with department stores; even ordinary shops didn't attract me any more', *Rear View* p. 156. The 'brightness' and simplicity wrought by life in the Sahara may have been short-lived; though San Mao later claimed to be embarrassed at finding shops attractive (*Rear View* p. 71) she also published a collection in honour of the treasures she had bought during her travels, see Appendix 3, 'San Mao Goes Shopping'.

⁵² *Stories of the Sahara* p. 253.

inhibition with the restraint which she suggests is characteristic of Chinese people,⁵³ thus suggesting a negative side to the 'Chinese virtues' discussed elsewhere - that is the 'endless endurance and sacrifice' that she claims have been practised by Chinese people for millennia. Each Chinese person, San Mao suggests, is personally stamped with the effects of 5000 years of 'endurance', and can learn from 'childish' European exuberance that festive frivolity may be as valid - or even as admirable - as hard work and suffering.⁵⁴

Other lessons in enjoyment learned by San Mao in Europe are taught by the elderly neighbours who surround her in Gran Canaria.⁵⁵ Their ability to teach is not solely a function of their age, as she explicitly compares them with Chinese elderly people to suggest that their outlooks are different.⁵⁶ These European elderly people shatter her preconceptions about the elderly and display values and behaviour that San Mao presents as emblematic of European culture: the ability to enjoy oneself, to come to terms with sadness, and to maintain hope and energy.⁵⁷

⁵³ 'As a Chinese person who has borne 5000 years of bitterness and pain', she notes, 'seeing another race that understands how to enjoy the love of life like this, opening up their spirits so frankly: wearing coloured clothes at a time of celebration, and singing, waving their hands and stamping their feet - unashamed - among crowds of strangers - I explain this not as childishness but as pure innocence...I used to see the glory of the human character as endless endurance and sacrifice in the face of adversity, but the happiness that I was seeing now...was another beautiful and moving colour. Why is endless work with no break the only thing we call 'meaningful'? Are rest, leisure and enjoyment at the appropriate time not vital aspects of human life as well?' *Crying Camels* p. 168.

⁵⁴ As noted in Chapter 4, San Mao joins in the Carnival fun, projecting an explicitly marked Chinese presence into the European festivities as 'the Chinese person with red hair'.

⁵⁵ In an ironic story based on a supposed lack of interest in her elderly neighbours as people who have nothing to offer her, San Mao outlines the preconceptions that have been challenged by her elderly neighbours and the lessons she has learned from them, *Diary of a Scarecrow*.

⁵⁶ 'To make a comparison, I felt that the Chinese and American elderly people I had seen were mostly rather pessimistic, while European ones were different - at least my neighbours were', *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 102.

⁵⁷ She is impressed by their energetic enjoyment of their evening walks, while she herself struggles to keep up with them on their 3-hour hike along the beach, *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 100-101. She is impressed by the public spirited commitment of one old man to keeping the neighbourhood clean by sweeping the streets and picking up rubbish daily (though he receives no remuneration for his labour); 'The Spanish government doesn't send anyone to do it, so I do it every day', he tells San Mao, *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 99. She is impressed by another elderly man for his vitality, hard work (he is constantly painting his house and gardening) and helpfulness to her (with her own garden) - all qualities San Mao herself has shown herself displaying (as noted in previous chapters). She is also impressed by the fact that he can still joke and laugh even though he misses his wife (who died the previous year), by his independence from his children, and by his insistence on living as well as he can so as not to depress them. When San Mao asks if his children do not look after their father, he replies 'They all have their own affairs. I live alone. I don't feel I'm useless - why should they come and take care of me?' *Diary of a Scarecrow* p. 102. Similar 'lessons' are taught by another elderly neighbour, who displays the kind of industry and generosity that San Mao admires and herself demonstrates in her narratives. When he invites her to an informal concert organised by the elderly neighbours, she is charmed by their 'happiness' and 'enthusiasm', delighted by the 'mischief' and 'refinement' of an old man who asks her to dance; and 'moved' by 'their vital love of life'. The culmination of the story of the elderly Europeans' enjoyment of life concerns a defying of the conventional morality of the 1970s and an affirmation of sex and romance for the elderly, when 74-year old Erich and Annie (an elderly widow) announce to her that they are moving in together. Erich humbly solicits San Mao's approval of their living together without marrying, and Annie tells her of the practical

The independence, self-reliance, energy and 'great wisdom and courage' of the elderly Europeans are all constructed as peculiarly European phenomena, but what impresses San Mao most of all is their happiness.⁵⁸ Again there is a suggestion that Chinese people can learn from European attitudes. European optimism and love of life is presented as a valuable lesson for a China constructed as pessimistic and lacking in the capacity for uninhibited fun; and San Mao herself has supposedly learned how to experience this European *joie de vivre* through her own years of residence in Europe.⁵⁹

In her remarks about what she has learnt from living in Africa and Europe, it will be noted that she presents herself learning from European people but not from African people. In Europe, Europeans teach her new lessons about happiness; in the Sahara, it is the experience of harsh landscape and material lack that teaches her lessons (albeit contradictory) about appreciating and discarding material possessions.⁶⁰ She does not 'learn' from Sahrawi people as such. In this narrative of personal learning, Europe is 'full'. Though it can profit from San Mao's own values, its joyful cultural values can still spill over into San Mao's consciousness. Africa is 'empty' - a receptacle for San Mao's humanistic activities

motivations for remaining unmarried so as not to forfeit her late husband's old age pension. The couple are incorporated into San Mao's narrative of the value of experience as Annie remarks, 'We all have a past, and we all miss part of it. But people have to keep living, and look for happiness again - but that doesn't negate love in the past'. 'What you mean', paraphrases San Mao, 'is that people shouldn't throw away any experience for nothing', *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 105-107

⁵⁸ 'Living alone in this district full of elderly people, I thought at first that I would be infected with their loneliness and sadness. I never imagined that at the end of life there could be another springtime, another hope, another confidence. I considered: this is the love they have for life, the deployment of their true wisdom about life. Only this could have created such miraculously glorious autumn years....These old people whom I had seen in the beginning as useless wrecks truly taught me a lesson that you can't learn in any classroom', *Diary of a Scarecrow* pp. 107-108.

⁵⁹ The point is made explicit in a rhetorical question to readers: 'What's the use of having children for your old age?' Clearly the negative example of Charlie, the elderly European man abandoned by his family to die ill and alone in the Canaries, is not the only lesson for China in European old age; there is a positive example as well, in this neighbour of San Mao's who constantly paints his house, helps her with her garden and lives a useful and independent life.

⁶⁰ Indeed there is a suggestion that these lessons of hardship that San Mao claims to have learned in the desert might have been taught by Europe first anyway. She invokes her father to suggest that the hardship of her stay in Germany - both financial difficulty and overwork in her studies - had changed her character for the better: 'After the trials of German life, my character changed a lot. Even now my father says that Germans are really capable; when his daughter was under his roof he couldn't alter her a jot, but the Germans had transformed her completely in just a few months', *Rear View* p. 156. Furthermore, her sense of spiritual superiority in not having material goods in the Sahara desert is paralleled by her frustration in wealthy Europe as she watches other people happily amassing goods that are denied to her amid the tedium and exhaustion of a routine and uncomfortable job. Just as the material privations of the desert teach San Mao dual lessons about the value both of having possessions and of not having them, the department store job in Germany teaches her to value money and to understand the difficulties of earning it, and hence to appreciate the burden she is placing on her father who is supporting her financially (she learns also to sympathise with shop assistants and to hate department stores). Though the desert may teach its lessons by its very presence, its landscapes and the poverty of its people, it is assimilation into the work routines that go along with urbanised modernity from which San Mao learns in Europe.

and philosophies. While Europe may offer human values, the desert offers only the ennobling power of 'empty' landscape, in which human agency does not play a part.

Tourist gazes

In his analysis of of tourism and travel, John Urry has identified two modes of 'tourist gaze': the romantic gaze and the collective gaze.⁶¹ In the 'romantic' form of the tourist gaze, according to Urry, 'the emphasis is upon solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze'⁶² (as, for example, in the presence of a an awesome natural landscape or a 'great' work of art). In the 'collective' gaze, however, 'the presence of other people is desirable, even necessary, to provide the required atmosphere and ambience that is in fact part of the experience itself'⁶³ (as in, for example, a European café, an 'exotic' market, a seaside resort).

San Mao's stories of Africa and Europe could be said to demonstrate both modes of gaze (though as a longer-term resident, her status as a 'tourist' is ambiguous). It might further be suggested that she exemplifies yet another kind of gaze, an emotional gaze that can unify the world into her narrative of feeling and concern people: the gaze of *renqing* or warmth between people.⁶⁴

Her romantic and collective tourist experiences are distributed relatively consistently between Africa and Europe. In the desert, she gazes in hushed awe at the landscape - the boundless and 'empty' earth, the vast sky, the coast; in Europe, she presents herself participating in carnivals, shopping at busy markets, sitting in cafés. Exceptions are few. Though she may visit European art galleries for private, semi-spiritual experiences of European art, she does not record the event; though she may participate in cultural festivities and communal events in Africa, they are not usually described.⁶⁵ There is an apparent link here with Shirley Foster's observations about nineteenth-century tourism and traveller's preconceptions about 'tame' experiences (in which 'culture' was the principal

⁶¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. In later work, Urry expands the categories to 4: the romantic (solitary, involving sustained immersion, and characterised by vision, awe and aura); the collective (distinguished by communal activity, a series of shared encounters and gazing at the familiar); the spectatorial (involving communal activity, a series of brief encounters, and the glancing at and collecting of different signs); the environmental (to do with collective organisation; sustained and didactic; and scanning to survey and inspect) and the anthropological (solitary, with sustained immersion, scanning and active interpretation), *Consuming Places* p. 191.

⁶² Urry p. 138.

⁶³ Urry p. 138.

⁶⁴ I thank Geremie Barmé for helpful discussion of this 'gaze'.

⁶⁵ The one collective gathering that San Mao describes attending in the Sahara is Guka's wedding; but this is less an invocation of a lively and stimulating atmosphere of shared participation in an exciting ambience than a gloomy and sinister scene marred further by injustice and violence.

focus) versus experiences of 'untamed wilderness'.⁶⁶ San Mao's narratives, it might be suggested, display a similar duality. Europe is shown to provide 'tame', urbane cultural experiences of architecture, civilised dining and kindly locals (most clearly observable in her 'tourist' stories of the Canaries and Madeira). Africa is noted not for culture or human sociability but for landscape - and indeed a landscape constructed as unremittingly harsh, unforgiving, endless and empty in comparison with the gentle, welcoming landscapes of Europe which are, as we have seen, so beautiful that they make the people who live there good. In this landscape-versus-culture divide, Africa's chief identity is as a place of nature - which is extreme and threatening rather than 'tamed' - and no 'culture'; its beauty is to be found in its scenery rather than its people, who are characterised as 'backward' and rather absurd. Europe, on the other hand, appears as a place of humanity, offering culture, architecture and human values. Both the desert and Europe may be characterised as dreamworlds, but the dreams are not the same; Europe is a benign dream, and Africa a somewhat threatening one.⁶⁷ Caren Kaplan has noted the effect of the 'great open emptiness of the desert, sea or sky' in inspiring 'metaphors of infinity and timelessness that alternately terrify and soothe the post-Enlightenment subject'.⁶⁸ The sense of extreme emotion in response to a vast and apparently empty landscape is frequently visible in San Mao's writing about the desert.⁶⁹ Further, Urry has noted the particular cultural

⁶⁶ Foster p. viii

⁶⁷ The dreams of the 'collective' gaze to be found in Europe and its peripheries were discussed in Chapter 4; the Saharan dream is of a land supposedly wild and empty, 'surreal' landscapes, extreme climate and blood-red sunsets. "Dreamlike" aspects of the desert are very similar to those Bishop had noted of Tibet - the vast distances (which caused travellers to lose their sense of distance and the passing of time); a feeling of 'illusion, of being alone in an entirely alien dimensionless space,' with time seeming to 'dissolve into boundless monotony', and the 'vast silence, space and stillness', Bishop p. 161; the apparently 'unique luminosity' of the light, evoking 'astonishing, almost unreal colors from landscape and sky', Bishop p. 162; an apparent 'elusive, fragile and delicate' quality of 'otherworldliness', Bishop p. 162; and a sense of dramatic extremes, Bishop p. 165. San Mao often describes a sense of foreboding or doom as she describes through the 'lonely land', which is variously described as 'dead', fierce' and 'savagely'. With a gesture of self-strangulation, she remarks to José, 'I think we will die in this wilderness one day. We come in and drive around it at random all day; we look for its fossils, we dig up its plants, we chase its antelopes, we drop dirty things like bottles and cardboard boxes, and we press down on its body with the tyres of our car. The desert says it doesn't like it; it wants us to pay for it with our lives', *Stories of the Sahara* pp. 71-72.

⁶⁸ Kaplan p 147.

⁶⁹ The majestic landscape is for San Mao the stuff of fantasy, creating a whole isolating world within itself. Like the Himalayas for early travellers to Tibet, the desert landscapes 'represent barren immensity and a-human Otherness', with the same 'immense scale, sense of natural power, contrasting extremes' and ambivalence between 'high and low, light and dark, benevolent and malevolent'; there is an '[e]mphasis on expansiveness and uplifting emotional response to landscape', a supposed 'isolation and protection from *cultural* contamination of civilisation' adding extra significance to the landscape; and the images being those of a 'desire to transcend (or just escape from) the materialistic world'; it is 'apparently closed off and isolated from the mainstream of the world', seeming 'to exert an extraordinarily far-reaching spiritual influence. Even the landscape was at the same time exhilarating and boring'; 'Desolation and solitude combine with overwhelming immensity of landscape, confusion, sense of *dismal savagery*', Bishop pp. 42-48,

capital that accrues to the appreciation of 'dead' landscape - and it is in these terms that San Mao presents the desert and her appreciation for it.⁷⁰ In the Sahara, San Mao frequently takes up what Susan Horton has referred to as the 'small me in the large landscape posture', in which the 'small colonial' is 'lost in a vast sea, sky and landscape that alternately awe and threaten to overwhelm her'⁷¹ (indeed the desert even attempts to take both José's life and her own);⁷² she also takes up the opposite pose, in which the desert makes the self grand and significant.⁷³ Her romantic gaze in Africa is reserved for the non-human; she does not record any visits to African historical sites or observe cultural objects.⁷⁴

In Europe, then, where San Mao's collective gaze feasts upon cafés, nightclubs, dancing, opera, department stores, markets and urban streets and gardens,⁷⁵ she can learn lessons (as noted above) of goodness. In Africa, by contrast, characterised supposedly by landscape rather than culture, the romantic gaze is focused in private semi-spiritual communion upon the 'wilderness'; and, perhaps like all romantic gazes, the gaze also turns inward and brings understanding about spiritual values, materialism or resistance to materialism, greed and solitude. As already observed, it does not seem to be coincidental that

68, 71. The desert is more than San Mao's senses can take in, with its mirages 'like dreams or fantasies or magic', its sandhills gently undulating like the curves of a woman's body, wild sandstorms, the burning land, cacti 'reaching up like pleading hands to heaven', riverbeds that had dried up millions of years before, the black mountains, deep blue frozen air, stony wilderness...'all of these scenes made me lose my senses with delight; my eyes couldn't take it all in', *Crying Camels* p. 23. San Mao is 'almost painfully' moved by the beauty of the desert landscape, *Crying Camels* p. 78.

⁷⁰ Finding pleasure in 'dead' scenery involves acquiring a fair amount of cultural capital', Urry, *Consuming Places* p. 196; this is perhaps the ultimate 'romantic tourist gaze', which emphasises a 'semi-private, quasi-spiritual relationship with the signifiers of "nature"', Urry p. 197. The tendency of new arrivals to construe landscapes they do not understand as 'empty' has been noted by Susan Horton, Horton p. 154.

⁷¹ Horton p. 166. San Mao is the focus as the emptiness of the desert 'liberates' her; she is alone in an unpeopled landscape that belongs only to itself, its inhabitants being merely incidental: 'Along the narrow sealed road for almost 100 km there are always scattered tents, and the if people who live there want to go into town to do things, there is no way to do it other than spending the whole day walking. Here, the endless waves of sand are the real owners of the land, and the people who live here are only little stones in the midst of the sand. Driving through the almost frighteningly quiet afternoon I couldn't help having a few strange and lonely feelings, but it was a very liberating thing to know that in this unimaginably vast land there was only my solitary self', *Crying Camels* p. 72.

⁷² In the fossil-collecting story discussed in Chapter 3, José almost dies in a freezing swamp and only with great difficulty and at great personal risk is San Mao able to save his life.

⁷³ Horton has identified both the 'small me in a big landscape' pose and the 'big me in a small landscape' pose as responses to African desert (Horton p. 166); 'The world is very small/I am very large' and 'The world is very large/I am very small' are familiar perspectives characteristic of...much European writing from the colonies', Horton p. 186.

⁷⁴ The only 'art' that features is the 'stone carvings' she buys in the cemetery, which San Mao distances from the human world with notions of madness and ghosts (see Chapter 3).

⁷⁵ Some of San Mao's descriptions of such 'collective' scenes are noted in Chapter 4. The story of the Japanese backpacker, Mori, contains such a market scene, in which the little fishing harbour that usually has 'no power to move you' gains 'an undescrivable flavour and atmosphere' when 'adorned' by the young people selling crafts on the roadside under the shade of flowering trees, *The Tender Night* p. 218.

the romantic and collective are divided in this way, allotting to Europe culture, sociability, civilisation and urban spaces, leaving Africa scenery and 'barbaric' spectacle rather than culture.

Thus San Mao integrates both the 'romantic' and 'collective' gazes into a life of international travel and participation in foreign societies, exemplifying the fulfilment of the tourist experience (through the synthesising gaze of *renqing*) and beautifying it in her writings. The romantic and collective experiences she describes have in turn created San Mao as an exemplary traveller. Commentators and biographers have perpetuated this division between the solitary, spiritual experience of landscape in Africa and the warm, sociable cultural experiences of Europe.⁷⁶ Indeed it is suggested that only a special kind of person (such as San Mao) could appreciate the aesthetic features of the Sahara, and that it is only through her eyes - through the transformative power of her capacity for the spiritual appreciation of the 'romantic gaze' - that it becomes beautiful at all.⁷⁷ While San Mao's transformative power supposedly makes Africa beautiful, no such transformation is needed for Europe.⁷⁸

The motherland as maternal home

The preceding chapters have attempted to argue for San Mao's status as an exemplary traveller; not only at play on two continents but also presenting a compassionate and philanthropic persona to her world, enacting a range of virtues. Towards the end of her life, after travelling in Europe, Africa and the Americas, it

⁷⁶ San Mao frequently compares Saharan landscapes to surrealist paintings, stressing their supposed 'mystery' and almost unreal strangeness ('mysterious as a dream'; surreal scenes 'actually do exist in the desert', *Crying Camels* p. 85). She also imputes a 'primitive' and threatening quality to the desert. Extremes of weather are invoked to set the scene for dramatic events (eg *Crying Camels* pp. 260-261). Zhang Yun too describes the desert as threatening; no other desert (in China, the USA, Egypt) 'gave you the feeling that they were fearsome and terrible as this one did - and also exciting and exhilarating' (Zhang p. 89, p. 109), like San Mao, perceiving the desert as a dream world (Zhang p. 92). He relates that when San Mao was asked what the desert was like, she would reply 'The most beautiful place in the world', with which Zhang concurs; 'but', he adds, 'I think that her praise of the desert was different from most people's, because she not only looked at the Sahara from material and worldly point of view but appreciated it from a natural and human point of view', Zhang p. 92.

⁷⁷ 'Only someone who had such deep feeling for the desert as San Mao could have observed it so finely', Zhang p. 123.

⁷⁸ Indeed biographers Cui and Zhao suggest that Spain actually helped to beautify San Mao: the 'Spanish lifestyle' and the passionate emotions that supposedly characterise Latin life 'changed her pale life', transforming her into a colourful, carefree butterfly through the freedom it afforded her to haunt cafés, dance the night away and smoke, Cui and Zhao p. 83. Cui and Zhao note also that San Mao 'fell in love with travel' in Europe, visiting Paris, Munich, Rome and Amsterdam; 'her nature changed...the quiet, pale San Mao who had endured humiliation by the the maths teacher 10 years before was gone, never to return. Her world of feeling would never be sad again. At night, Spanish boys would play the guitar and sing love songs under the balcony, and the last one would be dedicated to "Echo - the Chinese girl"'. After a year in Madrid, they suggest, she stopped corresponding with the man in Taiwan whom she had wished to marry. 'Spain became just as San Mao had imagined it, and healed her wounds of love. She had a new world', Cui and Zhao p. 84

became possible for San Mao to travel back to the place of her birth in China.⁷⁹ She made three trips in two years⁸⁰ and wrote a handful of stories about her experiences there; these have been adopted by biographers into a narrative in which the themes of San Mao's exemplary travel are perfected. In China, her romantic gaze finds a desert to rival the Sahara (the Gobi in the northwest)⁸¹ and her collective gaze feasts upon the streets, markets and tea-houses of the Jiangnan area in the southeast.⁸² As San Mao's place of birth, China was a 'home'; but it was in many ways also an unknown (or 'foreign') land, almost a legendary land, inaccessible to residents of Taiwan for decades other than in memory and cultural fantasy based upon knowledge of Chinese history, with a society as well as a landscape that differed from that of Taiwan.

In China too San Mao sought places to 'belong', integrating herself into the mainland through a number of complementary relationships. Indeed to establish familial ties was the stated purpose of her initial trip: not only with her father's village, but also with her metaphorical father, Zhang Leping, creator of the cartoon character 'San Mao'.

In her father's home town, crowds thronged to welcome their returning 'little sister' with tears and embraces. Biographers Cui and Zhao describe her behaviour there as 'theatrical...a bit like a person in a play' as she knelt and kowtowed to her aunt then performed filial rituals at her ancestors' graves with weeping and wailing, calling upon the dead, and the sprinkling of water she had brought from Taiwan for the purpose.⁸³ Though theatrical, her behaviour was,

⁷⁹ It became possible for Taiwan residents to travel to China in 1987, and San Mao made her first trip in 1989 after establishing contact with relatives and other associates of her father's. Biographers suggest that San Mao was full of joy at the possibility of visiting the 'motherland', Cui and Zhao p. 234.

⁸⁰ The first trip, to her father's place of birth and to Shanghai to meet Zhang Leping, took place amid much publicity in April 1989; on the second (in April 1990) she avoided reporters, travelling to Beijing and visiting the film set of *Red Dust*, for which she had written the screenplay; the third trip, in September 1990, was to include Guangzhou, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Dunhuang, Urumqi, the Tianshan, Kashgar, Chengdu, Lhasa, Chongqing, Wuhan, Shanghai and Hangzhou, but was cut short owing to illness. According to Cui and Zhao, San Mao hinted to friends before this trip that she did not intend to return, Cui and Zhao p. 239.

⁸¹ In Xinjiang and the western desert, she finds space, silence and vast landscape for the romantic gaze; 'the high sky and vast earth reflected San Mao's feelings for the Sahara. San Mao discovered the beginning of another love: for the northwest, for the flowerless wilderness...the northwest is where the Chinese people began and grew. If San Mao spoke of a "nostalgia for a previous age", perhaps it would be more appropriate there than the Sahara in north Africa. She felt as if ropes had loosened', Cui and Zhao p. 239. San Mao professed a special attachment to Dunhuang, where she claimed to have seen ghosts from the past, and where she said she wished to be buried, *My Happy Paradise* pp. 125-152. See also Cui and Zhao pp. 240-241.

⁸² In Suzhou (in the Jiangnan area, already invoked as a cultured site, as noted in Chapter 4) she was reportedly 'moved' by the collective experience of Chinese streetscapes, historic houses and gardens and teahouses, revelling in the sense of history and connection to compatriots.

⁸³ Cui and Zhao pp. 237-238. Ironically, San Mao's filial rituals led to difficulties in own family when her father failed to be moved and delighted by the bottle of water she brought home to Taiwan from her father's home. As well as visiting her father's native place, she visited the place

claim Cui and Zhao, 'natural and without a trace of affectation' as she performed 'the courtesies of her parents' generation'. 'It is very difficult', they claim,

to find a necessary link between this behaviour and the new-style Chinese education, edified with western learning, which she had received. What she did was absorbed from books and observation; San Mao maintained that this was China's tradition and treasure. San Mao said she wasn't encumbered by form, but actually performed the form earnestly and sincerely.⁸⁴

As San Mao grew older, suggest Cui and Zhao, she 'gradually returned to Chinese culture', as though her sojourn abroad had cut her off from it (or as it had never really been part of her because of her upbringing in Taiwan instead of China). It was, they suggest, difficult for San Mao's readers to conceive that 'having been through her "rainy season", studied abroad, spent time in the desert and on the island, San Mao would leave the impression in the spring of 1989 of such an old-fashioned Chinese woman'.⁸⁵

In addition to 'belonging' in her ancestral village, San Mao also suggests a vital 'kinship' tie to 'San Mao's daddy', the creator of the 1940s cartoon *The Wanderings of San Mao*. Visiting his home, she both behaves and is received as a daughter - making herself at home, calling him 'Daddy', and making plans to come back to spend the next Spring Festival (an important festival generally spent with family) with Zhang.⁸⁶ Describing her stay with Zhang and his family, Cui and Zhao suggest that San Mao's natural and affectionate behaviour demonstrated how she had been 'affected by the warmth of Latin people', while Zhang is portrayed as welcoming San Mao with deep feeling and believing her to be just like the 'San Mao' he had created in his books.⁸⁷ Thus San Mao entered into a relationship of filiality with Zhang, not only calling him 'Daddy' but explicitly referring to herself as his daughter. This quasi-adoption places her not only within

where she was born in Sichuan. At a press conference in Chengdu, she praised the place and joked that if she married again it would be to a mainland man, Cui and Zhao p. 244.

⁸⁴ Cui and Zhao p. 238. The biographers were perhaps unaware that such ceremonies have continued to be practised in Taiwan, and that they would have been familiar to San Mao from observation if not actual practice; they would not have needed to be learned from books.

⁸⁵ Cui and Zhao p. 238. Cui and Zhao claim that San Mao announced that she would in future encode the name of her hometown into a new pen-name and call herself 'The Woman of Xiaosha' (*Xiaoshanü*), but she did not in fact adopt this new pen-name, Cui and Zhao p. 3.

⁸⁶ Cui and Zhao p. 235. She spent her final spring festival in his home in 1990.

⁸⁷ Zhang 'thought that the two San Maos had the same character', Cui and Zhao p. 236. 'The old people were happy; and they liked this lively daughter' - so much, indeed, that the frail and elderly Zhang refused to return to hospital [where he was receiving treatment for Parkinson's disease] as planned and broke his prohibition on alcohol during her stay, Cui and Zhao pp. 246-247. According to Cui and Zhao, San Mao 'shattered the peace of the Zhang home. She never stopped talking - how cheap wool was in Shanghai, secrets about famous Taiwan people, the making of the *Red Dust* movie'. Before returning to Taiwan, San Mao agreed to spend spring festival with Zhang and his family the following year. Two months later, however, she had killed herself.

a mainland family but also within a mainland literary and historic tradition, through Zhang's fame as an artist and cartoonist.⁸⁸

It might be suggested that the other relationships which San Mao established with mainland men constituted further attempts at kinship. For example, she contacted the author Jia Pingwa (whose controversial novel *Feidu*, *Abandoned Capital*, she counted as a favourite book) to tell him of her enthusiasm for his work, and did her best to meet him. This has been interpreted by Ma Zhongxin as a relationship gambit, a final desperate gesture on the part of an aging woman to prove that she could still interest any man she chose to approach, even one of the most famous mainland writers of the time, and that she wished to demonstrate that she could solicit them as lovers or friends and be assured of a positive response.⁸⁹ Contact with Jia was also, of course, a way of attaching herself to the cultural figure of the moment on the mainland.

More significantly, San Mao spent some days in the home of Wang Luobin, an elderly singer and a famous name in modern mainland culture who had long been resident in Xinjiang, in the northwestern desert. Wang Luobin was, supposedly, to be San Mao's new 'desert lover'; their relationship, though it remained cloaked in mystery,⁹⁰ was much publicised and romanticised, culminating in the publication (with Wang Luobin's co-operation) of a series of romantic essays about the time they spent together.⁹¹ Whatever the nature of the relationship, San Mao became part of the story of the western desert through her connection with Wang, a figure from an earlier generation whose life had been almost as legendary as her own. An enthusiastic communist, Wang had volunteered to live in Xinjiang - a region relatively distant from China's political and cultural centre of Beijing - several decades earlier to help 'open up' the supposed wasteland of this non-Han territory of the Chinese empire; authorship of the folk songs he collected had been attributed to him, and he was famous as a Chinese cultural and political hero. Towards the end of his life - and her own -

⁸⁸ Cui and Zhao note that 26 years later, in the desert, she chose 'San Mao' as a pen name 'in memory of the first friend who spoke to her from a book', and that she told Zhang Leping that she had selected the name because of the 'simplicity' of the character, Cui and Zhao pp. 8, 14.

⁸⁹ Ma suggests that people in Taiwan knew her too well to respond to her overtures, but on the mainland there would be knowledge only of the lovable persona of her stories and not of the troubled woman behind the pen name, Ma p. 290.

⁹⁰ San Mao had first visited him six months before, and, according to Cui and Zhao, had 'felt an inexpressible tenderness when she left his quiet home', p. 242. She dressed herself up in Tibetan clothes in honour of Wang's famous song about the shepherdess (*In that distant place, Zai na yaoyuan de difang*). While staying with Wang she became ill, and there was some conflict between them. She did not stay as long as planned, and wept uncontrollably as they parted, Cui and Zhao pp. 243-244.

⁹¹ Ran Hong, with Wang Luobin, *Waiting: San Mao and Wang Luobin* (Dengdai: San Mao yu Wang Luobin), Yuesheng wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, Taipei 1994. Interest in the relationship was prompted in part by the disparity in their ages, Wang Luobin being in his 70s while San Mao was in her 40s.

San Mao became part of his story, and her visit was recorded in a biographical film about him.⁹² The symbolic implications of the 'return' of the lost daughter of the mainland from Taiwan into the embrace of the older communist (representing also the wisdom and culture of the ancient motherland) did not go unnoticed.⁹³

The narratives of San Mao and the mainland might suggest a culmination of the quest for belonging that was noted in connection with her African and European stories. In China as in foreign countries, San Mao places herself into relationships, and becomes integrated into a family with whom she has no actual kinship, to be welcomed as a daughter of the household and indeed of China. Having been torn from the motherland as a small child, she is now restored to it; and the implicit message in the writing of mainland commentators about San Mao's mainland experiences is that the Chinese motherland is the place where she is most truly at home. Other places (including Taiwan) might be seen as inferior substitutes for what China could offer all along in terms of warmth, belonging, culture, wilderness and sociability. China provides San Mao with the ultimate 'maternal home'.⁹⁴

Her final literary work, the screenplay for the 1990 film *Red Dust* was set and filmed on the mainland. A love story set in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai against the background of the Japanese invasion and Chinese resistance and collaboration, the film marked what biographers Cui and Zhao hailed as the beginning of a new stage in San Mao's literary career, her 'mainland period'. Cui and Zhao contend that once she had 'returned to the motherland' she had turned her back upon her old subject matter and style in order to embrace mainland themes and subjects; had she lived longer, they suggest, she would have continued to focus upon the mainland in her writing.⁹⁵ *Red Dust* remained her sole 'mainland' work, however, as she committed suicide in 1991, shortly after the film had won a number of 1990's Golden Horse awards.⁹⁶

In the footsteps of the masters

A discussion of San Mao's narratives of the world may be briefly complemented by further examination of her narratives of herself and the

⁹² San Mao's visit coincided with the filming of a television film of Wang's life, and her visit was included in the film; this, she claimed, created a sense of artificiality for her (as if she was performing in a play) and may have been one of the reasons for her abrupt departure, Cui and Zhao pp. 243-244.

⁹³ I thank Dilber Thwaites for discussion of this point.

⁹⁴ In addition to San Mao's claims of connection and kinship with mainland cultural figures, it has been suggested that she herself was eager to be thought of not as a Taiwan writer but a *Chinese* one, with connotations both of universality and of mainland identification.

⁹⁵ They add, however, that the screenplay did not display a real understanding of mainland life, Cui and Zhao pp. 296-297.

⁹⁶ Cui and Zhao pp. 294-295.

construction of her own persona. As noted in Chapter 1, San Mao displays a range of stereotypical attributes of the literary writer. She was known not only for her writings but for her 'lifeworks', her lifestyle and apparently larger-than-life personality: abandoning the restraints of school, immersing herself in literature, travelling, falling in love, responding to people, landscapes and situations with a great intensity of emotion, longing for solitude but also a sociable and entertaining companion. The 'low-culture' literata shares the attributes of the high-culture literatus, and her 'popular', 'non-intellectual' writings intersect (at a lifeworks level at least) with serious intellectual traditions of writing in Chinese.

In her discussion of questions of 'authority' in the work of Chinese intellectual writers of the 1920s and 1930s, Wendy Larson has chosen autobiography as the principal form for her analysis for the reason that (as in the later, non-intellectual work of San Mao) 'the proposed subject and object of the text is the same' and the concepts of authorial function and persona may therefore be comparatively clearly visible within the text. Larson places the author's choice of self-presentation style in the context of the ending of the imperial examination system in 1905. When the literatus was no longer obliged to memorise the traditional literary canon to pass competitive exams for entrance into the civil bureaucracy, its cultural authority was weakened; literary practice became more detached from the socio-political functions that it had formerly qualified scholars to perform, and the self-presentation of the *wenren* and author became less prescribed.⁹⁷ In the early decades of the twentieth century, authorial personas became more diverse or fragmented, and various social manifestations became available to, and were adopted by, writers: they could choose from an increasing repertoire of modes of self-expression including that of educator, entertainer, revolutionary, social activist, critic, escapist, prophet and so on. If literature was no longer to be coupled with participation in government administration, the act of writing and the function of those who wrote could assume a variety of different manifestations. This range of new literary personae contended not only for readers and for publishing opportunities, but for cultural authority as well.⁹⁸

In the early decades of the twentieth century, writers of popular literature took advantage of general improvements in literacy levels and the growing urban

⁹⁷ Like the May 4th writers who emerged after the collapse of the imperial examination system, San Mao too, took on a literary style and persona that was defined partly in opposition to examinations and official culture (having left school in her early teens to read widely in 'leisure' literature rather than memorising classical learning or the official texts of the 'Three People's Principles' as required in Taiwan high schools, and having begun her writing career in isolation at home).

⁹⁸ I thank Geremie Barmé for his helpful elucidation of the proliferation of literary personas and the relationship of San Mao to the May 4th movement.

fiction market and began writing fiction for a living.⁹⁹ The so-called May 4th writers (a term that covers a range of literary practitioners active roughly from 1917 to 1927) took on a serious, educative, nation-building mission, embracing literature as a means of national salvation and enlightenment; among them were the autobiographers of the 1920s and 1930s discussed by Larson. These writers, Larson suggests, appeared to lose faith in 'the efficacy of literary works or textual scholarship to maintain a valid social function within Chinese society'; they appeared to reject writing in favour of practical work and then to 'try to redefine it as closer to or part of material production' by producing writing of a utilitarian ideological nature (as 'an impetus to revolution', for example, or as 'commemorative ideology').¹⁰⁰ The notion of 'saving the nation' both through practical learning and through the production of literature that would show the way remained influential in Taiwan as well as China until at least the 1950s, and the May 4th writers were the modern canonical models for San Mao's generation. San Mao herself, however, rejected the serious social concerns of the May 4th writers and indeed any explicit instrumental function for writing, following instead her own path of self-expression, feeling and sentimental truth.

For the writer San Mao, any aspect of life could be an occasion for revelation of the San Mao self. This has been argued in preceding chapters in the case of her 'desert period' literature, and was to remain true later in her writing career when, living in Taiwan, she did not have the interest of exotic location to arrest the reader's attention. She turned to writing short pieces on homely subjects such as shoes (and San Mao's preference for comfortable, 'free' sandals), the beach (and San Mao's love of lonely places), relatives (and San Mao's delicately balanced emotional relationships with them), or buying stationery (and the kindly police who recognise San Mao and respond affectionately to her by keeping a parking space for her). In her earlier 'desert period' stories of living abroad, San Mao may have invoked narratives of Chinese virtue or national pride but she resolutely declined to 'save the nation'. She does not acquire knowledge or skills in order to benefit China (or Taiwan); and she does not advocate the devotion of the self to national political goals. Indeed San Mao famously stated that 'if you give everything to others, you will discover you've spent your life abusing one person: yourself'.¹⁰¹ As noted in previous chapters, San Mao did in fact present

⁹⁹ See Link, chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁰⁰ Larson p. 153. Ultimately, however, notes Larson, they continued not only to write but also to privilege textual work over its alternatives.

¹⁰¹ See Barmé pp. 107-112 for an account of the textual debate organised by the *Beijing Youth News* among students in 1991, in which readers were invited to choose which philosophy they preferred: the words of San Mao quoted above, or an eiphet in praise of the 'serving the nation' spirit of Jiao Yulu ('a model self-sacrificing party secretary who died from cancer and overwork in Henan in 1964'): 'In his heart he had a place for all the people, but no room for himself'. The

herself consistently giving to others, but her ethic of giving did not proceed from any existing moral code. Rather, it is based upon an ethos of personal choice: the choice to be 'good', and to manifest a loving and caring persona to those around her as part of the 'beauty' of her life and herself. Whether based upon the desire for fun, reciprocity, belonging or any other motive, it is fundamentally an aesthetic choice; indeed it is one aspect of the choice to care for the self. Just as San Mao beautified her home with the tasteful accessories of a humane international modernity, so she beautified her personality and her life, and projected this beauty into the world not only through action (in her dealings with other people) but, more significantly, through texts. Individual freedom, beauty, truth and love are the paramount ideologies and goals of the textual life of San Mao. The cultural persona of this writer embraces the manifold functions of educator, enlightener, pathbreaker, inspirer, fantasy object and close confidante for readers: she was the person who did what others could only dream of, who lived the definitively beautiful life, and who allowed others to participate in the dream and the life through reading her stories.

The most popular girl

San Mao's biographers Lu, Yang and Sun have suggested four reasons for San Mao's lasting popularity. The first was her supposed resistance to the education system; readers who remembered (or were still experiencing) long hours of study, memorisation and competitive exams on which their futures depended were, biographers claim, attracted to this aspect of San Mao's represented life. (San Mao herself, however, responding to suggestions that she had heroically stood against an unjust system by refusing to go to school, disclaimed any heroism in this regard, stating that her withdrawal from school had been based upon fear and lack of confidence).¹⁰²

The second reason suggested for her popularity is given as the exotic settings of her stories. Certainly the exotica factor of San Mao's European and Saharan stories was a selling point for her writings, and the 'exotic' stories, mostly written in her 'desert period' of writing, were her best loved. Stories about members of her family, or about her life in Taipei after her years of living abroad were apparently less attractive to readers; commentators suggest that there was

aim of the discussion was 'to contrast the selfless community spirit of the party hero who died for the People with the self-interested egotism of a bourgeois writer who killed herself for no socially significant reason'. While greater weight was given to opinions that supported of Jiao Yulu, Barmé points out that the respondents often framed their positive evaluations of Jiao not in the approved party categories but in the kind of terms typical of the San Mao persona, such as 'love' and 'self-fulfilment'.

¹⁰² *The World of San Mao* p. 142. She was, she claimed, just a weak person who didn't go back to school after being punished - and had paid too high a price for her fear.

less and less interest in her later stories and that she had run out of things to write about (indeed this has been suggested as a factor contributing to her suicide).¹⁰³

The third reason for her success, according to her biographers, is that she 'told her own story', sharing her 'legendary' life with all its joys and sorrows, including deeply personal aspects. Because of this she was appreciated by young people eager to 'understand life'.¹⁰⁴ Here the identification between San Mao as narrator and San Mao as heroine of the stories is complete. The adventures, joys, sorrows and personal feelings are considered to be 'real' events and sensations experienced by San Mao and truthfully shared with her readers.

The fourth and final factor to which biographers attribute her success was her 'unique' literary style - simple, direct and personal.¹⁰⁵ Contributing to this uniqueness was the influence of the European languages she had studied upon her prose style in Chinese, with unorthodox word order and unusual idioms; the simplicity of her writing style may also have been partly attributable to her lack of formal schooling.

The features of San Mao's writing examined in this study do not map onto the set identified by these biographers. Rather, I have endeavoured to explore the persona of San Mao itself, in its many guises: as the channel through which the reader may vicariously experience new places and new things; as the example through which the reader may consider, test and perhaps act out a host of emotional values; and as the embodiment of a way of being 'Chinese' in the world, a universal self who had proven herself able to conquer, understand and care for humanity, bringing 'others' close and integrating them into her world of feeling. As noted, San Mao's self-presentation covers a wide range of the attributes of the *wenren*, and indeed the San Mao persona could be said to have achieved the ideal function of the literary writer: namely, to have become a universal figure, authoritative in a commandingly varied range of contexts that attracts the admiration - and desire for emulation - of the reader. The San Mao figure may place itself within any environment and continue to flourish; it responds appropriately to all manner of situations; it maintains and perfects a set of desirable character attributes and values; and it is complete within itself as a literary, social and international being. Wherever the literary persona of San Mao chooses to go, she beautifies, educates and enlightens; she demonstrates the

¹⁰³ Critics noted that her work became more and more self-indulgent (items from her agony column replies and her collection of simple aphorisms, *Random Thoughts*, being singled out as examples) and inconsistent; it was suggested that San Mao had simply written too much and had lost track of what she was talking about, making contradictory statements because she had forgotten what she had written before, Bai Luo, 'The San Mao I don't love' (Wu suo bu ai de San Mao), *Literary Star* (Wenxing) 110, August 1987, p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ Lu, Yang and Sun p. 392.

¹⁰⁵ Lu, Yang and Sun pp. 392-393

possible scope of a 'beautiful life' based upon an ideology of feeling, an 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism', a modern ability to consume culture, and a set of bourgeois values. Readers and admirers of the stories of San Mao - with young women chief among them - could educate themselves through her into her vision of the world and could apply her example in the quest for a 'beautiful life' of their own. The authorial persona could mediate seamlessly between writer and reader; so seamlessly, in fact, that readers could believe they 'knew' the author herself.¹⁰⁶

The culture and institutions of 'the west' do not threaten the stability of San Mao's emotional poise, even though they may try; and neither is it diminished by the discomforts or difficulties of 'wilderness' and 'hardship'. The 'naturalness' of her persona remains unchanged; whatever the environment, San Mao continues to project to the world sincerity of emotion, caring for humanity and a playful spirit. The rewards of such a persona are many: a loving welcome and admiration wherever she chooses to go (not only within her own texts but also in the 'real' world of devoted readers), and a life of personal fulfilment, structured around playful, romantic, sincere relationships and adventures, beautified by the character of the persona herself. She is constructed as free, truthful and loving; beloved by those who know her and attractive and compelling to those who do not; and, through her 'beautiful life', fulfilling or perfecting the meaning of being Chinese in a modern and international world.

The soft, self-expressive, self-indulgent, unashamedly individualistic and pleasure-seeking elements suppressed in the revolutionary and practical traditions of May 4th writing are triumphantly displayed to the world in the persona of San Mao; at the same time, the romantic, whimsical creature of emotion that was San Mao was a product of the kind of society which May 4th literature was supposedly so influential in shaping (that is the modernising and economically ascendant society of Taiwan in the late twentieth century).¹⁰⁷ The genres of 'leisure literature' that developed in the 1920s and 1930s for popular consumption in urbanising China and fed into the popular genres of urbanising Taiwan in the 1960s (including *Crown* magazine, through which San Mao's stories were brought to the world) culminated in the stories of the legendary writer and persona who would be called 'Everybody's San Mao'¹⁰⁸ - a writer who rejected the practical May 4th

¹⁰⁶ This prompted the writer to reiterate the reminder to readers that, though they might think they knew her, the 'San Mao' they know is a fiction.

¹⁰⁷ Leo Lee illustrates this point in his discussion of 'modernism' and 'romanticism' in Taiwan literature, where he suggests that 'some of the most vaunted values in May Fourth literature became utterly meaningless once they were popularized and vulgarized in a post-May Fourth commercial setting', Lee in Faurot, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ San Mao's mother, Mu Jinlan, contributed a preface to one of her daughter's collection of short stories (*A Horse for You*) titled, 'My second child: everybody's San Mao'.

ideologies of literature to instruct the masses in the service of the nation and yet also perfected them through the sentimental revelation of an exemplary textual self.

Lasting echoes

As noted in Chapter One, 'Echo' was another of the names Chen Ping/San Mao chose for herself early in her life.

The 'real person', Chen Ping, killed herself in the early hours of 4th January 1991. A few days later, the final piece of writing by San Mao was published. The January column in her series in *Jiangyi* magazine, it was a paean in praise of life: 'My heart is full of hope in welcoming this brand new year...life really is beautiful; let us treasure every tomorrow on which the sun rises'.¹⁰⁹ Several newspapers reprinted the piece, remarking upon the irony of optimistic words appearing after the author had already died by her own hand.¹¹⁰

The life of Chen Ping ended as she hanged herself with a stocking from the shower head in the bathroom of a hospital ward. The beautiful life of San Mao, however, continues to echo through her stories. Her narratives of play, connectedness to others, freedom, self-fulfilment and, above all, love, though no longer the 'whirlwind' of the 1970s and 1980s, continue to whisper their message in reprinted editions and - perhaps more evocatively - in the memories of those who read, had admired and loved the San Mao persona at the height of her attractive power, and whose own dreams had been shaped by San Mao and her world.

¹⁰⁹ Reprinted in *Dear San Mao* pp. 151-155.

¹¹⁰ For example *Liberty News* 5th January 1991, p. 3; the headline announced that 'San Mao sang in praise of life but sought death herself!'

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Timeline of San Mao's life

(from Lu Shiqing, Yang Youli and Sun Yongchao, *San Mao: a biography*, Taipei: Chenxing Press, 1993, pp. 398-402)

- 1943** March 26, born in Chongqing, named Chen Maoping.
- 1946** Moved with her family to Nanjing. Read her first book, *The Wanderings of san Mao*. Unilaterally changed her name to Chen Ping.
- 1948** Crossed on Zhongxing ferry to Taipei with her parents. Began studying at Taipei Guomin Primary School.
- 1954** Took high school entry exam; marks miscalculated, started at Jingxiu Girls' School; marks later corrected, went to Taipei Girls' High.
- 1955** In second junior year, attacked with black paint on her face. Began to skip school and go to cemetery. Took leave from schooling, stayed at home.
- 1956** Went back to school again, then formally withdrew from schooling. Began to practise literary composition, music, painting, studied Chinese landscape painting from Huang Junbi and bird-and-flower painting from Shao Youxuan
- 1961** Studied sketching and oil painting from Gu Fusheng.
- 1962** December: published her first work, 'Doubt', in *Modern Literature*, under her real name, Chen Ping.
- 1963** January: Published novella 'Love in a Foreign Country' in *Central Daily*; published novella 'Moon River' in *Crown* 19, June 1963.
- 1964** Became informal auditing student at Culture Academy. Fell in love for the first time.
- 1966** 29th January, published prose work 'Bird of Paradise' in *Zhengxin News*.
- 1967** Failure of first love, went to study at Madrid Academy of Literature and Philosophy in Spain. June: published prose work 'Antony, My Antony' in *Lion Cub Literature*. Published prose work 'A Sunday Morning'. At Christmas, first meeting with José.
- 1968** Parted from José. Travelled in Europe: Paris, Munich, Amsterdam...
- 1969** Applied to philosophy department of Free University in Berlin. Entered Goethe Language Institute for German language study.
- 1970** Summer: gained opportunity to study ceramics in USA, at University of Illinois. Autumn: worked in Illinois University Law Library, responsible for English and American law.
- 1971** Returned to Taiwan, taught German at Culture Academy, Political Cadre School and in private homes.

1972 In love with German businessman, got engaged; the night before the wedding, fiancé died of heart attack. Attempted suicide by taking pills; revived. Winter: returned to Spain, saw José again.

1973 July: married José in El Ayoun in the desert.

1974 October 6: Published first Saharan story on literature page of *United Daily*, 'The Chinese Restaurant', used pen-name 'San Mao' for first time.

1975 Morocco invaded Sahara. October 31: San Mao left the Sahara.

1976 José unemployed; settled on Gran Canaria. May: 'Chinese Restaurant', 'Wedding Story', 'Doctor to the world' and other stories collected and published as monograph *Stories of the Sahara* by Crown Press; became bestseller. Early works collected and published as *The Rainy Season Will Not Return*. Returned to Taiwan to visit family for first time since marriage.

1977 February: José went to Nigeria. May: San Mao went to Nigeria. *Diary of a Scarecrow*, *Crying Camels* and translation of Spanish comic *A Child's World* published by Crown Press [*A Child's World* being a translation of the Spanish comic strip by 'Quino' about the adventures of a girl called Mafalda]. Winter: moved to Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

1979 March: went with José to live on La Palma. Pop song for which she wrote lyrics on first visit back to Taiwan ('The Olive Tree') became popular. September 30: José died in deep-sea fishing accident. *The Tender Night* published. Returned to Taiwan.

1980 May: Returned to Spain and Canaries to deal with inheritance, began life as widow.

1981 May 9: invited by Taiwan News Agency to return to Taiwan to host Golden Bell awards ceremony. Mid-October, gave first formal lecture in Kaohsiung. Early November: received support from *United Daily* to begin travelling to Central and South America for *Over the Hills and Far Away*. *How Many Flowers Fell While I Slept* and *Rear View* published.

1982 October 5: concluded trip to 12 Central and South American countries. Summer: returned to Spain and Canaries. October: returned to Taiwan, began working in Creative Writing Group, Chinese department, Culture University [as a teacher]. Travel account *Over the Hills and Far Away* and reportage translation *Song of Lanyu* published [*Song of Lanyu* being a translation of an English-language manuscript by Barry Martinsson, an American Jesuit missionary in Taiwan, about the Aboriginal community on the island of Lanyu where he lived and worked].

1983 June: Hong Kong Literature Research Group published *San Mao: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, which includes works by San Mao and other people's evaluations. July: *A Horse for You* published by Crown Press.

1984 Went to the USA for medical treatment and vacation. Teaching career ended. Reportage translation *The Story of Qingquan* published by Crown Press [*The Story of Qingquan* being another book by Barry Martinsson, about his community in Qingquan, near Xinzhu].

1985 Early in the year, took part in the Second Singapore Literature Workshop for Chinese-language Writers. Met mainland writers Qin Mu and Yao Xueyin. *Taking the City*, *Heart-to-Heart* and *Random Thoughts* published by

Crown Press. Created and compiled *Echo* album [*Echo* being a collection of songs with lyrics by San Mao, supposedly based upon her life]. Temporary amnesia and mental disorder. Winter: went to the USA for convalescence.

1986 First six months: studied at language school in USA. May: returned to Taiwan. Summer and autumn: went to Canaries to deal with her house and José's grave. October: formally returned to settle in Taiwan, judged by many Taiwan publications to be the reading public's favourite writer. Talking book *San Mao Tells Stories* and translation *In the Twinkling of an Eye* published by Crown Press [*In the Twinkling of an Eye* being a travel account of Mexico by Barry Martinsson].

1987 Talking book *Meteor Shower* and prose collection *My Treasures* published by Crown Press.

1988 June 12, wrote first letter to Zhang Leping, 'San Mao's dad'. *Stirring Up the School* published by Crown Press.

1989 April: first visit to mainland to see relatives; went to Shanghai, Suzhou, Ningbo, Dinghai and Hangzhou. June: after returning to Taiwan, moved out of parents' home, began to live alone. Began writing screenplay *Red Dust*.

1990 April: second journey to mainland; went to Shannxi, Beijing, Ningxia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Tibet and Sichuan. July to October: third trip to mainland. Talking book *The World of Reading* published by Crown Press. December 12: *Red Dust* won Golden Horse awards in 8 categories.

1991 January 2: admitted to Rongmin General hospital for examination and treatment for thickening of uterine membrane. January 3: underwent surgery. January 4: at 2 or 3 am, committed suicide by hanging by the neck with a stocking in bathroom of hospital ward.

Appendix 2:

San Mao Makes History¹

The Taiwan writer San Mao's stories of the Spanish decolonization of the Western Sahara lie at the intersection of multiple historical peripheries. The struggle of the Sahrawi Arabs for independence from Spain and Spain's eventual withdrawal² from the Sahara occupies a peripheral place in the history of the Spanish empire. It is peripheral to the history of 'the Arab peoples' as well, and also to the history of Morocco (which annexed the territory when Spain withdrew). Indeed as a struggle for national independence which has not resulted in the establishment of an independent country, the Western Sahara's story is peripheral to any history of 'states', being neither a tale of imperial glory nor the chronicle of the birth of a nation. A story of the Western Sahara written in Chinese is situated at yet another historical periphery, especially one written by a writer from Taiwan, itself at the periphery in a Chinese world dominated by the mainland². Yet this is a history of our own times - the history of modern Chinese culture as well as global processes of decolonization - and is as deserving of attention and remembrance as any other.

Just as the story of the Western Sahara is a 'peripheral' history, San Mao's work is peripheral to academic discourse. As a 'popular' writer, San Mao is easily placed at the margin of Chinese literature - yet her work has been among the most widely read literature of the Chinese-speaking world over the past twenty years, and the two stories examined in this paper are among her best-known and most admired works³. These fragments of 'history' were not written by the 'victors', nor even by a member or representative of any of the principal parties to the action; and they are, moreover, peripheral to the notion of history-writing itself, for they take short story form, dramatized and undoubtedly fictionalized.

¹The title refers to that of Kate Grenville's novel *Joan Makes History* (Grenville, 1988), in which the fictional heroine and narrator, Joan (or a series of Joans) inserts herself into various scenes throughout Australian history. Though there are obvious differences between placing a fictional 'everywoman' into historical events and narrating a story of oneself participating in events of one's own time, the allusion to Grenville's title is intended to invoke questions of history-making as both history-writing and acting to write oneself into history ('history' refers here to 'stories about the past' rather than history as an academic discipline). I thank Lewis Mayo and also Tomoko Akami, Geremie Barmé, Josephine Fox and Hank Nelson for their helpful comments on the issues discussed here.

²Taiwan, at the periphery of the Qing empire, and after 1895 the periphery of the Japanese empire, remains at the periphery of mainland China despite the ruling Nationalists' claims to 'true' Chinese centrality. One might note the irony of stories uniting three of the world's major language groups (Chinese, Arabic and Spanish) being marked as 'peripheral'.

³Biographers have nominated them as her best stories. One commentator claims that the Hong Kong film director Yim Ho was eager to make a film of 'The Crying Camels' and asked San Mao to a movie treatment (she did not, however, do so). Cui and Zhao 1995:269.

Yet San Mao's representations of the Sahara and her supposed experiences there cannot be completely dismissed as 'non-history' either for, despite their quasi-fictional form, they encompass publicly recorded events; further, they have been accorded a high level of credibility (not only by readers but also by biographers and other commentators on her work) both because of the quasi-autobiographical narrative style in which they are written and the author's own claim that she wrote only from her own experience⁴.

Since the history of the mid-1970s Western Sahara is not generally well-known, there are few external reference points for San Mao's readers to evaluate these accounts; in contrast with stories of a more widely discussed event (such as, for example, the Second World War), there would be for most readers very little framework of existing knowledge into which these Saharan stories can be fitted⁵. The idea that historical 'knowledge' can be created by those who process past events for popular entertainment is not new ('history' it has been said, 'is written by the Oscar winners'⁶); this is certainly the case with San Mao's 'history' of Spanish decolonization of the Sahara. It has become for readers more than just a history of San Mao herself, or even 'a history' of the Sahara; it is *the* history of the Sahara - a history in which, however, the stories of the Sahara and San Mao's own life are inextricably intertwined.

Chen Ping/San Mao

In early 1973, a young woman from Taiwan by the name of Chen Ping arrived in the territory then known as the Spanish Sahara⁷. Her motives were

⁴Her stories have been described as full of 'honesty and humanitarian concern between people; reading San Mao's works, you feel the beating of an honest heart from start to finish, a kind of mutual love between people and a mutual thoughtful caring'. Gu, 1991:120. San Mao herself is quoted as saying that 'Everything I have written is a factual record of my life...there's a record of my own feelings, and some experiences of my neighbors and friends...that's to say I have no fictional stories, because I can't make up stories'. (Sima et al., eds, 1984:114); 'My works are just an autobiographical record...a record and reflection of my life and my experiences' (Mei, 1991:162-163). Anecdotal evidence attests to a belief in the truth of San Mao's stories among some readers; more significantly, her biographers reproduce the content of her stories in reconstructing the 'facts' of her life. In the journalist Zhang Yun's later interviews with Sahrawi, he treats discrepancies between their stories and San Mao's as either failures of memory or unwillingness to be truthful on their part.

⁵For most of San Mao's readers, however (myself included), there are few readily available sources of information relating to the mid-1970s Sahara.

⁶Goldsworthy 1998:45. The quotation is well illustrated by the film *Titanic*, which has created 'historical knowledge' for countless viewers, prompting the descendants of one person depicted therein to challenge the veracity of his portrayal, with subsequent payment of compensation by the film-makers.

⁷Chen Ping (1943-1991), known to millions of readers as 'San Mao', arrived in the Western Sahara in March or April 1973. The 'Western Sahara' ('Spanish Sahara') was bordered by Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria and the Atlantic Ocean). A colony of Spain from 1884, it was incorporated into metropolitan Spain as 'a Spanish African province' in 1956; when Spain withdrew from the territory in 1976 it was absorbed into Moroccan and (briefly) Mauritanian territories (Damis, 1983).

romantic⁸; her journey was facilitated by her familiarity with the Spanish language (acquired in Spain in the 1960s); she would marry a Spanish man there⁹; her stay would last for two and a half years, until October 1975; and she was to introduce to millions of Chinese readers a Sahara Desert organized by her own imagination and literary style. The first of her 'Stories of the Sahara' was published in a major daily newspaper in Taiwan in 1974¹⁰, under the pen-name 'San Mao', and fame quickly followed. Until her death in 1991, Chen Ping/San Mao continued to publish collections of stories and became one of the best-known literary figures in the Chinese-speaking world, famous as a 'celebrity' as well as a writer, and the subject of a number of biographies as well as heroine of her own narratives.¹¹

To disentangle the writer Chen Ping from the pen-name and literary persona San Mao would be an extremely difficult task, and it is not my purpose to undertake it here¹². Since almost all of her stories are narrated in the first person by a young female character called 'San Mao', 'San Mao' is not only author but heroine and narrator as well. Furthermore, as noted above, Chen Ping/San Mao claimed that all of her stories were based on real events and experiences; thus situations and characters with the characteristics of fiction are thus claimed as historically truthful - at least in terms of the story of her own life¹³.

My consideration of San Mao's work as 'history making' does not center on distinguishing 'truth' from 'fabrication' in San Mao's works or separating Chen

⁸An article in *National Geographic* inspired her interest in the Sahara. (San Mao 1976: 211-212). The fascination with 'wilderness' (the 'unspoiled', the 'traditional', the 'exotic'), the apparent uniqueness of this appreciation of wilderness to modern industrial cultures and its connections with various aspects of romanticism has been discussed by Bishop (1989); San Mao's desert writing partakes of these same elements, stressing isolation, 'emptiness', 'primitiveness' and 'difference' from cultural 'centers'.

⁹Her Spanish boyfriend, José Marian Quero, took a job with the Spanish phosphate mining company Fosbucraa, near El Ayoun in early 1973.

¹⁰In the *Lianhe Bao* (*United Daily News*), 6 October 1974, later republished in *Stories of the Sahara*.

¹¹San Mao's books sold in great numbers in Taiwan and China. The stories that particularly captured readers' imaginations were those of the Sahara; others deal with Europe, Central and South America, the USA, childhood and family, and returning to Taiwan after years abroad. All her books ran to numerous editions; in addition to her stories she wrote magazine agony columns, pop song lyrics and a film screenplay, gave lecture tours and participated in literary and cultural events in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Her complete works run to more than twenty items, including cassette tapes of her public lectures and story-readings.

¹²'San Mao' (not 'Chen Ping') was the subject of public debate in magazine and newspaper features, biographies and (latterly) obituaries.

¹³Occupying a space somewhere between genres of autobiography, travel literature and fiction, San Mao's work is somewhat difficult to categorize. Various elements of the colonial travel narrative are visible in her stories, in particular the phenomenon of colonial 'anti-conquest' and its assumption of innocence, and the preoccupation on the part of travelers from imperial centres with creating an impression of reciprocity with the people and lands they visit. (See Pratt 1992).

Ping from San Mao. Rather than verifying or disproving her stories through archival research or interviewing witnesses¹⁴, I will discuss the intersections of her self-presentation with the politics and history of the Western Sahara. In these two stories that interweave personal history with national history ('Sergeant Shaba' and 'The Crying Camels'¹⁵), San Mao writes herself into the process of Spanish decolonization of the Western Sahara, 'making' history by recording her personalized version of the political events she experiences and participating in a national history as a significant agent, linking her own history with Saharan history and making the history of the Sahara her own.

Stories of the Sahara

San Mao's earliest stories of the Sahara tell of her decision to go to live in the desert, her arrival and everyday life in El Ayoun (the capital of the 'Spanish Sahara'), the desert landscape, the people she encounters and their 'exotic' customs.¹⁶ These two later stories, however, link personal experience with the turbulent events of the Western Sahara in the 1970s and place her into the story of the struggle for liberation from Spanish colonialism and Spanish withdrawal from the territory (after which the Western Sahara, rather than gaining independence as most of its inhabitants apparently wished, was partitioned between Morocco and Mauritania).¹⁷

Chen Ping/San Mao gained legitimacy as a resident of the Western Sahara through her Spanish husband, José (through whom she also gained Spanish citizenship), and lived as a Spaniard in El Ayoun with a corresponding level of privilege. Socially, her life was divided between Spanish and Sahrawi friends and acquaintances. In the course of her narratives she identifies with different - sometimes opposing - interests in the Sahara: with Spain (as a Spanish citizen, and through her connections with the Spanish community), and with the Sahrawi (through being non-Spanish, and through her wishful sense of 'belonging' to the landscape and its nomadic inhabitants). As a non-ethnically-Spanish outsider (though, as noted above, citizen of Spain), she could also distance herself from both sides when she chose, identifying herself as a Chinese - indeed (as she

¹⁴Such research could be (and in future may well be) undertaken by a reader of Spanish and Chinese.

¹⁵In *Crying Camels*, which ran to 27 editions during her lifetime (*Zili Wanbao* (Independent Evening News) 5th January 1991) and has been reprinted several times since her death.

¹⁶In *Stories of the Sahara*, *Crying Camels* and *The Rainy Season Won't Come Again*.

¹⁷In addition to Spain and the Sahrawi people, three other parties were involved in the dispute over the fate of the Western Sahara: Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. As Spain prepared to leave the Sahara, Morocco claimed it as part of its own territory on the basis of historical ties; Mauritania too asserted a claim; Algeria, though it made no territorial claim, remained a significant player, supporting Morocco and Mauritania until mid-1975, when it reversed its position and supported Saharan self-determination. Damis 1983:45, 14-15.

claimed) the only Chinese person in the desert. She does not maintain a permanent identification with any 'side' in the conflicts in the desert, and her shifts in identification throughout the two stories follow various permutations and combinations of these three positions according to her perceptions of what is morally right in each individual situation. These shifting identifications are akin to the 'oscillations' which Susan Horton has noted in the African writings of Isak Dinesen and Olive Schreiner: being between two entities and thus truly representative of neither side, and being 'complicit in and resistant to the colonial order', produced 'oscillations' between positions of identification, which in turn gave rise to a sense that this status had positive possibilities as 'go-between', 'intercessor' and 'mediator' (Horton 1995:166, 221-222).

A secret history

Most of San Mao's stories would seem to be outside the category of history as it is conventionally understood. The focal point of the narratives (as in so much writing about foreign countries) is in the personal reactions of the observer to new sights and experiences, new people and new situations, which are often superficially observed and tangential to any sense of a 'real' life ruled by explicit economic and political imperatives, creating an atmosphere of curiosity, innocence, leisure and play. Stories such as these are not scrutinized by readers for their 'historical accuracy', and their contents are not a matter of public record.

In the two stories discussed here, however, the narrative of personal experience is placed in a setting of national unrest, of social tension and personal suffering, where the upheaval and conflict that provide a background to the narrator's own activities are, to some extent, attested beyond her own description of them.¹⁸ 'History' records that the people of the Western Sahara *did* struggle for independence; the Polisario Liberation Front *did* engage in guerilla activities; the United Nations *did* send an inspection team to the Western Sahara to gage the will of the people; King Hassan of Morocco *did* lead his people in the so-called Green March to 'reclaim' the Western Sahara; Bassiri was a known historical figure; conflicts, explosions, injuries, deaths *did* take place; and San Mao *did* experience the history of the Sahara in 1975. In San Mao's 'history', the violent events are personalized into individual deaths. Whether or not she has 'made up' the people who die and the circumstances of their deaths, these narratives claim a

¹⁸These two stories were written when San Mao was short of money (having fled the unrest in the desert and settled in the Canary Islands, with her publications the only source of income for herself and José); accordingly, she wrote at a faster rate and employed more colorful themes than before. Cui and Zhao 1995:160.

specific political relationship of San Mao to Saharan history and Saharan history to herself.

Writing herself into the political situation of the mid-1970s Sahara, San Mao positions herself at the heart of the story, observing, acting and reacting, and presenting the capacity to be 'moved' by events as action in itself. As the supposedly truthful experiences of a young woman from Taiwan intertwine with the history of the Western Sahara, the geographical and temporal settings of the stories not only give them an extra quality of vividness or immediacy but also exert some claim upon the 'real' place and time. The Sahrawi struggle for nationhood and the contending claims of Spain, Morocco and Mauritania appear as part of a romanticized history of personal authenticity, an adjunct to the presentation of the self. Correspondingly, the self-presentation of San Mao against that background has created a Chinese 'interest' in the Sahara¹⁹, generating commentaries and biographical literature that build further on the relationships between San Mao, China, Spain and the Sahara that began with these stories of the desert. San Mao has 'made' Saharan history by establishing a relationship for it with Chinese readers.

It should be noted also that San Mao's writing of their history has hitherto been closed to the other participants in the events; as an account they have not been able to read, it can be said to be a secret history. Writing in Chinese, San Mao could expect that the Sahrawi and Spanish people who appeared in her stories would not read them, and would therefore not take issue with what she wrote²⁰. Her account has not been subject to scrutiny by the community which it describes but has been read solely by communities far removed from the original events.

As noted above, the recent history of the Western Sahara, though not well known internationally, is very well-known all over the Chinese-speaking world through San Mao's stories²¹ in a form interpenetrated with the personal, romantic narrative of San Mao and her life in the desert. In these stories violent deaths, even those of people she claims to know and to love, appear as colorful events in

¹⁹'Interest' in both senses: making it interesting to Chinese readers and making it into a place for Chinese political and diplomatic involvement. Although these Saharan stories have little direct 'relevance' to the interests of most Chinese-speaking societies, the interest in the Sahara created by San Mao's stories has led to its incorporation into a 'Chinese' history; it forms a part of Chinese literary and cultural history and also broader narratives of China and its place in the world (see below).

²⁰The historical identity of these stories is thus quite separate from any claims in relation to participant interests. The Spanish sergeant and the chief Sahrawi protagonists are all dead. Zhang Yun, who claims to have located individuals who appeared in her stories, notes that they have no idea that San Mao wrote stories about them or even that she was a writer at all. Zhang, 1996:160.

²¹Including overseas Chinese communities as well as Taiwan and China. *Crown (Huangguan)* magazine, where the stories first appeared, is published in Southeast Asian and American editions as well as the Taiwan edition.

the narrative of her own adventures and emotional life ('colorful', that is, because the struggles she describes have no direct impact on the lives and histories of her readers), structured by the context of her writings as a whole. Her accounts also generate history in their wake, as they give rise to a literature of commentary which unites her into a history with the 'characters' in her stories and situates her within further narratives of history (discussed in the final section of the paper).

Sergeant Shaba²²

• The ugly colonizer

The first indication for San Mao that all is not harmonious in the desert is the discovery of a crowd of Sahrawi youths gathered around a Spanish soldier lying drunk on the ground, mocking and spitting at him. She interprets this display of contempt less as a manifestation of Sahrawi resentment against Spain and its military forces than as a personal distaste for this particular soldier (who, we are to learn, is a well-known drunkard). The idea that bad feelings on the part of the Sahrawi towards the Spanish are personal and unrelated to the colonial system becomes something of a recurring theme through these two stories - even though San Mao is plainly aware of the existence of the Polisario organization, its 'enmity' toward Spain and its widespread popular support. 'At that time', she notes,

the young people of the Western Sahara had formed the 'Polisario People's Liberation Front'...almost all the young people in town sided with them in their hearts. Relationships between Spanish people and Sahrawi were already very fraught; the desert force was thus, of course, their deadly enemy. (*Camels* 42)

As we will see, Polisario will feature as prominently in San Mao's own personal narrative of her Saharan life as it did in the decolonization process itself.²³ Faced now with the drunken Spaniard, she and José drive him back to the military camp, and they are saluted by the guards with the words, 'Thank you, compatriots'. Identified by the Spanish as one of their own, San Mao reaffirms this sense of herself as Spanish by referring to the soldiers as 'our own army'. The

²²**Names:** Where I have been able to identify names, I have followed original-language spellings; when unable to do so, I have transliterated San Mao's Chinese-character versions in Hanyu pinyin. Zhang Yun, noting the distance between San Mao's transliterations and the Arabic originals, suggests that some of the names she uses are nicknames rather than formal names anyway. **Translation:** all translations are my own.

²³The Polisario Liberation Front emerged in 1973. Its predecessor organization, the Saharan Liberation Movement (MLS - a non-violent advocate for independence) had been violently suppressed by the Spanish in 1970 (Damis, 1983:38-40). Polisario guerilla activity began one month after San Mao's arrival in the Western Sahara; the liberation movement had already been led for two years by someone other than Bassiri. After Spain's withdrawal, Polisario established a government in exile in Algiers; it still claims to be the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people. Hodges, 1983:38.

Spanish desert forces are 'ours' as San Mao takes her position in the Western Sahara along with the ruling Spanish, claiming her right to be part of Spain as a Spanish citizen in the Western Sahara and thus accepting an identification (implicit or explicit) as part of a colonizing force.

San Mao's Sahrawi neighbor, Shalun, supports her dislike of the sergeant by starting in fear at the sight of him 'as if he had seen an evil spirit'; when she asks the sergeant his name, he replies: 'To my Saharan friends I have no name', and drives off. San Mao's immediate questions to Shalun about the soldier manifest both an implicit identification with the interests of Spain (through the belief that Sahrawi should have no reason to fear the Spanish military) and an assumption of her secure place in the confidence of the Sahrawi (assuming that she would know if Shalun was a member of Polisario, she assures readers that he is not). His reply is reassuring to neither her sense of Spanish rightness nor her own understanding of the 'natives' - indeed he undercuts both: 'That sergeant hates all of us Sahrawi...everyone knows; you're the only one who doesn't' (*Camels*, 48).

Encountering the sergeant again, San Mao notices a heart tattooed on his arm along with the words 'Don Juan of Austria' - the personal name, she is told, of King Carlos I ('before Spain and Austria were divided') - and also the name of a former military camp of Spain's desert forces²⁴. The invocation of an earlier large and 'complete' Spain - indeed a Spain engaged in warfare with Muslims²⁵ - is perhaps significant in this context where Spain, by reluctantly withdrawing from its colonized Saharan territory, is about to be 'divided' again.²⁶ When she questions the sergeant directly: 'Excuse me, why do the Sahrawi have a rumor that you hate them?' he replies, 'Because I do!', glares fiercely at a nearby group of Sahrawi, and strides away (*Camels*, 50).

• The colonizer 'wronged'

The aura of mystery surrounding the sergeant is dispelled only when the setting moves from San Mao's 'Spanish' life (where we see her settled in her home in the desert capital, partaking of Spanish privilege and entertaining Spanish friends) to her 'Sahrawi' life (in which she roams the wider desert and depicts herself as a treasured guest in the tent homes of nomadic Sahrawi). In the two stories examined here, San Mao moves between these two lives; in both, the

²⁴One of the two regiments of the Spanish Foreign Legion permanently stationed in the Western Sahara (not just a single camp) was named after Don Juan de Austria (Pazzanita and Hodges, 1994:415).

²⁵Don Juan of Austria defeated the Turkish navy at Lepanto in 1571, ending Ottoman power in the Mediterranean and supposedly freeing the Christian galley slaves of the Turks.

²⁶These words perhaps imply a belief in a greater Spanish unity that ought not to be divided and 'lose' its territory.

main action takes place in her 'Spanish' life, with Sahrawi desert-dwellers serving to underline her own observations and actions, to accept her legitimacy and 'rightness' in the desert, and to contribute vital knowledge of things that are hidden from her in town. In both stories she writes herself into the lives of nomadic Sahrawi families: first on a casual basis as a visitor and then as an honorary family member.

Here, a visit to a Sahrawi family in their tent by an oasis outside the town brings satisfaction of her curiosity about the sergeant. Welcomed by the family patriarch, San Mao expresses surprise that only a tiny handful of people are camped around this hospitable oasis. He tells her that in times past, thousands of tents had been pitched there, but a cruel and terrible event had caused people to move away - namely, a massacre of the desert forces by the Sahrawi.

Sixteen years previously, relates the old man, the Spanish desert forces had arrived at the oasis and set up camp. San Mao is quick with a *terra nullius* argument ('at that time the Sahara desert didn't belong to anyone. Anyone could come here; they weren't breaking the law'. *Camels*, 52) to defend the Spanish forces (who, after all, make it 'legitimate' and indeed possible for her to be there herself). The question of who this piece of the Sahara 'belongs' to, the central issue in the conflict over the territory, is pushed aside with the assertion that the land is 'unowned'²⁷. This defence of the army may resonate with the circumstances of San Mao's own childhood. Her father (a former Kuomintang military officer) brought his family in 1948 from the warring mainland to Taiwan - where the Kuomintang not only assumed political power (on the grounds that Taiwan was indisputably a part of China) but also maintained a sense of their own importance as civilized representatives of the culture of the Chinese 'centre' in the less civilized periphery, who would restore the Chineseness of a Taiwan supposedly corrupted by fifty years of Japanese colonialism, and who also harbored a sense of mission for a unified China along with a sense of temporariness about their residence in Taiwan (where they intended to stay only until they returned triumphant to the mainland to rule there).²⁸ For San Mao, the Spanish military have no less right than the Sahrawi to this 'unowned' land²⁹ -

²⁷It does not 'belong' to the Sahrawi under Spanish colonial rule; its 'belonging' to Spain is about to be questioned and overturned by the United Nations; it is soon to 'belong' to Morocco and (briefly) Mauritania; and self-determination for the indigenous inhabitants to whom it truly 'belongs' never came to fruition.

²⁸The two situations are not, of course, identical. The Kuomintang aimed to 'restore' Taiwan and its people to a national unity after Japanese colonization; although the Western Sahara had supposedly been part of Spain since 1956, Spanish policies did not attempt to make the Sahrawi culturally Spanish. At the time these stories were written, any suggestion of Taiwan independence from China was strictly illegal.

²⁹As the mainland Kuomintang would supposedly have no less right to Taiwan than the longer-term Chinese residents (let alone the indigenous inhabitants). The 'ownership' of Taiwan is still

and their camp is as acceptable a presence in the desert as the flocks and tents of the nomads.

The Sahrawi, however, had challenged the 'right' of the Spanish army to camp by the oasis and take water from it, and the conflict ended when 'a big group of Sahrawi made a surprise attack on the camp and killed all the desert forces in one night while they were asleep. Killed them all with knives' (*Camels*, 52-3). All except one, that is: the mysterious sergeant from San Mao's 'Spanish' desert life, who had been lying in a drunken stupor outside the camp.

San Mao's imagination recreates the scene for herself and for readers:

it was as if I could see a group of Spanish soldiers in uniform in hand-to-hand combat with turbaned Sahrawi, falling down under the knives in slow motion like on TV - piles of crawling bodies bleeding onto the Saharan sand, thousands of helpless arms reaching up to heaven, wordless astonishment on the bloody faces gasping hoarsely. In the dark night wind of that place the only sound was the laughter of the empty cavern of death. (*Camels*, 54)

Her description of how she imagines the massacre would have been makes of it a televisual image more suited to a fictional movie than a documentary account. Her presentation of the scene involves not a history of archival verification but an imagistic intensity of feeling, and the relationship that readers may acquire to the history of the Sahara from these images is that of viewers to a spectacle, and not scrutineers of a repository of evidence. There is in San Mao's tale of treacherous Sahrawi violence against an unsuspecting Spanish army a connecting of herself with a Saharan past - in which the colonizing nation of her own affiliation has supposedly been wronged - and a Saharan present in which a native patriarch involves her in local lore by telling her the story of the past. Ten years after San Mao's own Saharan sojourn, the journalist Zhang Yun, visiting the desert seeking traces of her life there, is taken to an oasis which he believes to be the one in this story. He presents both the reticence and the sketchy explanations of his guide as corroborative evidence to San Mao's account. The guide does not relate 'the tragic story' ('He couldn't possibly imagine', notes Zhang, 'that I not only understood this place but had also been shaken and moved by what had happened here') but finally tells Zhang that a conflict between Sahrawi and Spanish at the oasis had killed many and caused the remaining people to move away. 'Compared with the history of the place, he hadn't told me much', muses Zhang, 'but he had more or less confirmed the truth and reliability of the story. So there was no need to question any further' (Zhang, 1996:86-87).

contested, as dispossessed Aboriginal inhabitants assert their rights, and the Minnan(Hokkien)-speaking Chinese whose ancestors settled in Taiwan from four centuries ago (a large majority of the population) increasingly assert political and cultural sovereignty; the official line claims Taiwan to be part of 'greater China'.

For Zhang, it seems, San Mao's story has created the history of the place by emotional (rather than archivally corroborated) authenticity; things unspoken produce for him a historical truth too painful to be discussed more fully.

For the present, however, San Mao's interest is less with the tiny remnant oasis community than with the drunken Spanish survivor. The old Sahrawi man describes the sergeant waking from his stupor and falling among 'the corpses of his brothers, shaking like a madman'; his name, however, is still a mystery; since the massacre, he has refused to tell it to anyone' (*Camels*, 55).

• **The struggle for the Sahara**

Back in El Ayoun in the mid 1970s, where no one speaks of 'that tragedy that was already history', conflict between Spanish and Sahrawi is intensifying:

suddenly this piece of desert that the world had forgotten became complicated. Morocco to the north and Mauritania to the south wanted to carve up the Western Sahara between them, but the desert's own tribes formed a guerilla army and went into exile in Algeria. They wanted independence, but the Spanish government kept vacillating; they were favorably disposed, but didn't know how to abandon this territorial possession on which they had already expended so much effort and concern.

At that time Spanish soldiers who went out alone were killed; wells were poisoned, time bombs were found on the school bus, the phosphate mine conveyor belt was set on fire and the night watchman was hanged on an electric cable, and land mines exploded on the roads outside the town, killing people in passing vehicles...

Amid this ceaseless chaos there was fear in the town at the slightest sound. The government closed the schools at once, and the children were evacuated back to Spain. There was a total curfew at night....In this hitherto peaceful little town, people were beginning to sell off their furniture cheaply, and there were long queues outside the airline office every day for tickets. The cinema and all the shops were closed. All Spanish civil servants who stayed were issued with pistols. The air was tense, and the town, where no real direct conflict or aggression had yet occurred, was full of unrest and fear. (*Camels*, 55-6)

Although identified and identifying with the Spanish, San Mao declines to join the other women who are being evacuated to Spain with their children. José goes to work every day as usual, and every day San Mao scans the Spanish newspaper to 'find out exactly what the government was going to do with this piece of land' - but there is no news.

• **Spain's loss**

In this time of tension and uncertainty about the future of the Western Sahara and Spain's place in it, it is San Mao herself who divines the news, reading the intentions of the Spanish government in events she claims to have witnessed. A military vehicle loaded with coffins arrives at the military cemetery, and soldiers exhume the bodies for repatriation to Spain, 'lifting out their dead

brothers one by one' and placing them in new coffins. Now San Mao understands: 'Spain was going to give this land up after all!' (*Camels*, 57).³⁰

Through the crowd that has gathered to watch the exhumation she observes the nameless sergeant. When the third row of grave-stones is dug up, he strides over to one of the graves and jumps into it 'as if he had been waiting a long time for this moment'. Before San Mao's romanticizing gaze, his normal unpleasant manner is transformed:

With his own hands he lifted out that undecayed corpse and held it in his arms like a lover; holding it gently in his arms he looked attentively into the dried up face, no enmity or anger in his own. All I could see there was tender sadness. (*Camels*, 58)

As the Sahrawi crowd watches expectantly, another soldier quietly explains to San Mao: 'It's his younger brother - he was killed with the others'. 'An age' passes before the sergeant carries his brother's long-dead body to the coffin to place it 'as gently as if he were a baby, into the bed where he would rest forever'. (*Camels*, 58)

Despite her personal dislike of the sergeant, San Mao feels a moment of connection and sympathy with him, which fuses concern for his grief for his dead brother with sorrow at a shared national loss as well as his own personal loss. The soldier has lost his brother; Spain is about to 'lose' the Sahara; San Mao is about to lose the romantic Saharan life of her dreams and with it her persona as the Chinese woman of the desert. As he leaves, she turns away lest he feel 'that I was just a curious bystander watching unconcerned' - like the Sahrawi crowd, who pick up their children and flee as he passes. San Mao can empathize with the sergeant's loss; the Sahrawi, as objects of the Spaniard's hatred, are fearful rather than sympathetic. The repatriation of dead Spanish 'brothers' - literal or metaphorical - is not an occasion of regretful emotion for them, and there is no 'loss' to them in Spain's withdrawal. San Mao, however, from a position of personal identification with Spain, identifies here with Spanish emotion - even that of a Spaniard she dislikes - at personal loss, Spain's loss and by extension her own loss too.

• **Spanish goodness**

Nothing is left in the military cemetery except 'the neat rows of crosses, shining white in the sunlight over empty graves', and the story seems closed. That same day, however, an explosion is heard in El Ayoun - and 'that sergeant' is killed in the blast.

³⁰I thank Hank Nelson for pointing out that this scene is consistent with the Spanish military practice of repatriating war dead.

'He was driving past....a group of Sahrawi children...playing with a box with a guerilla flag stuck into it. The sergeant thought there was something not quite right about the box, and he got out of his truck and ran over to the children to tell them to get away from it. Then one of the children took the flag out and the box exploded...The sergeant threw himself onto the box and was blown to bits. Only two of the children were injured'. (*Camels*, 59-60)

In death as in life, the sergeant is full of mystery - though now the mystery is his unexpected goodness rather than his hatred. His body is buried the following day; he is the only Spanish soldier in the newly vacated military cemetery.

His brothers had long been taken away, and were sleeping peacefully in another land. But he had missed them; he was buried quietly in the Sahara, and this place that he both loved and hated was to be his eternal home. (*Camels*, 60)

Only after his death does San Mao learn his name (written, of course, on his headstone with the date - 1975). As in the story of the massacre at the oasis, a casual reader might wonder whether or not this story is true: whether or not Sergeant Shaba was a real person, and whether San Mao's account is a reliable version of documentable events, a fictionalized version, a cobbling together of verifiable events into a fictional sequential narrative, or pure fabrication.³¹ English language sources on the history of the Western Sahara do not refer to any such events. Subjecting parts of it to historical examination (through archives, newspapers, interviews) would not necessarily establish the story as 'definitively' true or false, and neither would it shift this account by San Mao from fiction to history or vice versa; the fact of San Mao's insertion of herself into Saharan history would remain, along with the position she takes up vis-à-vis the parties to the conflict. Her incorporation of Spain's military withdrawal from the desert into her own story makes it a crucial part of her placement of herself in the social and historical process and her imagination of that process. Verifiability is not the only issue in San Mao's story of Sergeant Shaba. As a Spanish resident of the Western Sahara at a time when Spain's presence is being continually and violently contested, San Mao places a story of Sahrawi violence that takes the lives of 'innocent' Spanish soldiers alongside a Spanish act of heroism that saves the lives of innocent children. An apparently evil man is shown repaying past Sahrawi evil with a final gesture of Spanish good; rather than avenging the deaths of his comrades and brother he lays down his life for the 'enemy' Sahrawi children and thus supplies a sense of personal nobility and rightness to Spanish actions in desert. Spain is perhaps the real hero here. Even as Spain prepares to withdraw, it is shown as self-sacrificing even in defeat; though it may have suffered at the

³¹Though Zhang Yun does not attempt to verify the story of Sergeant Shaba on his visit to El Ayoun, he notes that part of the cemetery has been built over.

hands of Sahrawi treachery and ingratitude, it can display a fine moral example in return. The reader of San Mao's story is implicitly invited to admire Spanish virtue in the person of the sergeant.

San Mao herself begins as a peripheral observer, distancing herself from the unattractive Spaniard and his vengeful enmity for the Sahrawi. Yet by the story's end, sympathy for him merges with her own identification with Spain to create a picture of Spanish withdrawal as a tragic sacrifice involving a sense of real loss. By writing the sergeant and his story into her history, San Mao writes herself into their history and the Sahara's too.

As already noted, 'Sergeant Shaba' is primarily a tale of San Mao's 'Spanish' life in the desert; Sahrawi act simply as informants of local knowledge or to provide a contrast to her own behavior. In the second story examined here, San Mao's 'Sahrawi' life is nearer the foreground and she involves herself more deeply in the story of the Sahara as a participant as well as an observer. By presenting herself in close connection with the people of the Sahara - and by representing their suffering as her own suffering - she seeks to make the Sahara her own and to 'belong', so that its history can become 'hers'. In 'The Crying Camels', the political upheavals of the Western Sahara are configured into a desert love story in which she herself is closely involved. The story places San Mao into various phases of the process leading to Spanish withdrawal from the Western Sahara (Polisario guerilla activity, the United Nations delegation, the World Court resolution, the Green March) and in interaction with a Sahrawi liberation fighter (Bassiri, a figure of historical record). Of all San Mao's autobiographical/historical stories, this is the most problematic; it has also been acclaimed by commentators as her most successful one.

The Crying Camels

• Deserving and undeserving 'natives'

In the delineation of the chief Sahrawi protagonists in this story, physical beauty is an important and constantly recurring theme. Aofeilua is a handsome, young and unusually likeable Sahrawi from an old desert family; Shayida too is beautiful and good. They also have in common a higher level of education than most Sahrawi under Spanish rule (both have had senior high school education in a colonized 'province' where even primary school education for the indigenous people is rare) and both work for Spanish institutions: Aofeilua as a policeman in El Ayoun and Shayida as a midwife at the local hospital. Familiar with Spanish ways as well as the Spanish language, they are for San Mao set apart from the 'ignorant' Sahrawi 'masses'; Shayida and Aofeilua not only interact with her

according to Spanish linguistic and social codes and demonstrate acceptance and affection but can voice political opinions as well.

It is with San Mao herself that the story begins, and this prefigures what is to come: throughout the story and throughout the suffering of her friends, the focus remains upon herself. The opening creates the atmosphere of a fictional narrative, with the landscape mirroring her mood as she recalls the deaths of her friends the previous day. A Fosbucraa representative arrives at her home to tell her that arrangements have been made for her and her friend to leave for Spain - but the 'friend' is now dead; he offers her his protection against the Sahrawi who surround her; and, though she declines, she locks her doors and windows as he leaves. In this atmosphere of tragedy, fear and insecurity begins the flashback tale that culminates in the deaths of her friends the previous day.

The leading female character, Shayida, is introduced by hearsay. A crowd of Sahrawi women are discussing the explosions they had all heard the previous night (supposedly the work of the Polisario Liberation Front). Two of the bombs had targeted centres of Spanish military and economic power in the desert³²; the third is believed to have been a personal attack on a rejected suitor of Shayida's. San Mao's response is a condemnation of Sahrawi guerilla tactics and a defense of Spain: 'Actually the Spanish government has made repeated assurances that they will grant self-determination, so what are they agitating about?' The Spanish government, it should be recalled, persistently stalled on its stated willingness to withdraw from the Western Sahara, until such time as Spain could make certain of retaining influence in its former territory and safeguarding its huge phosphate mining investments there. Here, however, at least some of the bombing is presented not as a political act but an act of personal revenge: Ajibi is in love with Shayida, who has rejected him for Aofeilua, thus giving rise to rivalries and vendettas between them.

The contrast between the venal 'everyday' Sahrawi and the 'good and deserving' Sahrawi is established early and recurs throughout the story. The ugly, dirty, petty, gossiping 'everyday' Sahrawi are placed in contrast with those extraordinary Sahrawi (like Shayida and Aofeilua) who are distinguished not only by superior physical beauty and unusual cleanliness but also by their greater appreciation of San Mao. Both 'types' of Sahrawi are represented by families: the dirty family next door and the beautiful, clean, tent-dwelling family (with which, as we will see, she presents herself as entering into a deeper kinship). In this opening scene San Mao stresses childishness and ugliness on the part of her neighbors (barefoot and filthy, nail-biting, 'stinking all over', hair in disarray and

³²The gate of the army camp and the Fosbucraa primary school.

stiff with mud, 'faces...very ugly, unspeakably jealous and hateful..like an ignorant ghost') contrasting them in her mind with the lovely Shayida ('refined and pure...beautiful as a spring flower...with a high level of civilized education' *Camels*, 101).

The drama continues when Aofeilua brings Shayida to visit San Mao and José. Finding them entertaining some Spanish friends, he is reluctant to stay. San Mao interprets his reluctance as purely personal, again demonstrating the same kind of political naivety that assumed that her neighbor Shalun should have no misgivings towards Spanish soldiers. When San Mao eventually persuades them both to come inside, Shayida's effect on the Spanish men is electric; they have never, claims San Mao, been so close to a Sahrawi woman before (let alone one willing to remove her veil, revealing a face of astonishing beauty that San Mao describes in orientaling detail³³).

Next morning, the dirty, gossiping family next door complain to San Mao about her entertaining Shayida in her home, condemning the latter as a 'whore' and a non-Muslim (she is a Catholic). Handi, the patriarch, objects to Shayida as a potential pollutant of his own family, and the conversation between him and San Mao highlights some issues of 'insider' and 'outsider' interaction in a colonial setting. When Handi accuses San Mao of leading his pure daughter astray by consorting with undesirable people, she replies by invoking the 'open' Spanish mind and the effect it should have had on Handi after his years of service with the Spanish police³⁴; in defence, Handi takes refuge in 'tradition', maintaining that he is acting according to Sahrawi culture. Distinguishing sharply between 'you' and 'us', Handi identifies San Mao with the Spanish as incapable of understanding Sahrawi ways while at the same time bringing into their midst practices that might contaminate their supposed cultural purity. On this occasion San Mao chooses to accept and identify with this 'difference' from Handi, expressed in

³³The excitement of proximity to a veiled woman intensifies when she removes her veil to reveal an 'exotic' beauty (cheeks the color of ivory; 'shining black eyes whose depths you could not see'; a smile like 'the newly risen moon', *Camels*, 103). Her unveiled beauty draws all present 'into an ancient dream', and thus she is marked as representing something old and timeless as well as exotic, backward as well as beautiful, reinforced by her 'mysterious' silence.

³⁴'Handi, you have been with the Spanish government for more than 20 years! You have to open your mind a bit some time. Times are changing'. 'Times might change but traditional Sahrawi customs don't change. You are you, we are us...A person betraying the religion of her own people - is there anything more shameful?' (*Camels*, 106). Discussing Korea under Japanese rule, Kenneth Wells has pointed to a defensiveness among a male population under colonial rule when confronted with questions of women's rights: 'the humiliation of the Japanese removal of the traditional male elite's prerogative to rule and consequent subjugation of Korean men rendered them extremely sensitive to any suggestion of loss of prerogatives in the home, let alone any call for Korean women to assert themselves against Korean men'. (Wells, in Shin et al. ed., forthcoming 1999). San Mao's portrayal of Handi, in which he appeals to a static 'tradition' that forms a polar opposite to the ways of the colonizer, suggests a similar tendency.

terms of 'modern' and enlightened values vis-à-vis the 'backward' and conservative Sahrawi.

Later she discusses the 'closed minds' of their Sahrawi neighbors with José. 'The guerillas themselves are telling them every day in their broadcasts to free their slaves and send their daughters to school', sighs José, 'but the only thing they hear is "independence" - they just ignore the rest.' Here the Polisario leaders are seen to be encouraging the very values of modern 'progress', 'civilization' and 'morality' that have been implicitly presented as inherent in the Spanish but lacking in the Sahrawi. The two examples cited by José (slavery and female education) are areas in which Spanish rule of the Sahara had initiated little progress; in presenting them here without reference to Spain's colonial aims, but simply as objective facts that are implicitly 'right', San Mao and José are positioned as partakers in that objectivity and rightness. The 'common' Sahrawi people, meanwhile, are shown as unwilling to listen to sense no matter who speaks it; despite attempts at moral guidance from both the 'open-minded' Spanish and the Polisario Liberation Front, they maintain a childish disregard for morality and remain unresponsive to any 'progressive' message (indeed ultimately destroying not only Spanish rule in the desert but the leaders of their own liberation movement, being supposedly unworthy of either). Their wish for 'self-determination' is presented as a simple-minded fixation on a rhetorical concept that they cannot understand, and is somehow equated with irresponsibility and backwardness - especially as Spain is supposedly willing to 'grant' them self-determination anyway. Defending Spain again, San Mao finds another party to blame: Morocco. If Morocco is the barrier to right action, then Spain may be exonerated from criticism of its continued procrastination and unwillingness to act upon its promises.

• **Independence vs foreign rule**

As political tensions increase in El Ayoun (bombs explode intermittently; Spanish residents are leaving and the town is 'as desolate as a ghost town', *Camels*, 107') the Sahrawi are, in San Mao's view, unaware of and unaffected by the conflict over their land and their future. Any sense of their understanding of the issues, support for Polisario or direct involvement in political activity is subsumed into fantasies of ignorant people in a 'primeval', and unchanging place. For San Mao, Sahrawi incomprehension of the issues of self-determination is a necessary part of the quality of the Sahara, part of a timeless cycle of nature separated from the world of politics and indifferent to any 'modern' concepts:

The people who actually lived here seemed unclear, unable to tell where their borders were. The sand was the same sand; the sky was the same sky; the whirlwinds were the same whirlwinds; and at the edge of this world cut

off from the world, in this place so primitive that heaven and earth was vast and empty, for many people actually living in this place the United Nations, the International Court in the Hague, national 'self determination', these strange words were all as insubstantial and unreal as smoke. (*Camels*, 107-108)

Unlike the Sahrawi 'mob', Shayida is credited with understanding, and the attitudes of 'outsiders' and 'insiders' to colonial rule in the Sahara become very clear when San Mao discusses the political situation with her, asking her what she will do if the Spanish withdraw. Shayida responds with a counter-question:

'What kind of withdrawal? if they give us independence? or if they let Morocco grab bits?'

'Either could happen'. I shrugged my shoulders, not caring one way or the other.

'If we're independent, I'll stay. If we're partitioned, I won't stay.'

'I think your heart is Spanish,' I said slowly. (*Camels*, 108)

For San Mao, as one of the ruling Spanish, there is no real difference between independence and rule by Morocco; the presence or non-presence of Spain is for her the only important issue, and she interprets Sahrawi unwillingness to remain in a Western Sahara that is even partially ruled by Morocco (rather than fully independent) not as a desire for an independent state but as a love for the Spanish colonizers. The Sahrawi woman's response places the focus back on the Sahara and on ties of kinship and 'home'; but when she asks San Mao in turn what she will do when Spain withdraws, San Mao's answer is bounded by no considerations other than a free preference to live wherever she chooses:

'I don't want to leave. I like it here'.

'What is there here that attracts you?' she asked me, surprised.

'What attracts me here? The vast sky and the vast earth, the burning sun, the violent wind, the lonely life - they make me happy, and sad; even these ignorant people, I love and hate them in the same way. I have mixed feelings - Ah, I can't even make it out myself.' (*Camels*, 109)

Something of the romantic outsider's fantasy can be seen here; San Mao is attracted by the extremities of the desert (the wildness, the climate) and by extension its inhabitants (configured as another part of the natural world: undeveloped, primitive and wild). Shayida, who has had a Spanish education, must therefore occupy a rather different space and San Mao consequently counts her along with Spain. The 'insider' Shayida, through her superior personal qualities and education, is perceived here as somehow not quite Sahrawi, while the 'outsider' San Mao can identify herself as loving the desert and belonging there by simply choosing to. For Shayida the desert is her home and her history; for San Mao it is a quasi-mythic world that she has chosen for herself. The difference in their attitudes toward the future of the Western Sahara is underlined when Shayida asks San Mao what she would do 'if this land was yours'. The question, of course, presupposes that it is not hers; yet for San Mao, as we have

seen, the issue of whether or not she truly belongs is insignificant: 'What's the difference if it is mine or not?' she replies³⁵. Shayida, for whom the question of self-determination is a vital part of belonging, asks, 'You've never thought about independence?' 'Sooner or later', replies San Mao, 'colonialism will be a thing of the past. The problem will be after independence - this bunch of ignorant violent people - how many years will it take before they can be established? I'm not optimistic at all'. To this classic colonial view³⁶ Shayida responds with quiet confidence, 'It will happen one day'³⁷. San Mao is shocked: 'Shayida, you can only say that to me - whatever you do, don't go saying it lightly to other people' (*Camels* 109) - thus marking herself as different, separate from the conflict between Spanish and Sahrawi and uniquely able to tolerate Sahrawi political ideas even though she does not agree with them³⁸.

• Multiple manifestations of colonial racism

When anti-Spanish graffiti suddenly appears all over El Ayoun, San Mao's 'difference' cannot protect her from the implications of a revolt against a system in which she belongs by association. Distressed by the graffiti, she and José seek out Spanish company in the Fosbucraa coffee shop. There is more than just graffiti to concern them: the imminent arrival of a United Nations delegation to canvass the will of the Sahrawi people for their political future; Fosbucraa's plans for its operations and its employees; Morocco's interests in the Western Sahara and their implications; and the supposed leader of Polisario, Bassiri. Enunciating

³⁵The implication that she can 'belong' simply by feeling that she loves the place is reminiscent of the modern 'western' notion that 'the world is ours' (Price, 1989).

³⁶Gu Jitang identifies 'something of the tone of an aristocrat' in this dismissal of the Sahrawi which reveals that although she 'was sympathetic with and supported the Sahrawi struggle, she still looked down on them' (Gu, 1991:72).

³⁷This has been interpreted as a demonstration of the capacity of uneducated people for patriotic feeling: 'That the thinking of a veiled woman could be as mature as this, her standpoint as steadfast as this and her ethnic feeling so clear was something that her good friend San Mao had no way of understanding...Shayida was not a guerilla, and she had no education or specialized training, yet her thoughts were on this high level. From her example we can see the level of the Sahrawi struggle for liberation' (Gu, 1991:73). Shayida's nursing and midwifery training are overlooked here in order to praise a 'simple', 'steadfast' nationalism among Sahrawi people in general.

³⁸Gu assumes a difference between San Mao and other non-Sahrawi residents of the Spanish Sahara. 'Even though José was Spanish, and San Mao was his wife, they not only did not take the attitude of rulers and bully the locals; they actually made a wide range of local friends and did good things for the local people in a multitude of ways...Throughout all of San Mao's work there is no praise of those who hold political authority; on the contrary, in all of her works the subjects and people she describes are almost all workers from the lower strata. Many people, when they go to backward areas, have an instinctive feeling of superiority and pride vis-à-vis the indigenous people, and unconsciously harbor a kind of disgust towards them, a feeling of dislike. Settling in the Sahara Desert, San Mao had not only been born in an ancient civilized country but had also experienced westernized [sic] Taiwan society. In addition, she went there as a wife of the conquering and ruling nation; usually such people feel refined and superior, occupy a commanding position and give orders. But San Mao was not at all like that. She always treated them equally, never discriminated, and actually used her personal mental and material power to run a school for them and teach them various kinds of knowledge'. (Gu, 1991:71-72; 111).

the classic lament of the colonizer, one Spaniard sighs, 'I heard that Bassiri had a Spanish education and graduated from law school. He was in Spain for many years - how can he come back and become a guerilla and start opposing us?'³⁹ Another claims that the Spanish are 'too tolerant' of Sahrawi unrest and should simply kill any Sahrawi who make trouble⁴⁰. At 'these inhuman words' San Mao's sympathies transfer from Spain to the Sahrawi; at the same time, her Chinese ethnicity becomes a significant issue in the terms of the discussion as the speaker suddenly notices her and shifts his argument to incorporate the example of British colonialism in Hong Kong and his prejudices about Chinese people under British rule:

It's not just Spain that has colonies. The Chinese in Hong Kong are only too eager to fawn on England, and all these years they've been doing exactly what they were told. The Sahrawi can't see this example - but we can...' (*Camels*, 113)

Thus Spanish racism extends here to Chinese people as well as Sahrawi. The Spaniard evidently despises Chinese people for their supposed compliance as much as Sahrawi for their wish for independence. With Spain and England placed together as colonial powers, and the Western Sahara and Hong Kong placed together as territories that ought to be subjugated, San Mao's Spanishness is effectively canceled out as she is placed with the 'fawning' Chinese and not alongside the ruling Spanish. In response, rather than defending the honor of 'the Chinese people', San Mao presents herself as a peacemaker counseling unity among Spaniards. José mutters angrily that his ugly compatriot should learn about Chinese struggles against colonialism ('He thinks that people who won't accept rule by a foreign power should just die like flies; how about you resisting the Japanese in Taiwan at that time? Does he know about that?'), but San Mao places herself back with the Spanish:

'José, I don't agree with colonialism either - but we are on the Spanish side; what is there to say? Getting into conflict with your own people will just mean that you get a reputation for being unpatriotic, and what's the good of that?' (*Camels*, 113)

³⁹*Camels*, 112. These twin notions of ingratitude and treachery echo a lament found in much colonial writing (and in fictional histories such as the film *Indochine*). As Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, when the harmony of reciprocity that European colonial rule imagines itself to bring to its colonies does not eventuate, the blame is inevitably laid upon the colonized. (Pratt, 1992:85). English language accounts record Bassiri as having studied not law in Spain but journalism in Egypt and Syria (Pazzanita and Hodges, 1994:292).

⁴⁰'Damn it, these guys don't even know how to eat or shit - and they think they want to be independent! We Spanish are too tolerant. If you ask me, we should beat them to death if they dare to abuse us! There are only 70,000 of them - it would be no trouble to blow them away with machine guns, the way Hitler did with the Jews...Slaughtering a Sahrawi is no different from killing a dog. Even dogs are better than them - dogs know they should wag their tails at the person who feeds them'. *Camels*, 112.

There seems to be an equation of colonialism with issues of racism and patriotism here, as if rejecting the ugly Spaniard's attitudes is equivalent to opposing colonialism⁴¹. Yet San Mao's relationship to colonialism is surely more complex than this, for she was complicit in the colonial order, and her Saharan life was only made possible by colonial structures with which, by counselling solidarity with other Spaniards, she reasserts her own status of belonging. For José, a 'real' Spaniard (without the option of identifying as non-Spanish) Spanish prestige among the Sahrawi is the important concern ('This guy brings disgrace on us all. How can you blame the Sahrawi for not liking us?'). Given a choice between arguing against racist colonial attitudes (thus dividing the Spanish community) and uniting with fellow-Spaniards into an ethnic bloc (thus being identified alongside people who hold the racist views of José's colleague), San Mao takes a middle ground: 'We don't pander to either side. On that side they call the guerillas dogs, and on this side we fly into a rage when we hear our own people talking' (*Camels* 114) Again the blame is removed onto a third party. Spain could settle peacefully with the Sahrawi; the difficulties are the fault of the Moroccans ('It could have been solved peacefully. If Morocco didn't want to partition them, it wouldn't have got so urgent, to the point of them wanting independence' (*Camels*, 114)). The problem in the Western Sahara still seems for San Mao and José more a matter of personal discord and misunderstanding between Spanish and Sahrawi than any systemic fault, and more of maintaining unity before a common enemy - Morocco - than of colonialism, resistance and decolonization.

With the arrival of the United Nations inspection team imminent, José suggests that San Mao leave the Sahara for a while, to return when the 'chaos' is over. Her refusal reasserts her right to be in the desert - indeed not only to be with the Spanish in a Spanish colony, but to continue to 'belong' once they have left⁴². El Ayoun becomes more and more tense amid signs of disquiet and military activity; martial law is imposed; the Spanish police search Sahrawi in the streets⁴³; and the conflict enters San Mao's own home when one of the

⁴¹Though San Mao might oppose colonialism she defends Spain. Biographers have claimed a strong anti-colonialism stance on her part, though the issues they discuss seem rather to be related to the personal difficulties brought about by the resentment against the Spanish in the desert. The ambiguities of her position have been noted: 'In El Ayoun, very few Spanish people lived in districts where the Sahrawi lived. White people were aristocrats in the desert. San Mao and José, living among the Sahrawi and mixing with them, had feeling for them...But in the eyes of the average indigenous person, they were still colonizers'. (Cui and Zhao 1995:156).

⁴²For every day that Spain is in occupation, I'll stay a day. And even when Spain leaves I might not leave'. *Camels*, 114. Biographers hail this stance as a manifestation of great courage in time of danger and claim that she was one of the very last Spanish wives to leave the Sahara (Cui and Zhao, 1995:156; Lu et al., 1993:208).

⁴³At this point San Mao introduces a Sahrawi child into the narrative, an appealing four-year-old in the care of the hospital nuns; later this child is revealed to be Shayida's.

neighbor children strikes her, shouting, 'First they'll kill José, then you. They'll kill José, kill José...The guerillas are coming; they'll kill José and they'll kill San Mao!' Despite her conviction that the child does not know the meaning of what he is saying, San Mao is frightened⁴⁴, and her fear combines with confusion, powerlessness and a sense of being wronged. Clearly her 'belonging' in the desert is under question here; though she herself may see the question of whether this land is really 'hers' as simply one of personal choice, such an assumption nevertheless carries political implications which she cannot escape.

• **Fantasies of acceptance and reciprocity**

When Aofeilua asks San Mao and José if they will take him into the desert in their car for a family gathering (in the tense political situation he cannot as a Sahrawi get a permit to leave town in his own car), she adopts the terms of the child's chant in her refusal: 'you' Sahrawi wish to kill 'us' Spaniards. Aofeilua's assurances that he can guarantee their safety are fruitless until San Mao recalls the relationship of reciprocity that exists between her and Aofeilua's family; José appeals to the reciprocity of friendship in agreeing to help Aofeilua as long as he really can guarantee their safety outside Spanish-garrisoned El Ayoun (and thus not 'betray our friendship'). Such a guarantee is possible in the present political situation not through Aofeilua's capacities as a policeman (and hence guardian of colonial law and order) but because he is Sahrawi; and his motivation is presented as a personal matter of reciprocity rather than a duty to the colonizing force that employs him.⁴⁵ This discourse of relationships of family and friends reinforces the 'belonging' of San Mao and José within meaningful reciprocal relationships with Sahrawi.

Their 'belonging' is underlined by the affectionate welcome San Mao and José receive from Aofeilua's family (mother, sisters and brother) all of whom are beautiful, clean and (it is implied) good. For them, San Mao reserves her ultimate compliment: unlike all other Sahrawi, they do not seem to smell. San Mao claims the desert as 'home' by equating her arrival with 'a homecoming, like being with relatives' (*Camels*, 124).

Aofeilua's father is presented as a venerable family patriarch, sadly aware of the coming conflict in the desert and eager to accept San Mao and José wholeheartedly into the life of the family⁴⁶. Aofeilua's mother is a wise earth-mother figure, raising her hands over the desert 'in a graceful gesture' with the

⁴⁴His mother, horrified, distances herself from his words and apologizes: 'We don't discriminate...We aren't like that. Please forgive us; sorry, sorry'. *Camels*, 118.

⁴⁵As in the case of Shalun in the previous story, San Mao does not entertain any suspicion that Aofeilua might have connections with the 'guerillas' to back up his guarantee of safety.

⁴⁶His gift of a silver anklet to match those worn by his daughters appears to become for San Mao a gesture of acceptance into the family. *Camels*, 124-125.

words, 'The Sahara is so beautiful'; extending her gesture of blessing over the land to anyone who 'loves' the Sahara and thus including San Mao among those who 'belong' there:

At the magical lifting of her hands, the world around us seemed suddenly filled with poetic sighing. It penetrated my whole being. There is only one Sahara in this world; and only to those who love it does it reveal its beauty and tenderness, and silently repay your love with its eternally unchanging sky and land and calmly keep the promises it made to you, wishing only that your children and grandchildren will stay and be born in its embrace'.
(*Camels*, 126)

Thus San Mao's will to 'belong' extends from the family to a union with the desert itself.

When Aofeilua's elder brothers arrive, San Mao is horrified to discover that they are all Polisario members. The whole family are quick to reassure her that familial affection is the sole concern of the day's gathering; she remains unconvinced until one brother 'sincerely' puts forward another explanation:

Actually it isn't easy for Lua to leave town. but he doesn't have to trick you to be able to come. The truth is, we brothers wanted to meet you; Lua often talks about you, and we don't often get the chance to meet, so we wanted him to invite you. Please don't be offended. Within this tent, please let us be friends.' (*Camels*, 130)

Far from being a generalized Spanish enemy for these Polisario members, San Mao and José are shown as something truly special: not ordinary Spanish citizens and colonizers, but individuals whom the 'guerillas' single out as good and wish to get to know.

A day of 'happiness and affection' that embraces San Mao and José as honorary family members is spent on communal chores. Gradually San Mao becomes aware that there is something remarkable about Aofeilua's second elder brother; again and again she notes that he stands apart from all the rest (he is bold, noble, courteous, kind, quick, mature, handsome, glorious and prince-like). When the talk turns to desert politics it is this exceptional second brother who argues the case for Polisario, claiming complete support in El Ayoun. San Mao is unconvinced:

'You are all idealists, you are full of romantic feelings about establishing your own country. If you did happen to get independence, I'm afraid you'd be at a loss to deal with the ignorant and illiterate majority in town...'
'Developing our resources and educating the citizens is the first step.'
'Who is going to go and develop them? even if these 70,000 people all go to block the border, they couldn't occupy the whole of it, and with Algeria as a protector you'd be worse off than you are now.'
'San Mao, you are too pessimistic.'
'You are too romantic. You can be guerillas, but it isn't the time for establishing a nation'.
'We'll do as much as we can; whether we succeed or fail is not something we can plan.' (*Camels*, 131-132)

These essentially pro-colonialism arguments have been heard from San Mao before; delivered to a Polisario member along with criticism of the anti-colonial movement, they are perhaps invested with a new authority. Although the 'guerilla' does not accept them to be true, he is not presented as offering arguments that can convince her that she is wrong.

At sunset San Mao and José prepare to leave; they promise to return, but Aofeilua's parents believe this will never be possible:

'There won't be a next time, I know. This is the last time. You and José will have to leave the desert forever'.

'If by some chance you get independence, we will come back'.

'We won't get independence. The Moroccans are about to come in. My children are dreaming..dreaming...' (*Camels*, 132)

Thus both 'earth mother' and patriarch echo San Mao's own belief that independence is impossible (though for them it is a foreign power that stands in the way and not inherent limitations on the part of the Sahrawi people). San Mao and José embrace the family in farewell; as he takes her hand, the second brother says quietly:

'San Mao, thank you for looking after Shayida'.

'Shayida?' I was astonished - how did he know Shayida?

'She's my wife. I have great trust in you'. Suddenly his eyes filled with tenderness and deep pain. We looked at each other, sharing the secret...then he turned round and strode off. (*Camels*, 133)

An even greater shock is yet to come, however. The prince-like second brother is the Saharan liberation leader, Bassiri.

• **Bassiri, soul of the Sahrawi**

'Bassiri! Your brother is Bassiri?' I cried out, my blood raging through me. The incomparably fierce leader of the guerillas, the soul of the Sahrawi people - that was who had just spoken Shayida's name and shaken my hand. (*Camels*, 134)

Thus San Mao and José are made party to information that most Sahrawi do not know. Bassiri is Aofeilua's brother, and has been married to Shayida for seven years⁴⁷. San Mao's friendship with Shayida takes on a new significance and her involvement in the story of the Sahara deepens through this connection with a Sahrawi political figure: she is a close friend of his wife, personally invited to meet him and specially thanked by him for her kindness, and able to criticize him for his 'romantic' politics and lecture him on the future of the Sahara.

⁴⁷Their marriage, says Aofeilua, is secret for political reasons, lest the Moroccans should capture her to try to find out about Bassiri's movements; San Mao's biographers blame the Sahrawi, claiming that it is on account of 'the foolishness of others of their tribe' that 'their love could not be openly known', Cui and Zhao, 1995: 192) Aofeilua claims that not even his parents know about the marriage because the family patriarch would never accept a Catholic daughter-in-law; given that the historical figure Bassiri was a Koranic scholar and teacher, a marriage to a Catholic would seem rather unlikely.

The 'Bassiri' of the Western Sahara was Mohammed Sidi Ibrahim Bassiri, a journalist, Koranic teacher and leader of the MLS, 'the first modern anticolonial movement in Western Sahara' (and the precursor of Polisario). Public knowledge of Bassiri ceases, however, soon after a violent confrontation between the MLS and the Spanish authorities on June 17, 1970 in which Spanish soldiers opened fire on demonstrators. Bassiri was arrested on 18 June, and the Spanish authorities claimed to have deported him to Morocco. The Moroccan government, however, claimed to have no knowledge of his return to Morocco, and his fate remains unknown⁴⁸. San Mao's claims to have met Bassiri more than two years after public record of him ceases (in 1973 at the earliest) and - as described below - to know the circumstances of his death thus constitute a rather different history of Bassiri from that of standard English-language accounts of the history of the Western Sahara.

• **Morocco and the United Nations**

After San Mao's supposed meeting with Bassiri, political events unfold quickly. Spain's official position for the past two years had been to reaffirm Saharan self-determination but to delay as long as possible (in the hopes of preserving their own investments there). A referendum in the desert had been promised; meanwhile, however, at the behest of Morocco and Mauritania, the International Court of Justice was preparing a verdict on whether or not the Western Sahara had been *terra nullius* before Spanish colonization. In early 1975, while submissions for the court were in preparation, guerilla activities in the desert intensified and control over public order became more and more difficult for Spain to maintain. In May 1975 the Spanish government made the announcement that it would 'transfer the sovereignty in the Territory of Sahara in the shortest time possible', though it continued to delay withdrawal plans in the hope that the United Nations would decide in Spain's favor. In the same month, a United Nations 'inspection team' arrived in the Western Sahara to observe the situation⁴⁹, and San Mao describes the scene:

Crowds of Sahrawi lined the road from the airport into town...faced by Spanish policemen. There was no noise; they just waited quietly for the convoy of cars.

When the governor-general drove into town with the delegation...the Sahrawi all cried out with a noise like thunder, 'Self determination! Self determination! Please, please! Self-determination! Self-determination!'

⁴⁸Pazzanita and Hodges 1994:293.

⁴⁹Comprising representatives from Iran, Ivory Coast and Cuba, the UN delegation visited Saharan towns to discern the will of the Sahrawi people. Its report (published October 14th, 1975) stated that the Sahara's indigenous population supported independence and opposed the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania; it also called for a UN plebiscite in the Sahara on the question of independence. Damis, 1983:59.

Thousands of tattered guerilla flags of all different sizes were raised...The slow procession of cars was followed by yelling and crying as if to rend heaven and earth; the Sahara howled in its final struggle. (*Camels*, 136)

Again San Mao dismisses the Sahrawi and their wish for self-determination. Their cries are 'lunatic ravings'; they are 'moths' throwing themselves into a flame. She herself, of course, is assumed to understand - as is the Spanish government, whose delaying tactics are presented here as kindly, wise, dignified and even-handed (they 'put up with them doing all they could to grab the UN, and didn't prevent or oppose them'). Rhetorically asking who could replace the Spanish if they were to withdraw, San Mao concludes that 'it couldn't be Bassiri; he would never be the leader of this weak people' (*Camels*, 136).

After the UN team's brief visit, San Mao claims that a 'strange intimacy' springs up between Spanish and Sahrawi. Now united against a common foe, they are 'more amicable than before'⁵⁰; 'Spain stood firm on its promise to the Sahara; it seemed that self determination would become a reality, and both sides...cooperated...under the threat of war from densely populated Morocco' (*Camels*, 136-137). Again, Morocco is the villain.

The International Court of Justice announced its long-awaited decision on 16 October 1975: that the Sahrawi population had the right to self-determination⁵¹. There is celebration in El Ayoun's streets; José too is pleased (despite his sadness at Spain's decline⁵²) as a peaceful outcome means that his own position in the Sahara can continue. San Mao is doubtful: 'It won't be that simple', she foretells, and is soon proved correct. That same night, King Hassan of Morocco summoned volunteers to march with him peacefully into the Western Sahara to claim it as part of Morocco⁵³.

The 350,000-strong 'Green March' begins forthwith, and each night those in El Ayoun with television watch the Spanish news to see the Moroccan marchers advancing towards the border between Morocco and the Spanish

⁵⁰San Mao likens the relationship between Spaniard and Sahrawi to that of 'guest and host' (*binzhu*), concealing the inequality of their respective positions to make the Spaniards welcome guests and the Sahrawi welcoming hosts. Ironically, *zhu* also means 'master'; it is not, of course, the Sahrawi who are the masters of the Sahrawi here; neither are the Spanish 'guests' as their presence is not by invitation of the 'hosts'. I thank Lewis Mayo for drawing my attention to this ambiguity.

⁵¹The Court ruled that the Western Sahara had not been *terra nullius* at the time of colonization by Spain, and that the 'legal ties of allegiance' between the Moroccan sultan and some Western Sahara tribes did not constitute territorial sovereignty. Damis, 1983:59-60.

⁵²'Colonialism is on the wane. It's not that the Spanish government is being generous; Spain is on the wane too' (*Camels*, 135).

⁵³The march, from the Moroccan-Saharan border to the outskirts of El Ayoun and back (100 miles) was to last twelve days. Volunteers came from all provinces of Morocco, and all of Morocco's political parties supported the march. Fearing violent confrontation between the marchers and the troops of both Spain and the Polisario Front, the UN Security Council adopted resolutions against the march, but to no avail. Damis, 1983:60-65

Sahara (only 4,000 kilometers away)⁵⁴. The marchers have announced that they will take El Ayoun on October 23; on October 21, messages are broadcast in the town calling for all Spanish women and children to be evacuated. José works day and night at the docks to expedite the withdrawal of soldiers and munitions; San Mao's (Spanish) friends rush to the airport, urging her to leave too while there is still time. The Spanish police disappear from the town, and the streets are empty save for the crowds outside the airline office. (*Camels*, 139).

• **San Mao at the center**

The night before the Green March is expected to arrive in El Ayoun, Bassiri reappears in San Mao's narrative, arriving with Shayida on her doorstep to seek her help. 'You're courting death coming here' she exclaims in horror; 'Handi has gone over to the Moroccan side' (*Camels*, 149). The contrast between the two desert families thus reaches its ultimate point: the dirty, gossiping family next door are traitors, while the beautiful noble family are heroic and brave. As people switch their allegiance to Morocco in preparation for the Moroccans' arrival⁵⁵ and few Polisario supporters remain in the town, Bassiri is indeed in great personal danger. Fearing for Shayida's safety if the Moroccans were to reach El Ayoun, he has left his fellow Polisario troops at the border where they have assembled along with the Spanish forces to stop the Green March and has travelled alone for many days and nights to reach her. Here San Mao writes herself into a vital role in Bassiri's story as provider of food, shelter and advice for him and for Shayida. Although Bassiri declines her offers of shelter, he demonstrates a high level of trust in her by asking her to take Shayida with her when she leaves.⁵⁶ Her role in the situation thus becomes pivotal - not only through her willingness to be involved, but also through the willingness of Sahrawi (indeed, the very leader of the 'guerillas') to solicit her help. The placement of her domestic space in intersection with global events and the presentation of herself as a stable centre in a time of unrest continues a pattern found in the work of certain European women travel writers. Flora Tristan and

⁵⁴The March (including delegations from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar) crossed the border into the Western Sahara on 6 November 1975. To avoid confrontation, Spanish troops had withdrawn from the border and established a 'dissuasion line' about 12 kilometres away. Though the march crossed into the territory it stopped short of this line, thus sparing the Spanish army 'the dilemma of choosing further retreat or firing on unarmed civilians'. On November 9, informed of a 'turning point' in the negotiations (clearing the way for agreement between Morocco, Mauritania and Spain), King Hassan instructed his marchers to return to Morocco. Thus both King Hassan and the Spanish army were able to save face. Damis, 1983:60-65.

⁵⁵*Camels*, 141-142. On October 22 (the day before the Green March is intended to reach El Ayoun) Handi puts up a Moroccan flag on his house to avoid trouble for his family. *Camels* p. 139

⁵⁶Again San Mao refers to the child of Bassiri and Shayida (supposedly leaving for Spain the following day with the Spanish nuns), thus again claiming to record a 'history' about Bassiri.

Maria Graham, for example (in Chile and Peru at times of political and military upheaval), 'make their houses and themselves privileged sites of political understanding and action', and write themselves into national histories just as San Mao does with published accounts of sheltering and advising revolutionary heroes (Pratt, 1992:164-166).

San Mao's goodness is displayed in her offer of assistance; Bassiri's reluctance to accept it demonstrates his regard for her, and his request for further help confirms his confidence in her. Having affirmed San Mao's importance to the personal narrative of a key player in the political drama, he disappears. The following day San Mao learns of his death when she discovers that a road has been closed for a burial: Bassiri's.

As already noted, San Mao's placement of herself into connection with Bassiri is subject to question - yet, according to the available English-language sources, the fate of Bassiri 'remains a mystery' (Pazzanita and Hodges 1994:293). Though 'both Moroccan and Sahrawi observers have suspected that he was murdered by his Spanish jailers'; and Bassiri's disappearance had already been raised as an issue with the UN Visiting Mission to the Sahara in May 1975 (Pazzanita and Hodges 1994:293), his disappearance in 1970 is absolute only in retrospect. Just as in the case of Doris Gentile's claim to have witnessed the death of Mussolini, the lack of corroborative records 'renders her story implausible but not impossible'.⁵⁷ There are clear messages here, however, about San Mao and her role: all would have been well - the hero of the Sahrawi would not have died - if he had only done as she suggested. Her supposed involvement with Bassiri is crucial to San Mao's significance in this narrative; biographers have further reinforced her claims of importance to this revolutionary leader by extending from her own account of their two meetings to present them as very close friends⁵⁸.

Though Bassiri is gone, the story of Shayida is not yet over. The Sahrawi 'mob' plan to execute Shayida that evening at the camel-slaughtering ground for supposedly betraying Bassiri to the Moroccans⁵⁹. San Mao, of course, is the only person to know the truth about Shayida and Bassiri, and believes herself to be the

⁵⁷Like San Mao, Doris Gentile (an Australian living in Italy from 1943-1945) claimed a connection with a historical figure and a significant role in the drama towards the end of his life, claiming in the unpublished 'fragments of two autobiographical novels' to have witnessed Mussolini's execution. Pesman, 1996:105-107.

⁵⁸See Cui and Zhao, 1995:156 and Gu, 1991:72. Her supposed friendship with a political figure has been used by biographers to establish importance for San Mao; conversely, the importance of these two figures to her has established a special position for them as romantic, heroic characters in comparison with the other Sahrawi who feature in her stories. Her interactions with them have been praised as the flowering of her goodness: 'San Mao's humane spirit and feeling finds full expression in her attitude in dealing with Bassiri and his family' (Gu, 1991:122)

⁵⁹The chief executioner is to be Ajibi, Shayida's spurned suitor.

only one who can save her. Resolving to prove Shayida's innocence, she joins the procession to the slaughtering ground where crowds wait silently for the action to begin.

Throughout the scene, the narrative focus shifts constantly between San Mao herself, the crowd and Shayida, as if all were equal participants in the scene. There is no trial procedure and no chance for Shayida or anyone else to speak in her defence - just as San Mao had imagined might be the case among people she has characterized throughout as ignorant and violent. The intensity of detail in her description increases through the scene; not the painstaking, inexorable piling up of dreadful detail upon dreadful detail that Evelyn Cobley has described as a technique of representing the horror of war (Cobley 1993) but an emotionalized detail centered upon the self as spectator that situates Shayida as a terrible spectacle. Amid the alternating voyeuristic description and focus on her own sensitivity (demonstrated by her distress at the sight) are assurances of San Mao's own impotence:

I wanted to cry out but I couldn't; I wanted to cry, but I couldn't; I wanted to look, but I couldn't bear to; I wanted not to look, but my eyes were fixed on Shayida, and I couldn't look away.

'No, don't...ah...don't', I heard my own voice screaming, hoarsely, not really a voice. (*Camels*, 152)

It is left to Bassiri's 'real' family to bring about the dénouement. Aofeilua leaps forward, pulls away Shayida's assailants, drags her back from the slaughtering slab and draws a pistol. As the crowd scatters, the focus shifts back to San Mao pushing vainly against them. Aofeilua is surrounded; a shot is heard; Shayida cries, 'Kill me, kill me, Lua, kill me'. The end is violent and conclusive:

Terrified, I cried out...I heard several shots; people shouted out in shock, pushing and fleeing. I fell back, trampled by people. It was suddenly empty and quiet all around...Two corpses lay on the ground: Lua...and Shayida. It looked as though Lua's dying gesture had been to crawl across to Shayida and protect her with his own body.

I crouched down on the sand at a distance shaking, shaking, without ceasing. It was so dark all around that I couldn't see them clearly. The sound of the wind suddenly died down, and gradually I was unable to see anything at all. All I could hear was the grief-stricken cries of the camels in the slaughterhouse, louder and louder, higher and higher, slowly the whole sky filled with the enormous echo of camels crying, which engulfed me like thunder. (*Camels*, 152-3)

In this dramatized and sentimentalized view of the death of a close friend,⁶⁰ in which the powerlessness of the observing self receives an emphasis equal to that of the pain of the observed sufferer, the suggestion that Shayida actually wished to die is perhaps intended as a mitigating factor for San Mao's failure to save her.

⁶⁰There is perhaps a resonance here with Sara Suleri's observation of 'the collaboration between violence and sentimentality' in colonial myth-making (Suleri, 1992:103).

San Mao can thus maintain her own innocence to the last; if Shayida did not wish to be saved, then it did not matter that no one saved her. This story of the failure and venality of the Sahrawi and their slaying of their own 'best' people and of San Mao's part in the political drama of the Western Sahara has been hailed as 'the best of San Mao's Saharan stories', demonstrating her to be 'not far from being a *great* writer' (Cui and Zhao 1995:194, 191).

The story of Sergeant Shaba ended with San Mao identifying with Spain, feeling sympathy for the sergeant and for the Spanish loss of 'their' territory; 'The Crying Camel' ends with San Mao on the side of Shayida and Bassiri, identified with the good and noble Sahrawi, pitted against the Sahrawi 'mob', bearing the vital secret of Shayida's innocence. Yet like the former, this latter too implicitly affirms the rightness of Spain's conduct towards the Sahara and ultimately reinforces Spain's position of colonial superiority. In depicting Sahrawi mobs killing the very people who are supposedly best qualified to rule, San Mao deploys the 'ignorant' Sahrawi to prove their own unfitness to govern themselves. As Spanish authority weakens, injustice and violence result among people for whom, San Mao maintains, self-determination could never be possible; Spain - on the point of withdrawing from the Western Sahara - is shown to good advantage by implicit contrast.

Thus San Mao's Saharan dream ends in a scene of brutal violence. Having achieved her romantic wish to belong, she stands by as powerlessly as the beautiful and noble desert family is destroyed; she herself has no more legitimate presence in the Sahara. Spain is about to give up and withdraw⁶¹, but San Mao leaves first; 'Sergeant Shaba' and 'The Crying Camels' were written soon after her departure, as events continued towards the withdrawal of Spain and the arrival of Morocco and Mauritania in their place⁶².

Suffering and belonging

⁶¹Spain withdrew from the Western Sahara in February 1976, and Morocco and Mauritania moved in to try to absorb it into their own national territories. In August 1979 Mauritania 'bowed out of the conflict'; Morocco is 'still confronting the Polisario Front' (Damis, 1983:45)

⁶²A tripartite interim administration in the Western Sahara was established between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania from 14 November 1975 to 26 February 1976. Polisario, though increasing in strength and resisting both Moroccan and Mauritanian forces, was ultimately unable to prevent the takeover of the territory; though it announced the creation of an independent Saharan state, Morocco and Mauritania partitioned the territory between them. Damis, 1983:65-78. As for San Mao herself, once uncoupled from the history of the Sahara her fame declined from its earlier heights. After leaving the Western Sahara, commentators claim, 'her artistic life was far from its pinnacle'; 'San Mao fever cooled and her glory receded' (Lu et al., *San Mao*, 297). Without the history of the Sahara, the 'ascent' that took her to the heights of 'Stories of the Sahara' supposedly reversed into a decline (Cui and Zhao, 1995:194); though her fame continued, she was unable to recapture the heroic glory of her Stories of the Sahara.

Incorporating the Spanish decolonization of the Sahara into her own self-presentation, San Mao gives a very personalized account of these events, her shifting identification maintaining her innocence throughout. The wish to 'belong' (and the sense of a right to 'belong') in the desert forms a constant thread throughout these narratives; strategies of 'belonging' range from a claim to love and appreciate the desert and its people, through a portrayal of herself in a familial relationship with a Sahrawi family to the creation of a relationship between herself and an important political leader in which his respect for her is unchallenged and, lastly, to a picture of herself suffering along with Sahrawi heroes. As she makes the story of the desert her own story, it could be said that she claims entitlement through suffering: if the suffering of desert people is her own suffering, then in sharing their pain she too 'belongs' - this, perhaps is the 'promise' that the desert makes and keeps to those who truly 'love' it. Her consistent focus upon how 'moved' she is by scenes, people and events in the desert places her in a position of generalized sympathy with the Sahara that elides any necessity for political commitment or even belief in the possibility of independence for its people. Indeed San Mao presents herself as suffering along with Spain as well as with the Sahara, claiming a compassion that can grieve losses wherever they occur; and by presenting her participation in these Saharan and Spanish histories as a matter of feeling she stakes a claim on a position outside politics as well.

Stories and histories

As noted above, San Mao's biographers and commentators on her work have tended to accept her stories as true. Indeed biographical material relating to San Mao is to a great extent based upon her own narratives, repeating the plots of her tales as the 'facts' of her life. At the same time, 'Sergeant Shaba' and 'The Crying Camels' have been praised for their literary merits using criteria more suited to a discussion of fictional techniques than to a factual record.⁶³ Biographers Cui and Zhao, as noted above, regard 'The Crying Camels' as San Mao's best work, linking it explicitly with 'facts' (such as the date on which San Mao left the

⁶³Literary devices used extensively in these stories include: the invocation of the weather to set or mirror the plot action; continual references to the narrator's physical state to indicate the depth of her emotions; the introduction of grim details for literary effect; and the merging of personal notes with discussions of political issues. This emotional presentation differs markedly from the practices of historical writing, in which historical reliability is equated with an elimination of emotional effects; the result of San Mao's incorporation of a narrative of feeling is a history that is more of San Mao herself than of the Sahara. I thank Tomoko Akami for pointing out that it is largely the 'feminization' effect of this emphasis on emotion and personal detail that would tend to debar these narratives from categories of 'history'.

Sahara) but describing it in the emotive terms of a discussion of fiction⁶⁴; thus it is the quasi-fictionality of this story that establishes its historical importance.

In 1995, twenty years after San Mao left the Sahara, Zhang Yun⁶⁵, a journalist from China, visited the Western Sahara in search of traces of her life there. His published account of his trip underlines her significance as a writer and celebrity by remarking on a high level of interest in her among important officials (who are presented as seeing her as a significant link between China and the Arab world⁶⁶), his driver and guide (who are 'moved' by the stories he tells them of San Mao's desert life and conclude that she must have loved the Sahrawi people), and a Chinese officer of the United Nations peace-keeping force⁶⁷. Zhao seems eager to corroborate both the truthfulness and seriousness of her stories as he enlists Sahrawi to express interest in and admiration for San Mao and seeks out places and people mentioned in her narratives to 'prove' that they are 'real'⁶⁸.

In his interactions with Sahrawi, Zhao creates not only an impression of San Mao's personal qualities but also a sense of innocence: on San Mao's own part and on the part of China (just as San Mao herself created an innocence for Spain). He presents his guide, Mustapha, as asking: 'I have the impression that very few Chinese people came exploring in Africa; how come that Chinese woman writer was brave enough to come here and have those adventures in the desert?' In reply, Zhang tells him of Chinese explorers as unknown to the Sahrawi as the Sahrawi were for China before San Mao's literary interventions:

Chinese people came to Africa very early. In the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He came to the east African coast, to Malindi and Mogadishu, half a

⁶⁴Biographers praise the creation of narrative tension, the flashback beginning, the quickening narrative rhythm, the creation of characters, the setting up of contrasts, and the 'rounding' of Shayida's character (Cui and Zhao 1995:192-4). The taking of moral sides is also noted; the stories are 'full of mourning and respect for the heroes' and 'enmity and rage' for the 'bandits, assassins and invaders' (Gu, 1991: 74).

⁶⁵Zhao Zhangyun (pen-name Zhang Yun) graduated from the prestigious Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute and represented China abroad in various diplomatic and journalistic capacities before becoming chief editor of the *People's Daily's* 'International section'.

⁶⁶The Chief Administrator of El Ayoun district and the Governor of Smara province are shown expressing great interest in San Mao, claiming that Chinese and Sahrawi people had long enjoyed friendly relations, admiring San Mao for being able to endure desert life and urging Zhang to arrange for her books to be translated into Arabic for them to read. Zhang agrees to explore the possibilities of translation with the respective embassies. (Zhang, 1996:30-33, 110-114). Thus the Moroccan 'villains' of San Mao's stories, who brought about the end of her stay in the desert, become supporters and promoters of her stories.

⁶⁷Zhang presents China as a diplomatic player in the history of the Sahara through its participation in the UN Peacekeeping Force in El Ayoun (Zhang, 1996:27); in deed China had supported Morocco's annexation of the territory in 1975 and was thus indirectly responsible for San Mao's departure.

⁶⁸Claiming to have found the house where San Mao had lived, Zhang pictures scenes from 'Sergeant Shaba' and 'The Crying Camel': 'Outside this door, the Spanish sergeant San Mao admired let himself be blown to bits by a bomb to save Sahrawi children; San Mao's good friend the policeman Aofeilua and his beautiful sister-in-law Shayida were beaten to death.' Zhang, 1996:148.

century before the European seafarers. The navigator Zhu Dayuan of the Yuan Dynasty may even have come to Tangier in the north of Morocco⁶⁹, just a few decades after Marco Polo came to China. Even in the present day, many Chinese people are seeking their livelihood abroad. But it's true that not many have come to Arab countries. San Mao coming to the Western Sahara was a special exception (Zhang, 1996:108).

Zhang ascribes to Mustapha the following comment:

If I'm right, Chinese people only came to Africa to explore, and when they'd done that they went home again. Europeans came to Africa to get rich, and so they stayed and didn't want to leave (Zhang, 1996:108).

This viewpoint is quite consistent with San Mao's own narrative position of innocent adventurer in the desert. Zhang gives further reinforcement to her innocence and her importance in national-level narratives when he asks his driver and guide for their impressions of this Chinese woman of whom they had never heard until he arrived on his quest. 'She was so good to us Sahrawi', replies Mohammed, 'and I want to thank her on behalf of us Sahrawi; I only regret that she has sadly passed away, or we should get her to come back to see our Western Sahara again.' (Zhang, 1996:167) Hassan agrees: 'Yes, it's a real shame. But now we should translate her books into Arabic, so that people here can learn all about her' (a wish already expressed, Zhang tells us, by the Chief Administrator of the El Ayoun region). 'Don't forget us Sahrawi, and remember us to our Chinese brothers', adds Mohammed (Zhang, 1996:167).

San Mao is thus appropriated by the People's Republic of China as an important player in a narrative of anti-imperialist solidarity and integrated into a story of international co-operation, linking 'our two nations' in brotherhood, involving embassies (as Zhang promises to discuss translation possibilities with embassy personnel) and officials, and representing Chinese interest, friendship and help. The 'two nations' invoked are, of course, the People's Republic of China (which claims sovereignty over San Mao's Taiwan) and Morocco (which claims sovereignty over the Western Sahara).

In his analysis of San Mao's work, the literary critic Gu Jitang is concerned with establishing the 'non-innocence' of Spain⁷⁰ and of Morocco. The 'old and new colonizers' are equally culpable⁷¹, and the heroes are the Sahrawi

⁶⁹'Moluoge' (Morocco) is misprinted here as 'Mogege'.

⁷⁰Unlike San Mao's own narratives (in which Morocco is the villain) Zhang's story presents Spain as the bully; thus another layer of historical explanation is placed on top of San Mao's history.

⁷¹Even though the Sahara Desert was a wasteland where nothing grew, it was sorely coveted by rapacious colonizing powers old and new. Even though it couldn't meet the demands of their greed for wealth, it could satisfy their territorial ambitions. Even though it was sparsely populated, to abuse power in the desert could satisfy their craving. The local indigenous people carried out their resistance against the greed of imperialism and colonialism to various extents and in all kinds of ways. Whatever difficulties they encountered, for every day that invasion and oppression existed their resistance would continue a day. Imperialism was not going to withdraw

people in their fight against dual colonialism - with the help of San Mao, whose Chinese ethnicity he presents as a vital factor in her ability to sympathize with the Sahrawi struggle for independence. Her interest in the Sahrawi people is supposedly a manifestation of solidarity among 'Third World' people who have experienced the sufferings of colonialism:

San Mao's love, sympathy and support for the Sahrawi people did not stem from any need of her own to get something from them, and definitely did not start from collecting material to write about;...it came simply from a pure and innocent feeling, from a natural affinity that came from her view of life, from her sympathy for ordinary workers and people of the lower classes, and from her support for oppressed people and oppressed nationalities...San Mao's attitude to and feeling for the Sahrawi was completely different from the discriminatory, arrogant and bullying attitude of westerners, who call Africans 'black devils'⁷². It came from the sympathetic connection between the Chinese and African peoples of the Third World, who had long suffered the bitterness of colonialism and imperialist enslavement.⁷³

It should be noted here that Gu's writing (and indeed that of Zhang and biographers Cui and Zhao) follows the Marxist narrative of a united 'third world' opposition to colonialism promoted by the People's Republic of China; thus San Mao is recruited not only as a representative of 'Greater China' but also an exemplar of mainland-espoused ideologies that are at odds with those of Taiwan's political leadership of the time⁷⁴. Further, claims Gu, San Mao's descriptions of Sahrawi sufferings can (and should) stir up Chinese nationalistic feelings:

In 'Crying Camels', San Mao's descriptions of the enterprise of people's liberation undertaken by the leader of the local Sahrawi people's movement, the guerilla leader Bassiri, and of his cruel slaying, can all awaken our memories of the past sufferings of the Chinese people, and can make a person who has had the experience seem to see the cruel scenes of the Japanese militarists invading China. They have a great enlightening significance for the reader. (Gu, 1991:118-119)

from these territories by itself, and the people there were not going to end their own struggle...A considerable part of the Sahara Desert in which San Mao and José lived was occupied at the time when the old colonist, Spain, was at the zenith of its piratical power. Even though at that time Spain was unable to fend for itself, it did not take care of the domestic economic depression...it sent a 'desert force' to the Sahara to rule the Sahrawi. However, the nations neighboring the Sahara, such as Morocco, seeing Spain being defeated, rose up to bully it, and snatched the lamb from the tiger's mouth'. (Gu, 1991:71).

⁷²Gu's claim for Chinese innocence in comparison with the 'west' is somewhat misleading here. 'Black devils' (*heigui*) was a term in common currency in China in the late 1980s; see Dikötter 1992 for a discussion of racial attitudes in earlier Chinese writing.

⁷³Gu, 1993:113. 'In "The Crying Camels", the depiction of Bassiri and his brother Lua constitutes an exalted and tragic hymn in praise of African ethnic heroes' struggle for the struggle for ethnic liberation and Third World independence...The depiction...expresses the justice and total heroism of the revolutionary heroes'. Gu, 1991:128.

⁷⁴Though Sun Yat-Sen had been an opponent of colonialism, the Taiwan Nationalist government was generally supportive of the American opposition to the spread of communism and opposed 'third world' liberation struggles that were in any way associated with that ideology.

Her descriptions of the 'aborted struggle for liberation and freedom' on the part of the Sahrawi people

can stimulate our latent internationalist spirit, and make us reawaken the shame and cruelty of imperialists and invaders. They can make us realise the significance of an independent motherland and a rich and strong nation and race. (Gu, 1991:119)

Moreover, lessons for China can be supposedly found in San Mao's 'history':

If a nation and race should one day lose its independence and self-determination, it loses its defensive shield, and lets the evil wolf in through the front, back and side doors; its life and dignity vanish into nothingness. Tragic things like the burning of the Yuanmingyuan⁷⁵ and the rape of Nanking could happen again. At that time, our fate may be worse than that of the Sahrawi today. Our parents, brothers and sisters might not have the security that the Sahrawi have today. Therefore loving our motherland, loving our race, loving our people is not an empty phrase...but is linked with our life and fate. If reading San Mao's work can lead to this kind of reflection, I think that would be San Mao's great contribution. (Gu, 1991:119)

Thus patriotic fervor is to be transferable through 'Third World' solidarities, and San Mao's writings are considered to have a vital function in keeping the memories of colonial wrongs alive. But that is not, according to Gu, the only contribution that San Mao has made to world consciousness through her 'history' of the Sahara. Her stories, he urges, should be used as source documents when an official history of the Western Sahara comes to be written (Gu, 1991:129.):

San Mao's depictions of the people there, her descriptions of the desert landscape, and her descriptions and records of many events there, can be seen in total as a very precious historical account and historical source. When people in the future write the history of the Sahara and the history of the 1970s, San Mao's works will have a thoroughly important reference value and will be an extremely important piece of literary evidence. Of San Mao's works, 'Crying Camels' has the greatest historical significance; we can say without the slightest doubt that it is a chapter in the history of the Sahrawi people. With her own eyes San Mao witnessed the cruel repression of the Sahrawi revolution by colonialism and local despotism; with her own eyes she witnessed the tragic scene of the inhuman slaying of the Sahrawi hero Bassiri, his family and comrades by bandits⁷⁶. In 'Crying Camels', San Mao created a very clear and detailed record of this process from beginning to end...Works like *Crying Camels* and *Stories of the Sahara* are unofficial histories of the Sahara written by San Mao, who was a resident of the Sahara (Gu, 1991:139).

San Mao, for Gu, has done what the Sahrawi people could not ('Writing a "Down with imperialism" slogan was extremely difficult, let alone using

⁷⁵The sacking of the Yuanmingyuan (old summer palace) in Peking by British troops in 1860 remains one of the most potent symbols of imperialist incursions on Chinese territory for Chinese nationalist consciousness.

⁷⁶San Mao did not in fact claim to have personally witnessed the death of Bassiri (see above).

literature to write their own history', Gu, 1991:129); in addition, he claims the emotional nature of San Mao's 'history' to be an important part of its meaning:

San Mao's descriptions of the great Sahara desert and her portrait of the masters of the Sahara, the Sahrawi, her representation of Saharan customs and conditions and the Sahrawi people's aborted struggle for the sake of their own liberation and freedom, the wild happiness of their celebration of victory, the description of their vehement sadness when they met difficulty, have profound informative value for us. She has not only let us know about these amazing things we had never heard of, but has also transmitted such rich and varied knowledge about the desert and given us great enlightenment. (Gu, 1991:119)

'History', he continues,

is for letting people know clearly about the origins and development of their own nationality and country and their great achievements, to strengthen their sense of ethnic pride and responsibility, to incite people all the better to create new history and continue the patrimony of their ancestors, and to develop a more magnificent future (Gu, 1991:129).

If, as Gu claims, the nationalistic functions of history are to be paramount and the writings of San Mao are to be considered truthful eye-witness records of real events, then the status of San Mao's writings as history is apparently accepted, on some level at least, within public discussion as well as within the minds of readers wishing to believe in the reality of the Chinese woman of the desert. Thus are San Mao's stories (her histories of herself) fitted into history (into Spanish history, Saharan history and Chinese history) and deployed in the process of making more history, recruited into two otherwise quite separate narratives of anti-colonial nationalism. One might say that these Chinese stories of the Sahara exemplify Stuart Hall's observation that the idea of 'two histories, one over here, one over there, never having spoken to one another...is simply not tenable any longer in an increasingly globalised world' (Hall in King, 1991:48).

Appendix 3:

SAN MAO GOES SHOPPING:

TRAVEL AND CONSUMPTION IN A POST-COLONIAL WORLD¹

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to situate one popular Chinese (Taiwanese) writer's experiences of travel and consumption in the post-colonial world.²

Much writing that considers 'non-white' post-colonial subjects has assumed their economic powerlessness, both domestically and globally. Issues such as cultural alienation, dispossession (as in much post-colonial writing in English) and social marginality (as in writing about minorities in white-dominated countries such as America, Britain or Australia) are frequently raised in this context. This study, however, takes as its subject a person from a former colony³ which has relatively recently become a wealthy and increasingly significant player on the world stage. The popular writer San Mao, one of the first mass-culture 'celebrities' of the Chinese-speaking world, moves freely between four continents, in roles which have been largely perceived as the preserve of the coloniser (or the coloniser's post-colonial 'first-world' heir): traveller, chronicler, interpreter, and consumer. Indeed she could be said to be enacting a variant of what Sally Price has called 'the Western principle that "the world is ours"⁴; San Mao too makes the world 'hers' and demonstrates her

¹Published in *East Asian History* 10, December 1995, pp. 127-164. I would like to thank Lewis Mayo for the many insights he contributed to this paper, and Allan Lo and Peter Kwan for their kind help with my translation queries. This paper was first presented at the conference on 'Colonialism, postcolonialism and the Chinese world' held at the Australian National University in September, 1993. It is an offshoot of a larger study of the 'San Mao phenomenon', which will deal in more detail with her status as a cultural icon and with the content of her writings.

²I use the term 'post-colonial' to refer to the international political, economic and cultural situation that has existed since the breaking up of the empires administered by European nations. The use of the term is not intended to imply any sense of a 'liberation' of the world from colonialism and its lingering effects or to deny the presence of 'neocolonialism' in international structures of economic imbalance and cultural domination.

³Taiwan was administered as a colony by Japan from 1895 to 1945. In the late 1940s, during the conflict between Communists and Nationalists on the mainland, many Nationalist supporters moved to Taiwan. San Mao's father, a former soldier for the Nationalists who had shifted his family from Shanghai to Chongqing when the Nationalists moved their headquarters there, was one of these; he brought his family to Taiwan in 1948.

⁴Price notes this maxim in connection with 'the accessibility of [the 20th-century world's] cultures to those who enjoy membership in Western society' and the assurance of the world market system that 'given financial resources, anyone can own anything from anywhere'; she notes that it is the basis of the collecting of 'Primitive Art' and 'its now aging parent, colonialism, and its somewhat younger cousins, travel journalism and tourism'. Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp.23, 79.

possession of it in her writings - and in particular in *My Treasures*, the collection of stories under discussion here.

San Mao is a truly international shopper, selecting objects to fit and create her desired self-image wherever she travels. Yet the items which she purchases around the world (and then publicly catalogues for her readers) are not the expensive designer goods with 'European quality' brand-names (such as Gucci or Chanel) that might be expected to embody not only 'international taste' but 'elevated taste' as well and have been embraced for their status value in East Asia as elsewhere.⁵ San Mao's consumption choices are conditioned by a rather more subtle set of identity markers linked to international taste regimes of a different kind.

As a citizen of Taiwan, San Mao does not fit unproblematically into the categories of 'coloniser' or 'colonised'. She did not experience the period of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan directly, although legacies of the Japanese administration remained in the Taiwan to which her family emigrated in 1948. As a mainland Chinese in Nationalist-governed Taiwan she can be seen as a member of a colonising elite; she takes on this position again as the spouse of a Spaniard in the Spanish colony in the Sahara desert. In her international travels between the 1960s and 1980s, she represented a Taiwan with no political power despite its steadily growing economic power. As she notes in her writing, Taiwan was presumed poor and backward by Europeans she encountered on her international travels - yet as the daughter of a relatively wealthy professional San Mao not only had the economic power to travel and consume but could also impress with her European cultural knowledge.⁶ Her economic power allowed her to consume and to exploit; her cultural authority allowed her to construct narratives of her dealings with 'Others' from the 'Third World' for consumption by Chinese readers. This examination of her narrative of international consumption experiences will attempt to shed some light on the world order by which they are informed.

San Mao and her treasures

The popular Taiwanese writer San Mao⁷ is well known throughout the Chinese-speaking world for her tales (purportedly factual) of her experiences in foreign lands. After studying in Spain and Germany in the late 1960s, she lived in the Spanish

⁵I am indebted to Tomoko Akami for her insightful comments about 'international taste'.

⁶See the early story 'Fu Ou lütu jianwenlu' ('Record of what I saw and heard in Europe') in San Mao, *Yuji bu zailai* (*The Rainy Season Won't Come Again*, Taipei: Crown Publishing House, 1976).

⁷'San Mao' was the pen-name of Chen Ping (1943-1991).

Sahara and in the Canary Islands for several years in the 1970s, writing about her experiences for publication in Taiwan. In 1981 a major Taiwan newspaper sponsored her to visit Central and South America on a six-month tour and write about her adventures there.⁸ San Mao's main ports of call are linked by European colonialism; her trajectory is from Taiwan to Europe, from Spain to Spanish possessions and territories, and thence to Spain's former colonies. Her studies in Spain and competence in the Spanish language granted her access to a world of tourism on three continents. Through her simply-written, direct and apparently personal stories of travel, relationships and everyday life in foreign countries, San Mao has been able to act for her readership as an interpreter of unknown worlds; anecdotal evidence suggests that she was also, to some extent, a role model for the fantasies if not the actual experience of readers.⁹

In 1985, San Mao arranged for some items from her collection of personal treasures to be photographed. The hundred or so objects in the eventual photographed set¹⁰ had been acquired by purchase or as gifts during her fourteen years of residence outside Taiwan and her travels in foreign lands, as well as more recently in Taiwan. The photographs, together with San Mao's short explanations of the process by which she acquired each object, appeared in *CUTE (Qiao)* magazine and *Crown (Huangguan)* magazine.¹¹ Later they were compiled into the book *My Treasures*

⁸According to one Taiwan writer, this kind of sponsored tour (which took place from November 1981 to May 1982, and spawned not only a number of articles, which were later collected into a book, but also an extensive lecture tour in Taiwan) was quite without precedent. The *Lianhe Bao (United Daily News)* is said to have paid a million \$NT for this tour, which would demonstrate an affirmation of the extraordinary popularity of San Mao and the consequent profitability of her name appearing in its pages (telephone interview with Taiwan writer, who requested anonymity, July 1995).

⁹On many occasions I have been told by young women in both China and Taiwan that they wished to be like San Mao.

¹⁰The publicly displayed set of 'treasures' is by no means an exhaustive inventory of San Mao's collections of objects. Her collection of bowls alone ran to more than 100 (183), but only a handful feature in this published record. As she remarks in her afterword, 'I have more treasures other than the tiny few in the book' (268).

¹¹Both magazines were published by Crown (Huangguan) Publishing House. *CUTE (Qiao)* was a short-lived magazine aimed at teenage girls, which began in March 1984 and apparently ceased publication in October 1985. Some of San Mao's treasures made their debut there in seven instalments beginning in August 1984 under the title of 'My collection' ('Wode shoucang'). The series ended when San Mao left Taiwan in 1985. After her return to settle in Taiwan in 1986 San Mao added to her collection by purchasing new 'treasures' there. The expanded 'My Treasures' was serialised in *Crown* magazine through 1987 (beginning March 1987, Vol 67 No. 1). *Crown* is a general interest magazine founded in 1954 and generally acknowledged to have a large circulation in Taiwan (although no exact circulation figures are available, these being closely-guarded secrets in the Taiwan magazine industry). In addition to its local edition it also appears in two foreign editions, for Southeast Asia and America respectively, as a result of which *Crown* writers are well known among Chinese speakers in those regions as well. Most of San Mao's books (and indeed the books of many other well-known Taiwanese writers, most notably Qiong Yao) appeared first in serialised form in *Crown* magazine and then were published in monograph form by Crown Publishing House.

(*Wode baobei*), published in 1987, which is the subject of this study.

At first, San Mao tells us, she had no intention of publishing the photographs of her 'treasures'. The images were for herself alone - so that if the destiny that brought the treasures into her hands should take them from her again, she would still have the photographs as a record and not be sad at their loss⁽⁶⁾. It is ostensibly this vision of the beloved objects moving into other hands that prompts the public record of their connection with her, so that the next person to possess them will be able to know their stories¹²; therefore, she notes explicitly that 'This is a story book, not a collection book'.⁽⁹⁾

Accordingly, *My Treasures* takes the form of 86 short, self-contained accounts of the situations in which certain of San Mao's treasures were acquired. Each account is accompanied by a small black and white sketch and a colour photograph of the object (or objects) concerned.¹³ The photographs take the form of sharply focused images of each object, placed on tables or shelves with a minimum of background detail. There are no pictures of the consumption sites where they were purchased, nor of the people from whom San Mao acquired them. With a very few exceptions, the stories give the impression that most of the objects had no life, no history before their fateful encounter with San Mao; the format of the photographs, in which there are no explicit outside referents, helps to create this conceit.

Like all of the experiences which San Mao shares with her readers through her writings, the experiences of travel and consumption outlined in *My Treasures* are presented as emotionally meaningful. The importance of the items she has collected,

¹² Apart from such sentimental considerations, the publication of the photographs in a catalogue of this kind would also ensure a favourable price if San Mao chose to sell the items. There is perhaps a hint here of 'the lustre of a famous owner' which 'made for a considerable part of an object's market value', as Craig Clunas has noted in the context of late Ming dynasty paintings and calligraphies, *Superfluous Things: material culture and social status in early modern China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p.113; Price has referred to a corresponding phenomenon in 'Primitive Art' collecting where the 'history of ownership' helps to 'define the object's pedigree' through 'an authenticated line of descent, providing for the potential buyer a guarantee of the value of the purchase'. Price p.102. The items in San Mao's collection acquire 'value' through their association with her.

¹³ I have been able to discern no overall pattern governing the order of the series; objects of different types, with different market values and acquired in different places at different times appear for the most part in apparently random sequence. There is no attempt at chronological or taxonomic classification. Such a presentation is consistent with the aura of spontaneity and serendipity with which San Mao consistently surrounded her public persona, and is perhaps an attempt to reinforce her assertions that each of her treasures came to her by its own individual fate rather than with any sort of consistent pattern - indeed the author herself remarks in her preface that she has decided against presenting a systematic classification because that is not the kind of person she is (p8). Two photographs of San Mao herself sitting at a table on which is scattered a profusion of jewellery and ornaments support this impression of random abundance. For readers in the People's Republic of China, San Mao's treasures were one step less accessible as there are no photographs in the pirate edition published there in 1989.

she tells us, lies not so much in themselves or their 'value' as in their connection with the times, places and circumstances of their acquisition. In her preface to the book, San Mao tells us that she loves her treasures, not just because of 'my appreciation of beauty' or because the things in the collection come 'from lots of different countries all over the world', nor even 'because they make my home more pleasant and comfortable':

none of these factors alone could give these objects the importance that they have for me. The reason I love these treasures so much is that when my destiny and theirs came together, there was a story behind each one...They are a record of my life.¹⁴

In stating that the appeal of her objects is not principally their aesthetic or monetary value, San Mao removes the discussion of her collection from the realm of the 'art' object to a supposedly depoliticised and individual level of self-expression. San Mao insists and reiterates that her treasured objects have come into her life purely by fate or destiny.¹⁵ They are never seen as outcomes of chance or coincidence, as consequences of greed or sentimentality, or as products of certain patterns of aesthetic preference. She betrays little awareness of the structures of taste that underlie her selections of objects to consume; what matters is the circumstances of each gift or purchase, her relationship with the donor or vendor, and the exotic foreign settings. Within San Mao's descriptions of these are encoded clear indications of her attitudes to the people and cultures of various countries, alongside an unselfconscious set of power relations.

At first glance there is little of intrinsic interest in a series of self-indulgent shopping stories, but there are two strands of meaning that make it worthy of study. Firstly, during a period in which consumption as an act of self-affirmation and

¹⁴San Mao, *My Treasures* (Taipei: Crown Publishing House, 1987), 5-6. All further references to *My Treasures* will be given in the text.

¹⁵*Yuanfen*, a word usually used in connection with fortuitous and fortunate meetings between people, suggesting a predetermined or karmic link between them (defined by *The Pinyin Chinese-English Dictionary* as 'lot or luck by which people are brought together'). This narrative of *yuanfen* echoes the characteristic conviction of collectors noted by Susan Stewart that the collection 'just comes' to them: 'collected objects are not the result of the serial operation of labour upon the material environment. Rather, they present the seriality of an animate world; their production appears to be self-motivated and self-realised. If they are 'made', it is by a process that seems to invent itself for the pleasure of the acquirer...One 'finds' the elements of the collection...The collector constructs a narrative of luck which replaces the narrative of production'. *On Longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 165. A similar observation has been made by Pierre Bourdieu in connection with 'the love of art', which, 'like any other kind of love', 'recoils from tracing its origins and prefers on the whole [to see itself as the result of], not common conditions and experiences, but rather the chance happenings that can always be interpreted as predestination'. Pierre Bourdieu, *L'amour de l'art*, quoted (in her own translation) by Sally Price in *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* p.18.

lifestyle creation was becoming universally accepted in Taiwan, shopping stories of precisely this kind would have had a marked significance, particularly for newcomers to the game.¹⁶ In the absence of evidence about the preferred souvenirs of later Taiwanese travellers, and given that the objects in San Mao's collection itself are to some extent a reflection of international fashion, it is impossible to gauge the 'real' influence of a volume such as this; nonetheless it does represent part of a larger material culture picture. Secondly, much of the importance of this book for its readers would have come from the persona of San Mao herself: the popular writer with the romantic international lifestyle and the exotic foreign husband, whose unrestrained emotional life and authoritative interactions with the non-Chinese world had already been presented to readers through her books and articles for more than a decade before the publication of *My Treasures*.¹⁷ These photographs of her prized belongings serve as an even more concrete illustration for readers of the beauty and exoticism of San Mao's life. All of San Mao's writings stress her love of beauty and art and the importance of emotion in her responses to them. *My Treasures* demonstrates this physically, in its cataloguing of the objects she herself has chosen and the gifts showered upon her by people who love her.

Shopping for happiness

¹⁶I am indebted to Geremie Barmé for drawing my attention both to this point and to Craig Clunas's fascinating book on the subject of the genre of books prescribing appropriate elite consumption in the Ming dynasty, such as *Treatise on Superfluous Things*, *Eight Discourses on the Art of Living*, and *Pure and Arcane Collecting*. The scope of such books extends beyond 'high-status and high-value works like painting, calligraphy and early bronzes' to include such things as jades, strange rocks, plum trees and bamboos, tea, shiny white porcelain and 'mysterious coloured pottery, old and new' (Clunas p.104-5). Clunas notes further that this kind of 'participation in debates about taste and style was accepted as a legitimate form of elite activity' (p.21). San Mao's presentation of her collection of personal treasures, however, does not direct readers to the 'correct' type of objects in generalised categories, as these Ming dynasty collections do. In accordance with her extremely personalised manner of presentation of other aspects of her life, San Mao avoids an overtly prescriptive approach in this record of consumption choices. Perhaps Gu Yuanqing's *Illustrated Praises of My Ten Friends* could be seen as a forerunner this book of San Mao's, but there are still important differences. The 'friends' of the title are ten of the author's possessions (including a table-screen, an ancient pottery vessel, a flute and an inkstone); precise measurements as well as detailed descriptions and pictures of them, along with a 'florid and literary "encomium"' for each. (Clunas p.52). San Mao, however, is less concerned with accurate measurement than with the stories from her life that her 'friends' remind her of.

¹⁷ San Mao's first book, *Stories of the Sahara* (*Sahalade gushi*) was published (by Crown Publishing House) in 1976. The question of precisely who San Mao's readers were and are is difficult to answer. It is fashionable to argue that her works are read only by teenage girls, and in the mid-1990s this may be true. During the early years of her popularity, however, her readership was undoubtedly much wider, largely owing to the fact that so much of her work was published in Taiwan's major newspapers, in particular the *Lianhe Bao* (*United Daily News*). My own experience is that it is not easy to find an educated Taiwanese person of either sex under the age of about 60 or a mainlander under about 40 who has not read at least one of San Mao's works.

At the outset of her catalogue of consumption, San Mao declares that love is what really matters and objects are secondary:

People come empty-handed and leave empty-handed. In the twinkling of an eye, everything we possess in this mortal world turns to nothing. Aside from love, what can we take with us or leave behind us? When compared in this way, the surpassing value and the sublimity of love shows it to be eternal, beyond compare.¹⁸

Nonetheless, her enthusiasm for material possessions is undeniable. She tells the reader that she actively collects bowls, coloured cloths, jewellery and Taiwanese folk jars. The excitement with which she consumes and recounts her consumption experiences is considerable - even to the point of being 'dazed with total happiness' (212) on one occasion when shopping in a Mexican market. San Mao does not conceal the fact that she collects objects for emotional fulfilment:

'You've already got a whole lot of old jars - what do you want more for?' my mother asked, uncomprehending.
I...said to my mother, 'I'm on my own, I don't eat much, I don't buy clothes, I don't sleep, I don't get married, I don't sing, I don't have a car, I don't have any time, I certainly don't go travelling abroad - I can't even whistle. I ask you, if a person like that wants to buy a few folk art objects one day and it makes her happy for a few days, is that excessive?'
My mother...thought about it, then wiped her eyes and said, 'If it can make you happy, buy them'. (254)

Although her analogy between shopping and sleep, time and marriage is presumably made flippantly, the fact that an exchange such as this can move her mother to tears indicates the significance of consumption in San Mao's life as a source of happiness.

The possessing gaze

Aside from being owned by San Mao, there is nothing to unite the items displayed for the reader in *My Treasures*. But despite their widely disparate nature and their varying degrees of monetary or artistic value, the objects in San Mao's collection are placed on an equal footing by being photographed and juxtaposed together in this catalogue of treasures. An old brass teapot, a dart board, a Phoenician pot, a plate printed with a sentimental message, an antique jade bracelet, a crocheted vest and some stones from the seashore (to name just a few examples) - all of these are placed together as equals. The objects are presented as meaningful to their owner not necessarily for any intrinsic value¹⁹ but because of the emotion with which they are invested. Thus their value

¹⁸*My Treasures*, 6. Similar sentiments are expressed on p.100 and p.165.

¹⁹ Questions of the monetary value of San Mao's treasures are never raised in the book - though certain treasures, such as a Phoenician pot (found by José on a diving expedition and later dated and authenticated by the Madrid archaeological museum; as it is broken and the museum already has

becomes equal, as all are equally important to San Mao.

Many of San Mao's treasures were purchased during her travels in foreign countries and as such might be termed 'souvenirs' - exotic objects that represent 'distance appropriated'.²⁰ As objects unified solely by their association with their possessor, and not forming a matching or recognisably coherent set, the treasures can also be defined as 'souvenirs' according to Susan Pearce's taxonomy of collection types.²¹ San Mao's presentation of her collection resonates strongly with Pearce's characterisation of souvenirs as 'intensely romantic'.²² Although the treasures are featured in the book's title and are ostensibly its subject, these stories of San Mao's possessive self and its treasures amply bear out that the narrative of the souvenir 'is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor'.²³

In her analysis of souvenirs Susan Stewart notes that they 'allow the tourist to appropriate, consume and thereby "tame" the cultural other'.²⁴ Identical metaphors of 'taming' and 'appropriation' have been applied to the photograph, which is, in the

several complete specimens, José is allowed to keep it - 94) are doubtless valuable. San Mao tells us in her preface that their value cannot be measured in terms of money (*My Treasures*, 5); their real value lies in their connection with the experiences of her possessive self and is thus truly 'sentimental'.

²⁰ *On Longing*, 147.

²¹ Pearce identifies three modes of collecting: collections as "'souvenirs' ('objects which take their collection unity only from their association with...a single person and his or her life history'); as 'fetish objects' ('which are...organised and stored according to a clear rationale...the collection plays the crucial role in defining the personality of the collector...[thus] at the opposite pole to...souvenirs... Here the subject is subordinated to the objects') and as 'systematics' ('organised, planned, assembled...[with] principles of organisation perceived to have an external reality beyond the specific material under consideration...not by the accumulating of samples, as fetishistic collecting does, but by the selection of examples intended to stand for all the others of their kind and to complete a set). Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: a cultural study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 69-87. As for souvenirs in the sense of mementoes of foreign travels, Susan Stewart has noted that 'the souvenir of the exotic' is 'both a specimen and a trophy: on the one hand, the object must be marked as exterior and foreign; on the other hand, it must be marked as arising out of an immediate experience of its possessor' (Stewart p147); this characterisation fits San Mao's collection neatly.

²² 'The romantic view holds that everything, and especially everybody, has a place in the true organic wholeness which embraces human relationships, in the traditional continuity of past into present, in the landscape and the changing seasons. It asks us to believe that life is not fractured, confused and rootless but, on the contrary, suffused with grace and significance...Souvenirs are an important part of our attempt to make sense of our personal histories, happy or unhappy, to create an essential personal and social self centred in its own unique life story, and to impose this vision on an alien world. They relate to the construction of a romantically integrated personal self, in which the objects are subordinated into a secondary role'. *Museums*, 72-3. As already noted, this 'souvenir' quality of San Mao's collection is one of the features that distinguishes it from earlier traditions of collecting in China. Although the precious objects collected by Chinese literati were doubtless a significant element in the integration of the personal selves of their possessors, they tended to be carefully collected as superior representatives of their type, based on a logic of connoisseurship, and thus more akin to the 'systematic' mode of collection.

²³ *On Longing*, 136.

²⁴ *On Longing*, 146.

words of John Urry, 'a way of taming the object of the gaze'²⁵; 'to photograph', he affirms, is 'to appropriate the object being photographed'. Urry observes that the photograph can be perceived not only as a statement about the world but also as a piece of it, 'a miniature slice of reality', even though that 'piece of reality' has already been selected, structured and shaped for the viewer by the person taking the photograph. In buying her souvenirs and in commissioning photographs of them, San Mao has selected her slices of the reality of foreign cultures out of 'an infinity of other images that were not chosen'. Not only do the objects themselves give their purchaser the illusion of possessing some essence of the culture they represent but their photographs also pass on the illusion in some measure to the viewer/reader. The objects in *My Treasures* could be said to be twice tamed, filtered through the two selection processes by which they become the representative objects first of their places of origin and then of San Mao's life of travel as well, as San Mao reappropriates them as signifiers of herself.²⁶

Just as San Mao gives her readers no sense of real qualitative differences between her objects, she also presents the circumstances under which she acquired them as somehow equivalent. Relations of power are glossed over, and no explicit political considerations are addressed. An account of San Mao's mother gathering pretty stones for her on the beach is somehow equated with the gift of a slave offered by an Arab nomad and the drum which he gives her when she refuses to accept the slave (as will be discussed further below). The purchase of the personal property of slum-dwellers or desert nomads and the receiving of gifts from wealthy neighbours are equalised in San Mao's narrative of emotionally meaningful possessions. As the items are unified through possession by San Mao they are also drenched in a rhetoric of personal communion and feeling; the implicit message of *My Treasures* is that feeling between people transcends all other considerations, including the historical and political context of the acquisition of the items.

Consumption and identity - purchasing the self

The function of modern consumption as an expression of the identity of the individual

²⁵John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 138-9.

²⁶San Mao's most 'exotic' travel experience, and the one that established her as a writer and role model (namely the time she spent living in the Sahara Desert), was itself a direct result of the power of the photographic image. Her decision to go to the Sahara (despite Africa's place in Chinese racial hierarchies) was a response to the persuasiveness of photographs in *National Geographic*; seduced by a mass-produced image, San Mao went to Africa to pursue a fantasy of desert life.

has been well documented.²⁷ The consumer selects items that will express his or her personality and individuality and at the same time structure the way he or she wishes to be perceived by others. Thus the selection and purchase of objects has a significance beyond the simple spending of money on commodities; the consumer seeks both to express his or her identity in what he or she buys and to buy the kind of identity he or she wishes to project. 'Individuality', notes Brian Spooner, 'is expressed through choice in the material world', by 'the use of objects to make personal statements, to say something about who one is in relation to others'.²⁸ Thus *My Treasures* bears witness to the construction of the individuality of one educated, middle class, cosmopolitan Chinese subject.

On what basis, then, does San Mao make her selections of items to consume? The processes by which individual tastes are formed and propagated have not received the attention from scholars that they deserve. Pierre Bourdieu links notions of taste and class with his concept of cultural capital, that legitimacy and authority of 'good' taste which an individual accumulates both from his or her family and class background and from his or her time spent in formal education.²⁹ San Mao would doubtless have gained a certain measure of cultural capital from her parents' household. The conventional category of 'father's occupation' as a class marker would place her firmly in the ranks of the middle class, her father having been a lawyer with a degree from a prestigious Chinese mainland university. Her educational trajectory too, although unconventional in that she had virtually no secondary schooling, took her to several tertiary institutions, first in Taipei and then in Madrid and Berlin³⁰; she was also to work intermittently as a lecturer at Taiwan's 'Culture University' (*Zhongguo Wenhua Daxue*) after her travels abroad. Her experiences in Germany and Spain are important components of San Mao's status as a cultural phenomenon in the Chinese-speaking world - not only from the point of view of her formal studies there but also from the easy familiarity with European languages and

²⁷Among them Gail Reekie, 'Changes in the Adamless Eden: the spatial and sexual transformation of a Brisbane department store 1930-90' in *Lifestyle Shopping: the subject of consumption* ed. Rob Shields (London: Routledge, 1992), 170-194; Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 1991); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value' in *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63.

²⁸Brian Spooner, 'Weavers and Dealers: the authenticity of an oriental carpet' in *The Social Life of Things* 195-235. Here, p226.

²⁹Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (trans. Richard Nice) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

³⁰She did not gain any degree or diploma qualifications from any of them, however.

cultures that she presents to readers in her stories. These experiences too were made possible by her 'class background', as her father's income was sufficient to support her life of international study and travel until she was able to generate her own wealth through her writing.³¹ In class terms, then, the education of San Mao's tastes and her power to consume would place her in an upper middle-class grouping.

For many members of the upper middle classes, after the socialisation processes of Bourdieu's two categories of family and education as generators of cultural capital have done their work, there is a third process that is perceived to add a final extra layer of cultural confidence and authority: namely travel, and in particular travel to and time spent in Europe. The significance of travel as a bestower of cultural capital is known to all of us outside the 'metropole'; to Bourdieu, writing from what chooses to consider itself the 'centre', this question of the perceived importance of experience outside one's own cultural milieu (and in a milieu more culturally 'legitimate' than one's own) evidently did not arise. San Mao replicates the pattern of cultural pilgrimage to Europe that has long been an almost requisite part of the experience of young educated upper middle class residents of Europe's former colonies. The example of San Mao's cultural authority, which was based at least in part on the 'cosmopolitan' image she gained from her years of residence in Europe and her knowledge of European languages, is perhaps an indication that the notion of Europe as providing 'definitive' experience and true culture is present to some extent not only in Europe's former colonies but also in a society that lies outside the recognised purview of European cultural dominance, such as Taiwan.

In her purchasing of identity and her search for 'unique' objects to express her personality, San Mao's preferred shopping spaces are markets, which are full of 'a flavour that you can't find in department store displays' (212). In this respect, her consumption choices reflect a scheme of taste that is observable in industrial western countries, namely the preference for 'exotic', 'ethnic' goods from the so-called third world - a preference which may be linked to the fashions of the hippie movement of the 1960s, when San Mao first set out on her international travels.³² Indeed in many

³¹San Mao's income for 1989 alone was estimated to be a million Taiwan dollars (Yang Tian, 'Huawen shijie shouru zuigao de zuojia', 'Highest-earning writers in the Chinese-speaking world', *Jiangyi* Vol. 6 No. 6, March 1990, p.76-79. Here, p.79).

³²The touristic desire for the 'exotic' has been noted by Janet Abhu Lughod in her account of the influence of touristic preferences for exotic markets on bazaars. The main city bazaar in Tunis has come to specialize in 'Tunisian handicrafts, 'traditional' goods, etc. It has kept its exotic architecture and multicolored columnades (sic). The plaintive (sic) sound of the ancient nose flute and the whining of Arabic music provide background for the European tourists in their shorts and T-shirts, who amble in twos and threes, stopping to look and to buy. Few natives, except for sellers, are to be seen'. As the main bazaar has become a relic of an exotic past for tourist consumers, a secondary

ways San Mao's tastes reflect what has been considered to be 'the Western taste for the things of the past and of the other'.³³ In this context, we might borrow Sally Price's convention of taking the capital-W 'Western' as signalling 'an association with European-derived cultural assumptions, whether in the thinking of someone from New York, Tokyo or Lagos'³⁴. Clearly it is not only people from any geographically defined 'west' who 'seek purity in order to demonstrate superior taste, to enhance...their individuality' as Alfred Gell suggests that 'westerners' do.³⁵ The composition of San Mao's collection of souvenirs might be said to mirror some of the traditional structures of colonialism, where the west consumes the East - but San Mao herself, the consumer, is part of that 'East'.

Authenticity

Although San Mao, like most tourists, is convinced of the uniqueness of her own tastes, her choice of purchases seems to be informed by certain internationalised patterns of aesthetic preference. She expresses her individuality by consuming 'ethnic' items, the 'exotic', handcrafted products of Africa, South America and Asia, and in doing so mirrors structures of colonial dominance - not only in what she selects but (as will be demonstrated) in her purchasing behaviour as well. As noted above, San Mao demonstrates through her collection that the world is 'hers'. In her references to the artefacts of the place where she grew up, Taiwan, as well as to those of foreign

bazaar has taken its former place as a site where where local Tunisian people shop for such commodities as radios, jeans and soap; few foreign tourists are to be seen there. 'Going beyond global babble', in Anthony D. King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System* (London: Macmillan, 1991, pp.131-137), p.132.

³³Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things*, 27. The taste for things of 'the past and of the other' has a long history in China too. A taste for 'antique things' in China was noted by the 16th-century traveller Matteo Ricci (Clunas p.94, quoted from Pasquale M. D'Elia, S.J. (ed.), *Fonti Ricciane*, Rome 1942, Vol. 1, p91) and, as Clunas has also pointed out, the elite consumers of the Ming dynasty were enthusiastic purchasers of 'exotica', including 'high-craft objects from Japan' and such items as Korean lanterns (Clunas pp.58-59). Clunas also draws our attention to their interest in 'objects which partake of the nature of curiosities', such as 'old lamps of the Yuan dynasty, imported Japanese folding fans and Korean writing paper'. (Clunas p.85, from Wen Zhenheng, *Treatise on Superfluous Things*.) Although San Mao may owe some debt to Chinese cultural traditions of collecting, there are many factors that set her situation apart from that of the Ming elite collectors - among them the difference in power and influence on the world stage between Ming China (arguably the most powerful state in the world at the time) and twentieth century Taiwan; the inflow of goods to Ming China versus the international travels of San Mao in search of souvenirs; the amassing of luxuries for the sake of a display of wealth and taste versus the collecting of objects as monuments to personal experience; or the explicitly prescriptive accounts of the possessions appropriate to members of a particular social class versus the personalised and ostensibly non-prescriptive nature of San Mao's consumption tales.

³⁴Price, p.3.

³⁵Alfred Gell, 'Newcomers to the world of goods: consumption among the Muria Gonds' in *the Social Life of Things*, 110-138. Here, p. 130.

countries, San Mao displays colonial and touristic attitudes that are familiar in the context of consumption in 'the West': the appeal and 'integrity' of folk art, the honesty and simplicity of countryside, and the dignity and beauty of manual labour.

Her preferences are for the antique, the hand-made, things that aren't 'too delicate' (29) or 'too touristy' (192). She likes brightly-coloured woven or embroidered 'ethnic' cloth³⁶ and 'ethnic' jewellery³⁷, and declares herself passionate about Chinese 'folk artefacts', including earthen jars, a rice bucket, a grindstone and hand-decorated bowls). But despite her protestations of individuality, her tastes are (as noted above) very much in line with educated western middle-class taste in their sentimentalised desire for the past, for handcraft, for the non-standard, for anything not mass-produced - in short, a taste for the 'authentic'.³⁸

San Mao's quest to express her individual tastes takes her to markets and antique shops on four continents where 'authenticity' is supposedly to be found. 'The location of authenticity', in the words of Susan Stewart, 'becomes whatever is distant to the present time and space; hence we can see the souvenir as attached to the antique and exotic'³⁹. Souveniring the past involves 'the objectification of the peasant classes, the aestheticisation of rural life which makes that life "quaint" ..Every aspect of peasant and rural life, from tools to architecture to dialect to "being" itself in the form of "the character", becomes...a potential souvenir'.⁴⁰ These objectifying tendencies are very apparent in *My Treasures*; many of San Mao's souvenir stories aestheticise the nomads, the vendors and the country people who represent the 'peasant classes' in her narratives of consumption.

In his explanation of the phenomenon of the modern quest for 'authenticity', Brian Spooner states that

³⁶San Mao tells us books and coloured cloth are the things she loves most in the world (191). Books account for only one shopping story, when in Story 49 she buys a set of Spanish encyclopaedias. Four stories concern the purchase of cloth: from South America (Story 17), from the Sahara (story 43), and two from India (stories 60 and 85 respectively).

³⁷In this collection she displays a brooch from Peru (Story 2), fish-shaped brooches from Bolivia (Story 3), a necklace of unspecified South American origin (Story 5), an Indian bead necklace (story 20), a red stone heart from an unspecified 'Africa' (Story 21), anklets, bracelets, an amulet and a necklace from the Sahara (stories 22, 23, 24 and 45), an Afghan necklace (story 32), a necklace from Thailand (Story 6 and 7), and an Indian bracelet (story 73). Chinese jewellery features too in the shape of a number of small locks (stories 6 and 7) and a brooch (story 8). In addition to San Mao's purchased jewellery, the collection also includes gifts - a snake-shaped necklace of unspecified origin (story 18) and other bracelets and necklaces (Stories 19 and 58).

³⁸'Authenticity' is neatly defined by Spooner as 'a conceptualisation of elusive, inadequately defined, other cultural, socially ordered genuineness'. Spooner in *the Social Life of Things*, 225.

³⁹Stewart, *On Longing*, 140.

⁴⁰Stewart, *On Longing*, 143.

the concept of authenticity belongs to industrial (even more to 'postindustrial') society...authenticity (as we understand it now) became an issue at a particular stage in our social evolution - when with the appearance of mechanically produced clone-commodities we began to distinguish between the social meaning of handicraft and that of mechanical production, as between uniqueness and easy replaceability...Authenticity is a form of cultural discrimination projected onto objects. But it does not in fact inhere in the object but derives from our concern with it. In seeking authenticity people are able to use commodities to express themselves and fix points of security and order in an amorphous modern society.⁴¹

This projection of authenticity onto handicrafts and other survivors of the ways of the past is very evident in San Mao's catalogue of treasures; her personal tastes would seem to exemplify this particular aspect of modernity.⁴² Yet the authenticity she seeks seems to reside as much in her experiences in acquiring her treasures, in her interactions with the people she encounters in the course of the acquisition, and even in her quest for a sense of emotional 'belonging' as in the objects themselves. The stories are, as noted above, principally stories of San Mao rather than stories of things; she is placing herself in the world for her readers through the situations into which her 'unique' tastes for 'authenticity' take her. San Mao's sense of her own uniqueness in the ability to select 'authentic' objects and imprint them with her own personality⁴³ comes very strongly through this collection of stories, with no suggestion of any recognised standard or shared aesthetic that might inform her choices. This sense of uniqueness and originality in her quest for authenticity suggests that San Mao saw herself as initiating new ways of thinking for her readers, not

⁴¹Spooner in *The Social Life of Things*, 226. In connection with this souveniring of a 'real world' that is removed from modern experience, Stewart notes further that 'Within the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object become critical. As experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence. "Authentic" experience...is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic and other fictive domains are articulated. In this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object...Furthermore, the seriality of mechanical modes of production leads us to perceive [what is] outside as a singular and authentic context of which the object is only a trace'. (Stewart p.133)

⁴²It should be reiterated here that there is also a long Chinese tradition of perceiving authenticity to lie in the simple and unostentatious. The aesthetic of the genuine, of the thing without affectation that informed the pursuit of cultural objects by Confucian literati was presumably known to San Mao and could well have been an influence on her consumption choices. But San Mao's emphasis is different, as has been noted above, particularly in that there is no trace of any narrative of connoisseurship in her stories of her treasures.

⁴³Here again there is a resonance with Price's observation regarding 'primitive art' collectors and dealers, who see their role as 'a vigorously active one, not unrelated to an artist's act of physical creation', seeing their role as a 'discovery' of qualities in an object that were not apparent to anyone else (including the object's maker) and describing it in terms such as 'artistic intervention' through the sophistication of their appreciation and taste that can discern 'quality' where others cannot. (Price p.104)

reiterating traditional ones. In terms of its emphasis on 'unique' tastes and experiences, San Mao's collecting persona seems very akin to the modern romantic collector of souvenirs.

In addition to modernity, Spooner suggests that another major factor is at work in creating this narrative of the 'authentic'; 'authenticity', he observes, 'operates in an arena constituted by...Western concepts concerning the Other'.⁴⁴ Can San Mao's concepts of the 'other' be said to be 'western'? During her stay in Europe and her marriage to a European man, all manner of 'western' notions doubtless thrust themselves upon her, among them surely notions of what constitutes 'the other' in the modern world. Certainly there are strong commonalities between western Orientalism and San Mao's touristic and exoticising gaze directed at Africa and South America - but this cannot be equated with a 'western' notion of the 'other', since the people and cultures of these two continents are, of course, as unknown and 'other' to a Chinese as to a European. Although San Mao herself is, from a 'western' point of view, an 'other', the 'Orient' from which she comes is no less economically powerful than the generalised 'west', her urban background⁴⁵ creates for her the same kind of distance from 'traditional' rural life that is present in the urbanised 'west'⁴⁶. Her sense of the 'otherness' of the poor and the rural could be analogous to corresponding 'western' attitudes without having been directly influenced by them. Obviously we cannot determine precisely where the attitudes expressed by San Mao in *My Treasures* come from, but it is fair to say that her interactions with 'others' as they are represented in this text display concepts of the 'other' that are very similar to those of the west - including the apparent 'otherness' of Taiwan, which will be discussed below.

Given that the authenticity of the past is thought to reside in the less 'complex', the handcraft, the village way of life, it is no surprise that it is to the economically less privileged areas of the world that the modern seeker of authenticity will go to search for it.⁴⁷ Many of the shopping transactions described in *My Treasures* are with economically dependent 'others', and San Mao's descriptions of them, display a number of strategies for dealing with or glossing over the inequalities

⁴⁴ Spooner in *The Social Life of Things*, 226.

⁴⁵ As the child of an immigrant family, San Mao had no family network to connect her to rural or small-town Taiwan.

⁴⁶ Again the connection can be made to Price's capital-W 'Western' that has no connection with any geographical 'west' but connotes 'an association with European-derived cultural assumptions' (Price, p.3).

⁴⁷ Spooner draws attention to the fact that 'we tend to search for authenticity in economically dependent societies', noting that authenticity has 'become an issue for us only since the condition of dependency has developed in the Other'. Spooner in *the Social Life of Things*, p.228, 231.

acted out through her consumption activities.

An international consumer of 'authenticity', San Mao is identified as such by an astute vendor in Bolivia who has figured out exactly what it is that people like San Mao want. When after a lengthy bargaining session San Mao has bought a brooch, the vendor tells her that

there is a reason why one of the coloured stones on the brooch is missing - otherwise, wouldn't people think it was new? It's only when there's one missing that you know it's an antique. That old woman was good with words, and she knew that what 'culture people' are looking for is antiques - that's what she called me, a 'culture person'.
(23)

The vendor is correct in her assertion that a 'culture person' like San Mao⁴⁸ will not want her treasures to look too new. The 'authentic' must be seen to be authentic. Indeed it is her preference for the 'authentic' that reveals San Mao as a 'culture person' in the first place. San Mao admits to her readers that she likes to preserve a romantic patina of the past by polishing her silver objects a little, but not too much. When she brings back a pile of blackened old objects from the antique markets of Hong Kong, and her father is helping her to polish them, she says with a laugh, 'Careful! Careful! Don't polish it too bright' (30). The same applies to her Bolivian silverware ('I don't polish it too dim or too bright') (231) and her medallion from the Sahara ('I washed it carefully - I didn't want to wash it too clean, but I couldn't have it dirty') (59). Although San Mao attempts to maintain the fantasy that all of her preferences are unconventional, such references as these point to some measure of self-consciousness about her souveniring of the past and the common tendency towards such nostalgia for the things of the past among 'culture people'.⁴⁹

Consumption as compassion

One rather curious way in which San Mao deals with the unease inherent in many of

⁴⁸The term 'culture person' (*wenhua ren*) is used in Taiwan to denote people (usually with tertiary education) who work in academia, the professions, the arts and the media - as such it corresponds closely to Bourdieu's classifications of the possessors of cultural capital and the 'cultural intermediaries' who propagate the tastes of those with cultural capital to the wider community.

⁴⁹A fascinating obverse to this nostalgic practice of preserving the appearance of age is mentioned in passing by Alfred Gell in his article about consumption practices among the Muria Gonds of India. 'The silver ornaments...are mostly old, but are cleaned and repaired by...silversmiths so that to all appearances they are brand new. This is a source of perplexity to Western visitors in search of old and authentic-looking tribal jewellery'. Gell in *The Social Life of Things*, 121. Such preferences have been known in China as well as in the 'west', as an observation from Matteo Ricci regarding a market place in China reminds us: among the 'antique things' for which the elite class are seen to 'make much of, 'many vases of bronze...are highly valued, and they desire them with a certain particular corrosion. Without it, they are worth nothing'. (from Pasquale M. D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, Rome 1942, Vol 1, p91, quoted in Clunas p94).

the shopping transactions in which she is purchasing authenticity out of dependency is to emotionalise her buying, bringing together love and consumption with constant references to the emotional nature of her relationships with shopkeepers and street vendors. Thus personal feeling is presented as transcending any considerations of inequality. This emotionalising account of San Mao's shopping experiences around the world seems to partake of the attitude noted by Sally Price of a kind of 'planetwide closeness' brought about by the accessibility of the world's cultures to those with the means to travel or to view them via television, which is 'from a Western point of view...permeated with the flavor of Unity, Equality, and Brotherly Love', but in which 'the "equality" accorded to non-Westerners...is not a natural reflection of human equivalence, but rather the result of Western benevolence'⁵⁰. Certainly there is in San Mao's persistent exoticising and sentimentalising of the people she encounters on her travels a strong sense of San Mao as a benevolent figure lovingly exhibiting largesse to the lower orders in many of the shopping stories she narrates here. No notion of solidarity between San Mao and other 'people of colour' is present in her work. In her interactions with the small traders of Africa and South and Central America, San Mao does not identify with them; rather, by virtue of her superior economic power, she remains throughout in a position somewhat analogous to that of coloniser, exoticising their lives and protesting warm feelings for them as she bargains for their valuables. Frequently she superimposes a kind of loving concern onto the transaction relationship of vendor and purchaser. On several occasions she goes so far as to embrace shopkeepers in foreign countries (90; 146, 218) and she often speaks of them as her 'friends' (24, 50, 89, 216).

Indeed the invoking of sentiment to add significance to consumption experiences is an oft-repeated feature of *My Treasures*. For example, when San Mao

⁵⁰Price p23. She goes on to note manifestations of this 'Brotherhood of Man' ideology such as television commercials for Coca-Cola ('a many-shaded sea of faces, all smiling, and united by their human warmth and shared appreciation of the good things in life, including Coke'), the 1985 hit song, 'We Are the World' ('in which the singers' brotherly smiles, phenotypic diversity, and altruistic record contracts were never allowed to stray fvery far from the minds of those who were humming along with the melody; indeed, this song...captures much of the essence of the Family of Man ideology, whose Brotherhood represents an idyllic regression to childhood...and much of whose attraction lies in the satisfacyion engendered by philanthropic goodwill') a French charity ad ('showing a little blond girl planting a benevolent kiss on the head of a little black boy, while his mother, dressed in African robes, stared blankly and passively into space') and 'The United Colors of Benetton' advertising campaign ('a visually enhanced pun between the many-colored Italian clothes being promoted and the many-colored people featured in the ad'). She notes that in all of these 'there is a definite suggestion of philanthropy. For, from the privileged perspective of white Europeans and Americans, the mingling of races strongly implies an act of tolerance, kindness, and charity'. (Price pp23-25) San Mao's writings seem to demonstrate the same kind of 'Family of Man' attitudes, likewise predicated on her own 'tolerance, kindness and charity'.

is trying on clothes in a market in Mexico:

A pair of big tragic eyes full of deep sorrow were gazing back at me from the mirror. I turned around and saw a stall selling things made of brass; sitting beside the stall was a young man...I gazed at him, our glances met, and we smiled at each other - but even though he smiled there was deep pain in the young man's eyes. (212)

At the time, San Mao doesn't have enough space in her bags to buy any of the brass objects he is selling. But

That expression in the young man's eyes never let me go during that whole...six month trip through Central and South America. As I travelled...I was burdened with guilt because I hadn't bought any of the brass things on his stall. After six months, at the end of my journey, I went back...It was 6 months later but that stall was still there, and the young man's eyes were still full of pain. I chose two copper pots. I didn't bargain; I gave the money to the youth quickly. Then at last my heart felt a little free. I left, and as I did so I couldn't help turning my head to look at him again. There was still tragedy in his eyes, which made me think that his sadness had nothing at all to do with business. And because of this backward glance I felt even sadder than before. (212-3)

In this as in other instances, San Mao's decision not to bargain is presented as indicative of some kind of emotional involvement with the vendor - or even a sense of guilt about the very act of purchasing. The emotion is, however, subordinate to the desire to consume, and does not inhibit acquisition.

The sentimentalised presentation of her relationships with the people from whom she buys things tends to obscure the power relations present in the transaction by focusing on factors external to the economic realities of the situation. Perhaps San Mao's constant public protestations of sentiment are a deliberate attempt to mitigate the feelings of guilt to which she occasionally succumbs in certain consumption situations. For San Mao, wishing to regard consumption primarily as emotional pleasure untainted by the sense of a guilty exercise of power, this is one possible means for dealing with that post-colonial dilemma of consuming in the so-called third world - that of wanting the 'ethnic' artefacts but not quite knowing how to go about acquiring them in an 'appropriate' or morally approvable way. The transaction is removed to an emotional plane where it can be dignified by some deep, meaningful understanding between herself and the vendor. Even (or especially) when the interactions are charged with embarrassment (sometimes on both sides), sentiment prevails.

A more extreme example takes place during San Mao's visit to Bolivia, where largesse is mingled with guilt. The exoticisation of working people and of various

ethnic groups that pervades *My Treasures* reappears here in the story of a Bolivian shoeshine boy who pleads with San Mao to let him clean her shoes.

I looked at the crowd of shoeshine children all around me, and I didn't dare give money just to this one. That feeling of being surrounded by hungry people really makes me sad, and often when I had an ordinary meal I couldn't shake off the gaze of several hundred people outside the window...An ice-block seller came by, and I bought a lot of ice-blocks and gave them out to the shoeshine children all around me. But when it came to money, I couldn't give them any. (185-6)

The boy offers to sell San Mao a little church-shaped box with a matador figure inside. San Mao asks him if it is his to sell; when the boy replies that it belongs to his parents, she asks him to take her to see his mother.

We went off together, my arm around the child's shoulders. We walked until we were almost outside the city...We came to a compound with a well...an Indian woman with an infant on her back was squatting at a tap washing clothes. Seeing that her son had brought home a foreigner, this Indian woman stood up immediately and stared at me, fingering her thick plaits nervously.

I went forward and greeted her, asking, 'Is this your son? He wanted to clean my shoes'. The woman was embarrassed, and apologised several times.

'Do you want to sell this box?' I asked.

The woman nodded, then nodded again.

I smiled and asked, 'How much do you want for it?'

She couldn't say, but just stood beside me, simple and honest, hanging her head. As I looked at this Indian woman I felt a sudden flash of tenderness...I took some banknotes out of my pocket and stuffed them into her hand. She stared at me dully, unable to say anything.

'So, thank you very much, I've bought the box now', I said.

I looked closely at the Indian woman again, then I took the child's hand and said to him, 'Let's go - let's get back to town before dusk'. (187-8)

The embarrassment of this act of consumption is thickly overlaid with sentiment. San Mao deals with the moral guilt of the affluent shopper surrounded by beggars by benevolently dispensing sweets. Because of her professed 'tenderness' for the woman, the reader is to believe that the hasty stuffing of a random sum of money into her hand is an appropriate payment for the item.⁵¹ As befits one of the exotic poor, the woman is characterised as 'simple and honest'. Attempts at humour are also added to

⁵¹As Price has noted in the context of purchasing 'Primitive' art works, payment is 'one thing when it occurs within a well-defined cultural setting in which both the creator and the owner-to-be share basic assumptions about the nature of the transaction...[but] when a Western traveler in Africa spots an interesting looking wooden figure and offers to purchase it for a price that represents a negligible sum to the traveler and a large sum to the owner...the buyer lacks understanding of the meaning of the object in its native context, the seller lacks understanding of its meaning in its new home, and there is no common ground in the evaluation of the price for which it has been exchanged'. Price p.78.

help dispel the embarrassment, with repeated references to the fact that, as San Mao was wearing sneakers, she couldn't have had her shoes polished by the shoeshine boy anyway.

Shopping with scruples

Several of the stories in this collection recount shopping behaviour that is decidedly predatory.⁵² Sometimes rapacious behaviour is tinged with guilt or apology, but without exception it is nonetheless written about affectionately. San Mao's protested compunctions about certain buying methods are completely undercut by her pleasure in the actual possession of the objects and her proud display of them in the book.

However, the connections between shopping and guilt are very clear in various tales in which San Mao offers money for somebody else's only valuable pieces of personal property. On one occasion, San Mao is buying food as the vendor is closing up her shop for the night. As the vendor puts on her cloak, San Mao notices the pair of silver fish-shaped clasps that it is fastened with.

I couldn't help putting out my hand and touching them. 'Are these fish for sale?' I asked, my face reddening. The woman hesitated, then said 'Yes, yes' very quickly as if she was afraid I would go back on the idea.

I'm an awful person - I exploited someone's trifling poverty. Neither of us could say how much I should pay for the fishes; we smiled at each other, both embarrassed. In the end I named a price and asked her if it was enough; she nodded eagerly, afraid I'd change my mind, and hurriedly took off the fishes. When she had taken them off, a gust of night wind blew her cloak off now that there was no brooch to hold it. 'I have something else old', she said, telling me to come back and find her the next day...The next day...she gave me...two pairs of earrings set with red stones. Again it was a case of me naming a price and her nodding furiously. Once I had taken all she had, I felt uncomfortable for quite a while, wrapping the earrings in a handkerchief, unwrapping them and wrapping them again. After some years...the image of the woman and her stall and her baby... is tinged with a sense of lingering guilt. I think that if I go back to La Paz in a few years' time I will give these things back to that woman, because she loves them. (22)

The questionableness of San Mao's grasping, coveting and buying the clasps is evidently supposed to be cancelled out by her protestations of remorse even as she displays the trophies to her admiring readers. San Mao's acknowledgment of her own 'awfulness' has an ironic ring, especially coinciding as it does with her trivialisation of the other woman's poverty as 'trifling'. Any sincerity in her expressed desire to

⁵²Though they pale in comparison with stories of the despoiling of native cultural items by colonising powers or the systematic acquisition of objects by stealth, theft and deception by early anthropological expeditions (some account of which is given in Price pp.70-74)

return the clasps to the woman who 'loves' them is immediately undercut by the lapse of years that would make such an action difficult if not impossible. Yet the sincerity of San Mao's own 'love' for a treasured possession is never in doubt; the story of the amulet discussed below is entitled '*Xin'ai de*' (What I love), the same phrase with which she described the importance of the fish-shaped clasps for the Bolivian woman in the example above. In San Mao's narrative of 'love', there is room for only one genuine subject: herself.

On yet another occasion, San Mao spies a crucifix among the enamel basins, fake pearls and hair clips on a street stall in Ecuador. As in the story cited above, the item San Mao wants is the vendor's own property, and San Mao tells us that she feels somewhat guilty about buying it because of its religious significance to its owner. In what becomes a familiar gesture of atonement for buying it at all, San Mao forbears to bargain for the crucifix but just pays the first asking price. 'I'll take good care of it for you', she promises (20) in a token gesture of respect for its importance to the vendor.

A similar scene takes place around an amulet which San Mao wishes to buy in the Sahara desert. Such amulets cannot be procured in the shops, and San Mao knows no one who is willing to sell her own⁵³. Then one day an unknown woman appears, heavily veiled; she holds out an amulet to San Mao and holds up four fingers to indicate a price of 400 pesos:

Taking the woman's hand, I asked gently, 'Are you sure you don't want it?'

She shook her head determinedly, and the expression in her eyes held no story.

'Who told you I was looking for one?'

She shook her head again and made no reply.

I gave her 400 pesos; clutching the money she opened the door and left...I felt both happy and apologetic, as though I had robbed the woman.

I didn't have time to think about that. (59)

Again, the narrative of San Mao's possessions denies the 'story' of the people whose economic necessity makes her consumption experiences possible. Would San Mao would have acted otherwise if the expression in the woman's eyes had held 'a story'? Perhaps this absence of a story is intended to serve as a justification for San Mao's insistence on making the purchase. Certainly the unexamined power relations of the situation give the impression that for San Mao there is no significance behind objects and transactions other than that with which the purchaser wishes to invest them. The

⁵³Not knowing a prospective vendor personally does not necessarily hamper her in her quest for an object she wishes to possess; she writes elsewhere of seeking a certain type of bracelet in the Sahara by going from tent to tent asking if anyone was willing to sell. (57)

gesture of holding the woman's hand is again reminiscent of the kind of benevolent condescension noted by Price.

In all of the above examples, San Mao invokes sentiment (either affection or guilt) to justify or mitigate her behaviour in purchasing precious items from strangers. The position is reversed in her story of buying a tapestry to use as a bedspread; here, her longing for the object in question overrides the 'friendship' she already has with the owner (119). While she is living in the Sahara (under Spanish colonialism and with her Spanish husband), San Mao wants to buy a bedspread but is unable to find exactly what she wants in the shops. One day, when she is a guest in the home of a Saharan friend, she is shown the family treasures. Among these is a tapestry which was part of her friend's grandmother's trousseau and is taken out only to be shown off to visitors. Obviously this is a precious and significant object to San Mao's friend and host, but here the opportunity to consume evidently matters more to San Mao than the relationship. She is aware that it is customary for a guest in a Saharan home to leave after the third cup of tea, and exploits this cultural knowledge to engineer a consumption opportunity. To allow herself more time in which to work up to making an offer for the tapestry, she deliberately keeps her cup in her hand and doesn't put it down to be refilled for a second time. Her host has no choice but to let her continue to drink slowly and stay as long as she wishes. Finally, to her friend's astonishment, San Mao says she wants to buy the tapestry.

I was bad - I tempted this family with money. I offered them a price five times higher than the usual shop price, thanked them and left.... Having offered a good price, I didn't go to that friend's place again - that was a psychological war tactic, so as not to let them see how much I longed to have the thing... Since they couldn't resist the lure of the price, before the end of the month when our friends' money was all spent...one of the women of the family...brought it to me. With a gleeful smile I took the...tapestry, and I counted out some big notes and gave them to her. (119)

As noted above, by the very act of including it in this collection of stories, San Mao dignifies consumption behaviour that is less than innocent. The admission 'I was bad' is made light of by its juxtaposition with the cynical rhetoric of consumption as combat. Again the incident is passed over with humour; the account ends with a remark to José, her Spanish husband, that from now on all they can afford to eat will be camel meat because she spent so much on the bedspread. The power relations in this situation are very much those of a colonial society; the Spanish colonisers, represented by José and by extension San Mao, evidently enjoy considerable material advantage over their Saharan neighbours. Although such behaviour as this is clearly

(and self-consciously) exploitative, the power relations in question are not challenged; rather, they constitute the material for an affectionate anecdote.

Imagined equality

Saturating transactions with sentiment is not San Mao's only approach to exotic shopping among the poor. Sometimes she is just out to enjoy a good bargaining session. One story tells of her encounter with an old woman who knows how to get what she wants. San Mao takes a photograph of the woman sitting in the market-place in the sunshine, knitting socks. Immediately the woman begins to abuse her, demanding that she buy a pair of socks as some kind of compensation or photo fee. San Mao apologises but refuses to buy any of the proffered socks because they are too big to fit her. Both women become angry, and then they begin to laugh, abusing each other and laughing by turns until San Mao discovers that the old woman has something she would like to buy: a brooch. She stops fighting immediately and pulls up a stool, sitting and bargaining until sunset. She finally leaves with the brooch and a pair of socks, remarking that the old woman is a formidable saleswoman, fierce and articulate, and adding:

I'd say she's a rich woman - that was definitely not the only old brooch she had, and her asking price was very high - she could buy a sheep and weave some more socks. (23)

Again San Mao displays an enjoyment of the thrill of the chase, bargaining enthusiastically both in the hope of a more favourable price and for the fun of it.⁵⁴ The final sentence, though perhaps jocular in tone, nonetheless encapsulates an idea that is not unusual on the part of rich 'first world' tourists - namely that the poor people they encounter in the countries they visit are not really as poor as they seem at all. The relationship played out in both this story and the story of the tapestry cited above is between someone with money and someone without - but for San Mao these are just encounters between individuals. The structures of power and domination in which her role is analogous to that of the coloniser are set offstage. Yet by suggesting

⁵⁴She is competitive too. When San Mao sees something she likes, she doesn't want anyone else to have it: 'A woman who was nearby saw them and came over. She asked me if I wanted them or not; I was afraid she would buy them, and I quickly said I wanted them. In a moment they had been wrapped up for me, and only then did I set my mind at rest and ask, "Where are they from?"' (24). 'The young people in the street crowded around; I was anxious and yelled "They are all ours - don't touch them"' (209); 'When I heard that the lock had been sold, I looked disappointed even though I had had no intention of buying it' (28). Pearce has noted that 'Competition has always been a clearly-marked feature of collecting'; (Pearce p51) and Price has drawn attention to 'the metaphors that collectors (of art) call on to evoke the emotions of collecting vary from game hunting to drug addiction to sexual conquest' (Price, p.101); perhaps emotions such as these characterise San Mao's collecting activities too.

that the old woman is rich, San Mao attempts to place her on an equal footing with herself and to negate any sense of her own superior economic power. As already noted, San Mao's position in this collection of consumption stories is never one of solidarity with the colonised; she is always in a position of economic power and is ready to exploit that power in order to consume to the maximum.

Orientalism: Spain's exotic colonies

In her writing about foreign lands, San Mao paints them with an exoticised colouring strongly reminiscent of the Romantic strain of European Orientalism so famously criticised by Edward Said.

San Mao's travels take her not only to colonies but also to ex-colonies and former colonial powers, and unlike the 19th-century European travellers to the countries of the 'Middle East' who constitute Said's paradigm of orientalism she is not herself an explicit representative of colonising power. Yet San Mao and her western counterparts, the international tourists and consumers of the post-colonial era, reproduce structures of 19th century orientalism in their constructions of 'Third World' countries as exotic 'others'. Although not a traveller and consumer from the 'west', San Mao fits quite naturally and comfortably into the same privileged space as spectator of 'local colour' wherever she goes.

She describes bus trips she has taken and markets she has visited in South America in terms strongly evocative of western tourist reminiscences or travel guides about China, exoticising the mode of transport and also (perhaps most reminiscent of western writing about China) the discomfort:

In my six months of travelling in Central and South America, I don't think I ever missed a market. Many times I would be sitting on a long-distance bus because I had heard that there was a market day somewhere, squeezed in with people, animals, goods for the market, pieces of wood. Sometimes I would be holding a little girl with a headful of lice on my lap.

Although these long-distance buses are very uncomfortable, I would never tire of sitting there for stop after stop because of the joy and surprise of the markets. The longest bus trip I took was three days and two nights...I was tired, terribly tired - even worse, they didn't stop for people to go to the toilet.

With every situation that is painful at the time, if it's only physical pain, you've forgotten it once it's over. When you think back to it you're just happy, and sometimes you even laugh. (157-8)

This balancing of the excitement of the exotic against its attendant squalor and discomfort is strongly reminiscent of the orientalist outsider's view of foreign countries found in much western travel writing. Other hallmarks of orientalist writing

too characterise her musings on her treasures and on the places where she acquired them. For example, there are hints of the macabre and the occult:

The...dolls look frightening, like some accoutrement of witchcraft. But in fact they are made from old cloth handwoven by the Indians - once [the cloth] has been worn a long time they turn it into toys for the children. (158)

The explicit connection between the dolls and witchcraft resonates strongly with one of Sally Price's observations about 'primitive art' as 'capable of evoking in Western viewers images of pagan rituals - particularly cannibalism, spirit possession, fertility rites, and forms of divination based on superstition'.⁵⁵ Although San Mao removes her treasures from discourses of 'art' as such, the appeal of the 'primitive' as 'pagan' is not only hinted at in the account of the 'witchcraft' doll but explicitly present in the small stone 'fertility goddess' from Bolivia (47).

There is also the self-conscious fantasy of a foreign dream-world:

The precious things about the effect of memory are its magical fantasies and its beauty. At least, that's how my dream of Central and South America comes and goes. No, I don't dare go back there - this way I can keep what I have created myself in my memory (231)

as well as self-conscious ideas of the superiority of the writer and the expatriate community of which she is a part :

When I think back to my days in the desert, it still seems so distant and vast; it's as if the clear cries of the goat-herding women are still sounding in my ears...

At that time, practically all of the Spanish people who stayed in the Sahara loved that land wildly...In that place with no water, no electricity, no gas and no food...there was something in this situation where we lacked material things that made us live like aristocrats in a spiritual sense. (164)

Again hardship and discomfort are exoticised. There is also an implicit reference to the fantasy of the wealthy who may choose a 'simple lifestyle' that the very lack of material possessions is somehow ennobling to the spirit. The power and privilege of the colonials is concealed here, even though San Mao tells us elsewhere that she is in a position to use her privileged situation of wealth deliberately and self-consciously to consume local culture (such as in the tapestry story cited above). Here San Mao is apparently subscribing to another common travel fallacy among post-colonial first world travellers - that is, that the hardships they undergo are the same as those experienced by the local people and that they can be at one with the local people in their suffering.

⁵⁵Price p.2.

San Mao's privileged position as colonial outsider in the desert can bring dilemmas of a more complex kind. Colonial relationships become apparent yet ambiguous on one occasion when San Mao, José and their friends go out into the desert on a camping trip. At dusk when they pitch camp and light a fire, they suddenly realise that an unknown man is standing staring at them. Nobody had seen him arrive. A Spanish woman in San Mao's party who has no experience of desert travel screams at the sight of the stranger; secure in her superior knowledge and experience, San Mao ('to show acceptance') drops what she is doing, strikes the woman who screamed and goes out to meet the stranger. Although the man can't speak much Spanish, it is established that he has come to beg for leftover food.

San Mao notes that whenever she and José travel in the desert they take along supplies of basic medicines, flour and sugar to give to people they might meet along the way who need them. They offer the man some of each; since he is tired from walking, they arrange to deliver it by car. 'Next morning', writes San Mao,

we went with him to his home - a tent, of course...The Saharan had said that he didn't live far away, but we drove for a long time before we found that lone tent ...I felt very sympathetic towards him for having walked so far; he must have started walking towards us before sunrise...

When we arrived at the tent, which had been patched and mended countless times, the women at once drew their veils shyly over their faces. There were three or four children...I didn't understand what this family - this one family - was doing living alone so far out in the wilderness...

They...had no camels, only a little flock of skinny goats, standing dully there as if they were half dead...We moved the flour, sugar and medicine. Then a black man in a robe started lighting a fire with dry branches that he had gathered, to make tea to entertain the guests. They had a petrol drum full of water and measured it out very carefully...

After we had drunk our tea we said goodbye and went home...and forgot all about it. A couple of weeks or so later, someone knocked on our door at night...outside stood the man from the tent, whom we had helped...with a black man in a robe - the one who had made the tea...

The man told us that he wanted to give us a slave, and pointed to the black man. (129-131)

Interestingly, San Mao and José do not assume the moral high ground of the liberal middle class repelled by the keeping of slaves. Their feeble protestations may perhaps be read as an attempt at cultural sensitivity.

We refused vehemently, saying our home was too small and we had no money to look after anyone, especially not a slave, and asked him not to put us in a difficult position...

But their visitor insists:

'He can sleep on the balcony. You can keep him alive on one piece of bread a day'.

I pulled at the black man's sleeve and drew him under the light to look at him. I asked him, 'Do you want to be free? If we were to take you, then let you go, you would be free. Do you want that?'

The slave was clever, and he understood me completely. When I mentioned letting him go he was terrified, and kept pulling at his owner's sleeve, saying 'No, no, no.'

'If you set him free, where would he go?' asked the owner.

'You take him back then. We won't accept this kind of present', I shouted, hiding behind José.

'Won't accept?'

'Really we can't - this is too precious a gift'.

'Then I'll give you something else', said the owner.

'Anything's fine, so long as it's not a person', I said.

He...bent over and rummaged in a flour bag and took out...a goatskin drum. We both let out our breath - it wasn't a person.

We have called the drum 'the slave' ever since. (130-1)

In this story San Mao converts a complex set of relations of power and morality into an object of consumption and entertainment. The story of a slave-owning colonised people offering their colonial masters a slave is recorded affectionately in this catalogue as an amusing tale. When San Mao and José confront a situation of moral and political complexity, the end result is an ornament for their home. The suggestion of San Mao and José as potential slave-owners adds an element of exoticism and a hint of the pleasure of the 'forbidden'. The whole story confirms their class power; they are in a social group that 'deserves' slaves, but they refuse to own them. Their refusal makes the article they receive in return seem innocuous, even though they like to preserve the slave-owning fantasy by referring to it as 'the slave'. The 'slave' drum is made exciting by the illusion of power being made innocent through the personal morality of San Mao and José.

Orientalism: Spain

It is not only the so-called third world of Africa and South America that receives San Mao's orientalisising and exoticising treatment. Her depictions of Spain are cast in similar fashion. There is an interesting interplay here between San Mao as a Chinese woman in an (initially at least) unfamiliar and exotic environment and San Mao as an international sophisticate who has apparently absorbed some of the standards and prejudices of European culture. Her affectionate writing about Spain is perhaps reminiscent of Lung-Kee Sun's suggestion that there is a resemblance in character and consequent deep fellow-feeling between the Chinese and Southern Europeans, based

on notions of collectivity, family and means of political expression.⁵⁶

San Mao tells us that she likes the 'character' of Spanish people, their 'craziness and warm-heartedness' (193) and their wine-drinking lifestyle. All of these, she says, are embodied in the Spanish wineskin she buys, of a type that is passed around at festivals and in street parades for all and sundry to drink from (192-3).

In Spain too she romanticises labour and hand craft. Her quest for hand-crafted leatherwork takes her to a saddle-maker's workshop, a small half-open shop at the corner of a 'snow-white wall'. A bent old man dressed in black is sitting in the doorway, making a rope by hand. San Mao stops to gaze sentimentally upon the picturesque scene. On entering the shop, she strokes a saddle, picturing as she does so 'a gentle little donkey' (203).

'Would you sell me this saddle? How much would it cost?' I asked warmly, dealing with this old man as gently as I could. As I spoke, I was looking at his extremely coarse hands.

'No - it's not for sale. This is the last one I'll ever make. I'm old and I can't do it any more', said old man hoarsely, without looking up.

'Is there no one studying your craft from you?' I asked.

'In this day and age? Hardly. What would a young person study this for?'

'Then would you accept me as an apprentice? I'm willing, would you take me?' ...I crouched in front of the old man and put my hands on his knees.

The old man stared at me as if uncomprehending; something intense shone out in his expression and then was gone. I caught his glance at my hands.

'My hands are small but they can be trained. I can put up with hardship, and I'm willing to, I can be patient, will you take me?' I was still kneeling in front of old man, unwilling to get up. (203-4)

We are not told of the old man's response - San Mao's romantic gesture is evidently more important than what the old man makes of it - but San Mao tells us that when she decides to make a purchase

the old man didn't let me pay for it, wouldn't take any money, saying he wanted to give it to me... 'In these times, if there's still some one like you who appreciates hand workmanship, that makes us friends. Money! What does that wretched stuff have to do with it?' (204)

Thus the old man is presented as colluding in San Mao's fantasy of emotional exchange. The picture of Spain which San Mao projects here is of a simple, innocent land, picturesque and charming, where young people might not study saddle-making but old men are quaint and responsive to San Mao's particular brand of sentiment.

⁵⁶See Lung-Kee Sun (Sun Longji), *The 'Deep Structure' of Chinese Culture (Zhongguo wenhua de 'shenceng jiegou')* Hong Kong: Jixian She publishers, 1983), 45-6.

Spain's ambivalent position as the exotic 'poor relation' (indeed, the 'Orient') of Europe combined with its 'innocence' vis-a-vis China (since, unlike so many European countries, it has no history of colonial involvement there) makes it possible for San Mao to present Spain as an appealing vision of handcraft and joyful sharing. In Spain as elsewhere, San Mao's target items are 'folk' handcrafts; Spain and its colonies together are linked into San Mao's romantic world where industry, capitalism and political inequality do not intrude.

Orientalism: Elsewhere

Although a superficial first impression of San Mao's travels (and perhaps the image she wishes to create) is of a free spirit roaming the world, her itineraries are, on the whole, structured around the Spanish empire. She remarks elsewhere on how convenient the prevalence of the Spanish language is in the countries she visits; no doubt some cultural superimpositions are familiar to her as well. The Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking worlds are obviously convenient targets for San Mao's shopping expeditions, but her apparent lack of interest in and contact with Southeast Asia seems nonetheless surprising, especially in the light of its proximity to Taiwan and its large ethnic Chinese populations. One could speculate that Southeast Asia is too close at hand to be exotic enough for her - or perhaps it is too accessible to San Mao's readers for her to be able to turn it convincingly into her own unique romantic brand of story (although given her exoticising treatment of Taiwan, familiarity with the subject on the part of readers is not necessarily a barrier to San Mao's exoticising imagination).

Although San Mao does not visit Southeast Asia herself in *My Treasures*, her parents do. 'All of my family have been to Thailand', she tells us, 'because its exotic flavour is so beautiful; they go whenever they have the chance' (195). Thus we discover that San Mao sees parts of Asia as exotic, which may or may not suggest westernised notions of the East and of what constitutes the exotic - as noted above, it is not only the west that may find 'others' 'exotic'.

Like Southeast Asia, South Asia scarcely features in San Mao's travel and consumption experiences. She does, however, have one noteworthy second-hand encounter with India when she buys an Indian bracelet from a shop in the Canary Islands owned by an Indian man. He is one of the shopkeepers whom San Mao counts among her friends, and one day he takes San Mao to his home in an old part of town. San Mao's lush description of his house is suggestive of the lavish palace of some oriental potentate:

The house itself was a work of art. The ceiling of one room was made entirely of glass, and the sunlight through the glass shone upon a host of stone statues from the Renaissance, ivories as big as arched doors, platters of purple crystals, shelves of gold-leafed books from the Middle Ages; the floor was covered with Chinese porcelain vases; there were crystal chandeliers, full sets of antique silver, several hundred rosaries of different precious stones, several hundred enormous handwoven tapestries, big music boxes that you could open to play hundreds of tunes, inlaid marble tables, more than 200 antique clocks, a wall full of Italian reliefs...he also had paintings by the great Renaissance painter Rafael. (217)

Inspired by the aura of oriental mystery of the house, San Mao's thoughts turn to exotic intrigue

I had a wicked thought; I thought I'd like go all out to seduce him and marry him and then wait for him to die and then these things would all be mine...But then I thought...if he was to find out my plan he'd poison me first. (217)

The Indian object which San Mao is to buy (a 'blood-red ivory bracelet') is made mysterious with a suitably macabre tale from the exotic orient. San Mao asks how the blood red colour is applied, and the dealer replies:

This is a grave good. Not all Indian corpses were burnt; they were buried as well. It's the blood from the corpse which accumulated over the years and was absorbed by the ivory. (218)

Although San Mao scoffs at this explanation, the dealer goes on to remind her that Chinese jade with a reddish tinge is also considered particularly valuable. She is forced to admit that she is unable to explain where the red colour comes from - thus preserving intact one of the mysteries of the East.

Representing China

As San Mao travels around the world her Chinese identity is self-conscious. She often speaks of being the only Chinese present, the sole representative of China in the desert or the person known to everyone in the Canary Islands because she is the only Chinese there. She tells of the many gifts she has received from 'foreign' friends, neighbours and acquaintances, demonstrating how much she as a Chinese can be appreciated by Europeans - a garment made for her by a Spanish friend, a bracelet from a Swiss woman, and priceless antique Mauritanian scrolls from an English neighbour (164-5; 166-172; 101-107).

Twice in foreign countries San Mao is given gifts simply *because* she is Chinese. On the first occasion, she is given 'an old style Spanish pharmacy jar', a gift from the local Spanish pharmacy out of their 'total respect and reverence for

Chinese medicine' (98). On the second occasion a young Swiss man in the Canary Islands presents her with a sandalwood box on their first and only meeting, saying, 'You are Chinese: do you play mahjong?' Although she replies that does not, he insists that she take it. The mahjong set is a valuable one, handcarved ivory on bamboo, given to the man's parents on their honeymoon in China many years previously by a Jewish friend and his Chinese wife with whom they stayed in Shanghai. During their stay, which lasted several months, they had learned to play mahjong. 'See, today it has come back into a Chinese person's hands', says the man as he hands the mahjong set to San Mao (80). Evidently the young man feels that this personal action is an appropriate or 'right' thing to do, perhaps indeed a gesture of 'cultural repatriation' based on notions of 'moral ownership'. Paradoxically, as this gift that had represented China for the parents is 'returned' to a representative of China, the use value that it had had for its previous owners recedes; unlike the Swiss man's parents, San Mao does not play mahjong. But like all of San Mao's treasures, it is invested with both sentimental and ornamental values as another 'exotic' (albeit Chinese) item as she displays it as a trophy in this collection.

Thus San Mao presents to her (Chinese) readers a China which commands the respect of the world for its own commodities. In addition, she displays her own Chinese identity to the rest of the world by consuming Chinese objects. Ironically, she describes her antique silk skirt as 'the first Chinese object I bought'. Having been brought up in Taiwan, she would of course have been consuming Chinese objects all her life - but somehow she does not appear to perceive her own life or the objects in it as 'Chinese' until she goes abroad and either becomes the 'other' herself or begins to perceive China as 'other'.

She explains how she came by the skirt:

I always choose clothes that have a natural style...none of the fashionable clothes in the shop windows suit my tastes. They're so formal, they should be for people who go to work every day ... I...don't look at the clothes shops at all - I go directly to Guanghai market to look at old books.

On the second floor of the old book market, in a tiny antique shop...I saw the red antique skirt.

...as I took it and looked carefully at the hand workmanship...I felt a mysterious love and pleasure in my heart! (31-2)

The skirt transports San Mao nostalgically back in time and into fiction, where Lin Daiyu, heroine of the classic 18th century Chinese novel *Hong Lou Meng*⁵⁷ is wearing this very skirt. Back in the present, the skirt matches San Mao's sandals

⁵⁷Known in English as *The Story of the Stone* or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

perfectly. 'Lin Daiyu was helping me get what I wanted - she wasn't at all mean. She wanted me to buy it, so I wore it home!' she exclaims. Later San Mao finds another antique skirt and she fantasises that it is the very one that was given by Xue Baochai to the maid Xiren in the same novel. She wears the skirts as a demonstration of her Chineseness to the west:

When I wear this skirt on the streets of Europe, there is always some woman who stops me and wants to look closely at the hand embroidery. I am always happy whenever someone wants to look at my skirt. If anyone asks me where they can buy one, I say 'A Chinese woman called Lin gave it to me - they are not easy to find'...

This summer I will wear them again and wonder about my own personality: how much of me is Lin Daiyu and how much is Baochai?
(32-3)

Despite San Mao's assurances about her clothing preferences, it is difficult to see expensive heavily-embroidered silken skirts from last century as simple and natural. Nonetheless, seeing in herself the heroines of China's most famous novel, San Mao self-consciously wears ancient China on the streets of Europe and shows herself integrating it into a harmonious present.

The folk and their art

Apart from the silk skirts and a few pieces of jewellery from Hong Kong, most of the items of Chinese origin in San Mao's collection are 'folk art', purchased after her return to Taiwan. The 1970s and 1980s in Taiwan saw a vogue for 'folk art' which went hand in hand with the 'nativist' movement in literature and art whose political corollary was Taiwanese independence. There are obvious parallels between this phenomenon and the tendency to exalt and exoticise peasant culture which accompanied the rise of nationalism along with modernism in Europe. The 'folk art' spoken of by San Mao here consists of 'useful objects' such as ceramic or wooden vessels and kitchen utensils of a kind that modern urban dwellers no longer use; in collecting such items she demonstrates the modern nostalgia 'for use value, for objects that characterised the pre-industrial village economy' which, 'surviving their original contexts, are seen as traces of the way of life that once surrounded them'; each one bearing 'the burden of nostalgia for...the experience of the family, the village, the firsthand community'.⁵⁸

As is the case with her possessions gathered in the rest of the world, the objects of practical use which San Mao acquires in Taiwan become recontextualised to

⁵⁸*On Longing*, 144, 140.

fulfil a purely decorative function. Her purchase of the everyday objects of an idealised Chinese village life as aesthetic items is consistent with the pattern of buying peasant items with the appeal of 'authenticity' from all over the world, exemplifying the nostalgia noted above that embraces the exotic and the past.⁵⁹ The gaze which exoticises and aestheticises the 'past' as represented by the rural embraces the local as well as the foreign, allowing the consumer to fantasise this peasant past as her own present. This shift of focus to the near-at-hand may indeed be a necessary consequence of the desire for the exotic; as Susan Stewart has pointed out that 'once the exotic experience is readily purchasable by a large segment of the tourist population, either more and more exotic experiences are sought...or, in a type of reverse snobbery, there is a turning toward the "classic" of the consumer's native culture'.⁶⁰ Strictly speaking, Taiwan's 'classic' folk arts are not, of course, 'native' for San Mao at all, given that she was not born in Taiwan and both of her parents were mainlanders. After her family moved to Taiwan in 1948, when she was five years old, she is likely to have preserved some sense of being an 'outsider' there, particularly in view of the continuing mainland focus of many such immigrant families (who tended to regard their stay in Taiwan as only a sojourn until they would return to a Nationalist mainland) and their natural identification as outsiders (*waishengren*) by native Taiwanese. Despite (or perhaps because of) this outsider status, San Mao draws heavily on rhetoric of love for the land, neighbourliness and belonging in her descriptions of Taiwan and its 'folk artefacts'.⁶¹ There is perhaps an unspoken uncertainty or tension here regarding what is 'her own' in Taiwan and what is not. The world may be hers but, owing to political factors related to her immigrant/coloniser status, Taiwan perhaps is not. Yet, as we might have come to

⁵⁹ Although the notion of the 'authenticity of the 'firsthand community' has already been discussed at some length, it seems relevant here to refer to Appadurai's comments about the purchase and recontextualisation of the 'community's' practical everyday objects. He has noted that it is in 'the domain of fashion, domestic display and collecting in the modern West' that this 'diversion of commodities from their original nexus' takes place, when 'the functionality of...workplaces is diverted to household aesthetics...the everyday commodity is framed and aestheticized; this 'aesthetics of decontextualization (itself driven by the quest for novelty)...is at the heart of the display, in highbrow Western homes, of the tools and artifacts of the 'other': the Turkmen saddlebag, Masai spear, Dinka basket. In these objects, we see not only the equation of the authentic with the exotic everyday object...This enhancement of value through the diversion of commodities from their customary circuits underlies...the purchase and display of 'primitive' utilitarian objects, the framing of 'found' objects, the making of collections of any sort' (Appadurai p.28). The connection can be made again to Price's 'capital-W Western'; San Mao too exhibits these tendencies and tastes, and her diversion of exoticised everyday objects (both into display in her home and into a published collection) demonstrates this same aesthetics of decontextualisation.

⁶⁰ *On Longing*, 148.

⁶¹ See stories 75, 82, 83 and 84 for particularly striking examples of this.

expect, there are no evident political considerations in her enthusiastic embracing of things Taiwanese. Notions of a distinctive Taiwanese culture and Taiwanese nationhood do not intersect for San Mao.

San Mao is an enthusiastic participant in the vogue for 'folk art' in Taiwan. 'Collecting folk objects', she cries, 'is like playing mahjong - you inevitably become addicted. To deal with this bottomless pit, you have to...find ways to pass the time, otherwise you'll just keep on indulging, and that happiness...will send you insane' (253).

She tells us that she loves all folk objects:

Folk things, old things, embroidery, woodcarving...we...talked about them all...people who saw us must have thought we were discussing the lottery - why else would we both be looking so happy? (248)

but makes the decision to confine her collection of folk art to jars and not buy any other items:

I thought and thought about it: what I don't get tired of looking at is jars. If a jar isn't for pickled vegetables then it's for sprouting bean sprouts or for some other useful purpose - but they are different colours, different sizes and different shapes - also, they have been used by the common people, so on a spiritual level they are full of the emotions of life. They are replete with that most simple and honest flavour of clay, and there is a kind of 'human' kindness in them. This 'humanity' is the common folk of earlier times, who wore clothes, ate vegetables and pickled them, just the same as we do. So, faced with this bottomless pit of antiques and folk objects, I have decided only to collect one thing: jars. (260)

With these fantasies of the simple, honest and kind 'folk' San Mao exoticises both the poor and the past yet again.

Her search for the authentic folk item takes her on frequent buying trips to rural Taiwan, where she purchases first and evaluates later⁶²:

Once I went with two friends to Huandao. I stopped at every village and shop to go and look for bowls till my friends moaned and complained, saying they had nowhere to put their feet - the floor of the car was covered in bowls and plates.

These were not particularly fine examples, but I didn't evaluate them carefully until I got back to Taipei. At the time, I just bought all of them that I wanted. (183)

In a later story, we find San Mao telling her friends that she cannot invite them to dine at her home because she doesn't have enough bowls to be able to serve

⁶²A technique she rejects elsewhere in the world; speaking of shopping for jewellery at a market in Seattle, she remarks that she will only buy something that is a true masterpiece and claims that buying in large quantities only brings trouble. (88)

them with food; she claims never to have thought of these treasured items (of which she has more than a hundred) as useable objects. Indeed it is not until a member of the urban working class 'folk' (whom she encounters when she hires him to help her move house) points out what a lot of bowls she has that she discovers their use value.⁶³ When she does begin to make practical use the 'rough' handpainted bowls in her collection, she fantasises about consuming the food of the poor, rural 'other' to match their bowls:

It's best not to put white rice into bowls like this; I should add some sweet potato...then perhaps it will have more of a rural flavour. (206)⁶⁴

As noted above, there is ample precedent in the Chinese tradition for the collection of the old, the simple, the curious, and even the ugly; but the preference for the simple, the antique, the 'authentic' is also a modern and international middle class phenomenon. San Mao's search for authenticity brings her to select souvenirs of the rural poor not only in foreign lands but in Taiwan as well.

While San Mao and her shopping companions disdain the mass-produced stock in crockery shops and ask for old hand-painted crockery instead, sending crockery vendors rummaging around in old cupboards and corners to locate old bowls, she tells us that the local noodle seller (again one of the urban 'folk') recommends bowls made of plastic as being more hygienic and less likely to harbour germs (206). Evidently the international sophisticate San Mao has passed beyond the modernising preoccupation with cleanliness to the appreciation of the grimy 'authenticity' of pre-industrial objects. Her quest for the authentic folk artefact even leads her to the grime of the rubbish cart:

I...caught sight of a...rubbish cart passing slowly by. What good things were hidden in that rubbish? I was inspired, I wanted to follow the cart and find out...I rushed out to follow the rubbish cart, and

⁶³*My Treasures*, 206. San Mao is not always amenable to the idea of sullyng her treasures through 'use'. She tells of an occasion on which she is buying yet another bowl and the proprietor of the folk-artefact shop suggests to her that it would be very suitable for arranging flowers in. 'All she talked about was function, function and function again - she was a thoroughly practical character. But I wouldn't ever use it for putting flowers in...I wouldn't let any flowers rob it of its elegance - it shouldn't be allowed to come down in the world like that' (p244). This fanciful logic on San Mao's part subsumes the 'authentic' history of the bowl as a vessel for grinding mochi paste in (243). This particular encounter ends with the saleswoman asking if she may have her photograph taken with San Mao in return for a folk jar, to which she happily agrees (244).

⁶⁴The choice of sweet potatoes to represent the quintessential rural Taiwan has a significance beyond the importance of sweet potatoes as a staple peasant food. The term 'sweet potatoes' has been widely used in Taiwan to refer to local Taiwan-born Chinese, as opposed to the 'taros' who came from mainland China with the Nationalists in 1949 (San Mao, of course, among them). I am grateful to Lewis Mayo for reminding me of this point.

yelled out loudly 'Stop!...Please stop the cart, I'll help you push it to the side of the road', I cried out to the woman, who had already climbed off her cart. She was quite at a loss, obviously not knowing what I was obstructing her for.

We had hardly pushed the cart to the roadside before I had pulled off all of the cardboard boxes, broken wooden crates, worn out shoes and old buckets. I reached out my hands and a clay urn fell into them...we found one clay jar after another, eleven in all, of various sizes. (208-9)

The woman is evidently not sure how much to charge for the job lot; in a now familiar gesture, San Mao assures her she won't bargain but will pay whatever she asks. She asks for \$100 and is given \$120. As is so often the case with her purchases in foreign countries, San Mao feels apologetic, thinking that she has got the best of the woman. Her scruples, however, do not move her to offer more.⁶⁵

In general, San Mao's consumption behaviour is even less scrupulous in Taiwan than elsewhere. No veneer of affection obscures her quest for the objects she wants to purchase. San Mao gives a strikingly unapologetic example of exploitative shopping when she and her friends hire trucks to go on a three-day shopping expedition for folk antiques (the need for trucks evidently indicating a desire to buy in considerable bulk). Their purpose is thwarted, however, by suspicious peasants who are reluctant to sell.

None of the country people were willing to sell. Not even things that they just left outside in the wind and rain - when we pulled up in the car and said we wanted to buy them, the old women...became agitated and said 'It's not for sale, it's not for sale'. One old man was even more interesting; he treated his pots and mortars and pestles as treasures and put them all under his bed, afraid that they'd be stolen. When we asked him to name a price...he replied with a ridiculous sum that made us double up with laughter. (232-3)

There is a clear double standard here, as San Mao scoffs at an old man for regarding as treasures the very things that she herself sees as treasures. Obviously only someone with her own level of education, travel experience and international sophistication is qualified to judge what is truly a treasure; for an elderly peasant to speak of 'treasures' is merely laughable, even when San Mao considers the same items to be 'treasures' too.

Despite the difficulties they place in the way of San Mao's rabid wish to consume, she considers these old people quaint and appealing - the interesting old man in the above story and the agitated old woman in the story below are true

⁶⁵ Although San Mao and her companions covet these jars as purely aesthetic objects, they speculate about the use to which they might have been put by the 'folk'; they cannot agree on whether they might have been used for housing bone ash after cremations (again the hint of the macabre that distances the object further into the realm of the exotic) or for pickling vegetables (210).

'characters'. 'The most interesting thing about that sort of trip', she tells us, 'is not searching for things but talking to these old men and women. It can make you happy for a long, long time' (233).

After two days, San Mao's party has not been able to buy anything at all. Their last hope is the folk art shops.

When we surged into a folk antique shop - over a dozen of us - the old woman in the shop just couldn't keep her eye on all of us. These 15 or so people filled every corner of the small shop, which was also her home, picking up things on every side and putting them down again so the old woman kept having to spin around. I could see that she was agitated.

There was no way she could watch all of us, and she couldn't keep us in line. The quiet little shop had gone mad.

I was the first to go out to the place where the well was, outside the kitchen, and there were almost 100 jars of all sizes piled there...My friends eyed some of the jars saying they wanted to take them back to put flowers in. If they were going to put flowers in them, they would have to test them to make sure they didn't leak.

The old woman kept saying, 'They don't leak, they don't leak'.

How could we believe that? We picked up her dipper and...poured a brimming jug of water into the pot...

I heard the old woman saying 'This is our dining table - don't move it!'

But who was taking any notice of her? we moved the dining table to the doorway into the sunlight to see the result.

It was chaotic - the air was full of offers and counter offers on all sides.

The old woman cried out bitterly, 'No, no'.

Taking advantage of all this chaos, I quietly picked up...a clay stool. I didn't dare call out, afraid that if my friends...saw it they would want to take it...Just when the hubbub was almost over and people had bought a lot of things, the old woman cried out as if she was in distress. The children with us...had filled all of the hundred or so pots with water and were checking them to see which few didn't leak. With great effort, the old woman picked up her big water vat - it was completely empty. (233-4)

Behaviour even less reasonable than that described in San Mao's stories of shopping in foreign countries is here recounted as an amusing anecdote; the shopkeeper attempting to assert her rights is presented as a comic figure. San Mao does not affect the same level of sentimental attachment to vendors in Taiwan as she did in South America. Although she constructs the physical environment and culture of Taiwan in a similar way to the third world cultures where she travels and consumes (that is, as desirably exotic - as will be illustrated below), her buying and selling relationships in Taiwan are to some extent exempt from the exoticisation and sentiment that attends them elsewhere. Taiwan may merit the same glow of cultural exoticism as other countries, but San Mao can shop there without any of the emotional and ethical

questions of buying elsewhere. There is yet another double standard operating here, in that the same behaviour occasions guilt abroad and amusement at home.

To leave the reader in no doubt about the 'amusing' (and perhaps, it is hinted, insincere) nature of the shopkeeper's behaviour, San Mao ends this anecdote with the words

The most interesting thing about that trip to Jiayi was hearing the old woman crying out on several occasions. I think she did good business that day - she even sold her dining table in the end. (234)

This is not San Mao's only story about questionable means of acquisition of goods in Taiwan. On another shopping expedition outside Taipei, San Mao is unable to sleep and goes for a late-night stroll.

As I was walking I saw a black dog by the ditch eating its dinner out of an old bowl.

When I saw that dog's bowl, my steps were transfixed and I waited in the darkness until it had finished eating so I would be able to take the bowl.

That stupid dog thought someone was trying to steal its food, and it advanced threateningly towards me...

I considered...Firstly, there was this fierce dog and secondly, things wouldn't look good if the owner came out to catch the thief. I thought again, crossed the ditch and went into the town.

In the town, she buys a new bowl.

When I returned, the dog was nowhere to be seen. There were no people either. Only the old bowl was there, licked completely clean. I crouched down and quickly took the old bowl, putting the new one in its place...I didn't dare walk too fast - although I was frightened, I walked away at the pace of someone out for a stroll. I didn't dare look back until I had walked some way. Once I knew I was safe, I washed the bowl in the ditch under a street light...I took back enough bowls and plates [from that trip] to open a shop. (183-4)

The motivation for this somewhat bizarre and excessive means of acquisition is not entirely clear. Presumably San Mao could have negotiated with the owner of both the dog and the bowl. Perhaps it is the frisson of the illicit that causes her to reject this obvious course of action, or perhaps a fear that the owner would refuse to sell. Alternatively, one suspects that she might have been afraid that, once the owner realised the bowl was of value to her, he or she might have demanded a higher price than she would have been willing to pay.⁶⁶ This collection of stories gives the reader

⁶⁶Her desire for the dog's bowl may also partake of the desire of the 'connoisseur' to 'rescue' objects that are not sufficiently cared for where they are, in the same way as some collectors have justified their 'sometimes irregular methods of acquisition' in terms of their supposed ability to treat the objects with greater care than the original producers and owners would, and to preserve them for posterity. (see Price pp75-77).

the strong impression that San Mao likes to acquire things that she both values herself and considers to be of absolute value for a price that is in no way commensurate with this value (even though it may accord with its market value). Here, such considerations are simply bypassed by means of a furtive and secret exchange.

As noted above, although San Mao evidently has occasional compunctions about her purchasing behaviour in certain foreign countries, and disguises or excuses it by means of protestations of emotion, she appears quite indifferent to issues of morality and exploitation when she shops in Taiwan. This reveals a basic ambivalence in her attitude to Taiwan; it is touristic in the sense that the objects she wishes to consume there are 'exotic' and 'ethnic', and the people are quaint and exotic too - but because Taiwan is also her home territory she does not need to display the reverent embarrassment and mystic affection she affects for the peasants of South America, or even the hint at guilt attending her questionable buying tactics in the Sahara. Rudeness and rapacity are apparently quite acceptable at home in Taiwan. San Mao seems to have no need to feel nostalgia and tenderness for these people.

Consumption spaces (and tourist sites) have been hypothesised as liminal zones where shoppers or tourists are freed from certain social constraints that condition their behaviour elsewhere.⁶⁷ Does this mean that San Mao is at home everywhere except in Taiwan? The world is 'hers'; is Taiwan 'hers' too? Her shopping behaviour in Taiwan might indicate that her relationship with Taiwan and its people is essentially that of the tourist, for whom the excitement and novelty of the experience can subsume the requirements of politeness and considerate behaviour. Or could it rather be the case that because she is 'at home' in Taiwan she can shop unhampered by the postcolonial guilts which (although she makes light of them) might lurk behind her consumption adventures elsewhere - without acknowledging that they might be present in Taiwan as well?

Exoticisation of home

The ultimate conclusion of San Mao's self-conscious fantasy of herself freely at play in a post-colonial world is that home is best after all.⁶⁸ But in Taiwan she is somehow at home and a tourist at the same time, exoticising and fetishising the everyday but persistently protesting the ordinariness of it all. This presentation of 'Asia' as extraordinary and exotic reveals an interesting tension between San Mao's Chineseness and

⁶⁷*The Tourist Gaze*, 100-104, 138; Shields in *Lifestyle Shopping*, 8.

⁶⁸It has already been noted that San Mao was not born in Taiwan; her upbringing there from early childhood and residence there until the age of 24 would qualify it as 'home' by most standards.

her 'outsider' status after her years abroad - and perhaps also some internalization of those 'Western concepts concerning the Other' referred to above.

After travelling the world for fourteen years, San Mao finds her utopian dream in Taiwan, among labourers in the countryside. An uncomfortable journey by truck along a dry bumpy stony riverbed takes San Mao and her companions to 'a village like a poem or a painting', and a kiln on the hillside above it where 'people were living in a painting, making ceramics'. 'The peacefulness of that ...place', San Mao tells us, 'was like something outside this human world' (150).

Like the landscape, the people are idealised:

She was a young woman out of a painting, with long hair, in a simple T shirt and trousers and no makeup, with features as clear as a quiet scene in springtime...

The woman, whose name was Meihua, serenely picked up a pot of water to make...tea. What kind of person was she, hiding here like an immortal?...

Gentle rain was falling on the pond, in which were lotus flowers...It was so still that you could hear the wind in the treetops...so still that people and clay merged into one, so still that I didn't wish to utter a single word...

I said to myself...'I envy her...if only I could be her. There is no one in the world more beautiful than she'.

As I have borne my fate throughout my life, I have never...envied anyone, never wanted to be anyone - only this once, my dreams alighted on this woman who made pots...

When will I be able to cast off everything and go and be someone who makes pots and looks at the wild flowers? If that day ever comes, it will be the beginning of happiness and freedom. (224-6)

The life of the kiln workers, and in particular the person of Meihua, is idealised to such an extent that the fantasy momentarily engulfs the desire to consume. The consumption experience is almost forgotten among these fond dreams; it is only when Meihua asks her what she would like to buy that San Mao comes to herself again and chooses an unfired pot.

Having idealised the countryside of Taiwan, San Mao applies her exoticising and idealising treatment to city life in Taipei as well. She presents her own life in the city as a fantasy of urban vitality, variety and neighbourliness every bit as desirable as the peaceful and beautiful mountain retreat of the kiln workers. Her ode to the liveliness and energy of Taipei sentimentalises and exoticises the small alley in which she lives, creating a walk through a 'neighbourhood' as she itemises the shops and street scenes in the touristic style of a guide book, complete with frisson of horrified glee over chicken-killing and blood:

I often ask myself, 'Can someone who has wandered all over the

world live peacefully in one lane?' The answer is 'Yes - and live a life full of vitality too' ...

No metropolis in the world can equal the vigour of Taipei. Let's look at the lane where I live. Come in from the hotpot shop at the beginning of the lane, and you can buy fruit - you can also see people making crispy-ash chicken, puffing rice and making cakes. You can go past the cafe... You can look into the pharmacy... you can go next door to the stationers and leaf through some colourful magazines... there are things hanging in the window of the roast meat shop that will make you salivate. If you should happen to remember suddenly that you are almost out of cigarettes, that little stall on the corner is bound to have them... you can... go and take a look at the art prints hanging in front of the glazier's, and you can buy maybe a little round mirror. It's easy to find a watch for NT\$90 in Taiwan, so if your watch isn't working, just throw it away! Go into the shop that sells watches and glasses to look at one and, if you go and chat with the owner, perhaps you'll buy a big wall clock as well.

...the rows of meat and vegetable stalls on the right of the lane look like a watercolour painting... You... buy a piece of betel nut to chew on then you ask at the Chinese pharmacy for some herbs... Then... someone can kill a fowl for you - it's quite awful, and they'll ask you if you want the blood. If you aren't too afraid, you can take a plastic bag of blood home with you.

Maybe carrying the blood will make you feel sick, so you stop off next at the flower seller and buy a big bunch of lilies. Then perhaps you don't have any milk... or bread... so you go on a few paces. Once you've bought the milk, you can call out to the young man who fixes air-conditioning ...

You wave to the hairdresser and call 'I'd like my hair washed after dinner'. When you're almost home again, you remember your that your niece has just had a baby... so you don't go home but go to the jeweller's and bargain for a little gold lock. Then the owner of the photo shop greets you, saying 'The enlargements of your family photos are ready. They're lovely'.

...The young apprentice from the garage smiles at you, and you suddenly start to discuss buying a bicycle with him... Then you are transfixed in front of the aquarium, watching the fluorescent fish.

...Then you go to the pet shop, the electrical repair shop, the paint shop, the typist, the tea seller, the Buddhist supply shop, the hardware shop, the laundry, the beef noodle shop, the soup stall... and then home...

Yes, the boundless universe described above can all be seen and heard and lived in this one short street in Taipei. Even if you live your whole life here, every day is different - including all of those chickens being killed.

So the 7 months I've lived in Taipei have been spent in this lane, and I'm so busy I can't fit everything in. (245-7)

It seems strange that San Mao should take such pains to describe the minutiae of urban life in Taipei when most of her intended readers might be expected to have some degree of familiarity with Taiwanese city life. Maybe this affirmation of Taipei's merits can be made convincing and authoritative to her audience because she has

travelled so widely; if someone familiar with the capital cities of Europe can express such enthusiasm about Taipei, then the city and lifestyle must indeed be truly distinctive and an occasion for national pride⁶⁹. Perhaps also San Mao's careful explanations of Taiwan life, even down to a definition of the Chinese word for 'alley', attest to her own cultural confusion and alienation after so long an absence. There is something excessive about her eulogies which is reminiscent of the attitudes of cultural cringe exhibited by so many expatriates who return home after long absences and protest theatrically that they could never live anywhere else. Urry and others have suggested that people in the post-modern world have become so alienated from the former stabilising aspects of life ('losing attachments to work bench, neighbourhood, town, family etc.') that they have begun to look for real life elsewhere and thus to view everything and every place with the gaze of a tourist.⁷⁰ This may well have been the case for San Mao, whose writing exoticises foreign countries and home in equal measure, seeking out the 'non-auratic' and the 'backstage' experience of authenticity, and looking for 'real life' in the lives and everyday activities of others.

After her eulogy to the gritty urban vitality of Taipei, San Mao reminds her readers of how far Taiwan has come in the past two decades in terms of consumption opportunities:

Twenty years ago when I left Taiwan a friend gave me a little cluster of three cowbells. At that time no one valued native things. I remember too that you couldn't buy ready-made clothes in Taipei then; if you wanted clothes you had to go to the western tailor. Taking the cloth already cut, you'd sit on a stool leafing through American magazines and then when you saw the pattern you wanted you'd ask the tailor to make it up for you. And you had to go to town and buy the buttons yourself. That was a time when we worshipped the west, partly because there weren't many things in Taiwan. (213)

Now, she maintains, Taiwan is as good as or better than anywhere else, measuring its value in terms of 'things' Paradoxically, it is precisely because of her experiences elsewhere in the world that San Mao can claim supremacy for the lifestyle and cultural products of Taiwan. However, occasional hints of European superiority remain to remind her readers of her international sophistication, with Europe presented as centre and standard. San Mao claims to have a 'half-Spanish soul' (110); she remarks regretfully that only sweet wine is drunk in Taiwan, as opposed to the bitter taste that she acquired a liking for in Spain (194); she is astonished that rich people on Taiwan

⁶⁹There seems to be some resonance here with the determined characterisation of Toronto as a 'world class' city noted by Margaret Atwood in her novel *Cat's Eye*: (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1989), p.14.

⁷⁰*The Tourist Gaze*, 8.

television hold their wineglasses incorrectly (195); she likes to drink iced tea with sugar rather than Chinese-style tea (247). Folk pottery in Taiwan, she claims, is as good as that of Europe (244), thus reasserting the cultural hegemony of Europe even as she would ostensibly deny it. San Mao remarks that Taiwan's 'worship of the west is not decreasing but it isn't thoroughgoing enough either' (195). She herself, of course, has the best of both worlds. She understands both the 'Asian' aesthetic and the tastes of Europe, and can appreciate the folk art of Taiwan as well as the great European masters.

Where East and West meet: unified by consumption

In *My Treasures*, San Mao tells us of her unique ability to make objects come alive with her personality and creativity. She speaks of a piece of embroidered Indian cloth bought by her German neighbour, which doesn't look right whatever the neighbour does with it. San Mao

picked it up and folded it casually into a triangle; putting it around my shoulders, I smiled and said, 'How does it look?'
Before she even answered I had shaken the cloth out and wrapped it around my waist. 'Now it's a skirt', I said. (191)

But it is not just San Mao's personal flair that makes the cloth look right. It is her Asianness.

That golden-haired woman smiled and said, 'There's nothing else for it - you're from the Orient; something like this, these colours, it has to go with a black-haired person. It doesn't fit here at my place'.
I said to her, 'This isn't meant to be a piece of clothing. Try it if you don't believe me - hang it on the wall, put it over the back of a chair, put it diagonally across a table - it would look good any of those ways'.
'It should still be at your place', she said.
So I took the coloured cloth and went home. I threw it down casually and it came alive. At my house, it was as if the four birds in the pattern began to sing.
I went back to the German woman and said... 'You were right; it looks right at my place, so let me have it'. (191)

San Mao may be invested with European or international taste, but she also has an extra dimension of taste, an adaptability and practical flair that is presented to San Mao's Chinese readers through the eyes of her German neighbour. San Mao seems to agree with the neighbour that some Asian essence makes her (and not the neighbour) the rightful possessor of a cloth from India. Furthermore it is San Mao (and again not the neighbour) who is able to recontextualize objects in ways that ostensibly improve on their original function.

Moving between East and West, it is by consumption that San Mao identifies herself with the surrounding community. In Taiwan she collects native folk art. Abroad, she identifies with her peers in Spain:

In Spanish homes, married women, more than 90% of them, have a rosary hanging on the wall above their beds.

When I got married, I wanted one of those big rosaries too to hang on the wall. (120-1)

and in the Sahara:

Not every woman in the desert has [an amulet], but if you have one it's a family heirloom; it will hang around your neck all your life, and only after you are dead will it be taken by the family and passed on to your daughter or daughter-in-law.

In 1983 when I was going to get married I wanted an amulet to hang around my neck, just like the adult women of the desert. (58)

In San Mao's world of equality by consumption, she can 'belong' and become 'local' anywhere. Ironically, this identification by consumption sometimes involves dubious purchasing behaviour - exploiting people in order to be one of them. Even more ironically, her very attempts to be part of a scene can mark her off as an outsider, as for example when she describes how she feels when she visits markets in South America.

South American markets are a succession of fantastic dreams. Sleeping in an inn, I could hear the crowds of people arriving before 4am. From the window I would watch the long line of Indian women with wares to sell, carrying them on their heads, pulling them in carts, or carrying them on horses; that cacophony of voices, that flourishing vitality pouring out in the streets that were still dark was very exciting. Perhaps in a previous life I was an Indian woman - otherwise, how is it that when I see this kind of scene I want to cry? (158)

San Mao would evidently like to think that her emotional response to the market indicates a mystic communion with the local people. In reality, it would seem to be only the outsider, the person to whom the market is a new and exotic world, who would find in it an occasion for weepy emotion.

The desire to identify and to belong need not, however, be a problem in San Mao's world of travel and consumption.⁷¹ With the international tastes San Mao has

⁷¹San Mao's readers are invited to join in and belong too. At the end of the book, three pages are left blank save for line drawings of two of San Mao's treasures (the desert amulet and the 'slave drum') and the words, 'Please put your treasure in the space below and record its story'. Readers' participation is clearly to be subordinated to San Mao's; one treasure compared with a whole bookful, sharing space on the page with two treasures of San Mao's which were there first. Readers are exhorted to participate further by giving copies of the book to their close friends, because 'what you give will be not only a story but also a big pile of...so-called treasures'. (269). Thus consumption of the book by the reader (and San Mao's consequent financial profit) becomes a loving gesture between friends rather

acquired she can shop freely everywhere. In selecting items to purchase and thus create and express her identity, she is self-consciously a 'citizen of the world'. *My Treasures* illustrates the internationalisation of consumption and demonstrates the effect of global shopping in reinforcing differences in power between nations and individuals - but San Mao is at pains to state the opposite. She presents her internationalised taste and consumption as a parable of world peace, a global unifier whereby the world can meet in her own person through what she has purchased:

I looked at myself: 'Kansas City, USA' was woven into my sweater...I had a necklace from Chiang Mai...around my neck...the jeans I was wearing were bought in Shilin⁷², my boots were from Spain, my bag was from Costa Rica, and my jacket was from Paris. An international smorgasbord; and you could say they all united harmoniously and peacefully - and that's exactly me. (197-8)

In the final analysis, consumption is for San Mao an assertion of a post-colonial world of supposed equality. In San Mao's world, no power inequalities are involved in the global marketplace; Costa Rica and Paris are equivalent consumption zones, and she herself is free to partake innocently of everything the world has to offer. Again, the world is 'hers'; it is not only united but happy and at peace as it is represented in San Mao's person and in her record of her cosmopolitan possessions. Ultimately, perhaps, the message of *My Treasures* is that the way to international harmony is through consumption - and that the world can bring it all about simply by following San Mao's example.

than a simple purchase

⁷²A wealthy district of Taipei known for its expensive stores.

Miriam Lang
 China and Korea Centre
 Faculty of Asian Studies
 Australian National University
 Canberra
 ACT 0200

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