

Engaging Malaysia: Greening Postcolonial Memories in *The Garden of Evening Mists*

Hamoud YAHYA AHMED MOHSEN, Raihanah M. M. & Wan MAZLINI OTHAMN

Author:

Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen
Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia
hamoud@fbk.upsi.edu.my
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7175-2021>

Raihanah M. M.
National University of Malaysia, Malaysia
raihanah@ukm.edu.my
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9408-043X>

Wan Mazlini Othamn
Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia
wan.mazlini@fbk.upsi.edu.my
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9824-3075>

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The Garden of Evening Mists is a symbolically charged historical narrative about the ramifications of Japanese colonisation in Malaya in the 1940s. A prominent metaphor in this novel is 'the garden' in *memorium* of the protagonist's deceased sister. This article explores the greening of postcolonial memories of the Japanese colonisation of Malaya in the novel and its deep engagement of Malaysian framed within the social, political and historical contexts. Using postcolonial ecocriticism as a reading lens, the analysis is carried out to be emblematically functional across the limitations of space and time in the country's colonial history. The analysis displays that the author, Tan Twan Eng, through his authorial-defined social reality, re-enacts numerous snapshots from the Malaysia ecosystem in order to achieve a coherent engagement of Malaysia pre, during and post Japanese occupation. The finding also reveals that while Tan's narrative provides us with some insights into the ways in which the Malaysians navigate various colonial and postcolonial consequences, it should also be recognized that the ecology of the land adds to the narrative. Through the intersection of the Malaysian landscape and the country's historical context, the current article reveal how postcolonial ecocriticism is instrumental in understanding the literary canon of Malaysia.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Japanese Occupation, Colonial Malaya, Malaysia, authorial-defined social reality.

1. Introduction

Tan Twan Eng's second novel *The Garden of the Evening Mists* (2012) is a historical narrative of colonial and postcolonial Malaysia seen through the eyes of a Japanese internment camp survivor, Teoh Yun Ling. Yun Ling's continued trauma after the war, following the horrific experiences and survival of the camp, forms the core of the narrative.

Tan's novel begins by describing the green geography of the Southeast Asian country, Malaya such as "On a mountain above the cloud" and "on the rim of the sunrise to come to the central highlands of Malaya" (p. 9). Embedded within this lush natural landscape is the story of survival and forgiveness. As a way to find some semblance of inner peace, Yun Ling sets out to establish a memorial to her sister who was captured, tortured as a comfort woman and later murdered at the hands of the Japanese soldiers during the brutal occupation of their country. Tan is among Malaysian writers "who have created a mark internationally" (Qauyum, 2021, xx) specifically in the way the Sino-Japanese relations is captured in this historical Malaysia fiction. The novel is regarded as a masterpiece of contemporary Malaysian historical fiction, shortlisted for the 2012 Booker Prize, and winning the 2013 Man Asian Literary Prize and the 2013 Walter Scott Prize for Historical narrative.

The current article explores the ecology-oriented theme of the narrative focusing on the significance of the green landscape of the once colonized Malaya, now independent Malaysia, which is one of the environmentally richest countries in Southeast Asia and the world. Our premise in reading *The Garden of Evening Mists* is that the greening memories of the colonial past permeate the postcolonial ecocriticism ideologies of this modern Malaysian fiction through its postcolonial narrative and historical, political and environmental settings.

2. Political and Historical Context of Malaysia in *The Garden of Evening Mists*

Malaya was a British colony from the 19th century. And yet, on the 8th December 1941, when Japanese soldiers entered Malaya, there was a sense of expectation that permeated the land. As Mochtar Lubis (2009, 87) observes, "The main roads of the city on which the Japanese troops were expected to march to the city center were already full with people." At first, the Japanese occupation was received as a potential promise of freedom.

However, within the land, the Second World War and the invasion of Malaya by the Japanese exacerbated the tension between the racially diverse population of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaya (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). The Japanese

ethnic policy, in particular towards the Malays and Chinese, worsened the racial tension between them. The Malays received a marginally better treatment at the hands of the Japanese than did the Indians and Chinese. But out of the three main races, the Chinese, who were aggressive in their anti-Japanese political acts (Goh, 2003: 168), were very badly treated by the Japanese (Wang Gungwu, 2003). Hence, if during the British occupation the Malays and Chinese were perhaps oblivious of one another's existence, Japanese occupation left little to be desired in the development of the Sino-Malay relationship. According to Syamsul Amri Baharuddin (2000: 20), "The downside of the Japanese occupation on inter-ethnic relationship, especially of the Sino-Malay, was that it transformed the nature of the relationship from that of 'peaceful difference' to an 'armed confrontation'".

Post war Sino-Malay relations took a turn for the worse as the communities now began to regard each other with very little trust (Ongkili, 1985). During the three months between Japanese surrender and the re-occupation of Malaya by Britain, Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was reported to have conducted "kangaroo courts" to prosecute and execute Japanese sympathizers, many of whom were Malays (Baker, 1999). It was during this time that poor Sino-Chinese relations caused clashes between the ethnic groups, the effects of which made these communities more ethnocentric in their overall outlook of life, particularly on social and political issues. Even with the promise of independence by the British upon reoccupation of Malaya in 1945, the ethnic communities continued to prioritize their needs and rights above the others. This scenario further enlarged the gulf between them though the joint ultimate aim was to achieve independence from British colonialism. In a nutshell, any sense of unity that the people felt was not centred in the soon to be independent land but in their respective nationalist movements (Wan Hashim, 1983). It was a fractured unity that eventually disabled the nation's move towards creating a collective identity upon independence from Britain. Thus, when the country received its independence in 1957, a "state" or, a political unit, was born without a "nation" of people who shared a history, and social, political and economic aspirations (Rahimah A. Aziz, 2003: xx, xxi).

However, the Chinese in Malaya was hostile due to the Japanese invasion of their country of origin, China. The Japanese soldiers were viewed as the enemies and the antagonism towards the Chinese in Malaya was acute as reflected in historical documents. As a Chinese Malaysian, Tan Twan Eng addresses the theme of colonial memories of the Japanese colonization within its Malayan political and history contexts. Accordingly, Tan's novel uses his authorial-defined social reality (Raihanah, 2009) to represent a version of the historical events during the brutal Japanese occupation of his homeland of Malaya.

Previous studies on Tan Twan Eng's narratives have identified the engagement of colonial memories and environment as primary finding. According to Maya Jaggi (2014), the novel reconsiders the stressful reverberation and consequences of the Japanese invasion of the landscape of Malaya and the post-war rebellion against the British rule. She argues that the artistic signals from the aesthetic cues of Japanese gardening opens up a new vista on uniting histories using the tricks and gyrations of fiction to highlight themes of political and historical honors and memories. Yet, the novel remains mysterious and questions "what it means to atone and ... to forgive" (Jaggi 2014, 6). Likewise, Saxena (2019) considers *The Garden of Evening Mists* as a record of the past memories which have been interrelated with the present. She argues that the novelist created a space where past memories were interconnected with the present nostalgia. She further asserts that the novel displays the various forms of historical rumination where remembering and forgetting play the same role that entails a form of existence where trauma and nostalgia of the past are closely interlinked.

In addition, studies on the novel have also extensively probed the theme of trauma and historical memories emphasising the novel's realistic portrayal of the history and politics in Malaya giving the novel's credence for winning the Walter Scott Prize for historical narrative (Fincham, 2015) The most recent of the previous studies on the novel is Ying's (2021) paper entitled, "Forgiving but not forgiving in *The Garden of Evening Mists*". It views the novel as a historical record of personal and collective memories of the colonial past. The discussion is focused on the ways in which the novelist, Tan, climaxes the relationship between incompleteness and mnemonic reminiscence. Using Ricouerr's philosophical perspective, the study traces the historical past of pains and violence as represented in the novel and explores the impulsive and close connection between the perpetrator and the victim, self and the other and the doctrine of forgiveness and forgetting (Ying, 2021).

Other studies focus on the importance of the garden and gardener to the theme of the novel. Daniel McKay (2015) debates that the novel presents an iconic form of gardening where the protagonist Yung Ling appears as the sole apprentice and Aritomo, the Japanese gardener in Malaya, is her tutor. The aftermath of Yun Ling's stay at the Japanese Garden, Yugiri remains the exchange of stories with those who have the same experiences. Furthermore, according to Fincham's study, Yugiri can also be viewed as a form of historical connection between the ancient arts of gardening of Japan and China. Likewise, Gail Fincham's (2015, 135) study concludes that *The Garden of Evening Mists* can provide readers with the idea that comes in line with the argument that "an abiding hope for the future; a hope that through an altered understanding of our place in the world".

In terms of ideological study, David Lim (2015) in his critical study entitled “The Zen of Japanese Imperialism in Tan Twan Eng’s *The Garden of Evening Mists*” explores the camouflaged history of Zen as a colonial ideology of the Japanese Imperialism in the novel. Lim’s study explores how the narrative represents the disguised history of Zen as a new ideology of Japanese domination. Lim (2015) also problematizes the view of historical fiction by Tan Twan Eng as a means to challenge the distortion of Zen ideology by western orientalist and Japanese apologists of the 20th century. Furthermore, Fincham’s (2015) study conducted a close ecological reading of the novel. He argues that the author had explored the Japanese gardening that reflected, to some extent, the interconnection between human and non-human worlds. To him, *Yugiri*, the Japanese garden featured in the narrative, demonstrates the close relationships between man and the environment.

From an ethnocultural lens, Fiona Lee’s (2019) examination of the novel theorizes the ‘Han racism’ in *The Garden of Evening Mists* in which the central characters are Malayan Chinese who experienced first-hand atrocities in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. Lee argues that ‘Han racism’ might appear as “a move to downplay ... the various forms of racialized violence directed at Chinese identified bodies” (Lee, 2019, 220). In examining the novel, she comes out with the view that the material and ideological conditions of the literary marketplace worldwide have been shaped in Tan’s novel.

Based on these past studies, it can be concluded that *The Garden of Evening Mists* has been explored for various themes and issues ranging from history and trauma to ideology and re-memory. These issues echo Tan’s ‘authorial-defined social reality’ (Raihanah, 2009) as shown in the numerous interviews Tan gave in reference to his second novel. For the engagement with trauma and re-memory, Tan (2012, 3) explains his vision for the novel as:

a good story that would appeal to not just Malaysian readers but around the world as well. It is about how survivors cope with what they have gone through. ... It deals with grieving, memories that cannot and refuse to let go off. It deals with how you reconcile yourself with these painful yet enriching memories that all of us have.

The gap in past studies can be seen in the lack of discussion on the environmental connection of the land to its postcolonial memories. Though Malaysian novels written in English have been known for several decades, it is only in the recent decade that they started to receive growing global environmental attention and acclamation. There had been no previous critical studies on Tan’s novel through the approach of postcolonial ecocriticism. Using postcolonial ecocriticism as a reading lens, this lacuna can be minimised.

3. Postcolonial Ecocriticism as an Approach in the Malaysian Literary Context

Postcolonial Ecocriticism as a recognized literary approach emerged in the early 2010's and it focuses on the intersection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism (Indriyanto, 2019). It is a recent literary lens that examines the environmental impacts of the colonial destruction. It has its roots within the field of ecocriticism. Hamoud Yahya and Ruzy Hashim (2015, 13) argued that "the advent of ecocriticism is regarded as one of the most significant developments in literary studies and criticism worldwide". Paliwal Nil (2020) views postcolonial ecocriticism as a theoretical approach that is used for analysing and understanding the colonial activities that are re-exploited to fuel the neo colonizers' profit driven ventures which destroys the environment. Huggan and Tiffin (2009, ix) argue in the preface to the second edition of *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* that:

[t]o see postcolonial ecocriticism as a politically oriented branch of environmental humanities is – as with postcolonial and environmental studies as a whole – to open it up to a range of different disciplines, in which literature and history, the formative disciplines for environmental humanities, play a significant but by no means defining role.

Thus, postcolonial ecocriticism generates the environmental concerns in the light of the postcolonial theory of reading literature and views postcolonial literary works from a dual perspective of ecocriticism and postcolonialism. When we use the lens of 'postcolonial ecocriticism' in the literary studies like the current study, we indicate a portrayal of the state of being shifted from a colonial control of a particular context of both human and non-human worlds to the state of being politically independent of the same context. Postcolonial eco-critics from the mid2000 onwards have drawn a special attention to duality of colonial oppressing attitudes, power and dominance upon the human and non-human beings of the territories. Jursa Barbara (2013, 179) asserts that:

[p]ostcolonial ecocriticism stems from the realization that Western-centrism and anthropocentrism consolidate one another. It draws attention to the principles of social ecology and the question of environmental justice, expressing concern about the fact that subaltern humans are denied access to the resources of the land they inhabit and emphasizing the sustainability of their cultural practices. Colonization has involved the anthropocentric view of the land as property and the treatment of the colonized environment as empty space.

Recently, Elizabeth Deloughrey and George Handley (2001) observe the mutual involvement between the ecocritical and postcolonial theories. Such approach views the notion of land not as an object to be exploited but as a hero in its own right. While the postcolonial approach is rather concerned with the marginalized history of the past and excavated colonial and migrant memories, the ecocritical studies are concerned with environmental pursuit of timeless moments of intimacy (Banerjee, 2016).

Utilizing the postcolonial ecocriticism approach in the current study is an attempt in the light of the continuing debates in the area to further the argument stated by Graham Huggan (2009,7) in his article entitled “Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Limits of Romanticism” who argues that:

[t]here is no need for the postcolonial ecocriticism to succumb to these crude romantic fables, if anything, it is more likely to be effective in guarding against them, even if postcolonial critics and eco critics alike are not always as attentive as they might be to the dangers of romanticising the oppressed.

The connection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism through the concept of place can be seen in the study by Caleb Jonah (2020) when he states that “postcolonialism focuses on the re-imagining of the history of a colonized place while ecocriticism critically theorises for a return to a conservation of a pristine place” (Jonah 2020, 7). To further emphasise the construct of place emphasized by Jonah, the current study addresses the symbolic garden and the memories of the place as a connecting icon of the postcolonial ecocriticism.

Therefore, the current article appropriates the postcolonial ecocriticism as a reading tool for greening the colonial memories in the Malaysian postcolonial context as embodied in the environmentally oriented text *the Garden of Evening Mists*. The authors of the article elucidate the environmental theme especially greening postcolonial memories in Tan’s novel as a fresh way of showing engagement of politics, history, environment and literature within Malaysian context. While ecocriticism as a literary theory focuses on the engagement of the natural environment, the postcolonial theory focuses on the “analytics of place, power, knowledge and representation” (Deloughrey 2011, 321). Thus, postcolonial ecocriticism, as a reading lens in the current study, is envisioned to converge on the point that both theories are focused to highlight the idea of the representation of memories of place, history and politics in the Malaysian context.

4. Discussion of Greening Memories and Gardening in *The Garden of Evening Mists*

One way in which to read the engagement of the Malaysian politics and history with its environment in the novel is based on the historical details of the events from the very beginning to the very end of the narrative. For example, the episode of the dialogue between the protagonist, Yun Ling, and the Japanese former polit, Tasuji, reflects such involvement of the history and politics within the colonial and postcolonial Malaysian literature as can be sketched in the following episode:

[f]or a long time neither of us speaks. He turns to me and gives me a bow so deep I think he is going to topple over. Straightening up again, he says 'I am sorry, for what we did to you. I am deeply sorry. 'Your apology is meaningless' I say, taking a step back from him. 'It worth nothing to me'. 'We had no idea what my country did,' he says. 'We did not know about the massacres or the death camps, the medical experiments carried out on living prisoners, the women forced to serve in army brothels. When I returned home after the war, I found everything I could about what we had done. That's when I became interested in our crimes. I wanted to fill in the silence that was stifling every family of my generation. (Tan, 186)

The above conversation between the Malaysian and Japanese characters is a disclose of memories being involved in the history of country during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. It also gives lie to the idea that the memories of the past retreat with the passage of time and environment. In the post war era, the artistic Japanese garden created by Aritomo becomes a sort of green colony memory where Yun Ling, the protagonist, remains the sole apprentice.

The term "greening memories" has been coined in the current study to refer the process of transforming the living environmental aspects of the Malaysian setting of the novel to portray the images of the colonial memories of the past during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. We mainly explore the implications of the use of the term 'gardening' in the context of the novel from the author's viewpoint as can be traced in the following speech of Fredrick:

[w]hat is "gardening" but the controlling and perfecting of nature. When you talk about indigenous gardening or whatever it's called, you already have man involved. You dig out beds, you chop down trees, and you bring in seeds and cutting. It all sounds very much planned to me. (Tan, 23)

Fredrick's speech above displays the concept of gardening to be vague and disfavoured. From the above quote, one can see that gardens are named in

accordance with the style and memories of their design such as the British, the indigenous and the Japanese gardens. Therefore, gardens are shaped as a memory according to their designers' involvement in the political and social contexts. The use of the Japanese garden can be claimed to be an iconic form of greening postcolonial memories of the history of Malaya in the novel. As a plot, *The Garden of Evening Mists* (thereafter, *The Garden*) deals with the memories of the Japanese occupation of the green landscape of Malaysia. The memory of such occupation, which in Tan's own words, is "a huge event, if not the most devastating to have occurred to our country up to that point" (Lim, 2015,436), has been recorded in its green setting throughout the narrative. Therefore, greening memories of colonial past in the current study pervades the postcolonial ecocriticism as it represents the whole narrative within its green setting. The opening paragraph of the novel provides us with a green indication to carry out this postcolonial ecocritical discussion and serves as an inaugural gateway into Tan's greenness of the postcolonial memories represented throughout the novel.

On a mountain above the cloud once lived a man who had been the gardener of the Emperor of Japan. Not many would have known of him before the war, but I did. He had left his home on the rim of the sunrise to come to the central highlands of Malaya. I was seventeen years old when my sister first told me about him. A decade would pass before I travelled up to the mountains to see him. (*The Garden* p.9)

The opening follows a highly environmental milieu in which the writer engages with the history and the environment of the land. This extremely amusing environmental launch is both evocative and promising. It is a part of an inventive description of the setting of the novel as a liminal ecological space for greening the memories of the colonial past. Further, it serves as an ecocritical introduction to the narrative and the mapping statement of the green postcolonial monument of the current study. The expression "on a mountain above the cloud" (ibid.) indicates the highly environmental index of the writer's sense of greenness granted to the history of the Japanese occupation of the place. Yet, it turns in the succeeding paragraph into highlighting the postcolonial context of memories when the narrator asserts the negative attitudes of the Japanese towards the local people and the colonial destructions of human and land:

[h]e did not apologize for what his countrymen had done to my sister and me. Not on that rain-scratched morning when we first met, nor at any other time. What words could have healed my pain, returned my sister to me? None. He understood that. Not many people did. (*The Garden*, p.9)

The above words evoke an overflow of the narrator's traumatic memories. They also reveal the recurrent unsaid of the narrative where the greening of the past memories will be accomplished. "that rain-scratched morning" (ibid.) is an environmental nod that connects the memories of the colonial past with the landscape of the narrator's homeland. The tone of the narrative at this point is very painful and disgusting. In fact, Tan appears to unite both human and non-human from the very beginning of the novel. He expresses his literary prophecy that can be understood in his own words when he once shares with the mapping picture of the garden of evening mists. He remarks that:

I had an overall picture in my mind when I began writing my novel. I was also studying pictures of Japanese gardens, trying to incorporate some of the more striking features into the story, features which I felt would act as symbols or visual representations of some of the themes and ideas I wanted to explore. After a while I felt that the garden in my head was getting overcrowded. (*The Garden*, p.1)

The writer's declaration above asserts that the "the garden" is employed metaphorically to further his agendas regarding the Japanese colonization of the country. He also engages the various aspects of the natural environment to regenerate the postcolonial memories in their green garment as this study will illustrate. In other words, the above remark demonstrates clearly the premise of Tan's idea of the novel as a symbolically charged historical story about the ramifications of Japanese colonisation. A prominent metaphor in this work is "the garden," a memorial location for the protagonist's deceased sister. It serves as a green postcolonial monument, uniting the memories of pain and sorrow with nostalgia, land and landscape. The scene where memories equally inhabit the postcolonial history and the ecocritical future is the visit made by Yun Ling, the protagonist and Aritomo, the Japanese gardener who she befriends, to the place of the temple of clouds in the central part of the narrative. Here is where Aritomo requested her to recollect the period of being imprisoned many years ago. She was the sole survivor of the Japanese internment camp which symbolizes the cruelty and barbarism of the Japanese soldiers towards the Malaysians.

The garden which Yun Ling decides to construct with the help of Aritomo requires an act of mapping-making that may cause a few changes to the current green landscape of the land. In fact, the novelist appears to keep the readers in the dark regarding the visual image of the garden in order to allow us to create our own mental projection of the structure as the narrative unfolds. Therefore, our own version of the garden can be discussed briefly based on our own eco-postcolonial reading of the novel. The garden which serves as the metaphor for

greening the postcolonial memories' monument consists of three chronometers, each of which spans a period in the protagonist's green memories' monument. Using J. H. Miller's (2003) premise that literature is about time, we appropriate concept of 'chronometer' to be used in the current analysis because time is a commonly explored theme in the fictional works, and it is impossible to produce a novel with no regard to the depiction of time. In this regard, it would be more fertile to use the concept of chronometer, an exceptionally precise timepiece, in order to spotlight the theme of greening memories throughout the novel which in turn makes it central to the field of ecocriticism.

The first chronometer of the analysis spans the early traumatic memories of the oppressed protagonist, Yun Ling, where her dead sister was victimized by the Japanese soldiers as a comfort woman. The 'Japanese War Camp' remains a memorial icon of tragic and traumatic period and the place where she was forced to become a comfort woman to the last moments of her life. Ching Wang (2019) comments on the situation as "Concealing the fact that they were once Japanese military 'comfort women,' they had to endure pain and poverty and even passed away without receiving proper apologies or fair compensation" (p.1). In the novel, the narrator expresses the memories of her victimized sister in bitterness and rejection: "She was with me in the camp. I shifted my body, unknitting the pain in my ankles; it had been a long time since I had sat like this. 'She died there'. (*The Garden*, p.56)

In the context of the novel, the Japanese camp has its historical implication as well as its memorial pain and trauma. It was a colonial platform of cruelty and exploitation of humans and it remains a memorial of Japanese colonial barbarity and animalism. The victimized sister of the protagonist has been immortalized by the token garden which in turn keep on greening such traumatic memories throughout the history. Further, the commemorative sketch of the Japanese war camp remains awful and it is recollected in its historical and environmental setting in the following narration from the mouth of the narrator whose memories have transmitted all limits of space, time and colour:

[s]unrise was still an hour away, but I could feel it coming as I lay in my bed, feel the light curving around the earth. In the internment camp I had dreaded its arrival; it means another day of unpredictable cruelties. As a prisoner, I had been afraid to open my eyes in the mornings; now, when I was no longer in the camp, now when I was free, I was frightened of closing my eyes when I went to sleep at night, fearful of the dreams that were waiting for me. (*The Garden*, p.89).

Here is a neat portrayal of the intersection engagement of the history, the place, the memories and the environment. The cruelty of the Japanese oppressors

evoked in the above narration reveals an episode of greening colonial memories represented by the traumatic memories in the camp. The sunrise and the sunset turn to be a source of everlasting colourful memories of colonial torture attached to the narrator. These memories reflect what the recent postcolonial eco-critics refer to as the duality of colonial oppressing attitudes, power and dominance upon the human and non-human which is a central idea in the area of postcolonial ecocriticism. Thus, the chronometer of Japanese war camp memories in the novel reflect a dynamic monument of the history of the place. As the narrative reaches its climax, the protagonist reveals a straight interpretation of memories in their green backdrop which is central to the crux of the current study. Yun Ling asserts that:

[m]emory is like patches of sunlight in an overcast valley, shifting with the moment of the clouds. Now and then the light will fall on a particular point in time, illuminating it for a moment before the wind seals up the gap, and the world is in shadows again. There are moments when remembering what happened, I am unable to continue writing. What troubles me more than anything, however, are the instances when I cannot remember what my sister looked like; I do not even have a picture of her (*The Garden*, p.309).

The above narrative signposts the traumatic memories which closely attached and engaged with the natural environment to shape its greenness as a running theme throughout the novel.

The second chronometer of the current discussion spans the period of the memories of Yun Ling's gardening apprentice in the company of the green-fingered Japanese gardener, Aritomo. Such memories seem to have positive impact on the part of the protagonist as she comes to learn the art of Japanese gardening which later on help her in designing the token garden in the memory of her deceased sister. Commenting on such memories, Yun Ling argues that:

[w]hat is gardening but the controlling and perfecting of nature? I am aware my voice is rising. when you talk about "indigenous gardening", or whatever it's called, you already have man involved. You dig out beds, you chop down trees, and you bring in seeds and cutting. It all sound very much planned to me. (*The Garden*, p.23)

The above memories of the Japanese gardening apprentice evoke the narrator's sense of realization of the colonial destructions. Such memories promote our understanding of the colonial activities that are re-exploited to fuel the neo colonizers' profit driven ventures destroying the environment of the locality.

The third chronometer of the analysis dwells in the token garden, *Yugiri*. The memories of the colonial past throughout the narrative have been granted their green garment from the token garden that borrows its own greenness from the earth, the sky and everything around it. The novelist once asserts that memories are a form of *Shakkei*, a Japanese term, that indicates that these memories are attached to the token garden and therefore, its related memories will be attached to it. Thus, a prominent metaphor in this narrative is ‘the garden’, a memorial location for the protagonist’s deceased sister. The metaphor of the garden which provided Yun Ling solace during the internment trauma can be traced to the following description:

[t]he sun was breaking free of the mountains. Over the distant treetops, a flock of birds unspooled into a black wavering thread, pulling across the sky. One day, a guard beat me for not bowing properly. He wouldn’t stop, but just kept hitting me. I found myself in a garden. There were flowering trees everywhere, the smell of water. (*The Garden* p. 57-58)

The above narrative shows clearly that the protagonist has realized that gardens like her *Yugiri* are not a heaven but rather a green trauma memorial in disguise. The garden forms as a symbol of the Japanese cruelty and destruction of both human and nonhuman worlds of Malaya, and yet it also provides her solace in her times of trauma. However, Yun Ling is resilient and regains some semblance of what she lost during the Japanese violence when she declares loudly that: “Gardens like *Yugiri*’s are deceptive. They’re false. Everything here has been thought out and shaped and built. We’re sitting in one of the most artificial places you can find.” (*The Garden*, p.23) This is the highest point of *Yugiri*, he said when we reached the crest. The foothills began here, rising into mountains tumbled in clouds. Spread out below was the garden. (*The Garden*, p.109). Further, the engagement of Malayan environment in greening memories through creating the token garden in their minds can be highlighted clearly in the protagonist’s dreaming of the garden:

[t]hat was the moment when we started to create our own garden (in the camp) in here (in their hearts) ...day by day we added details to it. The garden became our refuge. Inside our minds, we are free. (Tan, 59)

The above remark of the protagonist generates the power of the imagined garden in relieving and releasing the colonized people to escape the brutal torture of the Japanese colonization and therefore, reflects a coherent engagement of Malayan environment with the colonial history in order to demonstrate greening the postcolonial memories in the Malaysian context of the narrative.

Eventually, the highest level of greenness of the colonial memories reaches its climax at the end of the narrative when the protagonist gets totally engaged in the environment and even borrows her words from the natural surroundings to describe her memories of the past:

[b]efore me lies a voyage of a million miles, and memory is the moonlight I borrow to illuminate my way. The lotus flowers are opening in the first rays of the sun. Tomorrow's rain lies on the horizon, but high up in the sky something pale and small is descending, growing in size as it falls. I watch the heron circle the pond, a leaf spiralling down to the water, setting off silent ripples across the garden. (*The Garden* p.348)

Thus, the novelist concludes the narrative with the techniques of building the Japanese garden to demonstrate how he borrows his memories from the green Malayan landscape such as the borrowed hills, rocks, torrent beds, flowers and lakes from the surrounding Malayan landscape to integrate the scene of the garden with the local environment of Malaya. Such borrowed environmental aspects from the Malayan nature to shape the Japanese garden can be regarded as a green memorial icon that connect between the colonial history of Malaya with its natural environment. Therefore, such art of gardening might help attract the admiration of the colonized Malaysians to accept the Japanese colonialism of their homeland this is central idea in the area of postcolonial ecocriticism in the context of Malaysian postcolonial narrative.

5. Conclusion

In reading Tan's *The Garden of the Evening Mists*, we have discussed how 'the Japanese garden' located in Malaya used as an eco-postcolonial icon for greening the Malaysian postcolonial memories of the Japanese occupation by engaging politics, history, coloniality of Malaya with the Malayan environment throughout the narrative. The analysis displays clearly that the fictional depiction of the Malayan green setting, characters, culture and history throughout the novel made it deeply engaged in the political and historical contexts of Malaysia. While constructing the shape of the token garden, *Yugiri*, Tan borrows the various aspects and scenes of the natural environment of Malaya in order to maintain a coherent engagement of Malayan environment with the political and historical contexts of the country which is central idea in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism. Further, greening memories of the colonial past in *The Garden of Evening Mists* permeate the postcolonial ecocriticism in the contemporary Malaysian narrative as it represents the whole postcolonial fiction within its green setting. In our

reading of the novel, we have detected that while Tan's narrative provides us with some insights into the ways in which the Malaysians navigate various colonial consequences, it should also be recognized for its profound environmental engagement with Malaysian politics, history and coloniality. By incorporating the Malaysian viewpoint and voice in the current article, we have exposed how postcolonial ecocriticism is instrumental in meeting its targeted scope in Malaysian literary context as a multinational area of scholarship. Furthermore, seen from the lens of ecocriticism, the use of the Malaysian environment in this historical narrative is directly linked to the recent and growing field of ecocriticism which "investigates the link between literature and the natural world" (Hamoud et al, 2022,137). More importantly, Tan's novel reveals the network of environmental postcolonialism which can be clearly viewed through the Japanese eco-memorial icon of the garden developed throughout the narrative.

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