

# Anti-War Writing in Amy Tan's Novels from the Perspective of New Materialism: Taking *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *the Bonesetter's Daughter* as Examples

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**ABSTRACT:** Both *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, written by Chinese American author Amy Tan, take the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression as historical background. By depicting the characters' experiences and social circumstances, it recreates that period of history filled with suffering and resistance. When depicting the War of Resistance, the work incorporates a large number of material elements, such as eels, quarry, dragon bones, buildings, red dress, etc. Under the theoretical framework of New Materialism, these things vividly demonstrate "thingness" and "agency". They blur the boundary between objects and human, engrave traumatic memories, carry historical imprints, and promote the development of war narratives. Based on the theory of New Materialism, this paper explores the roles of these material objects in war. Through this study, the paper aims to reveal how these things write the history of the War of Resistance as witnesses, carriers, and participants, thereby offering a new perspective for Chinese American literary studies.

**KEYWORDS:** Amy Tan, New Materialism, writing of the War of Resistance

## I. INTRODUCTION

After fourteen years of arduous and heroic resistance against Japanese aggression, the Chinese people, through the bloody battles of the entire nation, achieved a great turning point in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. The war's extreme trauma, persistent resistance, and deep sense of national awakening lie at the heart of how it is remembered. Beyond China itself, these experiences also shape how overseas Chinese understand their homeland's past and form emotional connections to that history. Such a sense of shared history, or at least common feeling, tends to be transmitted, redefined, and become an ever-present motif in literature. As a representative writer of Chinese-American literature, Amy Tan (1952-) recreated the history of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in the form of literature. Her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), received widespread acclaim as soon as it was published. The novel is told by a first-person narrator, describing Wennie's own suffering and life under an arranged marriage at that time. It tells the story of how she moved from

tolerance to awakening and resistance, and eventually gathered the courage to pursue true love and went to the United States to get a new life. The story centers on how Winnie and her group escape during wartime. It shows how hard life was for the Chinese people in the War of Resistance against Japan. Ten years later, Amy Tan's fourth novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), once again presented her examination of the Anti-Japanese War. The novel tells the life experiences of three generations of women. By reading the manuscripts left by her mother, Lu Ling, the second-generation Chinese American Ruth comes to understand the rise and decline of an ink-making family in Beijing, and in the process uncovers the hidden histories of her mother and grandmother, Precious Auntie. Set in both China and America as well as set historically during the nineteenth and twentieth century, the novel interlaces its storyline with many incidents: traditional Chinese patriarchy, the finding of the Peking Man fossils in Zhoukoudian, and the numerous recorded atrocities committed by invading Japanese forces. Tan interwove history with personal fate, capturing the pain of the war era.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the domestic academic circle has witnessed a new trend in the exploration of "things". Bill Brown, as the leader of this trend, his "Thing Theory" provides a brand-new perspective for understanding the material world. In Brown's theoretical framework, objects are not passive existences but possess multiple attributes such as duality, sociality, and spirituality. He particularly emphasizes the agency of objects—they can not only construct the human subject but also influence and even threaten the relationships among subjects. This revelation of the initiative of matter breaks the traditional understanding that "people and things are the subject and the object". To this day, the scholars who focusing on New Materialism using literary works to support their viewpoints has not only provided valuable resources and research demonstrations for the study of new materialism literature, but also, to a certain extent, revealed some intrinsic connection between new materialism and literary studies (Han 180). Bringing this theoretical framework into the study of Amy Tan's representations of the War of Resistance allows us to see how material objects that carry memories of war do more than function as symbols—they actively participate in shaping the narrative itself. Through the presence of material things, historical suffering moves beyond the page and becomes a vivid, sensorial form of memory, prompting readers to reconsider the past and to remember the pain endured by both individuals and the nation.

Domestic research on the two works has been carried out from multiple dimensions. Scholars have focused on various aspects such as feminism, postcolonial feminism, mother-daughter relationships, trauma writing, cultural identity, narratology, ect. Although the discussion on the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression has not yet formed an independent research system, the relevant content has already permeated into the analysis of the former themes. In the field of ethics and mother-daughter relationship research, Zou Jianjun proposed that Tan's novels take "harmony" as the core of ethical thought. The reconciliation between mother and daughter not only points to the family level but also extends to mutual understanding among nations, conveying the vision of human reconciliation and peace. In terms of identity research, Ren Bing pointed out that *The Bonesetter's Daughter* constructs the identity of Chinese Americans through "family memory—cultural memory—national

memory”, and as the core of the nation, the memory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression connects individuals with the history of the country. For trauma research, Dang Binbin classified the war traumas in Tan’s autobiographical novels into three categories: physical, psychological and national, analyzed the narrative strategies of war traumas, and proposed narrative healing and cultural reflection. In social research, Pan Minfang reads *The Kitchen God’s Wife* through the lens of “disability narratives”, arguing that Wen Fu’s physical and psychological impairment serves as a metaphor for the collapse of what had once been taken as the “normal” social order in wartime China. Focusing on the portrayal of the war itself, Wu Jingling believes that Tan deconstructs traditional heroism through daily narratives and show the survival conditions of ordinary people during the war. Lin Xiaowen focuses on Tan’s critical engagement with the Anti-Japanese War as presented in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*. By contrast, Xia Nan situates *The Joy Luck Club* within a broader historical context, showing how a range of Chinese historical events drive the development of the novel’s plot. It is true that scholars in China have extensively explored themes such as ethics, memory, and trauma in wartime contexts.

However, little attention has been paid to the material elements that recur throughout these works. Whether it is the repeated presence of food in *The Kitchen God’s Wife* or the central motif of “bones” that runs through *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, existing studies rarely consider how such material objects are connected to war, what roles they play, or what kinds of effects they produce within the narratives. In the studies of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in the two works, “material and war” remains an unexplored field, and the gap in related discussions urgently needs to be filled. Foreign academic research on the two works has mostly focused on perspectives such as mother-daughter relationships, feminism, ethnic identity, trauma theory, and narratology. It is worth noting that some scholars have begun to pay attention to the things in the works. Xiao Bili focused on the food images in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, pointing out their roles in enriching character development, symbolizing power relations and reflecting cultural identities. Liu Qiping breaks through the traditional symbolic perspective and, within the framework of New Materialism, emphasizes the material agency of food in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, revealing its role as a “food narrative” in the construction of characters’ identities. However, no research has yet combined the things with the common theme of the Anti-Japanese War in the works, and there is still a broad space for exploration in between.

## II. THINGS AS WITNESSES

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues that both organic things and inorganic things possess inherent vitality and the ability to act. She consider that matter is not merely a passive object but rather an active agent capable of self-organization and intervention. Just as she wrote: “inorganic matter is much more variable and creative than we ever imagined (Bennett 7).” To support this view, she took the Odradek described by Kafka as an example: this spool of thread “exercises an impersonal form of vitality...straddles the line between inert matter and vital life (Bennett 7).” To further explain, Bennett drew on Bruno Latour’s concept of actant and defined it as: “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general (Bennett 9).” Actant is neither a pure subject nor a simple object, but rather an “intervener”

capable of catalyzing events and shaping outcomes. For example, a piece of evidence in the hands of a forensic doctor: “composite of glass, skin cells, glue, words, laws, metals, and human emotions (Bennett 9).” It plays the role of an actant in the trial, and its physical presence changes the course of the judgment. From this theoretical perspective, we can find that matter in Tan’s novels also demonstrates a strong agency in the anti-war writing. They intervene in the narrative with thing power, witnessing the trauma of war with their own material presence and agency.

In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Wennie and her companions embark on a southward escape journey to avoid the Japanese army. When they were passing through Guiyang, they enjoyed a sumptuous eel meal: “That night we ate plenty, big platters piled high with eels cooked whole, as thick as our fingers (Tan 153).” Wennie later learned that the Japanese army had carried out a massacre in Nanjing, cutting off people’s fingers and taking away rings. Sadness and fear lingered in Wennie for a long time. In her nightmare, the eels confront her once again: their violently thrashing bodies become entangled with the severed fingers of the dead, an image that haunts her. At this point, the eel intervened in Wennie’s spiritual world. It projected the suffering of the victims in Nanjing in the form of material existence, stimulating her nerves. As vibrant matter, eels provide tangible material links between past and present. They constitute a discourse that resonates in her memory of that miserable wartime which still affects her present life (Liu 173). As Freud observes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, after a traumatic experience, psychic defense mechanisms allow life to go on, yet certain elements of consciousness can no longer be integrated into a coherent, internalized experience. Therefore, some disastrous consequences lie dormant deep in the heart, unconsciously and continuously influencing the person’s inner world. For Wennie, the eel, already entangled with death and slaughter, could no longer arouse her appetite. Instead, they left behind that painful past and became material witnesses to her trauma.

Compared with the individual trauma triggered by eels, the quarry further implements the trauma in the real physical space. In terms of New Materialism, things have the “vitality” for taking part in the history-making process and they are not just passive bearers of symbols. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett illustrates this idea through her discussion of how earthworms shape human history: by creating topsoil and humus, they create the conditions for seed germination and human settlement. This material process links biological life, the environment, and human culture into a dynamic web of interaction. From this perspective, nonhuman material objects function as witnesses to history: their continued physical presence is itself a vivid record of historical interaction. In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, Lu Ling’s husband, Kai Jing, is a geologist who works at a quarry alongside other scientists, taking part in excavations of the Peking Man fossils. As the site where events unfold, the quarry is closely tied to a series of major transformations and the emergence of trauma. What begins as a simple cave is gradually excavated and reconfigured into a pit: “about one hundred fifty feet deep (Tan 267).” To allow for the excavation, the pit was painted in white grids, forming an orderly material system. This grid also represented the hard work that Kai Jing did for protecting the past, where every tile represents a piece of China’s hopes to trace back the origin of its civilization. But as the war became ever more desperate, the quarry itself was also in danger of being attacked: “Somebody had better watch the quarry, Kai Jing thought to himself: “Someone need to keep

an eye on the quarry, Kai Jing reasoned. What if the Japanese decided to blow up the hill (Tan 292)?” At this point in the narrative, the quarry becomes a highly vulnerable site under wartime destruction, a material space where civilization collides with violence. Kai Jing is conscripted into the army of the Japanese occupiers, drawn into the conflict and ultimately killed at the site of his quarry work. The quarry directly witnesses the turning point in his fate. Its physical presence functions as a remnant of history, recording in concrete form how war tears apart both human life and civilization. By “observing” Kai Jing’s transformation from protector to victim, the materiality of the quarry anchors individual destiny and civilizational rupture in a tangible space, showing how trauma is confirmed and inscribed at the level of lived reality.

In *Other Things*, Brown introduces the concept of the “materiality effect” to stress the relational nature embedded in materiality. What counts as materiality, he argues, is often shaped by a particular subject’s perspective, meaning that different individuals can interpret the material qualities of the same object in entirely different ways. In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, dragon bones recur as a material object whose meaning shifts with perspective: for the bonesetter, they are a life-saving medicine; for scientists, a living fossil of civilization; for Mrs. Chang, a means of profit. Taking on different forms of material significance for different characters, the dragon bones—and their eventual destruction—ultimately intensify Lu Ling’s personal trauma, driving it to its breaking point.

In the studies of New Materialism, sustained attention has been given to “the power of things”. It is understood as a general quality shared by all entities, manifesting in multiple forms and unfolding through a continuous, generative process. The meanings produced through this process exert influence in diverse ways on both human subjects and the material world that surrounds them. Within this dynamic framework, reality is conceived not as a composite of discrete, nor as hierarchically ordered forces, but as an entangled field in which things and various diffusive forces intersect and intermingle (Han 110). Lu Ling treats the dragon bones excavated by Kai Jing during his lifetime as a material anchor for emotion and a tangible medium through which memory is preserved and sustained:

I picked up one and with a thick needle carved words into it to make an oracle bone like the one Precious Auntie had given me. I wrote: “You are beauty, we are divine, unchanged by time.” When I finished one, I began another, unable to stop. Those were the words I wanted to remember. Those were the morsels of grief I ate. (Tan 305)

When rumors spread that the bones of Peking Man had been destroyed: “they threw them on the tracks to let them get smashed by other trains (Tan 307).” Lu Ling feels as though her own bones have been hollowed out. At this moment, the destruction of the dragon bones generates a powerful form of thing power: what Bill Brown describes as a renewed attention to how inanimate objects shape human subjects, how objects can move or threaten them, and how they mediate relationships among subjects. Compared with the quarry as a site of direct witnessing, the presence and disappearance of the dragon bones reveals that trauma does not end with an immediate experience but continues to extend into the future. The dragon bones thus become the war’s most profound testimony: not only are individual lives destroyed, but the material foundations that carry memories and civilization are erased

as well. Together, the eel that triggers sensory trauma, the quarry that confirms trauma's historical reality, and the dragon bones that obliterate memories bear witness to how war penetrates layer by layer, ultimately crystallizing into an indelible scar in the collective history of the Chinese nation.

### III. THINGS AS CARRIERS

In her representations of the War of Resistance, Amy Tan does not confine her attention to the violence of the battlefield. Instead, she turns to the lives of ordinary people, showing how war reshapes modes of survival through the intersection of domestic routines and sweeping national upheaval. This close attention to the textures of daily life allows ordinary objects like food, buildings, and ink move beyond their practical functions and become vessels of wartime memory. Food speaks to anxieties of survival; buildings show the destruction of home; and ink preserves cultural identity. Progressing from basic needs, to ways of living, and ultimately to cultural transmission, these elements converge to form an enduring memory within the history of the Chinese people's resistance to war.

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, depictions of food are deeply marked by the anxiety of survival under the shadow of war. Shortly after Wen Fu and the other pilots enter combat, Winnie uses her own savings to prepare lavish meals for them. As the war intensifies, the number of guests at these gatherings steadily shrinks with the loss of more pilots, yet those who remain consume increasingly large portions: "...when one pilot died, another took over his appetite. Those pilots ate as though they would never taste such good food again. I remember one night each man ate thirty dumplings, loosened his belt and sighed, then ate thirty more (Tan 135)." This almost crazy manner of eating reflects an attempt to push back against anxiety about the future through excess, under the constant fear that death or sacrifice could come at any moment. Psychological shifts were not limited to soldiers; civilians, too, were transformed by the war. Hulan used to be a generous person, found her childhood memories of hunger repeatedly resurfacing as successive waves of warfare returned her to a state of deprivation: "...we had nothing to eat, except dried kaoliang cakes. We didn't even have enough clean water to steam them soft... for a little kaoliang cake hard enough to break my teeth (Tan 193)." She overeat as if depositing gold in a bank. In the introduction to *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, Bill Brown argues that objects have the capacity to "make meaning, to make or re-make ourselves, to organize our anxieties and affections, to sublimate our fears and shape our fantasies (4)." Under the shadow of war, food ceased to be merely a means of sustenance. Its material properties—being storable and capable of warding off hunger—took on a new meaning as sources of security. The materiality of food reshaped patterns of human behavior, and this shift was not an isolated personal choice but a reflection of shared, collective experience. When the sirens in Kunming were lifted after Japanese bombings, a striking collective response could be observed among people in the marketplace:

Soon we were back at the market, which was busier than ever. Because now, all those people who didn't die had made up their minds—to buy an extra piece of meat, or a pair of shoes, or something they thought was no longer a luxury for life that might end with the next siren. Hulan and I went back to the same vendor to buy the mushrooms we had been dreaming about. (Tan 197)

This buying behavior results from the storability of goods such as food combined with fear of war. People insist on purchasing more than they actually need, and this is a material expression of the wartime experience of putting survival first. In this way, food responds not only to physical needs but also reflects widespread fear and anxiety, becoming a bodily basis of memory. Compared with the buildings that appear later, the memory carried by food still remains at the level of basic survival instinct.

Amy Tam meticulously depicted the destruction of buildings during the war:

Suddenly machine-gun bullets hit a white washed building in front of me—and a long line of holes instantly appeared, just like stitches when the thread is yanked out fast. The piece of the wall underneath those empty stitches crumbled away, and then the rest of the wall on top fell down, like a big pile of flour that had lost its sack. (Tan 200)

On their way to escape to Wuchang, Wennie witnessed the destruction caused by the war: “In almost every village, it seemed, were rows of one-story clay houses, with their middles crushed in, or their roofs torn off, or the walls on one side all fallen down. Some houses were already fixed, holes patched here and there with the broken top of a table. Or straw matting from a bed, or the door of a wrecked car (Tan 215).” Brown proposes the idea of the “social life of things”, treating objects as agents that interact with humans rather than as inert matter. These damaged buildings are therefore not passive backgrounds. Marked by the traces of war, they become participants that interact with people. He argues that only by setting aside an object’s purely physical properties can we focus on its social life and understand how it makes history visible. In a material society, objects function as important signs of social institutions, and their effects shape people through the socially formed ways they perceive and imagine things. A society organized around “thingness” also imposes itself on human senses and on mental imagination. In this way, objects gain a powerful influence over the subject. Put simply, human subjects are shaped by the sociality of things (Ning 134). The damaged buildings—“the bullet holes on the wall”, “the wall fell down like a pile of flour”, and “the torn-off roofs” are direct signs of wartime violence. They strike the senses visually and awaken Winnie’s fear of destruction. During her flight, she sees that almost every village lies in ruins, and that people of all ages look exhausted and distressed. Such scenes turn individual perception into shared understanding through a kind of socialization of feeling. The presence of the buildings translates the threat to survival and the pain of losing one’s home into something collectively perceptible. Unlike food, which remains tied to bodily fear and hunger, architecture lifts memory to a social level. In their ruined forms, the buildings gather a common awareness of devastated homes and show how war tears apart ordinary lives.

In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the transformation of the form of ink also carries the adaptation and perseverance of the Chinese people during the war. Lu Ling grew up in an outstanding ink-making family: “An inkstick of ours could last ten years or more. It did not dry out and crumble, or grow soggy with moisture (Tan 178).” Before the war broke out, people had very high demands for ink. Lu Ling recalled the way her father praised ink to customers:

He held up an inkstick and rotated it in the light. "See? It's the right hue, purple-black, not brown or gray like the cheap brands you might find down the street. And listen to this." And I heard a sound as clean and pure as a small silver bell. "The high-pitched tone tells you that the soot is very fine, as smooth as the sliding banks of old rivers." (Tan 225)

However, during the war, the form of ink underwent a significant change, evolving from fine ink to convenient ink. At this point, no one had the leisure to grind ink, so they began to make "Quick Ink": "We ground up the cheap ink, mixed it with water, and put it in small jars that we bought for almost nothing at a machine shop that was going out of business (Tan 321)."

The material qualities of ink changed: its texture became rougher, and it was easier to use. This was not simply a technical improvement. It was material evidence of how everyday life was forced to adjust, a collective wartime compromise in favor of efficiency. When fine craftsmanship became a luxury, Quick Ink turned into a practical way to keep writing and to preserve cultural memory. Unlike food, which triggers bodily memory, or buildings, which carry social memory, ink sustains a higher level of cultural memory. Its altered form shows more than reluctant adaptation. It reflects a shared effort to reset the rhythm of life and protect cultural roots during war, revealing the resilience of the Chinese nation.

#### IV. THINGS AS PARTICIPANTS

The war was not only a grand military and political event. It also entered everyday life through the use and transformation of ordinary objects. In Amy Tan's writing, food, clothing, and manuscripts each take part in the wartime experience in different ways. Food sustains individual psychological resistance. The red dress enables collective cooperation. The manuscripts carry historical recording and transmission. Through these objects, the experience of resistance unfolds from the individual, to the community, and finally to the nation.

In Tan's depiction of the wartime period, food is not a passive object waiting to be consumed. It functions instead as a form of "vibrant matter" with its own agency. Through its material presence, it actively participates in the struggle between people and war, and in its entanglement with human life, it helps shape the conditions of survival during wartime. Wennie bought these for the pilot out of her own pocket: "good pork, fresh clover for dumplings, many cattles of sweet wine, all very expensive during wartime (Tan 134)." Her original intention was: "As I bought this good food, I was thinking about those men, all the pilots, also Wen Fu. If their luck blew down, those men might not return for the next meal (Tan 134)." At this point, the scarcity and nutritional value of food itself constituted a material force, not only providing energy for the soldiers but also embodying Wennie's cherishing of life, participating in the emotional connection against the cruel war in a material form. She prepared auspicious dishes: "sun-dried oysters for wealth; a fast-cooked shrimp for laughter and happiness; fatsai, the black-hair fungus that soaks up good fortune; and plenty of jellyfish, because the crunchy skin always made a lively sound to my ears (Tan 134)." The names and forms of food are closely related to people's spiritual needs. They

participate in the psychological construction against the fear of war, becoming the “vital substances” that sustain hope rather than symbols.

When bombing becomes a daily routine, the initiative of food becomes increasingly prominent. Wennie confessed when buying “maodo, sweet-tasting greens (Tan 198)” in the market: “But during wartime, if you were lucky to have money, you didn’t think about saving your luck. A chance to taste something rare or new was like your saying ‘Eat, drink, be married.’ You could still have something to look forward to, even if life ended tomorrow (Tan 198).” Maodo, which brought Wennie immediate joy, fought against the crisis of war with its vivid presence, supporting people’s will to survive in despair. The detail of Wennie tightly grasping the chestnuts during the bombing is even more impressive: “I was sitting on a bench, staring at a chestnut in my hand...the same chestnut I had peeled before the airplanes came... I was about to throw it away, when I considered I should still hold onto it (Tan 147).” This tiny chestnut, at the critical moment of life and death, calmed Wennie’s panic, helped her fight against her fear and gave rise to the thought of “keeping it well”.

Apart from food, clothes also played an unexpected role in the war. Wennie noticed while hurriedly packing her luggage before fleeing Nanjing: “And then I saw I had packed only winter clothes—as if I would not live through more than one season. What bad-luck thinking! So at the last minute, I took out a sweater and put in two summer dresses (Tan 149).” These winter clothes triggered Wennie’s survival anxiety, pushing her to combat her inner unease by adding more clothes. The materiality of the clothes reminds her that she should have hope for survival. In the interaction between people and objects, the later become involved in human survival strategies and inner struggles. They can ease fear and provide strength, helping individuals maintain the will to survive even in extreme conditions. It is this daily form of support that enables resistance to endure and persist in people’s hearts.

If the objects above gave people some psychological comfort, then this red dress helped the group participate in the War of Resistance even more. In terms of escaping, the car got stuck into heavy fog on the mountain. They stopped because they couldn’t find his way due to the fog. Hulan pulled out her wedding red dress and Jiaguo raised the red dress in front of the car for them to follow. With the red dress, they can use its bright color as a signal. The driver drove ahead slowly. Thus they were able to get past it and go on.

The red dress came in handy at that time. The bright colour of the red dress helped her come out of the situation. When fog is heavy for driving, its high visibility material property converted as a navigation function, showing the material power breaking through an obstacle when interacting with people. In this co-operation between person and thing, and together they burst the obstacle apart, and made their flight. In this way, the red dress became one of the important material forces that pushed them to participate in the War of Resistance.

Beyond individual psychology and group actions, drafts further transforms the experience of the War of Resistance into historical texts and elevates the spirit of the War to a more macroscopic level. In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, Lu Ling records her life experiences through these drafts. As things that carry memories of the war, they participate in the war by preserving and transmitting those memories.

Drafts transformed Lu Ling's individual experience into a material existence that could be preserved and passed on. In his essay "Textual Materialism", Bill Brown raises the question of the materiality of texts. The material attributes of the carrier of words is itself meaningful and should not be overlooked (Ning 136). For Lu Ling, writing is more than a habit. It is her way of holding on to her sense of self during the war. Through writing, she resists being erased by violence and chaos. The drafts carry this act of resistance. Meanwhile, drafts has gone through writing, preservation, and reading, building a bridge of memory between wartime and post-war times. The generation of its meaning precisely aligns with the "materiality effect" proposed by Brown. This idea stresses that materiality is relational and often appears from a particular point of view (Han 112). Drafts enabled Ruth to touch upon her mother's long-buried memories. They become vivid and personal. As a result, Ruth begins to rethink her family history and her own identity. The drafts, as material texts, awaken the next generation's reflection on the past and help pass on the memory of the war. When Ruth takes out the drafts her mother gave her years earlier—pages she had long set aside—she falls into deep thought: "Her mother had given her those other pages... Did she know then that she was losing her memory... she wanted to be here, as her mother told her about her life, taking her through all the detours of the past, explaining the multiple meanings of Chinese words, how to translate her heart (Tan 168-169)." Drafts move across time and space, carrying memories of the War of Resistance. With its initiative, it continuously reinterpreted and given new meaning in changing contexts. At the individual level, material objects provide psychological support. At the collective level, they help to maintain cooperation in societies. At the historical level, they contribute to the transmission of memory across generations. Throughout all the duration of the war, the material force played an active and constructive role.

## V. CONCLUSION

New Materialism provides us with a new theoretical framework for understanding the depiction of the War of Resistance in Amy Tan's novels. By focusing on the agency, sociality and historicity of objects in the novel, this article reveals how objects transcend traditional symbolic representation and become witnesses, carriers and participants in war. Things not only record the profound impact of war on individuals and collectives, but also shapes characters' emotions, behaviors and identities with its unique "power", demonstrating the complex interactive relationship between objects and people. In Tan's writing, objects are no longer static backgrounds or tools, but "actors" with vitality. Eels, quarry and dragon bones intervene in the spiritual world of the characters, becoming silent witnesses to trauma. Food, architecture and ink carry the memories of the war, reflecting the tenacity and adaptation of the Chinese nation in the face of hardship. The red dress and the drafts directly participated in the war, becoming a key force in resisting the war and preserving cultural memories. These objects, in diverse forms of existence, form a dynamic "object-human" symbiotic relationship, outlining the close interweaving of matter and human destiny during the war period.

As a representative of Chinese American literature, Amy Tan's writings on the war are cultural reconstructions of national memory. In the contemporary context of globalization, she elevates the memory of war to the reflective level of the human community through a unique cross-cultural perspective. The power of

things, just like the words under Amy Tan's pen, has become an eternal carrier for safeguarding history and passing on memories.

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