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## Archetypal Numbers in Yangsze Choo's *The Ghost Bride* (2013)

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the symbolic and structural roles of archetypal numbers in Yangsze Choo's novel *The Ghost Bride* (2013), using Carl Jung's theory of number archetypes. The research explores how these numbers, rooted in Chinese cultural and philosophical beliefs, function as narrative and symbolic devices. Decoding number symbolism allow readers and critics to better appreciate the importance of numbers as a literary device. The research builds its theoretical analysis on the interdisciplinary approach of Carl G. Yung's Theory of Archetypal numbers and numerology concentrating on close reading of the text. After identifying the main archetypal numbers in the novel, the paper concentrated on time as a representative of archetypal number. The findings reveal that archetypal numbers enrich the thematic complexity of the novel and deepen its Chinese cultural resonance representing the three major belief systems and Chinese mythology.

## الارقام البدئية في رواية يانغشي تشوالعروس الشبح 2013

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### المستخلص

ان هذا البحث يدرس الدور الرمزي للارقام البدئية في رواية يانغشي تشو العروس الشبح باستخدام نظرية كارل يونغ للارقام البدئية. ان البحث يحلل كيفية توظيف هذه الارقام كوسيلة سردية ورمزية تستمد رمزيتها من الثقافة والمعتقدات الفلسفية الصينية. ان فك شفرة الارقام سوف يمكن كل من القارئ والناقد الادبي من فهم اهمية الارقام كعنصر ادبي يشير الى المكان والزمان ويعطي عمق للشخصيات. ركزت الباحثتان على الزمن كرقم بدئي وتم تحليله وفق نظرية كارل يونغ للارقام البدئية وعلم الارقام. بعد التعرف على الارقام البدئية في الرواية ركزت الباحثتان على الوقت كمثال على الرقم البدئي لتكون نتيجة البحث ان هذه الارقام تثري عمق موضوع الرواية ويعزز الابعاد الثقافية والفلسفية الصينية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : البوذية، الكونفوشيوسية، الابراج الصينية، الطاقة، التاوية، مهرجان قوارب التنين، يوم كنس المقابر

### 1. Introduction

From the very beginning of literature till this day numbers have been and are used in literary texts for many reasons; in novel and chapter headings to attract the reader's attention being a part of his collective unconsciousness for example *Less than Zero* (1985), *I am number Four* (2010). Numbers can serve as a literary device for example *1984* by George Orwell (1948) where the date by itself foreshadows the main theme of the novel. On the other hand, numbers can portray the literary character's personality. Although literature is rich in number symbolism, there has been a notable lack of studies on the significance of numbers as both symbols and as literary devices. This gap in literary studies has encouraged the researchers to study numerology within modern American novels taking Yangsze Choo's *The Ghost Bride* (2013) as an example.

### The Aim of the research :

The research aims at shedding the light on archetypal numbers in Chinese mythology represented in modern English novels by decoding their symbolism, and analyzing how they are used as both literary elements and literary devices.

### 2. Methodology:

The research builds its theoretical analysis on the interdisciplinary approach of Carl G. Yung's Theory of Archetypal numbers to discuss and analyze modern American novel representation of Chinese mythology namely Yangsze Choo's *The Ghost Bride* (2013).

## 2. THEORETICAL STUDIES

### What are ARCHYTYPAL NUMBERS:

The term archetype consists of two elements: the first, "arche" that means primal source or origin, while "type" means pattern. (Card, Mind, Matter and Archetype:A Review of the Jung-Pauli Hypothesis, 2020) According to the Merriam Webster dictionary the word archetype is a Greek verb "archein," which means to "begin" or "to rule" while "typos," means "type." It is defined as the "original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies." (merriam-webster, 2025) This pattern or model attracted the attention of Carl Gustav Jung, a well-known psychologist, who applied it to his psychoanalysis of dreams and then expanded its application to include literary criticism. According to Jung archetypes are "symbolic forms of stories, persons, places, or images that have been accumulated from human experience throughout history." (Leigh, 2015) He developed archetypes of personality, number archetypes, and later on archetypal plots were derived from his theories as well.

### Carl G. Jung's Theory of Number Archetypes :

Carl Gustav Jung was a psychiatrist, psychologist, and above all, a psychotherapist. He is mostly famous for his theory of archetypes which is largely applied in literature. During his later years, however, he made a theory concerning numbers through psychotherapy. He was working on a patient, treating him through dreams, when he discovered that in the patient's dream, there is a certain number that acts as a core point. (McGuire & Hull, 1977) Through his repeated studies, he concluded that smaller natural numbers are symbols, just like people and events are in dreams. These dream numbers represent the patient's collective character traits and behavioral situations. Jung believed that the first four natural numbers represent the phases of the psyche: one represents non-differentiation, two stands for polarity and opposition, three represents a movement towards

resolutions as the Christian trinity, and finally, four represents stability and wholeness as in the quaternary. (Jung, 1964) Jung interpreted numbers based on Pythagorean numerology, where one refers to God, two represent female, three represent male, and in  $1+2+3=6$  here number six represents creation and evolution. In some cases he used English cabalism for number interpretations; one is a symbol of the living God, two symbolizes spirit from spirit, three represent water from spirit, four represent fire from water, five is height, six is depth, seven is east, eight is west, nine is south, and ten is north. (Morariu & Card, 1998)

Soon after these studies on dream numbers, Jung generalized his theory and became fascinated with numbers and declared that “number itself is the most primitive archetype of order which became conscious.” (Card, 1996) Therefore, he believed that numbers coexisted with humans, and that humans discovered these numbers rather than invented them. Scientists throughout history tried to understand how the brain perceives numbers, and to this day they did not reach a conclusive result. Numbers do not only represent mere mathematical numbers, they are reflected in shapes, time, value, and measurement as well. Since numbers coexisted with humans. Jung considered them to be archetypes, symbolizing religious, philosophical, and aesthetic associations of a certain culture. Furthermore, Jung suggested that numbers are produced spontaneously by the unconscious, and drive man to behave specially. (Papadopoulos, 2006)

Jung started his theory on archetypal numbers believing that they are the key to universal mystery because a number “is just much discovered as it is invented. It is quantity as well as meaning.” (Papadopoulos, 2006) During the same time that Jung was working on his number archetype theory, Wolfgang Pauli, a Nobel prizewinner, and quantum physicist was a patient who sought Jung's help through dream therapy. Pauli immediately was interested in Jung's archetypal dream numbers, and soon they collaborated forming the Archetypal Hypothesis of Jung and Pauli.

Unfortunately, unable to complete his work due to old age, Carl Jung gave his work to Marie-Louise Von Franz who soon published her findings on Jung's number theory in her book *Numbers and Time* (1974). Franz concluded that "natural numbers appear to represent the typical universally recurring common motion patterns of both psychic and physical energy." Numbers exist from eternity and they belong to both the world of the realm

visible that is matter, as well as the imaginary, the invisible that is the mind. In other words, number is the great mediator between the two worlds. This theory was further developed by Charles Card who defined archetypal numbers as "the bases for all possible symbolic expression." (Card, 2020). Jung based his interpretations of numbers on Pythagorean numerology as well as on numerous areas of knowledge to come up with his theory. Although most world cultures and civilizations have unique numerology reflected in literature, extremely few studies are dedicated to studying and analyzing these reflections. Numerology does not include only numbers, it is interdisciplinary, therefore it include cosmology, astrology, chronobiology, alchemy, quantum physics, biology, and of course archetypal psychology and mythology to name only few. (Card, 2020).

### **3. *The Ghost Bride* (2013)**

*The Ghost Bride* is New York Times bestseller novel and adapted as Netflix – original Series in 2020 written by Yangsze Choo (2013) a Malaysian writer from Chinese descendant. The novel is based on Chinese mythology set in Malaya 1893, now a days Malaysia, during the British rule. It tells the story of Li Lan, a seventeen year old girl who is the last descendant of the previously wealthy Chinese Pan family. Her father, after his wife's death, fell into heavy debts, and became addicted to opium. The novel is divided into four parts; part one, "Malaya 1893," starts on the festival of the dead when she is asked to become a ghost bride for the wealthy Lim family. In return for marrying their dead son and living as a wealthy widow her entire life, her father's debt will be paid off and both her Amah, an elderly nurse, and Old Wong, the cook will be secured for life. Unfortunately, Li Lan was already betrothed to the dead groom's cousin, Lim Tian Bai but the engagement has been cancelled, instead he is betrothed to a girl from Quah wealthy family. At the beginning Li Lan refused to become a ghost bride, yet not only the Lim family takes extra measures to convince her, the ghost of the groom, Lim Tian Ching starts to haunt her. Plagued with sleepless ghost – hunted nights, Li Lan starts taking sleeping medications and made a deal with the ghost vowing to discover his murderer in exchange for her freedom. She started investigating the murder when she met Er Lang, a handsome man who claimed to be an official investigating corruption and bribery of afterlife judges by the wealthy Lim

family. In the second part “Afterworld,” Li Lan could not continue her investigation because she accidentally overdoses on her medicine becoming temporarily a ghost, she encounters hungry ghosts and spirits, and meets with Fan, the female ghost who helps her enter the land of the dead. The third part of the novel, “The Plains of the Dead,” we accompany Li Lan in her journey to the land of the dead where she witnesses the ten courts of hell, the nine judges, and eventually finds Lim’s mansion. With the help of Er Lang she solves the case finding the corrupted judge, and Lim’s murderer. Being a temporary ghost caused her to suffer the separation of her spirit from her body thus Er Lang saves her by giving her some of his qi, fifty years of his life, revealing he is a higher being, a dragon, then returns her to her body that she discovers is occupied by another ghost. The fourth and last part of the novel “Malacca,” describes her quest for expelling the intruder ghost from her body. The ghost managed to be engaged to Tiam Bai and are set to marry within three months. After reclaiming her body, Li Lan realized that her true love is Er Lang, the dragon, therefore ends up marrying him.

### 3.1. ARCHTYPAL NUMBERS :

In an article entitled “Numerology and Athermancy in Pythagorean Philosophy and The *Yijin*,” Juan Valdez explores the similarities as well as the differences between Pythagorean numerology and Chinese numerology. Valdez discusses that Pythagorean numerology is entirely based on western philosophy and knowledge, accordingly, the westerners viewed the world as a closed system having a beginning and an end. They also believed that sciences are relatively separated from each other and the goal of humans on earth is to discover the laws that govern the universe and to benefit from this discovery to gain health and wealth. Chinese numerology, on the other hand, is based on eastern beliefs that the world is an open system that have no beginning and no end. Sciences are not separated, on the contrary, they are built on each other and the goal of humans on earth is to gain harmony and achieve balance with the universe. These two different philosophies govern the manner in which numbers are interpreted. Scientifically speaking, there are no clear evidence that these two civilizations; the western civilization represented by the Roman Pythagoras and the eastern civilization represented by the Chinese, have been in contact with each other during the

formation of these philosophical approaches. However, numbers, being archetypes, are interpreted and expresses almost in the same way when a comparisons is made between these two seemingly different philosophies. (Valdez, 2016)

### 3.1.1 ARCHYTYUPAL NUMBERS AND CHINESE BEILEIF SYSTEM :

Chinese numbers are entirely based on the three Chinese belief systems: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Therefore, in order to accurately identify and analyze these numbers a clear understanding of these beliefs is a must. Confucianism, although commonly regarded as a religion, it is in fact a complex school of thought proposed by Confucius, a prominent Chinese philosopher. Confucius, in his book the *Analects*, introduced five main philosophical concepts that he believed are the pillars for a prosperous civilization: *ren* (humaneness), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (etiquette), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial piety). These concepts are applied in the five core societal relationships: ruler – subject, father – son, husband – wife, elder brother – younger brother, and new friend – old friend. (Britannica, Confucianism, 2025)

Daoism sometimes written Taoism, is a philosophy of living in harmony with the Dao, which is translated as the way, the universe, the substance of all matter. It is founded by two main thinkers Laozi and Zhuang Zhou. Laozi introduced his teachings in his books *Daodejing* and *Tao Te Ching* were he believed that humans should go with the flow of the universe and they should follow certain *li* to preserve the *Dao*. In other words, Man should follow certain rituals and etiquettes to preserve the universe. Therefore, the main concentration of this philosophical belief is Wu Wei (not acting), that is going with the flow without acting, reacting or revolting. Zhuang Zhou, on the other hand, introduced the *Zhuangzi*, a great philosophical book that is considered the main source for Daoism for its unique literary style, comprehensive nature, and its great influence on the development of Buddhism. It combines the folk tradition with Confucius tradition where Confucius concentrated on the morals and political system, Taoism concentrated on the personal and metaphysical systems. The book rewrote folktales enhancing the principles of Daoism mainly the way of the celestial masters and the harmony of opposites incarnated in the Yin

and Yang to achieve optimal *Qi* that is the energy of the universe within a person. (Britannica, Taoism, 2025)

### 3.1.2. Archetypal Numbers in *The Ghost Bride*:

The novel is based on many Chinese myths that are rich with archetypal numbers. Numbers from one to hundred are repeatedly mentioned not only as literary devices but as main themes as well. They are endowed with significant symbolism encoding, through meaning and pronunciation, cultural associations and philosophical ideologies. (Reed, 2024) Chinese numerology is rich with philosophies yet in this analysis we are going to concentrate only on those mentioned in the novel namely the numbers from one to ten, sacred geometry as well as Feng Shui and the Chinese Zodiac.

Number one, according to both Pythagorean and Chinese numerology, represent heaven, beginning, and leadership. (Zhenghua, 2016) Therefore when number one is used for describing a character's rank within a family things changes greatly. The first wife, the first son, and even the first concubine expresses the rights and privileges that character is entitled. Yet in many events in the novel number one is mentioned as a negative number because it refers to loneliness and the entire novel is based on the finding a wife to a single ghost. Number two is an integral part of Chinese mythology it represent duality, the Yin and Yan and the power of opposites completing each other. We see Li Lan's possessions are in twos, she has only two formal dresses, she always wears her hair in two plaits, the second wives and daughters, Lim is the second son. Number three in both numerologies is associated with birth, marriage and family and it is mentioned so many times; Madam Lim is the third wife, Fan haunted the man for three years, Isabel Souza, Tian Bai's first love, has three moles on her nick, the three houses in the plains of the dead, Lim's grandfather had three concubine, Li Lan left her body for three weeks, and her bed was three walled box. Number four is a very controversial number in Chinese mythology, always associated with death, the Lim family have four daughters and no surviving son, the four monsters who haunts Li Lan while she was a ghost, and the four board of officials she met in Lim's Mansion. Number five is used for describing the prosperity of Lim's family where they set five tables of food at festivals, and hold a five – needle threading competition and her Amah makes her five pairs

of beaded shoes as her wedding gift. It is also the symbol of the dragon, the emperor of China is believed to be a descendant of the dragon therefore his symbol is five claws on royal garments yet only three for common folk. In both numerologies number five represent the five elements fire, water, earth, wood, and metal. Number six represent flow and harmony and it is mentioned three times; the journey to the land of the dead took six hours and she became servant number six to discover the corrupted judge number six. Number Seven refers to the Double seventh festival. The seventh day of the seventh month was a festival to celebrate two heavenly lovers – the cowherd and the weaving maid. Also, to air books and scrolls. Number eight is not mentioned at all in the novel while number nine represent longevity, power, wedding and imperial celebration in the novel nine is the number of months Liam Ching is dead as well as the Nine judges of hell. Finally number ten in both numerologies represent perfection, completion, wholeness, and full cycles. (Yang, 2020) In the novel number ten stands for the Ten courts of hell, the ten days Li Lan had to live in the Plains of the dead and the ten guests at Lim's Mansion.

### **3.2. Archetypal Time**

Time is a representation of archetypal numbers. Man has always depended on the skies to measure time, mark the seasons, make up calendars, predict future natural phenomena like rain, storms, floods, and awaits signs from gods. The celestial bodies that adorned the skies the sun, moon, planets, and stars formed the main themes in world mythology. Each civilization had a unique system for measuring time hence came different world calendars. The first calendar was founded by the Sumerians, yet the Egyptians were the first to indicate 365 days in a year, the Mayan's established two calendars one include 260days while the other 365days. (Depuydt, 2017) Accordingly, the hours of the day differ as well, for example in both Chinese and Indian civilizations the day consists of 12 hours instead of 24 (each two hours are measured as one)and have special names. In Chinese they carry the names of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac. The concept of time itself differs across cultures carrying the entire frame of mind of that specific civilization. In all ancient civilizations for example, time is perceived as cyclic, meaning it is repeated. Humans are created, they are born, they live for a period of time, they die, they are resurrected to be judged, and then they

are incarnated as another being. This belief is prominent in major civilizations like Native American, Hindus, Chinese, Norse, Greek, Aztec while Egyptian civilization believe that time is both cyclic and linear. In all world religions life is short to the extent it is measured as a day or even half a day compared to the eternal life after judgment.

Therefore, in world mythology the concept of time, age, date, history, timekeeping, is archetypal in numbers yet unique in symbolism. Some civilizations view time as extremely precious, a notion that is still reflected till this day in daily idioms of time as money like save time, spend time, waste time.

### **3.2.1. Archetypal Time in *The Ghost Bride*:**

Time is an archetypal number in *The Ghost Bride* encoded with the three Chinese philosophical teachings: Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

According to these three Chinese philosophical teachings time is cyclic in nature, the clock itself is circular, it has no beginning and it never stops, the same is true with morning and night, weeks, months, seasons, and years. Buddhism express life as a circle that does not start with birth and ends with death, it is a repeated cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through incarnation. Each person's life is regarded as a "link within the continuum of the ancestral lineage," that includes both the living and the dead kept in harmony through rituals. (Castelli, 2015) Taoism expressed time as an endless cycle of birth, growth, and decay so as from decay a rebirth emerges. Hence the old saying history repeats itself because every birth brings change and transformation yet the transformation is harmonious and consistence. (Castelli, 2015)

In the novel Li Lan repeatedly states that she is a Buddhist "we were all normally Buddhist I supposed" (Choo, 42) therefore she believes in the cycle of rebirth and incarnation. Her father, on the other hand, is "a strict Confucian who reserved a certain contempt toward them [Buddhists]." (Choo, 42) her father does not believe in the spiritual world and is concerned with the physical world only. Tian Bai is Christian and according to his belief system time is linear; that is birth, death, and rebirth in the afterlife.

It is also important to understand that time is measured differently in Chinese calendar because it is measured differently using Chronometry, the science of measuring time accurately. The Chinese calendar is lunisolar that is a combination of solar cycles and

lunar cycles along with many religious, cultural, and political considerations. The Chinese calendar consist of twelve months each month is called after one of the twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac. (Merritt, 2021) (Alhousseini & Khaluhin, 2025) These animals were granted their rank and place in the calendar according to a Chinese Myth, the Great Race. According to the myth, the Jade emperor called for a race in which all can complete swimming through the heavenly waters to reach the emperor. The first twelve animals will take their place in the calendar in the order of their achievement in the race: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig. Each of the twelve animals is combined with wuxing, the five elements of metal, water, wood, fire, and earth as well as with the Yin and Yang. Therefore it takes 60 years to repeat the cycle. (Kostić, 2009) (Denisenko, 2021) The hours of the day are also named after the animals of the zodiac so when Choo gives time in the novel she refers to it the hour of the snake and the hour of the dog. Again the months of the festivals in the novel are also symbolic of the animals they stand for like the snake month in which the Qingming is held, the Dragon month in which the dragon boat festival is held, and finally the Monkey month in which the Qixi festival is held.

Time is skillfully integrated in the setting of the novel serving also as a literary device expressing motif, metaphor, irony, foreshadowing, repetition, and theme as well. The novel is set in 1893 capsulizing the historical frame of that era in a single date. This main setting is divided into four time zones; Malaya 1893, Afterworld, Plains of the Dead, and Malacca. During each time zone, the concept of time changes influencing all characters and actions in the novel.

#### **A. Malaya 1893 :**

In this time zone we are introduced to all main characters starting with the protagonist Li Lan within a mythical time frame. She is almost eighteen, the proper age for marriage, she is asked to become a ghost bride during the Qing Ming, the festival of the dead. The Qingming festival is a traditional Chinese festival observed by most of the Chinese in many countries in the 4<sup>th</sup> of April. The festival is dedicated to commemorate the dead by visiting the graves of their loved ones, sweeping their tombstones, burning incense, performing rituals, and making ritual offerings. The offerings include spirit money, and

material replicas of material goods like cars, homes, paper servants, and animals. (Ledeneva, 2024) (Kulik, 2025) This festival is based on the deep belief in the Buddhist afterlife where the dead remain in the afterlife phase for some time before reincarnation. At the end of the festival all the offerings are burnt, the food is eaten, and traditional Chinese games are played. It was during this festival that Li Lan got an invitation to the wealthy Lim's mansion to celebrate the festival and to play mahjong, a traditional Chinese game. Although Lim's mansion is rich with numerous delicacies Li Lan has never seen before, the object of her interest is the clocks. Li Lan noticed that the entire mansion is over decorated with clocks, "all around there were clocks," "Such clocks! The walls were covered with dozens of clocks in every style imaginable," upon which she came to a conclusions that, "time, it seemed, could scarcely go unmarked in this house." (Choo, 10) It was through clocks that she meets her first male attraction, Tian Bai, whom she thought to be a clock cleaner. She heard "a faint silvery chime" of a clock so she followed the sound to a room where she met Tian Bai. Shocked to see a young lady leaving the entertainment outside and concentrating on clocks he asks "you like clocks?" (Choo, 14) This question that led to an interesting conversation tying both in mutual attraction. It is from this conversation we learn of the old master's obsession with collecting cocks "he never rest until he had acquired a new specimen." Here the grandfather's obsession with clocks and time foreshadows his choice of life in the plains of the dead. The conversation develops between the two starting from comparing and contrasting different types of clocks mechanical, water, candles, and western clocks. Many aspects of Li Lan's characterization is revealed through her conversation about clocks. She knows that western clocks are more accurate in longitude and latitude unlike other types of clock. Tian Bai is fascinated with her knowledge, Li Lan shows how well read and educated she is. Also her father encouraged her educational interest by explaining difficult scientific concepts to her giving her strength of character that women during that time rarely have. She simply concludes the conversation with a daring statement that with this knowledge of how to measure time in both land and sea China should have conquered the world instead of being a mere colony. From this incident throughout the novel clocks and time became a major motif.

During the Qingming festival, madam Lim took Li Lan's hair ribbon and burnt it in the offerings to her son. Since then he was able to haunt her dreams and take hold of her life. Her first encounter with the antagonist, Lim Tian Ching, the ghost groom, was through a nightmare she had that exact day. Lim Tian Ching told her that he first met her at the Dragon Boat festival a year ago. Of course she has no recollection of this encounter, unfortunately Lim Tian Ching was interested in her from first sight and when he wanted to marry her he learned that she is betrothed from childhood to his cousin Tian Bai whom he deeply loathed. The Dragon boat festival also called double fifth festival is a traditional Chinese holiday that occurs in the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese calendar. This festival commemorate the Chinese prime minister and a patriotic poet Qu Yuan who committed suicide by throwing himself into the Miluo River during the Warring States Period after being exiled. It is said the locals raced in their boats to save him or at least to reclaim his body. They also scattered rice into the water so as to prevent fish and sea animals from eating his body. (Payne & Preston, 2025) Till this day the festival is celebrated by holding dragon boat races for good luck and eating rice dumpling called zongzi. Ironically, however, this month is considered unlucky and even poisonous where people fear the five poisonous animals so they hang plants with scary shapes and bad smells to ward off evil like calamus, Artemisia, and garlic gloves. They also eat food that are pronounced like number five in Chinese. They also wear five colored threaded braids representing the five elements to ward of these poisonous animals.

The second time she is invited to the Lim's mansion was during the Qixi festival or the Double Seventh Festival. It is also a traditional Chinese festival celebrating the romantic legend of Zhinu and Niulang, the Cowherd and Weaver girl according to Chinese mythology. Rituals include worshipping the celestials, burning paper items as offerings, eating Qiao food, and holding contests in domestic skills specially needlework symbolizing traditional talents of a good wife. (Payne & Preston, 2025) Li Lan participated in the five needle thread competition and being the fastest she won the competition.

She received a gift for winning the competition along with a gift from Tian Bai, a pocket watch, declaring his interest in her. Although she was so happy with the gift that she returned it by giving him her hair brush, the clock as a gift was so unlucky according to

Chinese beliefs. He Amah tells her that watches and clocks are bad omen and superstitious because they measure out the days of a person's life. Ironically Tian Bai gives her the same watch he was repairing the first time they met. It is foreshadowing as well as a metaphor for their relationship on two levels, first the watch is not brand new just like his heart for she is not the first love of his life. Also, the watch was broken when he met her just like his heart was broken from a previous relationship and now after fixing it he gave it to her.

From the burning of her ribbon during the Qingming festival Li Lan's dreams become nightmares haunted with the ghost of Lim Tian Ching repeatedly asking her to become his ghost bride. One night Lim visited her to tell her that Tian Bai murdered him and he was infuriated to see Li Lan mooning over the watch that Tian Bai gave her shouting "that clock, that watch, I hate those things." (Choo, 56) He ordered her to throw it away so she threw it at him.

After that encounter with the ghost groom, Li Lan became very sick that Tian Bai came to visit her but she knew their relationship is doomed so she tells him "time had already run out for us" (Choo, 60) She started taking medicine so as to be able to sleep without nightmares. The first day she slept till the hour of the snake. Choo repeatedly uses clocks as simile and imagery to describe characters for example when Li Lan's health started to deteriorate because of both the haunting of Lim and the medication her old maid, Amah, started to take care of her too much therefore she grew smaller than ever like Choo here describes her using a clock as an imagery, "a clockwork toy that had begun to run down." (Choo, 85) Finally Li Lan learned that Tian Bai might have murdered his cousin and is newly engaged to a lady from a rich family. She is devastated and injured that Tian Bai failed her and since the engagement contract is already signed it meant that "he failed for quite some time." (Choo,87) Li Lan, unable to wait for her Amah to give her the right dosage of her medication, overdosed and went into a death – like coma.

## **B. Afterlife**

This is the second time zone in the novel, she is in a coma, her body is in a death – like state, yet her spirit is floating around her physical body. She remained next to her body not knowing what to do till she found a thread coming from the watch Tian Bai gave her which she threw at Lim Tian Ching. The thread lead outside her window so she got out of her house

and follow it. Each place she reaches is related in some way or another to time; on her first stop for example, she met a ghost called Fan who was haunting her lover for three years feeding on his *qi*, life force, waiting for him to die so that she can go with him to the plains of the dead. Here, Choo beautifully portrays the ghost leaning over her lover while sleeping: “the time is almost at hand anyway.” (Choo, 111) Li Lan did not understand which time Fan was referring to “What time is that?” and to Li Lan’s shock, Fan answered “Why, I’ve been waiting for him to die of course.” (Choo, 111) On her next stop, she met Old Willem Ganesvoot, the ghost of Dutch architect who died fifty years ago and since then was not able to talk to anyone for there are no ghosts who understand his language except the lunatic Dutchman who killed himself jumping off the clock tower.

During this time zone many characters warned Li Lan that she should take care of her body otherwise, she will run out of time and stay in the spirit world like the Dutch architect, “she did not like the idea of lingering for centuries” (Choo, 122) so Li Lan felt hopeless saying “his words frightened me more than anything I had encountered that night.” (Choo,122) Therefore, Li Lan ran to her body for fear of fading, unfortunately, her house was guarded by two ox – head demons sent by Lim Tian Ching to find her. She heard them saying that if she, as a spirit, got lost and took a long time before returning to her body “her spirit will shrivel up. Even if she does come back, she won’t fit anymore. Be like a dried bean rattling around in a pod.” (Choo, 125)

Time is of vital importance, she didn’t wish to be like fan “trapped for decades in the orbit of her lover’s life.” (Choo, 138) Yet she went to Tian Bai and entered his dreams using the thread of the watch he gave her and pulled him to another dream. The people that was in the first dream “now frozen as though time has stopped for them.” That is when he realized that he is dreaming his dream world began to “ripple and dissolve.” (Choo, 138)

Finally she met Er Lang, who introduces himself as an official in the afterlife investigating a corruption case in the courts of hell and Lim Tian Ching is involved. Together they plan to solve the case yet Li Lan has to travel to the Plains of the Dead to investigate closely. Er Lang warns her that:

Time in the Plains of the Dead doesn’t pass at the same rate as it does here. The rate isn’t consistent; it ebbs and flows, but in general it will be faster than time here. That

is how someone may die one night and be reborn the next day, yet have spent months or even years in the plains of the dead (Choo, 157)

### **C. The Plains of the Dead**

Yangsze Choo uses repetition when it comes to ghostly habits especially “from time to time.” These repetitions occur more than ten times through the entire novel for example to show Fan’s suspicious behavior; in the Plain of the dead where she “from time to time her white hand smoothed her hair”(Choo, 170) and when “from time to time she glanced back with hard and bright eyes on Li Lan.” (Choo, 170) Ghosts admit sucking the life force of living people for Fan was sucking the like force of her lover reducing his life that although he is fifty – seven he looked in his eighties.

Injuries heal faster and some people look younger in the Plains of the Dead. For example Master Awyong stayed for two hundred years. Other spirits looked much older than they really are. Demons in the Plains of the Dead eat the spirit of the ghost making look much older like Li Lan’s grandfather’s third concubine who was twenty one yet looked old because she traded her age with a demon that ate out the essence of her spirit body in return for smallpox to kill all those she hated. Her mother sought the same demon and allowed him to eat out the essence of her spirit body in return for saving her daughter from the third concubine’s revenge.

As Er Lang warned Li Lan time in the Plains of the Dead moved in a strange way for they walked for hours, slept, then walked again in a journey that took strangely six or seven hours. Not only time changes in the Plains of the Dead, distance changes as well, “Distance is very deceptive here ..... you can spend days getting to some places and only minutes to reach others.” (Choo, 179) even the entrances to plains of the dead shifts and moves. These shifts in distance measurement made Li Lan confused, “it made me anxious too about how time was passing here.” (Choo, 176) In the this time zone she is supposed to stay for ten days only yet She was surprised to learn that she left the real world for almost three weeks, sometime time run faster other time reverse itself and runs slower. She needs to rejoin her body as fast as possible she has a few weeks at the best but “the deterioration in fit between your spirit and body might have already begun.” (Choo, 226) When Lim Tain Ching found her in his mansion he was shocked and asked her where she was for he was

looking for her for a long time. Li Lan lied to him telling him that she was lost in the in the plains of the dead for a long time even months and to her astonishment he believed her. Here too she met her mother in Lim's mansion where she came to work as a servant for years after hearing of Lim's obsession with her daughter. Li Lan was bewildered for the entire ghost bride affair did not take more than months but her mother affirms "it has been years. Time passes strangely in this place." (Choo, 259)

Finally in these Plains Li Lan learns from Lim Tian Ching that she is not the first love in Tian Bai's heart and that she will never be the first leaving her motionless for a long time. Fortunately, she is saved by Er Lang who revealed his true nature becoming a dragon so as to save her from the demons and monsters that were haunting her.

#### **D. Malacca**

In this time zone she returns to Malacca to reunite with her body before it is too late yet instead she goes to see Tian Bai entering his dreams only to find him rushing to the clocks room where he started rewinding all clocks as fast and as accurate as he can strangely "he never finished the task. The clocks appeared to multiply under his fingers." (Choo, 280) upon seeing her he immediately asks her to wind the clocks so as not to waste time. Rewinding the clocks seemed as a metaphor for her state that she felt like her own time is running out. She learned that Tian Bai broke his engagement to the rich lady and is now engaged to her.

She finally goes back home to her body and to her surprise she finds the ghost Fan occupying her body. Unable to return to her body weakened her and she started to dissolve. She called Er Lang for help but unfortunately time started slowing down and was about to stop, she felt sad that she does not have a future anymore, and afraid of becoming a hungry ghost so she stood motionless for hours telling herself "I would be lost forever, doomed to drift unanchored until the end of time." (Choo, 292)

Er Lang arrived and gave her fifty years of his qi, life force of a dragon that changed her for she will not age normally nor die for a long time. She will outlive all her descendants and forever will look young. Li Lan was not the least sad, on the contrary she left Tian Bai and married the Er Lang for eternity.

#### 4. Conclusions :

The novel is based on many Chinese mythologies adapted into an English novel to express many themes and ideologies. Numbers in the novel play an integral part in enriching themes as well as characters. These numbers are archetypal according to Jung's theory therefore they represent collective consciousness at the same time as reflecting Chinese religious, philosophical and cultural beliefs. One of the major number archetypes in the novel is time. Time is an integral part in the novel represented by numbers and encoded with Chinese entire frame of mind. According to Chinese belief systems time is circular, that is it has no beginning nor an end. This concept of time explains character choices in life and in the plains of the dead. In addition to that, the characters use animal names for hours of the day and months of the year symbolizing Chinese zodiac and the myth behind it. Time in the novel also serve as setting therefore the novel is divided into four time zones and each time zone has a unique setting. Characters are introduced during traditional Chinese festivals like the double seven festival and the double five festival. Clocks and watches serve as literary devices being motif in many events and metaphor in others.

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