

# Mostly Suppression, but Sometimes Liberation?: Intertwined Aspects of Marriage in Yiyun Li's “Love in the Marketplace”<sup>1</sup>

Akinori INOUE

**Keywords:** Yiyun Li, marriage, heteronormativity

## Introduction

The works of Yiyun Li (1972-) <sup>2</sup> depict characters who lead non-normative lives. Her first short story collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005), features stories of marginalized characters. One of the short stories in the book, “Love in the Marketplace,” describes the characters whose lives are influenced by marriage. As Elizabeth Brake says, “[Marriage] is life-defining” (*Minimizing* 23). Marriage is generally explained as an institution that regulates “sex, reproduction, and family life” (Brake, “Marriage and Domestic Partnership”). Marriage often functions as a mechanism for oppression regardless of sexual identity and orientation. In some cases, however, marriage could be seen as a way of liberation. These two aspects are inextricably linked together. This paper will examine how marriage functions as both a way of suppression and also an alternative way of escape. This paper will also discuss how sexual norms and sexual desire are described in the story. The reasons why the protagonist does not accept the marriage will be clarified throughout the discussion.

## Intertwined Aspects of Marriage

“Love in the Marketplace” is a short story included in Yiyun Li’s first collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005). As Michel Faber points out, “[T]he story takes a startling, erotic detour,” eroticness plays a significant role in this work. The functions of sexual desire, which will be discussed later in this paper, are an essential element in interpreting the protagonist’s behavior. However, the interpretation of “Love in the Marketplace” should not be limited to these romantic, sexual and erotic aspects. In relation to these sexual politics, marriage as a social norm is a critical factor that highly influences the characters of the story. As Elizabeth Brake says, “[Marriage] is life-defining” (*Minimizing* 23), marriage defines one’s life in various aspects. It is not only personal but also political,

cultural and societal. Marriage, which is a highly idealized political system, often works as a suppression, but in some cases, people also find marriage to be a way of liberation. In “Love in the Marketplace,” marriage functions as both a way of suppressing and an alternative way of escape. In addition, marriage is the topos where one’s sexual desire and social norms are entangled. This paper discusses her decision on marriage through her values regarding sexual acts and examines what she prioritizes the most according to her values.

The protagonist of “Love in the Marketplace,” Sansan, is an English teacher at the Educator’s school in her hometown. Sansan, now in her 30s, does not have a husband, a lover, or a close friend (92), though she used to have a fiancé and a best friend. Ten years ago, during their college days, she planned a secret project with two others: she made Tu, her fiancé from the same village, marry Min, her best friend and the most beautiful woman she has ever met, to let Min escape from China. Min was actively involved in a political event. Although she eluded imprisonment, she was doomed to lose her right to acquire a decent job after graduation. Min wanted to go to America after graduation, but her hope was broken when the new policy was introduced; it restricted students without American relatives from obtaining passports for studying abroad. Then, Sansan suggested that her boyfriend apply for graduate schools in the United States, and he and Min marry so that Min could leave China for the United States as his “dependent” (100). Every part of the project went well, including the process of acquiring Tu’s granduncle’s false certificate. The arrangement was expected to be successful with Min’s independence in the US, Tu’s divorce from Min, and his marriage with Sansan afterward. However, Sansan received a short letter from Tu, telling her that Tu decided not to marry Sansan and to stay in the marriage with Min. Since then, she has been teaching English in her hometown. The story starts on the day Sansan’s mother visits her and tells her that Tu has divorced. Contrary to her mother’s expectations, Sansan is not happy to hear about it. She says that she does not want to marry him.

Marriage functions mostly as a suppressing way in the story, while characters in “Love in the Marketplace” use marriage as an underhanded way. Sansan’s idea of “false marriage” (99)<sup>3</sup> was audacious, although she would face the pressure of marriage. To examine Sansan’s notion of marriage, it is vital to analyze her plan for the false marriage between Tu and Min. Marriage has often been accused of being a means of suppression. Marriage, legal systems of marriage, or norms concerning marriage, are all apparently a result of patriarchal institutions, and function as oppression and suppression, especially against women and sexual minorities. In this story, as we see later, marriage influences characters in an oppressive manner. On the other hand, it should be noted that a marriage can be seen in more than one aspect.

Marriage is a legal framework that protects a specific bilateral relationship, excluding others from the one-on-one heterosexual relationship at the same time. A good place to start is the case of the Tu’s and Min’s marriage. The marriage between Tu and Min, which was planned by Sansan, was initially supposed to be “a false marriage” (99). The false marriage, for Min, meant a chance to leave China, where she had lost “a right to any legal job” (98). As she dreamed of going to America, which was the “only hope for her future” (99), it was

necessary for her to leave China and live somewhere different. In order to make this happen, the only solution Sansan came up with, after the introduction of the new regulation that prohibits students from studying abroad in America, was to follow a man going to the United States as his wife. Sansan was successful in persuading both Tu and Min, and three of them implemented the plan. Thus, they agreed that marriage is the only, or the most probable way to liberate Min. Sansan's efforts imply that Min had no choice but to marry Tu and to take advantage of marriage. This is evidence that marriage is a politically privileged system. Furthermore, this also proves that Sansan's imagination was limited within the patriarchal norms: she could not come up with any other ideas to let Min escape unless they followed the framework of marriage. For Sansan, liberating Min from China was the most important and it worked well as she planned. They finally took advantage of the marriage's exclusive benefit, and in that way, marriage worked as a means of liberation for Min.

Marriage also brought liberation to Tu. Among the three of them, Tu was the only person who was eligible for a passport to study in America in accordance with the newly introduced governmental policy. The policy was designed to impose a restriction on the number of students who apply for passports to study abroad in the United States by requiring the applicants to have American relatives. This made Min embittered. However, Tu was technically not eligible to apply for his passport because he did not have any American relatives. It was Sansan's idea that they get a false certificate of Tu's grandfather's brother. His grand-uncle had been to Taiwan. Sansan argued, "[N]obody will go to America to check [Tu's] family history. As long as [Tu and Sansan] get a certificate saying that he's in America . . ." (99). In addition, when Sansan encourages Tu, she evokes his desire for freedom. "Don't you want to go to America, too? We don't have to go back home after graduation, and work at some boring jobs because we don't have city residency" (99). Sansan, who currently works as a teacher in her hometown, would think that she was "ready to abandon the students for America at any minute" (95). However, Tu didn't come back to China as they had promised. The marriage between Tu and Min was not only a way of liberating Min but also a chance for Tu to leave his home. It should be noted that Tu seems to have economic success. He bought "a two-bedroom flat" for his parents (103). The financial status Tu has established is attributed to his life in the US. The demand for students to have American relatives to acquire their passports to study in America, and Sansan's, Tu's and Min's need for preparing a false document of Tu's family, are another example of the societal structure based on consanguineous family.

Much more suppressive aspects of marriage are well described in the story. First of all, the demand for Sansan to get married is discussed. The pressure on her to get married comes from norms; people's imagination is limited in the story. There are apprehensions and prejudice about and against Sansan among the people in her hometown. In addition, Sansan's imagination is biased because of her assumptions about married life between Tu and Min. These analyses seem to be helpful in attempting to show how these imaginations and assumptions are limited due to marriage and other norms related to sexuality.

It is Sansan's mother who puts the most pressure on Sansan about marriage. Sansan rents a room and lives by herself, apart from her mother. When her mother came to talk to Sansan, it had been a year since the two of them had seen each other since her father's funeral. The reason for their reunion after such a long time is to discuss Sansan's marriage. Her mother tells Sansan: "Tu is divorced," and "Yes, he's unoccupied now" (95). Explaining that it is not enough to talk in a short time, she asks her daughter to visit her to discuss more. When Sansan goes to the marketplace near the train station where her mother works, her mother tries to persuade Sansan to get married to Tu. She argues that "[w]hat you need is a man like Tu," because "[y]ou don't even know how to take care of yourself" (103). Sansan has her own job and gets paid. This is a totally different life compared to the one Min was supposed to live. Sansan had her own rented room to live in, taught at a school, and received a salary. She seems to be able to make a living by herself. Sansan even offered her mother economic support. Nonetheless, her mother did not regard Sansan as an independent person. Her mother added, "[A] man needs a woman. You need a husband, too" (104). It suggests that her mother does not think Sansan is independent because her daughter stays an unmarried woman. Elizabeth Brake points out that "[s]ingles are seen as lacking a sense of responsibility as well as having empty lives" (*Minimizing* 93). Her mother's discourse exemplifies the prejudices and discrimination against being single and being a woman. These prejudices and discriminations function as norms that suppress both Sansan and her mother; pressure to get married to Sansan involves oppression against her mother. Such groundless prejudices would not have existed if society had not idealized the marriage system. In addition, readers can observe more descriptions of the patriarchal suppressive structure in the pressure that leads Sansan to get married.

In the first place, it is Tu's parents who inform Sansan's mother of Tu's divorce and suggest a marriage between Tu and Sansan. The very next day after she hears about Tu's divorce, Sansan's mother goes all the way to find her daughter to talk about the marriage. Sansan's mother, when she first tells her daughter about Tu's divorce during the class, explains that "[Tu's] parents want you to go back to him" (95). When Sansan hears the details of the marriage later, she tries to make sure the idea also consents with Tu himself asking, "Is that what Tu wants? Or is it his parents' idea?" (104) This question is obviously intended to clarify Tu's will; however, her mother does not understand the meaning and importance of her interests. Her mother replies, "He'll marry you if you want to go back to him, that's what his parents said" (104). These imply that Sansan's mother and Tu's parents believe that they have the right to interfere with their children's decisions on marriage. Furthermore, readers of the story can observe the prejudices against unmarried people.

The prejudices against unmarried people, or in other words, the norms that naturalize the married lifestyle, entangle not only Sansan but also her mother as well. Sansan's mother tries to persuade her daughter to marry Tu. What motivates her comes from two different values: an ideology that idealizes marriage, and the shame that her daughter remains single. The most significant example that shows how her behavior is influenced by those values should

be her line after Sansan declines the proposal of the marriage with Tu. She puts additional pressure on her daughter, saying, “Do you know we’ll both end up as crazy women if you don’t get married?” (108) So far, we have seen that when tracing back, the pressures put on Sansan and her mother are inseparably bound up with patriarchy.

In addition to these unfair and unreasonable norms and prejudices put on her, what are the reasons that make Sansan decide not to marry Tu? A significant factor that affects Sansan’s decision is the relationship between Tu and Min. In order to analyze more closely what makes Sansan state that she is not going to marry Tu, this paper now looks carefully at Sansan’s thoughts and evaluations of Tu and Min. We now consider both romantic and sexual relationships.

Sansan assumes that there has been a romance between Tu and Min. In addition, she imagines that they have sex after they get a false marriage. However, Sansan, and the readers of the story as well, do not know how Tu and Min maintained their married life in the United States. It should be emphasized that no explicit descriptions of Tu’s and Min’s married life exist. In the story, Sansan only has indirect knowledge about Tu’s and Min’s life in America. Sansan would receive letters from Tu and Min for the first year after they left China until she received the last letter informing her of their will to continue their life in America. Since then, she has long been out of touch with them for about ten years. Finally, she is informed of Tu’s divorce, though the information also comes from her mother, who had also been told by Tu’s parents. She has never been told directly from Tu himself. Sansan never knew how Tu’s and Min’s relationship had worked, but nevertheless, she assumed that they had fallen in love with each other. She argues that “[h]ow could a man resist falling in love with a beautiful woman whose body ate, slept, peed, and menstruated in the same apartment, a thin door away from him?” (100). In addition, “Sansan had never worried about the slightest possibility of their falling in love” (101). In other words, she did not doubt that they would fall in love. This assumption itself is highly romanticized. In other words, the framework of Sansan’s imagination is based on heterosexism, and her thoughts are limited to heteronormativity. She believes that Tu did not return to China for Sansan because he had fallen in love with Min. Min is, according to Sansan, “the most beautiful girl [she] had met” (97). It turned out that the false marriage, for Tu, was a cohabitation with a beautiful person of the other sex. Therefore, it is quite natural for Sansan that Tu falls in love with Min through their communal life. This paper, however, argues that it is not obvious that Tu and Min had romantic emotions with each other. For example, it might be possible that Tu did not come back from the United States as promised just because he did not want to go back to his hometown. When Sansan persuaded him, she also pointed out that he and Sansan did not have to “work some boring jobs because [Sansan and Tu] don’t have city residency” (99). In short, there are other possibilities of the reasons why Tu had not come back to China. It might be not because he had fallen in love with Min, but because he did not want to come back to his hometown in China. In that case, there does not necessarily have to be a romance between Tu and Min.

In addition to romantic bonds, this paper also argues that sexual acts need not have occurred between them. Although Sansan assumes that sexual acts occurred between Tu and Min, she has no evidence. Throughout the story, sexual acts play a significant role. Sansan has never had sex with Tu. When Tu asked for sex, Sansan refused. Sansan, at the time of refusing sex, followed what a character did in *Women in Love*. She read the story at college, and it remained in her mind. According to her explanation, one of the sisters in the story refused to have sex with her lover before he went to war. Whatever the reason, she refused to have sex.

In Yiyun Li's works, sex is sometimes connected with "uncleanness." Vivian Chin, in an interview, asks Yiyun Li about the connection between sex and uncleanness. Chin points out that "sexuality has a connection to the unclean" in Li's stories. Being discreet in generalizing ideas, Li answers that characters in her stories, including "Love in the Marketplace," are "probably more conscious of 'the idea about sex being unclean!'" She explains that "if you have sex before you're married then you're not keeping yourself clean or pure for your husband" (Chin, "Still"). Thus, virginity has a significant implication in "Love in the Marketplace." Not having sex with anyone, including Tu, Sansan remains a virgin. However, according to Hamada Maya, Sansan's "virginity matters among people" (217, my trans.) in her hometown, including her parents. "Sansan, for the first time, understands the town's tolerance of her, a pitiful woman used and then abandoned by a lover, a woman unmarriageable because she will never be able to demonstrate her virginity on the snow-white sheet spread on the wedding bed" (107).

Although it does not affect their lives, people in Sansan's hometown are interested in whether or not she is a virgin. Whereas there is no explicit description of why Sansan's father, who had been found dead in a pond a year ago, died, her mother believed that "Sansan's failure at marriage" killed him (94). Later in the story, Sansan thinks of her father: "[Sansan] wonders how much of the gossip about her lost virginity burdened her father before his death" (107). Furthermore, her mother is concerned with Sansan's virginity as well. It is her mother who emphasizes the value of her virginity the most. Sansan's mother, who has long misunderstood that her daughter had already had sex with Tu, assumes that Sansan has not married anyone because "[Sansan has] been waiting for him all these years" (106). According to Sansan's mother's idea, her daughter is still unmarried because Sansan is no longer a virgin, and her daughter stays single in order to wait for Tu to come back and to marry. Therefore, it is out of her imagination given that Sansan does not want a marriage despite being a virgin: "But why wouldn't you get married, if he never had you?" (107).

Her mother's imagination depends on the state of Sansan, whether or not she is a virgin, being limited to heterosexual norms based on patriarchy. Moreover, once her mother is informed of Sansan still being a virgin, she arbitrarily interprets the meaning of her daughter's virginity. "That's even better. I didn't know you loved him so much. I'll go talk to his parents tonight, and tell them you've kept your *cleanness* for him all these years" (107, *italic original*). Sansan's mother judges it is "much better" that Sansan still stays a virgin.

Her mother implies that she is going to take advantage of her daughter's state of virginity as a means of negotiation with Tu's parents. Sansan's virginity is evaluated as a good state because her mother relates virginity to "cleanness." This is the description of a character being conscious of the "idea about sex being unclean," which is exactly what Li reveals in the interview (Chin, "Still"). Sansan's mother interprets her daughter's state of virginity as proof of Sansan's love for him, and thus, she evaluates the fact as worth telling Tu's parents. These explain how Sansan's virginity is of interest to other people. Then, where is Sansan's desire directed?

Hamada discusses the direction of Sansan's desire and points out the possibility that "Sansan's desire was not directed to Tu" (218, my trans.) and that "what captivated [Sansan's] mind was not so much Tu as Min" (219, my trans.). Let us closely look at the descriptions of Tu and Min. The way Sansan imagines how Tu and Min have sex is, as she herself admits, "unfair" (101), treating the two differently. Tu is depicted as "a hungry, ugly piglet" or a "boy with a big head, thin body, and a humble smile" (101). These representations are not positive images, although he was her "childhood companion and classmate and boyfriend and fiancé at one time or another" (96). Min, who is "the most beautiful person in [Sansan's] life" (97), is described as a person with "impenetrable" beauty "like a diamond" (101). As Hamada points out (219), Tu is comicalized, while Min's beauty is canonized in Sansan's mind. In addition, it should be pointed out that Min is imagined as a sexually attractive person. In Sansan's imagined sex between Tu and Min, Min is the subject who sexually attracts Tu and seizes the initiative of their sex. "Min's silky long hair brushed against the celery stalk of Tu's body, teasing him, calling out to him" (100).

The imagined representation of sexually active Min is also contrasted with Sansan herself. Sansan refused to have sex with Tu. She did not get involved in any sexual activities with him, unlike the imaginary Min in Sansan's mind. It could be argued that the way Sansan imagines Min implies her regret, envy, and admiration. It could even include her sexual desire for Min. Sansan's emotions towards Min cannot be determined explicitly. Her emotions conceivably might not be able to be separated from each other. Friendship, sisterhood, and perhaps homosexual desire<sup>4</sup> are mixed and multilayered. Although Sansan's desire is not obvious, the existence of her possible desire towards Min is left open. In any way, Sansan's unfair imagination could be, at least, seen as a revelation of her affirmative emotions towards Min. Having discussed Sansan's desire for Min, this paper may now mention Sansan's desire for Tu as well. Was she sexually attracted to Tu? As for sex, Tu had actually "asked for it" (100); however, she had refused his sexual desire, as we have discussed. Her mention of the idea that she should have had sex with Tu does not explain her sexual desire for him. Rather, it should be seen as a way of anchoring his mind. Sansan seems to regret not having sex with him; however, it is not because she wants to. She just finds it useful in the sense that having sex could be a way to keep Tu's mind.

In order to stay in an exclusive bilateral relationship, according to Sansan's values, having sex was vital. As we have already discussed, she assumes that Tu's interests could

easily leave her because they had not had sex even once and that Tu chose Min because he fell in love and had sex with her. It is evident that Sansan's assumptions come from her heteronormative point of view. Nonetheless, having a heterosexist point of view does not always mean the person is heterosexual. Regardless of her sexual orientation, Sansan's imagination is limited under the influence of heterosexual norms. In other words, Sansan is also a victim of heterosexism and what Adrienne Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality (Humm 34).

There is no explicit desire of Sansan described in the story. She replaces herself with Min when she masturbates, imagining Tu's and Min's sex; however, it could not be definitive proof of Sansan's desire for Tu. Concerning the imagined sex between Sansan and Tu, what Sansan thinks of is her childhood memories with him rather than his attractiveness. Unlike the way she depicts Min, she never describes him in an attractive way. Thus, what makes Sansan's imagined sex with Tu "heartbreakingly beautiful" (101) is only constructed upon the residues of her lost relationship. Then, how does Sansan's desire manifest? This paper argues that Sansan has eventually established her own sexual agency throughout the story. She refused to have sex when Tu wanted before he and Min left China. Especially at this time, she was under the influence of the idea of sex being unclean. She was not ready to liberate her own erotic desire. She started to imagine the lovemaking between Tu and Min once she was informed that they would not return. She then began to masturbate, replacing herself with Min in the imagined sex with Tu.

Through the practice of sexual fantasy and masturbation, she gradually develops her own sexual agency and becomes ready to liberate her desire. She finally establishes her sexual agency at the end of the story. Sansan goes to a marketplace near a train station where her mother sells boiled eggs. A man, who has just entered the marketplace, suddenly slices his own flesh with his knife and states that anyone can slice him once with ten yuan. Sansan, knowing that she had finally met someone who understood what a promise was, sliced and opened his flesh with the knife.

Through the act of slicing the man's flesh with a knife, which seems "erotic" (Faber), or is what Hamada calls "an act of loving" (219, my trans.), Sansan liberates her desire. As the encounter with the man is a significant event for Sansan, it is important to examine the man. He comes to the marketplace where Sansan's mother works. In light of the people's reactions in the marketplace, he seems unfamiliar among them. At least no one detects who he is. The man, who seems calm, slices his left arm with a sharp knife he takes with him. Using his blood, he writes, "*Give me ten yuan and I will let you slice me once wherever you like; if you finish my life with one cut, you owe me nothing*" (109, italic original). Sansan's mother tries to give him ten yuan without slicing his body. However, the man does not receive money. He says, "I can't take your money without you cutting me. It's written here" (110). The exchange of money and the act of cutting him is a promise for him. Sansan picks up the bill her mother attempted to give him and pays. In return for the money, the man passes her the knife. Using the knife offered by him, Sansan slices his flesh under his consent.



What should be paid attention to is that their behavior is totally under their consent. Keeping their commitment to the consent is a foundation of keeping a promise. Sansan actively gets involved in communication with him. She values fulfilling a promise and judges that he is a man of his word: “[A]fter all these years, she finally meets someone who understands what a promise is” (110). The man does not take the money when Sansan’s mother offers ten yuan because “It’s written” (109). He receives the bill when Sansan offers because she slices his flesh as they promised. This act of slicing open his flesh is the symbol of her autonomy and liberation. This implies that what Sansan has been looking for is not a marriage but a person who values keeping a promise.

A promise is a key concept throughout the story. “A promise is a promise, a vow remains a vow; such is the grandeur of *Casablanca*, such is the true romance that keeps every day of her life meaningful” (104). It might be worth mentioning the Japanese translated version of the title by the translator Shinomori Yuriko. “Love in the Marketplace” is liberally translated as “市場の約束” (“Promise in the Marketplace”) (2007)<sup>5</sup>. For Sansan, the most prioritized thing is a promise. Thus, Sansan does not accept the “arranged marriage” with Tu (104). She herself tries to keep a promise, as she says, “I have my own promise to keep” (108). Even after ten years since Tu left China for America, leaving her alone in their hometown, Sansan “still imagines him on a daily basis” because she once stated, “*I’ll be thinking of [Tu]* until the day when all the seas in the world dry up” (97, emphasis added). One of the reasons that she liked Tu was that “he trusted her” (99). Trust is established when a promise is carefully kept. However, he broke the promise not just once but twice: once for not getting a divorce, another for getting a divorce with Min. Sansan does not accept Tu as a husband since he has already broken promises. Her mother argues that “[p]eople change their minds” (104), but Sansan is not persuaded. “People in this world can discard their promises like used napkins, but [Sansan] does not want to be one of them” (108). Her determination resembles that of her mother, who “want[s] to be the best egg seller in the world” just because she tells people that she sells the best eggs in the world, and she has to keep her promise (107-08). Her values seem to be similar to the man who asks people to cut his flesh in return for ten yuan as well. He is also a man of his word. What matters the most for Sansan is a promise. She does not prioritize a marriage, especially a marriage with Tu. Therefore, the unexpected offer to marry Tu does not satisfy her.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed that marriage might work as a way of oppression and liberation, depending on the situation. The marriage system is run based on patriarchal social norms, and one of the aspects “Love in the Marketplace” describes is the oppressive features. Although marriage functions mainly as an oppression of the protagonist in the story, marriage can sometimes be used as a way of escape. People may take advantage of marriage

in order to leave their hometown, motherland, and or family. In other cases, people might see the marriage system as a way to establish economic freedom. In any case, if they take advantage of marriage, it means that they make the politically idealized system a stepping stone. Marriage is a political system that allocates privileges unevenly to a limited number of people. It is a legal framework that protects a specific bilateral relationship, excluding others from the one-on-one heterosexual relationship. Since marriage is idealized, standardized and normalized, the unmarried status is stigmatized. In addition, virginity is the spotlight and is connected with the reason why the protagonist stays single. “Love in the Marketplace” also depicts the close ties between marriage and sexual acts and experiences. Regardless of her recognition, Sansan’s virginity matters among people in her hometown. This paper also pointed out that the idea of sex being unclean has a solid connection to marriage, and it influenced the protagonist’s past decisions on sex. As we saw that she did not have sex with Tu, she was more likely to be under the influence of the idea of sex being unclean. However, throughout the story, she develops her own sexual agency, and finally liberates her desire. The possible directions of Sansan’s sexual desire were also discussed. While she might have a homosexual desire for Min, there is no evident description that supports the possibility of her romantic and or sexual attraction between the two. At least Sansan has a positive evaluation of Min. On the contrary, this paper finds much less evidence of Sansan’s sexual desire for Tu. We have also analyzed the reasons why Sansan does not accept the marriage with Tu. Having analyzed Sansan’s values on promise, we conclude that Sansan prioritizes a promise over a marriage. Therefore, Sansan’s encounter with the man who asks her to slice his flesh in return for ten yuan is a significant event; she finally finds the person of his word and lets her explore her own sexual desire on their consent base.

## Notes

- 1 This is a revised version of part of my master’s thesis, which I submitted to Tsuru University in January, 2024.
- 2 Yiyun Li is a Chinese American writer. See Inoue Akinori.
- 3 The idea of “false marriage” also appears in “The Princess of Nebraska,” which is also collected in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005).
- 4 There are some other Li’s stories that should be analyzed in terms of family, marriage and homosexual desire. For scholarly work, see King-Kok Cheung.
- 5 The Japanese translation was initially released in 2007, and a revised edition, with the same translator, was published in 2023 by a different publisher. Li, Yiyun. *Sen nen no inori*. Translated by Shinomori, Yuriko. Shinchosha, 2007; Li, Yiyun. *Sen nen no inori*. Translated by Shinomori, Yuriko. Kawadeshobo Shinsha, 2023. [イーユン・リー『千年の祈り』篠森ゆりこ訳、新潮社、2007年；イーユン・リー『千年の祈り』篠森ゆりこ訳、河出書房新社、2023年]

## Works Cited

- Brake, Elizabeth. "Marriage and Domestic Partnership," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/marriage/ Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.
- . *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality and the Law*. Oxford UP. 2012.
- Cheung, King-Kok. "Somewhat Queer Triangles: Yiyun Li's 'The Princess of Nebraska' and 'Gold Boy, Emerald Girl'" *Critical Insights: Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction*. SALEM Press, 2015.
- Chin, Vivian. "I Still Have So Many Chinese Stories to Tell: An Interview with Yiyun Li." *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Volume XLVI, Issue 2. Spring 2008. hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0047.228 Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.
- Faber, Michel. "Rotting Fruits of Revolution." *The Guardian*. 7 Jan. 2006. www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jan/07/featuresreviews.guardianreview15 Accessed 5 Dec. 2023.
- Hamada, Maya. "The Image of America Told in Peking: Zong Pu's 1949, Yiyun Li's 1989" *Chugoku 21* 43 (2015): pp. 207-22. [濱田麻矢「北京で語られるアメリカ像—宗璞の1949年、イーユン・リーの1989年—」『中国21』43巻(2015年): pp. 207-22.]
- Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.
- Inoue, Akinori. "Yiyun Li, *Must I Go*" *AALA Journal* 28 (2022): pp. 89-92. [井上明紀「Yiyun Li, *Must I Go*」『AALA Journal』第28号(2022年): pp. 89-92.]
- Li, Yiyun. *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. Random House, 2005.

Received: October 27, 2024

Accepted date: December 2, 2024