

**"Will Chinese thinking ever take root in my brain?"**

Identity Formation, Ethnic Identity, and the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Amy Tan's  
*The Hundred Secret Senses*

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<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b>			
<p>The aim of this thesis is study Amy Tan's novel <i>The Hundred Secret Senses</i> in terms of identity formation, ethnic and cultural identity, and mothering, with a particular reference to Nancy Chodorow's notion of the mother-daughter relationship. I argue that the protagonist's, Olivia's, cultural and ethnic identity formation is influenced by her step-sister Kwan, and that their relationship resembles more a mother-daughter relationship than one between sisters.</p> <p>In Chapter One, I introduce my topic and thesis. I also discuss Amy Tan and her novel and some of the previous studies dealing with her and her work. Previous studies indicate that reoccurring themes in Tan's novels include complicated relationships between the immigrant mothers and their American daughters, ghosts and ghost stories, ethnicity, and identity. The aim of this thesis is to discuss these themes in terms of the theory provided in Chapter Two, and to compare the findings to some of the previous studies conducted on Tan and her novels.</p> <p>In Chapter Two, I discuss my theoretical framework in terms of such themes as Erikson's identity formation theory, Dennis' theory on biculturalism, and Chodorow's theory on mothering and mother-daughter relationship. In Chapter Three, I discuss Tan's novel with reference to the theory presented in Chapter Two. I argue that Olivia is faced with the sixth stage of identity formation crisis, intimacy vs. isolation, as presented by Erikson, during her adult years, and the issue is discussed in terms of Olivia's relationship with Kwan and Olivia's ex-husband Simon. Olivia is faced with issues of intimacy with both Simon and Kwan. In regard to Simon, Olivia is unable to feel complete intimacy because of his ex-girlfriend Elza, whose death still haunts Simon. The crisis is resolved only after Kwan disappears in Changmian, China, upon which Olivia comes in terms with her ethnic and cultural identity, and can begin to build a new relationship with Simon. Olivia and Kwan's relationship issues are resolved during the same period of time, as Olivia comes to appreciate Kwan's efforts to take care of her and teach her about their heritage.</p> <p>I also discuss how Olivia discovers her ethnicity and cultural identity with Kwan's help and guidance, how she finds Kwan's ghostly stories haunting and disturbing, and how Kwan becomes the mothering figure and the primary caretaker of Olivia upon arriving to America. I argue that Olivia becomes aware of her ethnicity and cultural identity only after Kwan arrives to America. Even though Olivia resists learning Chinese from Kwan and dismisses her stories and notions of guiding ghosts as imaginary, she begins to develop a completely new ethnic identity based on those stories. As Kwan becomes the primary caretaker of Olivia when her mother Louise is unable to perform her duties as a mother, Kwan also takes up the role of Olivia's cultural mother. Kwan takes it as her task to teach Olivia about her heritage and culture, which she has not learnt from their father due to his untimely death.</p> <p>The thesis also suggests that Kwan and Olivia's relationship resembles more a mother-daughter relationship. Kwan becomes the person to take care of young Olivia. Even though Olivia resents Kwan for taking her mother Louise's place as the mothering figure, Olivia grows to appreciate Kwan's efforts to look after her. As Kwan disappears during a trip to Changmian, Olivia adopts Kwan's family name as a sign of their kinship and family bond.</p> <p>In the concluding chapter I summarize my findings and suggests topics for further study.</p>			
<b>Avainsanat – Keywords</b>			
Amy Tan, <i>The Hundred Secret Senses</i> , Chinese American Literature, Identity, Identity Formation, Ethnic Identity, Mother-Daughter Relationship			

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## **1. Introduction**

In this thesis, I will study Amy Tan's novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* in regard to identity formation, cultural and ethnic identity, and mother-daughter relationships. In this introduction, I will present my aims, discuss some of the previous studies conducted on Tan and her novels and present the author and the novel.

### **1.1 Aims**

The aim of this thesis is to discuss Amy Tan's novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* in terms of identity formation, cultural and ethnic identity, and mother-daughter relationship. I argue that Olivia's cultural and ethnic identity formation is influenced by Kwan, and that the sisters' relationship resembles a mother-daughter relationship more than step-sisters' relationship. The theory used to address these arguments includes theory on identity formation and cultural and ethnic identity, whereas the theoretical discussion of mother-daughter relationship will be based on Nancy Chodorow's theory of mothering.

### **1.2 Amy Tan and *The Hundred Secret Senses***

Amy Tan was born in 1952 in Oakland, California to a Chinese-born couple John and Daisy Tan. Tan has a Master's degree in linguistics from the San Jose State University, and her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* has won several awards (Adams 2005, x). Tan became an instant hit in the publishing world, and her following novels continued that

success (Feng 2010, 53). *The Hundred Secret Senses* is Tan's fifth novel and was first published in 1995 (Adams 2005, x). In her novels, Tan tends to concentrate on the conflicts between mothers and daughters, and invokes, as Feng suggests, Chinese history and landscape in order to contextualize her portrayal of Chinese American experiences (Feng 2010, 24).

*The Hundred Secret Senses* is a story about the relationship between two half-sisters Olivia and Kwan. Coming from two different cultural backgrounds, American and Chinese, weighs on the relationship of the sisters', however, they ultimately manage to find a connection. The sisters' relationship begins when Olivia and Kwan's father dies when Olivia is four. Kwan has before that been a well-kept secret, still living in China, and the rest of the family finds out about her only before Olivia's father dies. Olivia makes sure that the reader understands that the family is "all-American", and that she has no interest in learning about her Chinese heritage from Kwan. Olivia is embarrassed by her sister whose Chinese customs seem alien and whose broken English irritates her. She is often teased at school about her "retarded" sister.

Kwan, however, relates to Olivia through her Chinese heritage and storytelling. Kwan learns English from young Olivia, and Olivia is "infected" by the Chinese language through Kwan's numerous stories of the past lives she claims they share. Kwan claims to have "yin-eyes" which allow her to see the dead. The stories Kwan tells Olivia during the night scare Olivia, and after she tells about them to her mother Louise, Kwan is sent to a mental institution. After Kwan returns home to the family, she shares with Olivia that she was able to trick the doctors, and is still able to see the dead.

Olivia and Kwan's relationship quickly turns into a surrogate mother-daughter relationship as Louise, Olivia's mother, begins to use Kwan as a babysitter for Olivia. Olivia detests the fact that Kwan is replacing her mother as her primary caretaker, and begins to feel resentment towards her step-sister. Olivia feels, at times, smothered by the closeness that Kwan feels towards her, but is unable to return the favor. Nearing the end of the story, Olivia travels to China with her ex-husband Simon and Kwan to visit the small village where Kwan grew up. During a storm, Kwan disappears into a cave at the mountain and is not seen again. The trip rekindles Olivia and Simon's relationship as Olivia gives birth to their daughter. To honor Kwan and their heritage, Olivia and her daughter take Kwan's last name Li.

### **1.3 Previous Studies**

In this section, I discuss some of the previous studies conducted on Amy Tan and her work. Those familiar with Tan's novels are aware of the repeated themes such as "mother-daughter relationships, the urgency of recuperating maternal memory and carrying on matrilineage, and the daughters' struggles with ethnic and professional identity" (Feng 2010, 54). Feng continues to say that even though Tan dislikes being called "a mother-daughter expert", as Feng puts it, both her first and second novel *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* "center on the love and antagonism between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American daughters" (2010, 53).

Ghosts, ghost-writing, and ghost narration are themes that have occurred in such key ethnic texts as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Tan has also recycled the idea of ghosts working as cultural and historical mediums (Feng 2010, 54). Tan's ghosts are closely linked to China and they can be regarded as products of her obsession with matrilineage and maternal memory (Feng 2010, 58). Ken-fang Lee also discusses Tan's ghosts in his article "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's Ghost Stories" where Lee addresses the role of the "cultural translation in formulating a cultural identity" (2004, 106). He argues that the ghosts represent the cultural memory of China that has been forgotten and which has to be remembered and exorcised by the immigrant sisters and mothers (2004, 116). In Lee's opinion, the ghosts are a part of cultural memory that cannot be forgotten or eradicated (2004, 117). Lee writes that Kwan's "ghost story is like ineradicable cultural memory that needs retelling and recollecting" (2004, 118).

These studies underline the reoccurring themes of Amy Tan's novels: the problematic relationships between mothers and daughters, the cultural ghosts presented in the novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and the problems with identity. These themes will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

In this section I have presented my aims and given some background information for my study. I have introduced the author and the novel and discussed some of the previous studies conducted on the author and the novel. In the following section, I will discuss the theoretical framework of this thesis.

## 2. Theory

In this section, I will discuss the theoretical framework of my thesis. I will discuss identity from a psychological and sociological perspective, and I will use Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic theory as the basis for the psychological approach, as Erikson can be considered, along Freud, one of the fathers of identity theory. The sociological perspective will include cultural and ethnic identity formation. Firstly, I will present a short description for identity, which I will develop later in the thesis. Secondly, I will discuss the differences in psychological and sociological approaches to research, identity formation, life course, and theory formation. Thirdly, I will present Erikson's theory on identity formation, and fourthly, I will discuss cultural and ethnic identity formation. In the last section of this Chapter, I will discuss Chodorow's theory on mothering and the mother-daughter relationship.

According to Erik Erikson, "[i]dentity' and 'identity crisis' have in popular and scientific usage become terms which alternately circumscribe something so large and so seemingly self-evident that to demand a definition would almost seem petty" (1994, 15). Erikson also notes that sometimes the term "identity" is made so narrow for research purposes that the overall meaning is lost (1994, 15). As a term, one could say that identity is frequently used in every day speech to refer to one's sense of self. Côté and Levine quote Gecas and Burke's perspective on the characterization of identity as follows:

Identity refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and other. In sociology, the concept of identity refers both to



self-characterizations individuals make in terms of the structural features of group memberships, such as various social roles, memberships, and categories... and to the various character traits an individual displays and others attribute to an actor on the basis of his/her conduct. (qtd. in Côté and Levine 2002, 39).

In other words, identity is what allows us to distinguish ourselves from others. Identity is also formed through both an inner and outer influence: through a self-actualization process and social recognition in a community.

## **2.1 Psychological versus Sociological Approach**

In this section, I will discuss how psychological and sociological perspectives onto identity differ from one another. The subject will be approached in terms of identity formation process, the life course, and theory formation. This section is presented here to give a description and general idea of how these two fundamentally quite different disciplines have interacted in the field of identity formation study.

Psychologists are interested in what happens to individuals in an identity formation process, whereas sociologists are more concerned with what happens on a social scale in the same process (Côté & Levine 2002, 10). In other words, psychologists focus on the identity within the individual and how the individual is responsible for their identity

(Côté & Levine 2002, 48). Information about identity can be obtained by asking questions from the individual, and the elements are thus accessed by active mental processes (Côté & Levine 2002, 48). In contrast, the social approach to identity realizes that identity is both internal and external (Côté & Levine 2002, 49). For sociologists, identity is internal "to the extent that it is subjectively 'constructed' by the individual, but it is external to the extent that this construction is in reference to 'objective' social circumstances" (Côté & Levine 2002, 49). The social circumstances include, for example, everyday interactions and socially acceptable roles and structures (Côté & Levine 2002, 49).

The second distinctive difference between the two disciplines concerns the way they perceive the life course. Psychologists mostly agree that development can be divided into different stages that take place at different times in the individual's life (Côté & Levine 2002, 49). An example of this is Erikson's eight stages of identity formation (see Erikson 1968). Overall, these stages are considered as something that every individual must go through as a part of normal development (Côté & Levine 2002, 49). For example, adolescence, which is an important focus point for psychologists, is distinctively different from adulthood, which gives this stage its own structural properties (Côté & Levine 2002, 50). Sociologists, on the other hand, see identity formation as a process that encompasses the whole life course, and no one period is considered more distinct than any other (Côté & Levine 2002, 50). For sociologists, looking at identity maintenance is more relevant than identity formation (Côté & Levine 2002, 50).

Another distinction between the two disciplines is in fact the role that theory plays in empirical research (Côté & Levine 2002, 51). Psychologists often use a kind of "building block" model, where collected data is assembled to be the theory over a longer period of time (Côté & Levine 2002, 51). This kind of theory formation is mostly intuitive and common sense than systematic empirical theory formation, whereas sociologists place much more value in theory and therefore more often construct formal theories that are tested and validated through hypotheses and large scale data sets (Côté & Levine 2002, 51-52). The sociological approach may have a solid theoretical base for their claims, however, the limitations of purely sociological approach lie in their lack of empirical data to support the theoretical claims (Côté & Levine 2002, 52-53). According to Côté & Levine, only a few studies are based on collected and studied evidence where "alternative conclusions have been systematically evaluated and eliminated if appropriate, so issues often remain unresolved and left at the level of opinion" (2002, 53). This leads to the inability to arrive at a consensus when those in the field tend to favor like-minded scholars (Côté & Levine 2002, 53). In contrast, the psychological field may have an efficient empirical base, but lacks the theoretical base that sociologists value, and their findings are usually guided by intuition (Côté & Levine 2002, 53). The best alternative may be to combine these two disciplines in order to utilize their best methods in collecting theoretically supported empirical data.

Considering that psychological and sociological approaches have had common roots, the two disciplines have operated in isolation from each other (Côté & Levine 2002, 11). Different theoretical traditions and emphases on subject matter have caused splintering and fragmentation in these two disciplines (Côté & Levine 2002, 52). Côté & Levine note

that partly due to professionalization and specialization, psychology and sociology as disciplines have become more isolated and independent of each other which has led to a body of fragmented literature in need of a common language (Côté & Levine 2002, 11).

## **2.2 Psychological Approach**

The main idea of identity, according to the psychological approach, is that the source of identity comes from within the individual, that it is a matter of finding one's talents and potential and placing those findings within the social context and available social roles of the individual (Côté & Levine 2002, 55). This section, especially Erik Erikson's theory on identity formation, is introduced here to give a description on how the identity formation process has been seen in the psychological studies. Erikson's theory on identity formation is not introduced here because of its direct applicability to the thesis, but because of its relevance and contribution to identity formation studies that have succeeded it. The psychological description of identity formation works as background information to the sociological approach to cultural and ethnic identity formation which will be discussed later in the following sections.

Erik Erikson can be considered one of the founding fathers of psychological analysis, or psychoanalytic approach, of identity formation. Especially Erikson's study on identity formation in adolescence is widely recognized (Côté & Levine 2002, 14). According to Kroger, Erikson's concept of identity "has been as important a contribution to the social sciences in the second half of the 20th century as Freud's concept of the unconscious was

to the first half of the 20th century" (2007, xi). Erikson divided identity formation into three dimensions, which are the psychological, the social and the personal dimension (Côté & Levine 2002, 14). The psychological dimension includes the ego, a.k.a. "a sense of temporal-spatial continuity" (Côté & Levine 2002, 15). The social dimension means the roles one takes on in a community, social acceptance and recognition, whereas the personal dimension includes behavior and characteristics that make us individuals (Côté & Levine 2002, 15). According to Erikson,

in psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (1994, 22-23)

Côté & Levine also present Erikson's views in other words, calling them the "three forms of continuity": "a sense of sameness of the self with itself; interrelationships between the self and the other; and functional integrations between other and other", this is having a sense of being the same throughout the course of time, having relationships that maintain stability between the social and personal identity, and maintaining stable relations within a community (Côté & Levine 2002, 16).

According to Erikson, the identity formation process includes both an ego aspect and a self aspect (Erikson 1994, 211). The ego, that is essentially an unconscious but central agency, must constantly deal with a changing self (Erikson 1994, 211). Self-identity emerges from the process where "temporarily confused selves are successfully reintegrated in an ensemble of roles" (Erikson 1994, 211). The ego identity is the synthesizing power, and the self-identity deals with the integration of self- and role-images (Erikson 1994, 211).

The sense that Erikson calls ego identity is something that is formed through the formation of self-esteem (Erikson 1994, 49). Physical mastery of, for example, walking in childhood and the social recognition that follows contributes to realistic self-esteem (Erikson 1994, 49). According to Erikson "this self-esteem gradually grows into a conviction that the ego is capable of integrating effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that it is developing into a well-organized ego within a social reality", and this ego is then called ego identity (Erikson 1994, 49). The difference between personal identity and ego identity, according to Erikson, lies in the consciousness: the realization of one's continuing sameness in the existence and the fact that others recognize that as well, is part of the personal identity. Ego identity, on the other hand, is the "awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity" (Erikson 1994, 50). In other words, the individual has a sense of being the same person even if social situations and places change around them.

Next, I will present Erikson's eight stages of identity formation, that include eight stages of identity crises. Each of those crises have to be solved successfully in order to advance

to the next stage that leads to a healthy and wholesome identity. Stages one to five cover the developmental period from early childhood to adolescence. Stages six to eight cover adulthood and old age. These stages are presented here as a whole to give a complete description of how Erikson viewed the identity formation process. Stages one to five are not relevant to the analysis of Tan's novel, but they give a complete picture of the process an individual goes through while forming their identity.

Erikson's theory on identity formation is based on a list of eight different stages, or crises, in identity formation which a person must encounter in order to reach vitality (Erikson 1994, 94-95). These stages are 1. trust vs. mistrust, 2. autonomy vs. shame, doubt, 3. initiative vs. guilt, 4. industry vs. inferiority, 5. identity vs. identity confusion, 6. intimacy vs. isolation, 7. generativity vs. stagnation, and 8. integrity vs. despair (Erikson 1994, 94). Each of these stages comes at a critical time, starting from infancy and must be confronted and solved before moving on to the next stage (Erikson 1994, 95). According to Erikson, a crisis does not imply an impending catastrophe, but a necessary turning point "when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson 1994, 16). Each step is then another potential crisis due to a radical change in perspective (Erikson 1994, 96). During an identity crisis, an individual aims to integrate interests and talents into a coherent personality structure that can invoke social recognition (Kroger 2007, 11).

The first stage of Erikson's theory, trust vs. mistrust, comes at infancy. The infant must form a "sense of basic trust, which is a pervasive attitude towards oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life", and the sense of trust comes from

the relationship formed with the parents or the caregivers (Erikson 1994, 96). The second stage, autonomy vs. shame, doubt, is also a crisis of early childhood. The child must be allowed to feel a sense of self-control without the loss of his self-esteem (Erikson 1994, 109). At the third stage, initiative vs. guilt, "the child must now find out what kind of a person he may become" (Erikson 1994, 115). The child begins to make comparisons about what he can and cannot do and begins to comprehend his own position in regard to grownups and his peers (Erikson 1994, 116). The fourth stage, industry vs. inferiority, is reached when the child is ready to enter school (Erikson 1994, 122). The child begins to feel dissatisfied without the sense of being able to make things, and the child learns to gain recognition by producing things beside and with others at this socially most decisive stage, as the society needs industrious and competent individuals to maintain a productive society (Erikson 1994, 123-125). Before entering to the fifth stage of identity formation, the adolescent must revisit earlier stages of crisis in order to determine the future path to his/her identity, and the results shape the identity the adolescent of about to form (Erikson 1994, 128).

Erikson discusses the final three stages only in brief, focusing clearly more on the stages confronted in childhood and youth, where most of the identity formation process is dealt with. Concerning the sixth stage Erikson writes that "[i]t is only when identity formation is well on its way that true intimacy - which is really a counterpointing as well as fusing of identities - is possible" (1994, 135). Erikson does not simply refer to sexual intimacy at this point, but includes friendship and love as parts of true intimacy (1994, 135-136). The individual "who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy or throws himself into acts of intimacy that are 'promiscuous' without true fusion or real



self-abandon" (Erikson 1994, 135). Isolation or distantiation are dangerous counterparts for intimacy, and can lead to severe character problems and feelings of not being anyone (Erikson 1994, 136).

According to Erikson, evolution has made the mankind a learning as well as a teaching animal for whom "dependency and maturity are reciprocal" (Erikson 1994, 138). Generativity in this case means guiding the next generation through own children or some sort of apprenticeship (Erikson 1994, 138). Erikson writes, that "[g]enerativity is itself a driving power in human organization. And the stages of childhood and adulthood are a system of generation and re-generation to which institutions such as shared households and divided labor strive to give continuity" (Erikson 1994, 139). According to Erikson, all institutions by nature reinforce generativity to meet the needs of the next generation despite "personal differences and changing conditions" (Erikson 1994, 139).

The final stage, integrity vs. despair, is a part of aging. The person has successfully dealt with all the previous stages and has adapted to the triumphs and disappointments of life and accepted life as being "something that had to be" (Erikson 1994, 139). At this stage, "the possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats" (Erikson 1994, 140). Its counterpart is despair or disgust in other people or particular institutions and individual's own life choices (Erikson 1994, 140). About despair Erikson writes that it "expresses the feeling that time is short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity" (Erikson 1994, 140). In sum, Erikson's stages of identity formation provide a helpful model for understanding identity in relation to the life cycle (Kroger 2007, 10). All of the

stages are interdependent with each other, and to complete one stage the individual must have successfully completed the preceding stages (Erikson 1994, 95).

In this chapter I have presented Erik Erikson's theory on identity formation. I have discussed the differences between psychological and sociological approaches to the issue and discussed Erikson's theory on identity formation and identity crises. Even though some elements of Erikson's work remain important theoretical resources, there has been some criticism concerning areas of his work where Erikson is "clearly lacking" (Côté & Levine 2002, 17), for example, he has been criticized for androcentrism and Eurocentrism (Côté & Levine 2002, 17). For example, Carol Hoare has discussed Erikson's theory on adults more thoroughly in her monograph saying that

For the identity that winds its way into adult life, certain renditions of the adult are more characteristic of mid to late-twentieth-century Western world adults than of adults across all societies, cultures, and times. Autonomous Western-centric identity development is not universal, and the world of Judeo-Christian thought in which his concepts are embedded cannot characterize the full realm of spiritual, religious understandings or the sense some adults have of participating in a more complete ancestral world. (2001, 200)

Hoare therefore supports the criticism that Côté and Levine claimed about Erikson's Eurocentrism and Erikson's tendency to generalize his theory to extend to all individuals despite their religion, nationality, or ethnicity. However, for the purpose of this study, I find Erikson's theory applicable because Olivia considers herself to be American above

all else, and she does not include her Chinese ancestry to be a part of her identity until at the very end of the novel. Therefore, there is no need to include her ethnicity when considering the psychological development of her identity, as she does not include it either. In spite of this critique, Côté and Levine also agree that there are still areas of Erikson's work that cannot be substituted by newer research (2002, 17). Even though Erikson's theory lacks in diverse applicability, I believe that, in this case, it can be used as a guideline to understanding the identity formation process. The idea of identity formation still works as a guideline or background information for understanding the sociological approach to the same issue which will be discussed in the next section. The section on sociological approach to identity formation will include ethnic and cultural identity and identity formation as well as theory on biculturalism as presented by Dennis.

### **2.3 Sociological Approach**

In this section, I will discuss the sociological approach to identity formation in the context of cultural and ethnic identity formation, and biculturalism. The main idea of identity formation in the sociological approach is that identity is formed through social processes in social context (Côté & Levine 2002, 55). Sociologists suppose that identity formation relies on feedback from others and that the positive or negative reinforcement applied in interaction within the community (Côté & Levine 2002, 56).

### **2.3.1 Cultural and Ethnic Identity**

Smith describes populations who possess a collective name and share cultural attributes such as language or customs that differentiate them from others as "ethnic" (2001, 108). Being ethnic usually differentiates the group from others by having some kind of link to a territory that might be shifting and uncertain (Smith 2001, 108). According to De Vos, "[e]thnic minorities have been present as long as sovereign political states have existed" but ethnic conflict has usually been observed from the standpoint of political struggles over territory (1975, 7). De Vos argues that for many individuals national identity is the same as an ethnic or cultural identity especially if the two words have been historically equal, however, an ethnic identity can be either more specific or broader than national identity depending on the priority given to the identity (De Vos 1975, 11).

There are two major terms that describe the identity formation in certain domains, such as cultural or national identity, that are best described "in terms of 'incremental' versus 'monumental' changes" (Côté & Levine 2002, 51). Amongst sociologists, the idea that is rather common is that an individual gradually or incrementally develops a cultural identity in a socialization process within the community that begins in childhood, however, developmental psychologists tend to look for rapid or monumental changes in the individual's life that usually happen during adolescence (Côté & Levine 2002, 51). According to Côté & Levine, the members of the dominant group are more likely to develop their identity incrementally whereas the members of minority group are more likely to go through monumental changes in self-definition due to possible discrimination and prejudice in the society (2002, 51). As they put it, "[t]his distinction is useful in

understanding ethnic differences in a national and cultural identity" (Côté & Levine 2002, 51).

The actual history of an ethnic group often trails off into mythology or legend, usually handed down orally, that are "often linked to migration memories and to rituals, symbols and myths of a common cult" (Smith 2001, 109). According to De Vos, "[s]ome sense of genetically inherited differences, real or imagined, is part of the ethnic identity of many groups, as well as being one of the beliefs about an ethnic minority held by those dominant groups who wish to prevent assimilation" (1975, 10). Also Smith concurs that ethnicity is attributed to the population by outsiders, and common genealogy combined with myths and rituals turns the population first into a dense ethnic network and then into an ethnic community (2001, 108-109). Whether or not the supposed genetic differences are real, they are usually maintained by the dominant group to uphold a caste like exclusion in the society "regardless of the presence or absence of other ethnic distinctions, such as language or religion" (De Vos 1975, 10). According to De Vos, this kind of exclusion cannot alone be rationalized on the basis of ethnic differences but "can be better maintained on the basis of genetic heritage" (1975, 10).

Language is one of the most powerful changes in the immigrant experience (Espín 2006, 247). It has a profound impact on the immigrant's identity and sense of self, as the immigrant is learning to live with two important languages: the mother tongue and the language of the host culture (Espín 2006, 247-8). Two languages mean two different social worlds, and learning the new language of the host culture means immersing oneself in the "power relations of the specific culture", which exposes the individual to social

inequality due to various levels of language proficiency (Espín 2006, 247). Fluency or the lack of in a second language is related to identity maintenance (De Vos 1975, 16). The resistance to not learning the new language proficiently may be a desire for self-preservation, as the new language might be posing "a threat for the individual's sense of identity" (Espín 2006, 248). In some cases, the fast learning of the new language may present the opportunity to create a new identity different from the one before (Espín 2006, 248).

Modern cultures, according to Cheng, are marked by an anxiety over authentic cultural identity (2004, 3). The polarization between authentic and "other" in a culture has resulted in the urgency in a globalized world to define a unique national character and identity that is distinct from everyone else's (Cheng 2004, 3, 5). Words used for immigrants by the dominant group have not only been used to separate them from the whites as inferiors, but they were also a way for the immigrants to identify themselves in the racial hierarchy (Roediger & Barrett 2003, 142). At the beginning of the 20th century, several different nationalities were deemed to "nonwhite" racial status in America, and therefore the immigrants were discriminated against and denied work (Roediger & Barrett 2003, 143).

Ethnicity and nationality of European, especially eastern European, immigrants, has raised questions of racial categorization, as whiteness could be interpreted on a scale, where, for example, Serbo-Croatians were lower on the scale than Poles (Roediger & Barrett 2003, 144). According to Cheng, in the early 20th century US, all Asians were considered "Orientals", thus lumping them all into a single monoracial category (2004,

132). Mixed-race Eurasians were left somewhere in between, declared by both sides as "inauthentic" (Cheng 2004, 132). In the US, the "U.S. law made citizenship racial as well as civil. Even when much of the citizenry doubted the racial status of European migrants, the courts nearly always granted their whiteness in naturalization cases" (Roediger & Barrett 2003, 145). Asians were more often declared unambiguously nonwhite and thus denied citizenship in America (Roediger & Barrett 2003, 145). Mixed-race individuals, such as half-white and half-Chinese, were automatically considered Chinese, which situated them to the lowest category on "the racial ladder" (Cheng 2004, 132). Cheng calls this the "hypodescent rule", which in his view, means that a person's racial designation "descends" to a lower rung on the ladder rather than "ascending" to a higher one (2004, 132-133). However, Cheng notes that the "genetic variations within a 'race' are much greater than variations between the 'race', and genetic similarities among the 'races' are much greater than the differences" (2004, 128).

In this section I have discussed the cultural and ethnic identity formation process and how ethnicity can be perceived by the individual. Even though these theories presented here do not specifically concern Chinese-Americans, they are, in my opinion, applicable to my thesis in a sense that same themes that have been discussed here can be found in Tan's novel for further analysis, as I argue that Olivia's cultural and ethnic identity formation is affected by Kwan. Olivia identifies herself as an "all-American", but I will argue that interactions with Kwan begin to change that identity as their relationship develops, and Olivia begins to identify with her Chinese heritage as well.

### **2.3.2 Biculturalism**

According to Dennis, "cultural change and adjustment [...] is a part of global progress" (2008, 47). As he puts it, "[t]here are individuals who live in two cultural worlds and believe themselves to be culturally and socially enriched by the differing institutions, customs, and social networks" (Dennis 2008, 16). Such biculturalism may emerge and form due to, for example, marriage or migration, or because the individual chooses to move from one cultural group to another, or because the two cultural groups share trade or socio-cultural activities (Dennis 2008, 16). As Dennis puts it,

[b]eing bicultural affords an opportunity to spread one's cultural and intellectual wings, if one desires to do so. The bicultural self may decide to move swiftly or slowly away from the birth culture and affiliate more with an adopted culture; or do the reverse have limited contact with the adopted culture, and dig more deeply into the birth culture. (2008, 4)

According to Dennis, in some cases the minority group may have to adopt some of the dominant culture's attributes for group survival, which eminently leads to biculturalism (2008, 16).

Biculturalism is linked to power and conflict (Dennis 2008, 25). Two or more cultures existing side by side within a political or geographical entity dominated by one culture, language, ethnicity or religion can lead to power and conflict relations (Dennis 2008, 25). In Dennis' words, "[t]hus, power politics provides the tool by which we understand



whether or not a formal bicultural state is established [...]" (2008, 25). Biculturalism is a test of sensitivity and sensibility and humans are more than capable of biculturality (Dennis 2008, 25, 27). Even though bicultural societies exist, there is almost always an imbalance between the dominant and minority cultures in that society (Dennis 2008, 31). Considering this,

[b]eing bicultural merely entails a desire to adjust and live in bicultural situations and to share a part of our own cultural perspectives with others, for that is the essence of biculturalism: two people, two languages, or two religions co-existing and individuals and groups are free to move, if they so desire, in one, or both (2008, 46).

Therefore, biculturalism can be seen as the freedom to partake in and switch between two cultures.

Dennis uses two terms to describe the individuals dealing with culture: the monoculturalist and the biculturalist. The monocultural citizen is usually part of the dominant racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic group in the society, and is usually considered being "the insider" (2008, 14). The monoculturalist "in a monocultural society is attached to one place in time, and generally has one central self and group identity", which allows a monoculturalist to possess a greater degree of certainty about life and surrounding social values (Dennis 2008, 14). Monoculturalists, this is the members of the dominant groups, usually resist learning the culture of the less dominant groups (Dennis

2008, 4). It is arrogance and ignorance that prevent monoculturalists from accepting other cultures (Dennis 2008, 28).

Dennis argues that everyone is born first as monoculturalists in a family setting and must learn to become biculturalists (2008, 3). Even though biculturality is more than possible for every individual, most of us are born into a network of family and friends that is monocultural (Dennis 2008, 31). Cultural education takes place in a group when facial expressions, body movements, expressions of feelings, and tones and pitches are absorbed informally, as we take in the world as infants (Dennis 2008, 35). Being surrounded by this kind of cultural information leads to an identification with these features and feeling of inclusion in the group (Dennis 2008, 35-36). The closeness "develops familiarity, trust, and provides children with feelings of security" (Dennis 2008, 36). This kind of internalization and socialization patterns and identification with the birth culture is important in identity formation (Dennis 2008, 41).

Groupness, another term used by Dennis to describe biculturality as a phenomenon, can be a birthright or chosen by the individual (2008, 35). A collective group identity depends on the group's status and on the degree in which social and cultural values have been embedded in the group's psychology (Dennis 2008, 36). A chosen collective group identification "entails a degree of formal knowledge and instructions in those ideas, stories, and assumptions which are believed by the group to express some of the essence of what it means to be a part of that group" (Dennis 2008, 36). The promotion of a collective group thought is a symptom of a minority group living in close contact with a more dominant group (Dennis 2008, 46). If the minority group is not belittled or insulted

by the dominant group, the smaller groups will develop a bicultural identity yet still remain in close affinity with their own culture, and this will promote biculturalism in the society (Dennis 2008, 46).

Seldom can family and friends offer children equal socialization in both cultures, because "for them to become bicultural must they be introduced to the other side of their culture to begin the process of internalizing the values and assumptions of that culture" (Dennis 2008, 3). One culture may be valued more than the other, and there may be feelings of rootedness and groundedness in one culture, usually the culture of birth, but not in the other more dominant culture (Dennis 2008, 3). This is usually because a network of family and friends has been formed early in life and this network becomes a reference group and the source of the individual's identity (Dennis 2008, 3). Some individuals approach biculturalism as an opportunity to educate themselves whereas some are more conflicted and torn between the two cultures at hand (Dennis 2008, 4), whereas some individuals may "appear to be willing to transcend their own culture of birth and are willing to move toward bicultural experiences" (Dennis 2008, 44). According to De Vos, some individuals who are dissatisfied with their current social status in a society may seek to leave their group and join the dominant group (1975, 10). It can be seen as an attempt to join "the white world" or as a rejection of their own cultural framework (Dennis 2008, 44). Instead, the willingness to engage in another culture's customs and attributes speaks of resisting the idea that one culture is better than the other and that one should stay within the framework of the birth culture (Dennis 2008, 44).

One's behavior and attitude may differ depending on one's status in the culture or cultures at hand (Dennis 2008, 27). According to Erikson, "one person's or group's identity may be relative to another's, and that the pride of gaining a strong identity may signify an inner emancipation from a more dominant group identity, such as that of the 'compact majority'" (1994, 21-22). Dennis presents three statuses of inclusion and exclusion in a culture: insider-insider, insider-outsider, and outsider-outsider (2008, 16-25). These statuses describe the status of the individual that can be reached in one or several cultures.

Insider-insider can move between the two cultures in question with varying degrees of difficulty (Dennis 2008, 16). Insider-insider has adopted both cultures as his own and can identify himself through both (Dennis 2008, 17). According to Dennis, the key to insider-insider status is the desire to engage in both cultures, especially if there are rewards and privileges associated with dual membership (2008, 17). Dennis, however, continues that such membership can be difficult to obtain if the cultural divide is also accompanied by, for example, color divide (2008, 17). It should be noted here that feeling comfortable in both cultures does not necessarily mean that the individual is accepted equally in both (Dennis 2008, 17). As Dennis puts it, "[i]t simply means that the person is familiar with the cultural nuances and subtleties of both cultures and is unafraid of moving within and between the cultures, and less intimidated by the possibilities of rejection" (2008, 17). It is important to note that only in rare cases are the two cultures equally experienced by the individual, and it is normal to feel more rooted in one culture, usually the culture of the person who has the responsibility of primary socialization (Dennis 2008, 18).

The insider-outsider status is more common than the other two statuses presented here, and it can be found represented in literary, sociological and psychological studies (Dennis 2008, 21). This might be because of the rarity of vast number of people living as insider-insiders and outsider-outsiders (Dennis 2008, 21). Also, contradictions, inconsistencies of life, and people militate against insider-insider status (Dennis 2008, 21). In contrast, no society could withstand the extreme alienation of outsider-outsider status that would afflict the society (Dennis 21-22). Dennis clarifies that "[t]he insider-outsider context highlights individuals who, due to cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences, are labeled as outsiders and hence subjugated to a larger powerful group with whom they interact" (Dennis 2008, 22). This kind of interaction is present when social status and privileges are benefits of the insider group, and the inferior group is relegated to an inferior status (Dennis 2008, 22). Dennis writes that "[s]pecifically, the idea of the insider– outsider points to the social inconsistencies and ambivalences rampant in societies with class, race, ethnic, religious, and language differences" (2008, 22). The idea of insider-outsider status points to the inconsistencies in societies with racial and ethnic differences (Dennis 2008, 22). According to Dennis, the Jews and the blacks in America, for example, have been an example of the insider-outsider status:

[T]he history of Jews in America has been a history of group ostracism and exclusion due to religious discrimination and early immigrant status. However, because of Jewish cultural traditions and their adeptness in small businesses, crafts, and the trades in Europe, Jews were generally able to become upwardly mobile faster than any other immigrant group, thus ensuring their cultural and economic success in areas and ways superseding Anglo-Americans. (2008, 22)

Even though the Jews became successful in business according to the dominant group's guidelines, they remained outsiders due to different religious belief (Dennis 2008, 22). However, many Jews abandoned Judaism in order to reach the insider status in the dominant group's culture, which made them bicultural (Dennis 2008, 22-23). In some cases, becoming an insider in the dominant culture means rejecting the original culture's customs and attributes (Dennis 2008, 24).

There are situations where the individual in question might become an outsider in one or both cultures (Dennis 2008, 18). According to Dennis, the biculturalist might reject or be rejected by the cultures to which identification might logically and naturally be attached (Dennis 2008, 18). Dennis calls this a four-fold rejection: "A person rejects and is rejected by a birth culture or early culture of socialization; A person rejects and is rejected by a non-birth culture into which he or she once lived or within which the individual lived in a degree of harmony" (Dennis 2008, 19). Situations such as inter-racial and inter-religious relations are examples of a possible outsider-outsider status (Dennis 2008, 20). Some outsider-outsiders might try to find a solution to their status by either rejecting both sides by becoming "citizens of the world" or by immersing themselves into one of the two cultures and becoming insider-outsiders (Dennis 2008, 21). Dennis does note about all the statuses that "especially for minority groups, it may be rare to become total insiders in majority institutions and organizations, just as it is often rare for members of minority groups to become total outsiders within their own groups" (2008, 28).

Dennis also discusses identity and self in accordance with biculturality (Dennis 2008, 45). Dennis explains how, in his opinion, there must be two or more selves within the individual ready to adapt and interact (Dennis 2008, 45). He calls these the primary and secondary self-identities (Dennis 2008, 45). The primary self-identity might be the one that operates within the birth culture, and makes connections within the closer and more intimate network of friends and family (Dennis 2008, 45). The secondary self-identity would then operate within and identify with the other cultural network at hand (Dennis 2008, 45). Dennis points out that neither of these self-identities are set in stone, and a primary self-identity might develop into a secondary self-identity in time and vice versa (2008, 45). As he puts it, "[i]n bicultural societies in which individuals are free to engage in both cultures the selves produced will, no doubt, reflect varying degrees of biculturalism. And the self in one culture may not be the same self interacting in the other culture" (Dennis 2008, 46). In accordance with this, one self appears in a workplace, another at home with family, another with friends and so on (Dennis 2008, 46).

In this section, I discussed the sociological approach to identity in terms of cultural and ethnic identity. I presented some theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and cultural and ethnic identity, as well as discussed the meaning of biculturality. In the next section, I will discuss the mothering theory as presented by Nancy Chodorow.

## **2.4 Mothering and Mother-Daughter Relationship**

This section will discuss Nancy Chodorow's theory on mothers and daughters. I will first present some information about mothering and the basis of mothering: the biological explanation and the role training explanation. Then, I will continue to discuss mothers and daughters and their relationship.

In the 1700s, marriage, adulthood, and child-rearing were essentially coextensive for women (Chodorow 1999, 4). Child-care responsibilities were carried out by women along with a vast variety of other productive work on the household, which was considered a major productive unit of society (Chodorow 1999, 4). Children were integrated early in to the working world, as fathers took responsibility of training the boys and women of the girls (Chodorow 1999, 4). Since then, the role of the family has lost some of its importance as an educational and religious institution, as the society started to move towards industrialization in production and the children began to spend most of their childhood years in school (Chodorow 1999, 4). Women's role in the family became centered on children and child-care, which was less physical and more isolated and exclusive than women's work before (Chodorow 1999, 5). Extended families were reduced into nuclear family units and women were left alone to take care of the children (Chodorow 1999, 5).

Mothering a child is acting as the child's primary nurturing figure or acting in a nurturing manner (Chodorow 1999, 11). Therefore, men and other members of the society can also mother a child: "Being a mother, then, is not only bearing a child — it is being a person



who socializes and nurtures. It is being a primary parent or caretaker (Chodorow 1999, 11). Men are rarely the primary caretakers, as women bear the children and usually also take primary responsibility for infant care in our society (Chodorow 1999, 3). Even if the biological mother is unable to care for her children, the other women in the society take her place more often than men as primary caretaker, even though men and fathers spend varying amounts of time with infants and children (Chodorow 1999, 3). This information can be applied to Tan's novel as I argue that Kwan takes up the role of Olivia's surrogate mother, as Kwan becomes primary caretaker upon her arrival to America.

Chodorow argues that "[w]omen, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself" (1999, 7). Mothering, then, reproduces itself cyclically, as women raise daughters as future mothers (Chodorow 1999, 7). Men, because they are not mothered by men, do not grow up with the same kind of relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition as women do (Chodorow 1999, 209). Women mother daughters who then grow up to mother because of the institutionalized family structure and mothering capacities that are developmentally built into them (Chodorow 1999, 209).

#### **2.4.1 Biological Explanation of Mothering**

According to Chodorow, "[t]he most prevalent assumption among nonfeminist theorists is that the structure of parenting is biologically self-explanatory": that being a mother is

assumed to be instinctual, as women are physically capable of child bearing and lactation (1999, 13-14). Women's mothering, then, cannot be separated from the biological fact that they are able to bear children, and mothering is seen as a natural product rather than a social construct (Chodorow 1999, 14).

The bioevolutionary explanation, according to Chodorow, is that women mother now because they have always mothered (1999, 14). One possibility for this assumption is that the explanation assumes that "the sexual division of labor [...] was the earliest division of labor, and was simply perpetuated", and that it was necessary for species survival (Chodorow 1999, 14). Another explanation for the assumption is that the division of labor is built biologically into the human sexual dimorphism, and is thus unchanging as women's mothering has been seen as a functional fact (Chodorow 1999, 14). However, Chodorow questions this assumption, as mothering had not been theoretically studied by social scientists before Chodorow's work, and because human behavior, according to Chodorow, is mostly culturally mediated and not instinctually determined (1999, 14).

The functional-cum-bioevolutionary explanation for women's mothering suggests that men's physiological attributes, such as strength and speed, made them biologically more suitable for hunting, and therefore women were left behind to gather and take care of the children with the help from older children and older members of the group (Chodorow 1999, 17). This explanation could also argue that "women have greater maternal capacities than men as a result of the prehistoric division of labor" (Chodorow 1999, 17-18). The assumption made here is that women, because of the physical capability to bear children, are more capable of taking care of the children, and it is thus more functional

for them to restrain from hunting (Chodorow 1999, 19-20). This argument, however, is "for the most part an argument from assumed convenience and cultural ideology, and only in rare cases an argument from species or group survival" (Chodorow 1999, 20). The argument is concerned with the division of labor in gathering-hunting societies, and not with the maternal instinct or biology in general (Chodorow 1999, 19). This kind of sexual division of labor should be seen as something that was once a necessary social form, but which has evolved as societies have developed and changed (Chodorow 1999, 21). The psychoanalytic argument for mothering presented by Chodorow is that women have a maternal instinct, and it is somewhat natural to them to mother (1999, 21-22). Sometimes it could be said that women "need" to mother (Chodorow 1999, 22). According to this argument, it is natural for biological mothers to mother, and it is assumed that mothers parent better than fathers for biological reasons (Chodorow 1999, 22). This argument, however, had not been proved at the time of Chodorow's study of mothering, therefore Chodorow does not discuss the topic further in her monograph.

Chodorow draws the following conclusion concerning the biological basis for mothering. The primary parenting that women are tied to is based on their capability to bear children and lactate, and not any instinctual nurturance beyond them (Chodorow 1999, 28). This evidence also suggests that other members of the group could and did participate in child care (Chodorow 1999, 28). There is no evidence of a physiological or an instinctual reason why women should be able to mother after childbirth, and why they should be able to perform it better than others. Chodorow concludes, that

[t]he biological argument for women's mothering is based on facts that derive, not from our biological knowledge, but from our definition of the natural situation as this grows out of our participation in certain social arrangements. That women have the extensive and nearly exclusive mothering role they have is a product of a social and cultural translation of their childbearing and lactation capacities. (Chodorow 1999, 30)

Chodorow's view of mothering is based on her studies conducted in 1978. However, this information can be applied in the analysis of Tan's novel. Next, I will discuss Chodorow's views on role training in mothering.

#### **2.4.2 Role Training in Mothering**

The role training explanation suggests that girls are taught, by their mothers, to be mothers from an early age (Chodorow 1999, 31). According to this explanation, girls are trained towards nurturance and motherhood through role training and role identification: girls identify with their mothers and thus mother themselves (Chodorow 1999, 31). This view assumes that "women's mothering is a product of behavioral conformity and individual intention" (Chodorow 1999, 31). By learning that they are girls, they identify with "girl-things", such as playing with dolls and becoming mothers (Chodorow 1999, 31). Women's mothering is not an isolated act, but it is structurally and causally related to the sexual division of labor (Chodorow 1999, 32). Women's role as mothers is a historically and psychologically constructed role (Chodorow 1999, 32).

However, behavior and role identification alone does not explain why women mother. (Chodorow 1999, 33). Gender roles are reinforced by role training and identification, but women cannot be expected to mother solely based on these, but the woman has to have some kind of unconscious capacity to mother, which cannot be explained by role training (Chodorow 1999, 33). Role training and the social control explanation relies on individual intent: that girls want to do girl things, and therefore learn to mother (Chodorow 1999, 34). However, Chodorow states that even though there is an intentional component to gender role reproduction, "social reproduction comes to be independent of individual intention and is not caused by it" (Chodorow 1999, 34). Social reproduction has depended on the continuation of the social relations of parenting and the organization of gender and mothering is eminently a psychologically based role enforced by the society (Chodorow 1999, 32, 34). Institutions, such as the organization of gender and the organization of the economy, represent conditions that demand people to engage in them, and people's participation and involvement therefore guarantee social reproduction (Chodorow 1999, 34-35). The economic system has depended on women's mothering, as income inequality has made men to be more likely the primary wage-earners (Chodorow 1999, 35). Women are therefore left to be the primary caretakers of the home and the children, which has made it very difficult to culturally separate women from mothers in language, science, and popular culture (Chodorow 1999, 35-36).

In this section, Chodorow's theory on the explanations for mothering were discussed. The bio-evolutionary explanation suggests that women mother because they have always mothered, and that there are physiological attributes that have made women more suitable

for mothering in hunting and gathering societies. On the other hand, the role training explanations suggests that girls are trained to nurturance and motherhood through role training and role identification. Even though Chodorow's theories date back to the 1970s, I believe that the arguments presented in her work are still applicable, and Chodorow's notions on mothering will be applied to examine Kwan and Olivia's relationship in Chapter Three.

### **2.4.3 Mothers and Daughters**

According to Chodorow, a daughter is able to develop a personal identification with her mother in a way that a boy cannot with his father due to the fact that mothers are present in a way that the fathers and other adult men are not (Chodorow 1999, 175). A daughter can, then, through the relationship that has grown out of their early primary tie, learn about womanhood from the mother and other female models (Chodorow 1999, 175). The relationship between mother and daughters is, however, complicated. During the prepubertal period, the daughter struggles with the psychological separation from the mother, while the father is emotionally in the background (Chodorow 1999, 136). The need to separate from the mother is conflicted by feelings of continuity with the mother, and confused by gender role identification (Chodorow 1999, 136). The daughter acts and feels connected and one with the mother, and the society's emphasis on gender differences highlights the identification with the mother (Chodorow 1999, 136). After years of conscious identification with the mother and women in general, the daughter still

feels dependent on and attached to her mother (Chodorow 1999, 136). Chodorow states that

[m]others feel ambivalent toward their daughters, and react to their daughters' ambivalence toward them. They desire both to keep daughters close and to push them into adulthood. This ambivalence in turn creates more anxiety in their daughters and provokes attempts by these daughters to break away. (1999, 135)

The girls might feel overly attached to their mothers, which might lead to protesting against the identification with the mothers (Chodorow 1999, 137). Criticism of the family, and especially of the mother, idealizing other women and other mothers, and emphasizing the differences between home and the extrafamilial world are common ploys to affect the individuation and independence of the girl (Chodorow 1999, 137). The dilemma that needs to be resolved by the daughter is between the intense merging with anyone other than the mother, and expressing feelings of dependence on and identification with the mother (Chodorow 1999, 137). These attempts involve a total rejection of the mother and identification with anyone but the mother, while feeling like the mother's double and extension (Chodorow 1999, 138). Yet the girls tend to remain preoccupied with issues of separation, identification without merging, easing of dependency, and freedom of ambivalence, and these preoccupations do not persist for biological reasons, but because the mother remains the primary caretaker (Chodorow 1999, 140). The father, even if idealized and adored, cannot take the place of the mother in this struggle (Chodorow 1999, 140). As girls are expected to identify with their

mothers to learn about the adult gender role of a woman, the daughters are faced with a dilemma of how to sufficiently distance and differentiate themselves from their mothers while still identifying with them enough to learn about their gender role (Chodorow 1999, 177). In sum, Chodorow's work suggests that there are evolutionary and role training explanations for why women mother, and that even though the relationships between girls and their mothers might be complicated due to issues with attachment and separation, girls need to identify with their mothers, or other important female figure, in order to learn about female gender roles in a society.

The framework presented in this chapter covers several aspects to identity formation. Erikson's theory on identity formation was chosen because of its groundbreaking views on how identity is formed from childhood to adulthood. The theory is used for this thesis to understand the general features of the identity formation process. It will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Cultural and ethnic identity has been discussed because of the relevance to the topic of this thesis, as I argue that Olivia's cultural and ethnic identity is influenced by Kwan. Chodorow's theory on mothering has been presented to support the argument that Olivia and Kwan's relationship resembles more a mother-daughter relationship than that of a step-sisters' relationship.



### **3. Analysis**

In this section I will discuss Amy Tan's novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* on the basis of the theoretical framework I have presented in the previous chapter. The novel will be discussed in terms of Erikson's identity crisis theory, cultural and ethnic identity formation, and mothering, with particular reference to Chodorow's notion of mothering and the mother-daughter theory introduced in Chapter Two.

#### **3.1 Erikson's Sixth Stage of Identity Formation**

In this section, I will discuss Olivia's identity formation process and the possible crises she may have encountered on the basis of Erikson's theory presented in the previous chapter. From the perspective of identity formation, Olivia cannot be analyzed through all of Erikson's identity formation stages, as her life is not discussed after midlife. Due to the same kind of lack of information, earlier stages cannot be discussed in detail either, however, the sixth stage, intimacy vs. isolation, will be discussed further in regard to Olivia and her relationship with Simon and Kwan. I will show that Olivia reaches the sixth stage in adulthood as she enters into a relationship with Simon. At the same time, she will struggle with her relationship with Kwan. This stage will be completed only after Kwan disappears in Changmian, and Olivia begins to build a new relationship with Simon.

In the sixth stage of Erikson's identity formation theory, true intimacy becomes the issue that needs to be dealt with in order to maintain a healthy and wholesome identity (Erikson 1994, 135-136). As Erikson points out, this stage does not simply refer to sexual intimacy, but rather includes all intimate relationships an individual can have with family, friends, and lovers (1994, 135). In order to complete this stage, the previous stages have to have been completed successfully beforehand, which, for the sake of this analysis, means that the previous stages will not be included in the analysis of Olivia's identity formation.

If Olivia's relationships with Simon and Kwan are viewed from this point of view, several issues concerning intimacy can be detected. For instance, Olivia has trouble trusting Simon completely, as their relationship began in the shadow of his ex-girlfriend Elza, who died suddenly in a skiing accident. Simon concealed her death from Olivia for several months and kept talking about her in present tense. When Olivia discovered the truth about the accident, she began to compare herself to Elza and kept doing it all through the early years of their relationship and marriage, trying to live up to the memory of her: "The way I embraced Elza's former life, you'd have thought she was once my dearest, closest friend" (*THSS*, 86). Six months after finding out about Elza's death, Olivia is finally beginning to feel the weight of Elza's memory putting a strain on her and her relationship. As Olivia puts it: "I felt guilty about every bad thought I'd ever had about Elza. As penance, I sought her approval. I became her conspirator. I helped resuscitate her" (*THSS*, 85). Perhaps, at first, as a way of keeping her distance from Simon, Olivia has accepted Elza's memory as a part of their relationship. As long as Elza was on Simon's mind, Olivia need not to be completely alone with him in the

relationship, and Elza would work as a safety net for the couple to lean on. However, Olivia is now beginning to feel tired of having Elza be a part of their relationship: "after six months acting like the noble runner-up, how could I suddenly tell Simon I wanted to kick Elza's ghostly butt out of our bed?" (*THSS*, 87).

Keeping Elza's memory alive puts a strain on their marriage from the start and alienates the couple. For Olivia, true intimacy is not an option because she feels that Simon is dependent on Elza and cannot be completely intimate with anyone else again. Olivia also uses Elza as an excuse to distance herself from Simon, claiming that the ghost of Elza is keeping them apart. True intimacy cannot be reached, because the memory of Elza is weighing on Olivia's mind throughout her relationship with Simon. Olivia decides to convince Simon to let go of Elza by arranging a psychic reading with Kwan. For Olivia, this would mean that Kwan makes up a story about seeing Elza's spirit and based on what Olivia had told her, would convince Simon to let Elza's spirit rest:

[Kwan] 'You see fireplace. I see something else. A yin person standing there, somebody already dead.'

Simon laughed. 'Dead? You mean like a ghost?'

[Kwan] 'Mm-hm. She say her name — Elsie.' Good old Kwan, she accidentally said Elza's name wrong in exactly the right way.

[Kwan] 'Simon-ah, may be you know this girl Elsie? She saying she know you, mm-hm.'

His smile gone, Simon now sat forward. 'Elza?'

'Oh, now she sooo happy you remember her.' Kwan poised her ear toward the imaginary Elza, listening attentively. 'Ah?... Ah. she already meet many famous music people, all dead too.' She consulted the fireplace. 'Oh?... Oh.... Oh!... Ah, ah. No-no, name I can't repeat! Okay, one... Showman? No? I not pronouncing right?'

'Chopin?' I [Olivia] hinted.

[Kwan] 'Yes-yes. Chopin too. But this one she say name like Showman... Oh! Now I understand — *Schumann!*'

Simon was mesmerized. I was impressed. I didn't know before that Kwan knew anything about classical music. Her favorite songs were country-western tunes about heartbroken women.

[...]

Simon blurted out a question: 'Elza, the baby. What about the baby you were going to have? Is it with you?'

Kwan looked at the fireplace, puzzled, and I held my breath. Shit! I forgot to mention the damn baby. Kwan concentrated on the fireplace. 'Okay-okay.' She turned to us and brushed the air with one nonchalant hand. 'Elsie say no problem, don't worry. She met this person, very nice person suppose be her baby. He not born yet, so didn't die. He have only small waiting time, now already born someone else.'

I exhaled in relief. But then I saw Kwan was staring at the fireplace with a worried face. She was frowning, shaking her head. And just as she did this, the top of my head began to tingle and I saw sparks fly around the fireplace. (*THSS*, 93-95)

Olivia, however, is not quite prepared for what happens in that reading, as she claims to the reader that she had seen Elza's spirit herself, yelling at Simon not to let her go:

Simon was nodding, taking it all in, looking sad and grateful at the same time. I should have been ecstatic right then, but I was nauseated. Because I also had seen Elza. I had heard her. [...] She was a cyclone of static, dancing around the room, pleading with Simon to hear her. I knew all this with my one hundred secret senses. [...] She was pleading, crying, saying over and over again: 'Simon, don't forget me. Wait for me. I'm coming back.' (*THSS*, 95-96).

By this time Simon is ready to let go of Elza's memory, but as Olivia is bothered by the vision she sees at the reading, the damage to the relationship has already been done. Olivia describes their relationship as agreeing on everything the first seven years, then doing the exact opposite for the next seven years. The fact that there is no real intimacy in the marriage, has resulted in Olivia and Simon keeping their innermost dreams and hopes to themselves. This has put a strain on the marriage which eventually ends up in divorce.

The crisis of stage six, isolation or distantiation, causes the feelings of not being anyone (Erikson 1994, 136). This can be seen in Olivia's dilemma of choosing a new family name as the divorce is being finalized. Olivia contemplates on whether to change it back to Laguni, which is the last name of her ex-stepfather Bob, or to Yee, her father's last name. However, neither of those names seems to suit her identity, which complicates her dilemma. This crisis, however, is dealt with in Changmian, where Olivia reconnects with

both Simon and Kwan, as well as her cultural heritage. Olivia ends up adopting Kwan's family name Li:

I have a gift from Kwan, a baby girl with dimples in her fat cheeks. And no, I didn't name her Kwan or Nelly. I'm not that morbidly sentimental. I call her Samantha, sometimes Sammy. Samantha Li. She and I took Kwan's last name. Why not? What's a family name if not a claim to being connected in the future to someone from the past? (*THSS*, 320)

This connection that Olivia talks about in the passage also is a proof of her successful manner of dealing with the crisis of the sixth stage of identity formation process.

Another expression of isolation in the case of Olivia is the feelings of intimacy that are also lacking in the relationship with Kwan. Olivia mentions that "I often feel bad that I don't want to be close to her" (*THSS*, 19), which shows that there are problems of intimacy present in the relationship. Olivia feels guilty for not feeling as close to Kwan as Kwan does to her, but is still unable to return those feelings. For Kwan, there is no one as close to her as Olivia, but Olivia does not share these feelings. Instead, she sometimes feels suffocated by the closeness and tries to avoid Kwan's company by, for example, evading her phone calls: "Before seven in the morning, the phone rings. Kwan is the only one who would call at such an ungodly hour. I let the answering machine pick up" (*THSS*, 24). To Kwan, there are no boundaries between family, which Olivia, on the other hand, needs in her life.

This stage is completed successfully and intimacy is reached only after Kwan disappears in Changmian. Even though Olivia loses her sister, she now feels closer to Kwan than ever before. Olivia laments the loss of her sister but, at the same time, appreciates the care she provided her through her life:

Kwan disappeared two months ago. I don't say 'died' because I haven't yet allowed myself to think that's what happened. [...] Until proven otherwise, you have to believe they're somewhere. You have to see them once more before it's time to say good-bye. You can't let those you love leave you behind in this world without making them promise they'll wait. And I have to believe it's not too late to tell Kwan, I was Miss Banner and you were Nunumu, and forever you'll be loyal and so will I. (*THSS*, 313)

When Kwan disappears, some of Olivia's doubts and reservations about Kwan and her stories disappear as well. Kwan had told her a story about how she had buried duck eggs in the Ghost Merchant's garden, and Olivia decides to find the truth behind that story by finding the garden and the eggs:

I went to the northwest corner and calculated: Ten jars across, ten paces long. I began to hack at the mud with the hoe. I laughed out loud. If anyone saw me, they'd think I was as crazy as Kwan. [...] I felt the hoe hit something that was neither rock nor soil. [...] And then I saw it, the lighter clay, firm and smooth as a shoulder. In my impatience, I used the handle of the hoe to break open the jar. I pulled out a blackened egg, then another and another. I hugged them against my chest, where

they crumbled, all these relics of our past disengraving into gray chalk. But I was beyond worry. I knew I had already tasted what was left. (*THSS*, 318)

For Olivia, Kwan's disappearance proves all the stories she heard as a child to be true. This brings Olivia closer to Kwan, even though Kwan is never seen again. Kwan's disappearance gives Olivia a sense of belonging, which allows her to begin to build a new relationship with Simon as well. Right before Kwan disappears, Olivia confronts her about what happened the night when Olivia saw Elza's spirit. Kwan told Simon that Elza wanted him to forget her, to move on, but Olivia heard Elza's spirit pleading with Simon not to forget her. This has troubled Olivia since that night seventeen years ago, and she must finally set the record straight:

Kwan puts her hand on my shoulder. 'Libby-ah, Libby-ah! This not secret sense. This you own sense doubt. Sense worry. This nonsense! You see you own ghost self begging Simon, Please hear me, see me, love me... Elsie not saying that. Two lifetime ago, you her daughter. Why she want you have misery life?' (*THSS*, 309).

The weight of this night and for having to embrace Elza as a part of the relationship and marriage have been pressing Olivia all this time in vain. In other words, if Olivia had confided in Kwan earlier, she would have avoided a lot of guilt and heartache. Olivia is grateful to Kwan for these words, because now, a weight has been lifted off her shoulders. Olivia is now ready to reconnect with Simon, and as a sign of the development, Olivia gives birth to a baby girl nine months after Kwan disappeared, and she and Simon begin to work out the problems in their relationship. Even though their



relationship is not mended fully when the novel ends, Olivia points to the fact that they are trying to become a family again. Olivia is therefore working on her intimacy issues with Simon, thus eventually completing this stage.

In this section, I have discussed some of the identity formation crises featured in Erikson's theory that Olivia is experiencing in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. What has been suggested is that Olivia faces the crisis of stage six, intimacy vs. isolation, in regard to her relationships with Kwan and Simon. Olivia struggles with those relationships throughout the novel, as she experiences Kwan's closeness as suffocating and the relationship with Simon is clouded by his ex-girlfriend's memory. Only after Kwan disappears in Changmian, Olivia begins to build a new relationship with Simon. Olivia also begins to feel closer to Kwan, as some of her inhibitions and doubts are lifted after the disappearance.

### **3.2 Ethnic Identity**

In this section, I will discuss the theme of ethnic identity in *The Hundred Secret Senses* from the perspective of the protagonist. I will argue that Olivia's ethnic identity is formed through Kwan's teachings of the Chinese culture and through her stories. Olivia's relationship with her Chinese heritage is complicated, and her identity is clouded by her struggles to accept her Chinese side. These struggles can be seen, for example, in the emphasis on her American life and her negative attitude towards Kwan's stories and

learning the Chinese language. Olivia does not feel connected to her Chinese heritage, and her difficulty to accept it is apparent in the novel.

Olivia emphasizes the fact that she considers her family to be American and that she sees Kwan as an outsider who does not fit in with the rest of the family. Olivia therefore considers Kwan to be ethnic, but does not see herself as one. Olivia's ethnic identity is tied with the dominant group's ethnicity, which in this case is American. Olivia narrates that "[w]e were a modern American family. We spoke English. Sure, we ate Chinese food, but take-out, like everyone else. [...] She [Louise] had never heard my father talk about Chinese superstitions before" (*THSS*, 6). According to Côté & Levine, as discussed earlier, ethnic or national identity formation can be described in terms of 'incremental' and 'monumental' changes (2002, 51). It is apparent that in early childhood Olivia did not hear about her Chinese heritage from her father, but instead began to learn about it only after Kwan's arrival. Olivia's ethnic identity was incrementally developed in the dominant American setting, and her Chinese identity began to develop monumentally after Kwan arrived and began to educate Olivia in Chinese culture and history. Kwan assumed the roles of a cultural educator and a caretaker for Olivia, and through her stories about past lives and Chinese mythology, she began to educate Olivia about her heritage and history.

History and cultural knowledge, which are handed down orally, are a general feature in the construction of ethnic identity. As Smith puts it, the history of an ethnic group is often handed down orally and linked to memories and rituals (2001, 109). Olivia's childhood is filled with Kwan's stories from past lives, which Kwan considers to be important cultural knowledge. The stories give a new meaning to Olivia and Kwan's family history, even

though most of oral narratives are stories about past lives that the two sisters shared together. Olivia struggles with the stories and tries to distance herself from them, and in so doing also tries to distance herself from the cultural knowledge Kwan is trying to provide. About her reluctance she narrates that "[f]or most of my childhood, I had to struggle *not* to see the world the way Kwan described it" (*THSS*, 43; original emphasis). For Olivia, Kwan's stories have been haunting her since childhood, and it has been difficult for Olivia to understand the meaning behind those ghostly stories.

Michelle Gaffner Wood argues in her article "Negotiating the Geography of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*" (2012) that the reader of the novel would have to consider the previous generation of mothers to understand the mothers and daughters living in America in *The Joy Luck Club* (2012, 82-83). Wood also argues that there is a geographical gap between the generations not only a cultural one which result in a tension between the four mothers and daughters as the mothers are unable to share myths and stories that are geographically bound to China (2012, 83-84). Wood writes that

[t]he mothers and daughters who live together in China share a cultural bond contiguous with geographical landscapes that transcend the potential generational divide in mother-daughter relationships. The lack of a cultural bond concomitant with geography informs the tension of the mother-daughter relationships in the United States and creates a so-called generation gap that the China-born mothers neither anticipate nor understand. (2012, 83).

Even though Wood has studied this phenomenon in *The Joy Luck Club*, similar implications can be found in *The Hundred Secret Senses* as well. Kwan's stories are strictly bound to Changmian, featuring events that took place over a hundred years earlier. For Olivia, it is difficult to feel connected to any of these stories or events because the setting and time are alien to her. What happens, however, is that when Olivia has the opportunity to visit Changmian, she begins to understand Kwan's stories in a completely different fashion:

I gaze at the mountains and realize why Changmian seems so familiar. It's the setting for Kwan's stories, the ones that filter into my dreams. There they are: the archways, the cassia trees, the high walls of the Ghost Merchant's House, the hills leading to Thistle Mountain. And being here, I feel as if the membrane separating the two halves of my life has finally been shed. (*THSS*, 158)

In discussing the novel, E.D. Huntley argues that as Olivia is "[r]emoved from the familiar and confronted with a new culture, Olivia curtails her litany of past rejections and begins instead to detail events as they happen; and because she is in China, Olivia no longer has to rely on her memory of Kwan's stories— China is all around her to be experienced" (1998, 116). Before this, Olivia has been narrating mostly about past events, but in China she is confronted with a new environment which she has no past connection with so she begins to narrate in the moment. However, when the three of them arrive at Changmian, it becomes clearer to Olivia why Kwan has insisted on telling the stories. Olivia's acceptance towards being Chinese is growing deeper in this statement. She is beginning to form an identity which accepts her Chinese side as well. Therefore,

cultural knowledge cannot be passed on from immigrant mother to their American daughter in the same fashion as the knowledge was passed on in China, as they are geographically bound to China and will seem alien to the daughters who have no real connection to the land. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* Olivia surpasses this boundary by visiting the place where Kwan's stories take place, and by doing that, she begins to understand the connection she has to China through Kwan.

As discussed in Chapter One, previous studies of Tan and her novels concentrate on the way Tan represents immigrant mothers and their American daughters (Feng 2010, 53). However, Feng also discusses how China becomes a "phantom space haunted by family secrets and ghostly past" (2010, 53-54). As discussed in Chapter One, Lee argues that the ghost in *The Hundred Secret Senses* represent the cultural memory of China that has been forgotten but needs to be remembered (2004, 116). In Lee's opinion, the ghosts are a part of cultural memory that cannot be forgotten or eradicated (2004, 117). Lee writes that Kwan's "ghost story is like inerasable cultural memory that needs retelling and recollecting" (2004, 118). These ghosts have also materialized before Olivia's eyes, for example, Elza's spirit, which was discussed in section 3.1. On one occasion, when Olivia is still a child, she sees the ghost of a little girl in her room:

I remember a particular day – I must have been eight – when I was sitting alone on my bed, dressing my Barbie doll in her best clothes. I heard a girl's voice say: '*Gei wo kan.*' I looked up, and there on Kwan's bed was a somber Chinese girl around my age, demanding to see my doll. I wasn't scared. That was the other thing about seeing ghosts: I always felt perfectly calm, as if my whole body had been soaked in

a mild tranquilizer. I politely asked this little girl in Chinese who she was. And she said, '*Lili-lili, lili-lili,*' in a high squeal. (*THSS*, 44; original emphasis)

The identity of this ghost is not revealed, however, it could be Kwan's friend from when she was five. Buncake Lili, as the girl was called, drowns in a terrible flood in Changmian. She was called Buncake Lili because "*lili-lili-lili* was the only sound she could make" (*THSS*, 224; original emphasis), which is the same sound the ghost in Olivia's bedroom makes. This flood takes both Kwan and Buncake Lili, but Kwan claims to have survived by switching bodies with Buncake Lili, since her own body was too broken to return to from the World of Yin. In this place where people go after death, Kwan claims to have seen Buncake Lili happy with her parents, and Olivia's unborn spirit pleading with Kwan to return to her body and wait for Olivia's birth:

I went to the world of Yin. I saw so many things. Flocks of birds, some arriving, some leaving. Buncake soaring with her mother and father. All the singing frogs I had ever eaten, now with their skin coats back on. I knew I was dead, and I was anxious to see my mother. But before I could find her, I saw someone running to me, anger and worry all over her face.

'You must go back,' she cried. 'In seven years, I'll be born. It's all arranged. You promised to wait. Did you forget?' And she shook me, shook me until I remembered.

I flew back to the mortal world. I tried to return to my body. I pushed and shoved. But it was broken, my poor thin corpse. And then the rain stopped. The sun

was coming out. Du Yun and Big Ma were opening the coffin lids. Hurry, hurry, what should I do?

So tell me, Libby-ah, did I do wrong? I had no choice. How else could I keep my promise to you? (*THSS*, 232)

Kwan's spirit returns to Buncake's body days after the accident, and her spirit in another girl's body shocks and terrifies the village for a while, until this unfortunate story of a girl that drowns turns into a secret when the rest of the village decides to forget about the whole incident:

They [the villagers] pretended I was not a ghost. They pretended I had always been the plump girl. Buncake the skinny one. [...] You see, everyone decided not to remember. And later, they really did forget. They forgot there was a year of no flood. They forgot Du Lili was once called Du Yun. They forgot which little girl drowned. (*THSS*, 231)

Since the people in the village decide to forget this incident, it becomes a cultural secret. As discussed by Erica L. Johnson, "[o]ften, ghosts signify a traumatic history to which haunted subjects do not otherwise have access, and here the phantoms of psychoanalytic theory and the ghosts of cultural analysis overlap" (2004, 110). This incident from Kwan's childhood is traumatic, therefore she tells this secret using ghosts and the World of Yin to make sense of it, and Olivia needs to learn this secret in order to understand Kwan's history and about the connection she and Olivia share. Ghosts become cultural secrets that need to be revealed, and in Olivia's case, Kwan has been telling all of her

stories about the past lives in secret: "But don't tell anyone. Promise me, Libby-ah" (*THSS*, 23). Grice argues similarly by stating that mothers and daughters "must divulge their secrets in order for reconciliation to be achieved" (2002, 219). As Kwan shares the story of the flood, she is trying to reconcile with Olivia by telling her how she returned to the mortal world as Olivia had requested.

Kathleen Brogan argues that "[b]oth the content of the memories and the process of remembering itself raise suspicion, leaving characters profoundly uneasy about their relationship to the past and, by extension, to the future" (1998, 129). By applying Brogan's view of the ethnic memory, by remembering or accepting the past, Olivia begins to build a relationship with the future, which can be seen in how she adopts Kwan's family for her daughter as well. The name connects Kwan from Olivia's past to her daughter who is the future. According to Brogan, "[m]emory is the mirror that reflects ethnicity [...] Shared memories, whether "officially broadcasted or secretly transmitted, link the generations in history and make particular social orders legitimate" (1998, 130). In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Kwan is trying to pass on this memory of their family history by telling the stories that took place in Changmian. By not believing in the stories, Olivia is denying herself of this ethnic memory Brogan is discussing. Olivia needs to believe in and remember these stories in order to be connected to the past and her ethnic identity.

For Olivia, the stories that Kwan tells are exactly that, family secrets and ghostly pasts, which she does not understand. Feng continues to argue that China becomes to represent the homeland which for the daughters of Tan's novels becomes the place for spiritual



healing (2010, 57). Feng's argument is valid for Olivia, as her insecurities and personal problems with Kwan and Simon are healed, or at least they begin to heal, during their trip to Changmian. For Olivia, Changmian represents a place to become whole, as the two separate sides of herself, Chinese and American, collide and unite. Whether or not Olivia, upon coming to China, actually begins to remember her past life that she shared with Kwan is not important. The fact that she discovers that Kwan's stories are based on a truth, is a part of revealing those cultural secrets Lee and Grice address. The fact that Olivia now, at the end of the novel, acknowledges Kwan's stories as important cultural memory that has been told to preserve the history of Changmian, makes a difference to Olivia's perception of Kwan and China.

Helena Grice argues that there is an important link between the figure of mother and culture. Grice states that the mother also represents the "mother-culture", and that

[t]he daughter's situation as a 'hyphenated' ethnic subject often alienates her from her mother, more rooted as the mother often is in the ancestral/'mother' culture. The daughter's differing social and cultural embeddedness thus often results in a barrier between mother and daughter which needs to be traversed. (2002, 45)

In this case, I would like to argue that the question is not about mothers and daughters in a biological sense, but that Kwan becomes a cultural representation of an immigrant mother in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. As Kwan becomes the primary caretaker of Olivia, as will be discussed further in section 3.3, she also becomes the representation of the "father-culture" which Olivia has not had contact with before. Kwan being more rooted in

the Chinese culture, the "father-culture", causes alienation between the sisters. Kwan represents the cultural heritage that Olivia has not been connected with, and ethnicity and culture become a barrier between Olivia and Kwan.

An important passage in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, also introduced in Section 3.1 from a psychological perspective, deals with Olivia's struggle to change her family name. This section will discuss the same matter from a sociological perspective. Olivia was born Yee, but her mother changed the family name to Laguni during her second marriage. When Olivia married her husband Simon, it became Bishop. In this passage, Olivia realizes that she has not felt connected to any of her multiple family names since she was very young: "As I think more about my name, I realize I've never had any sort of *identity* that suited me, not since I was five at least, when my mother changed our last name to Laguni" (*THSS*, 140-141; emphasis added). Olivia admits that for her, the family name represents identity and stability, which makes her dilemma more complicated. As Olivia ponders upon the name "Yee", she begins to feel more alienated from it. Even though it is her father's name and she was born with it, it has become distant and alien to her, and she does not feel connected to her heritage enough to feel completely comfortable with "Yee":

Olivia Yee. I say the name aloud several times. It sounds alien, as though I'd become totally Chinese, just like Kwan. That bothers me a little. Being forced to grow up with Kwan was probably one of the reasons I never knew who I was or wanted to become. She was a role model for multiple personalities. (*THSS*, 141)

Olivia realizes that Yee represents an identity that she has been disconnected from since childhood. However, Olivia feels that for the first time in her adult life, she ought to feel a connection with a name (*THSS*, 142). After Olivia has decided to change her name back to Yee, Kwan reveals that it is not the real name of their father:

[Olivia] 'What are you talking about? How could Yee not be his name?'

Kwan looked from side to side, as if she were about to reveal the identities of drug lords. 'Now I going to tell you something, ah. Don't tell anyone, promise, Libby-ah?'

I nod, reluctant but already caught. And then Kwan begins to talk in Chinese, the language of our childhood ghosts.

I'm telling the truth, Libby-ah. Ba took another person's name. He stole the fate of a lucky man. (*THSS*, 142)

Before leaving China, the father had encountered a thief carrying a stolen jacket. Inside the lining of the jacket was official immigration documents for a man named "Jack Yee". As such papers were difficult to acquire, the father assumed the name Jack Yee in order to immigrate to America (*THSS*, 143). Although Olivia's trip to China is initially an opportunity for her to find out where she comes from, she, however, learns more about herself than about her heritage. After Kwan disappears into the caves and is never to be seen again, Olivia and her newborn daughter adopt Kwan's family name Li. Olivia describes this as follows: "What's a family name if not a claim to being connected in the future to someone from the past?" (*THSS*, 320). For Olivia, Kwan's family name is a way

to show that she accepts Kwan as her sister and that she also accepts the Chinese part of her family history.

The way Olivia sees the outer markers of her ethnicity is interesting as well. When Kwan, Simon, and Olivia board a plane to China, Olivia states that "I notice there isn't a single white person in coach, unless you count Simon and me. Does this mean something?" (*THSS*, 149). This statement shows that she, in a way, is oblivious to the fact that she nor her husband Simon, cannot be considered white in the strictest sense of the term. Simon is half-Hawaiian and Chinese ancestry, and Olivia describes how his face was like a chameleon: "His face would change from Hawaiian to Aztecan, Persian to Sioux, Bengali to Balinese" (*THSS*, 63). It is apparent that neither Simon nor Olivia look white, yet in the presence of Chinese people she considers both of them as such. This kind of thinking proves that Olivia denies her ethnicity, and feels completely disconnected from her father's side of her heritage:

Like many of the Chinese people on board, Kwan is gripping a tote bag of gifts in each hand. These are in addition to the suitcase full of presents that has already gone into checked baggage. I imagine tomorrow's television newscast: 'An air-pump thermos, plastic food-savers, packets of Wisconsin ginseng -- these were among the debris that littered the runway after a tragic crash killed Horatio Tewksbury III of Atherton, who was seated in first class, and four hundred Chinese who dreamed of returning as success stories to their ancestral homeland.' (*THSS*, 149)

It is apparent that Olivia does not identify with the other Chinese on the plane, and she finds their behavior odd and alien. Not being able to identify with the Chinese people on the plane means that Olivia does not recognize herself as belonging to that group of ethnicity. Olivia clearly identifies more with her American heritage than with her Chinese identity, considering herself to be white instead of Chinese or mixed-race. According to Tamara S. Wagner, race becomes an important theme in Tan's novels (2004, 435). While Wagner claims that in her novels Tan juxtaposes immigrant communities living in the US (2004, 436), in *The Hundred Secret Senses* this is not the case. There is no comparison between different communities as Kwan's view is only compared to the way Olivia sees the world as an American. There is definitely a question of race and ethnicity, as Wagner also points out in her article (2004, 437), but the matter is only discussed in terms of Olivia, and her ethnicity is not directly compared to anyone else's.

One of Kwan's objectives has been to make Olivia more accepting of her Chinese side by teaching her to speak Chinese and telling her stories about Kwan's childhood and especially about Kwan and Olivia's previous lives in Changmian, which in her opinion are part of Olivia's past and cultural memory as well. When Olivia discusses the Chinese language she learned from Kwan through her stories, it is apparent that it did not happen on Olivia's request as seen in her choice of words: "That's how I became the only one in my family who learned Chinese. Kwan *infected* me with it. I absorbed her language through my pores while I was sleeping. She *pushed* her Chinese secrets into my brain and changed how I thought about the world" (*THSS*, 11; emphasis added). Strong words such as "pushed" and "infected", which Olivia uses in her description, portray Olivia's negative thoughts about learning Chinese. Olivia presents the process as if Kwan gave Olivia no

choice but to learn the language so that the two sisters could communicate more fluently. In return, Kwan learns English from young Olivia. Olivia states that it might be because of her that Kwan never learned the language well, as Olivia was a reluctant teacher (*THSS*, 11). Even though Olivia feels guilty about Kwan's poor English skills, she is reluctant to do anything to change it. Perhaps, in a way, Kwan's poor English is a way for Olivia to keep the sisters culturally apart. It is apparent that Olivia does not feel comfortable leveling the playing field by teaching Kwan properly. This might be a way for her to retaliate against having to learn Chinese against her will. Kwan has always told her stories about their past lives in Chinese to keep it a secret from everyone else. In Olivia's opinion, however, the language represents the Chinese heritage that she does not want to embrace. According to Espín, language has a profound impact on immigrant's identity and self, which means that when Kwan is teaching Olivia Chinese, she is, at the same time, moulding her identity (2006, 247-248). Olivia is, then, involuntarily beginning to acquire a new identity through Kwan's cultural stories and language.

While talking to a local inhabitant in Changmian, Olivia feels embarrassed that her Chinese is not better: "I laugh nervously, ashamed of my Chinese, my American accent" (*THSS*, 264). Even though Olivia speaks Chinese rather fluently for someone who has learnt it from stories, she still feels like an outsider when communicating with the locals. This statement from Olivia's narration confirms that even though she has grown up listening to Kwan's stories in Chinese, Olivia has never been interested enough to learn the language properly. While Olivia feels an outsider looking in on the lives of the real Chinese people, she begins to realize the connection she has to China by embracing the sights and people she sees in Changmian: "I inhale deeply and imagine that I'm filling my

lungs with the very air that inspired my ancestors, whoever they might have been" (*THSS*, 171). This statement shows that Olivia is beginning to accept that part of her heritage is Chinese. She still cannot completely accept that she is Chinese, but it is beginning to take root in her brain that a part of her is.

Next, I will discuss Dennis' theory on biculturalism in terms of Olivia and her status as a member of American and Chinese cultural group. I will discuss Olivia's biculturality and her status as an insider and outsider in both cultures.

According to Dennis, the "insider" is usually part of the dominant racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic group of the society (2008, 4). In Olivia's case this statement is problematic: Racially and ethnically Olivia is not a member of the dominant group which in this case means white American, however, Olivia considers herself as an insider in the American culture because in her opinion she has been a member since birth. This becomes apparent in her statements such as "[w]e were a modern American family" (*THSS*, 6) and "I notice there isn't a single white person in coach, unless you count Simon and me" (*THSS*, 149). Dennis argues that almost everyone is born to a monocultural family and friends setting (2008, 4), which in the case of Olivia means that the cultural setting she was born to is American and not Chinese. As it has been mentioned above, Olivia's father did not teach his children about his Chinese heritage but rather assimilated the whole family to the dominant American culture. Dennis discusses how the dominant group might most of the time feel more alien to a biculturalist than the mother-culture (2008, 3). In Olivia's case the dominant culture, i.e., the American culture, is considered to be the mother-culture and thus valued more than the Chinese culture Kwan is trying to convey. This is apparent

in the way Olivia tries to emphasize the fact that she is American, not Chinese: "Because I'm not Chinese like Kwan" (*THSS*, 223). Olivia's family as a whole is not bicultural but Olivia becomes the only member in her family to become bicultural through Kwan's teaching. As Dennis argues, biculturality can be a birthright or chosen by the individual (2008, 35). However, Olivia more or less chooses to become bicultural, especially after Kwan disappears in Changmian. According to Dennis, it is common that the members of the dominant group resist learning the culture of less dominant group (2008, 4), which in Olivia's case means that Olivia resists Kwan's efforts to teach her about the Chinese culture and language. Even though Olivia struggles her whole life with Kwan and her efforts to teach Olivia what it is to be Chinese, she eventually accepts the Chinese part of her heritage. Olivia might, in a sense, have been forced by Kwan to become bicultural but she does accept her changed identity in the end.

When discussing the "insider-insider" status, which briefly described means belonging to and identifying with two cultural groups, Dennis argues that an insider-insider can move between two cultures in question with various degrees of difficulty and can identify themselves through both (2008, 16-17). The key is that the members desire to identify themselves through both of the cultures in question. In regard to Olivia, there is no question whether or not Olivia is an insider in the dominant American culture. Olivia identifies herself through the American cultural setting more than through her Chinese heritage, which makes her an inside member of the dominant group. Potentially Olivia could be an insider in both the cultural groups in question, American and Chinese, as she belongs to both groups in terms of her ethnicity. However, as Olivia's father did not raise his children in the Chinese cultural group, Olivia does not identify with that cultural



group and thus is only a member of the dominant American group. Yet, it can be argued that Olivia switches from an outsider to insider member in regard to the Chinese cultural group. An outsider is an individual who, due to cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences, is labeled as an outsider by a larger powerful group they interact with (Dennis 2008, 22). In Olivia's case, she is not labeled as an outsider by the minority group of Chinese, but rather she distances herself from that group. Because of her heritage, Olivia has the potential to belong as an insider member to both the dominant group and the minority group. As Olivia and Kwan's story begins, Olivia is a monocultural member of only the dominant group, but as Kwan begins to teach her about Chinese culture, Olivia gradually starts becoming a member of the minority group as well. As Olivia is moved away from the dominant group she identifies herself with and is placed in another setting where the minority group becomes the dominant group, Olivia realizes that she is an outsider in the group she thought she might also belong to. When Olivia says that "We're on her [Kwan's] terrain" (*THSS*, 168), she implies that she does not consider China to be her terrain as well, but she is merely visiting the place where Kwan is an insider. Even though Kwan has been teaching her about the customs of their "father-country" all through Olivia's childhood and featured Kwan's home village in all of her stories, Olivia still feels misplaced and alien in Changmian while watching the local inhabitants living their lives according to their customs and beliefs.

The transformation of Olivia's identity from an outsider to insider is problematic. Dennis points out that an individual must identify themselves through both cultures in question to become an insider and there must be a desire to engage in both cultures, but the individual does not have to be accepted equally in both cultures (2008, 17). From the

local inhabitants' point of view, Olivia is probably seen as an outsider even though it is not discussed in the novel, although, Olivia tries to engage with their culture to the best of her knowledge during the trip. Olivia's lack of cultural knowledge and language proficiency might cast her as an outsider in the eyes of the local inhabitants. From Olivia's point of view, the trip to Changmian makes her more accepting towards her heritage, and, as discussed before, it allows her to reconnect with the cultural knowledge that Kwan has been passing on since Olivia's childhood. This supports the argument that Olivia becomes an insider due to her own choice and therefore it can be argued that because Olivia now identifies herself with the Chinese culture, she has become a member of that cultural group.

In this section, I have discussed the ethnic identity of the protagonist Olivia. I have argued that Olivia's ethnic identity is formed through interaction with her stepsister Kwan, and that even though Olivia begins her story as a monoculturalist, emphasizing the American side of her heritage, she develops into a bicultural person with the help of Kwan. Kwan's stories and teachings of the Chinese culture allow Olivia to learn about the history and customs of her father's side of the family. When Olivia accepts and embraces the fact that her Chinese heritage is as important as her American heritage, her status changes from an outsider to insider in the Chinese cultural group through this acceptance.

### 3.3 Mothering and Mother-Daughter Relationship

In this section, I will discuss Olivia and Kwan's relationship in terms of Chodorow's mothering and mother-daughter relationship theories as described in Chapter Two. I will argue that their relationship resembles more a mother-daughter relationship rather than one between two sisters. I argue that Kwan accepts the role of primary caretaker of Olivia upon her arrival to America, and thus becomes the mothering figure in the young child's life. The relationship between Olivia and Kwan is complicated, to say the least, since there is a lot of resentment and regret on Olivia's side, whereas Kwan is oblivious to any problems there might exist between the sisters.

Olivia describes her mother Louise as being "unreliable" (*THSS*, 7), seeing her as a person whose love is not unconditional, even towards her children (*THSS*, 7). More often than not, Louise puts her own needs ahead of her children's, and in Olivia's narration, the feelings of rejection and disappointment are apparent:

I learned to make things not matter, put a seal on my hopes and place them on a high shelf, out of reach. And by telling myself that there was nothing inside those hopes anyway, I avoided the wounds of deep disappointment. The pain was no worse than the quick sting of a booster shot. And yet thinking about this makes me ache again. How is it that as a child I knew I should have been loved more? (*THSS*, 7).

What this means is that even at a young age, Olivia has come to recognize that Louise's attention and love are divided unequally between her boyfriends, hobbies, and her children, and unfortunately, her children are at the bottom of Louise's list.

As a primary caretaker, Louise fails to provide love and care for her children. According to Chodorow, mothering a child is acting as the primary caretaker for the child, which means that biological mothers are not the only ones who can mother (1999, 11). In Olivia's case, even though Louise is the biological mother, she does not act as the primary caretaker. As Chodorow points out, other women in the society often take the place as the child's primary nurturing figure if the biological mother is unable to perform her duties (1999, 3). Also according to Helena Grice, other maternal relationships can be considered to form a mother/daughter dyad:

Several Asian American women writers depict maternal paradigms which depart from a typical 'family romance' – or nuclear family -model, where, for instance, the grandmother or aunt may undertake a significant part of the childcare. Consequently, the biological mother cannot be said to have the kind of exclusive relationship with her child suggested in many psychoanalytically-based narratives of the mother/daughter dyad. (2002, 37)

In Olivia's case, Kwan takes the place as the mothering figure for Olivia upon her arrival to America, as Louise is reluctant to care for her children herself. Kwan becomes the primary caretaker for Olivia and probably also for her two brothers, even though the

brothers are not discussed in detail in the novel. As a result, there is a lot of bitterness in Olivia's description of her mother, and some of that bitterness is transferred onto Kwan.

After finding out that Kwan is coming from China to stay with the family, Olivia, with the logic of a young child, feels even more rejected by her mother: "I would have preferred a new turtle or even a doll, not someone who would compete for my mother's already divided attention and force me to share the meager souvenirs of her love" (*THSS*, 7). For Louise, Kwan's arrival relieves her from her duties as a mother, as there now is someone else to take care of the children: "To Mom, Kwan was a handy baby-sitter, willing, able, and free" (*THSS*, 9). The negative attitudes Olivia has towards Kwan stem from Olivia's fragile relationship with her mother. As pointed out earlier, Louise divides her attention between several things and there is not always a lot of it to share with the children. Olivia recognizes this about her mother at a young age, which results in resentment and disappointment on Olivia's behalf. The arrival of another person for Louise to divide her attention to is enough for any child to start to feel resentment towards the new family member, as Olivia now feels that there will be even less of her mother to share.

Olivia and Kwan's relationship is complicated. Olivia tries her best to distance herself from Kwan by emphasizing the fact that they are in fact half-sisters: "Actually, Kwan is my half-sister, [...] just to set the genetic record straight, Kwan and I share a father, *only that*" (*THSS*, 3; emphasis added). The fact that Olivia utters her view in this manner shows how she feels about Kwan at this point of the novel. Kwan is an outsider who has come to replace her mother Louise. However, Olivia does recognize that Kwan has been

more like a mother to her during her childhood than Louise ever was (*THSS*, 19). Even though Olivia resents Kwan for taking over the role of the primary caretaker, she admits that Kwan was always reliable and available, however, instead of truly appreciating Kwan's efforts to take care of Olivia, she cannot help but to feel resentment towards Kwan for taking her mother's place (*THSS*, 10). As a sign of this, Olivia mentions that

When my teacher called Mom to say I was running a fever, it was Kwan who showed up at the nurse's office to take me home. When I fell while roller-skating, Kwan bandaged my elbows. She braided my hair. She packed lunch for Kevin, Tommy, and me. She tried to teach me to sing Chinese nursery songs. She soothed me when I lost a tooth. She ran the washcloth over my neck while I took my bath. (*THSS*, 10)

This passage shows that Olivia recognizes Kwan's commitment to her, but as is apparent in her narration, she would have preferred her mother to take care of her. For Louise, Kwan was a babysitter. Olivia resents her mother Louise for leaving her responsibilities to Kwan, and feels smothered by the closeness Kwan feels towards her but which she cannot return:

I often feel bad that I don't want to be close to her. What I mean is, we're *close* in a manner of speaking. We know things about each other, mostly through history [...] It's just that I wouldn't want to be closer to her, not the way some sisters are who consider themselves best friends. As it is, I don't share everything with her the way she does with me [...]. (*THSS*, 19; original emphasis)

The feelings of guilt push Olivia away from Kwan at times as Olivia tries to keep her distance from Kwan as much as possible. Olivia recognizes that Kwan has always been there to take care of her, but at the same time she resents Kwan for replacing her mother. For Olivia, Kwan has been an important part of her life when growing up, but she still continues to mourn for the lack of motherly love from Louise: "I should have been grateful to Kwan. I could always depend on her. She liked nothing better than to be by my side. But instead, most of the time, I resented her for taking my mother's place" (*THSS*, 10). In other words, Olivia laments the loss of her mother as the primary caretaker and is unable to rejoice gaining a sister.

Olivia states that "[t]o Kwan, there are no boundaries among family", and this makes Olivia uncomfortable (*THSS*, 20). The difference between the two sisters' approaches to intimacy and family results from cultural differences. Kwan states that "Chinese family very close, friends very loyal. You have Chinese family one lifetime, stay with you ten thousand lifetime" (*THSS*, 90). Olivia struggles with this idea of a loyal and close family as her mother so eagerly left her children in the hands of Kwan. For Kwan, it is a sister's responsibility to take care of the other family members, especially of a younger sister. Taking care of Olivia becomes the primary task for Kwan, and she pours all of her time and energy to caring for and teaching Olivia. The fact that "Kwan thinks she and I are exactly alike" (*THSS*, 19) ends up being more or less true for Olivia, as she learns more about life and culture from Kwan than she ever did from Louise. Yet, Olivia struggles with the Chinese mentality that a family shares everything: "Even with constant exposure to Kwan, I don't think I will ever understand the dynamics of a Chinese family, all the

subterranean intricacies of who's connected to whom, who's responsible, who's to blame, all that crap about losing face" (*THSS*, 119). The idea behind Kwan sharing stories about the past lives she and Olivia have shared together is to reconnect the closeness between the sisters Kwan knows they shared before. For Olivia, these stories merely haunt her dreams and she feels pressured by Kwan's insistence of feeling closer. After Kwan's disappearance Olivia begins to find proofs that Kwan's stories were true or at least based on a truth, which allowed her to see her sister in a new light. As Olivia accepts Kwan's stories as important cultural knowledge which have allowed her to reconnect with her father's culture, she ends up adopting Kwan's family name for her and her daughter to show respect to Kwan, and to finally feel connected to an identity as was discussed earlier. For Olivia, adopting Kwan's family name is a sign of respect and reconciliation on her part, as their complicated relationship came to an abrupt end. Olivia definitely feels regret for not appreciating her sister earlier, but at the end she realizes how important Kwan's support and mothering was to her growing up.

In this section, I have discussed the novel in terms of Chodorow's theory on mothering and the mother-daughter relationship. I have argued that the sisters' relationship resembles more a mother-daughter kind of relationship and I have presented arguments to support that proposition. As it becomes apparent in the novel, upon Kwan's arrival from China to live with the family, Louise steps aside as the mother figure for Olivia and allows Kwan to take her place. Consequently, Olivia feels abandoned by her mother which results in feelings of bitterness towards Kwan. Olivia, however, admits that Kwan has been more like a mother to her than Louise ever was, which is why after Kwan's disappearance Olivia adopts Kwan's last name as a token of their kinship.



#### 4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have introduced Amy Tan's novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* and discussed it in terms of identity formation, ethnic identity and Chodorow's mother-daughter theory. I have argued that Olivia's ethnic identity is influenced by Kwan, making her more aware of her Chinese heritage, and that Kwan acts as the mothering figure for Olivia, replacing the real mother Louise. This results in their relationship resembling more a mother-daughter than a step-sisters' relationship.

As a writer, Tan is famous for describing the problematic relationships between immigrant mothers and American daughters. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, even though the dilemma is not between mothers and daughters, the same kind of conflicts and identity problems occur between Olivia and Kwan. Kwan takes the role of the mothering figure for Olivia upon arriving to America, which results in the same kind of dilemmas as Tan is known to represent in her other novels as well. Ethnicity, cultural and ethnic identity, and identity formation are also the key themes incorporated in Tan's novels and *The Hundred Secret Senses* is no different. In this thesis, all of these themes have been addressed in terms of the theory discussed in Chapter Two and in regard to Olivia and Kwan. Olivia being the protagonist of the story, the main focus has been on her.

Erik Erikson's theory on identity formation was used as a basis for understanding the development of identity. Even though Erikson's theory on identity formation and identity crises is based on his studies conducted in the 1960s, it was used to understand how Olivia's identity formed throughout her childhood and adulthood. The sixth stage of

Erikson's theory on the stages of identity formation was discussed further at the beginning of Chapter Three to discuss the crisis of intimacy vs. isolation in regard to Olivia's relationships with Simon and Kwan. It was argued that Olivia faces this crisis with both Simon and Kwan, but successfully completes this stage after Kwan disappears in Changmian. With Simon, Olivia begins to reconnect and rebuild their relationship after having a baby girl together, and even though Olivia has not been able to reach intimacy with Kwan while she was still alive, she begins to appreciate the nature of their relationship after the disappearance.

Theories on ethnic identity and cultural and ethnic identity development were used to support the argument that Olivia's ethnic identity develops and forms in contact and interaction with Kwan, as Olivia's ethnic identity has been formed solely in the dominant American cultural setting before that. Before his death, their father did not teach his children about Chinese culture or heritage, which allowed Kwan to convey cultural knowledge to Olivia. Kwan teaches Olivia about the Chinese heritage they both share through a father, and thus makes Olivia more accepting of that side of her heritage. Dennis's theory on biculturalism was used to support the argument that Olivia becomes bicultural due to Kwan's teachings of the language and culture of their homeland. It was argued that with Kwan's help Olivia's status changes from an outsider to insider in the Chinese culture group Kwan belongs to. After Kwan's disappearance in Changmian, Olivia adopts her family name as her own to honor their cultural heritage and the memory of her sister.

Chodorow's theory on mothering and mother-daughter relationship was used to support the argument that Olivia and Kwan's relationship resembles more a mother-daughter relationship than it does a step-sisters' relationship. As Kwan arrives to America, she immediately takes the place as Olivia's primary caretaker, replacing Louise. According to Chodorow's theory, the primary caretaker can be other than the birth mother, and that figure in the child's life becomes the mothering figure. As Louise decides to focus on other matters important to her, Kwan steps up and takes care of young Olivia. For Olivia, Kwan was the mothering figure Louise could not be, and even though this results in resentment and bitterness in Olivia's behalf, she admits and recognizes that Kwan was more like a mother to her than Louise.

This study was conducted in order to discuss the role of identity in *The Hundred Secret Senses* in detail. I found the novel and the themes interesting and complex enough to be addressed in my thesis. As topics of further study I would suggest exploring Tan's other novels which discuss the same themes as *The Hundred Secret Senses*, as it has been stated that these themes reoccur in some of her other novels as well. What could be studied how the themes are presented in different novels and whether or not there are similarities or differences in those themes. Other writers and novels could also be considered for a comparison regarding the presentation of ethnic identity or its absence.

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## Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkielmassa käsittelen Amy Tanin romaania *The Hundred Secret Senses* päähenkilön identiteetin muodostuksen, etnisen identiteetin sekä äiti-tytär-suhteen näkökulmasta.

Ensimmäisessä luvussa esittelen tutkimukseni teesin sekä tarkasteltavan kirjailijan että romaanin. Argumentoin, että päähenkilön Olivian etninen identiteetti muodostuu vasta sisarpuolen Kwanin saapumisen jälkeen, ja että heidän suhteensa on lähempänä äiti-tytär-suhdetta kuin sisarpuolten välistä suhdetta. Esittelen myös aiempia tutkimuksia, jotka ovat käsitelleet joko kirjailijaa tai kyseessä olevaa romaania.

Amy Tan on amerikkalainen kirjailija, joka on tunnettu etnisyyttä ja äiti-tytär-suhdetta käsittelevistä romaaneistaan. Hänen esikoisteoksensa *The Joy Luck Club* voitti useita kirjallisuuspalkintoja, ja Tanista tuli heti kuuluisa kustannuspiireissä. Tätä esikoisteostaan seuranneet romaanit jatkoivat menestystä, ja vuonna 1995 Tan julkaisi viidennen romaaninsa *The Hundred Secret Senses*, jossa hän myös käsitteli jo tunnetuiksi tulleita teemoja äitiydestä ja amerikankiinalaisesta etnisyydestä.

*The Hundred Secret Senses* kertoo kahden sisarpuolen suhteesta. Olivia ja Kwan tulevat erilaisista kulttuurisista taustoista, ja Kwan muuttaa Olivian perheen luokse asumaan vasta, kun heidän yhteinen isänsä kuolee. Tässä vaiheessa Olivia on kuuden vanha ja Kwan jo kahdeksantoista. Heidän suhteensa on monimutkainen ja täynnä konflikteja, joita aiheuttavat kulttuuriset erot. Kwanista tulee nopeasti Olivian äitihahmo, kun Olivian

äiti Louise päättää käyttää Kwania ilmaisena lapsenvahtina. Tämä aiheuttaa Oliviassa ristiriitaisia tunteita, jotka jatkuvat pitkälle aikuisikään. Olivia on myös perheestään ainoa, joka oppii puhumaan kiinaa Kwanin kautta, sillä hän kertoo öisin tarinoita kotikylästään ja aikaisemmasta elämästään, jossa myös Olivia on ollut osana. Kwanin 50-vuotissyntymäpäivien jälkeen Olivia, Kwan ja Olivian entinen aviomies Simon päättävät lähteä Kiinaan vierailemaan Kwanin kotikylässä Changmianissa. Eräänä myrskyisenä yönä Kwan katoaa kylän lähellä sijaitseviin luoliin eikä häntä nähdä enää sen jälkeen. Katoamisen jälkeen kunnioittaakseen sisarensa muistoa ja viimein hyväksytyään kulttuuriperimänsä, Olivia ottaa Kwanin sukunimen omakseen.

Aiemmissa Tania ja hänen teoksiaan koskevissa tutkimuksissa on käsitelty paljon kulttuurisia eroja maahanmuuttajaäitien ja amerikkalaisten tyttärien välillä. Kulttuuriset kummittelut (haunting) ovat myös olleet tutkimusten kohteena, ja useat ovat argumentoineet, että Tanin tapa kuvailla Kiinaa ja Kiinan historiaa on hänen tapansa tuoda esiin Kiina eräänlaisena kummittelevana kotimaana, jota tyttäret eivät pysty pakenemaan. Tania on tässä mielessä usein verrattu Maxine Hong Kingstoniin sekä Toni Morrisoniin. Myös kulttuuri-identiteetin kysymyksiä useat tutkijat ovat tarkastelleet kirjoituksissaan.

Luvussa kaksi käsittelen tutkimukseeni liittyvää teoriaa. Identiteetin muodostuminen on tärkeä tema Tanin romaanissa, joten tutkimukseeni valitsin sekä psykologisesta että sosiologisesta näkökulmasta aihetta käsittelevää teoriaa. Identiteetti on tässä yhteydessä määritelty olevan se sisin, joka määrittelee meidät yksilöinä. Psykologisesta näkökulmasta katsottuna identiteetti muodostuu yksilön sisäisten pohdintojen ja



kamppailuiden seurauksena, kun taas sosiologisesti katsottuna ympäröivät ihmiset ja yhteisö vaikuttavat yksilön identiteetin muodostumiseen.

Psykologisen näkökulman teoria käsittelee pääasiassa Erik Eriksonin teoriaa identiteetin muodostumisesta sekä identiteettikriiseistä. Erikson jakaa identiteetin muodostumisen kolmeen eri ulottuvuuteen, jotka ovat psykologinen, sosiaalinen ja yksilöllinen ulottuvuus. Toisin sanoen, ulottuvuudet käsittävät samankaltaisuuden ja jatkuvuuden itsessä, suhteen itsen ja toisten välillä sekä yhdentymisen yhteisöön.

Sosiologinen näkökulma identiteetin muodostukseen perustuu ajatukselle, että identiteetti muodostuu yhteistyössä muiden ihmisten kanssa, jolloin yhteisön hyväksyntä sekä lähipiirin opastus ovat tärkeässä asemassa yksilön identiteetin muodostuksessa.

Etnisyys voidaan käsittää siten, että yhteisö, jolla on oma kollektiivinen nimi, ja jotka jakavat kulttuurillisia attribuutteja, kuten kielen tai tapoja, voidaan pitää etnisinä ryhminä. Etninen ryhmä eroaa usein muista ympäröivistä ryhmistä omaamalla tapoja ja tottumuksia, joita muut ryhmät eivät välttämättä ole omaksuneet. Aspektit, kuten kieli ja tavat ovat tärkeässä asemassa etnisen identiteetin muodostumisessa ja ylläpitämisessä.

Dennisin teoria kaksoiskulttuurisuudesta (biculturalism) käsittää yksilön kehittymisen kahden kulttuurin taitajaksi ja jäseneksi. Dennisin mukaan yksilö voi syntyä vain yhteen kulttuuriin, mutta yhteisön, perheen tai omasta vaikutuksesta hänestä voi tulla jäsen myös useampaan kulttuuriin. Useamman kulttuurin omaksunut yksilö voi olla täysinäinen jäsen yhdessä tai useammassa kulttuurissa, ja vaikka muut kulttuurin jäsenet voivat evätä

yksilön jäsenyyden erinäisistä syistä, tärkeimmäksi aspektiksi nousee kuitenkin yksilön oma halu toimia kyseisten kulttuurien jäsenenä.

Chodorown äiti-tytär -teoriaa käsitellään myös osana tämän tutkimuksen teoriataustaa. Chodorow argumentoi, että äiti-tytärsuhteelle on sekä biologisia että roolivalmennukseen perustuvia syitä. Äitiys voidaan käsittää evoluution saatossa kehittyneenä taipumuksena hoitaa lapsia tai sukupolvelta toiselle siirtyneenä käytäntönä. Chodorow esittää myös, että äiti-tytärsuhteen ei välttämättä tarvitse olla biologinen, vaan historiallisesti myös muut yhteisön naisjäsenet ovat ottaneet äidin roolin lapsen elämässä, jos biologinen äiti ei ole pystynyt suorittamaan tehtäväänsä.

Luvussa kolme tarkastelen Tanin romaania käsittelemäni teorian pohjalta. Tarkasteltavia teemoja ovat Eriksonin identiteetin kehityksen vaiheet, etninen ja kulttuuri-identiteetti, sekä Chodorown teoriaan pohjautuva tarkastelu Kwanin ja Olivian suhteesta.

Osiossa 3.1 tarkastelen sitä, kuinka Olivia kohtaa aikuisiällä Eriksonin teorian mukaisen identiteetin muodostumisen kuudennen tason, eli läheinen suhde vs. eristäytyminen. Argumentoin, että Olivian suhteet sekä Kwaniin että Simoniin kärsivät siitä, että Olivia ei kykene olemaan läheinen kummankaan kanssa. Lopulta Olivia kuitenkin käy läpi tämän tason kriisivaiheen Kwanin katoamisen jälkeen, jolloin hän kykenee rakentamaan läheisemmän suhteen Simoniin. Olivia lähentyy myös Kwanin kanssa, vaikka Kwan ei enää olekaan läsnä.

Seuraavassa osiossa esitän, että Olivian etnisen identiteetin muodostuminen on riippuvainen Kwanin saapumisesta. Olivian etnisyyttä ja identiteettiä käsitellään monesta eri näkökulmasta, kuten kulttuurisen kummittelun näkökulmasta. Olivian etninen identiteetti rajoittuu puhtaasti hänen amerikkalaisiin sukujuuriinsa ennen kuin Kwan saapuu asumaan perheen kanssa. Kwanin tarinat menneisyydestä ja kotikaupungistaan avaavat Olivian näkemyksiä etnisyydestä, ja lopulta hän löytää yhteyden kiinalaiseen perintöönsä.

Seuraavassa osiossa tarkastelen Chodorown teorian pohjalta Kwanin ja Olivian suhdetta, jota voidaan kuvailla enemmän äiti-tytär -suhteeksi. Kwan saapuu Amerikkaan Olivian ollessa kuusivuotias, jolloin Olivian äiti Louise alkaa käyttää Kwania lapsenvahtina. Kwanista tulee pian Olivian äitihahmo, joka toimii myös kulttuurisena äitihahmona. Olivian ja Kwanin suhde on monimutkainen, mutta Olivia tunnustaa Kwanin olleen hänelle tärkeä tukihenkilö, jonka kautta hän oppii myös kulttuurista ja etnisyydestä.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella Tanin romaania identiteetin, kulttuuri-identiteetin ja äitiyden näkökulmasta. Teemoja on käsitelty useamman teorian kautta pohtien, kuinka Olivian identiteetti muodostuu ja kehittyy tarinan edetessä. Olivian suhdetta Kwaniin on tarkasteltu myös Chodorown äitiysteorian pohjalta, koska Olivian suhde Kwaniin on verrattavissa äiti-tytär -suhteeseen. Jatkotutkimuksen aiheeksi ehdotan, että Tanin muita romaaneja verrattaisiin tästä romaanista tehtyihin löydöksiin ja tarkasteltaisiin sitä, kuinka muiden tarinoiden hahmojen identiteetin muodostus ja kulttuuri-identiteetti vertautuvat tämän romaanin hahmojen identiteetin kehitykseen.