

## Chapter One

### Introduction

As one of the most famous and best-selling Chinese-American writers in the United States, Amy Tan is noted for her mesmerizing storytelling and her particular taste in depicting the delicate and intimate bonds among female characters. Her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), which has made her name known not only in the United States but also around the world,<sup>1</sup> is about finely wrought short stories told by four sets of Chinese-immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters as they gossip after their weekly mah-jong game. Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), portrays the relationship between a mature Chinese-American woman and her mother, who are emotionally and culturally alienated from each other in the beginning, but are drawn together nevertheless after they disclose forbidden secrets to each other. Following her personal taste in characterizing female bonding but with a slight difference, Tan published in 1995 her third major novel, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, which delineates the relationship between two half sisters—Olivia Yee and Kwan Li. The novel consists of two parts—Olivia's narrative about San Francisco and China of the 90's and Kwan's about the nineteenth-century China and a small Chinese village during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Olivia and Kwan share the same father; except for that, they look totally different. Olivia is a San Francisco yuppie of the 1990s, and Kwan was born and lived in China before she was taken to San Francisco to live with Olivia's family when she was eighteen.

While Critical attention to Tan has been mostly focused on the mother-daughter

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<sup>1</sup> *The Joy Luck Club* is known not only for its fictional version but also for its later cinematic adaptation, which helps a lot promote Tan's fame overseas as a spokesman for Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants in America.

<sup>2</sup> For convenience's sake, I intend to use present tense when I discuss about Olivia's narrative and use past tense while talking about Kwan's narrative.

relationships of her first two novels, *The Hundred Secret Senses* is “conspicuously absent in critical essays.”<sup>3</sup> Among the relevant critiques available now I only single out four representative essays about *The Hundred Secret Senses*—one puts it in the context of the New Age Movement, another accesses it from a formalist approach, a third focuses on the storytelling and private talks in Tan’s three novels, and the other explores the function of magic realism in the novel. The following passages will present a brief survey of these critical essays.

To begin with, Sheng-mei Ma situates *The Hundred Secret Senses* within the context of the New Age movement. Tracing the origin of this western spiritual movement, Ma explains that the western self, because it has been long reified and atomized in economies of advanced technology, has drained out its vitality and is in need of recharging or healing in a spiritual sense, for which purpose the “primitive” third-world cultures are deployed. The primitive “other” utilized within this context is “simultaneously marked by its bestial savagery and spiritual transcendence.”<sup>4</sup> She argues that Tan’s success among the mainstream American readers is due to her combining the animalistic and the spiritual with the ethnic, which is influenced by the multicultural milieu of the U.S. at that time. She comments that “Tan’s vision of multicultural America comes with trappings of Orientalism, upgraded by New Age chic, presented by hip San Francisco yuppies”(Ma 5). The various Chinese elements that Tan draws upon—Buddhist notion of reincarnation, yin eyes, the hundred secret senses, etc.—help her create a more convincing account about Chinese ethnic culture that seems to reject Orientalist tropes but is in fact reviving them. According to Ma,

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<sup>3</sup> [http://members.aol.com/vicnbeck/Tan\\_Overview.html](http://members.aol.com/vicnbeck/Tan_Overview.html). Latest update: November 13, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Ma, Sheng-mei. “Chinese and Dogs’ in Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Ethnicizing the Primitive a la New Age.” p.1  
[http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_0/m2278/1\\_26/77049932/p1/article.jhtml?term=%2BKitchen+%2BWife+%2BTan](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m2278/1_26/77049932/p1/article.jhtml?term=%2BKitchen+%2BWife+%2BTan). Spring, 2001.

Tan “celebrates the exotic Chinese other in the image of animals with supernatural instincts”(Ma 5) by following the modernist primitivism in the West. The hundred secret senses of Kwan are equated with the “animal instinct” like “ant feet, elephant trunk, dog nose, cat whisker, whale ear [...]”<sup>5</sup> In short, Ma thinks that Tan’s motive behind this novel is to construct the American self which arranges and manipulates New Age ethnicity and primitivism, and to reenact the Orientalist fantasies of her mainstream readers.

E.D. Huntley approaches the novel from the perspective of the New Criticism. Although much of her essay is devoted to the formal design of the novel, some interesting insights are still available. Huntley points out that Kwan is a remarkable “other” in U.S. society. Although Kwan has lived in San Francisco for over thirty years, “the city has never become her natural landscape;” instead, “China remains her constant point of reference.”<sup>6</sup> Similar to Kwan, Nunumu (the nineteenth-century Kwan in Changmian) is triply marginalized. She is a Chinese servant in a household of Westerners, a “Hakka,” which means guest people “not invited to stay in any good place too long”(33), and a one-eyed girl who is considered physically deformed in the population at large. Comparing the two sisters, Huntley claims that, for Olivia, Kwan represents “ethnicity, a diaspora culture, and racial origin”(140) that comprise the visible half of her genetic inheritance. And by contrast, Olivia is “all-American except for her Asian features”(Huntley 140). The food, according to Huntley, symbolizes profound cultural dislocation for Olivia and Simon. For example, when Simon knows that the bird peddler is selling the white-owl for food, instantly he exclaims: “That’s disgusting. Tell him he’s a fucking goon”(215). When Kwan buys the owl, both

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<sup>5</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ivy, 1995. P.113. Unless otherwise noted, the following quotations are from this book; subsequent passages will be indicated in parenthesis after the quotation.

<sup>6</sup> Huntley, E.D. ed. “The Hundred Secret Senses.” *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood, 1998. p.128.

Simon and Olivia are worried that she is going to eat it; not until Kwan sets the bird free do they realize Kwan merely uses it to make a wish.

Wei-chung Chang investigates the discourse of narration in *The Hundred Secret Senses* and Tan's former two novels, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Tracing the style of Chinese-American literary works, Chang claims that Tan and many Chinese-American writers tend to utilize the skill of storytelling to construct the form and plots of their novels. Amy Tan's employment of the act of multiple storytelling and monologue toward readers is the main feature of the narrative style in her novels. Focusing on the discourse of narration, Chang explores how narration works in Tan's three novels with feminist approaches, and mainly reexamines the connections between Amy Tan's narration and her female characters. He analyzes the storytelling, monologue, and private talk among heroines in Amy Tan's three novels in order to demonstrate the correlated relations between the texts. Chang concludes that with the act of monologues and storytelling the heroines in three novels create the "community of memory" and "redefine the value of the selfhood."<sup>7</sup> Also sharing individual stories and personal secrets in the private talks helps these female characters reduce the confrontations inflicted by "psychological anger and cultural/ethnic confusion"(Chang 84), and guides them to reach reconciliation in the end.

Magdalena Delicka accesses *The Hundred Secret Senses* from the perspective of the "magic realism." Originally used to analyze Post-Expressionist paintings of the 20s, Kafka's works, and the literature of South America, the concept of magic realism has been gaining popularity as "a means of literary expression for the majority of

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<sup>7</sup> Chang, Wei-chung. *Storytelling and Private Talk in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God's Wife, and The Hundred Secret Senses*. M.A. Thesis. Taipei: Chinese Culture University, 2000. p.84.

ethnic literatures in the U.S. since the late 1960s.”<sup>8</sup> Delicka views magic realism as a mode which crosses the borders between two different forms of reasoning/epistemological system. This feature can be seen by Tan’s distinguishing Olivia’s narrative, which is rational and discursive, from Kwan’s, which is irrational and intuitive. Olivia only accepts empirical things and reasonable explanations. As she says, “to me, yin isn’t yang, yang, isn’t yin, I can’t accept two contradictory stories as the whole truth” (277). By contrast, Kwan takes the world of yin and her yin eyes for granted as part of her daily life. By juxtaposing two epistemological systems in the magic realism, Delicka argues that Tan projects her “ideological concerns with the socio-cultural and political borders of ethnic communities in the U.S., such as English/Non-English, white/colored, Christian/Non-Christian”(Delicka 2). This can be illustrated, for example, by comparing Olivia’s Christian faith in heaven and hell with Kwan’s Buddhist notion of reincarnation. Relevant to the distinction of these two notions are the different “chronotopes” imbedded in their narratives. According to Delicka, Kwan’s narrative is “cyclical and multidimensional,” while Olivia’s follows a “linear” pattern (Delicka 5). Kwan’s narrative jumps freely from America to China, and from the 1990s to her childhood and to the nineteenth century; by contrast, Olivia follows the rigid tenets of traditional Western fiction—the unity of time, place and action.

In addition to the formal designs, Delicka also deals with the issue of ethnic identity in the novel. She claims that Kwan’s narrative has the function of resembling that of the myth, which is to “make Olivia aware of her Chinese identity” through Kwan’s “bedtimes stories”(Delicka 5) in Chinese. Despite her childhood resentment to Kwan’s stories and strange ideas, in time Olivia has unconsciously absorbed those

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<sup>8</sup> Delicka, Magdalena. “American Magic Realism: Crossing the Borders in literatures of the Margins.” *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*. 6:25-33. 1997 Fall. Ankara, Turkey. Reprinted in <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~jast/Number6/Delicka.html> (pp.1-8) p.1.

ethnic notions and the Chinese language in which they are conveyed to the extent that she cannot distinguish “which part was her [Kwan’s] dream, which part was mine? Where did they intersect?”(32). In other words, those bedtime stories have unconsciously become the “collective memories” of both sisters, who share the same ethnical root. In short, Delicka argues that by structuring her novel on the formal duality of magic realism, Tan places her work in the realistic tradition of western writing, and at the same time popularizes and tries to preserve her ethnic culture embedded in the magic. The aim of Tan’s design is “questioning the western literary unities of time, place, and action, and implicitly challeng[ing] the hierarchal social order established by the dominant white society”(Delicka 7).

In a different context Sheng-mei Ma asserts, “The celebration of Chinese-ness in Tan must be traced back to the American-ness of the author [...]. The embrace of ethnic presupposes a source culture eager to be embraced”(4). It is this supposition, she argues, that leads Tan to conclude her first three novels in “the rediscovery of Chinese-ness beneath the protagonist’s American veneer”(Ma 4). As Olivia’s exclaims, “The world’s changed. It is hip to be *ethnic*”(emphasis mine 174). Indeed, the history of the ethnic Americans has long been suppressed by the white majority. For a long time, the U.S. had been proud of itself for being the racial “melting pot,” with the emphasis on “assimilation.” Not until the 1960s did the multicultural discourse substitute the concept of the “salad bowl” that stresses “integration” for the “melting pot.”<sup>9</sup> The notion of the “melting pot” aims to erase all peculiarities of ethnic groups that are different from the dominant norm that is white, male, middle-class, and Eurocentric, and to assimilate every unfamiliar thing into something that is comprehensible by this homogenizing norm. By contrast, the “salad bowl” stresses

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<sup>9</sup> Watson, C. W. *Multiculturalism: Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Buckingham: Open University, 2000. pp.2-5.

respect for all kinds of ethnic differences while all ethnic groups live harmoniously with each other. The notion of the “integration” emphasizes cultural diversity and hybridity, enabling the marginal or the non-white—the Other—not only to break away from the domination of the mainstream culture or the monocultural society but also to reclaim their rights to *enunciate*. In short, the issue of *the Other* is essential in multicultural politics. In *The Hundred Secret Senses* Tan presents both the violence of assimilation resulting from the oppression of the Other’s difference (or *otherness* or *alterity*) and harmonious coexistence of the Self and the Other based on respect for differences on various scales, from interpersonal relationships to intercultural encounters. It is in line with this openness to difference/alterity in multiculturalism that I propose to access *The Hundred Secret Senses* with Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics in this thesis. In the following passages I will give a brief introduction to Levinas’s ethical philosophy.

Basically Levinas’s ethics is a reaction against the onto-theological tradition of western metaphysics. Ontology cares only about the question of *essence*, that is, the “What is [...]?” question. The defect of this philosophy is that to seek the answer to this kind of question, one would only raise endless essential questions: to ask *what is* “what is [...]?” infinitely. Hence Levinas decides to find the other alternative to this thought, the tendency of which can be seen from the title of his *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Briefly speaking, he substitutes the “How is [...]?” question for the “what is [...]?” By so doing, he avoids the vicious circularity of ontology, whose ethics is the “ethics of transcendental sanction, of other worldly principles and rules.”<sup>10</sup> Against this transcendental and other worldly tendency in western ontology, Levinas takes up a more secular, “this worldly” attitude. He criticizes that to ask the

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<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Cohen in “Translator’s Introduction” to Levinas’s *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985. P.4.

“what is” of the already existent is meaningless because we already *are*. To be or not to be is not the question; what is more urgent is to think *how to* make this world of beings *better*. It is in this direction that Levinas sees the importance of ethics. Because of his personal experience of the genocide of his people by the German Nazis in World War Two, he thinks this ethical question is the most important concern of all humanity.

Born as a Lithuanian Jew, Emmanuel Levinas grew up in a background full of foreign cultures. His family were devoted to orthodox Judaism, but they were confronted by the surrounding Christianity, which was not freed from its anti-Semitic tendency. Levinas received his earlier education in Russia and later studied philosophy in France. He knew too well how it felt like being a marginalized outsider in a society that was different from his family background in language, religion, and ethnicity. The influence of his diasporic experiences is manifest in his philosophical concern for “the Other.” Before going into the discussion of Levinasian ethics, I need to clarify the distinction between the *other* and the *Other* in Levinas’s usage.

According to Colin Davis,

The former [the other] may be incorporated into the Same whereas the latter [the Other] never can be; the former confirms totality, the latter reveals infinity. The other may initially appear alien to the empirical self, but it does not fundamentally challenge its supremacy; the Other is utterly resistant to the transcendental Ego and cannot be assimilated to the world the Ego creates for itself. (*Levinas* 43)<sup>11</sup>

This concept of the Other is so significant that it can be seen as the central idea of Levinas’s ethics. In fact, as Levinas puts it, the “calling into question of my

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<sup>11</sup> In the parenthetical documentation hereafter, *Levinas* stands for Colin Davis’s *Levinas: An Introduction*. Cambridge: 1996, Polity Press.



spontaneity by the presence of the *Other*” is *ethics* (*TI* 43).<sup>12</sup> The ethics we discuss here is different from what we traditionally call “moral.” As Davis explains, “Moral choices are made by conscious subject, whereas ethical responsibility at the core of the relationship with the Other cannot be accepted or rejected in an act of conscious volition (*Levinas* 80). In other words, *moral* involves consciousness, while *ethics* is “pre-conscious.” The aim of Levinas’s ethics is not to establish the standard of moral behavior, as it might be wrongfully grasped; instead, the terms “ethics” and “ethical” refer to “a domain from which nothing human may be excluded” (*Levinas* 3). In other words, the human condition is fundamentally ethical.

Levinas’s ethics is chiefly about the relationship between the *Same*(totality) and the *Other*(infinity), the terms of which were initially introduced by Plato. According to Adriaan Peperzak, Plato considered the “I think” thought in western philosophy as “dialogue of the soul with itself, in which it [the soul] rediscovers, by *reminiscence*, the truth that was hidden in its own depth”(emphasis mine Peperzak 94). In western philosophical tradition the Other has generally been regarded as “something provisionally separate from the Same (or the [S]elf), but ultimately reconcilable with it;” otherness or alterity appears only as “temporary interruption to be eliminated as it is incorporated or reduced to sameness” (*Levinas* 3). Basically the history of Western philosophy has been a history of objectifying, assimilating and domesticating the others into the system of “the Same”(of which the image of “melting pot” is an instance). Hence, it would be appropriate to say that western epistemology as a whole is the knowledge of the “narcissistic Same,” rather than about the genuine Other. For Levinas the Other is absolutely beyond all comprehensive effort of the Same and should be preserved in all its “irreducible strangeness.” In a sense, one may say that in

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<sup>12</sup> In the parenthetical documentation hereafter, *TI* stands for Emmanuel Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969. p.43.

his exploration about ethics Levinas endeavors to protect the Other from the aggression of the Same and to formulate the ethical relationship between the Same *and* the Other.

In this thesis I will first explore and illustrate the totalizing violence of the Same in Tan's novel in terms of Michel Foucault's theory about discourse and Edward W. Said's observations about Orientalism and the relation between western culture and its imperialism, then to use Levinas's discussion about infinity and the ethical relationship between totality and infinity. By this formal arrangement I intend to use Levinas's ethical philosophy as the theoretical framework of my discussion, while adopting Foucault's and Said's insights into some features and functioning pattern of totality system. In juxtaposing these three different critics in this thesis I am not unaware of their philosophical and methodological differences and contradictions; in fact, I think a comparison of their theories must be very inspiring and interesting. But since it is not the point of this thesis, I will only concentrate on the common ideas that Foucault and Said have in line with Levinas's concept of ethics. It is based upon these common grounds that I boldly venture to use these heterogeneous theories in this thesis.

To begin with, I do not intend to discuss Foucault's elaboration upon the concept of ethics because Foucault's definition of ethics is roughly equal to traditional morality. In those collected articles by Foucault relevant to the issue of ethics in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, we see many examples of this equation. For example, in "On the Genealogy of Ethics" Foucault says, "[T]he kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself [...] which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a *moral* subject of his own

actions”<sup>13</sup>(emphasis mine). In this statement, we can see that Foucault confuses ethics with moral codes or prescription. Besides, Foucault’s definition of ethics is one’s relation to oneself, rather than one’s relationship with the Other. Hence, I would rather seek Foucault’s ethical concern for the Other in the *attitude* that he demonstrates in his works. In fact, Foucault places a major emphasis on the importance of *attitude*:

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an *attitude*, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibilities of going beyond them.<sup>14</sup> (emphasis mine)

From this passage we know that the *attitude* Foucault refers to, which stresses the significance to shake off the imposed limit on us and to experiment with new possibilities, is somehow in line with the *emancipatory* attitude Levinas reveals in his concern of ethics. Levinas tries to lead western philosophy out of its totalizing tradition, while Foucault also endeavors to change some unjust phenomena in western society. Foucault’s research in the construction of “madness,” in the relationship between disciplinary system and the formation of modern subjectivity, and in the relationship between power, knowledge and truth—all these indicate his ethical concern to liberate humanity from the cage and violences that we impose on ourselves and on the others. Through Foucault’s arguments over those aforementioned issues, people gradually pay attention to and request reformations of the treatments of the

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault, Michel. “On the Genealogy of Ethics.” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Trans. Robert Hurley and Others. New York: The New Press, 1997. p. 263.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, Michel. “What is Enlightenment.” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Trans. Robert Hurley and Others. New York: The New Press, 1997. p.319.

mental patients in psychiatric institutions and that of the prisoners in penitentiaries. Also Foucault's insight into the interrelationship between knowledge and power raises people's consciousness that knowledge is not neutral and that knowledge implies a knowing subject's sovereignty over his object. It is in this emancipatory attitude against the violence of totality that Foucault can be seen as an ally of Levinas.

As a diasporic Palestinian in America, Said is very concerned with the interests of his fellow people in Palestine. Ever since the reestablishment of Israel in the Middle East after the end of World War Two, the Palestinians have been forced to fight against the Israelis for the land that was once theirs. Partly because of the sufferings of his people, Said has always been very concerned with justice. But Said cares about justice not only for his people but also for all humanity. In *Orientalism* Said points out that the separation between Westerners and Orientals, between "We" and "They," only brings hostility toward each other and "limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies"(O 46).<sup>15</sup> Said argues that in order to achieve genuine mutual understanding between people we must think for the others, not for ourselves; that is why he concludes *Culture and Imperialism* with the following statement:

It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about OTHERS than only about 'us.' But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one (or not number one, for that matter). For intellectual there is quite enough value to do without *that*. (capital mine

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<sup>15</sup> In the parenthetical documentation hereafter, *O* stands for Edward Said's *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

CI 336)<sup>16</sup>

Like Levinas, Said knows well that all the hatred and wars in human history result from selfishness in humanity. If we really want to avoid any of hostility toward each other and live harmoniously together, we have to think for the others, willing to undertake the moral responsibility for public interest. As one of the leading intellectuals in the academic circle, Said emphasizes the moral responsibility of intellectuals for society and is highly attentive to social issues himself. As he puts it, “In the configurations and by virtue of the transfigurations taking place around us, readers and writers are now in fact *secular intellectuals* with the archival, expressive, elaborative, and *moral responsibilities* of that role” (emphases mine CI 319). Like Foucault, Said is also concerned with the politics in knowledge production. For Said there is no such thing as “pure knowledge;” all knowledges are more or less political in nature. For example, as Said observes, the anthropology, history, and cultural studies in Europe and the United States tend to “treat the whole of world history as viewable by a kind of Western super-subject, whose historicizing and disciplinary rigor either takes away or, in the post-colonial period, restores history to people and cultures ‘without’ history” (CI 35). In short, Said’s advocacy of the concern for the others and of moral responsibility of secular intellectuals precisely embodies the essence of justice in Levinasian ethics.

The main body of this thesis will be divided into three chapters. In Chapter Two and Three, I will depict the totalizing/assimilating violence of the Same. Chapter Two is divided into two sections, and it accesses the novel by drawing upon Michel Foucault’s theory about discourse. In Section One “Madness and Medical Discourse” I will analyze how modern western psychology/psychiatry constructs “madness” and

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<sup>16</sup> In the parenthetical documentation hereafter, *CI* stands for Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

accords it a pathological status by mainly utilizing Foucault's archaeological method. The doctors' diagnosis of Kwan as mentally ill and Kwan's receiving electroshock treatment demonstrates the imposed violence of western psychological discourse. Different from her condition in American society, Kwan's phenomenal ability of yin eyes and Du Yun's imagining herself as her late daughter are taken for granted in China. By comparison, we see western psychology is arbitrary and not universally valid. In Section Two "Counter-memory" I will investigate the discursive violence in the historical field. Contrary to traditional historiography, which views history as a seamless continuum with logical causality, Foucault argues that history is discontinuous and that it is an endless process of power struggles, with no specific beginning or origin and no end. Historical continuity is an illusion created by historiographers to justify the legitimacy of the existent regimes in official historical records. Contrary to the grand history in official historiography, personal memories and accounts offer dissenting versions of historical events. By drawing on Levinas's concept of "interiority," I will portray how Nunumu's narrative about her life provides a "counter-history" to official records about the Taiping Events. Also we will see the dispute over the truth between Olivia and Kwan regarding their father's identity as well.

Also consisting of two parts, Chapter Three utilizes Edward Said's observations about Orientalism and the connection between western culture and its imperialism. In Section One "Orientalism," Said shows how, as a mode of discourse, Orientalism constructs westerners' idea about the Orient and the Orientals by following the Manichean binary opposition. By viewing themselves as the "civilized" race, classical Greeks distinguished themselves from the "barbarians." Deep within the complex structure of Orientalism we can see a firm concept of "Europocentrism," in which everything in the world has to be measured against the norm of European values and

the Europeans are seen as the only human beings. From Said's perspective, we see how Orientalism affects the way Olivia views her sister, Kwan, who is so different from Olivia in cultural background. Also we will see that as a mode of discourse Orientalism permeates into seemingly harmless activities such as photography and influences Olivia's idea about aesthetics. Orientalism not only constructs the distinction between the West and the Orient but also provides theoretical foundation for western imperialism. In Section Two "Culture and Imperialism," by adopting Said's analysis of the relationship between cultural activities and western imperial enterprises, we understand that even in the cultural domain traces of the empires and imperialism can still be seen. By applying Said's discussion about western imperialism to Kwan's narrative about the nineteenth-century China, we see that the latent existence of the British Empire is the reason why foreign missionaries could appear in Changmian, that the enterprises and activities foreigners conducted in China were all for the interest of the empire, and how imperialism deeply affects the interpersonal relationships among the characters.

In Chapter Four, which is presented in two sections, I will shift the focus from investigating the totalizing violence of the Same back to the Other and the ethical relationship between totality *and* infinity. Section One explores further Levinas's theory about ethical relationship and the concept of justice based upon that relationship, while Section Two accesses the interpersonal and intercultural relations from Levinas's ethical perspective. I emphasize the conjunction "and" in ethical relationship because in it the Self and the Other can live together peacefully. Rather than basing the foundation of this ethical relationship on the idea of equality, Levinas proposes that in ethical relationship the Self and the Other are on unequal statuses—the Other is in an infinitely higher position than the Self—and that face of the Other not only resists the totalizing violence of the Self but also commands the

Self to respond to and be responsible for the Other. Ethical relationship is best realized in the face to face of discourse or conversation, in which there are always a *Saying* and a *Said*. Any utterance from either party in conversation is always *already* a *response* to the Other, which testifies to the priority of the *Saying* over the *Said*. In discourse the Other's addressing to the Self *invokes* the latter's (ethical) subjectivity; hence subjectivity is initially "for the Other." In the face to face with the Other the Self realizes that he is not alone in the world and that in response to the Other he is responsible for the Other. The Self's responsibility for the Other is infinite to the extent that the Self is also responsible for the Other's Other. At this point the "third person" is introduced into the ethical relationship, which consequently becomes a social one. In reality because there are so many others to consider, to divide Self's responsibility *equally* for all of them is necessary. It is this combination of the responsibility for the Other with the idea of equality that produces "justice."

Section Two provides abundant examples to illustrate the failure of totalizing violence to assimilate the Other's alterity and realization of ethical relationship in interpersonal interactions—from seemingly trivial argument between Olivia and Simon, through Kwan's selfless generosity to Olivia, to the willing sacrifice of various characters for the others in Kwan's narrative about the nineteenth-century China. Tan's formal design of juxtaposition of two narratives also reflects the ethical relationship. From these instances we witness that Levinasian ethics is not just an abstract theory that pretends to be universally valid and that cannot be realized in the actual world. Ethics proceeds from the Self (I) to the Other; it does not prescribe any laws from an objective position to demand others to follow them. And Ethics practically involves every human affair; it is deeply rooted in real experiences. Now without further ado I will immediately begin my main thesis discussion.