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***Embracing Hybrid Identity and Celebrating  
Cultural Differences: Love and Hope across  
Time and Space in The Hundred Secret Senses***

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# Embracing Hybrid Identity and Celebrating Cultural Differences: Love and Hope across Time and Space in *The Hundred Secret Senses*

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Following Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses* is her third novel published in 1995. While it remains popular among readers, critics from home and abroad hold divergent opinions towards it; it has been frequently discussed whether Tan is catering to the American mainstream ideology or challenging it in a strategic way. Besides, quite a few critics analyze the novel by focusing on the Chinese character Kwan. For instance, Yan Jianhua holds that Tan portrays a life and death relationship between Chinese and western culture by animalizing Kwan in multiple aspects and making her willingly perform animal sacrifice for the salvation and self-realization of the American protagonists, and Rima Bhattacharya insists that the writer 'astutely perpetuates occidental and oriental stereotyping' in her works and practices neo-Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> However, upon whether Tan is associated with Orientalism, Rui Kong stands by Tan by saying that while she does inevitably cover her work with 'veils of Orientalism' due to the limitation of her double identities, she also made efforts to subvert and transcend Orientalism by employing artistic techniques, hoping for 'the co-existence and co-beliefs of different cultures and beliefs'.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Zhang Qiong analyzes the novel from the perspective of neo-primitivism, holding that Tan's work switches between dual cultural identities, 'the primitive oriental and the modern occidental', and uses storytelling as the form of narrative, which integrates the Chinese tradition of oral literature with modern literary technique and allows the pristine to connect different cultures and separated spaces.<sup>3</sup> It is also pointed out that Tan's description of a 'seemingly unreasonable Yin world' deconstructs the 'so-called reasonable American social reality' and her emphasis on reclaiming ethnic identity is in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jianhua Yan, 'The Hundred Secret Senses: A Modern Myth of Sacrificing and Salvation', *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 6 (2005), p. 92. Rima Bhattacharya, 'Neo-Orientalist Stereotyping in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*', *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* (2019), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rui Kong, 'On the Representations and Subversions of Orientalism in *The Hundred Secret Senses*', *English Language and Literature Studies* 4 (2014), p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Qiong Zhang, 'Tints of Neo-primitivism and Amy Tan's Works', *Foreign Languages and Literature*, 1 (2005), p. 33.

hope of a harmonious co-existence of different races and cultures.<sup>4</sup> If the novel is seen through the view of archetypal criticism, then the ultimate theme of it can be concluded as love, which belongs to the collective unconsciousness possessed by the characters with double or multiple cultural identities both in the world of Yin and Yang, transcends different races and cultures, and provides a way out for those who feel confused in face of hybrid identity and multiple cultures.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is also a study which discusses the novel in light of Victor Turner's theory of liminality, holding that the possibility inherent in the liminal space enables Kwan to transcend the gaps between life and death as well as the present and the past through storytelling, by which Tan constructs an alternative way of seeing the world where liminal spaces are involved.<sup>6</sup>

So far, it is not hard to notice that these studies tacitly find it crucial to deal with the problem of multiple cultural identities and that of whether Amy Tan is reinforcing or deconstructing the antagonistic relationship between Chinese culture and American culture. In fact, the author of this paper holds that these problems can be summarised and discussed under the framework of the third space theory, which deconstructs the conventional dualistic view of space and emphasizes cultural hybridity, cultural difference, and shifting identity. Hence, considering the third space theory, this paper tries to explore how the protagonists in the novel deal with their identity problem, how storytelling as a narrative form serves well as a non-confrontational resistance strategy which actually challenges the western discursive hegemony, and how the novel deconstructs dualisms in multiple perspectives and reveals Tan's wish for the coexistence of different races and cultures.

## **I. The Third Space and the Philosophy of the Mind**

The third space is a concept put forward by Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha. It would be better explained by reference to a basic understanding of two-dimensional space. A dualistic view of space indicates an unequal relationship of the two sides involved, which constitutes a relationship of center and margin or the dominator and the dominated.<sup>7</sup> According to Bhabha, a two-dimensional space involves a 'space of the other', which is

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<sup>4</sup> Qiao Zhan, 'The Feast of Ghosts and Men: The Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*', *Comparative Literature in China* 1(2006), p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Leilei Chen, 'Analysis of the Phenomenon of Superstition in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*', *Foreign Literatures*, 4 (2002), p.121.

<sup>6</sup> Jienna Sun, 'Telling and Enacting Ghost Stories: Narrative and Agency in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 19 (2017), p. 261.

<sup>7</sup> Rixin Cha, 'Spacial Turn, Cultural Negotiation, and Identity Reconstruction: Commentary on Homi Bhabha's Criticism on Postcolonial Culture', *Foreign Theoretical Trends*, 3 (2011), p. 75.

always described as occupied by ‘despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, (and) violence’ in colonial discourse.<sup>8</sup> It includes the first space and the second space, which are also expressed as the ‘perceived space’ and the ‘conceived space’.<sup>9</sup>

The third space actually transcends the division between opposites and challenges the concept of the identity of culture as a homogenizing and unifying existence.<sup>10</sup> Bhabha holds that the third space helps ‘elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves’.<sup>11</sup> It is a cultural space ‘where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences’, and it is a liminal space which tolerates contradiction and provides new thinking patterns.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Wang Wei insists that the ultimate aim of such a liminal space is to realize new discursive power and identity construction for the liminal entities.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, it indicates a writing strategy of ‘the other’ which defines the cultural identity of the oppressed and results in the destruction of the western hegemonic discourse in terms of its one-sided definition of ‘the other’ and its domination of the space order.<sup>14</sup>

Cultural difference is emphasized and clarified by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Different from multiculturalism or cultural diversity, which indicates exoticism and forms another discursive space based on ‘Western connoisseurship’, cultural difference is constructed in the productive third space.<sup>15</sup> According to Bhabha, it should be remembered that it is the in-between that carries the meaning of culture.<sup>16</sup> It should be noticed that though different cultures, races, or beliefs can negotiate in the interstitial space, they may be ‘profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, or even incommensurable’ rather than ‘collaborative and dialectical’.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, openness and negotiation between cultures are the nature of culture.<sup>18</sup> Negation or neglect of that nature of culture would lead to hegemony, violence, and injustice.

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<sup>8</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Soja, ‘Third Space: Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality’, in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. by Karin Ika and Gerhard Wagner (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Bhabha, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Bhabha, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, p. 312. Wei Wang, ‘Understanding Homi K. Bhabha's Idea of Liminal Space’, *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, 2. (2016), p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Wang, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Cha, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Soja, p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> Bhabha, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabha, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Cha, p. 78.

Liminal entities refer to those who are resisted by both sides of culture and are ‘the other’ in both their own nation and the other nation. They exist in between and do not have a fixed or definite identity. Different from the entities in a stable social structure, liminal entities distinctively possess a bidirectional perspective of the other and mental sensibility.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Bhabha maintains that ‘the liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves’, which well explains some behaviors of Kwan in the novel.<sup>20</sup> Rather than assimilating herself into the dominant ideology, Kwan believes in and lives by her own senses, corresponding to Many Yanmin’s Philosophy of the Mind in traditional Chinese philosophy. According to Many Yanmin, there is no reason outside the Mind which is the ontology of the universe. One’s knowledge about the universe, the cultivation of one’s virtues, and the improvement of one’s ability to distinguish right from wrong all exists within his or her own mind. In this sense, one can completely rely on themselves to make judgments and decisions instead of depending on the reason from outside, which ‘fully confirms and emphasizes man’s subjectivity and initiative while negates the absolute authority of the saints’.<sup>21</sup> As Kwan tells Olivia in chapter 15, Yin people communicated through ‘heart-talk’ using hundred secret senses, a ‘language of love’ which could avoid confusion and involved all kinds of love.<sup>22</sup> Besides, Kwan’s mind served as her own authority, as can be seen from her firm belief in the World of Yin and the secret senses, which gradually influenced Olivia. In the last chapter, while the fertility specialist failed to give her pregnancy a convincing explanation, Olivia took the baby as ‘a gift from Kwan’, believing what she wanted to believe.<sup>23</sup> As she continues, ‘I now believe truth lies not in logic but in hope [...] I believe hope can surprise you. It can survive [...] all sorts of contradictions, and certainly any sceptic’s rationale of relying on proof through fact’.

## II. Embracing Hybrid Identity and Deconstructing Western Discursive Hegemony

In fact, lots of characters in *The Hundred Secret Senses* have more than one ethnical or cultural background. Some of them are hybrid, such as Olivia, a Chinese American, Simon, having western, Hawaiian, and Chinese origins at the same time, and Yiban Johnson,

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<sup>19</sup> Wang, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> Bhabha, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> Xinhua Deng, ‘The Anti-Neo-Confucianism of Many Yanmin’s Philosophy of the Mind and its Positive influence on the Literary Theories of Ming and Qing Dynasties’, *Jiangnan Tribune*, 12 (2004), p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, (New York: The G.P. Putnam’s Sons Book, 1995), pp. 211-212.

<sup>23</sup> Tan, p. 357.

half Chinese and half American. Miss Banner was an American woman travelling around China with foreign missionaries and died in China at last. Both Yiban and Miss Banner travelled a lot and therefore had complex cultural backgrounds. Moreover, some characters, such as Kwan and her father Jack Yee, even had borrowed or somehow stolen identity. Kwan revived in another drowned girl's body when she was five, while Jake Yee was a name shown on a stack of official documents for immigration got from a drunkard met by the father on his way home. That they could live a life in the body or the identity of another person's proves that identity is actually changeable and shifting. In fact, in this novel, whether in the present world or the past one, it is how the characters communicate and interact with each other rather than their origins or identities that has drawn much attention from the readers. By making such an arrangement, Tan seems to deliberately move readers' attention from the problem of origin or ethnic identity to the actual interactions between people as individuals. Hence, the more important thing becomes how those characters deal with their hybrid identity and get along with each other.

The protagonists in the novel, Olivia and Kwan, both belong to the minority in America. If Olivia felt alienated ethnically, then Kwan is discriminated and oppressed both ethnically and culturally. Living in a country where racism prevails, they cannot accept or go back to China and cannot totally integrate into America either. In this sense, they are both liminal entities, who do not have clear-cut identity and are 'the others' in western hegemonic discourse. Hence, how they deal with their hybrid identity is crucial for them to construct complete selfhood and gain true happiness.

Though Olivia was born and raised in America, she was a lonely child with an unreliable mother, who raised Olivia with divided attention and easily erased her promises to her daughter. When she was a child, she was often laughed at and bullied by others. After Kwan arrived, her company and ignorance of America made Olivia become 'an expert on public humiliation and shame', which also explains her unkind attitude or even hatred towards Kwan.<sup>24</sup> The prevailing racism and the Western-centric ideology, which consider the white as superior and the non-white as inferior, forced her to negate part of her identity as a Chinese. The internalization of the view of two-dimensional space made it impossible for Olivia to accept her two seemingly contradictory identities. By the same logic, she could not accept the world of Yin and the world of Yang at the same time. 'Why question the world,

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<sup>24</sup> Tan, p. 11.

indeed? Because I'm not Chinese like Kwan. To me, yin isn't yang, and yang isn't yin. I can't accept two contradictory stories as the whole truth'.<sup>25</sup> Under the effect of the doubt about identity and sense of insecurity and alienation, Olivia developed into a suspicious person and felt disappointed with her marriage with Simon, almost stuck in a state of unhappiness.

Different from Olivia, Kwan immigrated into America when she was almost an adult. Though she was often laughed at or even insulted in America, she maintained optimistic, making new acquaintances, and having a happy family life. Most importantly, she never doubted her identity, felt confident about her ethnic identity as a Chinese, and preserved Chinese culture in America. Though she was willing to learn some English, she always chatted with Olivia and told stories in Chinese. She told Olivia that many yin people wanted to be Chinese in the next life. Besides, Kwan's firm belief in the world of Yin, which is part of Chinese culture, was not wiped off or silenced in America. When she was put into the psychiatric ward due to her talking about ghosts, she remained silent and refused to answer questions, treating them like 'American ghosts'.<sup>26</sup> Even tortured by shock treatments over and over, she refused to stop the 'yin-talking' as the American doctors urged her to do.<sup>27</sup> Violence could not change her, neither did time; as Olivia says, time does nothing to Americanize her.<sup>28</sup> In this way, her rebellious acts effectively challenged the western discursive hegemony and demonstrated the right to be culturally different. Furthermore, behind the surface of insisting on Chinese culture, Kwan was sticking to her own senses about people's relationship since believing in ghosts means believing in the perpetual love between people. The firm belief in her own mind was no doubt what Kwan always lived by. As Bhabha says, 'the liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves'.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, despite Kwan's rebellious acts, she also told Olivia bedtime stories about yin people every night after she came back from the psychiatric ward. Since the stories were told to Olivia when she was about to fall asleep, she could not remember from which point her dream began and could not distinguish her dream from Kwan's either. Hence, the line between reality and imagination was blurred and the yin-telling became less ridicule and

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<sup>25</sup> Tan, p. 247.

<sup>26</sup> Tan, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Tan, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Tan, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, p. 212.

more credible. The act of storytelling proved to be effective in reviving the part of Olivia's identity as a Chinese. On the one hand, Olivia became the only one who learned Chinese besides Kwan. On the other hand, she gradually accepted the existence of ghosts and finally understood that believing in ghosts was believing that love never dies. Above all, it changed the way she thought about the world and helped her construct an integrated and happy selfhood. At first, she could not accept the coexistence of the two 'contradictory' worlds of Yin and Yang. After she arrived in the village Changmian and found it familiar to her owing to Kwan's stories, she felt 'as if the membrane separating the two halves of my life has finally been shed'.<sup>30</sup> The change of her world view also means the change of her spatial view, which changed from a two-dimensional one to an acceptance of the third space, a liminal space filled with differences and possibilities. A liminal entity with hybrid identity should never feel ashamed or unconfident, but should firmly claim the right to be different, readily embrace their hybrid identity, and actively explore the possibilities involved in different cultural backgrounds. Hence, that Olivia gained true happiness in the end derived from her acceptance of her hybrid identity and her understanding of the coexistence of differences including the seemingly contradictory things, which explains why she felt 'joy spilling from sorrow'.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the image of Kwan challenges and deconstructs the Western discursive hegemony in a strategic way. While she appeared to be submissive, docile, and ignorant on the surface, which satisfies the imagination of the westerners and corresponds with their arbitrary definition of the oriental, Kwan was also a rebellious, straightforward, and wise person with self-esteem. For instance, when Kwan knew that some kids called her a 'retard', she asked Olivia for explanation and directly asked her whether she thought in the same way.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, in face of the cruel and violent American discursive power, Kwan wisely changed her way of preserving the Chinese way of thinking and successfully established a new discursive power of her own through storytelling. When she first talked about her yin eyes and yin people, she scared Olivia, who exposed the 'secret' to Mom and Bob.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Kwan probably had adopted a radical and confrontational attitude when she exposed the world of Yin to them, which brought her to the psychiatric ward and caused her sufferings. As Olivia said when she grew up, 'In a way, she brought it on herself. After

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<sup>30</sup> Tan, p. 205.

<sup>31</sup> Tan, p. 358.

<sup>32</sup> Tan, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Tan, p. 14.



all, I was just a little kid then, seven years old'.<sup>34</sup> After she came home from the psychiatric ward, she began to tell Olivia bedtime stories about yin people and only talked about them in front of Olivia in America, in whom she truly trusted. This time she succeeded in transforming Olivia's view of the world and helping Olivia accept her hybrid identity. In fact, this non-confrontational resistance strategy in the form of storytelling can be understood as a strategy of 'the other', which is effective in defining the cultural identities of the oppressed, establishing new discursive power and space for liminal entities, and deconstructing the space order dominated by the western discursive hegemony.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Transcending Dualisms and Calling for the Coexistence of Differences

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Amy Tan seems to emphasize sharp contradictions, such as the conflicts between Olivia and Kwan as well as the differences between Chinese and American culture. However, this paper holds that the sharp contradictions described in the novel only exist on a superficial level, while the possibility of the coexistence of different races and cultures is what Tan truly wants to show her readers. Therefore, though facing discursive hegemony in America which brought ethnic minorities a difficult writing situation, Tan dissolves binary oppositions in many aspects and challenges the conventional space order dominated by the western hegemony in a strategic way.

Theoretically, the two-dimensional space dominated by the western discursive hegemony indicates an unequal relationship of the two sides involved. By the same logic, in terms of the West and East, while the West is thought to be superior, dominant, rational, scientific, and civilized, the East is always conceived and described as inferior, submissive, irrational, mystic, and barbarian. However, in this novel, these characteristics are no longer fixed but become shifting and the imagined clear distinctions are frequently dissolved. For instance, while Kwan was thought to be ignorant of right and wrong or left and right in America, she was actually the one who taught Miss Banner the knowledge of the world and life. 'I taught her what makes the world a living place: sunrise and sunset, heat and cold, dust and wind, dust and rain...I taught her the five tastes that gives us the memories of life: sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, and salty'.<sup>36</sup> After Olivia arrived in China, she also had to admit that her life was controlled by Kwan since she was 'on her terrain' and had to 'go by her rules'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tan, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Cha, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Tan, p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Tan, p. 186.

Hence, it can be seen that the so-called ‘reason’ or ‘truth’ are only constructed and formulated by the authority who owns the discursive power, which deconstructs the opposition between the ‘rational’ and the ‘irrational’. That the fertility specialist who had diagnoses Olivia with sterility failed to give a reasonable answer to her pregnancy also challenges the dominant position of reason and science. The ‘unreasonable’ explanation which held that the baby was a gift from Kwan seemed more ‘reasonable’ in this case.

Moreover, by treating both American culture and Chinese culture critically, Tan challenges the view that the former culture is superior while the latter culture is inferior. For instance, though the Chinese pickle-mouse wine and the way of cooking frogs seemed barbarian and cruel, the shock treatments given to Kwan by American doctors were no less violent. In terms of Chinese family, Olivia thought there were too many ‘subterranean intricacies’ and worries about ‘losing face’, while American family was less complicated.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Tan says through Kwan that people in a Chinese family maintain a close relationship, while Olivia’s American mother was unreliable and did not leave enough time and love for her daughter. Therefore, it is unreasonable to arbitrarily conclude that one culture is superior to another.

Furthermore, Tan employs Kwan as her agency to blur the line between the present and the past as well as that between the world of Yin and Yang. Living in the present life, Kwan has the memory of the previous life. Having a pair of yin eyes, Kwan could not only see the world of Yin but act as the spokeswoman for yin people, telling their existence and concerns. The way she reached Yin people was to use the ‘hundred secret sense’ with ‘mind and heart together’, through which message could travel fast between the living and the dead.<sup>39</sup> The total dependence on spiritual communication instead of language, physical instruments or institutions dissolves the boundaries between different cultures and classes and enables smooth communications between people of all times and spaces. More importantly, the boundless communication based on feelings deconstructs the hegemony of the dominant culture in the living world while gaining equal positions for different races and cultures. Meanwhile, she gradually made Olivia accept the existence of the previous life and the world of Yin, changed her worldview, and enabled her to accept the coexistence of differences and even contradictions. The change of world view was crucial for Olivia to accept her hybrid

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<sup>38</sup> Tan, p. 134.

<sup>39</sup> Tan, p. 102.

identity and gain a happy and hopeful life at the end of the novel. As Olivia said, she no longer believed in heaven and hell by the time she went to college and did not accept that 'Jesus was the only way', refusing to privilege Christianity over other religious beliefs.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the world of Yin can be seen as Tan's Utopia, where people of different origins or having different beliefs live together without racial segregation or discrimination. In this sense, the world of Yin is simultaneously a third space, which deconstructs the border between past and present while serving as an ideal locale willing to accommodate marginalized subjects. When Soja explains the third space as a new dimension introduced by Henri Lefebvre, he understands it as the Other which always 'disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute the conventional binary opposition into an-Other' and as 'a meeting place for all marginalized subjects wherever they may be located'.<sup>41</sup> Hence, believing in the world of Yin means accepting possibilities and differences. Moreover, in the World of Yin, the only standard to classify the people there was nice or bad, indicating that Tan emphasizes human interactions and connections centering on love. As Tan writes at the end of the novel, '...the world is not a place but the vastness of the soul. And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless, endless, all that moves us toward knowing what is true'.<sup>42</sup> For Tan, the truth may be the tolerance of differences, especially that of different races and cultures, and the mutual understanding between people reached through negotiation and based on love.

In face of cultural conflicts and identity hybridity, Kwan sets a good example for liminal entities. As a liminal entity, she not only managed to preserve the cultural difference and a complete selfhood, but successfully help Olivia, another liminal entity, accept her hybrid identity as a whole and realize the value of the culture of the so-called 'the other'. Like Yiban says in the novel, 'between life and death, there is a place where one can balance the impossible'.<sup>43</sup> Kwan was exactly the one who could balance the living world and the dead world, making it possible for the dead to communicate with the living people. In the same way, she made the coexistence of different cultures and races possible and acceptable. In short, Kwan can be conceived as a kind of hybrid which functions as a lubricant in the clashes of culture and a negotiator 'who would secure a future free of xenophobia'.<sup>44</sup> In fact,

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<sup>40</sup> Tan, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Soja, p. 51-52.

<sup>42</sup> Tan, p. 358.

<sup>43</sup> Tan, p. 341.

<sup>44</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. By Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 261.

Tan also creates other characters who function as lubricants between cultures, such as Olivia's mother. It has been mentioned that Olivia's mother preferred to date 'foreign imports', especially men from emerging nations or colonies, who were considered to know 'there's more at stake'.<sup>45</sup> Such a design may suggest the dynamic nature of space and challenge traditional space order dominated by the western hegemony. It also indicates that the difference in races or identities is not a problem in face of love and interactions between individuals.

It may be doubted whether Tan is calling for an ethnic return concerning identity through the novel. After all, the reconciliation between Simon and Olivia was achieved after they came to China, and the regeneration and self-integration of Olivia were also gained after she accepted the Chinese way of seeing the world. Besides, Olivia even decided to take a Chinese family name, Li, for both her child and herself at the end of the novel. However, Tan makes it clear that the meaning of a family name is 'a claim to being connected in the future to someone from the past', which derives from the respect and love for the person.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, that Olivia gained a happy life in the end was not simply the result of accepting Chinese culture. It was because she regained her hope for life through tolerating and understanding differences or even contradictions, including her hybrid identity as a Chinese American. As Olivia says in the last chapter, 'because I now believe truth lies not in logic but in hope, both past and future. I believe hope can surprise you. It can survive the odds against it, all sorts of contradictions, and certainly any skeptic's rationale of relying on proof through fact'.<sup>47</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Characterised by simple language and a clear narrative structure, *The Hundred Secret Senses* does possess multiple and profound meanings. As a Chinese American writer, Tan faces a difficult writing situation considering the prevailing racism and cultural hegemony in America. By displaying sharp cultural conflicts between Chinese and American culture and portraying a seemingly wacky and ignorant Chinese immigrant, Kwan, Tan may have satisfied and attracted lots of American readers. However, sensitive readers would come to realize that racial and cultural differences or conflicts are not the focus of the novel. That

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<sup>45</sup> Tan, p. 7, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Tan, p. 357.

<sup>47</sup> Tan, p. 357.

numerous characters in the novel do not have a clear-cut identity or a singular cultural background cleverly moves readers' concerns from identity problems to the connections between characters as individuals. In other words, while identity does occupy a significant position in the novel, it is not emphasized as a problem but merely functions as a background to highlight the real theme of interpersonal relationship against multicultural contexts. While the philosophy of the Mind underlines the subjectivity and initiative of individuals which liberates people's mind and individuality, Tan's emphasis on individual mind and feelings provides a way out for liminal entities who tend to struggle between conflicting ideologies of different cultures. Whether Tan has been influenced by the philosophy or not, it must be acknowledged that the way she finds out for liminal entities in countering dominant discourse through asserting mental independence shares much in common with the philosophy. At the end of the novel, it is not hard to find that love and hope are the truly meaningful things in the world and the coexistence of different races and cultures is totally possible and acceptable. In this sense, Tan has expressed her vision of the world in a strategic way and may even set an example for other Chinese American writers.

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