Stories and Dreams, 
Memories and Secrets 
Functions of Narration in Amy Tan’s 
*The Hundred Secret Senses*
Abstract
The aim of this dissertation is to explore the functions of narration in Amy Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*. The dissertation is divided into three parts: 1 ‘Introduction’, 2 ‘Analysis’ and 3 ‘Conclusion’.

After presenting the writings of Amy Tan and my chosen primary literature, I give a brief survey of terms, theories and previous research.

Part 2 ‘Analysis’ is presented in an order that corresponds approximately to the chronology of the primary literature, and will be divided into three chapters: 2.1 ‘Explain, Build a Relationship and Reflect’, 2.2 ‘Influence Thinking and Behaviour’ and 2.3 ‘Remember, Unify and Transmit’.

Chapter 2.1 has the first half of the novel as its main focus. It is organised mainly after the clarity of the narrator’s voice, i.e. if the narrator shows (e.g. ‘indirect explanation’) or tells (e.g. ‘explicit explanation’), and analyses how narration functions in order to ‘explain’, ‘build a relationship’ and ‘reflect’ on events and other things.

Chapter 2.2 elaborates on the narration that takes place before and after the trip to China, an event that divides the novel into two halves. This chapter deals with the function of ‘influence’, which can be seen as a result of the narrator’s authority and is summarised in the section called ‘Steps of Influence’.

Chapter 2.3 delves into the functions of narration most visible in the novel’s second half, which takes place in China. The functions of ‘remembrance’, ‘unification’ and ‘transmission’ have many sub-functions in common, which could perhaps be seen as a result of the blurred perspectives in the novel’s plot.

Part 3 aims to summarise the results of the analysis. A theme that recurs through the analysis of functions is the relationship and balance of authority between the two characters/narrators. Sometimes a narrator’s authority, or a shift in this balance, is a prerequisite of a function of narration.

Keywords: narration, function, narrating, narrator, story, narrative, authority, sisterhood, narratology, narrative theory, cultural studies, magical realism, post-colonialism
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Primary Literature

The Writings of Amy Tan

The themes in Amy Tan’s works are usually related to cultural clashes, language difficulties and the consequences of these for family relationships. Narration is often present in the novels, either in characters’ life stories or as tales told by characters to one another.\(^1\) This tends to result in a fragmented structure that is divided between a variety of narrators and genres within the novels.

This fragmentation is especially prominent in Tan’s first novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), in which eight women’s different life stories are told. In addition, these stories of mothers and their daughters often include shorter tales as well, which is also the case in the novel *The Kitchen God’s Wife* (1991). Similarly to Tan’s first novel, but with two narrators instead of eight, the lives of a mother and her daughter are told in their respective voices in this novel where the mother’s story is granted more textual space as she speaks of the war, her ex-husband and her past life in China. At the end of the novel, the main characters’ confessions make it possible for them to resume their broken communication.

A historical perspective is present in the works mentioned above, as well as in Tan’s third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). However, a theme developed in this novel is the blurred line between reality and dream. The main character, Olivia, tells the story of herself and her half-sister Kwan, who in turn tells of her previous life in 19th century China. As in Tan’s former novels, the narration makes it possible for the characters to reach an understanding, but a difference is that the two narrators are half-sisters rather than mother and daughter. An additional difference is that in the beginning the connection between the two stories is unclear, since Kwan’s story seems more like a dream than a memory.

The following novels in Tan’s writings focus less on narration. *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* (2001) develops familiar themes such as memory, language and a lost family name, while *Saving Fish From Drowning* (2005) introduces a number of new themes. Ghosts are present in both of them, as in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, but the division between dreams and reality is somewhat clearer, with a satirical tone present in *Saving Fish From Drowning*. In her latest

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\(^1\) The term ‘narration’ will be discussed further in chapter 1.3 below.
works *Rules of Virgins* (2011) and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), Tan returns to the theme of women’s lives in historical China.²

**Choice of Primary Literature**

I have chosen to study *The Hundred Secret Senses* because of the way in which it shares and opposes the themes of Tan’s other novels: the cultures of China and the USA are represented in the two narrators, and issues such as cultural identity, sisterhood and marriage are discussed. The theme of motherhood is reduced, which makes the narrators more equal to one another, while narration is more prominent compared to the later novels. The latter makes *The Hundred Secret Senses* particularly interesting as primary literature in a study of narration. Another interesting feature is that compared to *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, the narrators in *The Hundred Secret Senses* receive a more equal share of textual space, that may lead to a productive discussion regarding the relationship between the two narrators, as neither of them is superior nor inferior.

Since the main narrators also function as main characters in the novel, it is possible to clearly see the results, and hence the functions, of the narration. For example, the narration functions in order to influence other characters in the novel, or the voice of the narrator can have the function of raising a character’s authority.³ Functions like these would have been more difficult to explore in a novel like *The Joy Luck Club*, where the many narrators and stories contribute to form a fragmented structure and plot, and where each narrator rarely appears as a main character other than in her own short story. There is also more room for new studies of *The Hundred Secret Senses* whereas *The Joy Luck Club* has already been studied to a great extent.

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³ Susan S. Lanser makes a distinction between discursive and narrative authority: “Discursive authority – by which I mean here the intellectual credibility, ideological validity, and aesthetic value claimed by or conferred upon a work, author, narrator, character, or textual practice – is produced interactively” and “One major constituent of narrative authority [...] is the extent to which a narrator’s status conforms to this dominant social power.” Susan S. Lanser, *Fictions of Authority. Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca and London 1992), p. 6. My definition of authority lies close to that of Lanser, even though my analysis focuses more on what takes place inside the novel (e.g. narrators, characters, textual space) than on the world beyond (e.g. readers, society). To me, the authority of the narrator tends to be higher than the authority of the narratee or character, and I intend to show how this shifts in Tan’s novel.
Examples and Plot
In this section I intend to briefly sum up the plot of the novel, with reference to the examples I have chosen to study. Therefore, aspects of the novel that might seem important to the first-time reader but lack a relation to the purpose of this dissertation, will be excluded. The many examples consist of a variety of framed stories, and stories or extracts taken from dialogues or monologues. They are chosen partly because the subjects they bring up recur during the course of the novel, or because they make an important impression on the narratee, but most of all, the examples serve to illustrate the various functions of narration.

*The Hundred Secret Senses* starts out with Olivia’s description of how Kwan, her father’s daughter from an earlier marriage, came from China into her family in 1962, and what it was like to grow up with Kwan as an extra mother when Olivia’s own mother did not have time for her children, following the death of Olivia’s father. This situation evokes feelings of fear and hatred in the young Olivia, partly because Kwan comes from a very different culture, which makes it more difficult for Olivia to fit in with the group of neighbourhood children.

Olivia tells her story in the first-person singular, even though intertwined with Olivia’s childhood and youth are two short stories of how her father came to the USA, told by her Aunt Betty and by Kwan respectively. There is also an account of Olivia’s everyday life as an adult in San Francisco, her relationships with Kwan and with her soon-to-be ex-husband Simon. Juxtaposed with Olivia’s two levels of time (past and present), is Kwan’s story of Nunumu. This is a story that Kwan tells in the first-person singular about her former incarnation – a girl of the Hakka people who works in a house of missionaries in 19th century China. Kwan tends to tell Olivia this story in Chinese just before Olivia goes to sleep, and therefore it becomes difficult for Olivia to separate her own dreams from the story of Nunumu. As Olivia matures and meets Simon, she starts reflecting about her identity. She demands that Kwan stop telling her the story of Nunumu, and Kwan obeys. A passage of Olivia’s and Simon’s life together follows. However, following Olivia and Simon’s decision to get divorced, Kwan continues to tell the Nunumu story, without objection from Olivia.

Following Olivia’s reflection on family names, Kwan tells her a third and longer version of the story of their father. After this, it is decided that Olivia, Kwan and Simon will travel to China, to visit Kwan’s family village Changmian. In China, the voice of Olivia the narrator becomes more prominent as she comments on Chinese society. After buying a bird at the market, Kwan tells Olivia the story of Young girl’s wish – the name of a mountain that young girls used to climb in order to let a bird go free and have their wish fulfilled.
Following a hazardous taxi ride, the trio reaches Changmian – a place which Olivia somehow recognises – and meets the people of the village. Kwan tells Olivia the story of Buncake – a girl who functioned as a sister during Kwan’s childhood, but died tragically and mysteriously. This story adds to the dreamlike atmosphere, and makes Olivia question a number of things, amongst them the nature of truth. In the evening, they sit around a fire while Kwan tells stories of Changmian, and of a nearby cave; stories which make Simon enthusiastic about visiting the cave himself, despite the underlying warnings in Kwan’s stories.

A series of dramatic events ends with Simon being found inside the cave and Kwan’s disappearance. Olivia finds physical evidence that supports Kwan’s claim of the Nunumu story being true. In Olivia’s epilogue, she tells of how Kwan has changed her way of looking at the world, and that she has taken Kwan’s family name as her own.

1.2 Disposition
The structure of this dissertation is divided into three parts: Introduction, Analysis and Conclusion. These parts are divided into chapters, which in turn consist of smaller sections.

Part 1, ‘Introduction’, begins with a description of my choice of study object, the novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* and its role in the context of Tan’s writings. Following my explanation of the aim of this dissertation and definitions of central terms, I will introduce the method and theories used and finish with a survey of previous research on *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

Part 2, ‘Analysis’, which is the main part of the dissertation, is divided into three chapters which group several of the functions of narration discerned in the novel. A few functions are prominent throughout the novel, but more commonly, they reach their peak during a specific period. Therefore, the structure of my analysis is loosely based on the novel’s chronology. Consequently, the functions will be easier for the reader to follow. Paired with the functions of narration is the theme of the relationship between the two narrators and main characters as it develops through the plot of the novel.

Chapter 2.1, ‘Explain, Build a Relationship and Reflect’, groups three main functions with examples taken from the first half of the novel. The main functions are placed under two aspects of narration: either ‘Show’ or ‘Tell’ depending on the prominence of the main narrator’s voice in the examples. The sub-functions ‘indirect’ and ‘explicit’ explanations are placed respectively in ‘Show’ and ‘Tell’, while the main functions ‘Build a Relationship’ and ‘Reflect’ are kept intact.
Chapter 2.2, ‘Influence Thinking and Behaviour’, takes its examples from before and after the journey to China – an event that separates the novel in two halves. The main function is divided into two sub-functions, depending on the results of the influence: a change of thinking or a change of behaviour.

Chapter 2.3, ‘Remember, Unify and Transmit’, focuses on the functions of narration significant during the novel’s second half, which, apart from the last chapter and Olivia’s flashbacks, takes place in China. These main functions, with their sub-functions ‘make memorable’, ‘connect’, ‘enclose’ and ‘double perception’, are more difficult to keep separate from one another compared with the functions of the earlier chapters.

Part 3, ‘Conclusion’, aims to give a summary of the analysis and its results.

1.3 Aim, Definitions and Limitations

Aim
The aim of this dissertation is to explore the functions of narration in Amy Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

Definitions
The most central terms used in the dissertation will be defined in short here. More specific terms will be defined in chapter 1.4 and part 2.

Narration/Narrating
In my translated edition of Gérard Genette’s *Discours du récit*, the English term used “for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place” is “narrating”, whereas the word ‘narration’ has a more extensive article in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. As the latter term seems to be applied more commonly, I will strive to use ‘narration’ more frequently in the dissertation, with exceptions where references are made to the works of Genette.

The narration I will study in *The Hundred Secret Senses* encompasses both the longer story of Olivia’s childhood and relationship with Kwan in the present, as well as the shorter stories told by Kwan – such as the story of Buncake and the even shorter stories about the cave near Changmian. My usage of the term ‘narration’ also includes occasions where the narrator’s voice is present, e.g. in ‘explicit explanations’ and ‘reflections’.

I want to refrain from delving too deep into the definition of a story, more than mentioning the story frames such as beginning and ending. In addition, if a story is defined as such by a

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narrator in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, I will not question the accuracy of this. Due to restrictions in length, I have decided to focus on the stories told by Olivia and Kwan, even if both Simon and in a certain sense Du Lili, at times qualify as narrators.

In the translation of the essay “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov”, by German philosopher Walter Benjamin, the term ‘storytelling’ is being used, rather than ‘narration’ – perhaps because of the essay’s focus on orality. This can be compared to ethnologist Barbro Klein’s introduction to *Narrating, Doing, Experiencing. Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*, where she makes no clear distinction between oral and written narration, narrating and storytelling – perhaps because her text summarises the ideas of others. To me, the term ‘storytelling’ seems slightly more limited than ‘narration’, which is why I strive to use the latter in my analysis.

**Function**

Another central term in the wording of my aim is ‘function’, described in the Oxford Dictionary as “an activity that is natural to or the purpose of a person or thing”. I would like to add my own thoughts concerning consequences or effects of the narration in the novel, and an answer to the question “How?”. How does the narration function in the novel, in a structural sense as well as in relation to notions such as identity, reality, truth and others? How does the interaction between narrator and narratee function?

Gérard Genette’s few “functions of the narrator” and relationships between first and second narrative have served as inspiration, and do on certain occasions coincide with the ones I have found in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. A difference is that while Genette’s functions mostly share a structural or formal foundation, my functions are broader and more related to the characters in the novel. Definitions of Genette’s functions are presented in relevant places in the analysis.

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8 With inspiration taken from Susan S. Lanser: “Having learned from my biochemist friend Ellen Henderson that ‘how?’ is a scientific question but ‘why?’ is not, I have sought through this project to show how particular writers and texts may have come to use particular narrative strategies.” Lanser 1992, p. 23f.
9 The analysis in part 2 is to be seen as the initiation of a discussion and an example of a method by which to interpret Tan’s work.
Narrator
A role that is central in this dissertation, despite her absence from my aim, is that of the narrator. I will attempt to refrain from speculation regarding the intentions of the narrator, as there is a risk of venturing too far from textual facts and too far into the fictional psyche of the character. However, if it can be supported by the text, exceptions may occur.

As Kwan’s narration is usually framed by Olivia’s (with an exception in chapter 21 ‘When Heaven Burned’), I will henceforth refer to Olivia as the main narrator. Although it can be discussed how the authority between the two as narrators as well as characters, shifts throughout the novel.

Most functions in my analysis are related to Kwan as a narrator, as she is a narrator with clear aims and varying narrative situations. Furthermore, Kwan has no obligations to transmit the plot and the characters to the reader, which the main narrator is somewhat compelled to.

Narratee and Character
In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, the term ‘narratee’ is described as belonging to a strict hierarchical communication model of traditional narratology, as well as a “synonym for auditor”. In my analysis of Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the latter definition as auditor, or receiver of the story, is functional enough, as I am more interested in observing interaction and implications, than in classifying. On the other hand, I note that the difference in level and as a consequence authority between narrator and character is important. In the novel, Olivia is Kwan’s narratee as Kwan tells her stories to Olivia, while Olivia’s narratee is more unclear. Both narrators in *The Hundred Secret Senses* take part as characters in the novel, but shift the role of the narrator between them. According to the hierarchical model mentioned above, narrator and narratee are on the same level, but Tan’s novel makes this question more complex. Therefore, I have modified the model in order to make it applicable to the subject matter of this dissertation. As said in the section on ‘Narrator’ above, I aim to refrain from character analysis, except when it is necessary to the purpose of this dissertation.

Limitations
Due to the aim of this dissertation, I will avoid an analysis of the action or symbols in the novel, unless they have a direct connection to the narration. As narration and the interaction between narrator and narratee is more evident in between stories, the analysis will be focused

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12 A more explicit presentation of the two structural levels in the novel will follow in chapter 1.4 and part 2.
on what Gérard Genette calls “the level of narrative discourse”, or what could also be referred to as the frames of the stories, rather than on their content.

In my choice of functions, I have strived to give a balanced account of the two narrators Olivia and Kwan, even if Kwan is more varied as a narrator. In addition, it seems there is a shift in authority as they reach China. As the disposition of this dissertation follows the chronology of the novel, the balance between the two narrators in the chapters of the analysis may reflect the balance of authority as depicted in the novel.

Due to the limited amount of space, I will focus on the narration of Olivia and Kwan, even though on a few occasions other characters in the novel temporarily take on the role of the narrator. To me, the relationship between Olivia and Kwan, as characters as well as narrators, seems to be the most central theme of the novel. Stories told by other characters figure in the analysis for the sake of the exploration of this central theme, or the aim of this dissertation.

1.4 Method and Theory

My aim is to as far as possible focus on the primary literature and the functions of narration. Rather than choosing one theoretical point of view, I have tried to find relevant theoretical aspects for each function. In this sense, there will be more possibilities to illustrate the complexity of Tan’s novel. Therefore, the presentation of works below might seem a little overly diverse, especially since many of them are cited in the analysis only once or twice. However, the aim of exploring the functions of narration in The Hundred Secret Senses works as a unifying component, as does the relationship between the two narrators and characters Olivia and Kwan.

Before beginning a presentation of important theoretical works cited in this dissertation, I want to point out that many of these writers stand out as individuals rather than followers of any one theory or as members of any one group. This could partly be due to the built-in interdisciplinary aspects of the subject of narrative itself. My groups below are suggestions as to how I have interpreted the texts, and found similar aspects in others’. I have also tried to group them in order to make my choice of theory easier for the reader to follow, even if many scholars presented below share an interdisciplinary approach to their subject.

As ‘narratology’, along with a few examples from the field of ‘cultural studies’, builds most of the theoretical foundation of this dissertation, I would like to commence my

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14 Genette 1980, p. 27.
15 For instance, see Simon’s story of Elza’s accident (Tan, pp. 86-93), or Du Lili’s and Simon’s mute stories (ibid., p. 259f).
16 Such as the story of Olivia’s father told by Aunt Betty (ibid., p. 5f).
presentation with the extensive *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, in which one finds a general introduction to various notions of narrative. ‘Narrative theory’, or narratology, is a vast field with its roots in structuralism, from which I have picked out a few basic terms to help me in my aim of exploring the functions of narration in *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

Gérard Genette, who is central within the field of literary narrative theory and inventor of terms in which narratives can be described and classified, is the author of *Narrative Discourse. An Essay In Method* (originally published in 1972). In this classic work, notions of narrative are explored through the example of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*. Eleven years later, Genette published *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, to answer the criticism received on the aforementioned work. Criticised or revised terms will be discussed when used in the analysis, if the discussion is relevant in the context of the primary literature. However, as the aim of this dissertation is not purely theoretical, I will strive to make use only of the most important narratological terms.

Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* is for me a starting point of classical narratology. The two or three levels of narrative – call them metadiegesis, diegesis/intradiegesis and extradiegesis,17 or story and (narrative) discourse –18 are useful when looking at the role shifting in the novel.19 For instance, these levels make it clearer to see in a formal sense how the status of a character changes once she becomes the narrator and thus changes her level. According to Genette, one way to define narrating is by a change of level: “The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation.”20 Thus, narrating becomes visible in between stories, as said above.21 In *The Hundred Secret Senses* at least two levels can be found: the metadiegesis of Kwan’s story of Nunumu, and the diegetic/intradiegetic story of Olivia’s present life in San

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17 “We will define this difference in level by saying that *any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed.*” (Genette 1980, p. 228f). Kwan’s metadiegetic story is enclosed within Olivia’s diegetic/intradiegetic one. Olivia as character, and Nunumu, are situated on a diegetic level on the one hand and on a metadiegetic level on the other. However, Olivia as a narrator is situated on an extradiegetic level (outside of the diegesis), while Kwan both as a character and as a narrator is situated on a diegetic/intradiegetic level.

18 Ibid., p. 27.

19 Genette’s levels have been widely criticised, not least by Genette himself. For instance according to Susan S. Lanser: “With a frame of only a sentence, says Genette, the entirety of Proust’s *A la recherche suddenly becomes an intradiegetic narration.*” Susan S. Lanser, “Toward a Feminist Narratology”, *Style*, Fall 1986:20.3, p. 351f and Genette 1988, p. 95. However, this criticism is quite irrelevant in the case of *The Hundred Secret Senses*, where I perceive the levels as clear and well fleshed-out.


21 See chapter 1.3.
Francisco. One could name the two narratives of Olivia and Kwan “first” and “second”, respectively.22

Developing Genette’s ideas, as well as handling the criticism against narrative theory, Susan S. Lanser combines narratology with feminism.23 Through concepts such as ‘voice’,24 ‘authority’ and ‘narrator’,25 her work aims to use narratology as a clarifying tool,26 and gain insights for the field of feminism as well as the field of narrative theory. Lanser defines several aspects of ‘voice’ as well as ‘narrator’.27 These aspects will be defined when used in the analysis. Inspired by Lanser, I intend to combine the clarifying aspects of narratology (and Lanser’s feminist narratology) with the reflecting aspects of cultural studies and ethnology.

Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” is difficult to place but could be seen as a personal reflection on the art and decline of (mainly oral) storytelling in the age of the novel, positioned somewhere between the fields of cultural studies and narratology.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explores the concept of cultural identity as a static rediscovery or as an on-going production, depending on one’s attitude towards one’s home country, in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”.28

Perhaps categorised as anthropology, Walter J. Ong’s study Orality and Literacy has been criticised by many (see Johansson below) – a discussion I do not aim to take part in, and therefore his work is referred to only on a few occasions in the dissertation, for some basic insights in differences between senses.

Anna Johansson, sociologist and author of Narrativ teori och metod – Med livsberättelsen i fokus, continues this movement between disciplines as she presents literary narrative theory together with sociology and cultural studies, exploring the concept of the life story while

22 Genette 1980, p. 228.
24 Ibid., p. 3ff.
25 Ibid., p. 6: “One major constituent of narrative authority, therefore, is the extent to which a narrator’s status conforms to this dominant social power [of discursive authority]. At the same time, narrative authority is also constituted through (historically changing) textual strategies [...]”
27 See for instance “authorial voice” (Lanser 1992, p. 15f), “personal voice” (ibid., p. 18f), and “private” and “public” voice (ibid., p. 15). To me, Lanser’s “voice” and “narrator” seem to be quite interchangeable terms.
keeping a critical eye on male- and Western-dominated discourse (including Benjamin and Ong).  

In her introduction to *Narrating, Doing, Experiencing. Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*, Barbro Klein presents Scandinavian and interdisciplinary aspects of narrative and narrativity in folklore, ethnology and other fields.

Less focused on narration, Ashcroft et al attempt to introduce the field of post-colonialism in terms of models and strategies of reading and writing in *The Empire Writes Back*.

Doris Sommer explores the term ‘double consciousness’ and finds that it safeguards democracy, in “A Vindication of Double Consciousness”.

Amongst other things, Salman Rushdie examines his memories of India and the purpose of literature in his essay “Imaginary Homelands”.

Related to cultural studies and post-colonialism, but closer to the field of literature, Maggie Ann Bowers surveys the modus of *Magic(al) Realism* in her book of that title. This modus is highly relevant when studying the novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* – a thought I have in common with many writers of previous research on Amy Tan’s writings (see Magdalena Delicka and Begoña Simal González, as discussed in the next section).

1.5 Previous Research

In this section I would like to introduce previous research made in the field of Amy Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*. I will also try to draw some general conclusions regarding recurring views of Tan’s writing and disputes between the scholars. The texts are presented according to their number of occurrence in the analysis; the last text is the one mostly referred to.

The works of Amy Tan have caused strong reactions. Many scholars have observed the same elements, but interpreted them differently. An issue that some see as disputable concerns the expressions of China and the Chinese in her novels – are they stereotypes, ambivalent or could they be seen as a way to confirm experiences of the Chinese-American minority in American society? As this issue largely lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, references

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to the debate will be avoided unless necessary. Tan’s works are often compared to others’ in comparative studies, amongst them the Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, the Native American Louise Erdrich and the Cuban-American Cristina García. Indeed, Kingston is sometimes referred to as Tan’s predecessor.

Cynthia F. Wong’s text “Asymmetries. Loss and Forgiveness in the Novels of Amy Tan” lies closest to an analysis of the narration in Tan’s novel, even if Wong mostly deals with its functions for the main characters to reach understanding and forgiveness. An asymmetry in cultural understanding could, according to Wong, be due to fragmentated stories, and when the characters leave China a wound is created – a wound that can be healed through language. In chapter 2.3 of the analysis, I will return to the latter notion. Similarly to many of the texts described in this section, Kwan is in Wong’s text seen as a link, in this case between past and present. As stated by Cynthia F. Wong, Kwan’s stories play an important part in Olivia’s life: they give her an image of China that makes a return possible, and also an understanding of the cultural and the inexplicable, as well as compassion. At the same time, Kwan’s stories shape Olivia’s consciousness. This idea will be discussed in the section on the function of remembrance, chapter 2.3.

Begoña Simal González writes in “More Than Meets the Eye. Magic Realism in Amy Tan’s The Hundred Secret Senses” about magical realism and how Tan’s novel relates to this modus. González compares China’s magical influence on Olivia with its influence on the young Kwan: according to González, the mixture between reality and imagination survives the “transplantation” from China to the USA in the character “of the young Kwan” and in


35 Cynthia F. Wong, p. 63.

36 Ibid., p. 64.

37 Ibid., p. 70.

38 Ibid., p. 71f.
Reading Tan’s novel, Su-Lin Yu sees two sisters, whose relationship is used to show how the individual relates to a community. Yu employs a comparative method in her text “Sisterhood as Cultural Difference in Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* and Cristina García’s *The Aguero Sisters*”, and her subject of sisterhood is interpreted from a feminist and cultural viewpoint. Yu states that Tan’s novel expresses “a feminist’s anxiety to recognize one’s difference from the other woman and to contain it”. Yu’s ideas on the relationship between the sisters, Olivia’s and Kwan’s respective identities, and sisterhood in general will be discussed in chapter 2.1 and 2.2.

In her study “American Magic Realism. Crossing the Borders in Literatures of the Margins”, Magdalena Delicka investigates how Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* relates to the modus of magical realism, and, similarly to Yu, contrasts Tan’s novel to a work by another author, namely Native American Louise Erdrich. Delicka presents how the two opposites realism and magic are expressed in Tan’s novel, but she also notes how the magical co-exists with the real – of which the former is most prominent in Kwan’s narrative. In chapter 2.2 of my analysis, it becomes clear how Kwan’s narration challenges Olivia’s boundaries of reality, whereas in chapter 2.3, Delicka’s notion that Kwan keeps the past alive through her stories of Changmian, is discussed. Opposing Sau-Ling Wong’s view on Tan’s works as Orientalistic, Delicka concludes that to Tan, magical realism is “a tool of literary expression” that can “change the way people think about different cultures”.

Similarly to E. D. Huntley (see presentation below) and to me, Delicka is of the opinion that Olivia’s narratee is unclear - something which I would like to relate to the fact that Olivia’s narration functions as a frame story. Therefore, her story comes closer to the reader compared to the narration of Kwan.

Comparing Delicka’s study to the other text on magical realism in this presentation, Delicka writes that Olivia’s narrative lacks flashbacks, while González’s viewpoint lies...
closer to my own, namely that *The Hundred Secret Senses* contains many flashbacks, both in Olivia’s and Kwan’s narratives. Comparing the two texts, the division between the realistic and the magical world, and the definition of the term ‘magical realism’, becomes more complex in González’s text. On the other hand, González’s statement that

> in subverting the realist, empiricist epistemology, Tan’s book engages in critique of and resistance to domination, resignation and despair. Hope, instead, leads to the possibility of and wish for change and revolution

shows that she and Delicka hold the same opinion on the issue of the revolutionary potential in Tan’s novel.

The most comprehensive study of Tan’s writings that I have found is *Amy Tan. A Critical Companion*, written by E. D. Huntley in 1998. This work goes through Tan’s biography, the background of the Asian-American minority, and also describes and analyses each of Tan’s first three novels, in three separate chapters. *The Hundred Secret Senses* is analysed from a Jungian archetypal perspective, even though Tan’s use of narration comes in on a few occasions, for example the two voices of Kwan, which I will develop in chapter 2.2. Huntley states that the two stories change when the main characters arrive in China, which will be connected to notions of narration and authority in my analysis. Like Delicka, Huntley deals with Kwan’s conversations with her ghost friends from the yin world, but sees these conversations rather as a way for Kwan to bridge “the chronological gap between her two lives”.

Comparisons, asymmetries in cultural understanding, magical realism, feminism and archetypes – Tan’s novel has inspired analyses from many different viewpoints. Many of the presented studies above are similar, for example when it comes to the view on the structure of the novel, but they reach different conclusions. The two separate elements in the novel, which are mixed more and more throughout the course of the plot, can be seen as, in their turn: magical and realistic, past and present, Olivia’s and Kwan’s opposing cultural perspectives, and Olivia’s and Kwan’s voices of narration. Kwan is a medium, and a link between past and present – partly through her yin friends, partly through her stories of a past Changmian. The opposing values in the criticism of the novel are most clear between the critique of

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50 González, p. 105.
51 Ibid., p. 108.
52 Ibid., p. 123.
54 Ibid., p. 117.
55 Kwan “mediates between the community of the living and the transempirical reality thanks to the heritage handed down through oral tradition” (González, p. 104).
Orientalism and the one founded in magical realism: where Sheng-Mei Ma sees mockery, González perceives a revolutionary potential.

However, there is a lack of studies on the important theme of narration in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Even if Wong explores stories and fiction in Tan’s novel, she does so through the perspectives of culture and emotions. Through a combination of cultural and narratological perspectives, the following analysis attempts to add further to the investigation of narration in Tan’s work, in order to fully appreciate the functions of narration in Tan’s novel, which take place on many levels.

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56 Ma, p. 116.
57 González, p. 108.
2. Analysis

2.1 Explain, Build a Relationship and Reflect

The aim in this first chapter of the analysis is to examine how the narrators, through their narration, explain things, build a relationship and reflect on important matters.

Olivia’s narration has no obvious narratee, and in the novel, she does not seem to be aware of herself as a narrator – in Lanser’s words, she lacks “narrative self-reference”.58 Her narration of her current life in San Francisco is intertwined with flashbacks from her childhood and the years spent with Simon. Two chapters before the trip to China, the flashbacks cease gradually and the story is told mainly in present tense from there onwards.

Inserted in Olivia’s narration are stories told by Kwan. Most of these stories are told to a young Olivia about Kwan’s former life as Nunumu, but she also tells Olivia stories about their father, Kwan’s own childhood, and the people of Changmian. In Genette’s terms, Kwan’s stories could be called “metadiegetic”.59

Her narration of her current life in San Francisco is intertwined with flashbacks from her childhood and the years spent with Simon. Two chapters before the trip to China, the flashbacks cease gradually and the story is told mainly in present tense from there onwards.

I have tried to exclude Olivia’s mother and her husband Simon from my choice of examples, as the relationship between Kwan and Olivia is more relevant to the functions of the narration in the novel. Due to their accentuation of the narrator’s voice, explicit explanation and reflection will be presented together, in the section ‘Tell’ below, while the indirect explanation is examined in the section ‘Show’.

While Olivia’s narrative of her childhood explains why she hates and tries to resist Kwan, one function of Kwan’s narration is to build her relationship with Olivia. This sisterly relationship is important to the novel as a whole and to this dissertation. In the beginning of the novel, Olivia tells of how the relationship begins with fear of replacement.60 She goes on to explain her inner conflict, resulting in guilt, and how her feelings about their relationship are vastly different from Kwan’s.61

In this chapter, I want to study the first half of the novel and the beginning of their sisterly relationship, while chapter 2.2 continues with Olivia’s questioning of Kwan as her sister in the Buncake episode. Chapter 2.3 finishes with an exploration of how Olivia changes her view of Kwan, and transmits the stories of Kwan and the people of Changmian.

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58 Lanser 1992, p. 15: “narrative self-reference, by which I mean explicit attention to the act of narration itself.” On page 16 Lanser writes of how “no reference to the narrator or the narrative situation is feasible” where there is a lack of narrative self-reference.
59 Genette 1980, p. 228.
60 “I was scared of Kwan before I ever met her.” Tan, p. 5.
61 See for instance ibid., p. 21f.
Show\(^{62}\)

In this section, I will examine the functions of ‘explanation’ and ‘building a relationship’. The former includes the two sub-functions of ‘connection’ and ‘indirect explanation’, while the latter also has two sub-functions: ‘secret stories’ and ‘distraction’.

Explain

Walter Benjamin sees a conflict between stories and explanations. In fact, he says that

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\text{Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy}
\]

stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through

\[
\text{with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling;}
\]

almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a

\[
\text{story free from explanation as one reproduces it.}^{63}
\]

As a reply to Benjamin’s statement, which threatens to undermine this entire chapter, I would

\[
\text{like to argue a number of things. Firstly, it is important to note that Benjamin sees a conflict}
\]

between the novel and the story,\(^{64}\) which I do not. To me, \textit{The Hundred Secret Senses}

interestingly contradicts Benjamin’s view in its very form, as it is a novel consisting of many

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\text{stories, more or less linked to one another. The explanation is important as a ‘connecting’}
\]

function between all these stories. With a bit of generalization, the first half of the novel,

\[
\text{taking place in the USA, could be seen as an explanation to how characters act in the novel’s}
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second half, taking place in China. Without this explaining in the first half, the psychological

\[
\text{change that the main character Olivia goes through would not have been as dramatic. But of}
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\[
\text{course, Benjamin wants to avoid psychology in storytelling as well.}^{65}
\]

Benjamin’s thoughts inspired my division of explanations into explicit and indirect:\(^{66}\) in

\[
\text{Tan’s novel, the voice of the narrator becomes clearer and references to the narrative situation}
\]

increase while the narratee moves further away from the story. The explicit explanation and

\[
\text{the reflection are occasions when the narrator’s voice is most prominent, and could perhaps}
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\[
\text{not be defined as narration in Benjamin’s strict sense of the word. However, since the}
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\[
^{62}\text{‘Show’ and ‘tell’ are connected to the terms ‘mimesis’ and ‘diegesis’. Genette points out “that the very}
\]

idea of \textit{showing}, like that of imitation or narrative representation (and even more so, because of its naively visual}

\[
\text{character), is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can ‘show’ or ‘imitate’ the}
\]

story it tells. [...] the illusion of mimesis [...] is the only narrative mimesis [...] all we have and can have is [sic]}

\[
\text{degrees of diegesis” (Genette 1980, p. 163f). Later on, Genette continues this discussion in Narrative Discourse}
\]

\[
\text{Revisited (1988), pp. 43-47. Here, he suggests the more appropriate terms “narrative/dialogue (narrative}
\]

mode/dramatic mode)” (Genette 1988, p. 45). However, as the terms seem appropriate with their connotations to

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\text{the voice of the narrator, I will use them in my analysis, albeit with a certain wariness. See also footnote 261.}
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^{63}\text{Benjamin, p. 89.}
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\[
^{64}\text{Ibid., p. 87: “The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the}
\]

novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the}

\[
\text{narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book.”}
\]

\[
^{65}\text{Ibid., p. 91: “the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the}
\]

greater becomes the story’s claim to a place in the memory of the listener.”}

\[
^{66}\text{Explanations and reflections will be defined further in the introductions to their respective sections.}
\]
narrator’s voice has an important function in this novel as a way of connecting stories and character’s actions with one another, I have chosen to include it in my definition of narration.

In my reading of the novel, I have been able to discern two types of explanation: the ‘explicit’ one, in which an episode is accompanied by a short comment from the adult narrator so as to guide the narratee in her interpretation; and the ‘indirect’ explanation, by which I mean episodes that, for various reasons, lack comments but, nevertheless serve as a form of explanation of e.g. a feeling or behaviour. As the narrator’s voice is clearer in the explicit explanation, and the dividing line between explicit explanation and reflection is more indefinite than between explicit and indirect explanation, explicit explanation will be dealt with under the headline of ‘Tell’ below.

Explanation as Connection
The formal function of explanation in narration is related to the connection between stories. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the connection between Olivia’s story of herself (first narrative), and Kwan’s story of Nunumu (second narrative), is strengthened throughout the course of the novel. At first, there is no apparent connection between the two stories, apart from it being an example of how Kwan influences Olivia and forces her to listen.67 Moving on from Genette’s third type of relationship between the first and second narrative (no relationship at all), the second and thematic type of connection is exposed when Miss Banner has made her way into the story of Nunumu.68 Kwan tells of Miss Banner’s arrival in China, and her meeting with the new culture and language. Olivia, on the other hand, tells of Kwan’s meeting with North American culture. Furthermore, Kwan gives an account of how Nunumu and Miss Banner could not understand one another, until Nunumu taught Miss Banner Chinese. There is a confusing example of how Nunumu interpreted Miss Banner’s story of her life which mirrors two scenes in Olivia’s narrative.69 In the first scene Kwan teaches Olivia Chinese, and in the second scene she tells Olivia, in a very figurative way, the story of her and her mother’s life before she came to the USA.70 In Olivia’s narrative though, the lacking communication is due to differences in adult and child speech, rather than differences in language.

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67 Tan, p. 28f.
68 Genette 1980, p. 233. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette expands the number of functions but their meaning stay more or less the same, albeit divided into smaller parts. The thematic relationship is here turned into the third function instead of the second, while the explanatory function is still the first one (Genette 1988, p. 93f). However, so as not to confuse the reader I will use *Narrative Discourse* (1980) as my main source of Genette’s ideas.
69 Tan, p. 45ff.
70 Ibid., p. 12ff.
As can be seen from the examples, there is a thematic connection between Olivia’s and Kwan’s respective narratives. Closer to the novel’s ending, the vague thematic relationship changes into a causal relationship as it is revealed that characters in Kwan’s narrative are reflected by characters in Olivia’s narrative.\textsuperscript{71} It is Kwan’s continuous telling of Nunumu’s story, paired with physical evidence, which influences Olivia into believing in this causal connection. When the causal connection is clear, the story of Nunumu receives the “explanatory function” that Genette mentions,\textsuperscript{72} although in a backwards sense: the ending of the Nunumu story explains why Kwan, in the beginning of and throughout the novel, is so eager to reunite Simon and Olivia. Kwan feels guilty for separating them (then in the shape of Yiban and Miss Banner), and tries to free herself from her guilt. Going to China and making Olivia realise that she was Miss Banner, are intermediate aims on the way towards Kwan’s final goal of reunion. Making Olivia remember her former life in Changmian is also a part of Kwan’s wish to make Olivia transmit her stories, but this goal is less explicit.

Indirect Explanation
As the indirect explanations are lacking in comment from the adult narrator, these episodes are more difficult to interpret. In the first half of the novel, I have identified three explanatory episodes of varying length lacking comments. The episodes concern three recurring themes, which are as follows: Olivia’s fear of Kwan, Olivia’s wish to belong or Olivia being abused, and Olivia and Kwan’s shared father, of which the latter episode is the longest and also with Kwan as a narrator. I will attempt to draw out why these particular episodes lack comments or reactions from the adult Olivia and how they function as explanations.

Partly, this lack of a clear voice could be due to the fact that the themes in these episodes recur several times throughout Olivia’s narrative. The episode regarding the grasshopper gift concerns Olivia’s fear of Kwan — a fear which is commented on on two other occasions.\textsuperscript{73} Therefore, the fear is already highlighted and present in the narrative and need not be commented on once more.

A second theme in Olivia’s narrative is a feeling of wanting to belong and being normal, juxtaposed with verbal or physical abuse performed by the neighbourhood children. The first time this happens, the scene of verbal abuse is accompanied by short commentaries (the latter emphasised by me), and it could therefore be categorised as an explicit explanation.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 320f and p. 342f.
\textsuperscript{72} Genette 1980, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{73} Olivia’s reaction when she receives the grasshopper is described on Tan, p. 10. The two other commented examples of Olivia’s fear of her sister can be read on ibid., p. 4f and p. 14f.
I remember the day it first occurred to me to get rid of Kwan. [my italics] It was summer, a few months after she had arrived. Kwan, Kevin, Tommy, and I were sitting on our front lawn, waiting for something to happen. A couple of Kevin’s friends sneaked to the side of our house and turned on the sprinkler system. My brothers and I heard the telltale spit and gurgle of water running into the lines, and we ran off just before a dozen sprinkler heads burst into spray. Kwan, however, simply stood there, getting soaked, marveling that so many springs had erupted out of the earth all at once. Kevin and his friends were howling with laughter. I shouted, “That’s not nice.”

Then one of Kevin’s friends, a swaggering second-grader whom all the little girls had a crush on, said to me, “Is that dumb Chink your sister? Hey, Olivia, does that mean you’re a dumb Chink too?” I was so flustered I yelled, “She’s not my sister! I hate her! I wish she’d go back to China!” Tommy later told Daddy Bob what I had said, and Daddy Bob said, “Louise, you better do something about your daughter.” My mother shook her head, looking sad. “Olivia,” she said, “we don’t ever hate anyone. ‘Hate’ is a terrible word. [original italics] It hurts you as much as it hurts others.” Of course, this only made me hate Kwan even more. [my italics] 

The second time of abuse, the scene is described in less detail and with less dialogue:

I knew kids who did those things. They were the same ones who once pinned down my arms and peed on me, laughing and shouting, “Olivia’s sister is a retard.” They sat on me until I started crying, hating Kwan, hating myself.

It is clear from Olivia’s introducing comments in the same paragraph, regarding a different scene, that the following scene of physical abuse, like the scene of verbal abuse mentioned above, somehow is connected to Olivia’s wish to be special both to her mother and to the neighbourhood children, but there is no comment on the specific event:

I wanted once again to prove to my mother that I was special, in spite of Kwan. I wanted to snub the neighborhood kids, to make them mad that I was having more fun than they would ever know.

This episode of physical and verbal abuse is a reinforcement of the one in my longer example, narrated on page 11f. Comparing the two episodes, the first one is rich in detail and in commentary while the second one is more of a summary than a scene – this despite the fact that the abuse has increased in violence from verbal abuse to a combination of verbal and physical abuse. Thus, the latter example could be defined as an indirect explanation. The silence of the adult narrator is intriguing, but perhaps the horror of the episode makes commentaries superfluous. Nevertheless, it is evident that this last episode is an example of the self-hatred that Sommer describes, even if the minority group Olivia partly belongs to is different:

74 Ibid., p. 11f.
75 Ibid., p. 43f.
76 Ibid., p. 43.
First Blacks are short-changed by America, and then they fall short of their own American ideals. To feel oneself as a problem breeds the kind of self-hatred that members of any minority group are likely to experience, to the degree that they also belong to the majority group that hates them. To the extent that Blacks have a national (racist) consciousness which they share with inquiring Whites, Blacks also share the assumptions that Whites make in their discreet but nagging question.

Kwan’s presence, and her relationship as a sister to Olivia, is a hindrance against the young Olivia’s wish to belong to the majority group of American neighbourhood children. Her hatred towards Kwan comes as a result, and is explained by these two episodes. In the second episode, Olivia’s hatred towards Kwan shifts and turns against herself as well, or perhaps against the part of herself that resembles Kwan – the part of Olivia that belongs to the Chinese minority group. In this sense, these two episodes are indeed examples of Yu’s statement that Tan in The Hundred Secret Senses uses “the sister bond to problematize the individual’s relationship to her community” as Kwan’s arrival becomes a problem for the child Olivia.

The third explanatory episode lacking comments, reactions as well as reflections from the adult Olivia, is told by Kwan in the narrative’s present time. It is the third time that Olivia is told about her father and of how he came to the USA. Even though commented by Kwan as a private narrator, and therefore in between my categories of explicit and indirect explanations, this third father-story is completely devoid of Olivia’s reaction as a narratee, as opposed to the two earlier situations when she was either embarrassed or scared. Perhaps this lack is due to Kwan’s increased authority as a storyteller. The subject of Olivia’s father, and his importance in her choice of surname, is also reflected upon by the adult Olivia on other occasions – occasions which will be examined in the section on the function of reflection below. Perhaps these other occasions could partly account for Olivia’s silence in this particular case.

A formal similarity between these three episodes lacking comments is that they are immediately followed by a new episode adjacent in time. In both of the last two examples (Olivia’s self-hatred and the Third father-story), there is a causal connection between two

77 Sommer, p. 170.
78 Yu, p. 347.
79 Tan, p. 160ff.
80 The two other stories are told, respectively, by her Aunt Betty when Olivia is ten years old (ibid., p. 5f) and by Kwan when Olivia is probably around seven years old (ibid., p. 12ff).
82 And also lacks comments from Olivia as public narrator.
83 Tan, p. 5 and p. 14.
episodes told by different narrators: the physical and verbal abuse of Olivia (the indirect explanation) is followed by a discussion of the word “retard”, which will introduce Kwan’s narration of an episode in the Nunum story; Kwan’s narration of the story of Olivia’s and Kwan’s father is followed by Olivia’s comment on Kwan as a character, and an account of how she is persuaded by Kwan to travel to China.

To conclude, causality and explanation is highly present in Olivia’s narration. In the adult Olivia’s mind, her fear of Kwan, as well as Kwan’s role as a hindrance against Olivia’s wish to be a part of the American majority group, are in conflict with Kwan’s role as Olivia’s caring substitute mother. Together, these episodes told by Olivia explain the guilt Olivia feels towards Kwan. This guilt is the reason behind Olivia’s decision to invite Kwan to lunch, where she is told the story of their father, which is followed by the decision to travel to China. Thus, through Olivia’s and Kwan’s respective narrations it becomes clear that their feelings of guilt are important forces influencing the events in the novel.

Build a Relationship ...
By taking care of Olivia like a mother, teaching her Chinese and slowly breaking her resistance by a continuous telling of secret stories, Kwan builds her relationship to Olivia. I agree with the statements of Huntley and Yu since it is obvious that to Kwan, the relationship with Olivia is very important: “On one level, Kwan’s stories about Nunumu and Miss Banner reflect her wistful hope that she and Olivia can forge strong ties of affection.” and “Night after night in their shared bedroom, Kwan attempts to use her tale of reincarnation to construct her relationship with Olivia.” I would like to add that Olivia comments on Kwan’s loyalty on several occasions.

As opposed to Olivia’s narration, Kwan’s narration includes a high number of examples of what Genette calls “the function of communication”, even though Olivia’s replies as a narratee are rarely written out. An episode of the Nunumu story is generally introduced by references to the narrative situation, linking it to something, (usually a mundane object) in

85 Examples of the latter can be seen on Tan, p. 11, p. 21 and p. 352.
86 See for instance ibid., p. 15ff, p. 94 and p. 154.
87 Kwan’s teaching Olivia Chinese through narration will be examined further in the section on the function of transmission, chapter 2.3. For an example, see ibid., p. 12.
88 Huntley, p. 141.
89 Yu, p. 349.
90 The captivating strength of this loyalty, and Olivia’s efforts to resist it, is discussed lengthily on Tan, p. 26. See also ibid., p. 11 and p. 22.
91 Genette 1980, p. 256. For a closer examination of Kwan’s use of the function of communication, see chapter 2.3.
Olivia’s previous narration and with questions to Olivia as a narratee.92 Sometimes Kwan interrupts herself, or ends her story, with rhetorical questions to her narratee.93 This reaching out for her narratee, and connecting her narration to things in Olivia’s everyday life, shows how Kwan builds a relationship through narration. It can be noted that Olivia as a narrator never introduces an episode with a link to Kwan’s previously told story.

The narrator Kwan’s focus on the narrative situation might be related to the fact that Kwan is a private narrator as opposed to Olivia’s being a public narrator.94 Lanser writes that

because it forms a part of the fictional situation, the immediate communicative context of the private narrator is more easily represented in the text than is the context of the public voice. This means that private narration may encompass considerable commentary on communication itself.95

This suits my impression of Kwan’s narration in The Hundred Secret Senses perfectly.

Despite using a different name and telling the story of a person living in a different time and with a different history from her, Kwan’s story of Nunumu could be defined as “autodiegetic”.96 Telling Olivia her own story, about her loyalty to Miss Banner and how she betrays her at the end of the story, Kwan indirectly explains her actions as a character in the present time of the narrative. At the same time, Kwan forces Olivia to get to know her better. It can be noted that Olivia never does the equivalent – she tells her life story to an unidentified narratee instead.

Thus, Kwan builds her relationship with Olivia in two ways: first, in a formal sense of communicating with her narratee, linking their respective stories and asking questions; second, in a psychological sense by telling Olivia about herself.

... With Secret Stories ...

Kwan’s definition of ‘secret’ is unclear, but it is a word she uses frequently in combination with her narration, and when she describes her ability to talk to “yin people” – an ability she calls “secret senses”. The word ‘secret’ is in this case used to describe something which is forgotten by many: “Secret sense not really secret. We just call secret because everyone has, only forgotten.”97 Another clue as to what Kwan could mean by the word ‘secret’ is that she

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92 On Tan, p. 75f the link is “laundry”, on p. 146 it is “rotten” while on p. 169, the thought of “duck eggs” inspires Kwan to start telling her story.
93 See for instance ibid., p. 45, p. 56, p. 75, p. 163 and p. 185.
94 Lanser 1981, p. 138. See also the section of ‘Authority’ in chapter 2.2.
95 Ibid., p. 139.
96 Genette defines the autodiegetic type of narrative as when the narrator is “the hero of the story he tells” (Genette 1980, p. 245). Kwan remembers “dreams as other lives, other selves” and tells her story in the first-person singular, Tan, p. 28f.
97 Tan, p. 102.
remarks that the “secret sense always between two people. How you can have secret just you know, ah?”⁹⁸ When first telling Olivia about the yin people, Kwan refers to her ability as “a forbidden secret”, and “a burden”.⁹⁹ Important to note is that in the second quote of this paragraph, Kwan connects secrecy and the function of building a relationship.

According to Kwan, three of her stories can be defined as secrets. The first story Kwan tells to Olivia about their father, is concluded by Kwan’s emphasis on secrecy.¹⁰⁰ The story of Nunumu is a secret in a more indirect sense: firstly, Olivia tells of how Kwan’s stories are all secrets in a general sense:

> At the end of her stories, Kwan would always say: “You’re the only one who knows. Don’t tell anyone. Never. Promise, Libby-ah?”
> And I would always shake my head, then nod, drawn to allegiance through both privilege and fear.¹⁰¹

Secondly, Kwan makes Olivia promise never to tell anyone about her “yin eyes”.¹⁰² Thirdly, after Olivia has told her mother, and it resulted in Kwan’s stay at the mental hospital, Olivia is overwhelmed by guilt and determined never to tell anyone again. This guilt still haunts her as an adult,¹⁰³ and could be combined with the guilt mentioned in the conclusion of the section of ‘Indirect explanation’ above. The story of Buncake can clearly be defined as a secret, reading Kwan’s introduction to her telling of the story: “Libby-ah, now I must tell you a secret.”¹⁰⁴

The function of secrecy concerning Kwan’s stories can be seen from many aspects, but most important to the aim of this dissertation, the secrets bring Kwan and Olivia closer together. By telling these stories only to Olivia, thereby keeping parents and brothers excluded, and in addition telling them in Chinese – a language which no one but the two of them can understand,¹⁰⁵ Kwan shows to Olivia that their relationship is a special one. Olivia’s reason for not telling the stories to anyone else is to protect Kwan. Not wanting Kwan to end up in the mental hospital again, Olivia rather tries to keep the balance between sanity and insanity inside her own mind,¹⁰⁶ while at the same time being tied to Kwan through the guilt she has never stopped feeling.

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⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 212.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
¹⁰¹ Ibid.
¹⁰² Ibid., p. 14f.
¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 16: “Even today it hurts my teeth to think about that.” See also ibid., p. 17.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 246.
¹⁰⁵ Referred to by Olivia as “our secret language of Chinese”, ibid., p. 12.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 49: “When she came home, I then had to pretend the ghosts were there, as part of our secret of pretending they weren’t. I tried so hard to hold these two contradictory views that soon I started to see what I
These three secret stories of Kwan (the first father-story, the Nunumu story and the story of Buncake) are different from the ones she tells around the fire in Changmian. While the first ones are told to one person, building a special relationship, the latter ones are told to a group of people who will probably continue telling them to others. It could be concluded that the secret stories have an individual function, while the Changmian stories function more as a collective memory.\(^ {107}\)

... And by Distraction
An additional way to build a relationship through narration is by using the stories as a soothing distraction. Kwan’s narration functions as a distraction in three different narrative situations in the novel. Twice she tells stories to a sad Olivia,\(^ {108}\) while the third time, it is Kwan who comforts herself by telling a story to Big Ma’s ghost.\(^ {109}\) These occasions are examples of Genette’s third type of connection between stories: “it is the act of narrating itself that fulfills a function in the diegesis [...] of distraction [...].”\(^ {110}\) Genette further notes that in this function, the act of narrating and the present narrative situation is emphasised “with the metadiegetic content (almost) not mattering any more than a Biblical message does during a filibuster at the rostrum of the United States Senate”.\(^ {111}\) In Kwan’s narration the stories that have a distracting function are parts of the longer story of Nunumu, and therefore the metadiegetic content can be seen as important in other aspects as well. Thus, Genette’s quote might not be fully applicable in these situations.

As a conclusion, it is characteristic that this function of distraction is apparent in Kwan’s narration and not in Olivia’s, as the latter lacks references to the narrative situation.

Tell
While lacking references to the narratee or the narrative situation in which she tells her story, Olivia has a clear voice.\(^ {112}\) As Olivia never refers to herself as a narrator, she could therefore not be considered a narrator. This balance will be explored further in the motif of Olivia’s double perception, in chapter 2.3.

\(^ {107}\) The “Changmian stories” refer to the stories about Changmian that Kwan tells to Olivia and Simon around the fire on Du Lili’s courtyard (ibid., pp. 269-277). They will be examined further in chapter 2.3.

\(^ {108}\) Ibid., p. 56 and p. 321.

\(^ {109}\) Ibid., p. 210ff. On this third occasion of distraction, the purpose of building a relationship to Olivia is non-existent.

\(^ {110}\) Genette 1980, p. 233. This function is referred to as the fifth function in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Genette 1988, p. 94).

\(^ {111}\) Genette 1980, p. 234.

\(^ {112}\) For a presentation of the concept of voice in narratological and feminist terms, see Lanser 1992, p. 3ff. For the narratological voice, see Genette 1980, p. 212f. My use of the term lies closer to the narratological meaning in that I notice occasions where the narrator’s presence is heightened, even if Olivia can use her voice in order to raise her authority.
be said to function in the “‘figural’ mode”. I choose not to ponder further on this difficulty of where the voice comes from; I simply notice that the narrator’s voice is apparent on certain occasions and that Olivia as character and Olivia as narrator are deeply connected, as opposed to Kwan, whose parts are more separable.

In Olivia’s narration, there are many examples of what Genette calls the narrator’s “testimonial function”:

this is the one accounting for the part the narrator as such takes in the story he tells, the relationship he maintains with it – an affective relationship, of course, but equally a moral or intellectual one. It may take the form simply of an attestation, as when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him.

Olivia’s narrative is indeed an attestation, or as Delicka calls it, “a confession in which Olivia gives an account of all the things that haunt her and gets insight as to how her fears can perish”. I do not agree with Delicka on her last point, as I find no example of Olivia overcoming her fears on her own. However, Olivia’s fear of Kwan is an important subject in Olivia’s narrative that is explained by the help of stories on many occasions. Combining my view of Tan’s novel with Genette’s words, the narrator Olivia is very certain of “the degree of precision of [... her] own memories”. Olivia indicates how telling the episode of Kwan’s stay at the mental hospital still awakes a feeling of guilt in her, and imagines how her “mom must have felt when she first heard” of Kwan, but most commentaries concerning feelings towards her own narration are related to the feelings of the young Olivia, with fear, guilt and hatred as the most prominent ones.

The functions of explanation and reflection are a part of this confession. The voice of the narrator is more present in the explicit explanation and the reflection, while the indirect explanation in my definition is more closely related to the story’s content.

**Explicit Explanation**

Compared with the indirect explanation, which has been examined and defined above, the explicit explanation is easier for the narratee to interpret. I define it as a combination of story and commentary, where the latter gives a clue towards the interpretation of the story. Explicit

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113 Lanser 1992, p. 16: “in the ‘figural’ mode all narration is focalized through the perspectives of characters, and thus no reference to the narrator or the narrative situation is feasible.”
114 Genette 1980, p. 256.
115 Delicka, p. 30.
116 See Tan, p. 5 and p. 15.
118 Tan, p. 17 and p. 6. See also ‘Explicit Explanation’ below.
119 See for instance ibid., p. 12: “Of course, this only made me hate Kwan even more.”
explanation is what could be conceived as a more typical “explanation”, compared to the somewhat enigmatic indirect explanation.

In one of the Changmian stories told by Kwan, the narrative explains the landscape around Changmian. The two dragons in Kwan’s story dig ditches, which explains how the irrigation system came to be. Arrows piercing the dragons explain the caves, while the mountains are explained by the dragons themselves. The name of Changmian is also explained during this narrative situation, albeit not as a story in my definition of the word.

In Olivia’s narration, there are many occasions of explicit explanation, although the issues explained are far away from geography and closer to Olivia’s character and to the relationship between Kwan and Olivia. The commentary “I was scared of Kwan before I ever met her”, explains, in combination with the event just narrated, Olivia’s fear of Kwan. As does “I was scared out of my mind”, after the story about Kwan’s yin eyes.

Commentaries such as “Now that I’m an adult, I realize it wasn’t my fault that Kwan went to the mental hospital” and “Yet the way I remember it is the way I have always felt – that I betrayed her and that’s what made her insane. The shock treatments, I believed, were my fault as well.” in combination with Olivia’s narration of Kwan’s stay at the mental hospital, help explain the guilt Olivia feels towards Kwan since that episode.

Father-stories
The explanatory stories concerning Kwan and Olivia’s father recur three times in the novel and are told by different narrators. The subject of Olivia’s father is also present in some of her reflections concerning her name and identity, and is finally one of the unanswered questions she ponders at Big Ma’s funeral at the end of the novel. Thus, it could be concluded that the subject of Olivia’s father is important to the novel as a whole, and to Olivia as the main narrator and main character. The first two stories about the father are rather short

120 Ibid., p. 269f.
121 Ibid., p. 275.
123 Tan, p. 5.
124 Ibid., p. 15.
125 Ibid. and p. 17.
126 Ibid., p. 20 and p. 157f. Some of these reflections will be examined below.
127 Ibid., p. 354.
and told by two different narrators in combination with Olivia’s narrator: Olivia’s mother’s
cousin, called “Aunt Betty” and Kwan. Aunt Betty’s version includes the narrator’s comments
as well as the narratee’s reaction of embarrassment. Kwan’s first version is also both
comented and reacted upon while the third father-story lacks reaction. There is a
possibility that they are presented by the narrator Olivia in a non-chronological order, as the
Aunt Betty version might be told when Olivia is around ten years old, while Kwan’s
version is told when Olivia is around seven years old, or even earlier than that.

What are the implications of presenting the stories to Olivia’s narratee in a non-
chronological order, if this is indeed the case? In order to answer this question, I would like to
compare the two stories in closer detail. Aunt Betty tells her story through Olivia’s narration
with few interruptions except for sentimental commentaries such as “Of course, he sent
money for their support – what father would not?” and “With a heavy heart, he left for
America to start a new life and forget about the sadness he left behind.” – commentaries that
are in fact parts of the story, even though their underlying values make them differ from the
rest. Aunt Betty is an adult, tells the story in English, and gives the child narratee Olivia a
positive view of her father. Kwan on the other hand, is more difficult for Olivia to understand
since Kwan’s language is more metaphorical and she might be telling her story in Chinese
(the latter is unclear to the reader). Moreover, Kwan is younger than Aunt Betty, and tells her
story in dialogue with her child narratee Olivia, which perhaps makes it easier to question
Kwan’s story.

The fact that Aunt Betty’s story is presented first, in the midst of Olivia’s introducing
presentation of her life, gives this story a higher status and therefore a higher credibility. In
addition, it is easy to imagine the child Olivia’s inclination to believe the story that gives a
positive view of her father, and to question Kwan’s view of their father as a disloyal man.

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128 Ibid., p. 5f.
129 Which explains my categorization of the three stories into indirect and explicit explanations, even though
this categorization can be questioned, especially in the case of the Third father-story. Kwan’s first version, see
ibid., p. 12ff.
130 “When I was ten, I learned that my father’s kidneys had killed him.” (Tan, p. 5). However, it is impossible
to tell whether the following story of Kwan’s birth is told at the same time. The only clue is Olivia’s statement
that “By then, I was old enough to know what had to meant.” (Ibid., p. 6).
131 “One time, when I was seven, I played a mean trick on her. […] Another time...”, ibid., p. 12. As above, it
is impossible to tell whether the occasion beginning with “Another time” takes place when Olivia is still seven
years old. However, Olivia’s commentary when Kwan starts telling her story, “This again.” indicates that Kwan
has told the story of their father on repeated occasions, ibid., p. 13.

132 Ibid., p. 6.
When the young Olivia pictures life after death, she imagines finding “the proof that it was [...] her] father who told the truth about how Kwan’s mother died, not Kwan.”

One might assume that these two opposing explanations concerning her father’s history have raised questions and reflections in Olivia as a character. The opposing perspectives of the two stories might explain why her father has become an important theme in Olivia’s reflections.

**Reflect**
I want to define ‘reflection’ as the times when the voice of the narrator is at its clearest. A story can result in a reflection (or the other way around), but reflection itself is pure voice and no story. In a reflection, the narrator speaks directly to her narratee, voicing her thoughts or opinions. In Olivia’s case, the reflecting voice of the narrator belongs to the adult Olivia, sometimes reflecting on things that happened to her as a child. Usually, the reflections are full of questions concerning topics that are important to her as a character. As opposed to explanations, reflections are only loosely connected to a story or an event. On the other hand, the voice of the narrator is more independent here.

The function of reflection is not as common in Olivia’s narration as the function of explanation, but there are a few occasions when she reflects on her identity – of which her father is an important part. Olivia wonders what characteristics she might have inherited from her father, and when she first sees Simon, she notices him “because like me he had a name that didn’t fit with his Asian features”. There follows a short reflection on how names and looks can be very different from one another, and how this discrepancy makes other people ask questions.

The lengthiest reflection on names and identity is found just before Kwan’s telling of the Third father-story, and is intertwined in a dialogue with Olivia’s brother Kevin. Yu writes about this episode that Olivia’s confusion is highlighted when she cannot determine which surname to use: Yee (her Chinese father’s name), Laguni (her stepfather’s name), or Bishop (her husband’s name). Suddenly, she realizes that her life is devoid of meaningful ties and suitable identities.

Even though I interpret Olivia’s reflection somewhat differently than Yu, I do agree that it results in Olivia’s feeling alienated from her brothers as it turns out that Olivia has more

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133 Ibid., p. 52.
134 Ibid., p. 20.
135 Ibid., p. 66.
136 Ibid., p. 156ff.
137 Yu, p. 350.
memories from their biological father than her brothers do, but less of a connection to their stepfather Bob. It can be noted that this reflection on surnames, and Olivia’s decision to use her father’s surname Yee, is what induces Kwan to tell the Third father-story – a story that could be seen as a turning point in the course of the novel.\textsuperscript{138} Thus, despite not being stories in themselves, reflections can have important functions in the events of a novel.\textsuperscript{139}

Olivia finishes her reflection with two questions that relate her choice of surname to notions such as memory, paying “tribute” and feeling “connected”.\textsuperscript{140} These questions are resolved (ironically enough, in the form of a question) in the novel’s last chapter, when Olivia takes Kwan’s last name: “What’s a family name if not a claim to being connected in the future to someone from the past?”\textsuperscript{141} Such a claim could be seen as equivalent to a tribute, and so, the questions have received their answer.

Here, it becomes apparent that Olivia’s narration is part of an identity project. By choosing which stories to tell and thus reconstructing her “identity through reflexive practice”,\textsuperscript{142} as Andreea Deciu Ritivoi writes on the topic of feminism, identity and narrative, Olivia becomes aware of having a choice in the connections that make up her feeling of self. Similarly, telling the story of herself, and thus bringing together the reflexive adult voice of “experience with [the] expectation” present in the young Olivia, she can find meaning and make her identity more complete.\textsuperscript{143}

Judgements or Ideological Reflections
Genette’s “testimonial function” is certainly not in an airtight compartment compared to his “ideological function”.\textsuperscript{144} Comparing his two terms with Lanser’s “extrarepresentational’ acts”,\textsuperscript{145} I have found them all to be somewhat indistinct for the purposes of this analysis. However, combining these three terms gives a few interesting results when looking at Olivia’s voice as a narrator in China.

\textsuperscript{138} Tan, p. 158f.
\textsuperscript{139} For instance, the reflection of doubt on Kwan’s identity (amongst other things), in Olivia’s reaction after the Buncake episode (see chapter 2.2), can be seen as an example of Olivia’s double perception (see chapter 2.3) but also as part of a process that changes Olivia’s world view.
\textsuperscript{140} Tan, p. 157f.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 357.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 232: “As we bring to life an event that happened in the past, we endow it with meaning that combines experience with expectation.”
\textsuperscript{144} Genette 1980, p. 256f. In a later work, Genette accepts a suggestion to change from “ideological” to “interpretative” (Genette 1988, p. 131n). Nevertheless, because the first name suits my analysis better, I have decided to keep on using this term.
\textsuperscript{145} Lanser 1992, p. 16.
When she reaches China, there is a sudden change in Olivia’s narrative voice. The self-centred reflections are here turned into opinions on Chinese society – expressions of her voice that I would like to call ‘judgements’ inspired by Lanser, or with some inspiration from Genette, ‘ideological reflections’. When walking around the markets of the city of Guilin, Olivia tries to find photo opportunities but the contrast between guidebook descriptions and real life is sharp:

> It’s as though China has traded its culture and traditions for the worst attributes of capitalism: rip-offs, disposable goods, and the mass-market frenzy to buy what everyone in the world has and doesn’t need.  

Later on, the three of them are on their way from Guilin to Changmian by car:

> And then we’re in the outskirts of town, both sides of the road lined with mile after mile of identical one-room restaurants. Some are in the stages of being built, their walls layers of brick, mud plaster, and whitewash. Judging from the garish billboard paintings on the front, I guess that all the shops employ the same artist. They advertise the same specialties: orange soda pop and steamy-hot noodle soup. This is competitive capitalism taken to a depressing extreme. Idle waitresses squat outside, watching our car whiz by. What an existence. Their brains must be atrophied from boredom. Do they ever rail against the sheer randomness of their lot in life? It’s like getting the free space on the bingo card and nothing else. Simon is furiously jotting down notes. Has he observed the same despair?  

When reading *The Hundred Secret Senses*, I find that explanations, reflections and judgements are different functions of narration, albeit related to some extent. Genette and Lanser see things differently. Genette’s testimonial function accounts for the narrator’s relationship to her story – a relationship which could be affective, moral or intellectual. Therefore, this function is adequate both in the section on the function of reflection above or in the introducing section called ‘Tell’, but also here, as Olivia’s judgements in the quotes above could be described as expressions of morality, even if what she judges is not the story itself, as much as what the character Olivia sees in the story. Both testimonial and ideological functions are described by Genette as “the narrator’s interventions”, which in my interpretation means that the voice of the narrator is evident – as is the case both in this sub-function of judgements as well as in the function of reflections.

However, the part of the ideological function on which I would like to focus, is “the more didactic form of an authorized commentary”. The two long quotes above are filled with values and opinions in a way that differs from how Olivia’s voice as a narrator has previously

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146 Tan, p. 190.
147 Ibid., p. 199.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
been expressed. This makes me think that the narrator in her authorised voice wants to press her values upon her narratee, in a didactic sense.

Similarly to Genette, Lanser sees no difference between reflections and judgements as examples of “‘extrarepresentational’ acts”.\(^{151}\) Using this term, Lanser wants to make a distinction between narrators that represent (e.g. my own example of indirect explanations) and narrators that undertake the aforementioned acts. ‘Generalizations of the world ‘beyond’ the fiction” are also included in these acts,\(^{152}\) which might function as a way for the narrator to receive a higher status and thus, more authority.\(^{153}\) On the other hand, there is also a risk that by performing these acts, the narrator will be perceived as less reliable.\(^{154}\)

In the quotes above, Olivia judges what she sees as expressions of capitalism in the city of Guilin. As a narrator tightly connected to her story as her own main character, lacking “narrative self-reference”,\(^{155}\) this is as far as Olivia can come in performing her extrarepresentational acts. Whether she manages to reach outside of fiction or not, is a question that will remain unanswered.

How then does Olivia the narrator dare to be seen as unreliable, and why does her voice change in China? The answers might be found in Kwan and Olivia’s relationship. When leaving Olivia’s home country and reaching China, the sisters’ balance in authority, which Olivia has fought so hard throughout her life to uphold, shifts:

> We’ve been in China less than eight hours, and already she’s taking control of my life. We’re on her terrain, we have to go by her rules, speak her language. She’s in Chinese heaven.\(^{156}\)

Being in Kwan’s territory, Olivia needs to find new ways that can help her to keep her own self intact. As a method towards defining herself as a person, instead of letting Kwan do it for her, Olivia uses her authority as a narrator and attempts to increase this authority by explicitly expressing her opinions (which tend to judge Kwan’s “terrain”). These opinions are sometimes the opposite of Kwan’s, but generally similar to Simon’s:

> The whole scene gives Guilin the look and stench of a pretty face marred by tawdry lipstick, gapped teeth, and an advanced case of periodontal disease. “Boy, oh boy,” whispers Simon. “If Guilin is China’s most beautiful city, I can’t wait to see what the cursed village of Changmian looks like.”

\(^{151}\) Lanser 1992, p. 16.
\(^{152}\) Ibid.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., p. 17.
\(^{155}\) Lanser 1992, p. 16.
\(^{156}\) Tan, p. 186.
We catch up with Kwan. “Everything is entirely different, no longer the same.” Her voice seems tinged with nostalgia. She must be sad to see how horribly Guilin has changed over the past thirty years. But then Kwan says in a proud and marveling voice: “So much progress, everything is so much better.”

As a matter of fact, in all three examples of Olivia’s judgemental voice above, Simon seems to agree with Olivia. Perhaps these voiced opinions could be seen as a way of increasing Olivia’s authority as a narrator, but also as a way of getting further away from Kwan by getting closer to Simon. Worth noticing is that it was the thought of Simon that helped Olivia when she for the first time managed to “stand up to Kwan”. The formal risk of seeming a less reliable narrator is of minor importance, as Olivia is more of a character that happens to narrate, than a narrator that happens to be a character.

It is suitable that in the scene when Kwan and Olivia start coming closer to each other, Kwan uses the ideas of capitalism in order to criticise the “short memory” of Chinese people. Kwan poses less of a threat to Olivia as a character (like in this example) than as a narrator – therefore she can be allowed to express her opinion while Olivia is the narrator.

Closing Remarks
To summarise, the three functions of narration examined above are more or less related to one another. The explanations of Olivia’s hatred, fear and guilt against Kwan, consist of examples that are both indirect and explicit. The function of explanation has an important formal function in its turn, that is, to connect episodes with one another, using Genette’s causal connection. One of the narrators attempts to build a relationship through narration, in itself as well as in the form of secrets, distraction and teaching Chinese. At the same time, the autodiegetic aspect of this narration makes that narrative an explanation of Kwan’s guilt. The function of explicit explanation is situated in between the indirect explanation and the reflection, as its examples combine the inside of the stories with the outside voice of the narrator. Last but not least, the function of reflection can be seen as expressing the voice of the narrator, either in a self-centred and quite neutral sense, or with judgements attempting to reach outside of the fiction.

Each function contains formal aspects, with Genette’s connections and functions as the more prominent ones. In the section on the function of reflection, Genette’s terms are combined with Lanser’s, in order to reach beyond the labelling of narratology and attempt to explain the characters’/narrators’ behaviours. Intertwined with formal notions, the father-

157 Ibid., p. 191
158 And in one example on ibid., p. 200.
159 Ibid., p. 82.
160 Ibid, p. 322.
stories and the relationship between the two narrators/characters are important themes in all of these three functions.

The common denominator of these themes is the process of Olivia’s identity. According to Stuart Hall, the procedure of finding a cultural identity can be seen either as “a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity”, or as “the production of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past” one fixed and the other continuous, out of which Hall prefers the latter. In Tan’s novel, both these tendencies are present. Firstly, the village of Changmian lies preserved between its mountains, until the main characters are ready to discover it and be changed by it. Secondly, the first half of the novel shows how Olivia through connecting the stories of her past with reflections, and in the second half of the novel through using her authorial voice as a narrator, finds a somewhat insecure way of being herself and not be influenced by Kwan. However, the influence of Kwan’s narration becomes more vital as they reach China, which the following chapter attempts to examine.

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161 Hall, p. 225.
162 Ibid., p. 224.
2.2 Influence Thinking and Behaviour
This chapter will examine how narrated stories can ‘influence’ their narratees. I have divided
the chapter into two sections, depending on what results the function of influence receives: a
change in behaviour or a change in thinking. The examples will mainly be drawn from
Kwan’s narration, as her stories have a clearer effect of influence than Olivia’s narration. In
the first section of the chapter (‘Influence Thinking’), the story in the example does not result
in a change in the narratee’s behaviour as much as in a change in her thinking. However, in
the second section of the chapter (‘Influence Behaviour’), this initial influence is generally
followed by some sort of movement that can be seen as a result from the narration.

Influence Thinking
In this part of the analysis, where I try to examine how narration functions in order to
influence the narratee, one hypothesis is that narration can have an influence on how the
narratee thinks. A particular episode, which I will from now on refer to as the ‘Buncake
episode’ or the ‘story of Buncake’, makes clear how a story can make its narratee enter into
a state of doubt. The following text aims to investigate the various aspects that make this
function of influence possible.

Olivia’s reaction to this story is notably stronger than has formerly been the case with
Kwan’s stories. Of course, throughout most of the novel she keeps her resistance to Kwan’s
story of Nunumu, but it seems that the story of Buncake is more difficult to ignore. This clear
and strong reaction on the part of the narratee is one of the reasons behind my choice to
analyse this particular extract. Another reason is that the questions raised by the narratee’s
reaction are essential to the novel as a whole.

Olivia’s feeling of uncertainty in relation to this episode arises when she, after arriving in
China, talks to Kwan’s old family friend Du Lili and becomes puzzled. The question of Du
Lili’s age induces Kwan to tell Olivia the secret that Du Lili, after the death of her adopted
child, “was so crazy with sorrow she believed she became her daughter”. Olivia wants to
know “the whole truth”, and she asks how Du Lili’s daughter died. Kwan in her turn asks
Olivia not to be scared, and starts telling her the story of Buncake.

What follows is almost an entire chapter of detailed description of Kwan and her family’s
everyday life during Kwan’s childhood. Kwan and Buncake lived together with their

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163 Tan, pp. 245-259.
164 For instance, see Olivia’s non-existent reaction to the Third father-story (ibid., p. 160ff).
165 Ibid., p. 237. Olivia is surprised to hear that Du Lili is two months younger than Kwan, as she has the look
of someone much older.
166 Ibid., p. 246.
167 Ibid., p. 247.
respective caretakers in a relationship equivalent to sisterhood. After playing in a ditch during a flood, they were both seriously injured and believed to be dead, until Kwan miraculously woke up in her friend’s body. This scared Du Lili and Big Ma, but after a series of dramatic events including a visit to a ghost-talker, everyone in the village seems to forge the supernatural events into a more realistic memory. Kwan ends her story by telling Olivia of how the two of them met in the yin world, and that Kwan returned to life because of her promise to Olivia.

In her reaction of confusion and doubt, Olivia questions notions such as the identity and sanity of her sister, and also their relation as sisters. Olivia additionally asks herself if there is anyone alive in the village who can tell her the truth. The answer is: probably not, at least not in a language that she could understand. Perhaps this last revelation is what causes Olivia to give up questioning Kwan, and to start questioning herself. The result of this process is evident in the novel’s last chapter.

Starting off by exploring the ideas that are questioned in Olivia’s reaction, I will expand the discussion with a few additional suggestions as to how narration causes doubt to arise, with reference to the Buncake episode in *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

**Identity**

Su-Lin Yu states that

> The second half of the novel disrupts the tempting symmetry of the opposition between Kwan and Olivia by making Kwan an embodiment of multiple identities. It anticipates what has become familiar as poststructuralist notions of identity by portraying Kwan as an elusive and ambiguous character. In China, the representation of Kwan becomes deeply involved with a sister-friend, Buncake.

I would rather say that the notion of Kwan’s ambiguous identity is indeed deepened in the Buncake episode, but that it has been dormant throughout the novel – ever since Kwan first started telling Olivia the stories about her incarnation Nunumu.

In her reaction to the story of Buncake, Olivia does not entirely object to the idea of Kwan’s ambiguous identity – instead, she reflects on childhood memories and finds good arguments to why Kwan’s story could be true:

> Did the flesh-and-blood Kwan drown as a little girl? That would account for the disparity between the photo of the skinny baby our father showed us and the chubby girl we met at the airport. It would also explain why Kwan doesn’t resemble my father or my brothers and me in any way.

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168 Unfortunately, Yu refrains from a definition of these “poststructuralist notions of identity”.

169 Yu, p. 351.
Maybe my wish from childhood came true: The real Kwan died, and the village sent us this other girl, thinking we wouldn’t know the difference between a ghost and someone who thought she was a ghost.\textsuperscript{170}

The question is how significant one’s body is to the idea of self. As Olivia comes to the conclusion that Kwan is still her sister, no matter what body she has, it seems that her concept of identity is only loosely connected to the body.

Olivia concludes in a comment on a childhood episode that “when I was a kid, I didn’t have strong enough boundaries between imagination and reality”.\textsuperscript{171} These boundaries are a characteristic that differ between the adult Olivia and Kwan throughout the first half of the novel, but after the telling of the Third father-story, and as they reach China, Olivia’s boundaries slowly start to dissolve once more.

\textbf{Sanity}
After hearing the story of Buncake, Olivia’s sense of reality is still strong enough to make her question Kwan’s sanity:

Is Kwan – that is, this woman who claims to be my sister – actually a demented person who believed she was Kwan? [...] Did a terrible trauma in childhood cause her to believe she had switched bodies with someone else?\textsuperscript{172}

The question of Kwan’s sanity is not a new one. During her presentation of Kwan in the first chapter, Olivia describes Kwan’s stay at the mental hospital, and in the same chapter, Olivia tells the reader how she tries to avoid calling her sister crazy. On these occasions, the discussion of Kwan’s sanity is related to Kwan’s abilities, like for instance her claim to seeing ghosts, or her way of curing people and electronics. It is never a question of Kwan being someone else, which explains Olivia’s strong reaction to the story of Buncake.

An exception to this clear view of Kwan’s identity is of course when Kwan tells Olivia of her former self Nunumu. However, the story of Nunumu takes place far away in time and space (although the latter is only the case when it is told in the USA), and can easily be cast away as a childhood memory or a dream, related to the time when Olivia’s boundaries between real and imaginary were not as strong as they are in the present. In addition, it seems that Olivia never mentions Kwan’s sanity in connection with the Nunumu story. In contrast to the story of Nunumu, the story of Buncake is told in plain daylight, and moreover it involves Du Lili, who is still alive, and Big Ma, who died just recently. This closeness in time, the daylight and the real people involved, make the story of Buncake seem more realistic and

\textsuperscript{170} Tan, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., p. 258.
thus, more difficult to ignore. Another difference between the story of Buncake and the Nunumu story worth noting is the hesitancy with which Kwan begins her narration. In the case of the story of Nunumu, it is Olivia who decides not to listen, but on this occasion, Kwan asks her narratee’s permission and it is granted. This new hesitancy on Kwan’s behalf might have the effect of raising Olivia’s interest.

The issue of Kwan’s sanity is deeply related to how one chooses to define dreams on the one hand, and memories on the other. Also, by Chinese standards Kwan might not be considered insane.

**Sisterhood**

Trying to choose whether or not to believe Kwan’s story, Olivia realises that if Kwan is in fact someone else, this in its turn means that they might not even be related. But what is sisterhood, and is a physical bond necessary? Olivia ponders:

> Then again, how can Kwan not be my sister? [...] Even if we aren’t genetically related, isn’t she still my sister? Yes, of course. Yet I want to know what parts of her story might be true.

To Yu, sisterhood is important to the novel as a whole, as a structuring principle among other things. Yu also states that:

> The novels of Amy Tan and Cristina Garcia, for instance, not only challenge the validity and general application of the traditionally idealistic sisterhood but also adumbrate a radically alternative figuration of sisterhood.

In the story of Buncake, and in Olivia’s reaction to it, one can see examples of how the idea of sisterhood is explored and made more complex. The story complicates Olivia’s view on sisterhood, in the case of Kwan’s identity, but also as an example of a different kind of sisterhood. Kwan and Buncake are not related genetically in any way, but they live “in the same house” and sleep “in the same bed”. Kwan tells of how she is the only one who can understand Buncake’s mysterious behaviour, and knows of her traumatic background. This understanding comes without words, because they are both children and thus “still close to the time before this life”. Their communication is also made easier in that they share similar sad experiences. Perhaps the relationship between Kwan and Buncake could be seen as

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173 Ibid., p. 82.
174 Ibid., p. 247.
175 These issues will be discussed in the section below concerning truth and reality.
176 Ibid., p. 258f.
177 Ibid., p. 347.
178 Ibid.
179 Tan, p. 251.
180 Ibid., p. 248.
Kwan’s idea of an “idealistic sisterhood”. Following Yu’s argument, the relationship between Olivia and Kwan is portrayed as radically different from this ideal.

**Truth and Reality**

However, when it comes to experiences and memories, it is difficult to find out what really happened, something which Olivia becomes aware of. She realises that Du Lili’s or the people of the village’s version of what happened might not be any more trustworthy than Kwan’s version. The many versions contradict one another, and there is no possibility of ever finding out the real truth – something which becomes even more evident at Big Ma’s funeral a few weeks later – after Kwan’s disappearance. According to Maggie Ann Bowers, the occurrence of several versions of truth is a sign that “oral storytelling techniques” have been adapted, which is indicative of a magical realist text:

> In a text where categories between the real and the magical have already been broken down, allowing for more than one version of truth to be proposed, the use of such storytelling techniques which assume that there are multiple versions of a story, emphasizes the possibility of expressing multiple perspectives in the text.

Indirectly presenting to Olivia the possibility of multiple realities, following a questioning of Olivia’s view on reality, Kwan’s narration deepens the confusion in the mind of her narratee: between Kwan’s short telling of the secret of Du Lili, and the longer version of the story of Buncake, Olivia argues with herself to be practical, but at the same time she is confused and wants to know more. She feels as if she is in a dream “where the threads of logic between sentences keep disintegrating” and comes to the conclusion that she “can’t accept two contradictory stories as the whole truth”. Unfortunately, the longer version of the story leaves Olivia in an even greater state of confusion, but her search for a truth that she can believe in continues:

> Who can tell me the truth? Du Lili? She isn’t any more reliable than Kwan. Big Ma is dead. And no one else in the village who would be old enough to remember speaks anything other than Changmian. Even if they did speak Mandarin, how can I ask? “Hey, tell me, is my sister really my sister? Is she a ghost or just insane?”

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181 Yu, p. 347.
182 Tan, p. 354.
184 Ibid. Magical realism will be explained below, and the notion of oral narration will be explored further in chapter 2.3. The three different stories of Olivia’s and Kwan’s father, is another example where multiple truths are present in the text.
185 Tan, p. 246f.
186 Ibid., p. 259.
Clearly, the truth is important to Olivia, but Kwan has a different conception of reality, and this complicates Olivia’s search. To Olivia, truth and reality are closely related. To Kwan, dreams can be as real as memories, a conception which becomes apparent in her story of the dream where she met Olivia in the yin world. After telling Olivia about this dream, Kwan asks her: “Now you remember?”, to which Olivia replies in the negative. To Kwan, both memories and dreams can be shared as collective experiences. The view on dreams that Kwan maintains can be explained as being a part of Chinese culture – an idea that Begoña Simal González explores with the help of Robert Hegel. This cultural interpretation opens up the possibility that Olivia’s questioning of Kwan’s sanity could be related to her American definition of reality and imagination.

**Magical Realism**

This blurring of reality and fantasy is one of the characteristics of the modus ‘magical realism’. González is one amongst several writers claiming that Tan’s novel belongs to this modus. The magic or imaginary is in González’s analysis connected to China and Kwan, while the realistic narration is more closely related to Olivia’s scientific and American thinking. These two opposites start merging once they reach China, which is clear from González’s example where Olivia first sets her eyes on Changmian and feels “as if the membrane separating the two halves of [her] life has finally been shed”.

The story of Buncake starts out in a realistic mode, with detailed descriptions of how to cook frogs, and the tragic story of how Buncake’s parents died. However, the mysterious bond between the two girls is carried to extremes when Kwan’s spirit enters Buncake’s body. Nevertheless, the realistic remains in the story, merged with the magical, which has a somewhat comical effect in the incident when the ghost child wets her pants and the two women start “arguing about the color, the stink, the size of [her] puddle”.

Similar to Olivia’s way of looking at the world, Bower’s view is that truth and reality are related. She writes about cases of magical realism where

The root of this transgressive and subversive aspect lies in the fact that, once the category of truth has been brought into question and the category of the real broken down or

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187 Ibid., p. 258.
189 This discussion could be compared to Olivia’s double perception and Kwan’s order to “Think Chinese.” (Tan, p. 269) in chapter 2.3.
190 See for instance González, p. 99. See also Delicka, pp. 25-33.
191 Tan, p. 205 and González, p. 102. This quote is also referred to in the section on the function of remembrance, and also in the section concerning the sub-function of Olivia’s double perception, in chapter 2.3.
192 Tan, p. 254.
overturned, the boundaries of other categories become vulnerable. The reader becomes aware that if the category of the real is not definite then all assumptions of truth are also at stake.193

Applying this quote to Olivia’s reaction on the story of Buncake, it seems that when more than Du Lili’s factual age is at stake – that is, when reality is questioned – Olivia’s feeling of doubt spreads into adjacent areas such as identity, sanity, sisterhood and truth, of which the latter is the most significant and most closely related to reality.

**Authority, Truth and Reality**

Slowly losing her grip on reality, not knowing whom to trust, Olivia simultaneously loses her sense of authority. According to Ashcroft *et al.*, there is in Said’s or Foucault’s ways of thinking a connection between truth and power:

Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, the production of truth is a function of power [...].194

Olivia no longer believes in her previously held worldview, and realises that she will probably never find one version of reality. Her method for coping with this insecurity is to make a decision on the issue that she can control – that is, her view on Kwan as a sister – and let the remaining issues stay unanswered. Bringing together the two quotes from Bowers with the quote from Ashcroft *et al.*, I would suggest that the Buncake episode, establishing the possibility of multiple realities,195 works in a transgressive way to undermine the concept of a singular power system. Instead, there are at least three different authorities to believe, all with their own definition of reality: Du Lili, who to Olivia seemed more sensible than Kwan but who turns out to be “crazy with sorrow”;196 Kwan, who has taught Olivia everything she knows of China and the Chinese language, and who has functioned as a substitute mother during Olivia’s upbringing, but has always been considered a bit “wacky”;197 or the more realistic version of Big Ma and the elderly people of the village (who she cannot communicate with), which is similar to Kwan’s story, only mixed with a bit of forgetfulness, according to Kwan. Olivia’s own authority is no longer valid, now that they have reached China, “where

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193 Bowers, p. 67f.
195 Huntley discusses multiple versions of stories and states that “Tan seems to be suggesting that the truth exists in both in each version of a story and somewhere in the unspoken narrative or in the spaces between stories” (Huntley, p. 119).
196 According to Kwan (Tan, p. 246).
197 Ibid., p. 19.
[... she has] no control, where everything is unpredictable, totally insane”. As her “system of rules” is questioned, so is her fixed concept of reality.200

To sum up, the above text examines how aspects such as the exploration of identity and sisterhood, a merging of the real and the imaginary, and the occurrence of multiple realities (and consequently, many authorities to believe in) in the story of Buncake are combined to give the narratee a reaction of doubt and estrangement. These factors are closely related to Olivia’s own sense of self and to how she sees herself as different from Kwan. The differences between Olivia and Kwan when it comes to definitions of truth, reality and dreams are accentuated in Olivia’s reaction to the story of Buncake. There are also many differences between the narration of the Buncake story on the one hand, and the telling of the story of Nunumu on the other, which partly accounts for Olivia’s stronger reaction in the case of the former.

As I have shown, these topics are also relevant in relation to other passages in the novel, both before and after the Buncake episode, and can therefore be said to have significance for the novel as a whole. However, few direct references to this story, apart from discussions on the same topics and a mentioning at Big Ma’s funeral, are visible in the narration that takes place after this episode. Structurally speaking, it could be argued whether the Buncake episode is a turning point, a symmetry disruption, or simply a reversal of the process where Olivia tries to adopt a rational worldview. Nevertheless, the telling of the Buncake story could be seen as an important part in the process that finally changes Olivia’s way of looking at the world.

**Influence Behaviour**
In this section I will deal with the most concrete form of the function of influence; it is also the one that is more evident in the novel. The influence of stories on the movements of characters will be discussed in reference to three examples which I will call the ‘Third father-

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198 Ibid., p. 261.
199 Ashcroft et al., p. 165.
200 Hence Olivia’s reaction of doubt on one hand, and the ideological reflections in chapter 2.1 on the other.
201 E.g. Kwan’s sanity, the notion of identity and the blurred line between reality and imagination recur.
202 González, p. 102.
203 Yu, p. 351.
story’, 205 ‘Young girl’s wish’, 206 and ‘Simon and the cave’. 207 These excerpts are related in the sense that they all concern stories told or retold by Kwan, and are all parts of Kwan’s wishes as a character. 208 They are also amongst the clearest examples of the function of influence that figure in the novel.

**The Third Father-story**

The Narratee
The story which I choose to call the ‘Third father-story’ is told by Kwan to Olivia just before Olivia is persuaded to travel with her to China, together with Simon. There is no comment or reaction from the narratee Olivia upon this particular story. 209 Instead, on the two pages following this story, Olivia describes Kwan’s technique of persuasion, her own phone conversation with Simon which ends with Olivia’s invitation to him to come with them, and the beginning of their journey to China. 210

Kwan’s and Simon’s persuasions are two factors that, combined with the Third father-story, might be what influences Olivia to change her mind, follow Kwan’s advice and travel to China. However, my aim being the exploration of functions of narration, I will focus on the influencing function of the Third father-story.

Seen formally, this story could be defined as a turning point in the course of the novel and the main narrator’s telling of her life’s story. If correct, this assumption would strengthen my hypothesis that the Third father-story is a significant event in Olivia’s life; that it causes her to change direction and to begin the process towards an acceptance of Kwan and her way of looking at life. Olivia’s voice changes radically when they reach China, turning into judgements on Chinese society and reinforcing her viewpoint as a liberal American. 211 Anna Johansson writes of how a turning point can divide life into two categories of time and space:

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205 Tan, p. 160ff. However, my focus will be on what happens after the story, rather than on the story itself. For a discussion of this father-story as an indirect explanation, see chapter 2.1.
206 “Young girl’s wish” occurs twice in Tan’s novel: the first time, it is the name of a chapter (Tan, p. 186); the second time, it is the name of a mountain which in its turn is named after a story (ibid., p. 194). Further references to this name will be made to the story, or my example of Kwan’s retelling of the story (ibid., p. 194f).
207 Ibid., pp. 271-277. These stories are also referred to in this dissertation as the ‘Changmian stories’, see part 1 and chapter 2.3. The change of name and the narrower selection of stories in this chapter is an attempt to show that the focus of the analysis is different.
208 Kwan’s utmost wish is to become free of the guilt she has carried with her from her former lifetime (ibid., p. 343). The way I interpret the novel, there are a few prerequisites in order for Kwan to reach this goal: Olivia must come to China with Kwan (ibid., p. 195); she must redefine Kwan’s story of Nunumu into a memory of being Miss Banner (ibid., p. 320f); and Olivia and Simon must become a couple again (ibid., p. 343).
209 As said in chapter 2.1.
210 Tan, p. 165f.
211 As said earlier in the section ‘Judgements or Ideological Reflections’, chapter 2.1.
then – now and there – here. Olivia’s more critical voice, which strengthens the contrast between her and the surroundings, is an example of such a division. The journey in itself, from one country to another, is an additional example, as are the discussions with their Chinese taxi driver Rocky about differences between China and the USA.

There are fewer examples of the division between then and now. During the flight, Olivia thinks about first times: “The first time I’ve gone to China. The first time since I was a child that Kwan will be my constant companion for two weeks. The first time that Simon and I will travel together and sleep in separate rooms.” And on their first night in Changmian, Olivia comments that she and Simon “are in the same bed for the first time in nearly ten months” against her will but there is no other option. Apart from these thoughts of now and then, there are few references to their everyday life in San Francisco. This could be due to another shift in Olivia’s narration: the reduced number of flashbacks, even if a few of them still occur.

A formal aspect of how Olivia’s narration changes in China and after the Third father-story is the change from past tense to present tense. Present tense has been used earlier in the novel, but becomes more and more frequent the closer Olivia comes to describing her and Simon’s divorce. From page 132 onwards, present tense is used as a standard in Olivia’s narration, with exceptions in flashbacks and in Kwan’s stories. As fewer flashbacks occur in Olivia’s narration in China, the action taking place in present tense is increased. However, the gap between Simon’s and Olivia’s break-up and the Third father-story ending on page 163 indicates that there might be (at least) two turning points in the novel: the first one concerning Olivia and Simon’s divorce; the second would be the revelation about the false name of Kwan and Olivia’s father, and the subsequent trip to China. Johansson mentions a positive turning point in one of her examples, but I would like to argue that in the case of Olivia’s narration, the first turning point is a negative one while the second turning point is slightly more positive. Olivia’s shift to the present tense might be seen as a formal way to highlight the difference in time between now and then, even if this shift is more connected to the narration than to the character Olivia.

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212 Johansson, p. 321.
213 The discussions take place on Tan, p. 198f and 202f. A third argument are remarks such as “My first morning in China” (ibid., p. 186) or “in China, where I have no control, where everything is unpredictable, totally insane” (ibid., p. 261).
214 Ibid., p. 167.
215 Ibid., p. 277.
216 However, Olivia’s flashbacks in China occur later on, when the initial excitement of the cultural clash has calmed down, and these short flashbacks do not have an obvious function of strengthening this clash. (ibid, p. 304f, p. 307f and p. 311).
217 Ibid., p. 3f, p. 54 and p. 64.
218 Johansson, p. 354.
To conclude, events following the Third father-story could be seen as a turning point in Johansson’s sense of the word when it comes to place, but less so when looking at comments regarding time (“then – now”). The shift in Olivia’s voice as a narrator, the decreased number of flashbacks and a more frequent use of the present tense indicate however a turning point in terms of the narration – aspects admittedly not included in Johansson’s definition. When agreeing to travel to China, Olivia begins to change her way of thinking, and acts in a way that will lead to additional influences and a more substantial change in Olivia as a character.

The Narrator
Kwan’s stated intent to go to China with Olivia is reinforced several times during the course of the novel. Even before she went to the USA and met her, Kwan made a wish to return to China with her sister.219 Furthermore, in the beginning of the novel, taking place after Kwan’s fiftieth birthday, Olivia tells of how “Kwan has become even more troublesome”.220 Here, Kwan says that “she must go back before everything changes and it’s too late”.221

Later on, Olivia is overwhelmed with guilt for not appreciating Kwan’s love, and decides to take her sister out for lunch. When mentioning her tasks for the day, including a change of surname, Kwan chokes and insists on telling Olivia the secret of how their father stole his name.

Kwan finishes her narration as a response to Olivia’s approaching name change and sees the story as an argument in their on-going discussion about travelling to China:

That’s why you must go to China, Libby-ah. When I saw that letter yesterday I said to myself, This [sic] is your fate waiting to happen! People in Changmian might still remember his name, my auntie for one, I’m sure of it. [...] You and me, the two of us, we can change our father’s name back to its true one. [...] Yes, yes, the three of us together, Simon, you, me. I think this is the most practical, the best way to change your name.222

The above quote is an example situated in between what Huntley calls Kwan’s “two separate and distinctive voices” as it moves on from narrating a story in past tense,223 towards persuading Olivia in the present. I agree with Huntley on the two voices of Kwan (explained further below), although I would like to add that the two voices use different languages.

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219 Tan, p. 195.
220 Ibid., p. 23.
221 Ibid. It is ironic that Kwan herself brings about this change by her disappearance in the cave, which results in the arrival of scientists, a TV crew and tourists.
222 Ibid., p. 163. “That letter” refers to the magazine article that Olivia and Simon dream of creating together while travelling to China, which has now become accepted by the magazine, but too late...
223 Huntley, p. 123.
Therefore, it is no wonder that Kwan’s voice is “fluent” when telling a story in Chinese, while sounding like an immigrant when she talks to Olivia in English.\textsuperscript{224}

Extending Huntley’s idea of two voices, Kwan could be divided in two: Kwan the character and Kwan the narrator. In Huntley’s words, there is a routine of Kwan’s immigrant voice irritating Olivia, while her fluent voice “transports Olivia – and the reader – into another world and another time”.\textsuperscript{225} In the case of the Third father-story, the two Kwans co-operate in their influence on Olivia. Kwan the character has tried persuading Olivia before,\textsuperscript{226} without success, but it is in combination with her temporary authority as a narrator that Kwan finally manages to get Olivia on her side.

An important step towards influencing her narratee to act, is for Kwan the narrator to convince her narratee of the story’s truth – or, at least for the story to feel true enough to make her narratee feel insecure. Interestingly, as Huntley points out:

\begin{quote}
Amy Tan does not privilege Kwan’s version [of the Third father-story]. Kwan, in fact, prefaces her tale by saying that she heard it from Li Bin-bin, her mother’s sister who raised her – and who, under the circumstances, would be unlikely to feel kindly toward the bogus Jack Yee.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

How, then, does Kwan manage to convince Olivia of the truth in her story? In chapter 2.1, I wrote about Olivia’s inclination towards believing the “good” story of her father (see the section ‘Explicit Explanation’). This inclination makes her shift in thought upon hearing the Third father-story even more puzzling. In order to reach some sort of answer, I have listed differences between the two earlier father-stories and the Third father-story: the length, the amount of details and the respective age of the narrator and her narratee. The Third father-story is both longer and contains more details than the two earlier ones. In addition, both Kwan and Olivia are a great deal older when the last story is told.

There are at least four possible explanations as to why Olivia lets herself become influenced (if indeed she does) by the Third father-story: firstly, her mental resistance against Kwan might be weaker as Olivia the character is going through a period of changes at the time of the telling. A second possibility might be Olivia’s feeling of guilt towards Kwan, or thirdly, Olivia might have matured enough to be able to open up and lower her resistance. A fourth option could be that Kwan’s stated goals somehow coincide with Olivia’s less clear ones. The length and the plentiful details of Kwan’s story also function in making it more

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{226} Tan, p. 23, p. 27, p. 64. Kwan tries to persuade Olivia after the Third father-story as well, ibid. p. 142 and p. 152.
\textsuperscript{227} Huntley, p. 120.
credible. Admitting her own lack of memories, and exposing the insecurity of her source might also be a way for Kwan to – paradoxically enough – render her story more believable.

To sum up, Olivia the narratee is influenced by Kwan’s narration of the Third father-story to change her attitude towards the journey to China, and to finally take a first step on the path that will change her life and self more thoroughly, as is shown in the novel’s final chapter. Apart from Kwan’s narration of the Third father-story, the persuasive conversations with Simon and Kwan as a character have a role in this influence. The insecurity of the narratee functions in making the influence possible, as do Kwan’s wishes and the co-operation of Kwan’s two voices, where the narrator’s voice increases the authority of Kwan as a persuading character in the novel. Being moved by the possible truth in Kwan’s story, Olivia reaches a turning point, which is most evident in the change of her voice as a narrator and in how her story increasingly takes place in the present.

**Young Girl’s Wish**
The importance of believing in the story is most apparent in my second example, ‘Young girl’s wish’. Here, Kwan tells of a memory from when she was young about how young girls believed in, or wanted to believe in, a story so much that they were influenced into performing a sort of ritual and thus complete the story with an ending of their own. The story gives them hope that once they have performed this ritual of raising birds and letting them free, their wishes will come true. Curiously, the story is not very realistic, but the girls’ hopes are strong – perhaps so strong that Kwan feels compelled to explain that “It’s a story, just superstition”.

But even if the story is superstition, it might still have a role to play in the half realistic world of Tan’s novel. Actually, in a magical sense, the story of the Young girl’s wish has made Kwan’s and Olivia’s journey to China possible, as it influenced Kwan into performing a ritual making (most of) her wishes come true.

In contrast to the Third father-story, the influencing function of the story of Young girl’s wish takes place long before the present in Olivia’s narration. There is also a discussion between Kwan and Olivia regarding the story and Kwan’s memory, as opposed to the Third father-story which lacked comments or discussions. The story of Young girl’s wish, on the other hand, lacks an original narrator (even if Kwan is the one who retells it to Olivia). It

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228 As in the novel’s last chapter, when Olivia gains peace of mind by believing Kwan’s stories (Tan, p. 357f).
229 Ibid., p. 194.
could be assumed that this story is one of the more oral and collective ones in Kwan’s narration.  

**Simon and the Cave**

While the narratee’s belief in the story is difficult to discern in my first example of how stories function to influence behaviour, but more significant in the second, the third example makes this notion even more complex. On their first evening in Changmian, Kwan tells stories about the village and its nearby cave system while Simon and Olivia listen. But do they really listen? It seems that even though both Simon and Olivia are part of the same narrative situation, and hear the same stories, they choose to listen to different aspects of these stories – something that becomes clear when looking at their different reactions.

This example lacks neither comments nor narrator, as opposed to the second example of Young girl’s wish, which is commented but lacks information of the original narrator. The missing part in the third example is instead the act. Therefore, I cannot argue for the story’s influence on the actions of the characters – even if Simon mysteriously turns up inside the cave closer to the novel’s ending – but rather show how it changes Simon’s behaviour and makes him willing to act – despite, or even because of, Olivia’s fear that he may do so.

Looking at the behaviour of the narratees during Kwan’s narration, one finds that Simon stops listening on two occasions. The first time, he encourages Kwan to go on telling her story, and Simon seems transfixed by it, but as it turns out, his pacing is a reaction to a thought of his own. The second time, he tries to persuade Olivia to come with him to the cave, while Olivia tries, with the help of Kwan, to persuade him not to go there. After a while, Olivia perceives that “Simon isn’t listening anymore”, and he is still determined to seek out the cave. However, in contrast to Olivia and Simon’s phone conversation after the Third father-story, this time, Olivia will not let herself be persuaded by him. One could say that Kwan’s narration has influenced Simon’s behaviour to become even more persuasive.

The following day, Simon persuades Olivia to go for a walk with him. It is unclear whether his intention is to go looking for the cave or not. After a fight, they become separated. Olivia and Kwan go looking for Simon and finally find him inside the cave. In his account of how he spent his time while away from Olivia, the question of how and why he

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230 Such as the dragon story discussed in chapter 2.3.
231 Tan, p. 272.
233 Ibid., p. 276.
234 Ibid., p. 286.
235 Ibid., p. 345.
ended up in the cave remains unanswered. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that without Kwan’s stories, he would not have had the idea of going there. Additionally, Olivia blames Simon’s enthusiasm about the cave on Kwan’s stories: “Kwan is looking at me, and I want to shout at her as well: This is your fault! You and your damn stories!”

Olivia and Simon hear the same stories of the Changmian caves, but come to different conclusions. They equally believe some parts of the stories, and disregard other ones, but their foci are different. While Simon wants to believe that Kwan speaks the truth about the existence of the cave, Olivia’s perception of the stories is of the dangers related to the cave. Olivia perceives the underlying warning in Kwan’s stories, while Simon in my interpretation chooses to make his own ending to the cave stories – an ending of his entry “into the world of fame and fortune”. Or perhaps, Simon is adding a new story to Kwan’s catalogue of cave stories – a story where he is the main character and hero/explorer, rather than Kwan, the people of the village or the missionaries.

Later on, Olivia resents “Simon’s carelessness”, and reflects on differences between men and women. Possibly, their differences in listening could partly be related to their different traits as characters. Moreover, Olivia has heard Kwan’s stories before, and is used to resisting the influencing voice of Kwan the narrator.

One conclusion to be drawn from this example is that defining the story as true is a step towards acting, or at least towards a willingness to act – depending on one’s character. In addition, different narratees may be influenced in different ways by the same stories. As a narratee, one has the choice to stop listening in order to increase one’s authority and to become the narrator of one’s own ending, or to a whole new story, even if the initial idea comes from the stories of the first narrator.

**Authority**

A formal curiosity in Kwan’s stated goals, and her ability to achieve them, is that in Lanser’s terms, Kwan is a private narrator. As such, she is “frequently delineated for us by

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236 Ibid., p. 349f.
237 Ibid., p. 277.
238 Ibid., p. 272.
239 Ibid., p. 276.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid., p. 297.
242 Ibid., p. 296f.
243 “I want to tell him it’s another one of Kwan’s stories, but I can’t catch his eye.” (ibid., p. 271) This hypothesis somewhat undermines the argument of the influence of the Third father-story, but strengthens the possibility that Kwan’s goals in this first example somehow coincide with Olivia’s.
244 One of which is going to China with Olivia. Another one is to become free of her guilt by making Simon and Olivia get back together.
a public narrator or by other characters. Moreover, [...] the purposes of his or her narration are subordinate to the design of the story (and to the goals of the public narrator, if there is one)".246 Surprisingly, in Tan’s novel, the private narrator is the one with stated goals.247 The goals of Olivia (the public narrator) are less clear, but it could be concluded from her reflections that she wants to find a fuller identity for herself. Thus, in Tan’s novel Lanser’s formal system of authority is questioned and sometimes completely inverted. There are more examples of this inversion, apart from the respective goals of the narrators. For instance, the narration of the novel slowly shifts from the public narrator towards a preference for the private narrator. Huntley notes that:

Although the novel is Olivia’s story, Kwan gradually takes over with her distinctive talk story blend of travel narrative, legend, folktale, wry observation, and misremembered or reconstructed history as she attempts to make Olivia understand and finally acknowledge that they have a history together that goes back over a century.248

While occurring most frequently in the story of Nunumu, Kwan’s ability to ‘take over’ occurs during her narration of other stories as well. When telling stories to Olivia, using her “other voice” as a narrator,249 Kwan sometimes asks questions of her narratee. However, the narratee’s replies are rarely included. In Genette’s terminology, Kwan’s narration could at times be called “reduced metadiegetic (implying: reduced to the diegetic), or pseudo-diegetic”.250 The length of her stories on the one hand, and the occurrence of uncommented dialogue are arguments in favour of Kwan’s ability to act as a first or public narrator. In chapter 2.3, I attempt to show how this ‘taking over’ is somewhat softened during the telling of the Changmian stories through the function of communication.

As discussed in chapter 2.1 and which will be elaborated on in chapter 2.3, there are several occasions where Kwan’s authority is expressed. In China, Kwan’s increased authority as a character is met by Olivia’s ideological reflections or judgements as a narrator on Chinese society. When telling the story of Nunumu, Kwan tries to communicate with her narratee, but

245 In Lanser’s words, the definition of public narration is “narration (implicitly or explicitly) addressed to a narratee who is external (that is, heterodiegetic) to the textual world and who can be equated with a public readership; private narration, in contrast, is addressed to an explicitly designated narratee who exists only within the textual world”. (Lanser 1986, p. 352)
247 Which becomes clear in the discussion of the Third father-story and Young girl’s wish above.
248 Huntley, p. 122.
249 Ibid., p. 123.
250 “These forms of narrating where the metadiegetic way station, mentioned or not, is immediately ousted in favor of the first narrator, which to some extent economizes on one (or sometimes several) narrative level(s) [...].” (Genette 1980, p. 236f)
either her questions remain unanswered or perhaps the answers are not important enough to include in the story. Kwan’s ability to influence other characters in the novel through her narration is an additional example of Kwan’s authority.

However, it is a fact that, formally, Kwan’s narration is framed within Olivia’s narration. Olivia holds the formal authority of the public narrator to decide what will and will not be told. The authority Kwan receives as a private narrator is temporary and granted by the public narrator Olivia. Thus, Kwan would never have been able to take over, had not Olivia allowed this to happen. Despite this allowance, the reader’s impression is that of an ongoing dispute between Kwan’s and Olivia’s authorities throughout the novel; a dispute between their respective characters as well as narrators. It could be suggested that Olivia’s goals overlap with Kwan’s in some way, and that the public narrator therefore allows the private narrator to achieve her goals.

Closing Remarks/Steps of Influence
Looking at the four examples in this chapter, five possible steps of influence can be discerned, although not all steps are applicable to all of the above examples.

The first step, which has a manipulative ring to it, is the potential intention of the narrator. Stories cannot be reduced to means for the narrator to reach her goals; they have multiple functions and meanings, which I aim to demonstrate in the other chapters of this analysis. However, the possibility of the existence of a connection between Kwan’s stated and fulfilled goals as a character, and how Kwan the narrator influences her narratees, cannot be eliminated. In the case of the Third father-story, Kwan expresses her wish to go to China with Olivia on several occasions. That this indeed happens after her telling of the Third father-story could be a happy coincidence, but it is difficult to disregard the fact that it is Kwan’s longtime wish come true.

The second step of influence, taking place during or after the narration, is the narratee’s belief in the story. Difficult to see in the case of the Third father-story, but all-important in the story of Young girl’s wish, believing what he wants to believe increases Simon’s enthusiasm about the cave in Kwan’s stories. Believing in Kwan’s story of Nunumu might also be a step towards Olivia’s peace of mind in the last chapter of the novel.251

As the Third father-story lacks comments from the narratee, it is difficult to tell whether Olivia believes in Kwan’s story or not. However, it can be assumed that before the change of direction in her behaviour, comes a change of thought, or at least a hesitation concerning her

251 This will partly be explored in chapter 2.3.
way of thinking. This is what I would like to call the third step of influence. The story of Buncake is a suitable example of this third step, as Olivia’s strong reaction to the story shows a confused mind and a re-evaluation of important issues such as identity, sisterhood and truth.

The fourth step, desire, is most prominent in Simon and the cave. That Kwan’s stories about the cave make Simon want to go and see it for himself, is evident. In the Third father-story, Olivia invites Simon to “come to China too” and thus, she shows her desire to travel. The act of travelling (the fifth step) is simplified by Kwan’s booking the tickets.

This fifth step, the step of acting, can be assumed in the case of Simon and the cave, but is more evident in Young girl’s wish. Here, the story’s influence on characters’ behaviour can be seen in two ways: first, the story with an unknown narrator influences its young narratees into performing a ritual. Secondly, this ritual of wishes might, in a magical sense, be a helper and a part of how Kwan manages to travel back to China with her sister Olivia – a journey which will prove important to both of them, as seen in the next chapter of this dissertation.253

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252 Tan, p. 165.
253 I note that in this second sense, it is the ritual rather than the story that has an influence on the plot of the novel. However, I will refrain from exploring this any further, as this query lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.
2.3 Remember, Unify and Transmit

The purpose of this part of the analysis is to explore how narration can be used in order to preserve and pass on memories and traditions, and also how stories can have a unifying effect in various ways. Due to the high degree of narrative self-reference (see below), but also because the three functions are most visible here, the examples will primarily be drawn from the part of the novel where Kwan tells stories about the village of Changmian to Olivia and Simon, sitting around the fire with Du Lili, referred to as the ‘Changmian stories’. Occasionally, the narration of these stories will be compared to other examples of narration in the novel, in order to clarify the analysis of functions.

Commencing with a mostly structural examination of the narrative situation, and an attempt to show the significance of a fictitious orality in these stories, I will continue to investigate the functions of narration in this part of the novel through the loosely grouped sections of ‘Remember’, ‘Unify’ and ‘Transmit’. Occasionally, themes will reoccur under different headlines due to my unwillingness to put too much strain upon the text of the novel. Speaking with the words of Gérard Genette: “These [...] functions are certainly not to be put into watertight compartments [...]” The order of functions within this chapter is loosely based on chronology and time, seeing as the function of ‘remembrance’ is mostly related to the past, ‘unification’ to both past and present, and how the function of ‘transmission’ brings past, present and future together.

Narrative Situation and Orality

The Changmian stories share a few similarities with other stories told by Kwan, such as the Nunumu story. They have the same narrator, and they all take place in Changmian. However, the lengths of the stories and the main characters are different, but the most striking difference is the focus on the narration, on a diegetic or intradiegetic level. Using Susan Lanser’s words, this narrative situation does “permit narrative self-reference”, i.e. “explicit attention to the act of narration itself”.

This high degree of narrative self-reference is part of the reason why I chose to study the Changmian stories, as the functions of narration are more detectable when narration itself is made explicit.

The focus on the narration could partly be explained by the fact that these stories are told to a group, which compared to the Nunumu story being told to Olivia only, gives more room

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254 Tan, pp. 269-277.
255 I.e. the situation where the narration takes place, and where narrator and narratee can be seen to communicate in between and in the middle of stories.
257 Lanser 1992, p. 15.
for interaction between narrator and narratees and between the narratees themselves. Since these stories are noticeably shorter than the earlier ones told by Kwan, there is a higher degree of focus on the spaces in between stories, where relationships with narratees can be seen to take shape through the function of communication.

Kwan’s characteristic way of speaking English, and the continuous interaction between narrator and narratees all combine to give an illusion of a scene where oral storytelling is taking place. To clarify, I would like to call this scene mimetic on a diegetic level on the one hand, and diegetic or with a high degree of narrative self-reference on a metadiegetic level on the other. Thus, in Genette’s (and Lanser’s) meaning of the terms, the part of the novel where the Changmian stories are told can actually be seen as both mimetic and diegetic at the same time, all depending on which level the analysis takes place on. A mimetic representation lies closer to reality than a diegetic one, and the scene where the Changmian stories are told – the most mimetic narrative situation in the entire novel – is the author’s interpretation of an oral narrative situation.

Walter Benjamin, who prefers oral narration, points out the usefulness of “every real story”, which might consist of a proverb, for instance. This is the case with one of Kwan’s stories: the story about the missionaries and the pencil. The proverb and the story behind it are used in the novel’s present time to keep people in Changmian from being vain. Anna Johansson writes in a similar sense about the moral importance of oral stories, and how the stories can be used to convey moral values to children. Here, Kwan’s ‘Pencil story’ is a good example, but also the short story of how the wind blowing through the caves can be heard as voices to a sad person. I imagine that it could be used to keep people from entering the caves and getting

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258 See e.g. Tan., p. 270: “But one day, Water God, real low-level type, he get mad – ‘Hey, somebody took water from my river, not asking permission.’ [...] So big fight, back and forth. [...]”

259 With a few exceptions, such as her reaction on ibid., p. 275: “I pretend to laugh, but I’m bothered. Why does Kwan have so many stories about switching places with dead people?”.

260 “[...] in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can ‘show’ och ‘imitate the story it tells.” (Genette 1980, p. 164). For “the illusion of mimesis”, see ibid. For “the mimetic illusion”, see Genette 1988, p. 46.

261 Roughly speaking, mimesis could be defined as “imitation” and diegesis as “pure narrative” (Genette 1980, p. 162). Terms not fully endorsed by Genette (see discussion in footnote chapter 2.1, Genette 1980, pp. 162-173 and Genette 1988, p. 43ff), but well established in the study of literature, I will use them in my analysis of The Hundred Secret Senses, with the reservations, taken from Genette, that a complete mimesis in text is not possible and that an analysis of diegesis and mimesis are to be seen as placed on a scale of more or less, rather than either/or. See also footnote 62.

262 This orality – a theme which will be deepened in the text below – justifies usage of the term ‘listener’ as synonymous with the term ‘narratee’, when speaking of this particular part of the novel.

263 Benjamin, p. 86.

264 Tan, p. 273ff. From here on referred to as the 'Pencil story'.

lost. The story could also be seen as an explanation as to why so many people have disappeared while exploring the caves.

Barbro Klein and Walter Benjamin both describe how stories are transmitted through (oral) storytelling. Klein uses the metaphor of chains of experiences, while she and Benjamin share the image of stories as representations of the narrator’s experience, but also how oral narration is an experience in itself for those who are present. An example of this is found in Kwan’s telling Olivia and Simon of an “ancient village” located deep inside a cave. She claims (twice) to have been there herself. Thus, her own experience and description of the dragon carving is a continuation on the story of the dragons. In combination with other people’s stories about never returning from the caves in the valley, and with Simon’s reading about a famous cave in the guidebook, this event is memorable for both Olivia and Simon – something which is made clear by their respective reactions: Olivia is scared while Simon is excited. Eventually, Kwan’s story inspires Simon to make the cave his own experience. In this sense, Klein and Benjamin’s shared idea of narration as experience can be seen in Tan’s novel. Furthermore, at the beginning of another story, Kwan makes clear to her listeners that she does not tell a story from her own experience: “So I didn’t see, only hear Changmian people talk.” In this quote, it is illustrated how Kwan has the role as a transmitter of the experiences of others.

Changmian is not an oral community – as Kwan points out, the people were familiar with writing brushes in the 19th century. Nevertheless, she tells her stories orally, from her own memory, instead of writing them down for her audience to read. In addition, signs of orality can be observed by the reader of the Changmian stories, such as the use of the experience of one’s own or that of others, and stories’ usefulness in the form of proverbs or morality. Why oral narration continues to be used in a group whose members can read and write is puzzling, but here are a few suggested reasons: firstly, the oral narrator has an opportunity for direct communication and interaction that written narration lacks, and in this sense it is easier for an oral narrator to form and uphold relationships with her narratees. In oral narration, the

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266 Klein, p. 19. Actually, Klein makes no clear distinction between oral and written narratives – probably partly because of the difficulty to draw a line between “oral storytelling” and “written textualizations of oral telling”, p. 6.
267 Ibid., p. 22 and Benjamin, p. 87.
268 Tan, p. 271f.
269 See ‘Simon and the cave’, chapter 2.2.
270 Tan, p. 273.
271 Klein writes of a change in the way of looking at oral narrating: “If storytellers in the past were seen as transmitters of handed down traditions, they were now regarded as active artists with power to transform social life.” (Klein, p. 10) I would argue that Kwan as a narrator in Tan’s novel is an example of both these views.
272 Tan, p. 274.
function of communication is encouraged. Secondly, the oral storyteller also has an ability to create a unique event in present time, which becomes an experience in the memory of the listeners. Thus, the way in which oral stories can function as collective memories is significant. Thirdly, oral narration supports the sense of hearing over the sense of vision. According to Walter J. Ong, hearing and sound can be connected to immersion, which I connect to the enclosing function of narration. Consequently, orality is present as a condition of most functions presented in this chapter.

**Remember**

To remember could be defined as upholding an already existing relation to one’s past. This function of narration is deeply connected to the function of ‘transmission’, but whereas the function of remembrance is directed mainly towards the past and individual memories, the function of transmission serves mostly to keep a collective tradition and memory vibrant by transmitting it forward to the next generation. However, the sub-function of ‘make memorable’ (see below) is a prerequisite of the function of transmission. ‘Make memorable’, or in other words, to influence another person to remember a certain story, is a sub-function applicable both to individual and collective memories. The function of remembrance could also be defined as a part of the function of unification, as it serves to confirm a connection, but because of the importance of this particular connection in the novel, it has received its own section in this chapter.

The function of remembrance as connected to narration is present in other parts of the novel as well, e.g. in the form of flashbacks or stories told in past tense. However, when Olivia comes to see Changmian for the first time, it is made clear how Kwan’s memories have influenced her. Also, during the groups’ time in Changmian, it is obvious how Kwan’s narration has confirmed her memory of her home country. Thirdly, as the narrative situation is highlighted during the telling of the Changmian stories, it is therefore possible to see how several factors in Kwan’s narration make these stories memorable.

I aim to show how Kwan’s narration could in a magical sense be seen to preserve the Changmian of her childhood. Through her narration of stories taking place almost solely in the village of Changmian, being told in Chinese, Kwan confirms her relationship to her home

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273 See for instance “stories that function as reservoirs for the collective consciousness”, Delicka, p. 32.
country, and creates an imaginary homeland. According to Stuart Hall and Salman Rushdie, in their respective discussions of the world outside of fiction, it is quite impossible to pay a visit to one’s imaginary homeland – the impossibility lies in the very nature of Rushdie’s term. The imaginary homeland can be defined as one’s preserved memory (Rushdie) or conjured dream (Hall) of a place, which is thus separated from the continuously changing place existing in the real world. Kwan is haunted by the same feeling of loss, and “urge to reclaim, to look back” as Rushdie, with the difference that in her fictional case, the force of nostalgia is strong enough to do the impossible: to preserve the imaginary home village of Changmian and keep it in a state of timelessness. Kwan, in her longing for her home village, tells Olivia the story of Nununu, and thus transmits her individual memory to her narratee while keeping it vibrant to herself. Through Kwan’s continuous telling of the Nununu story, it is possible for Olivia to remember Kwan’s memories as if they were her own. This is something that Olivia realises as she sees Changmian for the first time but strangely enough also recognises it as Nununu’s home:

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.

This quote is an illustration of Olivia’s double perception – a theme which will be elaborated on in the section on the function of unification. Two versions of the village Changmian are here layered before Olivia’s eyes as Nununu’s version is mixed up with the one that Olivia can see with her own eyes. Later on, an additional layer from the story of Buncake is added in the blur of Olivia’s mind. When Olivia changes her way of looking, she also enters into a state of dreaming, or enclosure. The real Changmian, which is before her eyes in the present, and the imaginary Changmian, which is present in her dreams and in Kwan’s stories, merge in Olivia’s mind. The landscape is covered in transparent layers of stories, dreams and memories. I would interpret the moment of double perception, or “half memory, half illusion” as an example of what Wong writes, namely that “Olivia’s ‘return’ is achieved by the

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275 Hall, p. 231f and Rushdie, p. 10.
276 Rushdie, p. 10.
277 Tan, p. 205.
278 This is most evident before Kwan’s narration of the dragon story (ibid., p. 269): “Sweep from mind American ideas. Think Chinese. Make you mind like dreaming. [...]’ I open my eyes. It’s as though I’m viewing the past as the foreground, the present as a faraway dream.”
279 Ibid., p. 205.
mental reconstructions of place that Kwan had instituted in her mind when young”. Olivia agrees to come to Changmian with Kwan after many months of persuasion, but mentally her return to the village is achieved through Kwan’s narration. This return, I would like to argue, is made complete in the novel’s ending, when Olivia has made Kwan’s memories into her own and, through a change of name, starts looking upon Changmian as her own home village.

Nevertheless, something magical happens, or has already happened, when Olivia reaches Changmian: the setting from Kwan’s story of Nunumu has become real. This enclosure will be interrupted on a few occasions, which will be elaborated further in the sub-function of enclosure below. Worth noticing is the fact that Kwan, in the midst of her telling of the Changmian stories, seems to forget about her time living abroad. This forgetfulness enhances the feeling that the Changmian of Kwan’s childhood still exists. However, it can be questioned whether this is indeed the case. Through her narration Kwan has created or preserved, if not the real village from before, at least the vivid memory of the village as it once was.

**Make Memorable**

The telling of the first Changmian story, about the dragons and the creation of the mountains where Changmian is situated, has a long tradition according to Kwan:

“All Changmian people know. For five thousand year, every mother singing this story to little children, song call ‘Two Dragon.'”

It can be concluded that Kwan expects her narratees, or at least Olivia, to transmit this tradition. This continuous retelling of stories, i.e. transmission between generations, could be one strategy that keeps them in the memories of their narrators and listeners, even though Kwan’s telling of the Changmian stories is slightly different from this scenario as it takes place only once.

Repeating her story of Nunumu several times to the same narratee during Olivia’s upbringing is an example of Kwan’s methods to make her stories into memories. According to

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280 Cynthia F. Wong, p. 71.
281 Ibid., p. 271.
282 Cynthia F. Wong’s quote and Tan’s novel can be combined with the thoughts of Stuart Hall. He writes of Africa as “a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary” and Kwan has, through her narration, planted a dream of China in the young Olivia (Hall, p. 232). However, whereas Wong sees the dream of China as a condition for Olivia’s return, Hall accepts the impossibility of returning to the Africa of his imagination and instead suggests an alternative and circular journey home.
282 Tan, p. 270f.
Delicka, this story even becomes a part of Olivia’s own self.284 Olivia says herself that it was difficult to separate her own dreams from Kwan’s stories, and her own dreams were kept as memories through her obligation to tell them to Kwan.285 Thus, as Kwan tells her stories during the night and in this sense blurs stories, dreams and memories in the young Olivia’s mind, it is not surprising that Olivia recognises Changmian upon their arrival.

The dragon story explains how the landscape of Changmian came to be, and can be compared to Anna Johansson’s example from Cortazzi about the Apache people, where stories are connected to distinctive features in the surrounding landscape.286 In this example, the landscape itself becomes a method for remembering stories. Similarly, Olivia will recall Kwan’s dragon story each time that she looks at the mountains of Changmian, or when she tries to visualise them. This short analysis is an application of Delicka’s description of the Chinese village where the “landscape [...] hold[s] the memory of the years”.287

Each time a story is told, details might be changed by the next narrator in succession, for instance when Kwan modernises and translates her story to suit an American audience.288 In the function of communication,289 this modernisation and translation are seen as ways for the narrator to include her narratees and to establish a relationship between them. It could be discussed how far the narrator would be willing to go in order to make the stories memorable and intelligible – in the end there might be nothing left in the stories of the traditions they were once meant to transmit. Making the stories personally relevant to the narratees in the present time and making sure that they understand them fully by telling the stories in English, might also be methods used in order to retain the stories in the listeners’ memories.

To sum up, Kwan preserves the memory of her home village through narration, and might also have an influence in preserving the real village in a state of timelessness. This timeless state is interrupted on a few occasions.290 Through Kwan’s narration, Olivia’s first time in Changmian instead becomes her return, which is clear when she recognises the preserved Changmian from Kwan’s stories while at the same time seeing it with her normal vision. Through her narration of the Nunumu story and other stories, Kwan has given Olivia this ability of double perception.

284 Delicka, p. 29.
285 Tan, p. 28f.
286 Cortazzi, p. 105f; referenced in Johansson, p. 46f.
287 Delicka, p. 32.
288 Tan, p. 269.
289 See ‘Unify’ below.
290 This will be elaborated on in the section on the sub-function of enclosure below.
By telling the stories at night, and forcing Olivia to tell her own dreams, Kwan blurs the line between story, dream and memory, thus transforming her stories into memories. Repeating the stories, e.g. telling them to Olivia over and over again, is another way of making stories memorable. Examples of other methods are: connecting the stories to a landscape or translating and modernising the stories via the function of communication.

**Unify**

The function of unification can be divided into two main sub-functions: ‘connect’ and ‘enclose’. Seen as movements, these sub-functions sometimes oppose one another, as connecting usually moves in an outwards direction while enclosing moves inwards. The function of unification is, compared to the functions of remembrance and transmission, more focused on the structure of the narration and what happens between characters, rather than on the characters themselves.

**Connect**

Confirm Connections/Function of Communication

I mentioned earlier how oral narration facilitates interaction between narrator and narratee, and how, in this sense, it makes it possible for the narrator to form relationships to her narratees. This concern on the behalf of the narrator to establish or maintain “with the narratee a contact, indeed, a dialogue” has by Gérard Genette been labelled “the function of communication”.\(^{291}\) This function is present in other parts of the novel as well,\(^{292}\) but due to the orality of, and the high occurrence of narrative self-reference in the Changmian stories, I have chosen to focus my analysis of the function of communication on this part of the novel.

In her narration of the Changmian stories, Kwan tries to include her narratees in many ways, mostly with questions and jokes. Furthermore, the narratees are allowed to interrupt with questions of their own. On one occasion, Olivia asks for clarification in the midst of Kwan’s narration: “I interrupt Kwan. ‘You’re talking about Pastor Amen?’”\(^{293}\) Kwan replies, and continues with her story. However, when Kwan in her turn asks Olivia a question, her attention is divided:

“[…] Libby-ah, what you call this kind watering, flow by itself?”
“Irrigation.”
“Yes-yes. What Libby-ah say, irritation –”
“Irrigation.”

\(^{291}\) Genette 1980, p. 256f.
\(^{292}\) See for instance the section on the function of building a relationship in chapter 2.1.
\(^{293}\) Tan, p. 273.
“Yes-yes, irrigationing, they make this for whole village. [...]”

Even though, on this occasion, Olivia’s reply is written out in the text – an exception from many occasions when her reply has been simply included in Kwan’s narration or even left out entirely – and Kwan in this sense shows her wish to listen, Kwan is still too focused on her own words to be able to listen to anyone else’s. In a similar passage, Kwan listens more carefully to Olivia’s answer when it has more relevance to the narration: this time, she has lost her way in the story and Olivia helps her to return. In the Changmian stories, authority shifts between characters/narratees and narrator more effortlessly than before. The narratees Olivia and Simon sometimes try to find their own answers and endings, but Kwan still has the advantage of knowledge.

A third example of Kwan’s efforts to communicate with her audience is her joke with Simon (who has Hawaiian ancestry):

“[...] Later Water God hire some wild people from other tribe, not our village, somewhere else, far away. Maybe Hawaii.” She elbows Simon. “Hey. Joke, I just joke! Not Hawaii. I don’t know where from. [...]”

This quote illustrates how the narrator tries to make her story personally relevant to the narratee, and the communication is emphasised by physical contact. In this example, there is no direct response from the narratee, but later on, Kwan negotiates with her narratees on whether to tell a story or not, and awaits their reaction when she has finished her narration.

As a conclusion, Kwan’s ability to communicate as a storyteller can be questioned as she is not a good enough listener. In spite of that, it is clear that compared to earlier stories – where the narratee’s response is excluded – the narratee is allowed more textual space (and “indeed, a dialogue”) in between and in the middle of the Changmian stories. This space is vital to my analysis, as it makes narration, and therefore also the functions of narration, more visible. Consequently, two connections being confirmed by Kwan’s narration are the relationships between the respective characters, and the bond between Kwan and Changmian.

294 Ibid., p. 270.
295 See for instance ibid., p. 45, p. 56, p. 163 and p. 185, and chapter 2.1.
296 Ibid., p. 274.
297 Ibid., p. 274f.
298 Ibid., p. 270.
299 Ibid., p. 272.
300 Genette 1980, p. 256.
301 The latter as seen in the section on the function of remembrance above.
Create New Connections

While the function of communication builds on already existing connections, Kwan’s narration of the Changmian stories can also be seen to dissolve boundaries and create new connections. By translating the Changmian stories into English and telling them to Olivia and Simon, who have never been in Changmian, or even to China before, Kwan dissolves a linguistic and a cultural barrier. She also includes Olivia and Simon in the people of Changmian, who have up until now been the only audience for these stories.\(^{302}\) This inclusion is particularly important in the telling of the first story – the story about the dragons that helped create the setting for the village of Changmian.

The dragon story is significant in the way that it explains how the landscape around them received its current form: the ditch, the mountains, the caves and the annual flood. That the story is familiar to all people in Changmian and has been told for thousands of years, illustrates the importance of such an explanation.

On a structural level, the telling of the Changmian stories brings together the time of the story of Nunumu with the time of the present narrative situation and this can therefore be seen as a formal connection. Taking place in a time both before and after the Nunumu story, the Changmian stories fill out the holes in the history of the people of Changmian. Also, the recurring elements such as the missionaries and the cave combine to confirm the setting of the Nunumu story, even though other themes and elements, such as the main characters and the Hakka people, may differ. Thus, the Changmian stories partly serve as a context for the Nunumu story, in terms of time and themes.

A connection between past and present is also made clear through the motif of Olivia’s double perception, in its second occurrence in the novel.\(^{303}\) To be able to see the mountains as dragons is a condition for properly listening to and understanding the dragon story. This change of vision happens to Olivia before the story begins, with the help of Kwan:

I squint hard. Kwan grabs my shoulders and repositions me. “Squeeze-close eyes,” she orders. “Sweep from mind American ideas. Think Chinese. Make you mind like dreaming. Two dragon, one male, one female.”

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\(^{302}\) One of the characters around the fire is not included as a narratee. This exclusion is due to the language in which the stories are told. Du Lili does not understand English, but on the other hand, she has heard the stories before. The language is an additional difference between the Changmian stories and other examples of Kwan’s narration, of which the latter are all told in Chinese (the language in which the story about ‘Young girl’s wish’ is told is unclear, but it is probably Chinese. See Tan, p. 194). Perhaps the language change could be explained by Simon’s presence, and Kwan’s wish for him to be included, even if it means the exclusion of Du Lili.

\(^{303}\) Olivia’s double perception has been a part of her since childhood, induced by Kwan’s ghost stories. See below, and e.g. Tan, p. 49.
I open my eyes. It’s as though I’m viewing the past as the foreground, the present as a faraway dream. “The peaks going up and down,” I say, tracing in the air, “those are their two spines, right? And the way the two front peaks taper into those mounds, those are their two heads, with the valley tucked between their two snouts.”

In this quote, it is illustrated how past and present are blurred in Olivia’s mind. It might not be the narration itself inflicting this change, since it happens before the story is told, but it is a condition that makes it possible for Kwan to begin telling the story. It is also a foreshadowing of how experiences from times past will become new memories and modernised stories. However, I would like to argue that Kwan’s narration of the Nunumu story makes this double perception possible. Note that this motif also can be seen to blur the line, and in this sense form a link, between reality and story world in Olivia’s mind, in the section on the function of remembrance above.

To sum up, Kwan’s narration creates two new formal connections of explanation and context, while at the same time crossing barriers of language and culture, past and present, and reality and dream. Using Ong’s claim of how the terms ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are related to one’s bodily experience, another example of the connecting function can be found in Tan’s novel: through her oral narration Kwan connects inside with outside (in a more direct way than written narration would have done), using her body as a medium. These two opposing aspects are relevant when analysing the enclosing function of narration – a function that works rather to establish boundaries than to dissolve them.

**Enclose**

Inside boundaries, one is enclosed. The enclosing function of Kwan’s narration of the Changmian stories is partly due to orality, and how this requires sound and the sense of hearing. According to Ong, hearing is a sense that unifies, as opposed to vision: listening to something, you become surrounded, by the story in this case. Applying this statement to the narration of the Changmian stories, one can see that hearing makes it possible for Olivia and Simon to close their eyes and be inside the story. The darkness that surrounds them makes their hearing even more important. Words on a paper create distance. Words in your ear less so, because they are part of the moment and need you to be attentive, as they might never

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304 Ibid., p. 269. This connection of double perception, dreams and the Chinese, while ignoring American notions, could perhaps be related to González’s and Delicka’s connection between magic and the Chinese (González, p. 99, Delicka, pp. 25-33). Important to note is Kwan’s conflict between putting Olivia in a Chinese state of dreaming, while at the same time modernising and translating her stories to fit an American audience.

305 Ong, p. 72f.

306 Ibid., p. 71.

307 Ibid., p. 72.

308 “When the fire dies down, so does my available light. I slip the Leica into a jacket pocket.” (Tan, p. 266).
return in the same shape. The closer the narration gets to mimesis, the easier it is for the listener to forget about the present narrative situation, and let herself be enclosed by the story and to be a part of the story world.

An enclosure needs boundaries in order to function as well as possible and in the narrative situation of the Changmian stories there are many examples of these. Darkness divides the narrator and her narratees around the fire from the rest of the world. The dragons, with the village situated in between them, could be seen as the geographical boundaries of Changmian. The English language functions as a boundary that keeps Du Lili on its outside, while Olivia and Simon are inside. The spaces between stories have a double function, both as boundaries that enclose the stories themselves but also as awakenings from complete immersion in a single story. Thus, they work in two opposite directions. There are also elements in the Changmian stories that completely obstruct the movement towards enclosure, such as the shortness of each respective story and the possibility for the oral narrator to be interrupted by narratees, or to interrupt herself in the midst of narration. Interruptions also occur in the theme of Olivia’s double perception (see below). The function of enclosure can be pictured as an inwards movement, and the boundaries as circles of varying size: from the dragons as a large circle in one end, via the darkness and language towards the smaller circle of the structural elements in the narration itself – the spaces between stories.309

Double perception
Olivia’s double perception could be seen as an example of an enclosure in a world where dream and reality, past and present are blurred. It can be discussed whether this absorption in Kwan’s story world is relevant only in relation to the narration of the Changmian stories, or if it stretches out during most of her stay in China. Olivia’s reaction to the story of Buncake could be seen as a continuation of the latter process – a process of doubt commenced during Olivia’s childhood,310 awakened when arriving in Changmian,311 hearing the Buncake story,312 and finally confirmed when she sees the mountains as dragons,313 or herself as Miss Banner.314 Without Kwan’s stories of Changmian and Nunumu this process, which becomes

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309 A further example of enclosure could be Kwan’s other voice as she tells the story of Nunumu, and how Olivia’s replies are generally not included in this narration (see ‘Influence Behaviour’ and ‘Authority’, chapter 2.2).
310 Olivia’s double perception starts out as a pact between her and Kwan to keep the ghosts a secret, while at the same time, Olivia wants to live in the real world like the rest of her family (Tan, p. 49).
311 Ibid., p. 205.
312 Ibid., p. 258f.
313 Ibid., p. 269.
314 The latter example can be seen on ibid., p. 345: “half expecting that when I can see the world again, he’ll be Yiban and I’ll be wearing a yellow dress stained with blood.”
evident on four or five occasions throughout the novel, would not have been possible. The motif of Olivia’s double perception could be seen as an example of how Kwan’s “China fictions” shape “Olivia’s evolving consciousness”, as pointed out by Cynthia F. Wong.\(^{315}\)

Olivia’s awakened double perception, and her feeling of uncertain timelessness is heightened by the physical Changmian’s lack of modernisation, referred to by Delicka in her quote from Olivia’s reaction upon her arrival to the village: \(^{316}\)

Miraculously, Changmian has avoided the detritus of modernization. I see no tin roofs or electrical power lines. In contrast to other villages we passed, the outlying lands here haven’t become dumping grounds for garbage, the alleys aren’t lined with crumpled cigarette packs or pink plastic bags.\(^{317}\)

However, the feeling of “half memory, half illusion” upon their arrival,\(^{318}\) is interrupted by schoolchildren screaming in English. Later on, the magic returns with Kwan’s telling of the Changmian stories and Olivia is once again surrounded by the Changmian of the past. However, the well-educated shepherd that Simon and Olivia encounter during their walk is a further example of how this magical world is questioned. “The forces of globalization”, \(^{319}\) that Sheng-Mei Ma mentions, are present even here. Finally, the end of the Changmian of Kwan’s stories arrives after the narrator’s disappearance and with the discovery of the cave. Reports from George and Virgie tell of tourists and souvenirs, and of how the sea creatures in the cave lake were poisoned by all the thrown-in lucky coins.\(^{320}\)

Interruptions are, as opposed to boundaries, not functions of narration in Tan’s novel. Rather, the three examples above serve as awakenings from the dreamlike world of Changmian and in this sense they raise awareness of Olivia’s enclosure/double perception. Moreover, they have a comical effect and help to confirm the present time that the novel takes place in.

\(^{315}\) Cynthia F. Wong, p. 72. An idea perhaps far-fetched and speculative is to draw a parallel between Olivia’s double perception, her double identity and Doris Sommer’s double consciousness.

\(^{316}\) And also in a quote referred to in the function of remembrance above. Delicka writes of the village where “time seems to have stopped […]. The past still lives in the Chinese village, whether in the form of landscape or architecture that hold the memory of the years, or in the form of stories that function as reservoirs for the collective consciousness” (Delicka, p. 32).

\(^{317}\) Ibid. and Tan, p. 204.

\(^{318}\) Tan, p. 205.

\(^{319}\) Ma, p. 120.

\(^{320}\) Tan, p. 356. This passage could be seen as an additional way for the author to criticize the attitude towards landscape that Ma speaks of (Ma, p. 114).
To summarise, the connecting and enclosing functions of narration may work in opposing
directions, but can also be seen as complementary to each another.321 In the case of Olivia’s
double perception, several versions of the village Changmian are layered before her eyes.
Nununu’s Changmian, Buncake’s Changmian and Olivia’s Changmian are blurred and
connected since the stories share the same setting. Simultaneously, the narration separates the
layers from one another, and thus creates boundaries and enclosures, by telling each story by
itself as separate from the others.

Transmit

In this last section, I will try to make three points: first, that there is a tradition of handing
down stories in Changmian; second, that Kwan takes part in that tradition; and third, that
Olivia, through Kwan’s help, becomes a part of it as well. In my definition of the function of
transmission, I have tried to include only collective stories, as opposed to the individual
memories included in the section on the function of remembrance. However, as Olivia
includes Kwan’s memories/dreams/stories in her own narrative, the boundary between
individual and collective stories is dissolved. ‘Tradition’ can in this case be defined either as
the custom of transmitting stories to the next generation, or as the stories themselves. I make
use of both definitions.

Existing Tradition

An illustrative example of my first point is the story about the dragons. This story explains
how the geography of Changmian was created and is thus important to the identity of the
people in the village. It has been told for thousands of years, according to Kwan, and it can be
argued that she expects Olivia to keep on telling it. Perhaps this is the only story told by Kwan
from the time when Changmian was an altogether oral community, without writing brushes.
The dragon story is told by mothers to children, and can thus be seen as an inheritance and a
part of the upbringing for the Changmian children.

In oral societies, narration has a significant function as a way of transmitting the history
and culture of the people.322 Here, the storyteller’s role is vital for the survival of the people
and its tradition. In the case of Changmian, however, the function of narration is not necessary
for the group’s survival, as this is not a completely oral community. The children go to school
and learn English, so it can be concluded that they learn how to read and write as well.

321 Neutral and ideological reflections in Olivia’s narration could be seen as another aspect of these opposing
movements, as the former tend to focus on Olivia’s self while the latter attempts to reach beyond the boundaries
of fiction (see chapter 2.1).
322 Johansson, p. 16.
Nevertheless, oral narration continues to be used as a way of remembering and passing on traditions. The cultural documentation is partly oral, and the “stories function as reservoirs for the collective consciousness”.323 Perhaps the schoolchildren will hear the Pencil story as well as studying English, and by remembering this story, they will learn how important it is in the local culture to be like everybody else and to keep from being vain.324

**Kwan as Transmitter**

I have shown how Kwan in her narration of the Changmian stories mixes the experience of others with that of her own, thus becoming a part of Klein’s “chain of experiences” which is significant of oral narration.325 By using the function of communication, modernising the stories and focusing on her listeners, Kwan tries to make her narration a memorable experience that will become a part of her listener’s minds, even after the disappearance of the narrator herself. Through Kwan’s telling of the Changmian stories, the village of Changmian, which is in Olivia’s eyes already the setting for the story of Nunumu, becomes even more layered with memories from the people who have lived there through the ages.

Kwan has a special position in that she is the only one from the village who has been inside the cave and returned. She has seen the dragon carvings, and is thus aware of the old age of the village and its dragon story. Perhaps this also gives her an understanding of how important it is that the stories about Changmian are passed on. She is also the only one who can see ghosts, and is thus able to create a link between the past and the present.326 Kwan’s special position among the people of the village could be questioned by the fact that she has been living abroad for a long time, and the people of Changmian seem to have got on well with their lives without her. However, Kwan seems to be very welcome back, and her time abroad is a time she easily forgets while telling her stories.327 In addition, she has kept the village alive in her mind with the help of narration and by teaching Olivia Chinese. On her return, Kwan is still the only one among the people of the village who has seen the cave which bears witness of Changmian’s prehistoric existence.

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323 Delicka, p. 32.
324 Tan, p. 274f.
325 Klein, p. 19: “Experiences shape narrating and narrating shapes experiences in seemingly endless chains. [...] our lives are like experiences that are (re-)

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326 “By telling Nunnumu’s story, Kwan not only resurrects the lives of the dead people, but also provides a ‘soul channel’ through which the spiritual connection between the world of the dead and the world of those alive can be established.” (Delicka, p. 29)
327 Tan, p. 270f.
Olivia as Transmitter

Wong writes about language’s ability to heal, and I interpret this literally in the case of Kwan and Olivia. Teaching Olivia Chinese, by way of narration, Kwan keeps her bond to her homeland intact, while at the same time giving Olivia the opportunity to form her own bond to China. The reason behind Kwan’s choice to teach Olivia Chinese, “the people’s common language” instead of her own mother tongue, the Changmian dialect, is difficult to tell. Perhaps by enabling her to speak a language that is useful in more places than just Changmian, Kwan wanted to make it easier for Olivia to form a bond to their father’s country.

Another reason that is difficult to find, is why Kwan chooses to tell the Changmian stories in English, when Chinese (or Changmian, but Olivia does not know this dialect) would seem to be a more appropriate language. Olivia knows Chinese, and is used to Kwan telling stories in this language. Perhaps Kwan is trying to show that these stories are different from the story of Nunumu somehow, and perhaps she wants to include Simon as well. The latter would suit her goal of rebuilding the relationship between him and Olivia. Moreover, English is Olivia’s mother tongue, even though she understands Chinese, and perhaps the stories will have a greater affect on her by being told in English. It will then be easier for the stories to become a part of her memory and her identity.

By translating and modernising the stories, Kwan makes it clear that she wants to include her English-speaking listeners. Telling the stories in English, with modern wording, will make it easier for her listeners to remember them (even though it can be questioned how much is left of the original stories after this treatment). By including Olivia in the Changmian people thus, and by making sure that she is listening properly, she includes Olivia in Changmian’s storytelling tradition, which can be seen as an example of Klein’s chain of experiences.

Olivia gives herself and her child Kwan’s last name. This indicates that she sees herself as Kwan’s successor, in terms of family and perhaps also in terms of narration. By becoming a narrator herself, and by including Kwan’s stories in her own narrative, Olivia passes the stories on. She also documents the culture of Changmian, as it was before the arrival of scientists and tourists. The fantasyland Changmian will only live on in memories, and in

328 Cynthia F. Wong, p. 63f.
329 Tan, p. 12.
330 As well as establishing a bond between herself and her sister, as mentioned in chapter 2.1.
331 Tan, p. 163.
332 Ibid., p. 322: “She’s pressing all the buttons now. She’s not going to let me hide this time.” Even though this quote concerns the individual story of Nunumu, it occurs after the narration of the Changmian stories, and still illustrates Kwan’s urgent wish to include Olivia in her narration.
333 Ibid., p. 357.
334 Ibid., p. 205.
Olivia’s story. She has documented what it looked like, and makes it known to others by her narration. In that sense, Kwan’s stories keep on living, despite the disappearance of the character Kwan. Through her narration Kwan has preserved, if not the real village from before, at least the vivid memory of the village as it once was, and Olivia continues to fulfil the task of preserving this memory of the village.

Perhaps Kwan’s disappearance in the caves of Changmian increases her authority further as she borrows her “authority from death”. Transmitting the stories becomes a way for Olivia to finally reach reconciliation with herself and with Kwan, and also to uphold the relationship with Kwan – who becomes what Benjamin defines as a great storyteller as she reaches beyond the barrier of death.

However, a riddle that remains is: who will be the next ‘transmitter of handed down tradition’, who will be Olivia’s successor? This person is probably identical to Olivia’s unknown narratee.

To sum up, the function of transmission rests on the foundation of traditions in the Changmian village. Before telling the dragon story, Kwan makes it clear that this story has been told and passed on through generations. It can be concluded that the morals in the Pencil story will be conveyed through narration in a similar sense. The Changmian stories tell of experiences of the people who used to live in the village, and Kwan tells of her own experience as an explorer of a cave. This exploration, paired with her ability to see ghosts, gives Kwan a special position in the village – similar to the important position of the storyteller in oral societies. Making the stories memorable is a condition for transmitting them to one’s narratee. Perhaps Olivia’s continuation of Kwan’s transmission can be seen as a result of Kwan’s authority, i.e. her ability to influence others through her narration. Perhaps Olivia transmits Kwan’s stories as a way to keep the memory of her sister alive.

Closing Remarks
As seen in the text above, the narration of the Changmian stories includes many functions as well as sub-functions. Themes such as orality, the function of communication and Olivia’s double perception recur.

335 Benjamin, p. 94.
336 The ending of the novel is commented by Yu as “a simplistic solution” (Yu, p. 351) and the narrative’s attempt “to celebrate a moment of cultural wholeness and reconciliation” (ibid., p. 358).
337 Benjamin, p. 102.
338 Klein refers to this ethnological term as a traditional definition of a storyteller on p. 10.
The function of remembrance can be split in two: ‘Remember’ and ‘Make Memorable’, where the former preserves an individual’s relation to her past through narration while the latter induces narratees to remember the stories they have been told. Kwan keeps her memory of her home country intact while telling Olivia the story of Nunumu. At the same time, she tries to make Olivia remember her stories, for example by repetition. That Kwan has succeeded might be seen when Olivia sees Changmian for the first time, and recognises it. In this sense, Kwan’s story has become a dream which has become a memory.

Preserving a relationship, or confirming a connection, also occurs in the function of unification through Genette’s function of communication. The function of unification can be divided into the sub-functions of connection and enclosure which are symbolised by two opposing movements: outwards and inwards, respectively. Whereas the connecting sub-function creates cultural, linguistic, explanatory and contextual relations in formal and informal ways, the enclosing sub-function (which is helped by orality) works through the boundaries present in the narrative situation. For instance, there are linguistic, geographical and structural boundaries. Placed under the headline of ‘Enclose’, but in truth difficult to categorise, Olivia’s double perception could be seen as a blurred state of seeing two things at once. Not all occasions of double perception in the novel are induced by narration, but most of them. This double perception could also be seen as a result of Kwan’s influence on Olivia, an influence which is made present in the function of transmission.

Taking an active part in the tradition of transmitting stories in Changmian, Kwan induces Olivia to become a transmitter in her turn, partly through narration. Making the stories memorable, for example through the function of communication, or by connecting the stories to the surrounding landscape, is a condition for this transmission to take place. When Olivia takes Kwan’s surname and includes Kwan’s stories in her own narrative, it is clear that she has taken on Kwan’s heritage as a transmitter of stories. The stories, the people and the village of Changmian as it was before the invasion of tourists, is documented through Olivia’s narration and may survive for yet another generation.
3. Conclusion
The aim of this dissertation was to explore the functions of narration as expressed in Amy Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*. During the process of analysis, I found at least seven such functions, some of which are present in the novel as a whole while others occur only on a few occasions.

Chapter 2.1
In chapter 2.1, three prominent functions were found in the novel. Related to these main functions, there are a number of what I would like to call sub-functions. The function of explanation can be divided into indirect and explicit sub-functions, depending on whether they are commented by the narrator or not, i.e. how clear Genette’s testimonial function and the voice of the narrator is in the examples. The function of explanation also has a formal role of making causal connections within the novel. For example, if one chooses to believe in Kwan’s concept of reality, the story of Nunumu can be seen as a prequel to Olivia’s story, as the main characters in Kwan’s story are reflected as incarnations in Olivia’s.

While examples of explanations and reflections are most frequent in Olivia’s narration, even if they do occur in Kwan’s narration as well, Kwan’s narration functions in order to build another form of connection: namely, a relationship between the two sisters. Combined with her telling stories about herself, Kwan builds the relationship through sub-functions such as teaching Chinese, Genette’s function of communication, and distraction. Kwan’s emphasis on secrecy is also an important component in this function.

The explicit explanation shows a higher degree of Genette’s function of attestation and voice than the indirect one, and is most prominent in Olivia’s narration. As Olivia’s narration lacks both an obvious narratee and a clear narrative situation, the reflections are occasions when her voice is most prominent (even more than in the explicit explanation) and this is also when her narration comes closest to resembling a narrative situation.

The main function of reflection can be divided into neutral reflections, usually related to the narrator’s identity, and reflections that express the opinions of a character/narrator. I choose to call the latter ones judgements or ideological reflections, with inspiration taken from Lanser’s and Genette’s works respectively. The purpose of the ideological reflections in Olivia’s narration might be to balance the authority between her and Kwan, which would explain why these reflections stand out more clearly in Olivia’s narration.

Chapter 2.2
During Olivia’s childhood, Kwan’s stories and behaviour tended to cause fear, hatred or confusion in the young Olivia’s mind. In chapter 2.2, I delved deeper into the narratee’s
reactions, which in the case of Olivia consist mainly of doubt. The relationship between the two sisters becomes even more important in this chapter as Olivia finally yields to Kwan’s wish to go to China together, and as Kwan tells the story of Buncake – a story which portrays an ideal sisterhood, but also makes Olivia question Kwan’s identity as her sister, amongst other things. In China, the sisters are closer to one another on a physical level, but Olivia also gains a better understanding of Kwan on a psychological and cultural level.

The examples of the function of influence can be divided into two sub-functions: influence thinking and influence behaviour. Note that ‘influence behaviour’ includes an initial influence on the narratee’s mind, as well as moving a few steps further. In this chapter, I found that narration functions to make the narratee enter into a state of doubt regarding notions such as identity, truth and sanity. Narration can also influence its narratee to act. The process of influence was divided into steps, exemplified by the stories in the chapter. Not all steps have to be visible in the narration in order for influence to occur.

The function of influence is one of many expressions of Kwan’s authority. In contrast to her use of the function of communication, it is also clear how Kwan as a narrator “takes over”, with the shift from the often occurring dialogue in Olivia’s narration, to Kwan’s monologue of Nunumu. This opposition between outwards and inwards movement in Kwan’s narration was explored in chapter 2.3, where there are also further examples of the function of influence.

Chapter 2.3
While the functions of narration have been kept rather separate in the first two chapters of the analysis, the functions in the third chapter are more intertwined with one another. This is especially due to the complex function of unification, which works on many levels to combine aspects of the narration. This function could also be said to have an array of sub-functions, as it reaches into the other chapters of the analysis. The intertwinment of functions in chapter 2.3 could also be a reflection of the novel’s blurring of perspectives once the main characters reach China.

The function of remembrance can be defined as upholding an existing connection between past and present, for instance the connection between Kwan and Changmian or between Kwan and the Chinese language. These connections are kept through Kwan’s telling of the Nunumu story to Olivia. A sub-function of the function of remembrance is to influence others to remember, in short to make stories memorable. There are a number of ways in which this

339 Huntley, p. 122.
goal can be achieved: by communicating with her narratees, translating the stories into English and making sure to hold the listeners’ attention, Kwan makes the telling of the Changmian stories into a memorable event. Connecting the stories to a certain place, such as the dragon story to the mountains or the Nunumu story to Changmian makes narratees remember. Similarly, Kwan might hope that a continuous retelling of the Nunumu story to Olivia will make her remember it thoroughly; perhaps this retelling could also influence Olivia to redefine the Nunumu story as a memory rather than as a dream or a mere story.

The unifying function of narration can be divided into two sub-functions: connect and enclose. The outwards movement of the first sub-function can in its turn be divided into formal and non-formal connections. Examples of the formal connection are the causal connection of explanation and the mundane words used by Kwan to connect her narration to Olivia’s as mentioned in chapter 2.1. The way that the Changmian stories serve as a context for the Nunumu story can also be seen as a formal connection. A few informal connections made through narration are: firstly, the relation between Olivia and Kwan – the building of which was analysed in chapter 2.1 and secondly, the relation between Olivia and Changmian.

The enclosing sub-function is, as opposed to the connecting sub-function, an inwards movement which creates or is created by boundaries, such as darkness, language or spaces between stories. Aspects of orality in the Changmian stories help this movement towards enclosure.

Related to the sub-function of making memorable, is Olivia’s double perception which could be placed in the enclosing sub-function. This double perception could also be seen as a result of how Kwan’s narration influences Olivia to make new connections. As the story of Nunumu is on the verge of being transformed from a dream into a memory in Olivia’s mind (it is already a memory of how Kwan tells her the stories, i.e. a memory of the narrative situations in themselves), Olivia herself makes the connection between the real Changmian and the Changmian of Kwan’s stories. She is also influenced into seeing the mountains as dragons and herself as Miss Banner.

Another example of opposing movements is the neutral and ideological reflections in chapter 2.1, the former directed inwards and the latter outwards. However, the unifying function is most prominent in Kwan’s narration.

The function of transmitting a tradition can be defined as telling the stories of someone else, primarily stories which can be seen as the collective memory of a people. A sub-function is to influence the narratee to transmit a tradition. By making stories memorable and translating the stories so that Olivia feels welcome in the culture of the people of Changmian,
Kwan makes it possible for Olivia to transmit the stories further by way of narration – an act Olivia performs when, in the novel, she includes Kwan’s stories into her own narrative. It can be noted that by telling the Changmian stories in English, Kwan includes Simon. This could be connected to Kwan’s goal of uniting Olivia and Simon, and be seen as an additional example of the function of building a relationship.

Kwan’s authority as a narrator and as a character, which was discussed in chapter 2.1 (‘Judgements or Ideological Reflections’) and chapter 2.2 (‘Authority’), increases when the sisters have reached China, and might play a part in influencing Olivia into transmitting the traditions of Changmian.

**Further Research**

During the process of writing this dissertation, I have come to see narration in Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* as an expression of a relationship between two sisters – sisters who are very different from one another and who continuously shift the authorial role of narrator and the more passive role of narratee between them. The unifying function of narration seems to me to be the most important one in the novel as a whole – partly because of how the novel is constructed as a movement from differences to reconciliation. Also, the function of influence as a measurement of one’s authority as a narrator is essential.

I have tried to be as exhaustive as possible, and hence include as many functions of narration as I could find, but there are many suggestions for further investigations within this topic of which two seem to be the most promising ones. Apart from expanding the definition of the narrator, and analyse the functions of e.g. Simon’s narration, one could move on to a discussion of orality and literacy, perhaps with the help of Lanser’s and Benjamin’s partly opposing views on novels and stories. Does Tan question the opposition between orality and literacy by including oral narration in a novel, and if so, how? One could also let the choice of theory become even more inspired by works in the area of cultural studies: a performance view on the function of influence in *The Hundred Secret Senses* would certainly be an interesting read. Unfortunately, these issues are beyond the scope of this essay.

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340 A thought inspired by Yu, p. 351 and p. 358; and Zhang, p. 15.
341 “[...] the textual voice represents not only an individual but a communal author-ity” (Lanser 1981, p. 120) and “The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual” (Benjamin, p. 87).
342 Note that Johansson opens up the possibility that this opposition might be false, p. 50ff.
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