

**Tribhuvan University**

**Reconstructing the Female Space in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in the Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

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**August 2011**

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## **Acknowledgements**

At first, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Khem Raj Khanal, for his kind support, advice, patient welcome counsel and valuable constructive suggestion. This thesis would hardly have witnessed the form it enjoys at present without his vision, guidance and dignified suggestions and continuous encouragement during the thesis work

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ammaraj Joshi, Head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for the approval of this thesis in its present form. I am also grateful and heartily indebted to respected Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma and all the teachers of Center Department of English for providing valuable suggestion in developing the topic of the thesis and encouraging me to face the difficulty.

Thanks my parents for your blessing for a beautiful day, your mercy, you are my firm foundation. I know I can stand secure because your love is with me; I put my hope in your holy words during my study as well as the completion of my thesis.

I am too grateful to my friends, Suresh Raja, Debendra, Sandeep, Bhaktasha, Gaurab, Dip and Divya, for their continuous encouragement and kind help. My special thanks go to my dearest uncle Tika Ram Sharma, for his help and inspiration.

My deepest gratitude goes to my parents Mr. Basu Dev Sharma and Ishori Devi Sharma and my brothers Madhav Prasad Sharma, Rishi Kesh Sharma, and sister Reshama Sharma and sister-in-law Pratibha Sharma for their endless love, care, advice, prayers and material and mental support during my study. Finally, yet importantly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my all near and dear who were directly or indirectly helping me to get this thesis in its present form.

August 2011

Nirajan Pokhrel

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## **I. Context of Female Bonding in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club***

The research endeavors to excavate the reconstruction of female space through the female bonding in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the novel that revolves around the formation and cultivation of Joy Luck Club the place where female gains redemption from the vast horizon of patriarchal claptrap with their independent voice and agency over thoughts and actions from which they have been deprived of. More specifically, it puts spotlight upon the raising consciousness among the female after their observation of the painful suffering experienced by female of the generation that precedes them. Such insight not only arouses the sense of protest but also intensifies the powerful bonding between mother and daughter the relationship that assumes the shift from mother/son relationship.

Written during the dusk of twentieth century, the novel captures the women's story of asserting their own identity after the long struggle against the patriarchal iron shackle of linearity of time throughout the twentieth century mainly before 1980s. Along with the victimization of female by the male, Amy Tan foregrounds the adverse effect of women's exploitation of women themselves considering it as the hegemony of powerful patriarchal ideology upon the innocent women, which eventually puts spotlight upon the urgency of female bonding to get rid from patriarchal domination. In addition, Amy Tan finds her hope in sisterhood as she ends her novel at the meeting between American born Jing Mei Woo and her two sisters, born and brought up in China. As a matter of fact, Amy Tan's concept of sisterhood in *The Joy Luck Club* transcends national borders as well as the cultural barriers.

Indeed, *The Joy Luck Club* encompasses the history of female subjugation in China and equally male biased social structure in America. At the same time, it demonstrates the new social space of women after their insight of such victimization.

Seven different female voices, four of daughters and three of mothers, (Jing Mei also tells the story of her recently deceased mother Suyuan Woo) are interwoven through the sixteen stories that the novel comprises. While foregrounding the maternal voices, the novel materializes what Marianne Hirsch demands in her vision of a mother daughter plot, “The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters . . . [and] in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness” (161). Individual stories of all mothers and daughters intermingle to each other so as to form a singular whole that provides them collective awareness.

Structurally, the novel is divided into four different sections with four stories in each of them. The first section surrounds within the four mothers’ stories of subjugation and the subtle revolt against the oppressive patriarchy during the first half of twentieth century in China. Among the four mothers, Suyuan Woo challenges the male discourses about women through her activities during the period of war; against the social expectation as vulnerable women with heartrending cry during the war, she chooses her own hope from the joy. Before the Japanese armies’ invasion on the Kweilin, the city where Suyuan Woo and other many wives of Chinese armies are living, she has created Joy Luck Club with three other women in order to continue her hope of living. However, it lasts no longer when she is obliged to escape from the city to save her life, for the families of army officers are the main target in the war. Although she becomes successful to escape from the city, she loses her two daughters the way, which is the painful memory she is living with. Similarly, other three mothers Lindo Jong, Ying Ying St. Clair and An-Mei Hsu have their own traumatic experience of being victimized under the patriarchal society and the revolt against it.

The second and the third sections consists of eight stories of American born four daughters in which they express their difficulties in adjusting with Chinese mothers, and repentance in the negative attitude they have against their mothers. In fact, they come to know their mothers' undercurrent sense of revolt against the exploitation through their stories. It is through the means of storytelling their conflict culminates in affirmation. Thus storytelling helps in reducing the gap and reestablishing the bond between mother and daughters.

The last section is the stories of mothers after their immigration from China to the strange land of America. Their stories encompasses their appraisal of whether their hope to make their daughter independent and capable to make their own identity has been fulfilled in the way they have been expecting, or their migration have adverse effect upon the daughters? In addition, their disappointment in the conflict with their daughters turns towards positive perception when they succeed in reestablishing the bonding with their daughters.

By the 1980s, when the novel was written, the focus of the feminist writers was shifted from the political and cultural oppression of women towards the portrayal of the emotional and psychological intricacies of family relationship, particularly those between mother and daughter. Like the second-wave feminist, Any Tan argues in response to the traumatic effect of war upon women. However, at the same time, her novel departs from the female writers of 1960s while presenting the joint struggle of subsequent generations, thus creating the bond between women of different generations to construct their agency under the patriarchal society.

Amy Tan has raised the issues of miserable condition of female in the Eastern part of the world. Yet, it does not mean that she has found the lack of such condition of women in the Western World; even in America she finds the patriarchal ideology

still working in the underlying structure of the society in spite of the various laws against female subjugation. However, by the time of writing the novel, she finds the improvement in such pathetic condition after the insistent struggle of women with their deep insight of being subjugated by the oppressive patriarchy. Like her first novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan's another novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* raises the issue of female victimization especially of those who have been emigrated from their own mother land.

Since the time *The Joy Luck Club* appeared in the literary scenario in 1989, it became able to attract the attention of many critics and scholars. With the ending of the twentieth century and then beginning of the twenty first century this novella was read by a considerable number of critics whose interpretation is different according to their own understanding. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* has various qualities. It can be judged from different point of views; therefore, the criticism depends on the reader how she interprets. In this connection, Marc Singer comments:

History and myth coexist in Any Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, but they do not coexist easily. The novel traces family genealogies that span the twentieth century, and stresses the importance of ethnic heritage, suggesting a heavy investment in history and historical representation. Yet the family histories depicted in the novel are profoundly mythical – the tales of the mothers' youth are timeless fable filled with supernatural wonder, presenting a China that seems drawn as much from occidental cliché as from authentic Chinese history. Even events as clearly historical as the Communist revolution become transmuted into heavily allegorical parables such as An-Mei Hsu's tale of angry peasants rising tyrannical magpies. (324)

In the above lines, Singer has interpreted the novel from the mythical perspectives; he finds the novel as the nexus between history and myth. As the myths are interwoven in the stories of mothers, he terms it as fable. However, he finds the traces of history inside the tales of mother. For him, the relationships between the mothers and the daughters have drawn the family history of twentieth century. Moreover, it penetrates the history of communist revolution throughout the stories of female revolt back to China. In this way, singer associates the novel with the historical events that of twentieth century communist revolution in China.

In the same way, Magali Cornier Michael comments the novel by highlighting the individual agency and the notion of individualism with the Chinese American perspective. He further writes:

*The Joy Luck Club* offers a vision of individual agency that gestures away from American adherence to a self- interested, mark driven notion of individualism and anchors itself firmly in interdependence and community derived from a specifically Chinese American perspective- constructed within the particular hybrid socio-cultural context and lived experiences of Chinese women immigrants and the daughters they bear and raise the United States. Tan's novel rejects both the opposition between the individual and the community and the equation of the individual and individualism that typically underlie conceptualizations of agency within their American context. (39-40)

By this discourse, he means to reveal the fact that the novel negotiates an alternative model of agency inflected by the particular experiences of first-and second-generation Chinese women immigrants to the United States and the ways in which they have negotiated aspects of Chinese and American culture to create their own hybridized

cultural traditions. Tan's novel opens up a space for thinking about agency in Chinese- American inflicted terms that value and, indeed, assert the necessity of the material and psychic support that communities and families provide. Bringing together the mothers' imported traditional Chinese beliefs and values, especially with respect to family and filial responsibility and individual agency; the American dream upon which the United States' status as an immigrant nation depends.

Likewise, another critic Patricia L. Hamilton analyzes *The Joy Luck Club* from the perspective of the quest for identity, personal loss and interpersonal conflict. As he says:

A persistent thematic concern in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is the quest for identity. Tan represents the discovery process a arduous and fraught with peril. Each of the eight main characters faces the task of defining herself in the midst of great personal loss or interpersonal conflict. In all the stories, whether narrated by the Chinese born mothers or their American born daughters, assertions of self are shaped by the cultural context surrounding them. However, there is a fundamental asymmetry in the mothers' and daughters' understanding of each other's native cultures. (125)

In the above criticism, Hamilton highlights the issue of identity of both Chinese immigrant mothers and their offspring born and brought up in America. The mothers draw on a broad experiential base for their knowledge of American patterns of thought and behavior, but the daughters have only fragmentary, second hand knowledge of China derived from their mothers' oral histories and from proverbs, traditions, and folk tales. For him, incomplete cultural knowledge obstructs understanding on both sides, but it particularly restrains the daughters from

appreciating the delicate negotiations their mothers have performed to sustain their identities across two cultures. Thus, their identity is in crisis, which the immigrant Chinese mothers and their daughters are searching for.

Similarly, Steven P. Sondrup comments the novel by focusing upon the effects of variation of language in the relationship between the members of subsequent generations adopting different cultures:

In its portrayal of immigrant life on the fragmented margins of both Chinese and American culture, *The Joy Luck Club* is so conspicuously structured to disrupt any sense of linear flow of time, conventional narrative practice, or normative language usage in order to make connections that otherwise would not be made that the tentative conjunction of the two seems almost required. (41)

Sondrup analyzes the novel from the linguistic perspective. He finds the central concern of novel as the language, the variation of which problematizes the relationship between the characters that culminates in their conflict. The major causes behind the conflict between mother and daughters, for Sondrup, is the difference in language, as mother fails to speak and understand the American English language whereas daughters hesitates to speak Chinese their mothers prefer. He puts forward the mothers' inferiority complex in their failure of speaking English language and their wish to make their daughter independent by making them capable to speak it fluently.

Although many critics have observed and interpreted the text from different critical perspectives, none of them has analyzed the novel from the perspective of feminism. Most of the critics have focused upon the cultural differences. While doing so, they seem to have ignored the issue of female unity formed on the basis of their

shared oppressions and the feelings of protest against such suppression. Although Marc Singer tries to trace the idea of family relationship; he concentrates more upon myth and history. On the contrary, the present thesis concentrates upon the analysis of female characters rather than myths. Moreover, Magali Cornier Michael analyzes the text from the perspective of agency, but he associates with the Chinese immigrants in America. The present dissertation departs from the research of Magali Cornier Michael in the issue of the agency itself, for the present researcher is clear that such an agency is achieved after the raising consciousness among the female about their subjugation. Patricia L. Hamilton attempts to explore the identity crisis that immigrants have in the foreign land. Although this thesis deals on the issue of identity crisis, it differs to that of Hamilton in its association of identity crisis with the females under the predominantly masculinist society. Thus the research departs in its issue of female space that is reconstructed with the help of intergenerational bonding.

The primary objective of this research is to bring forth the feminist concept of female bonding as a means to assert their agency which helps in constructing equal space they lack in the society guided by the patriarchal norms and values. This study aims to scrutinize the inherent social status of females critically in order to analyze the rising level of consciousness among the females in the American as well as in Chinese Society. This project also intends to subvert the stereotypical representation of women as docile, submissive, meek and so on and so forth prevalent in twentieth century throughout the world. It aims to foreground the quest for self-maturity and self-discovery of females who were supposed to remain as ideal women of males during the first half of twentieth century in China. Besides, the research is targeted to present how the strong female is born and evolved out of the cruel circumstances, her journey from immaturity to maturity and how she tackled with the social sphere to exist as an

independent female. More specifically, the research aims to foreground the women's attempt of reconstructing their own distinct space on the ground of the bonding they have formed.

The researcher seeks to prove the ideas above within the theoretical framework of feminism; particularly the concept developed during the second half of twentieth century. Besides, the conceptual framework of feminists, who talk about the female space, is the guiding principle of this dissertation. Most of the feminists, who write on behalf of female, have expressed their ideas implicitly or explicitly with demanding appropriate space for women in the society. However, few of them have raised the issue of female unity on the basis of the shared experience of suppression and the sense of protest against it, thus creating the bonding among them.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of mother daughter relationship corresponds to Amy Tan's presentation of mothers and daughters the conflict among whom culminates in joint affirmation. In fact, their joint effort helps them to eliminate the passive reception of the male biased imposition upon them. Hirsch undercuts the Freudian concept of Oedipus complex that creates the gap between mother and daughter while showing the affinity between mother and son. Considering the Oedipus complex as the product of mind, contaminated by the patriarchal ideology, for it gives equal space of father to son by eliminating daughters; Hirsch comes forth with the idea of close affinity between mother and daughter. As she argues: "Because of maternal dominance in early childhood, and mother's closer identification with daughters than with sons women acquired characteristically feminine, affiliative, and rational sense of self" (20). Hirsch believes in the identification between mother and daughters owing to the maternal domination during the childhood, which goes in

opposition to the Freudian Sexual relation affection between mother and son developed during the same period.

Indeed, *The Joy Luck Club* can be considered as an emblem of literary product that comes forth with powerful mother daughter relationship, the lack of which in the literary history has really disappointed the critics like Hirsch during the 1970s. The novel, to some extent, fulfills the gap that Hirsch has realized in her review essay on “Mother and Daughter”; she has established a centrality in feminist analysis:

There can be no systematic study of women in patriarchal culture, no theory of woman’s oppression, that does not take into account women’s role as a daughter of mothers and as a mother of daughters, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women, and that does not study the relationship in the wider context in which it take place: the emotional, economic and symbolic structures of family and society. (qtd. in Hirsch19)

Hirsch feels the urgency of study on the relationship of mothers and daughters in order to create the identity of women belonging to previous and subsequent generations.

The present project, to some extent, fulfills the gap in literary criticism that Hirsch has felt.

Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s vision of female unity to achieve their rights is assimilated throughout Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*. Her concept of “we are all oppressed and hence we all resist” (112) is brought to analyze the underlying vision of the Joy Luck Club constructed in China and America by the women who have been oppressed owing to the males’ coveted desire of being powerful in the patriarchal society. Coming from different geographical locations of China, they have

the similar experience of being victimized which brings them under the single umbrella of Joy Luck club which is the place of “leftovers mixed together” (8). Their undercurrents of sense of protest help them to save their children from bearing sexual inequality prevalent even in American Society.

Moreover, Virginia Wolf demands distinct space for women in order to flourish their creative potentiality. She, in fact, implicitly raised her voice against patriarchy with demanding equal space for women in the society guided by the phallogentric vision. Her *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* have greater contribution in raising awareness among females about the subjugation, they have been living with. Her concept of female independence is assimilated with the mothers and daughters fighting for their independence throughout the novel.

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir, another most important precursor of feminist theory, in her essay *The Second Sex* (1949), revolts against the patriarchal assumption of females as ‘negative’ or ‘other’ to man. She talks about the female existence holding the view that “one is not born but rather become a woman” (17). She does not see any difference between sexes as male and female in the process of biological creation rather, according to her, what is masculine and what feminine in identity and behavior are largely cultural constructs that were made by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. Corresponding to her idea, Amy Tan presents the female characters suffering from the patriarchal myth and their sense of revolt against it. At the same time, she presents her female characters with strong determination as well as intellectually sound thus subverts the patriarchal myth.

Amy Tan depicts the pathetic condition of female victimization by the female themselves. Similarly, the truth functioning in such social system is constructed through the power structure. According to Foucault power is the source of so called

truth, which, in the novel, has been used to dominate the female characters in the society.

Finally, on the basis of above mentioned Feminist theorists, the researcher seeks to excavate the factors that pave the way for reconstructing the female space in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Though previously this text has been analyzed from various approaches but no one is oriented to approach it from the spectrum of feminism especially the female bonding. *The Joy Luck Club* is realistic novel which visualizes the condition of female in the so called democratic world of America and of China so as to disclose the changed consciousness of female. Four mothers, who learns a lot from the previous generation and their own experience, strive to make their daughter self assertive and independent. In this ground reality of women, the research have been shaped through the analysis of female characters of all three generations with the help of Virginia Woolf, Simon De Beauvoir, Elian Showalter Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault in general and Marianne Hirsch and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in particular.

This research has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outlines to the research with the brief historical background of the novel and the issues it raises. Along with the historical background, it presents the various critical perspectives the novel has attracted from the time of its publication. Presenting the departure from such criticisms, it moves to give the brief introduction of the theoretical framework applied in this research. The second chapter analyses the novel *The Joy Luck Club* by highlighting the female subjugation, their unity, mother daughter relationship, and the female agency achieved with their raising consciousness in the male dominated society. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study through the evidences from the text and its assimilation with

the theoretical concept. Finally, the third chapter sums up the main point of the present research and finding of the researcher.

## II. Reconstructing the Female Space in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

The research analyzes how the female characters, who have been obliged to be guided by males in oppressive patriarchy, strives for their independence by reconstructing the distinct female space of Joy Luck Club and construct their own agency in every thought and action in Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). In the novel, female characters realize their condition of being subjugated that ultimately makes them strong and powerful in such a way that they succeed to achieve self agency through the female bonding. Their newly derived identity through self agency helps in reconstructing the female space in the society.

In Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-mei Woo tells four stories in each of the four different sections, and thus binds the whole narrative which consists of sixteen short stories by seven different female characters. While forming the central axis of the novel, Jing-mei Woo retells "the stories [Suyuan Woo] would always tell [Jing-mei] when she was bored" (7) in the first and the last section by taking the dead mother's place in the Joy Luck Club. Indeed, the first and last section contain the mother's stories with full of pain and revolt against the patriarchy. In spite of the cultural barrier, the mothers and daughters enable to make their relationship better through the means of storytelling that paves the way for influential female bonding in the novel.

Tan's novel gives voice to a number of Chinese American female characters of two subsequent generations by making space for seven distinct narrators and the life stories of eight women. Their stories individual histories stand for ones that have never been told ever. Inside the very context of such relative absence or silence of Chinese American women's voices until the mid-1970s, the stories offered by Tan's novel turns out to be an act of self-assertion and defiance. The stories work as Chu in

*Assimilating Asians* says, “A claiming of political and social agency” (3) by and for its multiple Chinese American narrators.

The story of Suyuan Woo, as retold by her daughter, is full of pain and her powerful attempt to overcome it through the affirmation of collective agency. While her husband is fighting in the war Suyuan Woo finds herself in the difficult and potentially traumatic position of being alone with two small children in Kweilin. So, before the Japanese overrun the city, Suyuan initiates the first Joy Luck Club, inviting three other young women to join her in a ceremony of weekly gatherings aimed at raising their sad spirits “I thought up Joy Luck on a summer night that was so hot . . . every place was so crowded there was no room for fresh air” (10). By eating delicious food the women play mah jong that helps them to hold off the despair that inflects their lives as a consequence of the war. In fact, she has created the separate sphere of Joy Luck Club in Kweilin in order to transmute the painful history of women like herself into a communal expression of boldness and hope, so that “each week they would host a party and to raise money and to raise [their] spirit” (10). Suyuan Woo feels the necessity of psychological and financial independence to prolong the life of women through their creative potentiality of storytelling in the pathetic and poignant situation of war.

In this connection Simone De Beauvoir argues “on the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself” (53). What Beauvoir tries to argue is that the insight of subjugation inspires the females to be assertive against the predominantly masculinist society. Assimilating this Amy Tan makes her female characters to assert their identity.

By choosing hope through joy, the women in Joy Luck Club assert themselves as active agents rather than passive victims to receive whatever imposed upon them. After all it indicates their insight about hope, which, for them, is not only necessary for survival but also a choice. Rather than crying by looking towards the awful consequences of war, the women choose to look forward by constructing communal space within which they allow hope and the joy for themselves. In fact, Suyuan Woo's initiative of the concept of Joy Luck Club is further intensified by other women, suffering from the effect of war. As Suyuan Woo narrates:

My idea was to have a gathering of four women, one for each corner of my mah jong table. I knew which women I want to ask. They were all young like me, with wishful faces. One was an army officer's wife, like myself. Another was a girl with very fine manners from a rich family in Shanghai. She had escaped with only a little money. And there was a girl from Nanking who had the blakest hair I have ever seen. She came from a low-class family, but she was a pretty and pleasant and had married well, to an old man who died and left her with a better life. (10)

The above lines vividly depict the picture of Joy Luck Club, an emblem of separate space for women who have been victimized by the war during the time of Second World War in China. The luck club is not only the place of merrymaking but also the place where the leftover women can be mixed together for their collective agency with powerful bonding, for the women from different classes, including the rich and poor, who had been left alone by their men at a time of crisis, can share their own thoughts and feelings in it. Among the four women in the club, two have their husbands working as nationalist army officers. Those husbands had been proudly and

energetically participating in the writing of a glorious national history of their political party and their patriarchal agenda whereby their wives have been living their lives with terror of being raped or killed at any time in a distance city.

However, the small female community of Joy Luck Club constructs its own gender space and its own political power by engaging in activities which has never been anticipated under the patriarchal values from ‘dutiful wives’. According to Judith Butler, best way to resist patriarchy and hierarchical binary is to challenge values and norms constructed by patriarchy. As she puts it in her book *Gender Trouble*; “Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derive genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible” (201). Gender is constructed by the society, and thus it cannot solely be the real. But it does not mean that it is false. Corresponding this, the female characters in the novel questions the traditional concept of gender by refusing to accept their prescribed role.

The Joy Luck Club is the space to speak for women in the society in which they are marginalized and forced to remain silent against the norms of society. Irrespective of all the events happened outside, they tell stories and laugh to death at each other’s hilarious tales, such as the carnival story “about a girl who wrote love letters for two friends who loved the same man” (11). This oral tradition of creating and sharing such subversive stories by the women poses the question upon the male dominating culture that has been perfectly preserved in privileged written form. Rejecting the traditional behavior that society anticipates from women, they construct their own form of power and knowledge. As Suyuan Woo narrates what her mother has narrated to her:

People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week, while many people in the city were starving . . . others thought we were

possessed by demons- to celebrate when even within our own families we had lost generations, had lost homes and fortunes, we were separated, husband from wife, brother from sister, daughter from mother. Hnnnh! How we could laugh, people asked. (11)

Irrespective of the pathetic circumstances outside which is the outcome of male desire to become powerful, the Joy Luck Club women are celebrating and end their prescribed roles as inconsolable wives and mothers in the death of others. In such a very moment of national crisis, however, an official male dominating culture is dictating a stalwart continuation of women's traditional role of self-effacing and self-sacrifice for the sake of their families' survival.

Indeed, women refute to be confined within the limitations of the domestic sphere at a time their men have been performing heroic deeds in the public arena. Instead they subvert the male culture by creating their own way of life "each week [they] could forget past wrongs done to [them]. And each week, [they] could hope to be lucky. That hope was [their] only joy. And that's how [they] came to call our little parties Joy Luck" (12). The four women choose to promote luck through their weekly mah-jong game as a way of holding on to hope and creating joy out of the hope. Their activities help them to forget the bitter reality they have gone through in the past.

However, the Kweilin club is short-lived, for the Japanese soon overrun the city as expected. Eventually, Suyuan is compelled to escape the city "I packed my things and two babies into the wheelbarrow and began pushing to Chungking" (13) in order to avoid execution as the wife of an officer, and then she never again sees the other three women. During that period of Second World War, there was fear of gang rape among the Chinese Women as such incidents were rampant after the Japanese army's invasion over China. As Hiroko Tabuchi writes what Yasuji Kaneko, one of

the Japanese soldiers, who fought in China during World War II has admitted with Washington Post after more than sixty years that, “The women cried out, but it didn’t matter whether the women lived or died. We were the Emperor’s soldiers. Whether in military brothels or in villages, we raped without reluctance” (2). Amy Tan captures such historical circumstances while depicting the struggle of women during the war.

Women suffer from the effect of war declared by men to become powerful in the society. While escaping from Kweilin, unfortunately she loses her children and other things in her way; “by the time I arrived in Chungking, I had lost everything except for three fancy silk dresses which I wore on the top of the others” (14), says she. Innocent women like Suyuan are compelled to suffer in the wars grounded upon the nationalism which Virginia Woolf criticizes as entirely masculine in her *Three Guineas*. As she says:

The ruling values of such a state are male values: the entire ethos of war is exclusively male. The splendid military uniforms, the distinctions of rank, the rosettes and medals which are invested by men with so much significance, appear ridiculous to women. And truth about war reveals its -horror, beneath its long- valued glory. (97)

The above discourse clarifies that war is primarily a space of asserting male power and superiority. Woolf further says that war is an absurd play of unreasonable mind of men which makes life the life of women miserable. Indeed, male’s desire of power invites war, but in course of it females are destined to undergo different sorts of suffering. The war imparts negative impacts on female, physically and mentally. In the way Woolf views the war is the way Amy Tan portrays the female victimization of war through her female character, Suyuan Woo, who undergoes painful memory of

disintegration with her twin children throughout her life even in America, where she immigrates during the war.

After immigrating to the United States, although Suyuan Woo creates the San Francisco version of the Joy Luck Club on the basis of earlier one with her intention to share certain characteristics, the latter club is constructed little bit differently and serves different functions. In contrast to the Kweilin club's temporary status, the San Francisco Joy Luck Club is established two years prior to Jing-Mei's birth "my mother started the San Francisco version of the Joy Luck Club in 1949, two years before I was born" (6), and is still going "strong in the present time of late 1980s with [Jing-mei] now thirty-six years old" (14). Not only the United States-based club lasted thirty-eight years, but it also includes many more participants than did its antecedent in China. Although the San Francisco Joy Luck Club also begins with four women, it includes their families from the start. Moreover, it takes features and functions that correspond to its location of San Francisco in the United States and that address its participants' positioning within American culture.

Like that in Kweilin, Suyuan Woo selects the other three women who form the Joy Luck Club on the basis of affinity and empathy. In this connection, Chandra Mohanty in her *Feminism Without Borders* writes: "sociological substitutes the biological in order to create the same- a unity of women" (25). She means to say that it is the sociological sharing of the experience that brings women in a single space thus creates a bond between them. As recent Chinese immigrants, all four women have been experiencing similar circumstances and life course in the strange land of America. Although, the four women's life in China differs in many ways, they all come from middle- to upper class backgrounds and have been thrown into the lower class in the American context because of their lack of language skills and their alien

cultural and racial status as Asians. The major thing that binds these four particular Chinese immigrant women most strongly, however, are the “unspeakable tragedies” they suffered in China, as well as the “hopes they couldn’t begin to express in their fragile English” that Suyuan immediately recognizes in “the numbness” she reads in their faces (6).

It is their shared perspective, shared goals and shared experience of oppression that unites them in the Joy Luck Club. Not only on the basis of biological requisites but rather through the psychology of complex and contradictory historical and cultural realities, the female bonding is made possible within a single space. This leads in turn to the assumptions of women as a unified group. An ahistorical notion of the similarity of exploitation and eventually, sameness of their struggle binds women together. While analyzing the texts by Morgan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her book *Feminism Without Borders* again says:

The homogeneity of women as a group is, in turn, predicted on a definition of the experiences of oppression where difference can only be understood as male/female. The analytic elision between the experience of oppression and the opposition to it illustrates an aspect of feminist osmosis thesis: being female and feminist are one and the same; we are all oppressed and hence we all resist. Politics and ideology as self conscious struggles, and choices necessarily get written of such an analysis. (112)

The above lines illustrate female bonding on the ground of their struggle against the exploitation and the experience of victimization in the predominantly masculinist society. In Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, empathy, ‘the ability to feel into someone else’s experience’ draws the women together and creates a tie between them. These women

are thus brought together in part by the painful histories of oppressing part by their shared hopes for the future in the country they have adopted.

Regardless of their geographically distinct locations in China, all four mothers of Joy Luck Club in San Francisco have similar kind of painful memories of tacit suffering and oppression they are living with. Their past traumatic experiences in China derive from the actions of women perpetuating the Chinese male-dominated status quo. In “traditional Chinese Society”, as Ho notes, women were “confined to the private sphere where their virtue, honor, and chastity could be controlled and preserved” through means that “permitted the psychic and social abuse of women, an abuse in which women sometimes took part” (34). For example, when Lindo is only two years old, she is promised for marriage to the son of a wealthier family. Since then, her family begins to treat her as if she “belonged to somebody else” (48). The arising of such feeling within her mother is owing to the fear of social structure which will discard her if she does not function in accordance with its norms and values.

Lindo represents the pitiable condition of small girls in China who have been obliged to function according to the discourse created before they born. At the age of twelve, Lindo is sent to her in-law’s house, where she is treated like a servant. She is taught to be an “obedient wife” under the strict tutelage of her future mother-in-law. (50). Due to her patriarchal mental set, Lindo’s mother-in-law, never imagines the equality between her son and daughter-in-law, rather expects the latter as humble, submissive and obedient to the former. As Lindo narrates, “I heard her huffing and then all of a sudden she stood up from her chair, walked over to me, and slapped my face. ‘Bad wife!’ She cried. ‘If your refuse to sleep with my son, I refuse to feed your or clothe you.’ So that’s how I knew what my husband had said to avoid his mother’s anger (57). Lindo’s mother-in-law, who is guided by the discourse created by the

patriarchal power structure, sees female's devotion towards male as the single truth of their life. Such discourses are created by males, the powerful groups in the society in order to preserve their higher position in the society. In this connection, Foucault asserts:

Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statement. Truth is linked in a circular relation with the systems of power which produces and sustains it, and to the effect of power which it includes and which extent it. . . . It is not the matter of emancipating truth from every system of power but of detaching the power truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. (1145)

Foucault further views that the discourse created by the powerful becomes truth and knowledge which are assimilated in the culture and becomes part of life. In addition, females who have been living under such power internalize its discourses as knowledge. This is the basic way through which patriarchy holds a tight grip on the society. As has already internalized the truths created by patriarchal ideology, Lindo's mother in law feels that in order to get shelter in the family, Lindo must serve males in the family, for they are superior to her. It is all because she perceives such an ill treatment to female as common sense of the society and culture.

Nevertheless, Lindo has the strong sense of self determination which she shows in her marriage even at the age of twelve. Her mother, who is condemned to swallow her own sorrow in her life, suggests her to be an obedient wife. Lindo conceals her distress beneath a numb obedience to the same expectations, resolving not to bring shame on her family, but a rebellious voice survives to wonder silently

“why her destiny had been decided, she should have an unhappy life so someone else could have a happy one” (51). As she is prepared for the dreaded ceremony that would forever unite her with Tyan-Yu, she has an epiphany which indicates the undercurrents of sense of revolt:

I asked myself, what is true about a person? Would I change in the same way the river changes color but still be the same person? I looked in the mirror. I was surprised at what I saw. I had a beautiful red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see that no one could ever take away from me. I was like the wind . . . I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parents’ wishes, but I would never forget myself. (53)

As is clear from the expression above that the spirit of self affirmation has oriented her life toward a different and self determined destiny in spite of the repression she is living with. Her way of questioning oneself is the implicit indication of self realization of suppression under the patriarchal culture which never lays the rights to the females to form their own essence. Such an insight is the source of revolutionary spirit that ultimately constructs the female agency.

Here, it is noteworthy to bring the concept of Simon de Beauvoir who revolts against the patriarchal ideology that constructs the female identity before their birth. Drawing upon the existentialist idea, Beauvoir demands for existence before essence in the life of female who are doomed to suffer for the essence created by others. As she says, “An existence is nothing other than what [one] does: the possible does not extend beyond the real, essence does not precedes existence . . . women is to be measured by her acts” (998). Considering males with having absolute rights in

women's devotion, the patriarchal ideology imposes a categorical imperative on women. When Lindo is of two years, her life partner is fixed by others. As is fixed by others even if she is "getting such a bad husband" she has "no choice" (44). She is condemned to spend her life in accordance with the prescriptions of patriarchal norms and values towards female. However, in such condition, she has developed a sense of respect towards her 'self', which is materialized in her clever use of storytelling by inventing a tale of other people's destinies in order to escape from their control over her.

Similarly, An-Mei Hsu bears the most scars from her early years when she is compelled to be upbrought by her grandmother instead of mother. Although An-Mei is affectionately cared for by her grandmother Popo, her mother's mother and is relentlessly scorned by her and all her relatives for being her mother's daughter and is never allowed to express or receive the maternal affection she longs for. She was told that her mother was a ghost. When An-Mei becomes four, her mother comes to bring with her but all of others remain in opposition of her. Popo says in her shrill voice "who is this ghost? Not an honored widow. Just a number three concubine. If you take your daughter, she will become like you. No face. Never able to lift her head" (38). Not only Popo, other relatives also appear outside to discard her mother. And suddenly a "pot of boiling soup" is poured upon her that "spilled forward and fell all over [her] neck" in the way "everyone's anger is pouring" all over her (39).

Amy Tan's female characters' miserable condition aroused due to female's exploitation urges for the necessity of unity among them rather than split. An-Mei's memory, as told in her story, illustrates the disturbing historical fact women in feudal China were so indoctrinated by patriarchal influences that they did not hesitate to participate in the degrading and oppressive treatment of other women. An-Mei's

mother, who is called a ghost and a worthless goose but never by name, was once married to a scholarly man who died already by leaving her with impossible choices. As Wendy Ho argues, “the underlying reason [for ostracizing the mother] is the familial and societal perception that she had failed to remain a faithful widow and declined to commit suicide, which was considered an ideal option for a women in her predicament” (151). After the death of her husband, An-Mei’s mother is bounded with full of limitations constructed under patriarchal norms and values. In such situation, owing to her failure to understand conspiracy of a woman, she is raped that ultimately turns her into a degraded creature in the society.

Even being discarded by the society, her mother also revolts against the restriction, and takes her daughter; she feels that a daughter needs her mother and mother needs her daughter. After being taken by her mother, An-Mei witnesses the disastrous condition of her mother which summons the feelings of protest within her. An-Mei comes to know that her beautiful mother, who was married to a scholar but widowed at a young age, is dishonored after a wealthy man’s second wife, in an effort to pacify his sexual appetites, tricks An-Mei’s mother into sleeping in his bed. Then after her family disowns her and bars her from their home; she is thus forced to become one of the man’s concubines. She also sees her mother being tricked by the infertile Second Wife in bearing from Wu Tsing, against her will, a son for the Second Wife to present to Wu Tsing as her own. Women collude with the Chinese patriarchal system by asserting the only power they have, the power to regulate other women, so that in these cases communities of women function as a means of perpetuating a system that is oppressive to women. Such power to regulate other women has adverse effect upon women themselves, for they are unknowingly exploited while moving forward to punish other women.

Pained so much by watching her mother who is suffering the demoralizing consequence of being trapped in the multiple wives-concubines hierarchy, part of the patriarchal power structure, An-Mei is burned by the sense of protest and desires her mother's revolt against such domination "I wanted my mother to shout at Wu Tsing, to shout at Second Wife. . . . But my mother did not even have the right to do this. She had no choice" (269). With her upbringing in such oppressive setting, it is obvious that her spirit of resistance is developed. Later, after witnessing her mother's prolonged suicide, An-Mei chooses to make a gesture of rebellion. She produced the fake pearl necklace, Second Wife has given her, a sigh of her phony affection and crushed it under her feet, "and on that day, Second wife's hair began to turn white. And on that day I learned to shout" (255). Her shouting against them is the shouting against the subjugation of innocent women like her mother. She brings such spirit with her to the United States and tries to instill it in her daughter, Rose.

Like other three mothers, Ying Ying St. Clair has a shocking experience with patriarchal inequalities back in China. In the Moon Festival, she is shocked as she gets insight over patriarchal myth on women. Simon De Beauvoir says that patriarchal society is exploiting females by creating the myths that interiorize the females by creating the demarcation between the males and females. The patriarchal myths projects the "unbreakable core of night upon women" in order to define them as "Sentiments, inwardness, immanence" and male as "transcendence" to fly over the sky (997). She further says that women are associated with emotion, passion, passivity, and the quality which is considered as the insignificant whereas males are associated with the masculinity, active, and reasonable, which indicates the superiority of males over female. In Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Ying Ying realizes an attempt of patriarchal society to transfer such myths into reality through

the names. She says that “For women is Yin, the darkness within, where untended passion lie. And man is Yang, bright truth lighting our minds” (82). The powerful rulers of the society construct such myths in order to dominate the female, the powerless ones.

During her married life with her first husband, Ying Ying has also gone through the harsh experience of aborting a child after knowing about her husband’s multiple act of adultery. She even hesitates to take his name “this was a man so bad that even today I cannot speak his name” (278). Later she accepts a different kind of husband, one gentle but also bland and unseeing. Ying-Ying summons her force in her later life in the United States with her intention to save her daughter, Lina, from a lifeless marriage with Harold.

Each of the mothers’ powerful challenge and successful attempt to get rid from their oppressive situation indicates their self-assertions and agency even if the stories paint their families as steep in tradition. Arguably, the mothers depict themselves as revolutionaries in their refusal to play the role as dictated by the rules that overlook women’s oppression as well as in their choices to walk away from the structures oppressing them.

Indeed, in spite of such traumas they have all endured in China, the four mothers’ capacity to establish a new form of society for themselves in their adopted country articulates to their remarkable spirit and to their need to imagine a future for themselves and their children. Fragmented but carefully organized structure of Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* is the best example that illustrates the interdependence of the individual and the community and thus the communal aspects of agency. Mainly, San Francisco Joy Luck Club helps to demonstrate such idea of communal agency; rather than fighting to win, the women pull together to offer each other power and support.

Apart from themselves, they have also passed the sense of communal agency to the succeeding generation through their help to Jing-mei in her trip to China.

Moreover, the San Francisco Joy Luck Club – initiated by the mothers but also experienced by the daughters, functions as a model for the innovative form of individual agency dependent on community that the novel offers as a whole. Not merely limited as club, the Joy Luck Club turns out to be an emblem of the mothers' recognition that their individual survival and control over their fate in America requires communal support, and of their need to retain a sense of hope for the future. Moreover, in the align land of America, the Joy Luck Club provides for both mothers and daughters a communal space within which they negotiate hybrid individual identities that enable them to construct their agency over self assertion.

Although the daughter's lives in America seems liberated in contrast to the ghastly experiences of their mothers, the daughters nevertheless experience subtle form of sexism. It is manifested in Harold's behavior who hesitates to have equal investment in a business with his wife. As Lina narrates, "he would not hear of taking any money from me, not as a favor, not as a lone, not as an investment, or even as the down payment on a partnership" (171). Harold is trying to keep his wife back in terms of investment for he considers her as inferior in spite of her brilliant idea of opening a business.

The daughters have sad experiences with new relationships which is always contaminated by uncertainty and fear but in such situation, the Joy Luck Club balances their life by offering them a familial, familiar, nurturing space within which they can negotiate their difficult position. With their growing up, however, the daughters no more actively participate in the Joy Luck gathering owing to their overtly individualistic manner. Their embracing of American value of individualism

consequently diverts them too much from the community of Chinese Americans with whom they share strong affinities. Part of the problem is that the daughters mistakenly equate their Chinese heritage with their mothers. It, after all, creates the split between mother and daughter. As a matter of fact, their American style goes in opposition to their mothers.

The rejection of Lena and Rose of their mother and Chinese culture paves their way to marry with White American men. Ironically this move actually associates them to their mothers in terms of the patriarchal oppression, for the daughters experience inequality in their marriages in the way their mothers' experiences in China. Lena's marriage to Harold is based outwardly on equality, which they put into practice by splitting all of their expenses, but it put into fore the underlying form of patriarchal oppression slowly and gradually that Lena after long time. While both of them are working long hours at the architectural firm, it is the idea of Lena to launch a new business that makes him successful. Amy Tan's way of presenting her female characters with the rational ideas to guide the male in making them successful challenges the patriarchal ideology that consider female as inferior being indicating to their lack of rationality.

Revolting against such sexual discrimination in terms of wage, Linda M. Blum in her *Between Feminism and Labour: the Significance of the Comparable Worth Movement* asserts:

Much of the gap between men's and women's jobs therefore constitutes sex discrimination, which according to proponents, should be illegal. Women's lower earnings according to comparable worth arguments, represents the institutionalization of past discriminatory practices and contradict any notion of the 'free' market on the laws of

supply and demand. The wage scales in sex-segregated jobs should be set by a standard of “equal pay for equal jobs of equivalent values. (5)

It is owing to their dominating mentality that male give lower wages to female considering female as inferior to themselves. Linda further says that the comparable worth stems from the widely accepted tenet of ‘equal pay for equal work’: that men and women with the same jobs should be received the same pay. Such sexual segregation is prevalent even in democratic state like America. Although the idea of Lena has made them successful in business, Harold intentionally gives her seven times lower salary in comparison to him. Harold’s bizarre and disturbing insistence on dividing all their expenditure is in fact guided by the coveted desire of exploiting. He turns out to be selfish when he hesitates to make her a partner and continues to make much more money than she does. As she narrates:

I love my work when I don’t think about it too much. And when I do think about it, how much I get paid, how hard I work, how fair Harold is to everybody except me, I get upset. So really, we’re equals, except that Harold makes about seven times more than what I make. He knows this, too, because he signs my monthly check, and then I deposit it into my separate checking account. Lately, however, this business about being equals started to bother me. It has been on my mind, only I didn’t really know it. I just felt a little uneasy about something. (173-174)

As is clear from the above lines that sexual discrimination is prevalent in the American society where female are paid less than male in spite of their equal labor. Harold’s notion that keeping their finances separate will ensure their love thus proves a sham, since he has engineered a relationship in which he has the economic power in

the household, given is significantly larger salary, which he then uses to procure other forms of power. In one instance, it appears fair that Lena should pay the smaller percentage of the mortgage on the house they buy, that gives her lower earnings. As a result, she owns a smaller percentage of it where as Harold has greater say in decisions about the house. Consequently, Lena is thrust into a more dependent position.

Her mother's experience with patriarchal inequalities in her marriage to a man who cheated on her, enables her both to recognize the oppressive aspects of Lena's marriage and to put Lina into asserting herself, into acting on her own behalf. As Ying Ying comes to know about the sharing expenses of the items like 'Icecream' which Lina never eats, she stands up for her daughter when she asserts that Lena neither likes nor eat ice cream. Mother's revolting sprite invokes her sprite of self assertion. Which eventually helps her to assert her identity; she succeeds to declare her lack of interest "[she] hates the way [they] account for everything" and she "Just think [they] have to change things" (180). Her desire of change, in fact, is the protest against loveless nature of marriage and her husband's controlling influences.

Similarly, Rose's marriage is more overtly inequitable from its inception. In spite of their parents' disapproval of their interracial relationship, Rose and Ted change their relationship into marriage and decide in remaining away from them. Corresponding this, Simon De Beauvoir argues that Even in mutual love between male and female there is fundamental differences in the feeling of the love, which the woman tries to hide. The man tries to justify himself without her where as women attempts to justify in relation to man. As she argues, "If he is necessary to her, it means that she is evading her liberty: but if he accepts her liberty, without which he would be neither a hero nor even a man, no person or thing can be necessary to him"

(31). It is the weakness that initiates the dependence of female upon male and male uses it as the weapon to dominate the female. However, the inequality, which has been masked by their love, comes into force. A normal woman sometimes “yields in the end to the truth and finally recognizes the fact that she is no longer loved” (31).

As Rose says:

With imagined tragedy hovering over us, we became inseparable, two halves creating the whole: yin and yang. I was victim to his hero. I was always in danger and he was always rescuing me. I would fall and he would lift me up. It was exhilarating and draining. The emotional effect of saving and being saved was addicted to both of us. And what as much as anything we ever did in bed, was how we made love to each other: conjoined where my weaknesses needed protection. (125)

As the above lines indicate, Rose gets insight about her weakness which is sufficient for aspiration to make her stronger, more autonomous, less passive, or less like a victim. However, Ted places Rose within one of the prevalent American stereotypes of Chinese women, which Ling refers to as the fragile “China Doll: demure, diminutive, and deferential devoted body and soul to serving.” As Rose realizes in retrospect that they become obsessed to the roles they have chosen in their life.

After her marriage, their whole relationship thus relies on her dependence on Ted and his all decisions: “over the years Ted decided where we went on vacation. He decided what new furniture we should buy. He decided we should wait until we move into a better neighborhood before having children” (126). Ted gets power within American culture by his position as a successful white doctor with a wife who depends on him completely. After Ted loses a big but old suit and no longer feels all-powerful, however, he begins to blame Rose for never making decisions and, thus,

taking no responsibility or blame for anything; eventually, he demands a divorce.

Years of living in her husband's shadow "fifteen years of living in Ted's Shadow"

(215) leaves her with no sense of self and thus points to the oppressive quality of her marriage.

However, after learning from Ted that he needs the divorce paper signed immediately because he wants to remarry, Rose finally chooses to face the situation head on. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar points out that, "the feelings of alienation male predecessors" initiates the "need for" the bond with "sisterly precursors and successors" (1237) bond. Corresponding this, she gets support from her mother An Mei, who have experienced patriarchal oppression, and thus could provide Rose a supportive space within which to assert herself "why don't you speak up for yourself?" (216) as a subject capable of constructive agency. Then after, Rose refuses to sign the divorce papers and instructs him to wait for the papers till her lawyer fixes everything. She becomes assertive in the communication with Ted that can be found in her narration:

'I said I am staying here' I announced again.

'Who says' he folded his arms across his chest, squinting his eyes, examining my face as if he knew it would crack at any moment. The expression used to terrify me into stammer. . . . Now I felt nothing, no fear, no anger. 'I say I am staying and my lawyer will too, once we serve you the papers.' I said. And the answer, the one that was important above everything else, ran through my body and fell from my lips: 'you can't just pull me out of your life and through me away.' I saw what I wanted: his eyes confused, then scared. The power of my words was that strong. (229)

In the above communication, Rose exposes her as a subject with agency rather than as a victim or a shadow and thereby drastically changes the power dynamics between them. Indeed she reads the power that her words have in his eyes. Her dominant voice threatens Ted, who has expected the response with trembling voice like the past when she was afraid of to protest him in every action and thought.

Waverly and Jing-mei, other two daughters, have cleavage with their mothers due to their cultural differences, which is further intensified with their grown up in American culture. However, it is the story telling which plays the vital role to bring their conflict into culmination of affirmation. As Gloria Shen, in *International Women's Writing*, writes:

The sharing of cultural experience between mother and daughter through the device of storytelling transforms the naïve, self-protective daughters, who try hard to move away from, or surpass, their ethnic roots, into the mature daughters who are appreciative of their mother's Chinese ways with new consciousness, the mature daughter sees her mother in a new light. (242)

As is clear from the lines above, the storytelling not only helps to bring the Daughters back to their cultural roots but also recreates the bonding with their mothers, which has been cracked due to the daughters' failure in understanding the mothers desire of making their daughter better.

In fact, the mothers with the spirit of revolution have aimed to make their daughter independent in such a way that they can able to assert themselves and form their own identity. As in first parable, while embarking towards America, an old woman thinks, "in America, I will have daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her mother's Belch. Over there

nobody will look down on her” (3). Such a desire of mothers is comprehended by the daughters only when they know the spirit of mothers through the stories of their lives in which they have successfully challenged the patriarchal ideology and get rid of it with the revolutionary force they have. The sharing of experiences not only helps them to understand their mothers but at the same time helps them in transplanting the mothers’ spirit on them, and thus creating a new form of bonding among them.

Indeed, Waverly and her white Fiancé, likes to go to China so select it as the destination for their forthcoming Honeymoon. This shows her wish to attach more firmly with Chinese which has been remaining as the part of her. Her preference of China indicates Waverly’s assertion of herself as a subject with agency and at the same time, hope with regard to future.

Amy Tan has shown the bonding between Lindo and her daughter Waverly through the transmission of Lindo’s ‘wind’ like sprit upon Waverly, who becomes chess champion in her age of fourteen. Corresponding this issue, Adriene Rich writes in her book *Of Women Born* :

The cathexis between mother and daughter-essential, misused, distorted- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charge than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are there for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement. . . . Yet the relationship has been minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy. (qtd. in Hirsch 17)

These above lines are sufficient to comprehend the bond between mothers and daughters as rich focuses upon its vast horizon with associating to the energy that

flows from mother to daughter not only during the period of pregnancy but also at the time of delivery. Along with the relationship of energy, there is the relationship of knowledge between Waverly and Lindo; Waverley reveals that she has learnt various strategies of chess game from her mother. In her story 'Rules of The Games', she says, "I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength. It was a strategy for winning arguments, respect from others, and eventually, though neither of us knew it at the time, chess game" (89).

The strength of competitiveness, that Lindo has, is the main strategy to make her daughter champion in chess. She defeats her male opponents. Her sound intellectual capacity problematizes what Aristotle says that woman is woman by the virtue of certain lack of qualities. In order to further assist this idea, it is noteworthy to bring the idea expressed by Judith Butler in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* in which she describes how gender 'congeals' or solidifies into a form that makes it appear to have been there all along, and Butler asserts that gender is a process which has neither origin nor end, so that it is something that we 'do' rather than 'are'. In her early article, 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*', Butler declares that 'all gender is, by definition, unnatural' before she proceeds to upraise sex and gender from what many would assume to be their inevitable connection to each other. Butler departs from the common assumption that sex, gender and sexuality exist in relation to each other, so that if, for example, one is biologically female, one is expected to display 'feminine' traits and (in a heteronormative world, i.e. a world in which heterosexuality is deemed to be the norm) to desire men. Instead Butler claims that gender is 'unnatural', so that there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender. In that case, it will be possible to have a designated 'female' body and not to display traits generally considered 'feminine'. In other words, one

may be a 'masculine' female or a 'feminine' male. Assimilating this, Amy Tan has challenged the male patriarchal ideology, which considers the female as weak in comparison to males, through her character Waverly who becomes successful in game as well as in professional career.

Like Waverley, Jing-mei Woo shows affinity with her mother after the long gap between them. As her mother dies with the unfulfilled desire to meet her daughters, whom she has left during the war in China, Jing-mei not only takes her position in Joy Luck Club but also goes to China to tell everything about her mother with those daughters. She discovers her own ethnic self therein China. Jing-mei creates the new sisterly bond with them. As the final lines of her story goes:

My sisters and I stand, arms around each other, laughing and wiping the tears from each other's eyes. The flash of the Polaroid goes off and my father hands me the snapshot. My sisters and I watch quietly together, eager to see what develops. The gray-green surface changes to the bright colors of our three images, sharpening and deepening all at once. And although we don't speak, I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, long-cherished wish. (331-332)

After Meeting with those lost daughters, Jing-mei fulfills the remaining task of her mother, and at the same time creates a new sisterly bonding in order to construct the collective agency of female which will eventually help in creating the space for the female who are obliged to remain in the downtrodden position for long. Her meeting with them helps in reconnecting the detached mother and daughters. The tears following from their eyes are not the tear of sorrow rather of happiness, which

indicates the progress in the lives of women towards betterment. It, in fact, forecasts the equal space for women in the predominantly masculinist society.

Through the depiction of mother daughter bonding, Tan's novel depicts a gendered shift in the mother's primary attachment from son to daughter. In this connection, Marianne Hirsch in her book, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* writes:

An early erotic attachment between mother and daughter which remains permanently incorporated into the daughter's psyche, a need to recreate the quality of that bond in adult heterosexual relationships which promise to duplicate but ultimately threatens the principal loyalty to the mother, all in the context of male inconsistency and betrayal. (68)

Focusing on the feminine and, more controversially, on the maternal, Hirsch alters the perception of both the familial structures basic to traditional narrative of the Oedipus story and the narrative structures basic to traditional representations of the family that of Freudian family romance. She analyzes Freudian way of associating mother with son as the production of patriarchal ideology, for it attempts to give the space of father, the powerful one in the family, to the son. Freudian 'Oedipus Complex' renders the mother to the inferior position to her own son, as son achieves the similar space to her husband. At the same time, it creates the gap between mother and daughter.

Hirsch further argues that mother and daughter have the strong bonding from the birth which should be continued even in their heterosexual relationship. In fact, she emphasizes the mutual dependency between mother and daughter rather than seeing them as subjects exercising any independent control over their own plots. She

finds the paramount importance of mother daughter symbiosis in both of their life. Incorporating this, Amy Tan shifts from the mother son relationship with the mother daughter relationship. This shift keeps the mothers away from a patriarchal, hierarchical familial mode that ultimately paves the way in shaping of the Joy Luck Club and their hopes for their daughters to keep away from the patriarchal oppressions they had experienced as women in China.

Furthermore, mother daughter bonding continues after the death as well, which Amy Tan attempts to prove by capturing an incidents of daughter's witnessing of their mother's death; Jing-mei Woo and An Mei Hsu both faces the death of their mothers in different time period. Unlike the novels written by the males who valorize the bravery of son in the death of their fathers, Tan valorizes daughter's perception of mother's death in her novel. In the words of Elaine Showalter, who urges the female writers to write the female experiences by extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and technique of literature. As she says:

Hating one's mother was the feminist enlightenment of the fifties and sixties; but it is only a metaphor for hating oneself. Female literature of the 1970s goes beyond matrophobia to a courageously sustained quest for the mother. As the death of the father has always been an archetypal rite of passage for the father has always been an archetypal rite of passage for the Western hero, now the death of the mother as witnessed and transcended by the daughter has become one of the most profound occasions of female literature. (1230)

The literary creation of the males and even the females in the past ignored the bond between mother and daughter while focusing upon the matrophobia and the heroism of father and son. What Showalter tries to indicate is the need of female bonding in

the literary creation of the contemporary period. She further says that the separation of mother and daughter should not demonstrate the daughters as feeble creature rather should depict the daughters as strong as the western hero in the death of his father. She discards the way of keeping negative relationship with mothers as it never can be beneficial in the life of a female. She thinks that going against their mothers is no more than going against their own life.

Here, it is noteworthy to bring the idea expressed by the author about her novel *The Joy Luck Club*, which she thinks that a strong strike to the women who have lost their mother recently or are going to lose their mother forever in their life. According to her, the novel has captured the feelings of regret towards misunderstanding between mother and daughter owing to their variation in choices, which they realize either at the time of their mother's death or after it. Whatever it may be, as Tan argues, the death of their mother has paramount importance in the life of daughters. As she says:

I think I wrote about something that hit a lot of baby boomer women whose mothers have just recently died or may die in the near future. They felt that their misunderstandings, things that had not been talked about for years, were expressed in the book . . . I know many mothers who gave the book to their daughters, and daughters, who gave the book to their mothers, and marked passages of things they wanted to say. (17)

The life of mother is an important book for the daughters who must learn it in order to get rid from the sufferings that their mothers has gone through in the predominantly masculinist society. As expressed in her interview, Tan has chosen mothers and

daughters as her characters, who get resolution from the long conflict which makes the daughters more experienced and responsible in their life.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* presents the daughters as capable to fulfill the responsibilities after the death of their mothers; with the span of time, they turn out to be stronger than their mothers in the patriarchal society. Jing-mei witnesses the decease of her mother and discovers that her mother "dies with an idea inside her head" (1). As an responsible daughter she embarks towards the journey with the intention of fulfilling her mother's desire to meet her lost children in China which she knew when Ying Ying tells her in the Joy luck Club "Your mother was a very strong woman . . . she knew they were still alive, and before she died she wanted to find her daughters in China" (29). Her aunties in the club suggest her to tell everything that she knew about her mother so that they can feel their mother even in her absence. Jing-mei becomes strong after getting her Aunties' full support in her task and responds firmly to them "I say more firmly. And gradually one by one they smile and pat my hand" (32). By making Jing-mei firm in her mission to navigate her lost sisters in China, where she has never gone before, Amy Tan subverts the patriarchal demarcation of male and female in terms of the works; according to which female should be confined within the private sphere of kitchen whereas the males are for the public works.

Likewise, An- Mei Hsu also narrates her witnessing of her mother's suicide that her mother has committed due to the extreme exploitation of her husband in the oppressive patriarchal society of China. As she narrates, "Seeing her the last time, I threw myself on her body. And she opened her eyes slowly. I was not scared. I knew she could see me and what she had finally done. So I shut her eyes with my fingers and told her with my heart; I can see the truth, too. I am strong, too" (271). As Hsu

comes to know that her mother is the victim of patriarchal society she becomes stronger in order to protest against the domination of females in the predominantly masculinist society. In *Magpies*, she further says:

My mother, she suffered. She lost her face and tried to hide it. She found only greater misery and finally could not hide that. There is nothing more to understand. That was China. That was what people did back then. They had no choice. They could not run away. That was their fate. But now they can do something else. Now they no longer have to swallow their own tears or suffer the taunts of *Magpies*. (272)

The above lines depict the change in the situation of women with the change of time in China. These utterances are sufficient to understand the pathetic condition of the women in the patriarchal society where women are tied in the iron shackles of the patriarchal norms and values and they are obliged to swallow their own tear. They do not get freedom of choice; they are limited within the four walls of the house.

Women, in the patriarchal society, do not get chance to expose themselves in the ongoing social happenings and they are always sabotaged in the bottom rungs of the social ladder internalizing the fact that it is their own fate that obliges them to bow on the feet of patriarchal custodians. However, with the span of time, as An Mei thinks, women have attained freedom so that they no longer have to suffer throughout their life.

Finally, Amy Tan has created the bonding among the female with having the similar experience of oppression under the patriarchy for self assertion with the collective agency. Such a unity among the female paves the way in constructing female space where they have their own individual voice. At the same time, it intensifies the bonding between mother and daughter through the sharing of

experiences of subjugation and the protest against the oppressive patriarchy. Through the Joy Luck Club, both in China and America, Amy Tan has given the space and voice to the female who are obliged to live in downtrodden position under the patriarchal society where they lack the space and are always unheard. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan has shown the progressive leap from the status quoits patriarchal social structure through her self-assertive female characters with their agency.

### III. Quest of Woman's Space in *The Joy Luck Club*

In the novel, the female characters have been moving towards the quest of women's space in the patriarchal society of which they have been deprived for long. Their initiative is made possible through the bonding that they form on the basis of the shared experiences of oppression under the oppressive patriarchy. Indeed, such bonding helps in constructing communal agency that paves the way for blurring the dichotomy of masculine/feminine gender roles deep rooted in the patriarchal social and cultural system. Such communal agency aspires to assert female identity thus helps in reconstructing distinct female space. In this research, the assumption of reconstructing the equal space for women in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, is proved on the basis of female characters' attempt to put conventional patriarchal dichotomy under assault by asserting their self with their own agency. The structure of sexual discrimination created by males for the subjugation of females has been questioned by bringing the strong voice of the marginalized females to the mainstream. Specifically, it foregrounds the mother daughter relationship as a bond with the internal strength to alter such dichotomy coming throughout the history and prevalent till now.

With the glances of pathetic female condition in China during the Second World War, the novel deals with the unity among such four women under the umbrella of Joy Luck Club to choose their hope from joy and asserts their self. In fact, they question the males' coveted desire of power by celebrating with delicious during the period of war. Considering the war as the result of male's will to power, they stop to weep in its effect. During the war, patriarchal society has been expecting them as heartbroken wife and daughter in the death of their relatives, but they challenge it by choosing their own way of life.

Beside war, Amy Tan has also presented the glimpses of female victimization by the male as well as female in China during the first half of the twentieth century. It is the hegemony of powerful male dominated culture that has also contaminated the minds of females. As a result, they are unknowingly helping the males in exploiting the females themselves. The research analyzes the hegemony of powerful rulers among the powerless ones in the society. Amy Tan has illustrates the adverse effect of such hegemony thus urging for the bonding among females.

After her immigration to America, Suyuan Woo again creates the San Francisco version of Joy Luck Club with the four Chinese Women with the similar experience of victimization and having the sense of protest against it. Again, the similar experience of oppression establishes the bonding among them. As all of them have escaped from the grip of oppressive patriarchy with their revolt against it, they are living with the undercurrents of sense of protest against such domination even in America. Such a sense of revolution is transmitted towards their daughters that ultimately help their daughters to assert their self by revolting against the domination of underlying male biased social structure of America.

The research further analyzes shift of son and mother relationship as theorized by Sigmund Freud to the mother daughter relationship in *The Joy Luck Club*. Drawing upon the concept of Marianne Hirsch who dismantles the Freudian concept of Oedipus complex by considering it as the product of mind that is contaminated by patriarchal ideology; this research analyzes the novel as an epitome to problematizes the Oedipus complex, for it advocates the mother daughter relationship. According to Hirsch, daughter and mother are closer in comparison to son and mother during the child. Corresponding her, Amy Tan focuses upon mother daughter relationship, which, though begins in conflict, culminates in assimilation with the help of

storytelling only means to share their feelings. The shared feelings of oppression, in fact, bring them together in spite of the cultural gap as well as the generational cleavage. American Born daughters, at first, hate their mothers who were born and brought up in Chinese culture, but their realization of sexual inequality in American Culture and their mothers' revolutionary spirit brings them back to the lap of their mothers. Similarly, the ending of novel with the meeting of Jing Mei Woo and her Sisters, Suyuan Woo, who had left during the Second World War in China, and died with the desire to meet them, indicates the sisterly bond transcending the national border and the cultural barriers.

To wrap up, the research analyzes the female characters of three different generations in order to dramatize the growing consciousness among them which helps them to reconstruct their space in the predominantly masculinist society. Amy Tan's female characters create their own space in the patriarchal society in which as Spivak says, "There is no space from which woman subject can speak" (102). Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* revolves around the construction and development of Joy Luck Club that is rooted within the bonding of female having similar experience of oppression. Within the distinct space of Joy Luck Club, they have their own agency over their actions and thoughts that aspires the daughters to come up with the spirit to revolt against the domination. The experience of women from three different generations, as visualized in the novel, illustrates progress in their quest of space they have been fighting for.

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## **Abstract**

The present research on Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* excavates how the female characters reconstruct the female space through their bonding formed on the basis of the experiences of oppression they share under the predominantly masculinist society of China and America during the first and second half of twentieth century respectively. Initiated at first in Kweilin and continued in San Francisco, Joy Luck Club is the distinct space created by female for female where they have their own agency over actions and thoughts. Their communal agency pass on to the succeeding generation through the Joy Luck Club, thus aspires them to assert their identity. In spite of their cultural differences, storytelling, only means to share their feelings, helps to reestablish the connection between mother and daughter. The bonding among mothers and daughters, in fact, dismantles the Freudian mother son relationship. Moreover, female characters with strong revolutionary spirit and sound intellectual power subverts the traditional patriarchal dichotomy of masculinity/femininity, thus construct the distinct truth and space for female.