

Tribhuvan University

Chinese Nativism and American Assimilation: Transculturalism in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Central Department of English T.U.  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in English

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June 2014

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Anup Shahi completed his dissertation entitled "Chinese Nativism and American Assimilation: Transculturalism in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from September 2013 to June 2014 and completed it successfully. I hereby recommend his dissertation be submitted for the viva voce.

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## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and indebtedness to my supervisor, Dr. Ram Chandra Paudel, of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for his scholarly suggestions, constant encouragement and invaluable guidance while preparing this thesis.

Likewise, my sense of gratitude goes to Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, the Head of The Central Department of English who helped me in the completion of this project through his invaluable inspiration. Similarly, sense of my due respect goes to Dr. Anirudra Thapa, Coordinator of M. Phil. program, Prof. Dr. Beerendra Pandey and other teachers of the Central Department of English, who were helpful in providing me useful instructions and other suggestions.

At this moment, I also want to express thanks to my family members and relatives. Especially, I am thankful to my parents, and my wife and daughter for helping and encouraging me in this project.

June 2014

Anup Shahi

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## I. Amy Tan and Her Quest for Cultural Roots

This dissertation seeks to study Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) from the perspective of cultural criticism. The study explores the conflict between mothers and daughters while revisiting the themes of familial and generational continuities and misunderstandings in the two texts. It argues that the two novels use the mother-daughter conflict trope as a displacement of the struggles between Chinese nativism and American assimilation. Even as the narratives dramatize the generational conflict, the thrust is on reconciliation rather than unresolved disagreement. The research hypothesizes that the reconciliation is meant to convey a political message, which is that of transcultural identity formation. The mutual understanding is brought about on the one hand by the daughters' eventual realization that they cannot be American whites and on the other hand by their mothers' coming to understand that they cannot afford rejection by their own offspring.

The main objective is to show that the compromise is allegorical for the coming together of Chinese nativism and American culture. The purpose is also to show that Chinese American women's journey to transculturalism is full of twists and turns.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is a "semi-autobiography" (Adams 31). Semi- autobiographies were very popular among ethnic authors in the US from the 1960s to the 1980s. In the novel, Chinese myths and fables that Tan learned from her mother are "combined with stories based on Tan's own life" (Snodgrass 157). For example, Tan's mother escaped from her first Chinese husband, left behind her Chinese daughters, immigrated to the USA and remarried. Also some of the feelings presented in the mother-daughter relationships and the cross-cultural

conflicts are very similar to what Amy Tan herself went through in her childhood (Adams 29).

*The Joy Luck Club* is organized into sixteen different stories told by seven narrators. Each woman, both mothers and daughters, share stories about their lives and childhoods. All of the mothers want to raise their children in the traditional Chinese way and still allow them to be all that they can be in America. This causes many conflicts between them, when the daughters behave in too American way. Each mother shows their love to their daughters in a different way, and the daughters usually respond to it in a negative manner. There is a lack of communication between the mothers and daughters due to cultural barriers. Both mothers and daughters try hard to communicate with each other, but sometimes misunderstandings result from cultural differences.

In the novel, the communication between mothers and daughters is not only disturbed by generational differences. Most important is the barrier of "two cultures clashing; the older Chinese culture and the present American culture" (Shear 194). Moreover, the mothers and daughters have to overcome the class difference that has come between them. The Chinese mothers have always been manual labourers, whereas the daughters have had the opportunity to educate themselves and climb the social ladder. Therefore, racial, cultural, and class differences between mother and daughter influence their individual interpretation of situations and cause miscommunication and misunderstanding. Their individual decision to tell stories and let the daughters in on their secrets and histories is their last attempt to bridge the gap between cultures, generations and language and restore the brittle relationship between a mother and a daughter.

Chinese Americans have been kept in the margin since they first arrived at the continent of America, far from the mainstream dominated by white Americans. The majority of Chinese women who migrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century were “working class with neither the education nor the leisure to write books; their lives were engulfed by the duties of childbearing, childcare, and the business of earning a living” (Ling 13). After the Civil Right Movement, more and more ethnic groups came to the fore for their original identity. After Africans Americans, Chinese Americans — another large ethnic group — has actively joined in this trend as well, and to some extent women writers along with Maxine Hong Kingston (1940- ) and Amy Tan (1952- ) made their presence. Kingston has written three novels and several works of non-fiction about the experiences of Chinese migrants living in America. She has greatly contributed to the Feminist Movement with works as her memoir *The Woman Warrior*, which discusses gender and ethnicity and how these concepts affect the lives of women. Amy Tan, as another eminent Chinese American writer, has endeavored to assert a narrative authority for Chinese American women who have been kept silence for a long time.

Amy Tan, who was born to Chinese immigrant parents in 1952 in Oakland, California, is a celebrated Asian-American novelist. Her mother was forced to leave her three daughters from a previous marriage behind in Shanghai. Not until Tan was 12 did she learn of the existence of her sisters, which had become one of the several autobiographical elements she would later incorporate into her fiction. Throughout much of her childhood, Tan had always struggled with her parent’s desire to cling to traditional Chinese customs and her own wish to become more Americanized. Her parents wanted Tan to become a neurosurgeon while she wanted to become a fiction writer. Amy Tan’s life has been marked by death and



change. While still in her teens, Tan experienced the loss of both her father and her 16-year-old brother due to brain tumors. Tan received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English and Linguistics from San Jose State University, and later did doctoral linguistics studies at UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley. Amy Tan is a New York Bestselling Author and highly acclaimed award winning novelist for *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Moon Lady* (1992), *Sagwa: the Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), *The Opposite of Fate* (2003), and *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005).

The multiple themes of Tan's novels mainly focus on cross-cultural, ethnic and cultural identity and mother-daughter relationships. Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, published in 1989, is tremendous success which narrates the relationships between four Chinese migrant women and their American-born daughters. Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, was published in 1991 followed by the children's books *The Moon Lady*, *The Chinese Siamese Cat* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. *The Kitchen God's Wife* again deals with mother-daughter relationships, but in this novel, Tan confines herself to only one family and the complex relationship between Winnie Louie and her daughter Pearl.

*The Moon Lady* is a children's story based on an episode from *The Joy Luck Club* which is derived from a Chinese legend. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan tackles the relationship between two sisters: Chinese-born Kwan and her younger, Chinese American sister Olivia, who serves as the book's main narrator. The year 2001 saw the release of yet another successful novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, which, like much of Tan's work, deals with the relationship between an American-born Chinese woman and her migrant mother.

The themes of Amy Tan's novel mainly tackle mother-daughter relationships, familial bounds and cultural identity, which are universal concerns and commonly recognized themes. Her novels also discuss matters of common concerns to other Chinese American writers: the construction of self-identity, searching one's origins, the gulf and reconciliation between generations, conflicts of two distinctive cultures and individuals coming to terms with the facts of their lives. Amy Tan has been highly praised for her story telling skills and the manipulation of the English language. Literary critic E.D. Huntley comments that there are a number of distinctive trademarks in Tan's work: "a strong sense of place, a many-layered narrative, family secrets, generational conflict, Chinese lore and history, and an engrossing story" (113). As a Chinese American, Tan has interweaved the conflicts between two cultures, two languages and two philosophies by narrating wonderful stories which take place in the past and the present.

The contemporary Chinese American literature constitutes an important branch of the "ethnic literature" in the United States. The Modern Association issued bibliographies of various kinds of ethnic literature. In addition, the Chinese American literature has been included in a chapter named "Emergent Literatures" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* by Cyrus Patell, who points out:

American literature arises from a cultural moment marked not by consensus but 'discensus.' Its task, therefore, is to 'redraw the boundaries of the field' of American literary scholarship, opening up the canon to expansion and redefinition by acknowledging that literary history must be 'a multivocal, multifaceted scholarly,

critical, and pedagogic enterprise' driven by 'the energies of heterogeneity.' (qtd. in Bercovitch 671)

Under such circumstances, Amy Tan's writings, in addition to their great charm to the general readers, have attracted much attention of the academic researchers both in the United States and in China.

Critical commentary on *The Joy Luck Club* is highly complementary in America. This novel has been acclaimed by critics as a well-crafted work of fiction and as a keyhole through which the reader can peer into a culture that seldom been explored in American literature. *Publishers Weekly* called Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* "intensely poetic, startlingly imaginative and moving", describing it as "on the order of Maxine Hong Kingston's work, but more accessible, its oriental orientation an irresistible magnet [...] a major achievement." From *The Times Educational Supplement* came the following: "Amy Tan [...] is marvelously alert to the rich ambivalence in her material. With the delicacy of a butterfly she touches on matter that is ineradicable and profound".

During the decade from 1995 to 2010, 112 articles about Amy Tan and *The Joy Luck Club* research were published domestically. And most of them explored the cultural field. Firstly, some articles are primarily concerned with the subtle mother-daughter relationships. Shi Pingping's "The Mother-daughter Relationship" and the Politics of Race and Gender in Chinese American Women's Writings: A Study of *The Woman Warrior*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and *Bone* is a typical example of this sort. Shi's dissertation seeks to contribute to racial politics within feminism by examining the theme of mother-daughter relationship in the masterworks of three influential Chinese American women writers. Chapter Three of this dissertation elaborately deals with Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, which features

the multiple relationships between four pairs of Chinese migrant mothers and American-born daughters aside from more than four pairs of Chinese migrant mothers and their mothers and grandmothers in China.

Some Chinese critics focus on the study of the construction of Chinese American cultural identity. A large number of critics take Amy Tan as identifying with a new cultural subjectivity, and many famous Chinese critics, like Cheng Aimin (1955- ) and Hu Yamin (1954- ), hold that Amy Tan has succeeded in reconstructing a new cultural identity with her writings. In *Diasporic Writing and National Identity: Speculation also on Identity Issues in Chinese American Literature*, Chen Aimin points out the criterion in the construction of the identity in diasporic writing with strong evidence and support and argues that in ethnic writing a strict adherence to the essence of one's nationality is absolutely necessary, but too much adoration of nationalism must be avoided. Hu Yamin's *The New Cognition of Chinese Americans toward Their Cultural Identities in The Joy Luck Club* specifically explores the contrary attitudes of two generations toward cultural assimilation by employing *The Joy Luck Club* as his study subject.

Since the time *The Joy Luck Club* appeared on the literary horizon in 1989 and *The Kitchen God's Wife* in 1991, they have drawn the attention of many critics but no one has bothered to analyze the theme of transculturation. There are a host of critics who simply ignore such issues of the novels by pointing them as psychological novels.

Amy Tan's short story sequence, *The Joy Luck Club*, as Zenobia Mistri argues, focuses on four Chinese mothers and their American daughters who are at odds with their mothers, their inheritance, and the power of their mothers' wisdom and strength. Interestingly, none of these mothers longs for her daughter to be

Chinese following nothing but Chinese ways, for each woman has come to America with the intent of making a better life in which her family would know the fabled American successes. Each mother has her own powerful story of overcoming odds, of having learned the lesson of becoming strong through seeing her own mother suffer or by suffering herself. Each mother feels the anguish of the cultural separation between herself and her daughter. Each mother wants her daughter to know the power and advantage of two cultures instead of embracing only one- The American; and importantly, each mother rescues her daughter from the specific culture that threatens her (45).

In *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Amy Tan lists food items and portrays meals and parties from time to time. The texts provide adequate evidences to support the argument that Tan does not attempt to display food only. Food imagery has a three-fold purpose. First, food references help enrich the portrayal of characters. Second, activities concerning food, such as eating and cooking, symbolize power relations between man and woman, or between mother and daughter. Third, Tan's treatment of Chinese cookery shows how a Chinese American daughter gazes her mother's culture. It also indicates the daughter's ambiguous cultural identity. Pi-Li Hsiao highlights the importance of food item as carrying cultural significance:

The novels convey culinary connotation even in their book titles. *The Joy Luck Club* is portrayed as a regular gathering, where four female characters cook, eat, play mahjong, and have fun. According to Chinese folklore, the Kitchen God takes charge of the kitchen and makes an annual report to the Jade Emperor in heaven. Women

worship and bribe the Kitchen God otherwise he should betray them in his report. (34)

In addition to the titles, there are large amounts of food references in both novels. Tan lists food items such as "food in kitchens, food in restaurants, food in markets, and food in imagination. Critics have successfully explored evident subject matters in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*: the mother/daughter relationships, the search for female identity and the ambiguity in ethnic identity. But very few of them have explored the hidden meanings of those long lists of food items that recur here and there. The lists can be attributed to Tan's Chinese background, since the Chinese people are regarded as "food oriented" (Chang 11), but there are adequate evidences to support the argument that to display food is not Tan's only attempt.

Commenting on Amy Tan's novels, Gloria Shen has said that Tan has purposely externalized the eight characters' mental world by allowing each of them to tell her own story in a deceptively simple manner, thus allowing the reader to plunge into the mind of the characters as there by effectively dramatized. This particular writing strategy allows Tan to transcend the conventional novelistic dichotomy of preferred "showing" and undesirable "telling." The stories thus tell us a great deal about individual characters, their reaction to each other, and their activities together. Because the stories are told in the mothers' and daughters' own voices, we are spared the pressing question with which the reader of a conventional novel is constantly bombarded (5).

Similarly, M. Marie Booth Foster, analyzing Tan's novels argues that *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* are studies in balancing hyphenation and the roles of daughters, wife, mother, sister, career woman. In achieving

balance, voice is important: in order to achieve voice, hyphenated women must engage in self-exploration, recognition and appreciation of their culture(s), and they must know their histories. The quest for voice becomes an archetypal journey for all of the women. The mothers come to the United States and have to adapt to a new culture, to redefine voice and self. The daughters' journeys become rites of passage; before they can find voice or define self they must acknowledge the history and myth of their mothers- "her stories" of life in china, passage to the United States, and assimilation. And each must come to grips with being mother's daughter (18).

Tan's temporal framing embodies and increases the formal tensions between the past and present in *The Joy Luck Club*. The characters' desire for emotional connection in the present, as Marc Singer writes, would seem to invite a synchronic dialogue among the stories, yet that drive for synchronism conflicts with the novelistic narrative scheme that separates the stories along a diachronic timeline and divides the stories of the past from those of the present. Tan's narrative framing only exacerbates this tension. While she does locate nearly all of the stories within a common frame in mid- 1980s San Francisco, this setting never generates a dialogue between the characters or their stories (92).

*The Kitchen God's Wife*, Amy Tan's second novel, is concerned with a young, Americanized Chinese American woman's quest to accept her heritage and in so doing, she accepts her family, especially her mother. The first section of the novel, told from the daughter Pearl's point of view, concerns Pearl's difficult relationship with her mother, Winnie. Pearl perceives Winnie only as old, unfashionable woman with trivial concerns. Pearl is troubled by a secret that she believes she can't tell her mother. Pearl has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis,

but dreads her mother's reaction, her reproaches, her list of ways Pearl could have prevented her disease.

*The Kitchen God's Wife*, to refer to Bella Adams, is valuable because in representing a particular period of Chinese history, namely Japan's occupation of China during the 1930s and the 1940s as well as the Rape of Nanking (1937), it promotes an analysis that resists two equally conservative, if not downright oppressive, ideologies: neocolonialism and Japanese revisionism. These ideologies allow neocolonialist to factualize literature and ultranationalists to fictionalize history (9).

In spite of the availability of interpretation of Amy Tan's novels from different perspectives, the issues of Chinese Nativism, and American assimilation is ignored. This critical gap is what this research aims to fulfill through this research.

The dissertation has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – an introduction to the research, a short cultural and literary background of the writer Amy Tan and a short literature review. Moreover, it gives a general outline of the entire work. The second chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length, taking theoretical support from cultural theory, especially from Homi K. Bhabha. It analyzes how the texts *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* explore the conflict and the process of transcultural identity by the Chinese mother and their American-born daughter. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study – It argues that the two novels use the mother-daughter conflict trope as a displacement of the struggles between Chinese nativism and American assimilation. Even as the narratives dramatize the generational conflict, the concern is on the compromise and reconciliation rather



than unresolved disagreement. Thus, the research hypothesizes that the reconciliation is achieved through compromise, which is crucial in the formation of transcultural identity. But this identity is a kind of hybrid identity. Finally, the third or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the dissertation.

## II. Cultural Conflict in *the Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*

The novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan explore the hardships that Chinese mothers face with their second-generation "American" daughters in America. So, this dissertation examines their journey towards transcultural identity. Using short anecdotes and prose, which are filled with cultural description, Tan reveals the differences among five mother-and-daughter pairs. At the same time, Tan reveals their unfulfilled wishes and connections: a desire to understand and to be understood, despite the generation gap that separates their mindsets, and to take their experiences and make a better future while they still hold on to the wisdom of the past. In the case of these novels, Tan focuses on the different cultural patterns of Eastern and Western thinking, but in a broader sense, she also suggests the importance of creating an identity that will link the best of both worlds no matter what ethnicity or time they come from.

Transculturation is what Mieke Bal calls a traveling concept. She argues that "interdisciplinarity in the humanities, necessary, exciting, serious, must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in concepts rather than methods . . . to look at the practice cultural analysis" (qtd. in Codell 3). Bal suggests that a focus on concepts can better illuminate the object than a focus on methodologies. She advocates a return to a close-reading approach, using concepts not so much as firmly established univocal terms but as dynamic in themselves. While groping to define, provisionally and partly, what "a particular concept may mean we gain insight into what it can do. It is in the groping that the valuable work lies. . . . The groping is a collective endeavor" (qtd. in Codell 3).

*The Joy Luck Club*, Tan's first novel written in 1989 in her mother's dedication, records the lives and conflict of four Chinese-American mothers and

their America-born daughters. Although the novel is broken up into 16 short stories, the central theme of quest for cultural roots and diversity unifies the plot. Although this is common for a quest novel, it "allows the unconnected fragments of life, revealed from different but somewhat overlapping perspectives to unfold into a meaningful, continuous whole so that the persistent tensions and powerful bonds between mother and daughter. . . may be illuminated through a montage effect on the reader" (Shen4). Likewise, the daughters' stories often offer a distorted reflection of their mothers' past experiences; each mother-daughter pair also speaks of the other and expresses concern over their miscommunication.

Obviously, these novels are linked in many ways. Besides sharing the same author, they focus on central themes of cultural differences, mother-daughter relationships, problems and improvements of communication, and ultimately, greater knowledge through embracing of their heritage. Each group of characters shares something in common, be it an experience, hope, or weak characteristic. In emphasizing the storytelling aspects, Tan weaves a well-designed tapestry of anecdotes – "intricate and haunting memories couched in carefully wrought stories. The Mothers are deeply rooted to Chinese values; the three mothers in *Joy Luck Club* and to some extent, Jing-Mei's dead mother Suyuan all share a common concern. As Jing-Mei states in the first short story:

They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and lucky do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-

born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it doesn't exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (31)

Although each mother has an individual disposition, the underlying expression in all the mothers is the same: they want their daughters to understand and learn from their past and heritage in the hopes that this wisdom will continue to live on in the different socio-cultural surroundings in America. Winnie in *The Kitchen God's Wife* exhibits the same desire, although at first she keeps it within her. In short, all of the mothers are deeply rooted to their Chinese values. Walter Shear refers to them in his essay as "students who have learned about social realities around them and use these experiences to come to conclusions about essential forms of character strength and weakness" (132). This is apparent in the way we can see the mothers' past experiences connect with the discipline that they try to instill in their daughters, which creates conflict as the daughters are brought up in white culture.

In Lindo's story "The Red Candle", she expresses her worry about Waverly's future children and how they, like Waverly, will lose the strong filial ties that were so respected in Lindo's time – so important, in fact, that Lindo suffers through a terrible marriage in order to remain respectful of her parents. Waverly even admits herself in "Rules of the Game" that her mother "imparted her daily truths so she could help me and my brother rise above our circumstances" (89). Rose Hsu Jordan, in "Without Wood", finally realizes that all of the assumptions she had made about her strict mother in the past had been wrongly derived – An-Mei had not wanted to restrict her daughter's life nor make it miserable; she merely wanted to be able to help her daughter. She was inspired by the lessons she had learnt in her young age after learning about the lies and deception that existed in the world.

It is because of this experience that An-Mei is so concerned for Rose's faltering marriage; she wants Rose to be able to speak out for what she believes in, as opposed to An-Mei's own oppressed childhood. In the end of this particular short story, Tan uses the metaphor of Old Mr. Chou, a harsh dreamland persona who ends up being a friendly character after Rose can finally peer through the fog in her dream, to reveal Rose's misconceptions about her mother. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the same personality is evident in Winnie. Her story, even more shockingly harsh than those of the mothers in *Joy Luck Club* is full of lessons learned and renewed perspectives.

Throughout the story, Winnie holds on to parts of her former life whether it is a happy thought, such as sharing secrets with Peanut in the greenhouse, or material goods, such as her ten silver chopsticks in order to mentally help herself through the bad times. Likewise, she indirectly shares this same principle with Pearl, telling her stories about her past life emphasizing various Chinese beliefs. The whole time that Winnie has lived in America, she has still kept close ties with her Chinese friends and principles, ultimately adhering to the roots in her own mother culture. She talks about her beliefs and meanings, a source of miscommunication with her daughter but common in older Chinese generations when women were expected to be modest and not so loud spoken and modern. Winnie also emphasizes the difficulty of her previous life and compares it with Pearl's life of convenience to help her daughter appreciate the life that she lives now in the United States. On the surface, we may, as Pearl does, assume that this is typical of older lifestyles and believe it to be a hyperbole. In fact, Pearl, for the most part, is mildly annoyed about these discussions and does not appreciate the full value of her mother's indirect teachings, leading to some misunderstanding. For

example, when Winnie attempts to give Pearl the Kitchen God altar, it is not until she hears her mother's full tragic story does she finally realize the pain and suffering her mother has gone through and why she had always tried to keep Pearl close, protected, and well-raised.

These mothers are all "strong, determined, endowed with mysterious power, [and] all show similar concerns about their daughters' welfare, possessively trying to hold onto their daughters" (Shen 56). Unfortunately, the daughters seem to be slipping away every day, and it is not until they are able to fully listen to and appreciate their mothers do they realize the power of their mothers' Chinese philosophies. The daughters of both novels suffer from confusion, usually torn between the Eastern and Western ways of thinking. For the most part, they embrace the Western, "American" culture that they have been born into, which generates a detachment from their mothers and creates conflicts and misunderstandings. In a way, the daughters are caught in an identity crisis, facing divorce and other troubles with their Americanized ways of thinking and culture.

Shear describes this as "knowing possibilities rather than answers, puzzling over the realities that seem to be surrounding them and trying to find their place in what seems an ambivalent world" (195). Although different from their mothers in philosophy, however, the daughters exhibit the same desire to understand and be understood. After acknowledging that their marriages and lives may potentially be on the line, the daughters realize that perhaps their American ways of thinking are not the best after all. As Rose explains it in "Without Wood", "there was a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices... so much to think about, so much to decide. Each decision meant a turn in the other direction" (214). The daughters approach their mothers for explanations, validations, and identity

reinforcement and definition, but are unable to fully connect until they are willing to listen to their cultural roots and accept a compromise of both philosophies and cultures.

Language, a literal representation of the communication barrier, comes into playing many times in the novel. The mothers attempt to speak broken English but falter and relapse into Chinese while the daughters do not fully understand the Chinese idioms what their mothers convey but rather talk back in English. Later, in *Joy Luck Club*, when Jing-Mei asks her father for retelling of her mother's story, she insists him in speaking in Chinese after he starts in broken English. This return to Chinese, the mother tongue of all the principle characters, symbolizes finally a unity and compromise between the new and the old, the daughters and the mothers, the West and the East.

In the novel, the relationships between the mothers and daughters share neither the same realm of experience and knowledge nor the same concerns. Their differences are not marked by a slip of the tongue or lack of linguistic ability or even by a generational gap, but rather by a deep geographical and cultural gap. When these two perspectives are put together, we can clearly view the main conflict between the mothers and daughters: a clash of Eastern and Western philosophies. While the daughters perceive "cultural blanks", the mothers tend to fill in too much, at times appearing too forceful in their cultural pride. Shen points out the irony in this conflict: "The accomplishment of the mother's dream for her daughter, a dream that entailed physical removal from her motherland, results in multifarious problems with her daughter" (67). The mothers have left China in order to pave a new destiny for themselves and their future daughters, but in doing so; they have invited the problem of cultural drift into the story. For example,

Lindo accuses herself of being responsible for Waverly's attitude. She wanted Waverly to have the best of both worlds, but was unable to foresee that her daughter's American circumstances would not mix well with the Chinese reality.

In *Joy Luck Club*, the novel is made of two opposing sets of stories: one from the mothers telling of the wisdom and experiences they had in the past and other from the daughters, one about growing up with their mothers and one about their current family troubles. By utilizing the "stories within stories" format, Tan externalizes all of the characters' mortal worlds and allows for a display of "motives, desires, pains, pleasures, and concerns in a simple yet dramatized fashion . . . stressing the mixture of action, consciousness, and sub-consciousness" (78).

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the link lies in the two secrets of Winnie and Pearl. Although separated, each of these characters has a voice; each has a message they have always wanted to convey to their respective relation, but are unable to fully express themselves until they realize that this desire to verbally and spiritually share experiences is mutual. Each of these stories can be effectively grouped into sections as in the case of *Joy Luck Club* to centralize them even more. The prologue to each section introduces the running theme that ties all four stories together, and though they reside in different novels, these central themes extend to *The Kitchen God's Wife* as well.

The prologue before the first section details the story of a young woman who attempts to bring a swan with her to America, with hopes of a new and better life. However, when she arrives, all of her possessions and swan are taken away. The only thing that remains of her big dreams are a single feather, which she stows safely away until her daughter is old enough to be explained its significance.



In parallel with this prologue, this section focuses on the mothers; how their childhood experiences have shaped who they are, and the hopes they possessed for their daughters. Since the story actually starts with Jing-Mei narrating in place of her now deceased mother, Suyuan, we find an image of the Americanized daughter who grew up "speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow"(3). By introducing us to Jing-Mei first, Tan establishes the mindset and attitude that the daughters have towards their mothers before delving into the stories that refute or explain the seemingly harsh facades of the mothers. In fact, she even symbolically shows the subdued side of the mothers. Whereas An-Mei is described as "a short bent woman in her seventies, with a heavy bosom and thin shapeless legs" (19), at the end Jing-Mei notes that as the mothers play *mahjong* and chat together as part of the Joy Luck Club, they become "young girls again, dreaming of good times in the past and good times yet to come" (32).

Each of the mothers as children comes to realizations about the realities of life that she later tries to pass on to her children. An-Mei as a child was forced to forget her mother for most of her love, but she began to love her when she saw that mother's love was deeper than the pain grandmother had caused her. "This is how a daughter honors her mother... The pain of the flesh... you must forget. Because that is sometimes the only way to remember what is in your bones. You must peel off your skin, and that of your mother, and her mother before her" (41). Just like she was able to realize how strong her own mother's love was, An-Mei hopes someday that her daughter Rose will be able to appreciate and reciprocate the same love. In this sense, An-Mei uses the metaphor of "peeling away skin" (56) to stress the central theme of heritage and remembering where one's cultural roots originate from.

Migrating from one's country to another presents a metaphor of dislocation which evokes images of loneliness and cultural conflicts. Amy Tan depicts the clash of cultures and the ensuing dilemmas and success with unique understanding and startling sensitivity. Her writings have held up a mirror to Chinese community in America, and are truly representing the work of a cross-cultural writer.

Amy Tan's literary discourse on nationalism and multiculturalism engages the complexities of national narratives to offer a negotiation that moves beyond a simple acceptance of dominant definitions of national and cultural identity. Homi K. Bhaba and other cultural theorists view the new forms and configurations of identification of diaspora communities as provoking a dismantling of exclusionary narratives of the nation and of national policies such as multiculturalism. In his influential essay, Bhaba contends that:

The nation margins, to which diaspora and other minority communities relegates highly complex and flexible recesses of cultural production from where various oppositional practices and analytic capacities can emerge. The space of betwixt and between the margins constitute that intestinal space of overlapping of cultures and histories, the very site from which new narratives of national and cultural identity can be written and imagined (299).

Bhaba especially talks about the overlap between the culture and history. This influential book takes the references from the diasporic people to flourish the idea of transculturation.

In the book, *The Joy Luck Club*, Lindo has an important revelation on the day of her wedding, realizing that obeying her parents doesn't mean forgetting herself and her identity in the new American city. She says, "I remember the day

when I finally knew a genuine thought and could follow where it went... I promised not to forget myself" (63). Filled with this new strength and courage, Lindo takes matters into her own hands and shapes her own future, something that is exaggerated when Lindo boasts about Waverly's ability in chess later in the novel. Lindo is obviously filled with pride for her daughter. The possibility of expressing knowledge and ability is something that as a suppressed wife she was not able to do in China. However, Waverly misinterprets this motherly care as intervention, which creates conflict between mother and daughter.

As a contrast to Lindo, Ying-Ying does not find her identity but rather gives it up, becoming a "ghost". She goes her entire life without much control over her path, and sadly regrets this in her old age:

Now that I am old, moving every year closer to the end of my life, I also feel closer of the beginning. I remember everything that happened that day because it has happened many times in my life. The same innocence, trust, and restlessness; the wonder, fear, and loneliness. (83)

She tries to save her daughter from the same road, as there is striking parallel between her life and her daughter's. Just as Ying-Ying is able to reflect on the past and find herself, this is a common goal shared by the daughters and displays the theme of "cultural healing" that prevails throughout the novel. Although the daughters have always perceived their mothers as misunderstanding of their American lifestyle, the truth is that they lack full appreciation of their mothers' pasts. The revealing of the lessons that each of the mothers have learnt sheds light on and provides a backdrop for the reasons behind their behavior in the next section

narrated by the daughters to display their attitudes toward their mothers who still seem too fully rooted in traditional Chinese principles.

The daughters, through each of their own stories, attempt to explain the difficulties that they face in association and understanding their mothers' Chinese methods to attempt to teach their children virtues. Waverly admits herself that her mother "taught her the art of invisible strength" and "imparted her daily truths so she could help older brothers and [her] rise about [their] circumstances" (89). However, in most cases these good intentions are lost in passing between mother and daughter, and misunderstandings occur. In Waverly's case, they drifted when she felt that she and her mother were too different. In essence, it is this variation in thinking and communicative style that causes the drift in the first place.

Lena, unlike Waverly, takes a semi-passive approach to the difference between her and her mother. Like her mother, who makes up partly-true lies in order to protect and teach her, Lena reflects this by making up her own lies:

When a man at a grocery store yelled at her for opening up jars to smell the insides, I was so embarrassed I told her that Chinese people were not allowed to shop there. When the school sent a notice home about a polio vaccination, I told her the time and place, and added that all students were not required to carry metal lunch boxes, since they discovered old paper bags can carry polio germs. (109-110)

This avoidance of direct confrontation shows the difference between the two and yet also shows the similarity in how they avoid the truth to prevent a troublesome situation and strike a compromise. Ultimately, this avoidance stems from the common theme: misunderstandings between the two generations and cultural styles. For example, Ying-Ying does not realize that etiquette in the States

disallows her to open up the grocery market jars, but instead of directly stating the difference, Lena chooses to use the Chinese heritage excuse, in a way even brushing aside her own cultural roots as inferior.

As a contrast to An-Mei's past, Rose originally sees her mother as someone who has lost her faith. When her brother Bing fell into the ocean, she witnessed her mother's faltering and giving up, a surrender of her strength and faith, a realization that she could not take everything into her own hands. This difference between the strong and faithful woman Rose has always known her mother to be and the one that falters awakens Rose from her perceptions and makes her realize the change. Even though her mother still encourages her, Rose is worried since she thinks her mother will try in desperation to get her to fix her broken marriage, just as she tried in desperation to find Bing until, it ended in failure. Finally, Jing-Mei ties together the symbolism in this section with a classical story of a battle of wills, taking the clash of her desires and her mother's desires to a literal level. "I looked at my reflection... the girl staring at e was angry, powerful. This girl and I were the same. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts willed with lots of wants. Iwon't let her change me, I promised myself. I don't be what I'm not" (144).Despite hermother's efforts to "only ask her to be her best". Jing-Mei, while finding her own headstrong Americanized identity, tosses away the filial respect that is expected of Chinese daughters, rebelling against her mother and her good intentions. This further separates them and eventually Suyuan stops trying to convert Jing-Mei into a talented person, a product of her hopes and dreams in America.

American Translation "Look inside. Tell me, am I not right? In this mirror is my future grandchild, already sitting in my lap next spring." The daughter

looked... there it was: her own reflection staring back at her" (136). The title of this section refers not only to the Americanized lifestyles that the daughters lead, but also the translation of their Chinese selves to American and vice versa. It is in this story that the daughters' acceptance of their mothers slowly comes into play and reveals new, alternate ways for their troubles. This has been only possible through a combination of American and Chinese principles, which is a compromise.

Rose states the trouble between the American and Chinese ways of thinking in her second story: "Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was better" (214). It is only later on in her life that she realizes that "there was a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices, so it was easy to get confused and choose the wrong thing"(218). With this knowledge in mind, Rose eventually goes to her mother for reconciliation and the Chinese opinions that enable her to successfully deal with her troublesome divorce with Ted. In this case, it is the Chinese opinion that brings her strength to speak out, and Rose realizes this was what An-Mei had been trying to teach her all along. Lena is currently suffering the results of a bad marriage; being too liberal has caused a hard relationship between her and her husband. They put up a balance sheet to the refrigerator door that lists out how each of their money is shared. It takes Lena's embarrassment after Ying-Ying questions this sheet before she realizes that perhaps it's not right after all. When Lena confronts Harold about this later in the day, amidst their argument, a small table that represents their relationship topples over. Ying-Ying's response is, "Fallen down." "It doesn't matter", Lena says, but Ying-Ying again questions her with, "Then why didn't you fix it?" This simple question evokes a sense of wonder and near shame in Lena as she realizes that her mother had been right all along in

her predictions about her life and relationship. "I believe my mother has a mysterious ability to see things before they happen. ... but she sees only bad things that affect our family. And she knows what causes them" (161). Just as Ying-Ying expresses regret for not being able to stop these malicious things, Lena mirrors this as she realizes, nearly too late, that she should have heeded her mother's warnings. Though melancholy, this story subtly introduces the beginnings of Lena's acceptance of her mother's wisdom. This is the example of coming to a compromise.

Waverly exemplifies the blend of Chinese and American cultures quite well as she tries to make her mother accept her American boyfriend Rich. After her refusal to continue to play chess, it was "as if she had erected an invisible wall and I was secretly groping each day to see how high and wide it was" (190). When Waverly takes Rich home for dinner, she can see that his Americanized behavior catches Lindo's disapproving eye. Waverly begins to feel helpless, as if there is no possible way the Chinese and American lifestyles could blend together, but in reality, her mother slowly accepts her choice. It is then that Waverly realizes that her mother had never directly wanted to oppose her: "I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was really there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in" (204). Queen Mother of the Eastern Skies "I was once so free and innocent. I too laughed for no reason. But later I threw away my foolish innocence to protect myself. And then I taught my daughter . . . to shed her innocence so she would not be hurt as well. Little Queen, you must teach my daughter... how to lose your

innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever. "The last and final section in *The Joy Luck Club* carries a note of inspiration for the future; even the prologue is expressive of the mothers' hope for their daughters: "how to lose your innocence but not your hope." All three mother stories, with the exception of Jing-Mei's, take a closer look at the mothers' pasts. Instead of just focusing on the childhood lessons they learned as in the first section, these final stories connect past to present, as the mothers themselves refer to their old Chinese life and their daughters' new American ones in an attempt to transfer their former wisdom.

An-Mei, through her mother's suicide, acquires a stronger spirit. She realizes that her mother's suicide was an act of will; that she gave up everything to show An-Mei the reality that surrounded her. An-Mei does indeed see her mother's love and the false faces of others, using this death and pain to change her own life. An-Mei takes this strength and wisdom and tries to teach Rose the same: "I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness. And... I taught my daughter the opposite" (241). Likewise, Ying-Ying says, "I must tell my daughter everything... she will fight me... but I will win and give her my spirit, because that is the way a mother loves a daughter"(286). Because she was unable to become more than a ghost in her lifetime, Ying-Ying wants to make a better future for her daughter so that she does not follow on the same path to destruction. Lindo and Waverly eventually realize that both their faces and their hearts are the same. Despite Lindo's worrying of, "Which [face] is American? Which one is Chinese? Which one is better? If you show one, you must always sacrifice the other" (304), she secretly hopes that Waverly can blend these two cultures to create her own, individual face that still carries traces of the best of both worlds.



*The Kitchen God's Wife* is comparable to an individual story section in *The Joy Luck Club*. It carries the same tone and underlying meaning: the meaning of mother/daughter relationships, conflict and resolution through compromise to enhance cultural respect and blend into a significant outlook for the future. Both Pearl and Winnie have a secret, and only after hearing Winnie's long story about her former life does Pearl finally understand the horrors that her mother has gone through. Despite her earlier misinterpretations of her mother's intentions, she realizes the reason for much of her mother's actions. As Tan argues the importance of fate and individual choice (Dew), she also imposes questions and parallels between Pearl and Winnie's lives, especially through emphasis of the trials and tribulations of the latter. She emphasizes the "nobility of friendship" and the "necessity of humor" (Dew), two things that Winnie also wants Pearl to appreciate in her own life. Despite the seeming stereotypical of Winnie, Dew in his critical essays suspects that it is Tan's intention to "present us with a formulaic character and then slowly reveal to us our own misconceptions," paralleling Pearl's own personal revelation through the book. This revealing of secrets allows for greater understanding of Winnie's past and Pearl's future; Pearl serves as the bridge between China and America. If she had not listened to and accepted her mother's painful and dramatic past, she would not be able to pass on the principles and appreciation, and her daughters would not have any connection to their Chinese roots.

To understand the reasons behind the cultural clashes, which take place in the novel, requires a comprehensive grasp of main cultural concepts and the practices and institutions that foster and support these concepts in American and Chinese cultures. In American culture, these concepts include "independence,

freedom, choice, ability, individual control, individual responsibility, personal expression, success, and happiness,” norms that Americans perform in their everyday social life (Heine et al. 769). In Chinese culture, which is highly influenced by Confucianism, these concepts include corporation, individual modesty, “propriety, compliance, learning, discipline, industriousness, respect, deference, order, and submission” (Slote and De Vos 46). As exemplified here, the cultural ideas and values in Chinese and American cultures differ from each other and because of these cultural differences, many misunderstandings occur between the mothers and daughters of the story.

An example of this cross-cultural misunderstanding that causes a conflict between Lindo and her daughter Waverly is their dispute over how to play chess effectively. In the “Rules of the Games” we read that Lindo who takes great pride in Waverly’s talent in chess makes her follow her to every shop that she visits, buying little or nothing, for the purpose of introducing her talented daughter to the shopkeepers. Waverly misunderstands her mother’s pride in her achievements, and thinks that her mother is using her to “show off” (99), something that has been seen as an embarrassment by her. Therefore, she declares, “I wish you wouldn’t do that, telling everybody I am your daughter” (99) by saying that Waverly separates herself from her mother, and subsequently from her entire family. She also thinks that her mother wants to take credit for her success and she expresses her resentment towards her mother:

She used to discuss my games as if she had devised the strategies. I told my daughter, Use your horses to run over the enemy, she informed one shopkeeper. She won very quickly this way. And of course, she had said this before the game-that and a hundred other

useless things that had nothing to do with my winning. I hated the way she tried to take all the credit. And one day...I told her she didn't know anything, so she shouldn't show off. She should shut up.  
(170)

It can be said that in this story, the conflict between mother and daughter is constructed as a cultural conflict--American culture vs. Chinese culture. American culture promotes individualism whereas Chinese culture supports collectivism. In collectivistic cultural orientation, the view of the individual is different from that of the individualistic cultural orientation. Within the framework of collectivism, "the sense of self" is "largely external"; one is "identified by the way that others" view her/him. That has "always been the goal of Confucianism", which defines "the individual's place strictly in relation to the people around her. . ." There is "not a tradition [as there is in the West and certainly in the United States] of anchoring one's identity to a fixed set of values regardless of what others [think]" (Hessler 282). As opposed to the Chinese Culture, in American culture, it is of vital importance to be one's own person: "Within the ontological... framework of individualism, the person is assumed to be a separate and somewhat nonsocial individual who exist independently" (Heine et al. 769). These individualist norms are reflected in and fostered by "key institutions such as schools, courts, and the media", they are performed in everyday cultural practices such as those of childcare, and they are part of "Western [including American] social science" (769). The American -born daughters including Waverly went to school in America and like other American schoolchildren; they too were encouraged to be independent.

The aim is to turn the dependent child into an “independent person with distinct preferences and unique attributes.” Children are also encouraged to think about themselves “positively as stars” and “as winners...” (Heine et al. 770). These cultural ideas are reflected in Waverly’s criticism of her mother. She brings attention to several of these concepts including her winning chess tournaments. For Waverley, playing chess is her unique talent something that makes her special and separates her from her mother and the others. Waverly wants chess to be strictly her own personal achievement, part of her own separate identity. She is a star and she wants to be recognized and praised as such. She also criticizes her mother for taking credit for her success. When her mother stays near her and guides her during her practice sessions, she feels violated, as though her mother is somehow taking credit for what Waverly sees as her own personal strength. People usually tend to take credit for success regardless of their cultures, but it seems that to be recognized for success is of more significance in American culture and for Americans than that of any other cultures and people, and Waverly is no exception. In her case, she feels that she is sharing her success with someone else even though that someone is her mother; still, she is not happy about it. Waverly puts her dissatisfaction into the words: “At the next tournament, I won again, but it was my mother who wore the triumphant grin” (97), Waverly desires recognition for her talent and wants her success to be only hers -- this is the essence of individualistic thinking. Contrary to American culture, individualism is not supported in Chinese culture. Chinese people “place higher value on corporation and individual modesty”. Independence, as defined in America as a “personal, culturally supported” goal is unthinkable for Chinese society (Slote 44). Instead, Chinese society promotes group and family. Chinese culture is a family oriented culture and

the Institution of family is the pinnacle of the society. In this culture, the individual “is not an ‘I,’ rather he/she is an inextricable part of an encompassing we ” (45). Lindo, who grew up in that culture, places great importance on the family and its unity. In her mind there is no "I", as Waverly sees it, but we. For her, Waverly’s success is the family success; therefore, she disapproves Waverly’s behavior and especially censures her lack of modesty. To Lindo, Waverly is an undeserving girl because she does not appreciate her family, who put the interest of her ahead of their own. Everybody in the family has to sacrifice something in order to help Waverly to achieve her goal. Her brothers, for example, had to give up their comfortable bedrooms and sleep “in a bed in the living room facing the street”, because Waverley needed a room, which was less “noisy” they also had to do Waverly’s “chores” while they preferred to go out and “play” (99). Waverly also received special treatment; Lindo usually asks her “what special thing” (171) she wanted to eat, not to mention that she follows her in every tournament to watch her to play. She also functions as her manager, without asking for anything in return. Waverly accepts all the help she gets from the family, but refuses to share her success with them. For the mother, the daughter is vain, because she considers herself as the center of everything.

Lindo, whose view of the individual is different from that of her daughter, cannot understand the importance of being independent for Waverly who lives in America and is growing up in that contemporary American culture. As Lindo sees it, Waverley’s quest for independency is a declaration of rejection of the family. To Lindo this is a threat to the family harmony, and the family harmony is very important in Chinese culture. Lindo does not understand the fact that Waverly, who has learned at school to be autonomous, needs to differentiate herself from her

mother in order to gain her own sense of self and to create her own identity, and chess is the only thing through which she can claim her separate identity.

American culture also upholds a positive self-perception; more often American's "self-perceptions tend to be systematically biased toward an overly positive view of the self" (Heine et al. 779). Like any other Americans, Waverly too has a positive view of herself. She is a national chess champion at the age of ten, and according to American culture, she has every right to feel good about herself. Feeling good about herself means that she is an adequate individual. She is proud of her achievements and expects her mother, too, be proud of her. In fact, she anticipates to be complimented over her achievements. Waverly's self-esteem shatters when her mother, instead of praising and complimenting her on her success, proclaims, "You don't have to be so smart to win chess" (170). This story is narrated from Waverly's point of view and the reader never gets to hear Lindo's perspective on the topic; she is deprived of the power to voice her interpretation of the issue. However to learn about, at least one aspect of Chinese culture may help us to understand Lindo's point of view. As discussed earlier, American people view themselves as 'independent' and 'separate' from others and Chinese people, who have a collectivistic cultural orientation, see themselves as "inextricably connected to others". Because American culture views the self as separate from others, they inspire their members to demonstrate their "uniqueness by engaging in self-enhancement strategies (i.e., presentation of the self as superior to others)." Whereas Chinese culture views the self as connected with others, hence they inspire their members to "maintain interpersonal relationships through self-effacement strategies (i.e., presentation of the self as inferior to others)." This means that, while American individuals "tend to view and present themselves

positively” Chinese individuals “tend to view and present themselves negatively” (qtd in Tsai, Ying, and Lee 285). This insight into Chinese culture helps us to understand Lindo’s view when she modestly says you do not have to be so smart to win chess. Through the self-effacement, Lindo, as Waverly’s manager, retains interpersonal relationships with whoever involves in the tournaments including sponsors, players, and other managers.

As Waverly’s mother, Lindo wants to teach her daughter about Chinese culture, and the importance of modesty in that culture. The hierarchal respect for the elderly in China might discourage adults from giving excessive praise on children. Perhaps that is the reason why Lindo does not pay any compliment to Waverly over her achievements. Lindo also wants to teach Waverly to be appreciative of her talent. Because mother and daughter are influenced by two different cultural belief systems -- the individualistic and collectivistic -- regarding their views of the world, they get into an argument. Waverly who is just a child that trying to make sense of the world defies her mother and in order to get her own way she decides to punish her mother. She does this by announcing, she will never play chess again. This was only an empty threat on Waverly’s side who wanted to bring her mother to her knees. She was not serious about quitting chess. Having her plan failed, after a while, Waverly declares her intention to resume chess. She thinks that by changing her strategy, she can reconcile with her mother; but Lindo thinks otherwise, she says, “[y]ou think it is so easy. One day quit, next day play. Everything for you is this way” (171). In her statement, she is refereeing to Waverly’s fickle and ungrateful treatment of her talent for chess. She also criticizes Waverly for disregarding the sacrifices that the family made in order for her to be

successful. Her quitting the chess without discussing it with the family suggests that despite all their helps and involvements they have nothing say in this matter

Later, Lindo decides not to talk to her daughter and she also stops instructing her when she practices her movements. When Waverly goes against her mother, she not only loses the protector and supporter that she had in her, but also loses the power that she calls “the art of invisible strength” (89), a strategy that she learned from her mother. In the art of invisible strength, a person does not disclose his/her secrets until the right moment comes, and then s/he reveals the secrets for her or his own personal gain. Lindo herself had used this strategy to extricate herself from an arranged marriage without dishonoring her parents’ promise to her husband’s family. When a girl growing up in China, Lindo’s mother arranged for her to marry a –year -old boy, named Tyan-Yu, who was a pampered and self - centered child. At the age of sixteen, Lindo and Tyan -Yu got married, and Lindo’s mother – in -law planned their wedding.

At the wedding ceremony, according to custom, the matchmaker arranged for the couple to have a “red candle” (59) marked with Lindo’s name on one end, and Tyuan - Hu’s on the other. The couple lit the candle and a servant was instructed to “watch” over “the candle” (59) all night, because if the candle burned until dawn without either end extinguishing prematurely, the matchmaker would declare the marriage indestructible. That night the servant ran from the room where she was watching the candle because she mistook a thunderstorm for an attack by “the Japanese” (60). When Lindo saw the servant girl leaving the room, she went into the room and “blew out” Tyan - Hu’s “end of the candle” (59). She did this because she was very unhappy in the Huangs’ house and wanted out of there and also out of the marriage. The next morning, however, the matchmaker displayed the



candle's burnt remains and announced that the marriage was sealed. Lindo realized that the servant girl relit the candle. Months passed and Tyan -Hu, who was just a child with no desire for women, still would not touch Lindo. She was relieved and came to love her husband like a brother, but her mother - in law wanted grandchildren and she blamed Lindo for their lack of children. To make Lindo fertile Huang Taitai took away all Lindo's gold and "confined" her "to the bed so that her grandchildren's seeds", the seeds that her son claimed that had planted in Lindo, "would not spill out so easily" (62). Lindo describes how it felt lying in bed: "Oh, you think it is so much fun to lie in bed all day, never getting up. But I tell you it was worse than a prison" (ibid). Even staying in the bed did not help and Lindo still bore no children. By chance, noticing that a servant girl was pregnant by the deliveryman, Lindo devised a plan to make the Huangs think it was their idea to end the marriage. She pretends that she had a dream in which her ancestors came to her and revealed that the matchmaker's servant allowed Tyan -Yu's end of the candle to go out, which meant Tyan -Yu would die if he stayed in the marriage. Furthermore, she said that the ancestors also revealed the servant girl was carrying Tyan-Yu's baby and that the girl was of royal blood. Lindo announced this news at just the time she could use the revelation of the servant girl's pregnancy to her own advantage from that miserable marriage without dishonoring her parents' promise. Lindo was granted a divorce and Tyan -Yu married the servant girl. Later in life, Lindo moved to the United States and married her second husband. Lindo, who had benefited from the art of invisible strength, decides to teach this strategy to her daughter so she too can overcome the difficulties in her life. Waverly's success in chess was partly due to this strategy and partly due to her mother's devotion and guidance. Because of their dispute, Lindo ceases teaching her daughter about the

strength of hidden truths, silences and self - position. Waverly who does not have her mother's guidance and support anymore, loses her steady confidence and loses her next tournament and other defeats follow. She finally quits playing chess, and because of this, she loses part of her identity as a future chess champion.

Waverly and Lindo's relationship is severely damaged because of their cultural differences, a damage that takes years for mother and daughter to repair. Waverly lives in-between two worlds with two diverse cultures, the Chinese culture at home and the American culture outside the home. These two cultures are extremely different from each other and it is very difficult for her, a ten – year-old child, to handle the situation. Unable to balance her life between the two cultures, she chooses to go with the dominant culture, which is the American culture. As Lindo emphasizes, Waverly follows her mother's "Chinese ways" only until she learns "how to walk out the door by herself and go to school" (253). Waverly's decision, to ignore her Chinese inheritance has an effect on the construction of her identity. She grows up resenting that part of herself that is Chinese, as Lindo bitterly expresses, Waverly "would have clapped her hands -- hurray" if she was told, "she did not look Chinese" (253). Rejecting her oriental heritage, Waverly never acquires any knowledge about the Chinese culture and she never learns the Chinese language.

There is another story in the book, which involves another schoolchild who describes her childhood as full of pain and resentment connected to not having ever been the "prodigy" (132) that her mother wished her to be. Even in this story, the dispute between the Chinese mother and the American-born daughter is constructed as a cultural conflict, with the mother's attempts to maintain control and the daughter's wish to run free. This episode is built around June's piano lesson.

Lacking talent and drive, June, who resented the piano lessons, decided not to practice seriously, as a result, her piano recital debut ended in disaster. Because of the talent show fiasco, June believed that she “never had to play the piano again” (141). A few days later, when Suyuan insists that she carry on her regular schedule of practice, June refuses. When Suyuan finds her daughter sitting in front of the TV instead of practicing piano, a conflict takes place. She demands her daughter to turn off the TV and starts practicing, but June refuses. She articulates her thoughts: “I didn’t budge. And then I decided. I didn’t have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China.” (141). After letting the reader know how she feels about the piano lessons, she challenges her mother: “I’m not going to play anymore.” “Why should I?” “I’m not a genius” (ibid). Suyuan’s answer is “[w]ho ask you be genius?” “Only ask you be your best. For your sake” (136). Suyuan, who believes in her daughter and her ability, does not accept no for an answer. She walks over and stands in front of the TV. June screams “No!” “No! I won’t!” (137). This story is narrated from the daughter’s point of view, She is a ten -year -old child who has her own will and opinion. If her ‘preference’ is to watch the TV and not to practice the piano, she should do accordingly.

### III. Process of Identity Formation in the Novels

As discussed earlier, American culture encourages 'individual control,' 'freedom,' and 'choice'. In the quarrel between mother and daughter, June like Waverly, brings up some of these concepts in her argument. She too resists her mother's imposing things on her against her own will. The American culture places "high value" on 'freedom' from "externally imposed constraints". When June proclaims that she will not continue practicing the piano, it is because she perceives her mother's demands as an imposition. Individualists are primarily concerned with protecting individual autonomy against obligations imposed by anyone or any institutions social or family alike, and June is aware of that. She has learnt at school that individuals should have control over their lives and that they are free to choose what they want to do or not to do. June resorts to her right of freedom by declaring: I am not your slave. She backs her declaration up by insisting that such imposition is not the norm in the United States -- this is not China. June consciously compares the two cultures and associates specific norms with the Chinese and American cultures. She associates individual's 'freedom', 'control', and 'choice' to the American culture, and force, "torture" (91), and "misery" (141) to the Chinese culture. This association is exhibited in her description about how her mother slaps; her and forces her to sit in front of the piano.

She yanked me by the arm, pulled me off the floor, snapped off the TV. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me toward the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up and onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now, looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased I was crying. (141-42)

Here, the mother is represented as abusive, both, verbally and physically. The mother of the story wishes to change her daughter and forces her to “be someone” that she is “not” (142). Suyuan’s wish to change her daughter has the indication that June is inadequate that is to say, she is not capable for her mother’s criteria for merit. Suyuan’s criticism of June could be destructive because it could damage her positive view of self. Given the psychological importance of self-esteem in American culture, it is not surprising that June, who has learnt to have high regards for herself, feels that she is adequate and her mother does not have any right to change her. She relates to the reader: “I promised myself, I won’t let her change me” (134). By changing her, the mother wants to shape her daughter’s future, according to her own ideal without regarding her daughter’s feelings. The indication here is that Suyuan is in control of her daughter’s future, in turn this indicates that June is not free to choose what she wants to be or what career she wants to pursue.

June has no control over herself, her life, and her future and this is against everything that she has learned at school; it is also against every principle for which the American culture stands. June, who thinks her mother is being unfair, thinking that she is not good enough: “Why don’t you like me the way I am?” (136), resists her mother’s demands, and declares, “I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!” (143). Suyuan replies: “Only two kinds of daughters,” “[t]hose who are obedient and those who follow their own mind!” As a mother, Suyuan has the authority over her child by virtue. She can demand her daughter to do as she says. For, it is her house and in her house, her daughter should live by her rules. When she asserts, “Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter” (142), she emphasizes the duties of the daughter. The fact that Suyuan requests her

daughter to be "obedient" does not conform to the concept of freedom, which is highly significant in American mainstream culture. Because, the construction of the mother is through the daughter's eyes, Suyuan, like Lindo, is deprived of the power to voice her clarification of the issue. Therefore, it is difficult to make sense of her behavior, that is to say, dragging her daughter in that manner to the piano and forcing her to practice. It would be beneficial to learn something about the concept of hope in the Chinese culture in order to construe Suyuan's perspective, but prior to that, there is a discussion on the reason behind June's decision to quit piano.

Although June claims that she is an adequate individual and her mother is being unfair on her thinking she is not good enough, but the truth is in her sub-conscious June feels that her mother is right. She talks about the "disappointment" her mother "felt in" her:

In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight. As I didn't become class president, I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college. For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me. (142)

This feeling of inadequacy is pronounced by June once again when she takes her mother's place at the Joy Luck Club, a weekly mahjong party. At the Joy Luck Club meeting, June questions her own ability to replace her mother, who was a strong resourceful woman: "[h]ow can I be my mother at Joy Luck?" (27). She remembers her mother's critical attitude toward herself. Suyuan had always compared June with her friend Lindo's daughter, Waverly, a successful tax accountant. June feels insufficient because she never succeeded in becoming the prize daughter that Waverly is. June's remark about how she could ever replace her

mother and carry her mother's hope into the future implies that she has doubt about her own strength and ability. Replacing her mother also means to maintain part of her mother's past in her own present. Suyuan created the Joy Luck Club in Kweilin in China because she wanted to create a sense of belonging and "happiness" (25). She describes their *mahjong* parties to June: "[w]e were not allowed to think a bad thought ... we played games, lost and won .... And each week, we could hope to be lucky (ibid). That hope was our only joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck" (25). Suyuan recommenced the club in the United States, hoping that it would bring a sense of continuity between the club members' old and new cultures and also help them to preserve their identity in this new culture. The club is a symbol of hope, and the responsibility of carrying all the club mothers' hope into the future falls upon June. June, who thinks that she has not met her mother's expectations regarding being a prodigy, finishing the college, and finding a well-paying job like Waverly has, feels that she already represents the failure of her mother's dreams and hopes.

Hope is the value that is highly esteemed in every culture, the world over -- especially in Chinese culture. In *The Joy Luck Club*, most of the transformations are accomplished through hope, understanding, and life circumstances. Already in the first vignette, "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away", we read about an old Chinese woman's high hopes for a daughter whom she is dreaming of having in the United States. The woman wants to present her future daughter a gift and that gift is a "swan feather" that "comes from afar and carries with it all [her] good intentions" (17). She becomes successful, respectable and happy, but that success and happiness could not be possible if it were not for her mother's help and hard work toward it. Hope is something that people desire, expect, plan, and try for

themselves and for their children. In many Asian cultures including Chinese culture “hopes for children are considered as a responsibility of parents” (Yin 163). Therefore, Suyuan, just like the old Chinese woman in the parable, feels that it is her responsibility to help and plan her daughter’s future. Suyuan’s plan is to make a successful pianist of her daughter and to become a successful, “famous” (136) pianist requires perfection, and perfection requires hard work. Chinese people are very diligent -- a result of Confucian teaching -- and Suyuan is no exception. She views achievement as a function of effort and discipline. In her view, if June practices every day she can improve and perhaps reach, if possible, some sort of perfection. Believing in her daughter and her capability to be ‘anything that she wants to be,’ Suyuan does her best to get June all the help that she needs in order to achieve success in life. Often “a hope for a particular family member would also mean sacrifice on the part of the other members” (Yin 163). Suyuan, like Lindo, makes some sacrifices for her daughter. She provides help for June by doing “housework for an old retired piano teacher” (37) who gave her “lessons and free use of a piano to practice on in exchange” (38). Instead of appreciating her mother’s commitment to her success, June defies her mother by saying, “I wish I wasn’t your daughter” (142). By saying that June, like Waverly, separates herself from her mother and consequently she disconnects herself from her entire family. Both June and Waverly tend to think that the role of the mother is to be unconditionally kind, supportive, and encouraging. Despite their idealized notion of a mother, in reality, they often feel criticized and pressured by their mothers, who push them towards success.

However, if American culture promotes the individual right of happiness, June and Waverly, who follow the American cultural traditions and values should



put their own needs, interests and happiness above all, regardless of how much tension their behavior can create in their relationships with their mothers and with the entire households. The conflict between June and Suyuan over the piano lesson created a kind of tension that took its toll on their relationship. Because of their cultural differences, mother and daughter cannot maintain a healthy relationship and over the years, they grow even further apart.

June like Waverly shakes between two worlds, with two different sets of traditions, values, lifestyles, and social expectations. Unable to traverse the cultural distance between the home and the outside world, which embody two contradictory cultural extremities; she chooses the American culture over the Chinese. In Chinese culture, the belief is that self-cultivation begins with the recognition that biological bonds are an important part of one's identity. This is in keeping with the collectivist, cultural idea that "one's identity and sense of self is inextricably established only within the context of the whole" (Slote 44). If the process of building one's identity begins at home then June and Waverly's identities are not complete; neither are the other daughters' identities including Lena and Rose. This is because of their disregard for their families and their Chinese cultural heritage.

Although, the focus of this section has been the formation of identity of Waverly and June, it can be said that Lena and Rose, the other two novel's daughter characters, have gone through the same process of identity construction. Encountering Chinese culture at home while having the immediate experience of living in America, they too are caught in a state of living in-betweenness. Unable to cope with the dichotomies of cultures they decide on total assimilation into the American culture. All four daughters consciously reject their Chinese heritage.

They also refuse to learn the Chinese language and in so doing they neglect the social value of being bilingual.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this essay, Anthony Giddens argues that modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices. According to Giddens, the individual is free to choose: "'What to do?' 'How to act?' 'Who to be?'" (164). This means that identity is not something we possess or have. Rather, identity is a mode of thinking about ourselves. To have the freedom to choose who to be, the four daughters of *The Joy Luck Club* decide to be Americans. By choosing America and following only the American culture, the daughters ignore their oriental heritage, something that prevents them from creating an identity that incorporates both their cultures.

Although as the second-generation, the daughters attain more opportunities to communicate with the mainstream American society, the dominant Western culture overshadows their attempt of assimilation. The Western hegemonic discourse and their supremacy are long established, which greatly damages their confidence and recognition of their own culture. Both Lena and Rose's experiences reveal the minorities' perplexities when confronting the pressure and prejudice from the mainstream American society. The two daughters share a common feature: their consciousness of their ethnicity affects their confidence, and subsequently cast shadows on their marriages. Both of them marry the white men, therefore, the puzzlement in marriage provides space for the postcolonial analysis. For Rose, the daughter of An-mei, her choosing Ted as boyfriend and husband is the evidence of the hegemonic influence.

The Western hegemony indicates that the white is the superior race, which is the incarnation of wisdom, power, strength, etc. Therefore, Rose is proud of

choosing Ted rather than a Chinese boy as her boyfriend. Only later does Rose realize she is living under the shadow of the Western supremacy. “I was victim to his (Ted) hero. I was always in danger and he was always rescuing me. I would fall and he would lift me up” (125). Ted resents Rose’s hesitation and even says: “What would you have done with your life if I had never married you?”(127) Ted’s words clearly show that the Western hegemonic discourse views the white man as the savior of the weak and the powerless Chinese woman. Then Rose realizes her dissonance, “The next morning, I was still thinking about my marriage; 15 years of living in Ted’s shadow” (215).

The coexistence of East and West at the end of *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-Mei takes a trip back to China to find her half-sisters and share the memories and wisdom she has gained from her mother. When first told this news at the beginning of the novel, Jing-Mei is distraught as she finally realizes that she has not been fully listening and learning from her mother the way that she should have. However, at the end of the novel, Jing-Mei is used to represent the realizations, and changes that have taken place in the daughters' lives. Although Jing-Mei herself has no communication with her mother throughout the course of the novel, the relationships between the other mother-daughter pairs serve as a representation of the transformation that happens in all of the daughters, including Jing-Mei. Although the conflicts from story to story are different, they all carry a universal theme that is shared among all five girls, including Pearl. Through others' communications and experiences, we can readily infer that since these themes are universal. Jing-Mei also undergoes realization and appreciation for the mother who had tried to instill valuable Chinese principles in her daughter. When she makes her final trip back to China, Jing-Mei finally understands the true meaning of the

lessons her mother had taught her, and she is ready to share them with her sisters. The transformation is complete, and she, along with the other daughters, has completed the journey of cultural healing to find their true identities: American-born girls with strong Chinese roots. Despite the pre-1970 setting of Tan's novels, the themes conveyed timeless. Just like the daughters of *The Joy Luck Club* and Pearl of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Chinese-American girls nowadays still face the same struggles of identity. Mothers attempt to instill Eastern morals in the daughters, who are constantly caught up in the difficult process of adopting American lifestyles. Thus, in many cases, this causes conflicts, hardships, and ruthless bickering, but before these daughters set off on their journey into life, they begin to realize the good aspect and truth embedded into their mothers' endless lectures and teachings. It is then that they all realize that their heritage lies not in the American world they are submerged in, but the ancestry that dictates a sense of hope, courage, and pride to every descendant of China. These higher-generation American-born Chinese have the privilege of a wonderful combination between Eastern and Western thinking, creating a new philosophy that melds together the old wisdom with new experiences.

Though mothers and daughters may be separated by cultures, it is possible to find some timeless lessons and motifs that will forever link those of one generation to another. By seeking this desire to understand and gain from past wisdom, Chinese-Americans can utilize this connection to their cultural roots to enhance their lives and establish an identity for themselves that unites the best of both worlds. Though these cultures may clash, they can also peacefully coexist.

### III. Coexistence of Eastern and Western Culture

*The Kitchen God's Wife*, Tan's second novel, simplifies this web of connections into one mother-daughter pair: Winnie and Pearl, who also share the main theme of lack of communication. Pearl, who has multiple sclerosis, has learned to keep secrets from her mother or only tell half the truth in order to make things easier between them. For example, Pearl refers to her job of speech rehabilitation by a fancy title so that her mother won't criticize it in her blunt Chinese ways, referring to it as "teaching retarded people". When Helen, convinced she will die of cancer, suggests that she should tell Winnie all of Pearl's secrets, the later takes it upon her to improve the rapport with her mother. Likewise, Helen also convinces Winnie to share the secrets of her past. Most of the novel is simply Winnie's anecdote about the troubles in her past; troubles that Pearl had no idea about until this newfound bridge of communication was found.

Tan describes unfamiliar settings by beginning the story in California with a familiar situation — an American couple -- Pearl and Phil -- experiences tension over the demands of the wife's mother (Winnie). Pearl's visit to her mother's flower shop in Chinatown gently brings forth the several details of Chinese culture, and later the Buddhist funeral plunges Pearl. Tan backs off from the foreign setting briefly while Winnie fussily cleans her house in preparation for telling the long story that follows, so the reader is reassured that Winnie is at least currently a rather ordinary American widow living alone in the home where her family was raised. As Winnie tells her life story to Pearl, a woman with little connection to her Chinese heritage, she has to explain details of the Chinese settings and customs to Pearl.

Pearl goes through a transformation and a change. At the beginning of the novel, she was still the hesitant fatherless daughter of a Chinese mother who did not want to become involved in the complications of associating with her Chinese family. And yet, even after just one meeting with her mother, Pearl seems to become pensive. After she receives the altar from Auntie Du's will and after her mother has told Cleo and Tess the story of The Kitchen God's Wife, Pearl seems to begin to look at the house differently. When her husband complains about how ugly the house is, Pearl can only say, "Umm." This uncertainty, by the end of the novel, turns into understanding as a connection is forged between her and her mother and between her life and her past.

Pearl thinks this to herself in the beginning, while she is at Bao-Bao's engagement party. "Mostly I see my mother sitting one table away, and I feel as lonely as I imagine her to be. I think of the enormous distance that separates us and makes us unable to share the most important matters of our life. How did this happen?" (13). This quote illustrates the distance that there is between Pearl and her mother, much of it having to do with the fact that Winnie's heart is linked to China and Pearl's to America. This cultural distance is never expressed straight out in one sentence, but it is implied through recollected stories that are told and remembered throughout the novel which illustrate the cultural gap between mother and daughter. And yet, the two do share one thing: loneliness. Pearl says she feels "as lonely as I imagine her to be." This sentence forges a connection between mother and daughter that will be explored in the novel, and it illustrates that even what separates can bring them together, because even when they are furthest apart, they are together in their loneliness. Also, it illustrates that even if Pearl does not

understand her mother, she feels love for her because this statement is not one of pity but one of empathy.

Just as later on Winnie will take the hurt from her daughter's heart and put it into her own, Pearl is doing that with her mother's pain here, which is a pain she knows very little about, only that it exists. It is important that this is said in the first chapter because it lies a roadmap for the necessary work that will be done in Winnie's other story. It will bridge the distance.

Winnie talks about the portrait of her mother, who had already been gone for several years. In this book, Winnie Says:

I saw a little spot of mold growing on her pale painted cheek. I took a soft cloth and dipped it in water, washed her face. But her cheek grew darker. I washed harder and harder. And soon I saw what I had done: rubbed half her face off completely! I cried, as if I had killed her. And after that, I could not look at that picture without feeling a terrible grief. So you see, I did not even have a painting anymore to call my mother. (257)

This quote is significant because if this book deals with the relationship between mother and daughter, then it is important to understand Winnie's relationship with her own mother, who had abandoned her. Winnie wants to clean the "image" of her mother, which may be related to the image she has in her mind of her. And yet, when she tries to do this desperately and by herself, she is unable to and, instead, she mars the image and the image begins to disappear, just as the memory of someone's face that has died can begin to fade in a person's mind. Thus, what happens in this recollection is what had happened to Winnie in real life: she had been forced to remember her mother on her own, without anyone helping her to

remember the good things, only gossiping behind her back. As a result, her mother began to fade away from her, and this scene is symbolic of their relationship.

Winnie's mother disappears physically from her life, and she is left with only a semblance of a mother, which soon also disappears as the years go on.

When reconciliation and understanding is made possible between Winnie Louie and her daughter Pearl, on sharing their secrets, a true bondage of love begins with the mother and the daughter. It is when Winnie decides to choose a peculiar gift for Pearl that she buys a lady statue in Mrs. Hong's shop and fixes it inside the red altar which is presented to Pearl by Grand Auntie Du. Winnie wants to push away Mr. Kitchen God from the altar to the margin and place Mrs. Kitchen God's Wife in the center, thinking that it is the 'Mrs.' who deserves to be worshipped as the Goddess. But later she changes her mind: "She would live there, but no one should call her Mrs. Kitchen God. Why would she want to be called that, now that she and her husband are divorced"? (414).

Therefore she renames the lady's statue as Lady Sorrow free. "Lady Sorrow free, happiness, winning over bitterness, no regrets in this world" (415). Winnie gets this courage of breaking the old custom to suit her own convenience from the strength which is gained by having assimilated into a new identity; "Chinese American." She has imbibed the Chinese myth and American miraculous freedom to invent Lady Sorrow free.

Hyphenated experiences such as the Chinese-American experience always bring issues of identity to the fore. *The Kitchen God's Wife* is very much about the issues that arise out of the immigrant experience and the generation gap between immigrants and their children. This struggle is mostly illustrated through the character of Pearl, who is American born but is raised in a household with Chinese



customs and traditions always coming into play. It is difficult for someone like her to live the space between being fully American and fully Chinese. It seems that she has tried to abandon her Chinese heritage and tries to avoid it at all costs; she does not want to go "home," and she feels a distance from her mother.

Throughout the novel, Winnie remembers instances when Pearl had been hesitant to learn about her Chinese past. For example, when Pearl was studying the Second World War in school and her mother tried to tell her about World War II in China, Pearl had complained that what her mother was talking about was "Chinese History" not "American History." Like this there are many other instances, such as the fact that the pair share different ideas of beauty. Winnie had given her daughter a dresser that she thought was beautiful, just like one she had had a long time ago in China, but Winnie had complained and hated the dresser. Pearl's father was also American-born Chinese but he died when she was so young that she did not have the chance to share her experiences with him or for him to share his similar experiences with her.

Winnie's Chinese identity has given her only bad memories whereas American identity has given her the best memories. She cannot stop the tears rolling down her cheeks even after forty years when she thinks Louie's waiting for her in the bookshop. She is unable to continue her conversation with her daughter as the words are struck with happiness. "And now I have to stop. Because every time I remember this, I have to cry a little by myself. I don't know why something that made so happy then feels so sad now. Maybe that is the way it is with the best memories" (346). Despite her happiness in her new life she has to face the problem of duality. She is now imbued with Chinese roots as well as with the newly acquired American identity. She is caught at the crossroads of her Chinese and

American identities. This criss-cross of two identities torments her. She has to face the problems of inter-culture, inter-language, inter-belief, and inter-thought conflicts.

However, Winnie who has lost three of her children and killed many fetuses in China is successful in America in bringing up her daughter. Though she has lost Samuel, her American son, and Louie, her American husband, she is delighted at least at the success of her daughter Pearl's life. Pearl has a very loving husband and is also blessed with two daughters. Although Winnie cannot speak proper English, she has raised her daughter to empower English. "I took a position as a speech and language clinician with the local school district" (15). If she had endorsed with her Chinese identity she would not have elevated her daughter to the best position. She would not have enjoyed autonomy but would have submerged in the pools of Wen Fu's cruelty. Since she is assimilated into a newer identity she is able to cope with her life.

The United States proves this point with vast diversity of its origins, perhaps the most multicultural in the world. This made assimilation a matter of necessity, a matter of national survival, and helps expressing the extremes of American nationalism as a means to that end. Immigrants poured across the Atlantic from all countries and cultures in tidal waves and are evident to these human hordes. In the single century from 1815 to 1914 over thirty five million came across largely as individuals, and in the twenty-five years of greatest intensity in this century seventeen million crossed over. The great majority of the immigrant came to America to better their lot or to escape worse in their country.

Each of the immigrants possesses a firm identity and often is in a state of continuous confusion about their original identity and their adopted identity. At the

present time, the unveiling of identity takes place and the true concept of Multiculturalism is brought into force. The essential multiculturalists point is articulated concisely by Steven C. Rockefeller: “Our Universal identity as human beings is our primary identity and is more fundamental than any particular identity, whether it be a matter of citizenship, gender, race, or ethnic origin” (88). This statement helps people of all races become universal citizens, which can only be achieved through compromise.

Taking pride and pleasure in one’s “particular identity” is perfectly all right so long as a question of basic commitment arises, it is one’s universal identity that is affirmed, for as “important as respect for diversity is in multicultural democratic societies, ethnic identity is not the foundation of recognition of equal value and the related idea of equal rights” (Rockefeller 89). That is to say, we have rights not as men or women or Jews or Christians or blacks or Asians, but as human beings, and what make a human being is not the particular choices he or she makes, but the capacity for choice itself; and it is this capacity rather than any of its actualizations that must be protected.

In this way, in the both novels, Amy Tan uses stories from her own history and myth to explore the voices of mothers and daughters of Chinese ancestry. Each woman tells a story indicative of the uniqueness of her voice. Mary Field Belensky, in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, argues that voice is “more than an academic shorthand for a person’s point of view . . . it is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women’s experience and development. . . . Women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; . . . the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined” (18). In Tan’s fiction, the daughters’ sense of self is intricately linked to an ability to

speak and be heard by their mothers. Similarly, the mothers experience growth as they broaden communication lines with their daughters.

The second generation American born daughters, June, Waverly, Rose, Lena, Pearl, are fictional representations of the Chinese Americans who are caught between Old world ethnic values and new world cultural norms. It is these immigrants who suffer the problem of dual identities and affiliations. The problems of the new immigrants of the post-sixties differ from their ancestors in their attitude and self concept. These new immigrants are educated, and hence, do not lack these self-esteem which characterize the early immigrants. As a result, the new immigrants from Asia are willing to conform to American standards yet retain their ethnicity. This is also the case with second generation immigrants who are educated in America. The rich cultural heritage of India\China prevents these races from total assimilation into an Anglo-American culture.

In a nutshell, in exploring the problems of mother–daughter voices in relationships, Tan unveils some of the problems of biculturalism—of Chinese ancestry and American circumstances. She presents daughters who do not know their mothers' importance and thus cannot know their own; most seem never to have been told or even cared to hear their mothers' history. So, the novels of Amy Tan explore the transculturalism emerging in the world due to the globalization.

#### **IV. Affirmation Transcultural Identity: A Compromise**

The research work on Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* explores the cultural conflict between Chinese mothers and Chinese-born daughters in America. In addition, the dissertation examines the formation of transcultural identity of the daughters. The daughters have assumed different identities at different stage of their lives. When they were children, they spent their childhoods trying to escape their Chinese identities. At that stage of their lives, they defined themselves as Americans and their parents as Chinese. As they grow mature, they come to the realization that their identity is entirely a function of two worlds that have made them, a world within the family that represent China and Chinese culture, and the world outside the family that represent America and the American culture. Their new world includes the culture of the moon lady, the story of the magpies and the spirit of the tigers, but it also includes the American Dream. The daughters, who once forgot who they ethnically were as individuals, start showing cultural consciousness and even regret having neglected their Chinese cultural identities. They come to learn to translate their mothers' narratives in ways that has eventually enabled them to go beyond the dichotomies of cultures and to develop a hybrid identity, which integrates their two cultures. At the end of the novel, the daughters recognize that they are as much Chinese as they are Americans. Thus, a new category of identity has emerged and the outcome of the emergence of such new identity formations is that of the Chinese-American identity.

Throughout *The Joy Luck Club*, the various narrators meditate on their inability to translate concepts and sentiments from one culture to another. The incomplete cultural understanding of both the mothers and the daughters owes to

their incomplete knowledge of language. Additionally, the barriers that exist between the mothers and the daughters are often due to their inability to communicate with one another. Although the daughters know some Chinese words and the mothers speak some English, communication often becomes a matter of translation, of words whose intended meaning and accepted meaning are in fact quite separate, leading to misunderstandings and conflict.

At some point in the novel, each of the major characters expresses anxiety over her inability to reconcile her Chinese heritage with her American surroundings. Indeed, this reconciliation is the very aim of Jing-mei's journey to China. While the daughters in the novel are genetically Chinese except for Lena, who is half Chinese and have been raised in mostly Chinese households, they also identify with and feel at home in modern American culture. Waverly, Rose, and Lena all have white boyfriends or husbands, and they regard many of their mothers' customs and tastes as old-fashioned or even ridiculous. Most of them have spent their childhoods trying to escape their Chinese identities. Lena walks around the house with her eyes opened as far as possible so as to make them look European. Jing-mei denied during adolescence that she had any internal Chinese aspects, insisting that her Chinese identity was limited only to her external features. Lindo meditates that Waverly would have clapped her hands for joy during her teen years if her mother had told her that she did not look Chinese.

In the case of establishing her identity, Amy Tan narrates the version of her own experience as an Asian-American woman growing up in California, living in a house where there has been a language barrier and where misunderstandings and miscommunications have been common. For example, in the novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Winnie has a difficult time understanding what her daughter does for a

living. Significantly, Pearl works with language as a speech therapist. All of the factors that arise out of a "hyphenated experience" are not all negative because once one learns to accept the mixture and the beauty of living in two cultures one can begin to reap the benefits of understanding, much like in the happy ending of Tan's novel.

The major concern of the novel is to investigate the way how the difficulty of maintaining the Chinese native culture and a sense of their heritage when immigrants settle in America. They find that it is even more difficult to pass the culture and heritage down to their second-generation children, who are born and brought up in America. Although the Chinese mothers in the book struggle to retain their heritage, their Chinese-American daughters have little interest in things of the homeland. They want to be a part of the modern, liberal American society in which they have been raised; however, as they learn about their mothers' varied experiences in China, the daughters begin to understand and accept their dual heritage.

*The Kitchen God's Wife* which explores dynamics of the mother -daughter relationship in the context of cultural and ethnic disjunctions focuses on a woman's journey to wholeness after an eventful life that replicates the Chinese immigrant experience in microcosm. Extracting from Winnie Louie's version of the story of the Kitchen God who achieves deity status when he proves to be capable of shame upon discovering that the wife he has mistreated still cares about his welfare Amy Tan depicts Winnie, the Kitchen God's wife is denied membership in the Chinese pantheon of deities despite her fidelity.

Presenting a widening rift between Winnie and her daughter Pearl, Tan has succeeded in narrating the fully developed chronicle of Winnie's life in China.

Through her story, Pearl contextualizes Winnie's reminiscences, describing a series of events and revelations that ultimately changes their relationship. Required by family obligations to attend the funeral of an ancient "aunt" and the engagement party of a "cousin," Pearl spends more time with Winnie than she has in many months, and the enforced companionship prompts the younger woman to examine the roots of their estrangement.

Winnie, who is inspired by a letter from China that closes a painful part in her past, decides to tell Pearl about her life in China. As a native-Chinese that ever faced too many predicaments such as cultural identity problems, her behavior is hybrid in order to settle down her nativeness belongs to her western environment. Counter discourse happens and reflects the domination of Kwan Li over the Americans. Although she has interwoven her cultural identity with colonial behaviour, but it is done in order imitating colonizer; thus she influences them back. Thus, her migration as first generation of diasporic people impacts on the contrary effect of migration.

Amy Tan has not related the story of Pearl as well and fully as Winnie's. The reason for this is that Pearl is the character that does most of the listening in the novel, as Winnie tells the story of her life. This position likens her to us and illustrates that just as Winnie is trying to make her daughter understand Winnie's past and is trying to bring Pearl closer by telling her about her life. In the same way, Amy Tan, as a writer, tries to reflect on her own Chinese-American experience and transcultural identity formation through the two narratives.

In this way, *The Joy Luck Club* is a novel portraying the complex mother-daughter conflict as well as Asian-American women's voices and identities. In the next novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which continues to explore the mother's life



stories, Tan constructs a daughter narrative to recapitulate her mother's story in China, thereby delving into a broader China narrative. The trope of journey, the return to the mother (land) as discovery and reconciliation, plays a central role in Tan's stories. Finally, the present research observes the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship and conflict exploring the clash between different cultures which creates the transculture in the United States.

## **Abstract**

As multicultural narratives, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* revolve around the development of a transcultural identity in which immigrant experience and all the questions of ethno-cultural identity play central roles. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the process of identity formation of the second-generation Chinese immigrant daughters who encounter Chinese culture at home while having the immediate experience of living in America, with a focus on the cultural, language and generational gaps that exist between the Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. This study is guided by a theoretical framework that combines postcolonial theory and a theory of identity construction including the concept of hybrid identity in order to analyze and explore the American-born daughters' conflict with their mothers in the process of identity creation. Finally, the conflict is resolved through a compromise on the adoption of Western culture as the mothers cannot afford rejection by their own children. Based on this analysis, this study presents evidence that an identity formation process, which involves many twists and turns, is that of a hybrid identity.

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