

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



Volume V, Issue III March 2017



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IMMIGRANT IDENTITY IN AMY TAN'S *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*

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Abstract

Amy Tan is a Chinese-American novelist. Her writings are based on her personal Chinese experiences. The novel chosen for study is *The Joy Luck Club*, published in the year 1989. The researcher concentrates on the difficulties faced by the main characters in the newly settled world (America). Being the inhabitants of China, the four prominent characters, Suyuan Woo, An-meihsu, Lindojong, Ying-Ying St. Clair, moves to America, where they realize that they have lost their own identity. The paper argues that there is a mix of culture with all the main characters. Tan speaks about the generation change and the struggle to adapt the newly introduced culture. The research tool is *hybridity*.

Keywords: inhabitants, immigrants, culture, identity.

Introduction

Amy Tan is a Chinese-American novelist, born on February 19, 1952. Her writings discover mother-daughter relationship and the Chinese-American experiences. Among her writings, the best know work is *The Joy Luck Club*. The novel has been translated into 25 languages and has been adapted into a film in the year 1993. Several other bestselling novels includes *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, *Saving Fish From Drowning*, *The Opposites of Fate*, *The Valley of Amazement*. A collection of non-fiction essays along with two children books was also published by her.

Chinese-American literature is a body of literature produced in the United States by the writers of Chinese descents. The genre began in the 19th century and the well-known writers of the genre were Sui Sin Sar, Frank Chin, Amy Tan, and Maxine Hong Kingston. The major themes of the literature revolve around the challenges and the interaction between

generations, search for identity and questions of gender. The novel chosen for study is *The Joy Luck Club*, and the paper focuses is on the quest for the identity of the immigrant people.

Background to the Study

The Joy Luck Club tells the story of the four immigrant mother and four American-born daughter pairs: Suyan Woo and Jing-mei Woo, An-mei Hus and Rose Hus Jordan, Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong, Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair. The club was initiated and named by Suyan Woo in 1949. The whole story takes place in the club named The Joy Luck Club, where all the eight characters play Mah-Jong a traditional Chinese game and each woman share their painful childhood and adulthood memories, the stories which their own daughters have never been heard.

The novel clearly talks about the generation gap that happened because of immigration from China to America. The story of their past in China was irrelevant to the present day American scenario. The daughters, who were brought up in the American culture couldn't understand their mother's past life as they are so comfortable with the present life.

The paper argues that there is a mix of culture with all the main characters. The research tool used for the study is Homi K.Bhabha's *Hybridity*. This is the 19th-century concept of analysing the literary text. The term Hybridity means mixing up of cultures. Thought all the mother characters in the novel were born in China and immigrated into American society they still cling to the Chinese culture, and not readily accepting the cultures of their own daughters who were living sophisticatedly in America. They were caught between two entirely different cultures and they don't know which to follow.

Discussions

The oxford dictionary defines the word immigrant as a person who has come to live permanently in a foreign country. In the novel *The Joy Luck Club* the characters, Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hus, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair migrates from China and became the immigrants of America. The main motive for their immigration is to change the lifestyle of the upcoming generations. They don't like to stay in China and so decides to start a new life with their newly remarried husbands in America. Initially, in the novel, there are misunderstandings between the immigrant mothers and the American-born daughters, they are not on the same cord. For instance, the two groups of women speak a different language, different ideologies and different ambitions over the life. But the only aspect which kept them united is The Joy Luck Club.

To be more particular with the topic, the researcher filters his concentration to the four immigrant mothers, Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair. The first immigrant mothers taken up for discussion is Suyuan woo. She was the founder of The Joy Luck Club. The club was formed with three other Chinese female immigrants whom she met at church. Suyuan woo dies before the novel begins and her past life was narrated by her daughter, Jing-mei June Woo, based on the information collected from the club. Even though Suyuan woo remarries and moves to America as an immigrant, the twin girls whom she abandoned haunts her for the rest of her life in America. This shows she doesn't enjoy the happiness of normal immigrant women. The motive of the immigrant process is to forget the past and live the present new life, but she was caught in between the two cultures.

An-Mei Hsu was raised by her grandparents and relatives in her early childhood in China. Her mother shocks her by becoming a concubine to a middle-aged wealthy man, Wu-Tsing after the death of her first husband. An-Mei's life in China was unpleasant and she desires that the same situation might never happen in her daughter's life.

It's my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix? (308)

When Rose's marital life was in a struggle, An-Mei tries to impose the actuality that Ted has been cheating on her but Rose was not in a position to understand her mother. Later understands that her mother leads her on a right track. An-Mei wishes that Rose must have an identity of her own unlike An-Mei, who doesn't have any identity of her own.

Lindo Jong is a strong willed woman. She was forced to marry, Huang Tyan-Yu when she was just sixteen. Unsatisfied with her marital life and the in-laws, Lindo plans to get rid of the family. Freeing herself from the family she immigrates to America and remarries a Chinese-American man, Tin Jong. Lindo experiences that she has lost her identity in China by living so long in America and plans to make her identity in America with the help of her daughter, Waverly.

I... looked in the mirror... I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see that no one could ever take away from me. I was like the wind... I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parents' wishes, but I would never forget myself. (58)

Lindo in the above lines, describe Waverly that how she herself acknowledged her inner strength. She expects that the story might be helpful in finding the internal strength of

Waverly and thereby she may be successful in her chess matches. Lindo efforts to mark individuality by taking credits over Waverly's win

Ying-Ying was grown up by her family in such a way that Chinese girls should be meek and gentle. As she belongs to the Chinese zodiac; Tiger, she develops a passive personality of her own. She marries Lin Xiao and aborts her pregnancy when she understood that Lin Xiao has extra marital affairs with many other women. Clifford St. Clair, an American; falls in love with her and Ying-Ying immigrated to America only after the death of her first husband, Lin Xiao. Ying-Ying was horrified when she learns that her daughter, Lena; a Tiger like herself, has emulated her passive behaviours and was trapped in a loveless marriage life with her controlling husband. Lena feels frustrated and powerless with her husband, Harold. Ying-Ying wants Lena to regain her spirit and stand up for herself. She tries to make her daughter realise that one must mark their own identity, where ever they live.

Saint took me to America, where i lived in house smaller than the one in the country. I wore large American cloths. I did servant's tasks. I learned the western ways. I tried to speak with thick tongue. I raised a daughter, watching her from other shore. I accept her American ways. With all these things, I did not care. I had no spirit (305)

Though Ying-Ying St. Clair is very positive all through her life, her daughter didn't have an iota of positive ideas in her. The above-mentioned quote clearly shows that how Ying-Ying St. Clair approaches her daughter and what's the result of that. She metaphorically aborts her daughter for the second time. There is no room for her to act as a mother, as her daughter leads her own unhappy life.

Summation

Every immigrant mother wishes to implement the obedience and the culture in which they are bound up in their childhood days. But the total circumstances are different in America where it has its own set of rules and philosophy. This is the position where the immigrant mothers lose their identity. The American-born daughters couldn't able to comprehend or appreciate what their mothers say to them. The immigrant mothers feel strange about the relationship which they have with their own daughter. The researcher, from the novel; *The Joy Luck Club*, grasps that no immigrant mother has an identity of their own and they cling to the natives of America to show off that they to belong to them.

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