

Abstract

The primary aim of this project was to highlight the doubly oppressed position of Asian American women, and the manner in which they have aimed to combat gender and racial discrimination. Through analysing the Tan's female protagonists in the selected texts of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* using Feminist, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories, it has proven how Chinese immigrant mothers and their second generation Asian American daughters have been immersed in different cultures that dictated their thought and behavioural patterns. Additionally, this project has illustrated the strict patriarchal rule of pre-revolutionary China through the oppressive treatment the Chinese immigrant mothers receive while growing up, and the ways in which they emancipated themselves from gender oppression. Furthermore, the racial discrimination the mothers endure in American society is examined, and this project proves how the mothers combat the negative stereotyping associated with their culture by sharing the stories of their oppressed lives in China with their daughters. It is through telling their stories that the mothers draw their daughters closer to the culture they previously alienated, and mending the emotional and cultural rifts that were once present in the mother-daughter relationships.

An exploration into the life of Amy Tan has also been conducted due to the semi-autobiographical nature of her writing, while a historical analysis on Chinese culture and Asian immigration has also been accompanied to provide an overview of the historical significance of Asian American literature. While feminist literature focusing on the emancipation of white women has been widely published, the field of Asian

American women's literature has not developed to the same extent, and is thus the rationale behind this project.

The theoretical frameworks used in this project are Feminism, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories. The area of Third Wave Feminism contributes particularly to this project, as the female protagonists are women of colour who feel excluded from the concept of feminism that white women have created for themselves. The female protagonists wish to establish their own voice, free from patriarchal definitions and white feminist's assumptions regarding women of colour. Cultural Studies Literary Theory assists in examining the affect that one's culture controls thought and behaviour, which differs according to culture. Ethnic Studies Literary Theory helps to analyse the treatment one affords from mainstream society from the cultural and racial characteristics that one displays.

The comparison of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* provides insight regarding Chinese women's oppressed status in China, the emancipation of Asian American women, and reuniting with the culture that the second generation Asian American daughters abandoned. Tan's message of identifying with one's culture to create awareness of one's own identity is promoted in her writings, and illustrated in the analysis of her selected texts.

Key Words: Asian American Literature Amy Tan The Joy Luck Club
The Kitchen God's Wife The Bonesetter's Daughter Feminist Literary Theory
Cultural Studies Literary Theory Ethnic Studies Literary Theory



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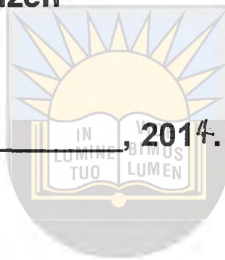
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Fort Hare. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Tamryn Beth van der Westhuizen

11th day of April, 2014.

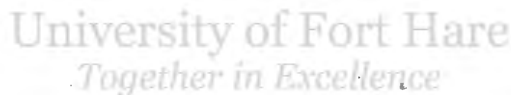


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INTRODUCTION

In Western terms, we were a dysfunctional family. From a Chinese perspective, however, my mother's urge to kill herself was understandable. It was part of a larger legacy passed from generation to generation, grandmother to mother to daughter. In lieu of the family silver, what was inherited was a suffering silence followed by sudden implosion, an urge to blot out all memory and existence. (Tan *The Opposite of Fate* 80)

Renowned Asian American writer, Amy Tan, in agonising clarity, describes what it felt like being raised in a Chinese family in American society. In three of Tan's texts to be examined: *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Tan notes that according to American society, her family was judged dysfunctional as they did not conform to the Euro-American status quo. Tan states that in Chinese society, however, her family appeared perfectly normal and their actions understandable based on shared experiences and expectations, particularly of women. Tan highlights "a suffering silence" and a "sudden implosion" suggestive of the consequences of a woman's oppressed and subordinated position in a male-dominated society of China. The hypothesis of this research is that Asian American women are doubly oppressed as they are viewed as the inferior sex in their culture, while they are considered as an inferior race in American society.

Chinese women have always occupied low positions in society throughout history. According to Xinran, they were classified as objects or property, shared along with food, tools and weapons, and proceeds to explain that while Western women in the 1930's

were demanding sexual equality, Chinese women were only beginning to confront patriarchal restrictions such as foot-binding and arranged marriages (49). Feminism in China was a concept that developed slowly due to the prominent patriarchal ideology that dominated thought and behaviour in Chinese society. Feminist thought shall be used in this project to expose the brutal suffering to which women in China were subjected, and acknowledge their struggle for social and economic freedom.

Amy Tan uses her ethnicity and the relationship with her mother as dominant themes in her texts. Born into a refugee Chinese family now living in America, Tan faced the complexities of being raised according to Chinese traditions, while at the same time being integrated into the dominant American society and culture. Tan's works, therefore, compare the differences between Chinese and American society, and fictionalises the conflict of identities when attempting to integrate these two vastly different cultures. Tan articulates her feelings of rejection by her family and American society, together with her feelings of entrapment in a Chinese and American identity debacle, finding neither solace nor understanding in either (*Opposite of Fate* 110; 305). In her adolescent and early adult years, Tan never completely identified with her mother due to their cultural differences and the resultant alienation conditioned conflicting ways of thinking and behaving (*Opposite of Fate* 110). Tan uses her conflictive relationship with her mother as the impetus for writing, and the theme of a distant and disturbed mother-daughter relationship is repeated throughout her works. Tan believes that one should embrace one's ethnicity no matter how divergent it is from the acceptable standards of Western culture, as this helps to understand and shape a positive

relationship with one's family, enabling one to feel accepted through accepting (*Opposite of Fate* 110). Through the process of maternal reconciliation, Tan realised that she should further reconcile with her original culture, as it was the alienation of her culture that solidified the depiction of her own mother as an alien in her acculturated world. To assist in exploring these themes, Cultural Studies Literary Theory and Ethnic Studies Literary Theory shall be used in this project to highlight the difference between Chinese and American culture, and expose the inferior treatment afforded to ethnic minority population, most particularly Asian Americans, in America. It is through a close textual analysis of Tan's selected texts that she shows how the different constructs of gender, culture and ethnicity labelled women as inferior in Chinese and American society respectively.



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Tan's first book, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), tells the story of the estranged relationship between Chinese mothers and their American born daughters. The book is divided into four parts, with each mother and daughter recounting their own story. While the mothers talk about their past in pre-revolutionary China and the heartache of their emotionally distant relationships with their daughters, the daughters reveal the challenges of being raised in American society according to Chinese customs. Their decision to be accepted into mainstream American society comes at the price of alienating their family and culture. The book concludes with the daughters embracing their cultural roots once the mothers shared with their daughters their oppressive experiences in China and their quest to liberate themselves from sexist Confucian principles. Through reconciling with their mothers, much like Tan and her own mother,

and forging meaningful relationships with them, the daughters find ensuing happiness in their lives, and begin to seek a balance between their original and assumed culture.

Tan's second book under interrogation, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), is a story about a Chinese woman, Winnie, who suffered at the hands of men in pre-revolutionary China, and how she overcame such oppression to change her fate, and liberate herself from patriarchal rule. Winnie tells her life story to her culturally alienated American born daughter, Pearl, so that her daughter can understand her suffering and feels more connected to her mother and her Chinese heritage.

Tan's third novel to be analyzed, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), surrounds the reconciliation between an Asian American woman, Ruth, and her Chinese born mother, Luling, who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Before the disease consumes Luling's memory, LuLing records the events of her life in Chinese. Having rejected her mother's home language, Ruth realizes she does not have much time left to learn her mother's story, so she organizes her mother's story to be translated into English. While Ruth is reading the story, she realizes that her life feels incomplete and hollow, and determines that it stems from rejecting her Chinese culture. Ruth is inspired by her mother's story of courage and determination, and this motivates her to embrace her culture and to reassess the relationships in her life.

Amy Tan's texts, housed in the genre of Asian American literature, ties stories of mainland China, and the lived experiences of Asian immigrants and their second

generation Asian American offspring. According to A. Ling, Asian American literature is comprised of writings from Asian immigrants or their American raised children and holds several purposes:

...to remember the past, to give voice to a hitherto silent people with an ignored and therefore unknown history, to correct stereotypes of an exotic or foreign experience, and thus to claim America for the thousands of Americans whose Asian faces too frequently deny them a legitimate place in the country of their birth ("Teaching Asian American Literature").

Asian American literature thus spans more than one generation, as Chinese immigrants have birthed offspring whose experience of being Chinese is vastly different to their parents. Park offers that Asian American identity is multi-layered, especially for the second generation Asian Americans, who were either birthed and/or raised in America (545). He further writes that these second generation Asian Americans have fully integrated into mainstream American society, whereas their immigrant parents are still regarded as foreigners based on their lack of language fluency, accent and appearance (546). This integration, or lack thereof, raises questions regarding the assimilation patterns and racial socialization of second generation Asian Americans. According to Park, unlike their immigrant parents, second generation Asian Americans had the term 'Asian' designated and applied to them on the basis of their ethnic difference to the Euro-American majority (546). Tan's texts focus explicitly on the assimilation of second generation Asian Americans, who often distance themselves from their original culture, into mainstream society. Park assumes that the resistance to the constant ethnic labeling on second generation Asian Americans could have been the motivating factor

which determines why they want to integrate fully with mainstream American society, instead of upholding the customs of their ancient culture and ethnic roots (546). Park's hypothesis is confirmed in Tan's selected works as the second generation Asian American daughters assimilate into acculturated American society in an attempt to distance themselves from their Chinese mother's alien status.

Asian American literature cannot be read or understood without sound grounding in the historical and cultural contexts of Asians in the United States. In an attempt to validate the Asian American identity, Hong Song, Lai and Goellnicht suggest that Asian American literature is heavily embedded with feminist ideology and Cultural Theory, in an attempt to complete the transitional phase from being an outsider to becoming part of American society (7). Feminist Literary Theory thus opposes China's masculinist ideology, and constructs a new identity for Asian American women, devoid of the oppressive labels that were previously attached to women of Asian descent, and recognizes the agency of subjugated women who overcame their predetermined future of servitude and submission. Lennox acknowledges that Cultural Studies Literary Theory allows feminist scholars to acknowledge how social structures simultaneously restrict women, but also recognize their agency as they oppose oppression in ways that also enable them to envision alternatives. Cultural Studies Literary Theory illustrates the expectations of women in China to act in accordance with their culture, while emphasising the agency that women in China created by rebelling against their oppressive culture. According to Hong Song, Lai and Goellnicht, Cultural Studies Literary Theory places emphasis on racial identity in Asian American literature that is

founded in American nativity, and opposes this identity with the one that is founded and cultivated in China (8). Due to the racial identity that is exposed in Cultural Studies Literary Theory, Ethnic Studies Literary Theory shall be an essential tool in decoding Tan's selected texts, as it illustrates how one's ethnic background is used as a marker to determine how one is treated by the host society, thus revealing the prejudice that American culture discriminately employs and attaches to the Asian American culture.

Chapter One includes a historical account of China's oppressive treatment of women, and how Asian Americans are experiencing liberation and/or further oppression in their new social, economic, and political environment of America. A biography of Amy Tan is also included in this chapter because of the semi-autobiographical nature of her texts.



Chapter Two focuses on theoretical frameworks of Feminist Literary Theory, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories. These theories are thoroughly explored, from their historical origins, to their development, as well as their pioneering and contributing theorists.

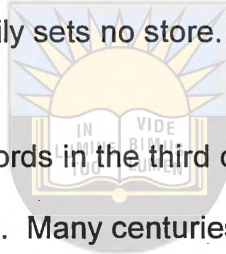
Chapter Three consists of a close textual analysis of the Chinese mothers and their American born daughters in the selected texts of Amy Tan. Under the scrutiny of Feminist, Cultural Studies and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories, the depiction of the Chinese mothers will be analyzed according to their gender oppression in patriarchal China, their ethnic oppression in America, and the cultural differences straining the relationships between the mothers and their daughters. The American born daughters

are analyzed according to their cultural alienation and assimilation into mainstream American society.

This project serves to explicate a number of significant areas of research. Due to the rise in globalization, there is an increase in cultures meeting and functioning alongside one another requiring mutual respect and understanding. Additionally, the exploration of the alienation of a racial minority population by majority population has significant literary value. A further significance to this study is the creation of new cultures from the fusion of existing cultures; for example, an Asian American culture was formed from Asian immigrants and their descendants. Furthermore, this study aims to demystify cultural myths and stereotypes, while also providing insight into the treatment of women in Chinese culture. By using the theories of Feminism, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies in examining Amy Tan's texts, the voice of oppressed women is acknowledged, creating both an understanding and respect for their lived experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

How sad it is to be woman!
Nothing on earth is held so cheap,
Boys stand leaning at the door
Like gods fallen out of heaven,
Their hearts brave the Four Oceans,
The wind and dust of a thousand miles,
No one is glad when a girl is born:
By her family sets no store. (Fu 72)

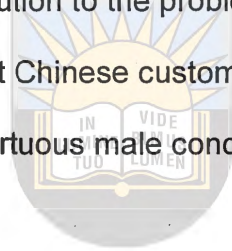


A Chinese female poet wrote these words in the third century explicitly bemoaning gender discrimination against females. Many centuries later, little has changed regarding the status of Asian women, and where political intervention has attempted to uplift the beleaguered image of women, centuries of patriarchal subjugation maintains the superiority of male ideology. While the First World, usually Western countries, have enjoyed progress in feminist thought since the First Wave of Feminism swept across the United States of America and Great Britain in 1848, countries like China have not shared in the advancement of women's rights. Unique influences of culture, tradition, and customs have maintained gender oppression in China.

1.1 SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Historically, Chinese women have been subdued by the ruling patriarchal ideology of Confucian principles, Taoist philosophy, and the male-dominated, patriarchal institutionalized religion of Buddhism that has classed them as inferiors. Confucius, a

Chinese thinker in the fifth century BC, advocated a political and social doctrine of obedience to one's country and family, and thus the socially acceptable way of life was ruled by Confucian doctrine. According to Fieser, the inception of Confucian philosophy emerged as a response to the social upheaval experienced in China at the time, referred to as the 'Warring States' period. He further states that it was during this era, known as a 'Period of the 100 Philosophers', in which many intellectuals proposed various solutions to the problems of social chaos in China, that Confucius emerged as the prime philosopher, offering his own solution to the problems of social chaos. Confucius advocated a return to the ancient Chinese customs before social turmoil and emphasized the importance of virtuous male conduct.

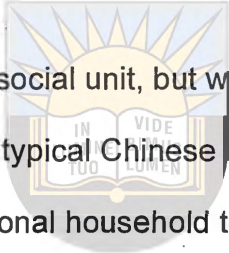


Confucius managed to bring peace and stability to Chinese society through his inception of ancient traditional Chinese principles which contributed towards the oppression of women. Swann reports that Confucian doctrine did not accord women a status equal to men because women were generally regarded as unworthy or incapable of literary education. She mentions that this resulted in most Confucians regarding the subservience of women to men as natural and appropriate. Confucian doctrine additionally advocated household rules, which ultimately determined the position of women as inferiors. Confucian doctrine proclaimed that a failure to maintain a proper relationship between two people of unequal status would result in social disharmony and a breakdown of all the rules of propriety. Domination was seen as an aspect of a specific set of social roles. The Chinese conception of roles, together with the obligation to fulfill those roles, infiltrated every sphere of Chinese society, Hamilton writes, much in

the same way that individuation and law pervade every sphere of Western society ("Patriarchy" 77, 98). Performing one's gender role was crucially important in Confucian ideology, and deviation from one's socially accepted gender role received harsh censorship within Chinese society as it was an indication that one was deliberately disobeying societal norms and values. In terms of Confucian ideology, Hamilton contends that power is an aspect of a role, and it was obligatory for authoritarian figures to command others to conform to their roles ("Patriarchy" 82). As women were not imbued with power, their subjugation to such patrilineal roles and power structures gave them no rights of their own, except to marry and bear children. In traditional China, across all class lines, the woman's only role was that of a domestic, maternal nature; caring for the household and bearing male heirs. Hooper writes that some women resisted the Confucian doctrine that advocated a strict adherence to gender roles, but in a system that had been incorporated into Chinese society for thousands of years, women had no alternative for release but suicide (135). Hooper adds that countless women decided to choose this path by drowning themselves to escape becoming wives or concubines (135). Women in China were exposed to such oppressive conditions and appalling treatment, that killing themselves was favoured over a life of agonizing unhappiness that awaited them as a subservient daughter, a subordinate wife and docile daughter-in-law.

Individuality, a prized concept in the West, was severely minimized in Chinese households and society. According to Budani, in a country where the emphasis was not on the individual but on society, individual identity was denigrated, forcing people to

adhere to designated roles in the family as individuality was perceived to be evil. Security was found by maintaining one's role, Budani offers, while members of family were known or addressed in kin terms instead of their actual names; such as first daughter, second son, sixth uncle, etc., which stripped family members of a shred of individuality. Thus strict compliance was expected of members of a Chinese household to address others according to their kin terms, as deviation from this norm was considered an act of insubordination.



A Chinese family was not only a social unit, but was also viewed as an economic, agrarian unit. Zuo asserts that a typical Chinese male lineage family performed large-scale functions in a multigenerational household to provide employment, food, security, support of the elderly and young, and personal safety (545). Zuo states that the importance of social roles and organization around collective lines was paramount in order for the family structure to survive and flourish (545). Division of labour in the Chinese households was extreme and was assigned according to one's gender. Therefore, Zuo contends that family members' authority was allocated along both gender and generational lines which resulted in the emergence of both generation and gender-based patriarchy (545). Thus not only were females deemed inferior, based on their gender, but young unmarried females and wives were also relegated to a subordinate position in the family based on the hierarchy present in Chinese families.

According to Budani, part of the economic activities and roles of a male lineage household was the selection of brides, as it was staunchly believed a man was not

acquiring a mate; instead the male lineage was receiving a social, economic and biological contribution to its destiny. Males in a family unit were forced to import women as brides and disposed of the women born in their household by marrying them off to other families, Swann states, thus marriages were arranged by the male family elders of the prospective bride and groom. Temperament, fertility and virtue were the prime characteristics a bride should possess, as the bride was expected to perform domestic duties in the household. Swann argues that a married woman was almost always overworked and abused by her mother-in-law, who had suffered the same oppression as a bride, and whose only power in the household was the authority she acquired over her daughter-in-law. A women's destiny was static. Her purpose in life was to marry, and thus relocate to her husband's residence at the time of her marriage to become incorporated into his familial line, lose the familial base she had in her parental village, and bear sons who would look after the elderly family members and continue the male kinship line.

Within this structure, women were regarded as outsiders in both their family home and their married home. Daughters were not regarded as highly as sons. Mies contends that daughters would be an economic and social advantage only when married off to another family, while sons served as security for financial and economic stability, since they would inherit the family compound and thus perform their duty of taking care of their parents (125). She further notes that daughters were only a temporary addition to the natal household, and perceived as an economic loss to the family, therefore, parents invested minimally in their education and training (187). Marriage was another

oppressive custom that demeaned women and solidified their subordinate status in society. Arranged marriages were impartial to the decision of both husband and wife. However, Hooper argues, while the wife was obliged to remain faithful to her husband, it was socially acceptable for a husband to bring concubines into the home or to seek sexual pleasure outside the home from prostitutes (135). Polygamy was a recognized custom amongst the upper class to showcase their wealth through the possession of women. Thus women were perceived to be of material value and viewed as commodities, Hooper elaborates: men's status in society would increase depending on the number of women that he "owned" (135). Because women were invested with no rights, it was impossible for women to divorce their husbands. Men, on the other hand, could divorce their wives, especially for adultery. Hence most suicides were the result of family conflict, Swann asserts, and a high percentage of these were young brides who were unhappy in their marital home but had no recourse to a better life for themselves. Women in China were thus severely restricted to live under dire circumstances with no refuge for protection against the harsh patriarchal conditions which they faced both in their homes and in society.

In a culture that idolizes sons and dreads the birth of a daughter, to be born female came perilously close to being born less than human. Ward and Moore state that the earliest challenge females faced was of surviving infanticide, as baby girls were reported to be killed at birth by some parents. In terms of Confucian ideology, Swann writes, it was expected of a woman to

modestly yield to others; let her respect others; let her put others first, herself last. Should she do something good, let her not mention it; should she do something bad let her not deny it. Let her bear disgrace; let her even endure when others speak or do evil to her. Always let her seem to tremble and fear.

The above quote details one of the four virtues expected of women in China in terms of Confucian philosophy: to be chaste and yielding in behaviour. The other three virtues are: not be talkative in speech, to be restrained in appearance, and to occupy herself with handiwork and embroidery. Confucius recognized the notion of ritual conduct in his teachings. Fieser explains that this is understood to be the effortless adherence to social norms and the performance of customs associated with ceremonial formality, as Confucius believed that ritual conduct held society together. Confucian rituals and traditions were practiced on females as soon as they were born. According to Swann, on the third day after a birth of a girl, a ritual was performed displaying three customs: to place the baby below the bed, give her a potsherd (a broken piece of pottery), then finally to announce her birth to her ancestors by an offering. She explains that the interpretation of these three customs is that by placing the baby below the bed signified her lowly and weak position and her primary duty to humble herself before others. The potsherd suggested that she should practice labour and regard her primary duty as being industrious. While to announce her birth before her ancestors meant that there was an expectation of her to continue the observance of ancestor worship in the home. Females suffered oppressive rituals and tyrannical customs from birth to death that reminded them throughout their lives of their insignificant standing in society. Males, on the other hand, did not have to undergo rituals once they were born. Unlike females,

males were constantly reminded of their elevated status in society and the power that came with being male.

Females suffered under patriarchal rule in their own families and households as it was custom for families to treat daughters and female relatives in accordance with Confucian principles. The Chinese family was considered a Confucian state in miniature, where the patriarch, the oldest living male, ruled the household in the same way that a government rules a country, although the patriarch was more aligned to a dictator than anything else. Males occupied all the principal positions of authority within the family, with the patriarch being the ultimate head of the family. The patriarch also enjoyed the supremacy of being head of a household, Hamilton asserts, as wives and children were the purveyors of obedience ("Patriarchy" 79). Hamilton contends that the patriarch had absolute authority; he could adopt children, divorce wives, recognize or reject paternity, and had the right to kill his children and slaves if punishment was deserved ("Patriarchy" 82). With land being the main wealth in China, Hamilton continues, the patriarch owned everything, from property to slaves, and his wife and sons owned nothing, while only in the event of his death would his land be divided equally among all of his surviving sons ("Patriarchy" 82). The patriarch was feared by his household as he dispensed justice to all in his domain. Only he had the rights of a citizen and only he could seek justice before a public tribunal, Hamilton asserts, while he was also solely responsible for the crime committed by his family members, and only he had the authority to punish family members for their misdeeds ("Patriarchy" 82). Across generations, males occupied the position of the patriarch once they became the oldest living male in the homestead,

while females never reached a position of authority; they remained subordinate to men until death.

Confucian doctrine advocated the ethic of filial piety, loyalty to one's parents, which contributed to the absolute subordination of young to old, and more importantly, female to male. Hamilton states that filial piety was thus characterized as the sincere submission towards the superiority of the father's role, as well as the manner of obedience given to the person in that role ("Patriarchy" 77). In a system branded and affected by filial piety, Zuo offers, a woman's life was characterized by three obediences: to her father during childhood, to her husband during marriage, and to her son during widowhood (546). She further contends that intimacy between spouses was frowned upon, as a husband should show obedience and preference to his parents before his wife, so such intimacy was deemed a potential threat to the parent's old age security, harmonious relations of all family members and the continuity of the male lineage family (547). It was socially acceptable for a husband and wife to occupy separate rooms as an act of distancing themselves from each other, and thus respecting the principle of filial piety by showing their subordination to the older generation.

The Confucian principles, together with the Taoist philosophy and religious tradition of yin and yang, contributed to the oppression and insubordination of women in China. According to Bancroft, it is unknown when Taoism began, but it is believed to have originated in China in 2000 B.C from what is known to be the possibly mythical Yellow Emperor (183). The symbols of yin and yang are both used extensively by Taoism and

Confucianism. The unequal treatment of women in all spheres of life was rooted in the Yin Yang theory. Yin and yang suggest that polarities are never distinct and separate entities; they contribute and sustain each other, thus commanding balance (Bancroft 187). She continues to explain that the yang is synonymous with “positive, masculine strong, firm, light, heaven, rising, and father”, while the yin is linked to “negative, feminine, weak, receptive, yielding, darkness, earth, falling, and mother” (187). Bancroft states that the quality of yin is dark, representing the woman's womb, and signifies primordial chaos, creativity and birth, while the quality of yang is light, representing something being born, and signifying intellect, repose, and motion (188). The husband and wife are closely linked to the philosophy of yin and yang. Swann contends that the husband is viewed unworthy if he does not possess anything by which to control his wife in performing his masculine duty of power, while a wife is deemed unworthy if she possesses nothing with which to serve her husband. She explains that if a husband fails to control his wife, and if a wife refrains from serving her husband, it is deemed that the proper relationship between men and women and the natural order of things are neglected and destroyed. This is because Taoist philosophy views the controlling of women by men and the serving of men by women to be inter-related concepts. According to Hooper, yin and yang are complementary, but not equal, which is the reason why women were always considered subordinate to males (134). Chinese society is, therefore, embedded with patriarchal ideology with regards to Confucian principles and the Taoist yin yang philosophy, which assists in delineating the status of women as unworthy and insignificant. These two principles are accepted as a social norm in governing the way of life in China, and steadfastly advanced by men, who

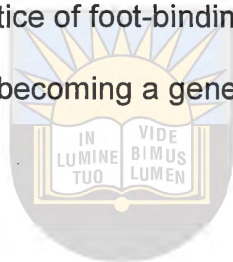
represent the dominant class in society. Winnie, the female protagonist Chinese mother in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, questions the Confucian principles of female submission and the strict compliance to one's gender role. Winnie does this by deviating from her required gender of submission through confronting her abusive husband and thus allows her voice to be heard. The oppression suffered in China by Winnie is a result of men embodying and practicing Confucian principles. However, the agency shown by Winnie when rebelling against her gender role and invoking feminist thought illustrates her disregard for the socially acceptable Confucian doctrine and the creation of a new consciousness held by empowered and resistant Chinese women.



1.2 FOOT BINDING

Foot binding is a Chinese practice that originated around 1000 AD, and can be regarded as one of the most painful, cruellest and oppressive customs practiced on Chinese women. Foot binding is believed to have originated from Chinese dancers who spread the fashion of their small feet throughout central and southern China, Mackie states, however over time "a practice supposedly originating among dancers eventually made dance a forgotten art" (1001). The foot binding process started as early as the age of between six to eight years for Chinese girls so the foot could reshape its form during girls' childhood development. Mackie explains that foot binding involved breaking and bending the four smaller toes under the foot, forcing the sole to the heel, and securing it with a tight bandage, suspending the growth of the foot, while moulding it into a bowed and pointed four-inch-long accessory (1000). Foot binding was an extremely painful process for young girls to endure as it carried risks and complications. Mackie writes

that the most common injuries suffered from foot binding were ulcerations, paralysis, gangrene, and mortification of the lower limbs, while women with bound feet were virtually immobile and were largely housebound (1000). At first, foot binding was only practiced amongst the upper class who wanted to showcase their wealth by indicating they were so rich that their wives did not have to work around the house. Kim contends that this custom soon spread to all classes of society, as every mother wanted her daughter to have the perfect feet that were idolized by upper class Chinese culture ("Half of China"). Thus, the practice of foot-binding developed and spread from signifying wealth in the family to becoming a generally accepted custom in Chinese society.



Unbelievably, a custom so oppressive and physically crippling to women was greatly supported by women. It is through foot binding that Chinese mothers taught their daughters to succeed in the male-controlled Confucian world by ensuring marriage proposals from distinguished families for their daughters. Thus women taught their daughters that foot binding was necessary to find a good family into which to marry. According to Blake, the selection of brides was the task of the mother-in-law whose criteria for a good daughter-in-law was the discipline that the bound foot represented (683). Bound feet not only carried hope for the daughter of securing marriage into a wealthy family, but also controlled the daughter's family's reputation. Women with unbound feet were considered disgraceful, Mackie argues, as it signified poverty and belonging to a lower class structure as the family needed mobile daughters to work in the fields or workshops (1001). Yet, Mackie stipulates, some poor families preferred to

struggle along for a precarious living, while binding their daughters' feet with the hope of a proper and prosperous marriage proposal for their daughters, which would result in economic elevation for all (1001). Therefore to ensure the repressive life that marriage offered to women, they first had to endure the painful custom of foot binding as a child. Their bound feet thus served as a constant reminder of their subordinate position in society, as pain was associated with beauty, and beauty secured marriage proposals.

Foot binding not only crippled women physically, but also emotionally, as it followed the Confucian principle of daughters and wives embodying characteristics of subservience and submission to their fathers and husbands. Foot binding upheld the Confucian ideology of the subordination of women to men, Yung writes, as women with bound feet struggled to walk unassisted, and this immobile state ensured their close proximity to the family home and thus chastity and fidelity (6). By keeping their daughters immobile, Walsh stipulates, Chinese mothers taught their daughters the art of handiwork, such as sewing and weaving, which was one of the four virtues expected of women in Confucian philosophy. Foot binding also promoted the concept of women as muted, which is the focus of Confucian doctrine. According to Blake, muted does not infer the inability of Chinese women to talk, rather it suggests their incapacity to give their words the weight of authority, or to have their words, expressions and ideas to be taken seriously, or attach credibility to their decisions (685). It is important to note that no equally painful and oppressive custom was practiced on little boys in China, which further emphasized the fact that being female in China was not an enviable experience as it resulted in second class status and oppressive practices and customs. While foot binding is not

mentioned in Tan's selected texts, it thus corroborates Tan's depiction of women in China as subjugated and mistreated. The painful and tyrannical practice of foot binding confirmed the status of women as lowly and inconsequential, as women were deemed as commodities, and their bound feet represented the value attached to their bodies.

1.3 BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a religion that is practiced by much of the Chinese population. Buddhism originated in India in 5 B.C when Siddharta Gautama, the son of the ruler of the Sakya tribe, who is said to have attained enlightenment and Buddhahood. At the core, Buddhist teachings are not patriarchal in nature, Ingram explains, however the societies in which it was originally practiced shaped this religion to accommodate the elevation of men, and excluded women from attaining enlightenment (49). The central teaching of Buddhism is that all living things are able to reach Buddhahood, so the foundation of the religion did not condone one gender above another. Ingram argues that the issue lies in the fact that Buddhist institutions have remained male-dominated and oppressive towards women (54). According to Minamoto, the theories and rules put forward by Buddhist monks influenced the religion of Buddhism in becoming a patriarchal institution (160). Confucianism in China heavily influenced the male-centred patriarchal ideology that was incorporated into Buddhism by Buddhist male followers. The patriarchal systems embedded in Buddhism introduced five theories to bar women from attaining enlightenment and achieving Buddhahood, Minamoto asserts, and these five theories were that:

women were not able to be (1) Brahma, the creator, the highest god; (2) Sakra Deranman Indra, the main god protecting Buddhism; (3) Mara the devil who damages lives and people's goodwill; (4) the king of the four states – East, West, South and North – and king of gold, silver, copper, and iron; and (5) Buddha. (159)

One of the central beliefs of Buddhists, which contrasts with most religious beliefs, is that after death, one is reincarnated and returns to earth in a different living form.

Minamoto writes that male Buddhists developed and upheld the theory that women would first have to be reborn into the world as men before they could reach and attain the peak of Buddhahood (160). Therefore, women had little room to protest the oppressive ideology that Buddhist men held in accordance to their patriarchal ideals and culture. In the Sutta Nipata, a sacred book of Buddha written by male Buddhist disciples, Minamoto contends that women are described as temptresses who are unworthy of men, while there is no mention of men being tempters (157). In addition, men are considered blameless when accepting advances from the temptress (157). These views held by the Buddhist disciples further exonerated their sexist attitude toward women by refusing to take responsibility and accountability for their sexual advances on women.

In the practice of Chinese foot binding, Buddhist terms are used to describe the shape of the bound feet. The term that is most loaded with symbolic meaning was *jinlian*, translated as “golden lotus”, and according to Blake, the central symbol of Buddhism (691). He continues his explanation that “*lian*” (lotus) was used as a metaphor to

compare the purity and serenity of a lily floating on water to women with bound feet (691). He adds that women were supposed to evoke an illusion of a floating lily through the short, mincing steps of their walk, due to the complexity of walking with their bound feet. He further states that the word "*jin*" (gold) before *lian* expressed the notion that bound feet were considered commoditized objects of value, and this was confirmed by the fact that the weight of marriage proposals rested on the quality to which a girl's feet were bound (691). While Buddhist symbols are associated with women and foot binding, there is, however, no reference to foot binding in formal Buddhist doctrines. This further reveals the way in which Chinese society institutionalized the religion of Buddhism according to their patriarchal beliefs by overlaying Buddhist symbols on the oppressive practice of foot binding, and validating this practice through the use of religious symbols. The incorporation of patriarchal ideologies in the religion of Buddhism illustrates how this religion affected the forlorn status of women in China, barring them from reincarnation, thus confirming their ineffective position in society. Therefore, together with the oppressive Confucian principles embedded in Chinese society, the patriarchal institutionalized religion of Buddhism devalued women in China, and thus offers proof regarding the lowly status of Tan's female protagonist Chinese mothers' lives in China.

While Confucian principles, Taoist philosophy, and the patriarchal institutionalized religion of Buddhism are still embedded in Chinese culture and society, there has been a recent improvement in the treatment towards women. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the conditions for women have improved in the

material, legal and social terms. Traditional practices like arranged marriages, polygamy, sale of daughters, child betrothal and concubinage have been ruled illegal by the Marriage Law of 1950. Additionally, Salaff writes, vocational training and educational opportunities that were previously closed off to women were being promoted and women were encouraged to join (260). However, these improvements were only half-hearted attempts at showing the advancement of women's rights in China as inconsistencies and contradictions were ever present in the progression of women's rights. Chun notes that when the People's Republic of China first embarked on a quest for equal rights for women, feminist issues were handled under class struggles while the traditionally male dominated power structures were never addressed (15). This suggested that the independence of an oppressed people and the transformation of the ancient regime had nothing to do with the well-being of women. The Education Act of 1907 sought to bring education to women, according to Croll, as it was thought:

the good education of the citizens...depended upon the good education of its women, however 'citizens' was synonymous with men, and so women's issues were subsumed under male political and intellectual quests for national strengthening and nation building. (53)

Although women moved into positions previously held by males, White, Howell, and Shang contend that they were not relieved from their domestic duties, and while in the work place, new oppressions arose in the form of discrimination between male and female employees. In an attempt to instill agency in females, the Chinese government passed The Marriage Law of 1950 to remove discriminations against women and to strive for equality between the sexes as it legally endorsed privileges of divorce to

women while abolishing the traditional practices of marriage. However, Wolf offers, it did not achieve its intended results as traditional lineage structures maintained their hold over marriage practices as women opting for divorce would face staunch opposition from the family and community (1). These family struggles that ensued from abolishing arranged marriage and allowing women the right to divorce were not only between men and women, but also between older and younger generations. Hooper explains that the older generation felt deprived of the authority and power they held over the younger generation, most particularly the right to arrange the marriages of their offspring (136). Mothers-in-law fiercely objected to the new law, Hooper adds, as they would lose the only power they held over the younger women (136). Therefore, while attempts were made at government level to eradicate female oppression, Chinese society was still embedded with traditional Confucian thinking that ensured women held insignificant positions in society.

1.4 FEMINISM IN CHINA

Feminism in China is a movement that has gradually taken shape, and which is ever evolving to gain momentum. According to Chun, there existed a minor but splendid tradition of women striving for freedom in imperial China, but who were unable to change the chauvinistic male-dominated Chinese society (15). Feminism in China began to sprout in the late nineteenth century among the upper-classes wherein the 'new woman' of China emerged. Hooper contends that women living in rural areas, who made up roughly 85 per cent of the female population in China, were unaffected by the upper-class feminists advances until the incorporation of the People's Republic of China

in 1949 (133). The May Fourth Movement during the 1910's and 1920's, in which intellectuals protested against the corrupt government structures and the foreign invasion of China, was a notable movement for women, and is referred to as May Fourth Feminism. Interestingly enough, the main activists behind the May Fourth Feminism were male intellectuals who were exposed to Western ideas. Their objective in fighting for the liberation of women wasn't for the sole benefit of women, Li argues, but their desire to change Chinese society and to make China a stronger nation. Thus in order to achieve this, women needed to be educated and be afforded equal opportunities and treatment to men in order to save China from economic disarray and humiliation. These innovative ideas affected Chinese society, enabling it to be a fierce global competition, but did little to improve women's rights. In China, only feminist demands which have practical, holistic value are prioritized, Hooper declares, but there is little place and tolerance for individual liberation of women, as it opposes the familial structure of China (132). According to Li, the Great Leap Forward of 1958, encouraged women to leave their domestic roles and enter the labour force in order to accelerate China's economic development. Although the programme failed, it made a noteworthy contribution to women's liberation, as it sparked women's desire to work and secure economic freedom apart from their husbands. The advancement of women's liberation in China continued at the onset of the communist revolution and socialist modernization, during the period between the late 1960's and the late 1970's. Chun states that during this time, women achieved educational and economic parity, freedom in marriage, the development of public health provisions and child-care services, and government and community intervention in the private sphere against violence and discrimination (16). In

September 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women which focused on the action for equality, peace and development was held in Beijing, China. Beijing signed a declaration known as the Beijing Declaration on the 15 September 1995 affirming their determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for women in the interest of humanity. According to Symonides, Janusz and Volodin, the Beijing Declaration recognized that progress regarding the status of women had been inconsistent in China, and that inequalities between men and women still existed, and hoped that the effort of signing the declaration would accelerate progress (xvi). The slow developing concept of feminism in China illustrates how staunch patriarchal institutions that had long been ingrained in Chinese society objected to its growth. Even though it took a while for the ill-treatment of women in Chinese society to be internationally and nationally recognized, there still existed women in China who believed that they should have equal rights to men, and the female protagonist Chinese mothers in Tan's selected texts are clearly indicative of these 'new women' thinkers who fought for better lives for themselves.

1.5 ASIAN IMMIGRATION

The motivation for Chinese immigration to America replicated the yearnings of most émigrés: the search for economic opportunity and development. The first wave of Chinese immigration began with the 1849 Californian Gold Rush. This wave predominantly consisted of male immigrants, Woo asserts, who left their country due to poverty and hunger, high taxes, the Opium Wars, and peasant rebellions, to build better lives for themselves in a land that was believed to be abundant with opportunities and

wealth (48). The wives of most of these Chinese immigrants did not accompany their husbands, Woo adds, as Chinese culture and tradition bound women to their homes, and restricted migration for women as surety for the return of their husbands (49). Another reason that contributed to Chinese wives remaining in China was that the expense of travel was also prohibitive and the American living conditions were harsh. Chinese immigrants were initially welcomed as they were willing to work menial jobs for minimal salaries, Woo contends, but their diligent work ethic threatened the white working class (49). Discriminatory laws began to mount against the Chinese, and in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This Act called for the arrest of immigrant Chinese labourers into America until it was outlawed in 1943, Woo writes, but the borders still remained closed to them (50). The Chinese Exclusion Act did, however, make exceptions to the rule, and only allowed Chinese officials, students, teachers, and merchants, together with a small number of wives and daughters of these men, entry in America. However, the Page Law of 1875 which was promulgated to prohibit the entry of Chinese prostitutes, made it extremely difficult for Chinese women to enter America, as, according to Woo, they were considered prostitutes unless they could prove otherwise (50). Due to the Exclusion Act, the number of Chinese women entering America began to drop, but their numbers began to increase after 1900 with China's worsening conditions and the decline of American cultural restrictions on Chinese women migration. Woo states that it was only after World War Two that there was a heavy influx of Chinese women onto American soil (52). With time, these women began to enter the public sphere and work outside their homes, due to the low-paying jobs of their

husbands which could not sustain their families, thus overstepping their required gendered acts that were expected of them in China.

The Chinese immigrants differed from other arrivals in America, Ling writes, as these immigrants were of the opinion that they would return home after making money in America ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 461). Therefore, Chinese immigrants did not intend to form a permanent part of the population as they perceived themselves as sojourners. As a result, the Chinese immigrants made little effort to assimilate themselves linguistically and culturally into mainstream American society due to their lack of commitment to remain. Ling further contends that the sojourners were China-orientated and non-English speaking, and suffered exclusion by the Americans as they remained truly Chinese ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 462). Chinese immigrants were not given full citizenship rights until the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s from which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Nationality Act of 1965 materialized. Before this, Chinese immigrants were treated as second class citizens in American society, Tong stipulates, having to live in ghettos reserved exclusively for Chinese immigrants as they were deemed non-assimilable by the ruling population. American attitude towards Asian immigrants severely plummeted during World War Two and the bombing of Pearl Harbour by the Japanese, which contributed to the hostile treatment that was afforded to Asian immigrants.

The acculturation of Chinese immigrants depended mostly on their age at immigration. According to Ling, the younger they were when entering America, the easier the

acculturation process and the less they suffered from emotional maladjustment ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 463). However, she adds that Chinese immigrants of mature age possessed strong ethnic identity, but were not as successful in the acculturation process as their younger counterparts ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 464). As younger immigrants experienced a smoother transition into American society, younger women were more accepting of their new elevated gender roles. Pyke and Johnson assert that the Chinese immigrants experienced a shift in gender arrangements, centering on the loss of economic power in males and increased dependency on their wife's wages (38). Even though Chinese women immigrants were the target of cheap labour by employers, writes Pyke and Johnson, these women still possessed a new sense of autonomy, decision-making power, and demanded assistance with their domestic chores from their husbands, yet husbands still sought to maintain their position of power and dominance over their wives and families (38). By working outside of their homes, Chinese women started building a network of friendships with other women, Woo states, and they started joining community organizations (53). World War Two marked the beginning of significant socio-economic and political change for Chinese American women. American patriotism and Chinese nationalism inspired Chinese American women to enter into the formerly male areas of fundraising, propaganda, civil defense, the Red Cross, armed services, and defense factories. Woo stipulates that this contributed to their increased socioeconomic status, the broadening of their public role, and then equality with men for them backing America during a time of national crisis (54). Thus, Chinese immigrant women were motivated to

depart from their required gendered acts and take on responsibilities and duties that were previously assigned to males.

The 1920's brought about the emergence of the second generation Chinese Americans who were born in America, and who were not exposed to traditional Chinese practices like foot binding, but they were still raised according to Chinese culture. Second generation Chinese Americans became more acculturated into American society than their parents, as they were given firsthand experience to integrate with American children at school. Whereas schooling and educating girls was viewed as an economic loss in China, Chinese immigrants realized the importance of educating their daughters in America, due to the abundance of opportunities that catered for educated people. Second generation Chinese American women desired to be autonomous, Woo writes, but gender role expectations inhibited their freedom, which frustrated their attempts to find a perfect balance between the culture into which they were born, and the culture into which they were assimilated through social integration (54). During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and after the re-emergence of feminism movement, American society witnessed a major change in the male-centered focus on Chinese American literature and culture. Ling asserts that during this time, the experiences of Chinese American women were considered and acknowledged, thus validating their experiences as a central part of Chinese American history ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 461). Due to Asian American women being vested with a new sense of independence through contributing to the finances of their homes, they slowly shifted away from the traditional Chinese gender roles of subservience and reliance on their male relatives. Second

generation Asian American children maximized the liberation of gender roles and the non-adherence to patriarchal culture and practices.

1.6 ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Asian American literature not only promoted Asian American identity, but it also addressed the injustices of the past, while simultaneously questioning the power structures in American society for oppressing the ethnic minority population. According to Kim, 1943 and 1950 marked the years in which the first books were published by a second generation Chinese American man, Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), and woman, Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) ("Defining Asian American Realities" 91). These books, however, have not impacted the study of Asian American literature to the extent of later novels. Wong's novel was written to validate American culture in the eyes of a minority, Kim contends, while invalidating the discriminatory problems that Asian Americans experienced ("Defining Asian American Realities" 91). Louis Chu's book *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) formed the cornerstone of Asian American literature as Chu exposed the common dilemma experienced in Asian American culture: generational conflict due to loss of native culture. Chinese American women writers, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, have both made substantial contributions into the discourse of Asian American identity, Maxey argues, by revealing the persisting Asian American immigrant problems of the first generation and their children who take on a distinctive character for Chinese Americans (1). In their writings, Kingston and Tan both exhibit generational conflicts between Chinese immigrants and their Americanized offspring to highlight the different

cultural constructs that are accepted by each group. While Louis Chu's earlier novel involves generational conflict between father and son, Kingston and Tan focus on the generational conflicts between mothers and daughters. Maxine Hong Kingston was not the first Asian American women writer to publish a book in the genre of Asian American literature, but her debut novel, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), has received significant critical attention since the 1970's. According to Ling, Kingston successfully penned one of the prominent themes of Asian American women writers: the experiences of Chinese American women and the transition from an old culture to a new one ("Surviving on the Gold Mountain" 464). Amy Tan's works, published in the late 1980's, also highlighted the transitional experiences of Chinese American women emphasizing the disappointment and heartache of lost dreams in this land of opportunity. Kingston and Tan's feminist novels have not escaped criticism from academics, especially in the field of their own ethnic genre: Asian American studies. One of Frank Chin's arguments against the validity of Kingston and Tan's Chinese American woman experiences is that he feels that other problems in Asian American culture are worth noting, and that these writers have undermined the power of Asian American men to combat racist stereotypes of the dominant white culture (3). He further postulates that Kingston and Tan have constructed blurred historical accounts of China to promote their beliefs that Chinese society is heavily patriarchal (3). Despite the mostly male criticism for Kingston and Tan, these women's works have canonized Asian American literature through their bicultural and biographical accounts of the Chinese culture. Maxey offers that by promoting the aims of community building, and cultural self-empowerment, they have given a voice to first and second generation Asian Americans women (1). As members of second

generation Asian Americans, Maxey states that Kingston and Tan have further established “the authenticity of their Chinese credentials, by tacitly appointing themselves in the process as representative spokespeople for their community” (2). Thus, by writing about the oppressed lives of Chinese women, Kingston and Tan act as agents for the liberation of Chinese women and Asian American women from their subjugated gender roles.

1.7 TAN’S BIOGRAPHY

Amy Tan was born in 1952, in Oakland, California to Chinese parents, John and Daisy Tan, who had just escaped the Chinese Revolution. Adams writes, in her essay published in 2001, that Tan’s father, John, worked as an electrical engineer, and an assistant minister at various Baptist churches, and he ensured that his children were brought up in a Christian household (“Amy Tan”). While living in America, Daisy Tan experienced discrimination of a different kind, not according to her gender as in pre-revolutionary China, but due to the cultural and ethnic markers that she possessed from being born and raised in China according to Chinese values and tradition. Tan explains the prejudice that American society attached to her mother because of the manner in which her mother spoke English:

...when I was growing up, my mother’s “limited” English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not

take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her. ("Mother Tongue" 7)

Due to the prejudicial reactions to Tan's mother, Tan wanted to distance herself from her mother and her Chinese culture as a way of ensuring she would not receive the same derogatory treatment. These negative experiences made it difficult for Tan to embrace her Chinese ethnicity while growing up in American society, Adams states, and thus her commitment to assimilating into American culture and society generated difficulties between her mother and herself ("Amy Tan"). Tan was so fixated on being accepted into mainstream American culture that, according to Adams, she slept with a clothespin on her nose in an effort to "westernize" it, showing an early start to alienating her Chinese culture and identity ("Amy Tan"). Tan was insistent that she shed her original Chinese cultural markers, including her physical features, to be accepted into American society as an acculturated individual.

Tan writes how different the Chinese culture, in which she was raised, was from American culture, to which she was assimilated:

The word 'fun' was not commonly used in our family... [it] was a bad f-word, and its antonym was 'hard' as in hard work. Things that were hard led to worthwhile results; things that were fun did not. Another bad f-word was 'freedom'...and 'friends' those purveyors of corruption and shame whose sole purpose in life was to encourage me to talk back to my mother and make her long to return to China, where there were millions of girls my age who would be only too happy to obey their parents without question. (*The Opposite of Fate* 136; 137)

The American culture represented freedom of choice, freedom of thought, the freedom to befriend people of different backgrounds, and the image of the American Dream where opportunities were plentiful and one's life was characterized by simplicity and happiness. Conversely, Chinese culture held opposing beliefs concerning how one should live. Instead of striving for freedom, opportunities, simplicity and happiness, hard work and effort overwhelmed every notion of Chinese life, as it was believed that only through hard work could one's rewards be realized. These Chinese ideals were steadfastly adhered to by Tan's mother who insisted that her children be immersed in Chinese culture.



Tan's mother, Daisy, followed Christianity for the sake of her minister husband, but when her husband and son both died from a brain tumor in the same year, she was released to pursue her Chinese roots, a side that she had hitherto repressed as a Baptist minister's wife. According to Adams, this included returning to Chinese superstitions, and revealing her Chinese past to her daughter, Amy ("Amy Tan"). It was only after the death of Tan's father and brother that Tan learned the appalling life that her mother, Daisy, and her grandmother endured in Communist China. Following the death of Daisy Tan's father, her mother was raped by a man who forced her into marriage, thus lowering her status to a concubine. The son she birthed as a result of the rape was handed to a high-ranking wife of the rapist, and this pain and loss led the concubine to commit suicide by eating raw opium. Daisy Tan, who was now deprived of both parents, entered a traditional marriage that was arranged by relatives. Amy Tan

describes the horrifically oppressive marriage her mother was forced into when she was nineteen:

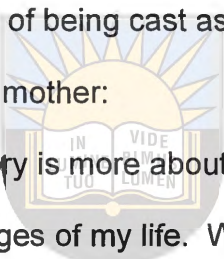
The day before their wedding, he [Daisy Tan's husband] was with another woman. Later he openly brought his girlfriends home to humiliate her [Daisy Tan]...when she ran away with the man who would become my father, her husband had her jailed. (*The Opposite of Fate* 216)

After serving her prison sentence, Daisy Tan was forced to flee from her abusive and adulterous husband, while sustaining the heartache of leaving her three Chinese daughters behind when she fled to the United States of America. This was a painful decision for Daisy Tan to make, however, political circumstances in China had worsened and ties to other countries would soon be severed. According to Adams, divorce, emigration and the tension generated from the Cold War severely complicated one's choice of residence ("Amy Tan"). Daisy's recollection of her Chinese past came as a shock to Tan who felt vulnerable and bewildered at the telling of the horrific story of her mother's life in China, and it changed Tan's perception of her mother, which, in turn, challenged all of Tan's preconceived notions of her mother and her culture. Due to the semi-autobiographical nature of Tan's works, the female protagonists share similar disenfranchised mother-daughter relationships as Tan and her mother, with both generations finding it difficult to understand the other. Thus, Tan based her characters' experiences of maternal conflict as prominent themes in her books on her own life experiences. Her illustrations of cultural differences between mother and daughter and the resultant breakdown in mother-daughter relationship, ultimately leading to the

harmonious reconciliation once the mother reveals her oppressive past are core elements of her novels.

Tan and her surviving family members moved quite frequently between New York, Washington, Florida, Holland and Germany, before settling in Switzerland and this nomadic life contributed to Tan's feelings of insecurity and instability. Tan attended a private school in Montreux, Switzerland, and mixed with learners from affluent backgrounds and lifestyles. Adams writes that this resulted in Tan befriending a wild set of people, being arrested for the possession of drugs, and nearly eloping with an escaped inmate from a mental institution ("Amy Tan"). Tan managed to graduate successfully from high school in Switzerland at the age of seventeen, after brushing shoulders with the law and constant fights with her mother. After graduating, Tan moved back to America, which followed a turnaround of events as Tan won an American Baptist scholarship to study medicine at the Linfield College in Oregon. However, after two semesters, Tan changed colleges and majors, as she decided to study a Bachelor of Arts with double majors in English and Linguistics at the San Jose State University. The decision by Tan to change universities and courses infuriated her mother whose aspirations for her daughter included a prestigious medical profession and becoming a concert pianist. According to Adams, Tan's refusal to submit to her mother's aspirations led to a complete breakdown in communication between Tan and her mother ("Amy Tan"). Tan went on to study her Masters Degree in Linguistics from which she graduated at San Jose State University in 1974. She then registered and completed her first year of a doctoral programme at UC Berkeley, but decided to leave her studies in

1976 to secure a job as a Language Development Specialist working with disabled children. In 1981, after marrying tax attorney, Lou DeMattei, whom she met while studying, Tan landed the job of a freelance business writer, but while being financially secure, this job provided her with little satisfaction. Tan's job ambivalence resulted in unrewarding feelings, and Adams writes that it was during this time that she sought professional psychological help and developed her interest in writing as an alternative form of therapy ("Amy Tan"). While using writing as therapy, Tan was able to document her thoughts regarding the issues of being cast as an outsider by American society, and her unstable relationship with her mother:

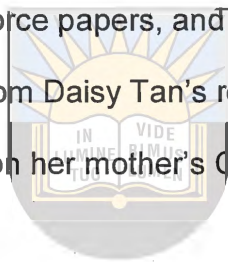


For me, writing from memory is more about remembering my psychological place in the world at different stages of my life. Where did I fit in my family, or why didn't I fit...I write stories about life as I have misunderstood it. To be sure, it's a Chinese-American life, but that's the only one I've had so far. (*The Opposite of Fate* 110; 305)

Thus it is the constant conflict with her mother, and the emotional turmoil of feeling emotionally and culturally dislocated from her mother and her Chinese culture that captures the central themes of Tan's successful novels.

Fearing her mother's death and personal regret of not understanding the Chinese side of her mother, Tan decided to visit China with her mother to discover her cultural background. By embracing her Chinese culture and bridging the cultural and emotional rift between herself and her mother, Tan learnt more horrific details of her mother's life in China. Her mother, at the age of nine, had watched her own mother swallow raw opium

and die. This tragic incident made Tan realize why her mother was so obsessed with death and harboured feelings of regression from the age of her abandonment as she did not have a mother to guide her through the oppressing life that awaited her (*The Opposite of Fate* 80). The more details she learnt about her mother's life and the abusive first marriage she endured, the closer she felt to her. Tan learnt that her mother's first husband forced her to bow before him and ask for forgiveness while he aimed a gun at her, denied their first born son urgent medical care which resulted in his death, and forced her to sign fake divorce papers, and then raped her afterwards (*The Opposite of Fate* 82; 15). Thus it is from Daisy Tan's retelling of her life that Amy Tan was motivated to write stories based on her mother's Chinese experiences.



Amy Tan wrote her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, in 1989, influenced by the stories of her mother and similar women. The novel stayed on the New York Times best-seller list for nine months, sold over four million copies, received nominations and awards from a number of prestigious literary groups such as the Bay Area Reviewers Award for Best Fiction and the Commonwealth Gold Award for Best Fiction. Amy Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, was written in 1991, and loosely set around Daisy Tan's life in China. It also hit The New York Times best-sellers list, and earned three awards: The New York Times Notable Book, the American Literary Association Notable Book, and the Booklist Editors Choice. Amy Tan has also written *A Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), *Saving Fish From Drowning* (2005), as well as an autobiography titled *The Opposite of Fate* (2003), and two children's books: *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *Sagwa, the Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994).

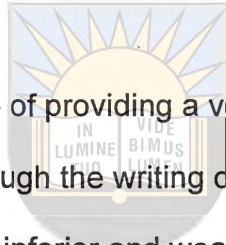
Tan's selected texts will be interrogated in this project in order to reveal the oppressive past of women in China and the strained relationships between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. The following chapter articulates the nature and selection of Feminist, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories, in analyzing these texts.



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CHAPTER TWO

I speak without concern for the accusations
that I am too much or too little woman
that I am too black or too white
or too much myself
and through my lips come the voices
of the ghosts of our ancestors
living and moving among us. (Lorde 74).



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Audre Lorde highlights the importance of providing a voice to centuries of silenced women, which Amy Tan achieves through the writing of her texts. Tan redresses the Confucian view of Chinese women as inferior and weak through the feminist depictions of the female protagonists in her selected texts as fierce and autonomous agents. The selected texts written by Amy Tan share dominant themes of female oppression, gender discrimination, and the abusive practice of cultural traditions, all of which invite analysis by Feminist, Cultural and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories.

In terms of Feminist Literary Theory, the selected texts all form part of the Third Wave of Feminism. According to Kinser, the Third Wave of Feminism appeared in the mid 1980's having emerged from scholarly discussions and writings relating to the intersections of feminism and racism (130). Yet Feminism did not suddenly appear in the 1980's; it emerged roughly one hundred years before in 1848 and has progressed in following and form through time. Feminism can be divided into three distinct phases or

waves: First Wave, Second Wave, and Third Wave Feminism, each wave focusing on a different aspect of female emancipation and liberation.

2.1 FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement that focused on restoring the unequal relationship between males and females in society, and incorporating a system of equal treatment and opportunities for both sexes. According to McCann and Kim, Feminism is a concept which usually refers to political activism by women and involves the implicit claim that the prevailing conditions under which women live are unjust and must be changed (1). Johnson writes that the First Wave of Feminism emerged in the United States of America in 1848 with the aim of opposing women's inferior position in society, while advocating the idea that men and women are equal and should have equal rights with regards to economic and personal freedom ("First Wave Women's Movement").

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, founder of the early women's rights movements in the United States, wrote in her Declaration that "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her". Stanton wanted women to realize the position of power that men held over them, and that they should protest against this patriarchal norm in society in order to find equality with men and to be treated with rights with which men in society were invested. The First Wave of Feminism was politically motivated, as the focus was on the attainment of women's rights and suffrage, as women were not invested with the right to vote, and thus lost the right to be heard.

The Second Wave of Feminism developed in the 1960's and coincided with the time of the Civil Rights Movement. This wave of Feminism was focused on the second-class citizen status of women, or according to De Beauvoir, their position as the Other that was bestowed on women in American society. This movement was supported both by housewives and working women who wanted to demonstrate their rights as citizens. Having won the right to vote, women felt they were still sidelined by men in that they had not fully acquired equal rights to men. The Second Wave of Feminism called for the emancipation of women through opposing patriarchal thought that believed the main purpose of women's lives consisted of being wives, mothers and homemakers (Johnson "Second Wave Women's Movement"). Women had become frustrated with financially relying on their husbands for survival, and needed a platform to expand on the feminist thought of equality between the sexes that had already been established in the previous century. Second Wave Feminism, therefore, challenged women to enter the workplace, attaining economic freedom for themselves, while advocating equal wages between men and women in the workplace (Johnson "Second Wave Women's Movement").

Second Wave Feminism focused on the economic emancipation of women, and while the idea of the financially independent working women was promoted, it also focused on the second-class status of women in higher education. According to Johnson, female university students of the 1970's demanded the inclusion of courses in Women's Studies to cater for their interests ("Second Wave Women's Movement"). The focus of reconstructing women's second-class status in higher education was for women to gain economic freedom and independence which Virginia Woolf had insisted upon in her writing. The objective of economic liberation for women was to prove that women were

no longer economically dependent on men for survival, and that women could provide for themselves, whether married or unmarried.

2.2 FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY

From the politically loaded feminist term emanating from the First Wave of Feminism, theories in Feminism began to develop from women writers who wanted to voice their discontent with the insubordinate position that women were expected to fulfill in society. The First Wave of the Feminist Movement and its concern with obtaining equal rights and freedoms for women impacted the literature of the time, advocating feminist ideals into texts. Virginia Woolf, a feminist women writer belonging to the First Wave of feminism, imbedded feminist thought in her writing, and thus feminist ideas were perpetuated in the minds of women readers. Davis and Schleifer suggest that the field of Feminism developed in tandem with Marxism and Psychoanalysis, which in some way have contributed to the examination of literature and discourse in general (454). The unequal relationships between men and women, and the power that men hold over women can be recognized in terms of Marxist theory as hegemony, which is defined as the complete control of a subordinate class by the dominant (Gramsci 673). Psychoanalysis lends itself to Feminism through the incorporation of experiences of women, both conscious and unconscious. Rivkin and Ryan propose that Feminist Literary Theory undertakes to correct the masculine image of women as subordinate to men, and thus recreates the image of women by emancipating the status of women as equal, or sometimes superior to men (766). Some women authors wanted to redress the manner in which they were defined in literature, a field not long ago devoted entirely

to the writings of men whose works were published and their definitions accepted as the status quo. Culler explains that the purpose of Feminist Literary Theory is to deconstruct the opposition man/woman and the oppositions associated with it in the history of Western culture (126). In doing so, this supports the identity of women, demands women's rights, and promotes women's writings as representations of the experience of women, thus providing women with a voice to speak their own language. The opposition man/woman can be explained in terms of the concept of "Othering", a concept which is used by the dominant group in society to control and manipulate the subordinate group. Melani posits that the Other is an individual who is perceived by a group to be an outsider due to the differences between himself/herself and the group, as the group views itself as the norm, and judges those who do not meet the norm or criteria, placing these outcasts into the position of the Other ("The Other"). Otherness may take many forms, but it is most present in the divide between the sexes and between majority and minority ethnic groups, as the difference between gender and race are mostly based on the physical differences between the dominant group and subordinate group. Melani further states that because the Other is perceived as lacking essential qualities and characteristics to be part of a group, they are seen as lesser, inferior beings and are treated accordingly ("The Other"). Therefore, people or groups being Othered are treated according to their Othered status, and because they are inherently different from the dominant group, they are relegated to an inferior position, as the dominant group constantly reminds them of their second class status. Women writers have addressed the Othering of females through their writing, opposing the

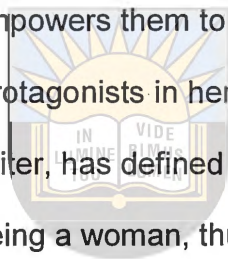
demeaning status that women have had to bear in patriarchal society while promoting the idea that women are equal to their oppressors.

Virginia Woolf is a prominent feminist writer who made a profound contribution in the field of Feminist Literary Theory with her landmark essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929). It is in this famous essay which Woolf wrote: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). Woolf criticized the limited access to education for women in Britain, as well as the lack of space and financial freedom that women suffered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but she cast her focus on the literary representations of women by men. In her essay, Woolf disapproved of the manner in which women were represented by male authors, who viewed women in an entirely different way than women viewed themselves, and defined women in terms of Othering (60). From this argument, Woolf extended the idea that women need to speak for themselves in order to find their own identity and be vested with agency to have their voices heard (60). Woolf writes:

It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were...not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose.
(128)

In light of this, it can be argued that women writers shaping the representations of women in society provide a more valid and untarnished account of themselves and other women than male writers because of the fact that they do not have to explain or

understand women using methods of differentiation. Woolf believed that women should be provided the social and economic freedom to follow their aspirations, which in many cases requires them to break away from their traditional gendered role of serving as an enlarging mirror for male identity (60). Woolf's main argument was that there existed a persistent inequality between men and women that was evident in all aspects of social life and existed across cultures and time (134). Woolf's discussion contributes to the analysis of Tan's works as Tan instills in her female protagonists the agency to question patriarchal definition of women and empowers them to define themselves in their own terms. Tan's portrayal of the female protagonists in her works as independent and self-reliant shows that Tan, as a female writer, has defined and represented women according to her own experience of being a woman, thus resisting the chauvinistic patriarchal representation of women.



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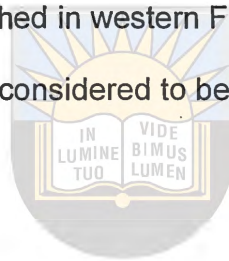
The Second Wave of Feminism focused on civil rights, and most importantly social and economic equality. It was French Feminist, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) that served as a foundational text during this era which criticized patriarchal culture and analyzed the marginal position of women in society and the arts (95). De Beauvoir identified a political and economic base of oppression towards women in a male-dominated social discourse within which particular misogynist practices occurred (130). De Beauvoir famously wrote that "one is not born, but rather one becomes a woman", challenging the patriarchal thought of differentiation and Othering which divided women separate from men due to the belief that women were inherently distinct from men who defined their personal, social, and legal existence (267). De Beauvoir was

intrigued with the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender. She believed that society modelled women into the subordinate beings they are expected to be; therefore it is behaviour and not biology that dictates womanhood and their second-class status (136). De Beauvoir wrote about how men differentiate themselves from women,

She [woman] is simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (xvi)

De Beauvoir claimed that patriarchal cultures have always regarded women as the primordial Other. She felt that the Self (man) has to be juxtaposed with women to find full meaning as a subject, and as a result, the Self can only be defined through alterity (29). Because it is believed that women originated from men, from the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam, De Beauvoir wrote that men, in their self-defined position of superiority, possess the ability to act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women's meaning is characterized only in relation to men (246). Thus women are defined not only in terms of their difference to men, but also their inadequacy in comparison to men. Tyson corroborates De Beauvoir's attack on patriarchy by stating that according to men, the word "women" is thus synonymous with the word Other (96). She explains that a woman is not a person of her own, she has to be a man's Other, and she does not belong in a man's world as she is not the same fully developed human being that makes a man (96). Thus it is only when women recognize De Beauvoir's

theory of dismissing women's passive object status and become a subject, that they can be liberated from patriarchal oppression and be able to attain the freedom to determine their existence. De Beauvoir's work adds to the analysis of Tan's selected texts, as the female protagonists encounter a process of being Othered from their gender and ethnicity. It is from recognizing their devalued and inferior status in which patriarchal society positions them that the female protagonists oppose definitions scripted by men, and start viewing themselves as worthy valuable women with as much purpose as men. While De Beauvoir's theory is entrenched in western Feminism, her ideas are globally recognized as women are universally considered to be the devalued Other in relation to men.



Although Feminist theories can be relatable for women from different cultural backgrounds, the initial movement of Feminism was only encountered in western countries. Feminism not only affected Britain and America, it also expanded to Europe, with French women writers contributing to the theory and literary works of Feminism. While American women were striving for liberation in higher education in the 1970's, Castle states that French women writers were making their voices heard regarding the status of women in society, extending the concerns of Second Wave Feminism by introducing philosophical, psychoanalytic, linguistic, and deconstructionist discourse (97). French Feminism had a distinct intellectual aspect to it which distanced it from Anglo-American Feminism. According to Tyson, the focus of French Feminism can be divided into two different forms: Materialist Feminism and Psychoanalytic Feminism (96). Materialist Feminism is interested in the social and economic oppression of women,

while Psychoanalytic Feminism, focuses mainly on itself with the psychological experiences of women.

Luce Irigaray, a prominent figure in French Feminism and Feminist Literary Theory, incorporated Psychoanalytic Feminism in her theory, resisting the male dominated area of psychoanalysis and its repressive definitions of females. Irigaray believes that women are limited in their representations due to the traditional masculine idealizing tendency and philosophical discourse ("The Power of Discourse" 795). She writes that "women are trapped in a masculine world of representation, forced to be the reproductive medium or essence in which men find their essential being, but are themselves debarred from actually possessing essence" (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 78). Irigaray extends De Beauvoir's theory that women exist in a world defined by men by mimicking men's thoughts and expectations in order to fulfill the substandard role stipulated to them by patriarchal society. Irigaray argues that without the traditional philosophical discourse, a woman can only function by adopting the masculine methods of speech and language, thus women take on roles prescribed to them by a male-dominated, philosophical framework ("The Power of Discourse" 795). As long as women reflect ideas created by masculine thinking that are expressed in masculine language, they will remain subverted, a mimesis of the male (Irigaray "The Power of Discourse" 796). Irigaray extended her theory to address psychological theorists she deemed sexist, who demeaned women through their theory of human development. As such, Irigaray questioned Freudian discourse on femininity, most particularly the Oedipus complex which mainly focuses on the development of little boys, while being

silent in the area of development of little girls (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 29).

Irigaray was further suspicious why girls were seemingly irrelevant in terms of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, suggesting that they were trapped in this patriarchal model as female identity and female sexuality were only ever seen through the male lens (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 26). Freud believed the manner in which to define women was through visual differences between men and women; the sexual organ being the most striking (133). According to Freud, because men have an obvious sex organ and women do not, he views women as an incomplete specimen, due to their absence of the "male norm" (133). Irigaray additionally questioned Jacques Lacan's definition of women. Lacan solidified Freud's sexist ideology, by classifying the male as the Self, or the I, and categorizing the female as the Other (1286). According to Lacan, it is through the lacking Other that man finds his identity and being, while fulfilling his desires (1286). Irigaray states that due to Freud's and Lacan's patriarchal and sexist definition of women that has been accepted as common thought amongst society, "the feminine has consequently had to be deciphered as forbidden...in between signs, between the realized meanings, between the lines" (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 20). It is through these enslaving definitions that women are trapped in a masculine world of representation, thus being forced to submit to their assigned roles. One of the most undermining aspects of masculine thinking, according to Irigaray, is the subversion of feminine pleasure, which illustrates the feminine as virginal in masculine and philosophical discourse ("The Power of Discourse" 796). Irigaray believed that it was generally assumed through patriarchal ideology that women's desires differed completely to the desires of men, and that feminine pleasure was only valid for the

purpose of satisfying the fantasies of men, a point which will be more fully explored when analyzing the sexual exploitation of women in Tan's texts (*This Sex Which is Not One* 23). Women were, therefore, perceived as facilitators for the sexual desires of men. Irigaray believed that women prostituted their bodies for fulfilling a desire that is not their own, leaving them in a state of dependency, as "not knowing what she wants...he will "take" her as the "object" of *his* pleasure, she will not say what *she* wants" because they (women) have no agency and no choice (*This Sex Which is Not One* 25). It was obvious that feminine pleasure and thought did not have a place in the masculine theoretical system. Irigaray promoted that for this reason, women should not attempt to forward their own theory that would place the feminine in an elevated place; rather they should attempt to confront the masculine thought, and attack the theoretical machinery itself ("The Power of Discourse" 797). Irigaray thus believed that women should use language as a weapon to confront patriarchal ideology and incorporate language as a tool to reshape the image and representation of women in literature.

Irigaray not only felt that women were oppressed by patriarchal definitions; she further believed that women were devalued as societal members through their bodies. In her article "Women on the Market", Irigaray suggests that not only do women feel sidelined in a male dominated world, but their bodies are used by men for financial procurement to establish their domination over women (799). Irigaray stipulates that women are reduced to the concept of a commodity by men, as they perceive women to have value only for the purpose of exchange, which shall be seen in the treatment of Tan's female protagonists ("Women on the Market" 799). Both An-mei's mother in *The Joy Luck Club*,

and Winnie's mother in *The Kitchen God's Wife* were concubines who were used to elevate the social status of a man. These women thus contributed to the wealth of their husbands, and acted as commodities and tokens of exchange, as value was attached to their bodies which lowered their human worth in the eyes of men.

Not only were women physically reduced to commodities through the actions of men, but also through male ideology. Just like a commodity that has value for purposes of exchange, Moi offers that women were believed to hold value in two ways: use value and exchange value (140). She continues this sentiment by stating that women's "use value" is fulfilled when they satisfy the sexual desires of men and procreate which is then transformed into "exchange value" based on a mystical standard of equivalence of money or the phallus (140). Irigaray felt that patriarchal power was evident in what many thinkers refer to the male gaze from which the man looks, while the woman is looked at (*This Sex Which is Not One* 151). She suggests that the man who is doing the looking is the one in control as he is vested with the authority to name things as he sees them, while the woman being looked at is a mere object in the eyes of the man (*This Sex Which is Not One* 152). According to Irigaray, in patriarchy, women act as tokens, markers or commodities in the male economy with the explicit function to display men's relations to other men, as men are only interested in impressing other men while using women as their object of display ("Women on the Market" 799). Irigaray contends that women themselves are alienated from their own bodies, becoming instead both forms, shaped by the cultural values of men, and mirrors to reflect patriarchal morals ("Women on the Market" 802). Due to the domineering nature of patriarchal ideology, Irigaray

believes that women, therefore, live in a world in which all meaning has been derived from patriarchal language ("Women on the Market" 802). While women may not seem aware of it, they do not speak as active originators of their own thoughts as they passively imitate previously spoken ideas. Irigaray writes that even though women's bodies are used by men for their selfish needs, a woman's body determines a mode of writing and thinking that is essentially different from men and revolt against masculine modes of writing and thinking ("Women on the Market" 802). Women can, therefore, positively utilize their bodies to achieve a departure from the dominant masculine world and create a space for themselves defined according to their own ideology, which women authors, such as Amy Tan, are attempting to do. Irigaray contends that for women to liberate themselves from patriarchal power, they need to use the same vehicle that conditioned patriarchal power onto them: language (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 440). According to Castle, it is thus in this new space assigned by women themselves, where their own desire, that was previously banned from patriarchal discourse, can find expression and ultimately gain resistance against the generally accepted male dominated discourse (98). Not only do women need a language of their own; they need a voice that is distinct from the oppressing male who writes women into the stereotypes that they deem appropriate, and Tan employs Irigaray's thoughts in her works as she creates a distinct feminine voice through which the female protagonists are able to oppose oppressing patriarchal structures that have caused them great suffering.

2.3 THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

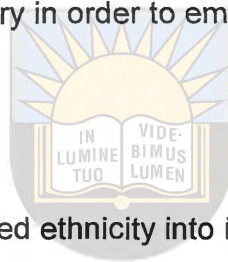
The application of Irigaray's feminist theory is apparent in Tan's selected texts, however, Tan's texts identify acutely with Third Wave Feminism as it combines both gender and racial emancipation. Third Wave Feminism developed in the 1980's after women gained economic independence through attending university and securing jobs. According to Kinser, Third Wave Feminism called for a 'new subjectivity' in feminist voice (130). Kinser explains that Third Wave Feminism focuses on addressing the needs of women of different ethnicities who are finding their own voice to speak about the injustices and subjugation of women in their own race and culture (130). In China and other non-western countries, women have not embraced the feminist movement to the same extent as Westerners, as some women are still fighting for the basic rights of equal treatment and the right to vote. Harnois explains that Third Wave Feminism emphasizes the destabilization of classifications in society, together with the reinterpretation of identities and signs (135). Harnois writes that

third wave feminists' belief in the power of reinterpretation and parody, combined with their focus on microlevel cultural change, helps us to understand what is among the most controversial issues in intergenerational feminism: the (ab)uses of women's sexuality. (135)

According to Mack-Canty, Third Wave Feminists characteristically use each other's personal experiences as young women in a gendered society as a resource, while focusing on how the lives of young women interact with feminism, from a multiplicity of social locations (156). She argues that Third Wave Feminism

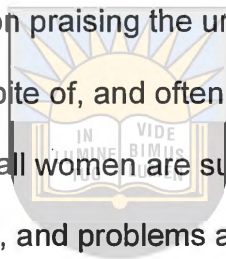
demands from women of colour and third world women, the differences among women occupying different social locations to be acknowledged, facilitating and recognizing the universalism inherent in both the feminist arguments for equality and for difference. (158)

Since Third Wave Feminism not only focuses on the singular aspect of women oppressed in society, as its horizon is broadened to examine women from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, it incorporates particular aspects of Cultural and Ethnic Studies Literary Theory in order to embrace fully the women of every colour, nation, and community.



Third Wave Feminism incorporated ethnicity into its gendered debate, as women of colour felt secluded from the universally white concept of Feminism that was created by white women for white women. According to Tyson, Third Wave Feminists offer that gender oppression cannot be understood apart from racial oppression; a woman of colour is oppressed by patriarchy not just because she is a woman, but because she is a woman of colour (106). A woman of colour is a category that has been defined historically in America as less valuable than the category of white woman. She extends her analysis by stating that the Victorian ideal of a 'true woman' as submissive, fragile, and sexually pure, which still influences patriarchal thinking today, excluded the definition of women of colour and poor women of all races (106). She postulates that the survival of women of colour demanded hard physical labour and they were often vulnerable to rape and sexual exploitation in the workplace (106). This contributed to the destructive logic that a woman whose racial or economic situation forced her into hard

labour and made her victim of sexual predators was unwomanly and therefore unworthy of protection from those who exploited her. Women of colour believe that confronting gender inequalities solves at least half of their problems. Dolan writes that instead of adhering to the white mainstream idea of feminism, women of colour advocate an ethnic cultural feminism that is concerned with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group, rather than with those of women in general (86). Ethnic cultural feminism acknowledges the damaging effects of sexism by women of colour. Saunders offers that ethnic cultural feminism focuses on praising the unique feminist cultural values that women of colour have developed in spite of, and often because of, their oppression (223). According to Thornham, while all women are subject to patriarchal oppression, each woman's specific needs, desires, and problems are greatly shaped by different markers determined by her culture (103). The selected works of Amy Tan undoubtedly belong to the sphere of Third Wave Feminism as Tan's books are based around the lives of her mother and grandmother in pre-revolutionary China who suffered under the brutal patriarchal Confucian rule, which only heightens the reality regarding the treatment afforded by women in China, and the horror and shock in learning how they endured daily battles with little or no human rights vested to protect them against oppressive patriarchal elements. Through writing her books, Tan protests against the oppressive treatment of women in China, as well as promotes the advancement of rights for Chinese and Asian American women. It can be offered that the power that has been stripped from oppressed Chinese women has been returned to them through educating readers regarding the ill-treatment of women and their inferior status in the patriarchal society in which they lived.



Kum-Kum Bhavnani, a sociology professor who was born in India, grew up in England, and now lives in America, is a Third Wave Feminist and focuses on the inclusion of women of colour under the banner of feminism. Bhavnani, together with Meg Coulson, an Australian sociologist, wrote essays highlighting the relationship between gender, class and race. Bhavnani and Coulson write how Second Wave Feminism borrowed the notion of self-determination which resulted from anti-colonial struggles, and the political ideals from the American civil rights and black power movements ("Race" 74). Because white feminists felt their lack of agency reduced them to second-class status in society, they believed they could relate to minority ethnic groups who were sidelined on the basis of their race, while assuming unity with these women through their 'common' struggles (Bhavnani and Coulson, "Race" 74). Bhavnani and Coulson believe that white women mistakenly assume sisterhood with black women, however, it is only when white women understand the difference between the relationship with white women and white men, and black women and black men, that this perception of sisterhood becomes a genuine concept and not an ignorant assumption ("Transforming Socialist-Feminism" 72). Bhavnani and Coulson argue that the ethnocentric attitude of white women further distances them from understanding the issues facing women of colour ("Transforming Socialist-Feminism" 69). Bhavnani and Coulson define how the incorporation of "different" women in the area of Feminism has expanded the theory, and has succeeded in shifting the focus of Feminism from white women to all women, stating:

the logic of feminist critiques of masculinist thought, when applied within feminism, meant that white women could no more claim to be or represent women in general than white men could represent humanity as a whole. No

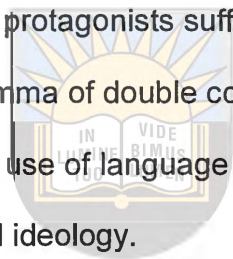
woman was simply a woman. 'Different' women raised their voices; they insisted on the particularity of their experiences and aspirations from positions which combined women with 'race', class, coloniality, sexuality, dis/ability, agency and other differences in a great variety of ways. ("Race" 74)

The importance of story-telling is stressed by Bhavnani and Coulson, as they feel that through storytelling, one can access women's representation of themselves, their lives and circumstances ("Race" 80; 81). Bhavnani and Coulson write: "stories have become a significant means of destabilizing boundaries of difference, of speaking into silences and of opening up possibilities for making connections" ("Race" 80; 81). Thus from including women of different ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic backgrounds and recognizing and appreciating these differences, Feminist theory expands itself to be multiple, complex and diverse. Tan uses story-telling as a method to bridge unstable mother-daughter relationships, thus Bhavnani and Coulson's approach to feminist theory is helpful in analyzing Tan's purpose of telling stories to represent female life experiences.

Shirley Goek-lin Lim believes that white feminists and Asian males have contributed to the split between gender and ethnicity. Lim writes that white females have denied women of colour inclusion into the narrowly defined concept of feminism, while Asian males reinforce stereotypes attached to women of the same colour to maintain their position of power over them ("Complications" 810). Lim validates this assertion with the Asian American publication "Aiiieeeee", consisting mostly of male writers, that was issued with the express purpose of forging a new identity defined by Asian Americans

themselves ("Complications" 814). Asian American males still held the Confucian belief that women were inferior to them, and this attitude reflected in their work. The writers of "Aiiieeeee" mostly focused on attacking Asian American women writers who publicized negative images of Asian men, Lim explains, and thus reinforced stereotypes associated with Asian American females while demystifying errors associated to them ("Complications" 814). Lim acknowledges that the construction of a newly formulated Asian American sensibility relied on the use of language, albeit male-centered, because "language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility"; thus without language, they cannot speak for themselves ("Complications" 814). Even though Asian American males were attacking women through their writing, they were simultaneously rewriting the Asian American image according to how they felt it should be defined, and thus the power of language was noted by Asian American women writers as creating awareness for the reconstruction of an ethnic identity. Lim argues that Asian American women share the dilemma of having a dual personality as they constantly waver between their inward selves, a self-defined context that is influenced by culture, and their outward selves, which adapts to society's norms and standards ("Complications" 815). While experiencing the perils of double-consciousness, Lim asserts that Asian American women are further sidelined; not only are they oppressed in their culture by the traditional patriarchal structures that present the image of women to be subordinate to men, but they are additionally oppressed by American society, which treats them differently based on their race and behaviour ("Complications" 814). Asian American women began to address their oppressed state of double consciousness through their writings, to demystify the errors mistakenly associated to them by American society for

being Asian, as well as addressing the patriarchal thought held by males in their own culture. Because Asian American men decided, possessed and exhibited cultural national sensibility through language, Lim contends that Asian American women captured the essence of language to their own advantage to portray their doubly oppressed status of being alienated in their Asian culture and American society ("Complications" 814). Lim's views regarding feminism and how Asian American women have shaped language to form valid representations of themselves is helpful in analyzing Tan's texts as Tan's female protagonists suffer both racial and gender discrimination. They embody the dilemma of double consciousness, but they further embody agency to establish their own use of language to form representations according to their feminist thought and ideology.



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Ilen Ang is another theorist advancing the inclusion of women of colour in the previously narrowly defined concept of feminism, and yet another Third Wave Feminist who hopes to restore the flawed image that white women have bestowed upon women of colour. In Ang's essay, "I'm a Feminist but... 'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism" (1995), she writes how white Western feminists have occupied the position of Self, mostly reserved for men in society, and how these women have defined women of colour in their own terms (397). This belief thus places women of colour as the Other, Ang states, to occupy an inferior position to the Self as white feminists believe they are 'saving' women of colour by talking for them (397). While white Western feminists ignore the distinctions between them and women of colour, they instead try to find common ground with women of colour and define them in their own terms. Ang feels that the motivation

behind white women identifying with women of colour is that they want to overcome their own guilt that is attached to their race privilege (397). The construct of women varies and changes according to the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, and nationality because, according to Ang, "not all women share the same experience of 'being a woman', nor is shared gender enough to guarantee a commonality in social positioning" (395). Therefore, women of colour need to define themselves in their own terms to demystify and deconstruct the universalizing assumptions of white Western feminist. In order to bridge the gap between dominant white feminists and Othered women of colour, it is not necessary to find common ground between these two polarizing groups of women. Ang believes that focus should be shifted on how these women are different and not the same, to be able to acknowledge the plight and lives of women of colour (396). Ang's approach to Feminism is useful to analyze Tan's selected texts, as there are two groups of female protagonists who belong to the same race, but one group alienates their culture to represent the Self, while the other group cannot separate their identity from their culture, and are Othered due to their cultural differences. Ang's theory is displayed when the Othered group tells their daughters, who represent the Self, of their oppressive lives in China, and through acknowledging the striking difference in their upbringing; the daughters learn to accept their mothers, and ultimately their cultural heritage.

Gloria Anzaldua, a Chicana lesbian writer, in her writings promotes the image of the *mestiza*. The *mestiza* is not considered to be racially pure by dominant white society and white feminists. Anzaldua defines the *mestiza* as constantly finding herself in a

perpetual state of culture swapping: showing her original culture to the members of her race and society, but assuming an acculturated stance when in contact with white, acculturated people (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 420). The *mestiza* has to assume white culture when encountering white people, as it is expected of her, while white people feel immune to addressing people of colour according to their culture. From crossing over cultures, and transitioning between different languages, Anzaldua explains that the *mestiza* experiences mental and emotional disorientation, as messages are encoded within speech and language (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 421). Thus a bilingual, or multilingual person can send multiple opposing messages, often confusing to the speaker and herself. White people are disinterested in learning the language of the *mestiza*, as again, it is expected of the *mestiza* to learn the privileged language of the white race: English. Anzaldua writes:

Our [women of colour] speech, too, is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane. Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. ("Speaking in Tongues" 26)

The crossing of cultures and languages is not an option for the *mestiza* who wants to communicate with the dominant white race, nor is the psychological destabilization that results from the transition between cultures and languages, always affecting minority groups, never the dominant race. Anzaldua believes, however, that the *mestiza* does have an option: through counteracting the dominant white paradigms that deny women of colour agency and autonomy, and by creating a new consciousness through the *mestiza's* own writings (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 422). Anzaldua thus promotes writing

on the topic of women of colour to oppose the demeaning expectations of white society, regarding culture crossing and language transitioning. Through her writings, the *mestiza* reveals the imprisoning effects of cultural and language swapping put in place by white society. Additionally the *mestiza* shall promote women of colour as victors, rising above their limitations and expectations, and creating a new way of viewing oneself without being shackled by white society's representation of women of colour (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 422). Anzaldua's feminist idea of women of colour creating a space for themselves, where they will no longer be expected to cross cultures and switch language codes is effective in the analysis of Tan's selected works. Tan's protagonists create awareness of the clash of cultures through their storytelling and the effects of their dual personalities. Tan also highlights the importance of language as a means to connect to one's culture, supporting Anzaldua's notion that it is through speaking a language that one's culture is best understood.

Feminism can thus be defined according to Essentialist Feminism and Anti-Essentialist Feminism. According to Cavallaro, Essentialist Feminism maintains that there is a natural essence at the core of femininity, while Anti-Essentialist Feminism identifies femininity as neither natural nor essential, but rather the result of culture and politics (115). Cavallaro explains that Anti-Essentialist Feminism is preoccupied with culturally constructed practices from which sexual differences arise, and how one's biological characteristics hold mythical meanings based on the patriarchal ideology held in society (115). Gender relations are erroneously constructed according to sociopolitical fabrications that men are superior to women in intellectual, political, and linguistic

spheres, Moi argues, and so Anti-Essentialist Feminism aims to stop sexist generalizations while denying that biology (or sex) influences social norms (178). Anti-Essentialist Feminism is attached to or correlates with Cultural Studies, and how culture impacts the way in which members of society view women. Thornham claims that Anti-Essentialists agree that men and women are biologically and anatomically different; however, they argue that masculinity and femininity are cultural concepts that change significantly through time and space (75). One woman writer whose theory on women and gender is infused with the Anti-Essentialist view of Feminism is Judith Butler, whose writings have contributed heavily to the area of Gender Studies Literary Theory.

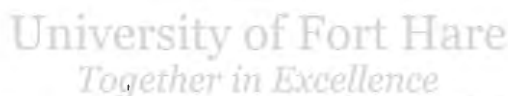


Judith Butler was monumental in her contributions to Gender Studies. Her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) introduced the notion of "gender performativity" and has been a classic reference to the study of gender. Butler introduced the concept of gender as a performative reiteration through which the subject constantly attempts to embody the socially accepted norms attached to gender in society ("Performative Acts" 901). Butler states that performativity is not about choosing which gender one wants to be, rather it is being compelled to engage with existing norms through acts or performances in which language and gestures are associated with a specific gender ("Performative Acts" 901). There is a generally accepted societal expectation for females to perform feminine acts, while masculine acts are to be performed by males. According to Butler, gender is thus solidified by the performing acts which are associated to male or female, and such acts that represent gender are repeated, which is how social meanings attach themselves to a particular gender ("Performative Acts" 901). Butler further expounds that the social

agents, or better known as the actors, rehearse these gendered acts before performing them in public or society, in the same way as actors rehearse a script before a performance ("Performative Acts" 901). In this way, males and females are conditioned from a young age to acknowledge and repeat gendered acts, and are aware of the need to conform to their required gender to gain approval and acceptance in society. Butler states that the reason for rehearsing is that one has to feel comfortable in society when performing a gendered act ("Performative Acts" 901). Butler explains that gender acts are kept in line through punitive measures that are placed on individuals who do not conform to their required gender; hence those who fail to perform their required gender suffer punishment ("Performative Acts" 908). Butler provides an example of the punitive measures society places on individuals who refuse to conform to their required gender with her example of a transvestite. If a transvestite is acting on stage, the audience will usually find the performance funny as they can distance the act from reality; however, if a transvestite had to occupy a seat on the bus next to a person, feelings of anxiety, fear, or even violence could ensue, as now they cannot distance the act of the transvestite ("Performative Acts" 902). It is thus through the intention of the performer regarding their deviation from their required gendered acts that affects society's reaction to the gender variation. Therefore, if society can acknowledge that the rebellion is out of jest and not by choice, less harsh criticism shall follow from society's reaction.

While punishment is delivered on rebelling against one's gender, society is, however, accepting of the fact that gender performances are not fixed, and do evolve over time. Butler states that the body is a historical site, and for instance, the concept of women is

different to that of one hundred years ago ("Performative Acts" 901). Therefore, gender acts have been readjusted over time to alter in accordance with social changes. While society does accept the need to modernize gendered acts, as expectations for men and women change throughout time, gendered acts are fixed within cultures, and what is considered to be accepted from a gender in one culture, may differ according to another culture. Butler reiterates how the body is believed to be a nucleus of performance, and so gender is instituted through the stylization of the body which bears cultural meaning by performing gendered acts ("Performative Acts" 910). Thus each culture possesses a set of socially acceptable gendered acts, which may differ from other cultures, and thus being female and the gendered acts that accompany femininity in one culture may be a different experience to being and acting female in another culture.



Butler was inspired by Simone De Beauvoir's theory of how one evolves into a female through one's social experiences, and advanced her theory on this foundation. Butler proceeded to challenge the sex/gender distinction and claims that sex does not cause gender, and gender is the "cultural construction" of sex (*Gender Trouble* 152). Whereas sex is the fixed (so it was thought) biological determiner between physical differences between male and female, gender is variable, and a social and cultural determiner between the performative acts of the sexed bodies (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 152).

Butler's view on gender is that

if sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender; in other words, "woman" need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and "man" need not interpret male

bodies. This radical formulation of the sex/gender distinction suggests that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two. (*Gender Trouble* 152)

Butler explains that when one ignores the scorn of society for not performing according to their sex, a host of different genders arise, that is not limited to the normal constructs of male and female (*Gender Trouble* 188). Thus, if gender is indeed performative, then one could potentially perform one's gender differently and thereby disrupt heteronormativity, and this disruption could ultimately lead to the democratization of the field of gender norms (Butler *Gender Trouble* 192). Judith Butler's theory on gender is instrumental to the analysis of Tan's texts as the female protagonists in China are expected to conform to their gender and perform gendered acts in relation to the Chinese patriarchal ideology of women as submissive and inferior. Tan's female protagonists show feminist ideals through rebelling against their required gendered acts, and, instead, perform acts that are associated with males. While the female protagonists perform against their gender, patriarchal Chinese society punishes the female protagonists for their defiance, and forces them to perform acts expected of their gender.

2.4 CULTURAL STUDIES

Feminists have argued that the subordination of women occurs across a whole range of social institutions and practices. Barker offers that the subordination of women is understood to be a structural condition known as patriarchy, a concept that has connotations of male-headed family, mastery and superiority (280). Patriarchy operates

differently in different countries and cultures: patriarchy in the United States is significantly different to patriarchy in China. In the domain of culture, a power struggle exists between the dominant class and the subordinate class. Fiske writes that dominant classes “attempt to ‘naturalize’ the meanings that serve their interests into the ‘commonsense’ of society as a whole, whereas the subordinate classes resist this process in various ways and to varying degrees and try to make meanings that serve their own interests” (1269). In this way, as Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Judith Butler have contended, men, previously regarded as the dominant group in society, have created thinking and meaning around their masculine ideas. Such patriarchal ideology often represses women, the subordinate groups, who have to resist these social meanings by creating their own ideology. In society, Haralambos and Holborn believe that a higher value is placed on culture than on nature, thus it is not only the biology that ascribes women to inferior status in society, but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology (107). They further contend that while being male was perceived as the norm, female was, therefore, assumed to be the deviation from the norm, which afforded women different treatment to that of their totalitarian counterparts (829). Melani offers that the process of Othering is thus evident in Cultural Studies where the dominant group in society fulfills the position of Self, while the subordinate class is assigned to the position of the inferior Other (“The Other”). Otherness can take on many forms besides the male/female opposition, and the Other can be one of a different culture, race, religion, nationality, social class, sexual orientation, etc. Fiske writes that as these ideologies from the dominant class are being accepted as the social norms in society,

the subordinate class has little ground to resist due to the dominant class's position of social power (1270). Domination was not only experienced between the sexes, but also between cultures, with one culture generally dominating a culture belonging to minority population and in a minimalist power position.

In finding a link between the selected texts and Feminist Literary Theory, it would be advantageous to include Cultural Studies Literary Theory to provide a broader perspective on the lives of Tan's female protagonists, as the culture of a society can serve as a basis for the idea of women as weak, insignificant, and inferior. Lennox explains that Cultural Studies is devoted to the study of an assortment of a society's beliefs, and communicative practices, and these cultural products are responsible for shaping and determining the ideology of society at any particular historical period. The term "Cultural Studies" was first used at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s and early 1970s. Balsomo explains that the inception of Cultural Studies attempted to integrate the textual focus and interpretative methods of literary studies, while paying particular attention to the fields of anthropology and politics when analysing the cultural context of literature (96). Cultural Studies at first mainly focused on white male working class culture, and was initially interested in the culture shift of the working class in Britain during the 1950's. Lennox states that this is because of the growing affluence among workers resulting in an increase in consumerism, which transformed the working class culture through exposure to mass culture via television sets. In its inception, Cultural Studies was mainly Marxist-based, focusing heavily on Antonio Gramsci's concept of Hegemony which concerns itself with

social power and the domination of one group over another (673). However, Thornham argues, it was not until the late 1970s that British people of colour, together with feminists, strenuously intervened and objected to the Marxist view and white patriarchal concept of Cultural Studies (63). The time coincided with the decline of power of the dominantly white male British Labour Party along with the rise of Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first woman Prime Minister. While the United States of America was experiencing the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, which included the awareness and recognition of people of colour and women's rights, it also affected and influenced literary studies and programmes in American universities. Lennox states that unlike Cultural Studies in Britain at the time, America was more interested in the subjective side of people's experience to attempt at finding a level of understanding and empathy. Cultural Studies is now an interdisciplinary field, incorporating Feminist Theory, Social Theory, Political Theory, Literary Theory, Media Theory, Communication Theory, Art History, and others to study cultural phenomena in various societies.

2.5 CULTURAL STUDIES LITERARY THEORY

Cultural Studies Literary Theory possesses a political element in that it includes the ruling of a dominant culture over subordinate cultures. Fiske corroborates this statement by writing that Cultural Studies Literary Theory includes "a way of living within... society that encompasses all the meanings of that social experience" (1268). Tyson writes that according to Cultural Studies Literary Theory, the term "culture" is believed to be an ever-changing process of a lived experience, and not a product that is fixed in definition (296). Thus social meanings evolve over generation and distance,

being the direct result of the history and structure of changing society. Tyson defines culture as a process because it consists of an interactive collection of cultures, each of which is represented by the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, occupation, and similar factors that contribute to the experience of its members (296). According to Lennox, feminists using Cultural Studies Literary Theory have undertaken to

investigate the roles of various kinds of women in various nations in contributing to the production of modernity, nationhood, and the state by showing how they both respond to and transform ideologies that situate them in the realm of the private sphere, everyday life, tradition, and the home, insisting on their own agency as they participate in practices designated as 'women's work' like housekeeping, cooking, and childcare.

In Tan's selected texts, the Chinese culture contributed to the inferior status of women, as practices of religion, philosophy or customs endorsed male attitudes which served to shred Chinese women of their fundamental human rights. Tan, through her novels, has thereby offered Chinese women agency and a voice with which to inform the world regarding the culturally engendered affairs of the patriarchal society in which they live.

Cultural Studies is an inter-disciplinary field, as it overlaps and incorporates other theories in its analysis, such as Feminism, Marxism and Ethnic Studies. Cultural Studies Literary Theory allows feminist scholars simultaneously to acknowledge how social structures variously confine and define women, Lennox postulates, but also recognize their agency as they oppose oppression in ways that also enable them to

envision alternatives. Gayatri Spivak's theory of the Subaltern is useful in terms of Fiske's Cultural Studies theory that culture is ruled by the dominant class's ideology. Spivak insists that 'subaltern' is a term signifying the 'proletarian', whose voice could not be heard, as evidenced in patriarchal societies throughout the world ("A Critique of Postcolonial Reason" 304). In terms of Spivak's concept of a subaltern, the term was used to refer to the poor, lower class of India which was subordinate to the colonial government of the British Empire ("A Critique of Postcolonial Reason" 302). However, Spivak states that the male subaltern was always provided with more agency than the female subaltern who was doubly oppressed by her economic condition as well as her gender ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 32). Spivak thus focused on women, their lives and their histories, when determining a more nuanced approach to the subaltern definition. In Spivak's acclaimed essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) she writes about the suicide of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri in 1926 in North Calcutta, who hanged herself instead of carrying through the political assassination she had been instructed to follow (35). Spivak writes how Bhaduri had no agency and voice to be heard; her suicide represented the fact that her objection mounted to nothing, therefore feeling that she had no alternative to assassinating politicians, and instead assassinated herself ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 35). Bhaduri thus embodies Spivak's definition of the voiceless subaltern, unable to be heard, supported or understood outside the normal patriarchal channels, and thus solidifies Spivak's argument that the subaltern indeed cannot speak. Spivak believed that marginalized groups in society; in this case women cannot be heard. Afzal-Khan, in reviewing Spivak's views, felt that even in the area of Feminism, there still is a hegemonic relationship between white feminists and women of colour

(389). Afzal-Khan further contends that in order to eradicate this disproportional relationship, Third World women need to be given the chance to speak for themselves (389). Spivak's theory of the subaltern is helpful in examining Tan's selected texts, as the female protagonist Chinese mothers represent the subaltern, whose voice could not be heard by the dominant group in their culture (Asian males) and the dominant group in American society, acculturated white Americans. These female protagonists were Othered as a result of their gender and cultural differences, and due to the obvious differences that existed between themselves and the dominant group, they were considered unworthy of recognition.



2.6 ETHNIC STUDIES

While Cultural Studies focuses on the traditional practices or customs of people belonging to a specific culture, thus creating an understanding towards one's culture, Ethnic Studies examines how people from minority ethnic backgrounds are treated by the majority ethnic population. Castle describes Ethnic Studies as the theoretical study of race and cultural pluralism, and this field of study developed in the United States of America by African American writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (86). W.E.B Du Bois, an African American writer who was particularly influential in defining the terms of debate in contemporary discourse on race in African American studies, articulated in his acclaimed work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line", believing that if race was a problem, then the individual whose race differs from the dominant group would also be considered a problem (16). Critical Race Theory, which developed from African

American studies, greatly impacted and contributed to the field of Ethnic Studies, which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States of America. According to Delgado and Stefanie, a progressively large group of lawyers and law professors recognized that little progress was being made to the ground that was gained during the Civil Rights Movement, and thus Critical Race Theory developed from this thinking (2). They further state that these professionals realized that new approaches to counteract racism were desperately needed, which focused on the legal issues regarding the attainment of civil rights for African Americans (2). The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, which forbade discrimination in public places, in employment, in housing, and in franchise, and held that each citizen would be endowed with the same rights as every other citizen. Castle explains that African Americans, together with the other ethnic minority population in America, continued to demand cultural recognition after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which then expanded to represent minority population groups by including them in education, public policy and economics (88). Ethnic Studies programmes were first initiated in American universities which resulted from the fierce confrontations of university students who wanted universities to recognize and offer courses on Ethnic Studies. Prashad states that the aim of these students was to reveal racism on minority population, to expose state betrayal felt by minority population who believed their needs were not accommodated, while also attempting to recognize the unheralded struggles of their community and its allies for justice (160). Prashad further argues that from its main purpose of challenging racism that white supremacists inflicted upon people of colour and minority populations, the area of Ethnic Studies developed to include multiculturalism, which recognizes the diversity of cultures, with each culture

having logic of its own (161). Thus Ethnic Studies is the umbrella under which ethnic minorities can elevate their subjugated position in society and promote acceptance for their ethnicity and culture by reshaping their ethnic image into a more accurate and valid account than that presented by misguided Western assumptions.

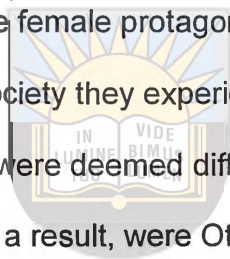
Although the emergence of Ethnic Studies was heavily influenced by African American writing and ideology, it soon became a vessel for all minority population groups in America, as well as globally, to redress and deconstruct the dominant majority population's erroneous ideas surrounding certain minority population groups. Brewton infers that Ethnic Studies Literary Theory includes itself under the umbrella of Third Wave Feminism as it is concerned with biological race, and how one's race determines the treatment one receives from society. Ethnic Studies and Feminism are both intent on actualizing the image that the dominant group has bestowed upon women, women of colour, and people of colour. The Other is not only a label given to women to highlight their difference to men, but it is also a label attached to people of colour to expose their apparent cultural differences to the acculturated West. Edward Said, a postcolonial literary theorist, wrote about the Othering process with which the West scrutinizes the non-westernized countries, through his theory on Orientalism. Said's theory of Orientalism highlights the extent to which supposed knowledge about the Orient, as it was produced and circulated in Europe, was an ideological accompaniment of colonial power (1). By the Orient, one is referring to Middle-Eastern countries or countries whose main religion is Islam. Said's Orientalism contained representations of non-Western cultures, formed not by non-Western verdicts, but by Western terms. The Orientalist

study of the Orient has always been from a Western point of view, while Said felt it was vital for the Orientalist to remain objective when examining the Orient (327). Ashcroft and Ahluwalia describe the Orient as "treated as objects that can be scrutinized and understood...such objectification entails the assumption that the Orient is essentially monolithic, with unchanging history, while the Occident (West) is dynamic, with an active history" (64). Orientalism thus concerns itself with Othering. Not only is judgment passed through gender, or differences in gender, but differences in race is also a means through which people are judged by the assumed Self of the West, and are Othered based on the apparent differences to the standard the West maintains. Said's argument was based on the manner in which the West judged the Orient; they measured the differences to which the familiar opposed the strange; to which the West, the Self, varied to the Orient, the Other (43). Therefore, the Western concept of the Orient was based on, in the opinion of the Westerners who studied it, in what manner and degree the Orient deviates from the West, while awarding the West with a position of superiority. Said's Orientalism shall be of assistance when analysing the selected works of Tan, as the female protagonists who represent the acculturated American daughters form judgments of their mothers' culture, based on the Westernized modes of differentiation, and the supposed knowledge they garner from observing their mothers. Thus, the daughters deem themselves superior to their Chinese mothers because the daughters display socially acceptable thought and behaviour that conforms to Western standards.

2.7 ETHNIC STUDIES LITERARY THEORY

Ethnic Studies influenced literature, as writers of colour would contribute to the genre of Ethnic Studies Literary Theory. According to Brewton, Ethnic Studies Literary Theory interrogates the subjugation of a minority population and focuses on the nature and dynamics of minority literatures in the context of dominant cultures. Ethnic Studies additionally forms a divide between the minority and majority population's ethnicity, in this case Asian American and Anglo-American, by placing Asian American in the category of the Other and Anglo-American as the Self. Through the process of Othering, the minority population of Asian Americans perceived their differences in race and culture as negative to the ruling population of Anglo-Americans, and that the ruling population unjustly enjoyed a position of superiority over them and other minority population groups. Du Bois uses the term "double-consciousness" to illustrate the way in which a person of colour looks at oneself through the eyes of white people and as a result feels a sense of multiplicity; "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body" (16). Du Bois' use of the term "double-consciousness" describes the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures: one's original culture and the European culture imposed on minority population by white America (16). Du Bois explains that for the minority population, double-consciousness comes into play when having to represent oneself in a different form in a white-dominated public space, such as the workplace or at school, sometimes even having to switch between two languages, while having another cultural self at home (16). Frantz Fanon, a postcolonial literary theorist, extends Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness through his work entitled *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), advocating

that under colonialism, black people were acquainted with white culture and values, which they assumed in the same way as a mask in an attempt not only to lose their culture, but also the stigma and inferiority that was connected to their culture, and instead imitated the privileged white mask of culture to become accepted into society (3; 4). Although Fanon's theory involves colonialism, Childs argues that his work focuses on the acculturation of people who borrow another culture at the expense of their own culture for the sake of social acceptance. Du Bois and Fanon's works contribute to the analysis of Tan's selected texts, as the female protagonists not only suffer prejudice based on their gender, in American society they experience censorship based on their racial stratification. Asian Americans were deemed different from and inferior to mainstream American society, and as a result, were Othered, causing them to be viewed as perpetual foreigners.



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Ethnic Studies Literary Theory thus focuses on literature written by ethnic minorities who detail in their works racial prejudice and ethnic pride. Culler writes that the main purpose of celebrating diversity and multiculturalism, while strengthening cultural identity of particular groups, is by linking it to a tradition of writing (131). This theory is a helpful tool when interrogating Tan's selected works, as Tan focuses on the marginalized Asian American population in American society, and shows how this minority group is mistreated, stereotyped, and ostracized by the dominant culture, who views them as an infusion group because of their visible differences in comparison to the superior Self. Castle adds that Ethnic Studies Literary Theory is influential in reviving and promoting the study of literatures of ethnic minorities, to position minority writers who have been

sidelined by dominant society into the spotlight, giving voice to their issues that have been ignored and shunned by white society (86). Lisa Lowe incorporates the concept of hegemony into her work in the field of Ethnic Studies Literary Theory, by explaining that hegemony can also be reinterpreted by referring to the process in which minority groups resist hegemony by creating awareness of their ethnicity and culture and celebrating their diversity (510). It is such resistance to the Self's differentiating tendencies that the genre of Asian American literature has developed as a tool to oppose the stereotypes that have erroneously and ignorantly been associated with the Orient by the westernized position of the Self.



Under the umbrella of Ethnic Studies Literary Theory fall the literary studies of minority population: African American Literature, Chicano Literature, Native American Literature, and Asian American Literature. Asian American literature falls into the category of Ethnic Studies, as it concerns itself with the subjugation of the Asian American population while promoting a truer identity resistant to the accepted Westernized stereotypes. Asian American literature has only recently received critical acclaim, and been compared to the minority discourse counterparts of African American, Native American, and Chicano Literature. Lee states that theorizing Asian American Literature involves understanding the socio-economic and demographic shifts in the 1960's and 1970's at the time when Asian Americans were forging an identity for themselves (20). This era was synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement in America, and so Asian Americans were beginning to gain awareness of the power they held to change their Othered status, and redress the stereotypes and labeling of the acculturated and prejudiced Western Self.

While Asian American literature promotes a specific Asian American distinctiveness, a Chinese American and Japanese American might not feel they have much in common and should not be branded under the same banner of ethnicity. Park argues that Asian Americans feel they have been stereotyped to fit under one rubric, while truthfully they belong to many different countries and cultures: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Indian, etc. (543). Not only have these cultures been placed under one rubric, but so have different generations. Lowe postulates that Asian Americans are both born in the United States and Asia with very different socio-economic backgrounds, thus a whole new culture of Asian American began to exist, and from this the desire for a cultural identity began to ensue (508). Lowe offers that through the need for obtaining a valid cultural identity amongst different cultural immigrant groups from Asia, one hybridized Asian American identity was established for all Asian immigrants and their offspring (511). Lowe writes how this fixed definition of Asian American identity suppresses differences of national origin, generation, gender, sexuality and class, while denying distinct groups within the Asian community their independent and representative voice (512). Asian American Literature is deeply embedded with hybridity and assimilation, as mostly second generation Asian Americans alienate their culture in an effort to feel accepted into mainstream society. Asian American literature is heavily grounded in the disruption and distortion of traditional cultural practices, which is a common experience amongst all Asian immigrants and their offspring. Lowe writes that "Asian American discussions portray immigration and relocation to the United States in terms of a loss of the 'original' culture in exchange for the new 'American culture'" (506). This need for assimilation and shedding of their 'old' culture for a 'new'

more accessible culture proves how Asian Americans also suffer from the double-consciousness explicated in W.E.B Du Bois' writings, in that they feel the need to portray one culture or the other, and are very aware of the context in which they should switch their culture. Fuligni, Kiang, Witkow and Baldelomar argue for the importance of language in ethnic groups, explaining that the level of one's language use and proficiency determines the strength of one's ethnic identity (954). They further their argument by concluding that if second generation Asian Americans are unable to speak their native language to the same extent and proficiency of speaking English, the language of the dominant population, they will have trouble in finding a cultural connection and identity to Chinese culture (954). Prashad suggests that the need for Asian Americans to lose their original culture is that being Asian American is not only a culture and race; it is also viewed as a class category which embodies class aspirations of a community (167). The younger generation of the female protagonists in Tan's texts all show attempts at conforming to the acculturated mainstream American society by altering their cultural cues and behaviour to gain acceptance as part of the Self, and move away from their Othered status. These female protagonists all experience a loss of identity as a result of alienating their culture, and it is only once they become aware of the need to connect with their own culture, do they start feeling whole and genuine.

In conclusion, Feminist Literary Theory, Cultural Studies Literary Theory, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theory are going to be applied to Tan's texts in the following chapter. Feminist Literary Theory shall focus on feminist advancements in Chinese culture. Cultural Studies Literary Theory shall dissect the manner in which China conforms to

patriarchal ideology. Ethnic Studies Literary Theory will scrutinize assimilation patterns and the loss of ethnic culture amongst second generation Asian American offspring as a means to feel accepted in mainstream American society.



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CHAPTER THREE (PART ONE)

THE JOY LUCK CLUB

After all the guests had gone, my mother said to me, "You want to be same like American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside, you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you different. You only shame is be ashamed." (Tan *The Opposite of Fate* 127)

Amy Tan sets the foreword for the analysis of *The Joy Luck Club* from her autobiography, *The Opposite of Fate*. Tan reveals her personal encounter with her mother who instructed Tan never to forget her Chinese heritage despite her Americanized appearance. *The Joy Luck Club* exposes the cultural gap that exists between Chinese immigrants and their acculturated offspring, as Tan's main focus is on the cultural misunderstandings apparent in mother-daughter relationships, using the rocky relationship with her own mother as her impetus and motivation.

The Joy Luck Club is spatially constructed into four sections, with each section devoted to the stories of selected protagonists, although the only character who writes in all four sections is Jing-mei Woo as her mother is deceased. At the beginning of each section lies a fable-like preface in which the theme of the section is expressed, helping the reader to pick up on the emotional curve of each quartet. The preface to the first section of *The Joy Luck Club* is titled "Feathers From A Thousand *Li* Away", and presents a tale of how a Chinese mother emigrated to America with good intentions and the hope of bearing a daughter who would experience a life of affluence, stability, security, freedom

and opportunity, yet finds her relationship with her daughter is distant and conflicted. The preface of the following section, "Twenty Six Malignant Gates", shows the cultural rift between the mother and daughter, and how the daughter feels burdened by her mother's overprotective nature which causes her to resist rebelliously. The preface of the third section, "American Translation", shows the altered perception of the mother and daughter. Through the placing of a bedroom mirror according to *feng shui* custom, the mother can already see her grandchild, while the daughter only sees her own reflection. Souris suggests this indicates the clear vision the mother embodies, and the distorted reality held by the daughter (111). In the preface of the last section, "Queen Mother of the Western Skies", the mother is playing with her grandchild, hoping that her daughter will learn "how to lose [her] innocence, but not her hope", and be able to pass this lesson on to her child (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 213). Thus the four prefaces are written from the mother's perspective, outlining the hope she savoured for her daughter's future of freedom in America, while depicting the mother's patient longing for a loving relationship with her daughter, mirroring the one she had with her own mother.

Jing-mei Woo, who has anglicized her name to June, is the opening narrator of *The Joy Luck Club* and begins her story by explaining that her father requested that she replace her deceased mother, Suyuan Woo, at the mah-jong table, alongside her three Chinese 'aunts', An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair. These ladies comprise the Joy Luck Club which now meets in San Francisco, although it was initially started in Kweilin, China. Jing-mei is discomforted at her father's request as she never established a connection to her mother, the chasm formed by their different cultural ideology. "My

mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 37). Jing-mei provides an account of her mother's history in China, recalling the countless times her mother narrated the same story, but changed the ending every time. This alteration caused Jing-mei to doubt its reality, thus making Jing-mei believe the story was not true. Over time, Jing-mei realized her mother's narrative was in fact true, and came to know the shocking elements to her mother's life story: that her mother had a first husband and twin girls whom she was forced to abandon when the Japanese army invaded China. The end of Suyuan's story has continually haunted Jing-mei: "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 26). Like Tan, Jing-mei questioned other reported elements of her life, and her mother, and believed that if her mother's hidden past was true, then other aspects of her life could also be hidden from her knowledge. Jing-mei construed her mother's silence as deceit, and felt that she could not trust her mother's assertions. If her mother had withheld information as important as her own life history, then she could quite potentially have supplied Jing-mei with misguided information regarding equally important events and information.

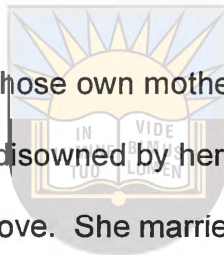
3.1.1 CHINESE MOTHERS' NARRATIVES

The Chinese mothers' first narrative focuses on their lives in China; their stories share the common theme of oppression perpetuated by both men and women in Chinese society. It is through the offering of their stories that the mothers create an awareness of the subjugated lives of women in China. As the mothers' first narrative focuses heavily

on their oppressed state in China, their stories reveal the resistance they faced from patriarchal society in their endeavors to gain gender equality. These stories promote the feminist ideas that the mothers held to change their depressing fate, and the mothers hope that through their stories they will instill feminist consciousness onto their daughters. Through the depth of their courage the mothers portrayed when defying Chinese patriarchal customs and laws, they possess experience and knowledge on how to liberate oneself from oppression. Mistri offers that each mother bears a powerful story of overcoming odds, having learned to become strong through seeing her own mother suffering, or suffering herself (251). Although the mothers' stories are depressing, they do focus on the little ground of autonomy that these women made for themselves and their children through their own self-determined choices which changed their destiny from an oppressive life under patriarchal rule to a life of independence in America.

One of the characters, Suyuan Woo had to make the hardest decision for a mother who only wanted the best for her daughters, but could not provide it to them. While fleeing her village when it was raided by Japanese soldiers, Suyuan had little financial means to continue her fight without watching her babies die. With a heavy heart, she decided that her daughters had more chance of survival without her, while hoping a merciful stranger would take pity and care for her two starving children. Suyuan left her babies at the side of the road with the little remaining jewellery and money with which she managed to flee and placed it under the babies' shirts. She also left photos of her and her husband and wrote the address of her family at the back of each photo, instructing the babies be

returned to that address after the war. "...she walked down the road, stumbling and crying, thinking only of this one last hope, that her daughters would be found by a kindhearted person who would care for them. She would not allow herself to imagine anything else" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 283). Bearing the heartache of possibly never seeing her babies again, Suyuan selflessly risked fate by offering her daughters a better life in war torn China with a family who could take care of them, thus choosing her daughters' possible survival over her own.



An-mei Hsu, a Chinese mother whose own mother committed suicide in China; recounts the story of how her mother was disowned by her family when she became a concubine. "A girl in China did not marry for love. She married for position; and my mother's position, I later learned, was the worst" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 228). An-mei's mother, recently widowed, was tricked by a man and his wife, Wu-Tsing and Second Wife, who could not bear sons. She was subsequently raped by Wu-Tsing, whose action stripped her of her good name and character, as women in China were not allowed to indulge in marriage or intercourse after the death of their husband. An-mei's mother decided she had no choice but become Wu-Tsing's concubine, as she was already called a prostitute. Hooper recounts that in China, the status of a concubine was lower than the legal wife who usually felt threatened by the concubines and laboured to get rid of them (35). If a woman was a concubine, her future was unstable, while her children were not considered important members of the household, and their future doomed to servitude. Even though An-mei's mother had no control over her own destiny, she knew that "by

killing her weak spirit, she could give [her children] a stronger one”, and killed herself in an effort to upgrade the destiny of her children (Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* 240).

...On the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. In my mother's case, this would be the first day of the lunar new year. And because it was new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow. So on that day, Wu Tsing, fearful of my mother's vengeful spirit...promised her visiting ghost that he would raise Syaudi and me as his honored children. He promised to revere her as if she had been First Wife, his only wife. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 240)

With her death, An-mei's mother secured her children's destiny and ensured them privileges that a concubine's children were usually denied.



Even though concubines had the lowest status in society, the life of a woman who was considered by patriarchal society to be a wholesome wife was still a cruel experience. Women in China are regarded as disposable property and detachable appendages despite their crucial role in maintaining the family line through childbearing. It is for this reason that Lindo Jong was considered an outsider in her family and treated like a temporary family member.

Because I was promised to the Huangs' son for marriage, my own family began treating me as if I belonged to somebody else...My mother did not treat me this way because she didn't love me. She would say this biting back her tongue, so she wouldn't wish for something that was no longer hers. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 51)

From the age of two, Lindo had been consigned to an arranged marriage orchestrated by her parents. Although unhappy with her fiancé, Lindo still did not want to disappoint her parents, and went ahead with the marriage. In a pivotal moment of self-reflection before her marriage, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and Lindo saw her real self:

I had on a red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see, that no one could ever take away from me...I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parents' wishes, but I would never forget myself. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 58)

With this new realization, Lindo cleverly devised a plan to leave the marriage, by not bringing shame to her parents or herself. Lindo constructed a story of a dream in which her ancestors warned her that her marriage was doomed. Using Chinese superstitions to her advantage, Lindo was able to abandon her marriage, without breaking her promise to her parents or herself. "It's a true story, how I kept my promise, how I sacrificed my life...I remember the day when I finally knew a genuine thought and could follow where it went" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 68). Lindo worked her way to America to make a better life for herself, using the money she was given by her parents-in-law to leave her marriage.

Ying-ying St. Clair was part of a wealthy family in China who followed the Confucian principles of submission that Ying-ying was taught from a young age. Ying-ying was educated to believe that girls acted differently to boys because girls were deemed less important. "A boy can run and chase dragonflies, because that is his nature...but a girl

should stand still. If you are still for a very long time, a dragonfly will no longer see you. Then it will come to you and hide in the comfort of your shadow" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 72). Ying-ying recalled the time when she, as a little girl, got lost at the New Moon festival and connected this childhood event to her experience of loss, bewilderment and hopelessness as an adult. "And 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. How I lost myself" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 83). Ying-ying experienced an extreme sense of loss later in her life. She lost her first husband to another woman during Ying-ying's pregnant state; she lost her unborn baby through an abortion, as she did not want the baby to remind her of her philanderer husband. Finally, Ying-Ying lost her *chi*, her fighting tiger spirit, when she attempted to distance herself from the pain she experienced through her losses. Ying-ying married an American man after hearing of her first husband's death, and knowing that she was finally free from her first marriage, she immigrated to America with her new husband while leaving behind her losses, and ultimately, the fighting tiger spirit that she had lost. Ying-ying explains the tiger spirit to her daughter and how she lost it:

...a tiger is gold and black. It has two ways. The gold side leaps with its fierce heart. The black side stands still with cunning, hiding its gold between trees, seeing and not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come. I did not learn to use my black side until after the bad man left me... I lost my strength... and then I floated like a dead leaf on the water until I drifted out of my mother-in-law's house and back to my family home (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 248; 249).

The abandonment of Ying-ying's first husband and the abortion that she orchestrated to forget about her husband led to the loss of her tiger spirit, which she only regained years later when she saw her daughter displaying the same hopeless approach towards life. Ying-ying believed that she had to embody feelings of strength and agency to lead by example, and prove to her daughter that nothing is gained from silence.

3.1.2 FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Each of these Chinese mothers, though bound by cultural restrictions, embodied feminist ideals in their thoughts and actions that opposed the patriarchal structures of their culture. In terms of Irigaray's feminist theory, these Chinese women resisted masculine ideology by determining their own definition of self and creating their own space to succeed, allowing them to move beyond patriarchal restrictions. Suyuan Woo, the Chinese mother who experienced the extreme heartache of having to abandon her two baby girls in China, previously established a club with her three friends in Kweilin during the onset of the Second World War in China, at which she and her friends would play mah-jong with the sole intention of momentarily forgetting about the horrors of war and to celebrate life when so many were dying.

We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck...people thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many in the city were starving...what was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness. (Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* 25; 24; 25)

Instead of fixating on the horrors of war, and potentially starving to death like the rest of the city, the Chinese mothers show agency and autonomy by finding their own method of surviving the carnage the war offered. Through the establishment of the Joy Luck Club, the mothers prove that a positive mind trumps the feeling of fear. According to Davis, the establishment of the Joy Luck Club symbolized tenacity and the will to survive, with the women choosing to overcome the horrors of war through this entertaining diversion ("Wisdom (Un)Heeded" 93). The choice to opt for happiness over depression, while society frowned upon this decision, proves how these women would not allow any circumstance to defeat their spirits. This aided them later to overcome problems by seeing that one always had a choice to better their lives, no matter how distant or obvious this may appear.



An-mei realized this choice through her mother's suicide. She noted how her mother used her suicide as a weapon to make victors out of victims, and more importantly, establishing hope in An-mei's life where before it didn't exist (Adams "*The Joy Luck Club*"). The rape of An-mei's mother represents how females were viewed as objects of pleasure to men. In addition, it illustrates how women were forced to conform to their gender roles as An-mei's mother had to succumb to the disfavoured status of a concubine as she already felt prostituted through the misuse of her body. Budani writes how in Chinese culture, the only advantage women had over men was their anger, because men perceived that quarrelling with an angry woman was considered a bad omen as semi-mystical powers were attributed to women. According to Butler's theory, An-mei's mother deviated from her prescribed gender of the submissive victim through

the use of aggression by eating raw opium and killing herself. Thus, Davis suggests that An-mei's mother used anger to her advantage, haunting her husband by killing herself so he would take better care of her children out of his own fear, while An-mei learned from her mother's suicide how to use the world to her own advantage ("Wisdom (Un)Heeded" 92). Not only did An-mei's mother give her a better life, but she provided An-mei with a voice, realizing that one always had a choice to turn a situation around, as An-mei discovered on the day of her mother's death that "Second Wife's hair began to turn white. And on that day, I learned to shout" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 240). Even though An-mei's mother ended her own life, she was still making a choice, and chose the betterment of her children's lives above her own. It is through this action that An-mei realized that one is always vested with a choice upon which to act. By losing her mother, An-mei gained a voice, and she soon learnt the power that was now attached to her words.

By displaying the courage to orchestrate a plan to extricate herself from a loveless marriage, Lindo best exemplifies a woman of agency. She experienced her first spark of autonomous, independent thought when she saw her valuable and powerful reflection in the mirror. The mirror image is tantamount in Lacanian psychology to that which symbolizes the manner in which women are oppressed in society. According to Lacan, women see a reflection in the mirror that they do not recognize, having been distorted through the masculine definition of women (1286). Irigaray opposes Lacan's mirror theory by urging women to break the chains of patriarchal thought and instead define themselves according to their own words and thoughts (*This Sex Which is Not One*

440). In Lindo's definition of herself through her reflection, she is replacing the male gaze with her own, using her own language to create her self-image and breaking away from the category of the Other.

Lindo also deviates from her prescribed gender norm of submission and compliance when she decides to end her marriage. Divorce was not an option for women in China; only men could divorce their wives. Therefore, Lindo embodied masculinist thought and deviated from her gender through plotting to end her marriage. She did this by blowing out her husband's side of the marital candle, which according to Chinese culture, as defined by Hooper, symbolized a short lived marriage (135). Lindo acts with agency, diverges from her prescribed gender, and empowers herself once again, when relocating to America and working at a fortune cookie factory. Lindo orchestrated her marriage proposal from her second husband, Tin Jong, by inserting a message relating to matrimony inside his fortune cookie. While Tin perceived that fate united them, Lindo actually arranged events, to ensure her choice would become his. Therefore, Lindo actually chose him to be her husband, a clearly culturally defiant and self-empowering act.

Most of Ying-ying St. Clair's narration concerns the feeling of loss she experienced throughout her life. In her narration, Ying-ying accuses herself of becoming a ghost. So overwhelmed she has become by her philanderer first husband and aborting his baby, that she willingly lost her *chi*, "the spirit that caused [her] so much pain" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 251). Shear argues that Ying-ying's early social circumstances have

psychologically crippled her, and she has fallen into a subconscious state from which she never fully recovers (196). The defining moment in Ying-ying's life, Wong explains, is when she notices her daughter, Lena, following the same path that led Ying-ying to feelings of displacement, and decides to tell Lena how to detect and evade people's craftiness that can crush one's soul (34):

The pain that cut my spirit loose. I will hold that pain in my hand until it becomes hard and shiny, more clear. And then my fierceness can come back, my golden side, my black side. I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter's tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 252)

Ying-ying might not have embodied feminist thought and agency in her life, but it is through opening up to her daughter and sharing her past pains that reignites the tiger spirit, that fierce independence in Ying-ying, as she wants her daughter to resist and fight for herself.

3.1.3 AMERICAN DAUGHTERS' NARRATIVES

The daughters tell their own stories of being raised according to Chinese culture, but align with American culture due to its logic and accessibility. Jing-mei's uneasy feeling of replacing her mother at the mah-jong table grew into bewilderment when her aunts asked Jing-mei to do the unthinkable: fly to China to unite with her half-sisters and tell them her mother's story. Jing-mei initially felt unequipped to tell these complete strangers about their mother; a woman whom she also considered somewhat of a stranger. While informing her aunts of her worries, Jing-mei extenuated the very thing

they feared about in their own culturally alienated daughters: the inability to relate to their mothers:

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 luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds "joy luck" is not a word, it does not exist. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 40; 41)

What the aunts fear is actually real; their daughters have abandoned their original Chinese culture to embrace the American culture, assuming American culture and thought as if they never had a choice. The daughters not only distance themselves from their culture, but also from their mothers. In terms of Spivak's postcolonial theory, the daughters have categorized their mothers as the Other because of their inability to form an understanding with their mothers, focusing rather on the obvious cultural differences between them, than the emotional similarities within them. However, the daughters are unaware of the traumatic suffering their mothers endured in China which shaped them into courageous, independent thinkers whom the daughters find so difficult to understand.

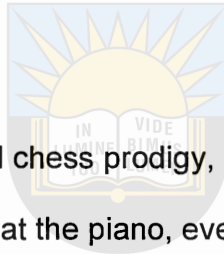
Waverly Jong, the daughter of Lindo, remembered her mother teaching her the art of invisible strength, which she honed into chess skills to become a childhood chess champion. "I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength...I could create barriers to protect myself that were invisible to my opponents. And this gift gave

me supreme confidence" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 89; 170). Waverly becomes increasingly annoyed with the way her mother flaunts her skills and boasts about her chess accolades, thinking that her mother wants to take credit for Waverly's winnings. Waverly admits that her anger stems from her sense of superiority to others because of her remarkable chess talent, while she feels resentful towards her mother for thinking that her success came from luck and not talent:

I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I'm your daughter...It's just so embarrassing...Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess. My mother's eyes turned into dangerous black slits. She had no words for me. Just sharp silence. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 99)

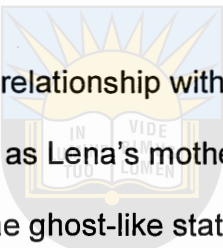
While Waverly boldly represents the loud, aggressive, and opinionated American, Lindo's character embodies the silent, modest Chinese woman. Waverly felt superior to her mother as she viewed herself as the champion chess player, and viewed her mother as her insignificant supporter, someone lacking the logic and spiritual acumen to outplay others. She felt that she completed her mother's life through her success and that without her, Lindo would have no purpose or pride. Waverly's chess match translates into a battle with her mother who believes that Waverly's success is due to a stroke of luck. In retaliation, Waverly bars her mother from relishing in her chess achievements, while distancing herself from her mother to guard against her mother's trivializing remarks. The invisible strength that Waverly's mother passed onto her was used by Waverly as a barrier to separate herself from her mother. Instead of connecting with her mother's cultural beliefs and values, Waverly submerged herself in American culture as

a barrier to distance herself from her Asian culture and her mother. "In her hands, I always became the pawn. I could only run away. And she was the queen, able to move in all directions, relentless in her pursuit, always able to find my weakest spots" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 199). Waverly acknowledges how she distanced herself from her mother as she did not want her mother to have complete control over her life and remind Waverly of her imperfections. Being a perfectionist, Waverly did not want to hear about her weaknesses and isolating her mother meant she did not have to face or hear about her imperfections.



While Waverly actually became a child chess prodigy, Jing-mei felt that her mother pushed her to become a child prodigy at the piano, even though she had no visible talent. "I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations...for unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be myself" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 142). Jing-mei was forced to continue with piano lessons after a failed piano recital, which to Jing-mei was a horribly embarrassing experience, which was escalated by her Asian loss of face. Feeling contempt and frustration at her mother for expecting too much, Jing-mei rebuked her, telling her she wished that she had never been born. Her rebellion culminates in her statement: "And then I decided. I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before and look what happened. She was the stupid one" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 141). From her experience as a underachieving child, Jing-mei never overachieved in life, she only aimed for as high as she felt capable, not wanting to meet anyone's expectations but her own, always

doing what she felt she could do and believing she could only be herself, not anything more, or anything less. The complacency that resulted in response to her mother's demands shows the pressure that females place on other females, particularly their offspring, to excel in certain areas and to conform to their expectation of excellence. Thus, by Jing-mei rebelling against her mother's expectations, she is forming her own rules by which to live her life, much in the same way that the mothers rebelled against their gendered acts in China.



Lena St. Clair longed for a loving relationship with her mother, like her neighbour's relationship with her own mother, as Lena's mother seemed to be a ghost; alive, but disconnected. Commenting on the ghost-like state of her mother, Lena noticed how "my mother often looked this way, waiting for something to happen, wearing this scared look... Only later she lost the struggle to keep her eyes open" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 105). Lena would hear her neighbours, a mother and daughter, fighting constantly through the thin walls of her house. One night, after a huge fight between them, Lena realized the mother and daughter were shouting to settle their differences, that they actually loved each other and felt frustrated at being misunderstood. Lena hoped that one day she and her mother could reconcile in the same way as her neighbours, by showing the other love through the hurt they felt at being misunderstood. Lena was saddened that her mother's depression led to her emotionally numb state, as her mother never seemed to care about anything, including the relationship with her own daughter.

Rose Hsu Jordan felt frustrated with her indecisiveness which became increasingly acute during her divorce. "My mother once told me why I was so confused all the time.

She said I was without wood. Born without wood so that I listened to too many people” (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 191). Rose’s mother gave her a Chinese diagnosis for her indecisive condition, however, Rose felt that her uncertainty sprang from the predicament she experienced from being both Chinese and American, trapped between her original culture and her assumed culture. Rose explains: “Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was much better” (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 191). She clearly suffered from Du Bois’ state of double-consciousness as she felt burdened from having to choose between her two cultures, vacillating between her cultures when making decisions. Rose began to feel emotionally exhausted from constantly shifting between cultures, and slowly lost her true identity in the process. Rose’s mother, An-mei, was disappointed that Rose was not fighting for anything, giving up on her marriage, and not speaking up for what she wanted. In response to Rose’s assertion that she has no hope to fight for her marriage, An-mei replies, ““This is not hope. Not reason. This is your fate... You must think for yourself, what you must do. If someone tells you, then you are not trying” (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 139;140). An-mei offers motherly advice to Rose in the hope that Rose will acknowledge how silence is destroying her character and begin to change her fate by voicing her discontentment to her husband.

3.1.4 CULTURAL STUDIES ANALYSIS

The cultural and maternal alienation worsened in the daughters’ adult lives, which is evident when each daughter encounters an identity crisis from assimilating into American culture and rejecting their Chinese heritage. Su-Lin Yu states that this

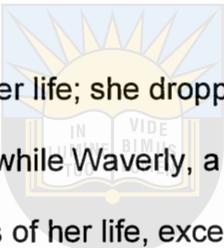
assimilation process first started as a way of seeking acceptance into their adopted society, but then festered into a habit and way of life for the daughters ("Narrating Chinese M/others" 49). Rose Hsu Jordan grew up to be a timid and uncertain woman, always allowing her husband to decide her fate, until he decided he wanted a divorce. Following this crisis, Rose began to frequent a psychiatrist, much to her mother's disgust, as it signified that she rejected her mother's advice. Rose felt more certain that a stranger could cure her problems, despite her mother's warning:

A girl is like a young tree... You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 191)

Rose dismissed her mother's advice because it was steeped in what she believe to be a superstitious Chinese culture, something Rose was unable to take seriously as she had already submerged herself in the American culture of logic and science. Thus, she assumed the position of Self through her association with American culture and placing her mother in the inferior position of the Other, due to the obvious differences that existed between their cultures. An-mei's prophecy about a child growing into a weak tree does emerge, as Rose became indecisive and unsure of herself from listening to other people, her husband and the psychiatrist, instead of listening to her mother who knew her best.

Lena St. Clair suffered similar effects to Rose as they both embodied a silenced and suffering woman, as a result of their culturally alienated state. Lena became trapped in a

dysfunctional marriage that was obsessively based on the ideals of “fairness”; her husband would halve every bill and receipt for them to pay, while Lena’s expenses were considered as her own to pay. Lena felt invisible to her husband who did not acknowledge her creative input into the successful restaurant designing business they owned together. Lena, unaware of her mother’s suffering in China, was of the opinion her mother’s depressed state was a result of a miscarriage, not from a difficult life in China.



Jing-mei lacked ambition throughout her life; she dropped out of college and seemed complacent in her mediocre strivings, while Waverly, a divorcee and an ambitious tax attorney, had succeeded in all spheres of her life, except in her relationships. When inviting her new fiancé to dinner at her parent’s house, Waverly felt more ashamed of her parent’s Chinese customs than her fiancé’s ignorant behaviour, illustrating her acceptance and respect of American customs, and disgrace and humiliation of her original Chinese culture.

Cultural alienation has affected the daughters’ relationship with their mothers, as they are unable to forge any emotional bonds with these women whom they fail to understand. The daughters felt certain that their mothers’ lack of physical affection was attributed to the lack of love they felt for their daughters. Adams argues that in reading the daughters’ narratives, there was a shared belief that the absence of maternal love in their lives explained why their mothers were rendered as their fiercest opponents (*“The Joy Luck Club”*). This train of thought is evident when Jing-mei tries to teach her mother

a lesson about maternal love: she advises “that parents shouldn’t criticize children. They should encourage instead. You know, people rise to other people’s expectations. And when you criticize, it just means you’re expecting failure” (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 31). The daughters held the belief that, according to American society, parents showed love to their children through physical gestures of hugs and kisses, conveying phrases of love and gentle expressions of encouragement, and if these words and gestures were not displayed, it was evident that parents did not love their children. Jing-mei later observed that Asian parental affection is shown through food and not physical affection: “That’s the way Chinese mothers love their children, not through hugs and kisses, but with stern offerings of steamed dumplings, duck’s gizzards and crab” (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 202). While the daughters felt unloved in their childhood as their mothers did not shower them with physical and verbal affection, the mothers also experience a dilemma. Samir states that mothers want to raise their daughters in the Chinese way, yet still allow them to enjoy American opportunities; however, this causes conflict between them when the daughters develop western expectations and behaviour (302). What the daughters do not realize is that by ignoring the cultural and linguistic differences that reside between their two cultures, they have failed to understand their mothers. Hooper suggests that Asian mothers express love through criticism because girls in China were taught to be obedient, respectful, humble, and timid, and it was a mother’s primary duty to ensure that her daughter embodied this Confucian ideology, albeit through harsh instructions (134). Thus both mothers and daughters felt unloved as each failed to express love in the correct cultural form; the mothers were not affectionate and their daughters did not embody obedience that translated into love for their mothers.

The mothers and daughters not only belong to different cultures that dictate their thought and behaviour, but these cultures also possess different styles of expression and interpretation. Yu offers that one of the main causes for the sense of disenfranchisement between mothers and daughters are the inconsistencies expressed by their use of different languages; Chinese and English ("Relocating Maternal Subjectivity"). Thus the communication barrier between mothers and daughters is another rift that separates them culturally. China is categorized as a high-context culture, while the United States of America embodies a low-context culture. Melani explains that in a high-context culture, individuals possess internalized meaning and information, so little is explicitly stated in written or spoken messages as the listener already understands the message ("Amy Tan"). However, in a low-context culture, information and meaning are explicitly stated as members of this culture expect explanations when statements are unclear, which they often are (Melani "Amy Tan"). While both mothers and daughters try hard to communicate with one another across their separate cultures, much of the mothers' intentions are lost due to their unsatisfactory command of English, and the misunderstandings that result from the daughters' misinterpretation of the message. Rose Hsu Jordan confirms how the daughters fail to contextualize their mothers' speech, thus misinterpreting their words: "I thought she said "fate" because she couldn't pronounce the "th" sound in "faith" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 121). Fate and faith have different meanings, therefore, due to the mothers' faulty pronunciation; the daughters contrive mistaken meanings to their mother's speech. Dunick explains that miscommunication results from faulty translation stemming from a combination of literal translation together with cultural and psychological interaction; therefore successful

translation entails more than a desire to understand, it also entails ability, interest and cultural knowledge (6). Anzaldua's feminist theory focuses on how language and culture are intertwined: "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 59). In terms of Anzaldua's theory, the daughters are, therefore, unable to create a meaningful relationship with their mothers because they do not speak the same language, and cannot relate to their mothers whose ethnic identity is different to their own. While being able to speak a language is essential in creating meaning and for accurate translation, Hamilton asserts that the ability to supply implied or missing context is imperative to decoding language ("*Feng Shui*" 126). Thus, through the mothers trying to indoctrinate traditional Chinese values and beliefs in their daughters, the daughters are unable to understand the cultural referents behind their mothers' words. Lena St Clair illustrates through her narrative her inability to understand Chinese due to the lack of cultural context: "I could understand the words perfectly, but not the meaning" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 109). Meanwhile, Jing-mei Woo understood Chinese, but could not translate her own words into Chinese: "These kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different languages, which we did. I talked to her in English, she answered back in Chinese" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 33; 34). What intensifies the dilemma between mother and daughter is the frustration the mothers bear from their daughters misunderstanding them. According to Zeng, this dilemma drives the mothers to try and control their daughters out of fear of losing them, and ultimately sparks rebellion in the independent daughters who reject their original culture and their mothers (3). Melani argues that the mothers' warnings to their daughters are not supported by the context of American culture, as the daughters fail to

understand their mother's alien Chinese ways and beliefs ("Amy Tan"). The inability to speak the other's language with understanding, distances both the mothers and daughters from acquiring a meaningful relationship with one another through the misinterpretation evident when mothers and daughters attempt to decipher the messages of the other through their different codes of interpretation.

3.1.5 ETHNIC STUDIES ANALYSIS

The daughters, being second generation English-speaking Chinese American women, are desperately seeking acceptance into American society that has a history of oppressing Chinese Americans. Yu argues that the daughters alienate themselves from their mothers and their heritage by assimilating certain stereotypical Orientalist views of the Chinese ("Narrating Chinese M/others" 50). The daughters embody Edward Said's critical and subjective Orientalist, by judging their mother's non-Westernized culture according to the daughter's Westernized standards, and making Westernized assumptions regarding Chinese culture. Yu continues to explain it is the lack of cultural confidence and wholeness in the daughters, who assume the Orientalist view of Chinese women as a terrifying figure of power with whom the daughters do not wish to identify, and from whom they flee in an attempt to cultivate autonomy and freedom for themselves ("Narrating Chinese M/others" 50). Through feeling unloved and unconnected from their Chinese mothers, the daughters feel that acceptance into American society is easier than being accepted by their critical mothers who embody different cultural thought and behaviour to the acculturated mainstream American society. The mothers are ultimately rejected as the despised Other by their daughters

who have assumed the position of Self in mainstream society, believing their mothers to be endowed with mysterious and psychic powers of mind-reading. Waverly finds herself subjected to her mother's spell, frightened by the powerful force her mother embodies:

Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile. "Strongest wind cannot be seen", she said. Her black men advanced across the plane, slowly marching to each successive level as a single unit. My white pieces screamed as they scurried and fell off the board one by one. As her men drew closer to my edge, I felt myself growing light. I rose up into the air and flew out the window. Higher and higher, above the valley, over the tops of tiled roofs, where I was gathered up by the wind and pushed up toward the night sky until everything below me disappeared and I was alone (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 101).

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Yu argues that this sentiment illustrates how the daughters viewed their mothers as their rivals, condemning their mothers as the eternal exiled outsiders, and feeling compelled to reject their mothers due to their inability to comprehend their mothers' cultural ways ("Narrating Chinese M/others" 50). From their acculturated state, the daughters fail to create a meaningful relationship with their mothers, who not only are viewed as the inferior and insignificant Other, but also as the daughters' opponents, a force that constantly reminds the daughters of their incomplete selves and their unsuccessful perpetual strivings for perfection.

Jing-mei assumes the position of the Self when she describes the manner in which her Chinese aunts communicate to each other. She notes that her Chinese aunts "speak in

their special language, half in broken English, half in their own Chinese dialect" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 43). Samir suggests that referring to her aunt's English proficiency as broken, not only makes a statement about the level at which they can communicate in English, but also indicates acceptance or rejection by society (311). Amy Tan provides her opinion on the usage of the term "broken English" that American society frequently attaches to second language English speakers like her mother:

I've been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks...I have described it as "broken" or "fractured" English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than "broken" as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness..."limited" English...just as bad, as if everything is limited,

including people's perception of the limited English speaker. ("Mother Tongue" 7)

Samir further conjectures that by claiming that a group speaks "broken English" designates the group as marginalized, thereby rejecting it from dominant culture, and ultimately placing this group in the Other category, forming a mode of differentiation to recognize this group as the Other (311). The mothers are Othered to the position of the subaltern, in terms of Spivak's theory, as they do not possess proficiency in English that enables them to be accepted by American culture, and because they are unable to speak perfect English, their voice cannot be heard by the dominant culture. The daughters embody Ang's idea of Western feminists who assume the position of Self through embracing American culture and alienating their original culture. Because their mothers speak a different language, belong to a different culture, and were raised in China, the daughters cannot relate to their mothers, and place their mothers in the

irrelevant position of the Other. Therefore, according to Yu, through the daughters exposing the superficial differences between themselves and their mothers, they are assuming a position of power over their mothers, judging them through the eyes of an acculturated being of Self, and perceiving their mothers as the racial Other “whose thinking and behaviour are encoded in the stereotyped imagery of American imperialist discourse” (“Relocating Maternal Subjectivity”). The daughters reject their mothers’ culture, and in terms of Fanon’s theory, don white masks of acculturation, siding with their mothers’ oppressors, which accentuate their desire to gain acceptance into mainstream American society. The daughters conceptualize themselves as a recognizable ethnic minority; however, they feel desperate to erase the sense of difference they feel among their peers. Hamilton argues that the daughters dissociate themselves from their mothers’ broken English, Chinese mannerisms and traditional teachings, only to find themselves in a perpetual state of insecurity about their ability to perform satisfactorily in multiple roles ranging from dutiful Chinese daughter to successful American career woman (“*Feng Shui*” 126). The daughters face conflicting demands from two opposing cultures, vacillating between their Chinese and American culture, which causes them severe anxiety regarding their identity. This problem is most apparent in Rose’s adult life when she is plagued with Chinese and American choices regarding her marriage, and the American choices she makes only intensifies her indecisiveness. The nagging cultural and personal uncertainty the daughters experience while growing up festers into their adult lives, culminating in and characterized by their identity crises.

The Chinese mothers share similar frustrations to their daughters and feel disheartened that their hope of giving their daughters a better life comes at the price of the daughters distancing themselves from their culture and simultaneously from their mothers. Melani explains that the mothers are saddened that their daughters have not internalized Chinese values, and do not share the filial respectful relationship that the mothers experienced with their own mothers ("Amy Tan"). An-mei Hsu felt the connection to her mother was "so deep it is in your bones", but this vision does not extend to the daughters who are unable to connect to their mothers on a cultural and emotional basis (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 41). In the preface to "Feathers from a Thousand *Li* Away" the Chinese mother imagines the daughter she will raise in America;

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by her husband's belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow... Now the woman was old. And she had a daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow... And she waited, year after year, for the day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 17)

Lowe suggests that the mother presents herself as having sacrificed everything to build a better life for her daughter, who does not acknowledge, or is even aware, of the sacrifices that her mother has made (516). This is a perfect example of how the mothers' good intentions are misunderstood by their daughters who hold different cultural values and interpretation skills to their mothers, and who constantly find errors in their mothers' speech because the mothers are unable to enunciate English perfectly.

Lindo Jong still remembers the promise she made to herself on her wedding day, and has kept this promise never to forget herself, but she is aggravated that her daughter cannot keep any promises she makes. "I once sacrificed my life to keep my parents' promise. This means nothing to you, because your promises mean nothing" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 49). Not only does Lindo and Waverly hold different views on what a promise means, they hold different ethnic identities, and it is at the hairdressing salon where Waverly takes her mother to have her hair cut, that Lindo clearly notes the cultural division between her daughter and her. Waverly and Mr. Rory, the hairdresser, discuss Lindo's haircut as if Lindo was not in the room, or even had a say in how she wanted her hair to look. Waverly repeats Mr. Rory's words to Lindo and talks haltingly slow to her mother, even though Lindo can perfectly understand English. The demeaning manner in which Waverly treats her mother is evident that she has processed her mother as an inferior outsider, an Other, to whom Waverly feels she has to talk to and treat as a child because she considers her mother to be intellectually inferior to her. Lindo notices her daughter's patronizing ways, but instead of being angry, she cooperates: "I smile. I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 255). For Lindo, having to wear her American face relates to the wearing of a mask, which resonates with Fanon's theory of the colonized assuming white masks for their oppressive colonizers to show acquiescence to their culture and power. While Lindo has not been colonized, she is an oppressed immigrant who feels burdened with being branded an outsider because of her ethnicity and cultural markers. The wearing of a mask functions to suppress one's true emotions and instead of symbolizing the loss of culture in the

daughters' usage of the white mask, Xu explains that to Lindo it represents "survivalism," the need to adapt in a society that does not accept differences, but hypocritically embraces individuality (11). This is seen when Mr. Rory then pointed out the facial similarities between Lindo and Waverly, leaving Waverly highly ashamed that she resembled her mother. "I am ashamed she is ashamed. Because she is my daughter and I am proud of her, and I am her mother, but she is not proud of me" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 255). It is this shamefulness that Lindo notices in her daughter that makes her decide to tell Waverly the story of how she created her own destiny by leaving her marriage while still keeping her promise, to make Waverly proud of her and realign Waverly with her and her culture. Lindo is aware that Waverly, in her acculturated state, views her as the Other, someone who shall always be labeled inferior and insignificant by dominant American society. Lindo wants to correct this unequal relationship between her daughter and herself, and enable Waverly to view her through her own definitions.

Ying-ying St. Clair also feels the sting of her daughter's acculturated condemnation, ignoring her mother as if she was not present before her. "...because I remained quiet for so long now my daughter does not hear me. She sits by her fancy swimming pool and hears only her Sony Walkman..." (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 67). For so long Lena St. Clair has not listened to a word her mother said, ignoring the advice that passed her mother's lips, and as a result, her marriage suffers. Ying-ying decides to tell Lena the cause of her depressed state so that Lena understands the troubles that she endured, and realizes that she had to follow a different path to her mother and fight for what she

believes: "Now I must tell my daughter everything. That she is a daughter of a ghost. She has no *chi*. This is my greatest shame. How can I leave this world without leaving her my spirit?" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 252). Ying-ying blames herself for Lena's inability to speak up to her manipulative husband, and feels that by telling Lena of her past sufferings, she can transmit her once lost tiger spirit onto Lena.

An-mei Hsu is frustrated at her daughter's feeble attempt to save herself from pain and suffering, noting that all Rose can do is watch her marriage fall to pieces while thinking that she has no choice in the matter: "She cried, "No choice! No choice!" She doesn't know. If she doesn't speak, she is making a choice. If she doesn't try, she can lose her chance forever" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 215). An-mei cannot believe that in a country loaded with opportunity and autonomy that her daughter can feel trapped, for in China, a country where there is no freedom of choice, An-mei Hsu still made a choice.

3.1.6 THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

The mothers bridge the relationship with their daughters by deciding to share with them their own stories of oppression, rebellion, and their strivings for autonomy, thus disposing the myths belonging to their culture that the daughters are so focused on avoiding. According to Melani, talk story enables women who have been socialized into silence to reconfigure the events of their lives into tales to speak out and share with others the important events that have shaped them into the women they have become ("Amy Tan"). It is through the power of "talk story" that the mothers succeed in liberating

themselves from silence and stereotypes, finding their own voice and selves, and connecting with their daughters who start to see their mothers for who they really are. Yu offers that it is through the mothers turning their stories of oppression and victimization into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment that the mothers aim to protect their bewildered daughters from similar pain and oppression as women in America ("Narrating Chinese M/others" 51). In terms of Bhavnani and Coulson's feminist analysis that women are best heard through storytelling, the mothers decide to use this method to connect with their daughters, showing representations of themselves in terms of their own definitions. In any culture, storytelling transmits cultural values and nuances, Samir explains, and because the mothers cannot speak "perfect American English" they resort to talk story as they grew up listening to tales (310). Therefore, the mothers feel that talk story is the most appropriate way to share their personal histories to their non-Chinese speaking daughters (310). Waverly realizes that she has been using the art of invisible silence to distance herself from her mother after her mother told her story.

I saw what I had been fighting for... 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 armour, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in. (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 183; 184)

Lim writes "the essential thematics of maternity is also the story of race... [the mother] is the figure not only of maternity but also of racial consciousness" ("Japanese American Women's Life Stories" 291). It is only once the daughters have heard their mothers' stories that they are able to see their mothers for who they really are in terms

of their mothers' definition of self, and that the daughters feel a connection with their mothers. The daughters also ultimately become aware of the ethnic identity they have dismissed and should embrace to form a meaningful relationship with their mothers. Davis advises that once the daughters become aware of their mothers' vulnerability and their weaknesses, they start feeling a connection with their mothers, and invite their mothers into their world ("Wisdom (Un)Heeded" 99). The mothers reach out to their daughters through their narratives, trusting that their daughters will hear and fully understand them, believing that mothers and daughters share an eternal bond: "...She was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 215). The mothers feel that mother-daughter relationships should be meaningful, as it was the relationship a daughter had with her mother that deemed her value and confirmed her self-worth in a society that considered women irrelevant and unworthy. From the daughters now being able to connect with their mothers, knowing their mothers' past sufferings, defeats, and triumphs, they simultaneously connect to their Chinese culture, realizing that being Chinese is in their blood. The daughters begin to take cognizance of their mothers' advice and embrace their mothers' culture and ethnic identity, thus moving away from their acculturated position of Self while releasing their mothers from the irrelevant Other. The daughters have bridged the gap between themselves and their mothers, according to Ang's feminist idea, by not focusing on the similarities, but instead acknowledging the apparent differences between the lives of their mothers and themselves. Thus, it is through the

awareness of difference that the daughters are able to understand their mothers' plight and ultimately form an emotional connection with their mothers.

The daughters show acceptance of their mothers' culture by taking heed of their advice. Ying-ying's tiger spirit is passed onto Lena who confronts her husband about their unequal marriage, and voices her concerns and dissatisfaction that she has kept silently hidden for so long. After hearing her mother's story of how she found her voice, Rose Hsu Jordan decides to stand up to her husband by not allowing him to take away the house from her, and refusing to sign the divorce papers until she gets what she wants. Instead of Rose feeling *hulihudu*, a Chinese term for what one could describe as confused as a result of listening to other people and not taking cognizance of her mother's advice, her husband has now become *hulihudu*, and Rose realizes through her mother that "the power of ...[her] words was that strong" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 198). Thus the daughters' embody their newfound Asian American identity, believing themselves to share cultural thought and behaviour with their mothers, while living in an opportunistic country like America and realizing their dreams through the inspiration of their mothers as warriors and women of agency.

Jing-mei is the last narrator in the book and represents the culmination of the daughters' cultural transformation. She has accepted the task from her aunts, to visit China and tell her half-sisters about their mother's life. Jing-mei accomplishes the transformation evident in the American daughters when she returns to China as she finally feels connected to her roots. She is becoming Chinese and finally understands her mother

and the culture that she has shunned for so long: "The minute our train...enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 267). When in China, connecting to her Chinese roots and feeling the cultural confidence that has evaded her, Jing-mei asks her father to tell her in Chinese the story of her mother's life in China: "No tell me in Chinese," I interrupt. "Really I can understand" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 281). For Jing-mei to instruct her father to refrain from telling her mother's story in English, the language which she fully understands, and instead enlighten her in Chinese, illustrates that Jing-mei has finally embraced her Chinese culture and that she has embraced the language as well. The final act of meeting her sisters is the ultimate step in completing Jing-mei's cultural transformation, making her feel confident to tell her sisters the story about her mother's life: "And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood" (Tan *The Joy Luck Club* 288). Lowe offers that even though Jing-mei's mother is dead, reconciliation takes place through synchronizing herself with her mother once in China and through meeting her sisters, thus completing the process of cultural transformation and the healing of mother-daughter relationships (517). By visiting her mother's native land, making an effort to communicate in Chinese, and meeting her half-sisters to tell her mother's story, Jing-mei pays respect to her mother through fulfilling her wishes of connecting with her Chinese side. It is through this connection that Jing-mei feels her mother's presence and keeps the memory of her mother and her mother's story alive.

The Joy Luck Club illustrates how important culture and ethnic identity is in one's life, and how the recognition and acceptance of these two aspects can balance the different spheres of one's life. Tan highlights the importance of family relationships through her mother and daughter characters, proving how one's family and one's culture is the core of one's life. The next section interrogates female oppression and liberation in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, while scrutinizing the cultural restraints imposed on women in pre-revolutionary China.



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CHAPTER THREE (PART TWO)

THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE

That bad man was using my body. Every night he used it, as if I were – what? – a machine! Today you teach your daughters to say to a stranger, “My body is my body. Don’t touch me.” A little child can say this. I was a grown woman, and I could not say this. (Tan *The Kitchen God’s Wife* 312)

Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife* (1991) is a story about a woman’s suffering at the hands of men, and how she overcame abuse to change her fate, and live a life free from patriarchal rule. This section explores the oppressive conditions Chinese women experienced in pre-revolutionary China and during the Chinese revolution.

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The Kitchen God’s Wife examines the life of Winnie, a Chinese immigrant now living in America, who tells her American-born daughter, Pearl, the story of her life in China in an attempt to bridge their unstable and distant relationship. Winnie and Pearl’s relationship began to deteriorate during Pearl’s adolescent years as Winnie was upset that Pearl did not mourn her father in the Chinese way. Pearl’s father’s stomach cancer had not only taken his life, but had consumed his personality, the part of him to which Pearl could relate. Pearl could never provide a proper explanation to her mother that she felt the stomach cancer her father suffered from destroyed his character to such an extent that when he died, he was not the same man anymore. Years later, as an adult, in the course of this revelation, Pearl is shocked to learn her mother’s own revelation: that her biological father is not the man who raised her.

As Pearl was born in America, she inculcated herself with American ideologies, values, and beliefs, so she had a hard time understanding her mother's Chinese mannerisms and culture, and this caused a further rift in their relationship. According to Fidler, not only did Winnie and Pearl's vastly different geographical cultural origins separate them by age, class, culture and language, but it was Pearl's ignorance of her family history that caused the emotional rupture of their relationship (11). Winnie's sharing of her traumatic life in China, exposing the obstacles she faced as a woman in a strongly patriarchal society, and her reason for hiding the secret of Pearl's biological father, Pearl discovered the upheavals and trauma that her mother endured in China. Pearl is further astounded by her mother's inner strength to survive such oppressive conditions.

Winnie does not reveal the secret about Pearl's biological father right away. She first wants to confide in Pearl the appalling circumstances of her life, so that Pearl will learn about the cultural hardships her mother faced in China, and thus not hold a grudge against her mother for not informing her of her paternity sooner. Winnie begins her story by revealing a shameful secret that her own mother was her father's second wife who deserted him and disappeared. This resulted in Winnie being sent to live with distant relatives who taught her that to be female meant she was to be obedient and inconspicuous. The family arranged a marriage for Winnie with Wen Fu, an abusive Kuomintang pilot, which resulted in years of physical and psychological mistreatment. During the Second World War, Winnie lost all three children to disease and poverty. Jimmy Louie, a Chinese American working for the American army, helped her escape from her tumultuous marriage and the civil war in China, providing her with hope and a

new life in America through marriage. Only at the end of telling Pearl her story, does Winnie decide to reveal her biggest secret: before she managed to escape China and join Jimmy Louie in the States, Wen Fu attacked and raped her, resulting in her pregnancy with Pearl.

Throughout her life in China, Winnie is oppressed by men both within the family as well as the male-empowered society: her father, her husband, the law, the media, and Chinese patriarchal society. Each role player assumed a different position in crushing her opportunity to find happiness and justice, yet none succeeded in killing her spirit or her will to live. Despite these gendered oppositional forces, Winnie survives, escapes to America and begins a new life with her young daughter and new husband.

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3.2.1 ETHNIC STUDIES ANALYSIS

Although Winnie escaped the China's gendered oppression, in America she could not escape the racism to which ethnic minorities are subjected. She recounts the time she was ill-treated by an Italian shop owner because she could not speak fluent English.

"The Italian man...yelled at me just because I wanted money back for a light bulb already burnt out when I bought it. He pretended he could not understand me. My English wasn't good enough, so no money back" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 254).

Winnie quickly realized that in America, one was not judged by their gender, but instead by their ethnic and cultural markers, and the greater the difference from the American acculturated status-quo, the more distance society placed between itself, the Self, and the misunderstood, ethnic Other.

Pearl felt the burden of constantly having to switch between her biologically determined Chinese culture and socially assumed American culture. Izgarjan explains how Pearl recounts being raised in a Christian home: her Asian American father was a Baptist minister, while her Chinese immigrant mother reluctantly tolerated the family religion although she never abandoned Chinese superstitions and religious beliefs, which clashed with Christian ideology (241). When having a bad dream one night as a little girl, Pearl's father reassured her that the only ghost was the Holy Ghost, who was not harmful and would never scare her, while Pearl's mother searched the room to find the ghost, believing it to be real. Having to vacillate between competing religious systems resulted in Pearl's anxiety surrounding her identity, Izgarjan explains, which caused the double consciousness she experienced from shifting between two different cultures (241). Fidler strengthens this argument, stating that Pearl neither felt authentically Chinese, as she lacked the cultural code from being born and raised in American society, nor was she perceived as purely American due to her apparent non-whiteness (8). Pearl is a victim in terms of Du Bois' theory of double consciousness, because at home she was immersed in conflicting religions that represented two different cultures, while in society she felt neither wholly Chinese nor American through the absence of Chinese cultural markers and white physical attributes. Pearl's identity crisis intensifies when she marries a white American man who does not understand Pearl's culture or her mother's familial demands. As a result, Pearl starts resenting her own culture as it becomes the basis for misunderstandings and fights between Phil, her husband, and her.

We've learned to sidestep the subject of my family, my duty. It was once the biggest source of our arguments... I have come to resent the duty... whenever I'm with my mother, I feel as though I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 16)

From her husband's resistance to Pearl's culture, and her blind devotion to her mother, Pearl alienates herself from her culture, and dons the white mask of privilege according to Fanon's theory. She assumes the stance of an acculturated being and the privileged position of Self, bridging closer to her husband, while emotionally and culturally distancing herself from her mother, whom she begins to view as the Other. The acculturated stance Pearl assumes at the Buddhist funeral of her mother's dear friend resulted from the total ignorance of religious customs of Chinese culture. Pearl illustrates the point: "I feel silly, taking part in a ritual that makes no sense to me" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 44). Fidler writes that Chinese rituals and customs are never explained to second generation Asian Americans, whose cultural context and practices differ vastly from the highly-contextualized Chinese culture of the mothers who never needed an explanation as they were raised and indoctrinated according to Chinese culture (17). Pearl never makes an effort to discover the meaning behind these rituals and traditions, and instead adopts a condescending and patronizing attitude towards Chinese culture and her mother, both of which represent separation from the accepted and highly favoured American acculturated Self. It is Pearl's ignorance and misunderstanding of Chinese customs that causes her to distance herself from her culture and ultimately her mother, and she places herself in the position of the privileged Self through assimilating with acculturated American society. Pearl thus represents

Said's concept of the Orientalist who judges and defines non-Western cultures from their supposedly advantageous position of knowledge regarding cultures under scrutiny.

Pearl resultantly regards her mother as the abnormal Other, by judging her mother's culture to be inferior to the West, thereby deeming it insignificant to the characteristically acculturated state of American society.

3.2.2 CULTURAL STUDIES ANALYSIS

Due to the different cultural backgrounds of mother and daughter, problems arise from misunderstandings, most particularly from Pearl. She notes that "whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 11). It is also difficult for Winnie to communicate with Pearl as some Chinese words have no direct translation, which makes it more difficult to establish meaning and context. Fidler explains that Winnie tries to explain to Pearl the meaning of the Chinese word *taonan*, however, she finds herself defining the word through eliminating other possible meanings, than actually giving a definite meaning to the word (14). It is from this linguistic and cultural barrier that Pearl feels unable to communicate effectively with her mother, because attempts at communication cause confusion and conflict, something which Pearl wants to avoid altogether from both her mother and her husband. Anzaldua writes how the *mestiza*, a woman of colour, who is immersed in two cultures, subconsciously feels attacked through their shifting identities by vacillating between cultures (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 421). Pearl, therefore, represents Anzaldua's *mestiza* as she cannot identify with her mother or her husband, two people representing the opposing cultures between which

Pearl wavers. While Winnie is hiding a secret regarding her daughter's paternity, Pearl is also hiding a secret from her mother; she has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Fidler argues that the retention of this secret signals a wall that Pearl erects against her mother (46). Pearl feels unable to inform Winnie regarding her neural disorder, as she might not understand the diagnosis and instead attach her own Chinese theories and superstitions, mostly involving how Pearl could have prevented this disorder:

...it drives me crazy, listening to her various hypotheses, the way religion, medicine, and superstitions all merge with her own beliefs...according to my mother, nothing is an accident... So I never told my mother...I didn't want to hear her theories on my illness, what caused this to happen, how she should have done this or that to prevent it. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 29;30)

While Pearl feels guilty for keeping her neural disorder from her mother, she is inclined not to inform her mother regarding her condition. Pearl fears confrontation from her mother and being blamed for not preventing the disorder, which ultimately translates into not following her mother's advice and cultural teachings. This is another way in which Pearl represents Anzaldua's *mestiza* as she already anticipates being attacked by her mother, before she has confided in her mother about her illness, thus illustrating the psychological attack on Pearl's psyche from immersing herself in opposing cultures. It is as a result of this festering emotional wound that, together with the persuasion of Winnie's close friend, Helen, compels Winnie to reveal her painful experiences in China and her story of oppression and submission, as well as her resilience and power.

3.2.3 THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

The tenets of Third Wave Feminism assist in the analysis of *The Kitchen God's Wife*.

Rivkin and Ryan explain that Third Wave Feminism focuses on the advancement of the rights of women, most of whom have not celebrated the effects of the First and Second Wave of Feminism, as these women belong to a different cultural or racial group, and the dynamics of such groups barred any feminist advancement from impacting their lives (566). Irigaray and Lim's feminist thought of women creating their own literature, in which women are able to form a voice of their own, is evident in examining *The Kitchen God's Wife*. It is through her revelation to Pearl that Winnie is able to find her own voice by speaking out against the injustices she suffered under patriarchal Chinese society. According to Booth Foster, Winnie realized through opposing patriarchal ideology that "a voice is not a voice unless there is someone there to hear it", and thus by confiding in her daughter the secrets she has kept for so long, she is released to be heard (21). In terms of Spivak's theory of the subaltern whose voice could not be heard, it is through Winnie finding a voice for herself and making herself heard through the telling of her story, that she thwarts the Othered position thrust upon her by her daughter and society. Winnie realizes that by telling Pearl stories from her past, she is voicing her anger with the Chinese patriarchal system and the resultant invalidation of women. Tan recounts her mother's response to a relative who scolded her mother for telling Tan the "useless stories" of her past which cannot be changed, to which Tan's mother replied "It can be changed. I tell her, so she can tell everyone, tell the whole world so they know what my mother suffered. That's how it can be changed" (*The Opposite of Fate* 103). Using maternal inspiration, Tan thus relates her mother's purpose to Winnie, who wants to

change the past to ensure a better future. It is interesting to note that the talk-story tradition is central to Chinese women's culture, Fidler explains, as it forms the oral tradition by which women pass on knowledge from generation to generation, and because women were historically denied an education, women could use talk-story to share history, religion, literature, and filial duty (25). Through Winnie's testimonials, she opens the wounds she once kept hidden from Pearl, enabling her wounds to heal in their retelling, sealing the cultural and emotional rift between mother and daughter, and establishing a voice and an identity of her own.

3.2.4 WINNIE'S NARRATIVE

The Kitchen God's Wife is set mostly in China, incorporating pre-revolutionary China to the invasion of the Japanese and the Second World War. Adams, in her 2003 published essay, offers that *The Kitchen God's Wife* represents a particular period of Chinese history involving the Japanese illegal invasion of China during the 1930s and 1940s, charting the Japanese movement from Shanghai to Nanking, which ultimately resulted in the Rape of Nanking ("Representing History" 9). Winnie shares the horror of the Rape of Nanking, as she informs Pearl of the political turmoil in China:

Raped old women, married women, and little girls, taking turns with them, over and over again. Sliced them open with a sword when they were all used up. Cut off their fingers to take their rings. Shot all the little sons, no more generations. Raped ten thousand, chopped down twenty or thirty thousand, a number that is no longer a number, no longer people. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 234)

The Chinese Nationalists and Communists joined forces to fend off the Japanese, and this period of war unsettled the citizens of China. In addition to the Rape of Nanking, the Japanese pilots were making life unbearable in China by dropping bombs in villages which killed innocent civilians. Winnie remembers:

Bombs, I was falling, the ground was shaking, then roaring in my ear, and from all sides I heard glass shattering...The world had changed...lying on the rooftops and in the road were all the things that had blown over the buildings. Bits of blankets and stools, a bicycle wheel, a cookstove and pot, and torn pieces of clothing – only it was not just clothing, but a sleeve with a bent arm, a shoe with a foot, and things I did not want to recognize...hearing other mothers calling for lost children, watching layer after layer of hope peeled away, hearing shouts, then screams, then moans of disbelief fading into whispers of regret. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 295; 296; 298)

This time of political uncertainty mixed with fears of personal safety festooned the emotional climate for the Chinese people who lived in constant terror, not knowing if they would survive the attacks from the Japanese army. The inhumane treatment by the Japanese army towards the Chinese people is paralleled with the callous treatment Winnie endures from Wen Fu, who was fighting in the Chinese Nationalist Army. Caesar states that Winnie tells the story of an increasingly violent and degrading marriage set against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of China, and as the war continues, so Wen Fu's character spirals into similar destruction (40). Adams suggests that *The Kitchen God's Wife* draws parallels between the Rape of Nanking and the rape of Winnie, by comparing similarities between the Japanese military and her Chinese

husband; both these groups of men refused to accept responsibility for their crimes ("Representing History" 16). In telling the story of her life, Winnie reveals how she endured the most horrific abuse from Wen-Fu, while traditional Chinese society not only failed to intervene, but Caesar adds, colluded with her husband to add to her victimization (38). The political uncertainty in China during the Japanese invasion and the Second World War illustrates the physical insecurity together with the emotional insecurity Winnie endures from her marriage with Wen Fu as a victim of abuse, while Chinese society failed to protect her from her abusive husband because, as a woman, she was considered worthless.



In the patriarchal society of China, not only were women considered as insignificant, their sole purpose was to continue the male lineage through reproduction. Additionally, women and girls also had to perform certain gender behaviour to show that they were from respectful homes. Such behaviour ultimately decided the quality of their marital opportunities. Winnie enlightens Pearl regarding the status of females in China, making her aware that to be female in Christianized America and to be female in Confucian China were two completely opposite experiences: "I don't know why everyone thought Confucius was so good, so wise. He made everyone look down on someone else, women were the lowest" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 103). In terms of applying De Beauvoir's theory, Confucian principles positioned Chinese women into the displaced status of the Other, as women were defined by Confucian ideology to be subservient to men. Chinese women's Othered status is solidified by males through differentiating women to themselves, the Self, and based on their physical differences and gendered

duties, women are rendered irrelevant to men, and treated accordingly. According to Butler, gender performances are delineated and assigned to each gender, and members were expected to perform according to their respective gender through rehearsing their gendered acts ("Performing Acts" 901). Nonetheless, Old Aunt instilled the Confucian ethics of female submission in Winnie, ensuring that she performed her required gender through rehearsing the socially acceptable acts that were expected from females:

Old Aunt...was raised in a feudal family, the traditional way: The girl's eyes should never be used for reading, only for sewing. The girl's ears should never be used for listening to ideas, only to orders. The girl's lips should be small, rarely used, except to express appreciation or ask for approval. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 102)

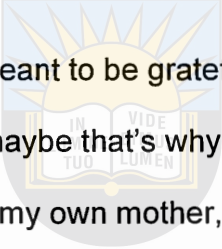
Women therefore had to perform these gendered acts of submission and servitude to prevent shaming themselves and their families. A girl who embodied Confucian ethics was thus valued above one who rebelled against it.

Tan learned, while researching the history of the status of women in China, that:

a third of all deaths among women in rural areas are suicides. Nationwide, more than two million Chinese women each year attempt suicide, and 300 000 succeed. And in contrast to any other country, more women than men in China kill themselves....Conditions for women in China have changed for the better in the last hundred years, and life in the countryside may not be egalitarian, but is it really so bad that women are willing to down a bottle of rat poison? (Tan *The Opposite of Fate* 80)

This situation is exemplified in the life of Winnie's mother who committed suicide.

Winnie's mother had no recourse to correct these injustices, as women belonged either to their fathers or husbands, and decided she would rather kill herself than endure an oppressive life as a woman and a concubine. Winnie's societal position thus worsened with the death of her mother. Winnie was now seen as a burden on the household by her father. As she had no mother to care for her, her father banished her from his household to live with her aunts, where she was ousted by Peanut, her aunts' favoured child. Winnie states:



Of course, I hurt...I was meant to be grateful. They took me in, leftovers of my mother's disgrace...And maybe that's why I hurt – they had no intentions for me. They forgot I did not have my own mother, someone who could tell me what I was really feeling, what I really wanted, someone who could guide me to my expectations. From that family, I learned to expect nothing, to want so much.

(Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 112)

The reader notices Winnie's sense of unworthiness from being passed on to her aunt's house as a product of her mother's disgrace. If her own father abandoned her, then no one would wish to care for her. Winnie was only to see her father again twelve years later, to seek his acceptance for the marriage proposal and learned again the level of his disgust: "I found out: My father knew all along the Wen family character was not so good. So by allowing me to marry into the family, he was saying I was not so good either" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 150). Winnie's father was the only person vested with the authority to accept or decline marriage proposals for his daughters. "Old Aunt announced a marriage proposal from the Wen family - not for Peanut, but for me. I did

not say yes. I did not say no. Nobody asked for my answer because it was not my choice to make" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 136). Thus, Winnie is forced into a subdued position by her father as she is rendered silent in her capacity to be heard and voice her discontent at her own marriage proposal. Winnie's misfortune of losing her mother early in life began the destructive spiral in her life, as she was without loving and caring guidance which would have formed the basis of good decision making. "So you see, I did not have a mother to tell me who to marry, who not to marry...Although sometimes, even a mother cannot help her daughter, no matter what" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 110). Winnie, however, was aware that even if her mother was still alive, there was only so much a mother could do to shelter her daughter from disaster, as even mothers had a limited position of power and voice.



Thus Winnie was forced to endure the pre-arranged marriage with the abusive Wen Fu who became the main oppressor in Winnie's life. Anderson explains that arranged marriages in pre-revolutionary China were the norm, one of the many demeaning rites of passage a woman endures. Women were reduced to commodities when they were married to another family, as the nuclear family received compensation for the passing of ownership of a girl to her new marital home. Winnie started noticing a change in Wen Fu's character when he was called to the Nationalist army to fight the Japanese invasion; however, this change was most evident after she gave birth to a baby girl, Yiku. Anderson observes: "In a culture that idolizes sons and dreads the birth of a daughter, to be born female comes perilously close to being born less than human". Wen Fu did not only demean his baby girl, but he disregarded and disrespected Winnie

for her role in bringing another female into the world, treating her more like an animal than a child. He took great enjoyment in humiliating her in front of people even if it was he who was in the wrong. For instance, Wen Fu accused Winnie of being a whore because she sang songs at the dinner table with Wen Fu's colleagues and friends, while he was sick in bed. Wen Fu construed her behaviour as signs of infidelity, although he had instructed her to entertain his colleagues. His response was public and immediate:

...he reached over and slapped me, gave me a real big slap in front of all those people... nobody tried to stop him. They watched and did nothing as I lay with my head touching the floor. They said nothing when my husband ordered me to say, "Sorry, I am wrong, you are right. Please forgive me."...As I bowed and begged, cried and knocked my head on the floor, I was thinking, Why doesn't anyone help me? Why do they stand there, as if I were truly wrong? (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 252; 253)

The fact that no one flinched at Wen Fu's abusive treatment of Winnie confirms the patriarchal norms of Chinese society, and the second-rate status allocated women. In China's patriarchal society, Wen Fu easily escaped blame for his oppressive behaviour. Xinran states that a man battering his wife or beating his children was considered to be "putting his house in order" by many Chinese (201). The fact that Wen Fu slapped Winnie was not questioned by their guests as it was acceptable for men to discipline their wives in public. This confirms that women were perceived as juveniles in that they received the same treatment given a naughty child.

Further evidence of Wen Fu's abuse is noted in his complicity in orchestrating his daughter's death. By refusing to interrupt his game of mah jong to allow the doctor to attend to Yiku, and ignoring her fatal symptoms whilst proclaiming Winnie was exaggerating her condition, Wen Fu callously indicates his disinterest in his daughter, even proclaiming to everyone "If she dies, I wouldn't care" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 266). However, once Yiku was moments away from death, Wen Fu changed his attitude, questioning Winnie's motherhood, while not one person in the room took Winnie's side when it was so obvious that Wen Fu had disregarded his daughter's health. Adams offers that Winnie was thus forced to accept the unreliability of eyewitnesses as Chinese society would turn a blind eye to the bad character of a male, yet support evidence of a woman's wrongdoing ("Representing History" 19). Winnie's witnesses, most of whom were men, did nothing to help a beaten woman and a dying child. Not only were they afraid of Wen Fu's violent temper, but they lived in a culture that never criticized men, advocating the Confucian doctrine of male supremacy. In fact, Adams offers that violence against a wife or a daughter does not signify oppression in the Chinese patriarchal society because women's significance is determined by men ("Representing History" 20). This again relates to De Beauvoir's feminist theory of the Othered position of women in society as men felt they occupied the privileged position over women, as Confucius had solidified this ideology in Chinese society. Winnie reveals to Pearl that this is how she and everyone else in China were raised: "never to criticize men or the society. I could blame only other women..." (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 257). Criticizing men was taboo, something that was viewed as disgraceful if one uttered words of disdain in the presence of males about their character.

Women were also reduced to commodities by becoming concubines to men who were already married. Tan writes: "Back then, there was no other reason to marry a second, third, and fourth wife, except to use a woman's prettiness to add to a man's prestige" (*The Kitchen God's Wife* 101). For a man to have more than one wife was a symbol of his wealth, as it suggested that he could afford to buy more than one wife, and if the woman was pretty, this only added to her value, which the husband hoped would increase his standing in society. In terms of Irigaray's feminist theory, one of the ways in which women are controlled by men is through reducing a woman to a commodity, something which exudes value for exchange purposes. Men in China dominated women by attaching value to a woman's body and using her for displays of wealth and financial transactions, such as marriage and concubinage. Wen Fu did not marry a second wife during his marriage to Winnie although it could be argued that he could not afford to marry a second wife at the time when the Chinese economy was the most fragile due to the Sino-Japanese War. Winnie's father, however, had five wives which was an ostentatious sign of his abundant wealth. Wen Fu did not have to reduce Winnie's status to an object by marrying a second wife, his treatment over her was evident enough that he did not respect his wife:

I thought about how Wen Fu had gambled away almost all my dowry money: When there was no more money to steal from me, he used my own body like a gambling chip, laughing and telling the men they could sleep with me if he lost! I remembered the many nights he used my body after he had already been with another woman: He even brought a woman right to our bed and forced me to

watch. Of course, I did not, but I could not shut my ears. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 321)

Winnie was considered an object in Wen Fu's eyes, he used her to gain his selfish desires, and once satisfied, he had no need for her. She was not treated like a person, an equal, or a woman; she was used and abused by her husband, and left to pick up the broken pieces of her soul, once he had finished consuming her dignity.

Women were, therefore, regarded as an opportunity to expand one's wealth, based solely on finances. "Getting married in those days was like buying real estate. Here, you see a house you want to live in, you find a real estate agent. Back in China, you saw a rich family with a daughter, you found a go-between who knew how to make a good business deal" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 134). When a woman married, she would be transferred to her husband's family home, where she would be given duties to fulfill, mostly cleaning and cooking. Money was exchanged in the transaction: the husband's family provided bridal gifts to the bride and her relatives, and the bride's family, in turn, reinvested the bridal wealth. This financial exchange for a woman's body further illustrates Irigaray's theory that women are controlled by men through attaching financial value to their bodies. Barlow argues that the very act of buying and selling a bride, reduced her status in society and her household, as she was viewed as a commodity, something bought and paid for, the owner of the 'thing' being allowed to get as much use out of it as they desired (20). He continues by stating that marriage was thus a political and social arrangement, and was seen as an opportunity for raising the class standing of the bride's natal family, or the bride's married family (20). Marrying for

love, the choice that is offered in the West, was a concept unknown in pre-revolutionary China, as marriage was arranged by the parents whose decision was based on the money they would garner from the marital home for the transaction of marriage, and payment for their daughter.

Furthermore, oppression towards women in China was evidenced in the judicial system that favoured testimonies from men over those of women. Adams explains that Chinese patriarchal ideology, especially in the family and the legal system, endorsed a gendered hierarchy that repeatedly privileged Wen Fu's false account over Winnie's, even when the facts suggested otherwise (*"The Kitchen God's Wife"*). Wen Fu took Winnie to court when she attempted to flee from his stronghold for a better life in America to be with her new husband, Jimmy Louie, whom she met at one of Wen Fu's military dances that was hosted by American soldiers. Wen Fu became particularly angry at the night of the dance as Jimmy Louie, an American soldier and Winnie's future husband, asked to dance with Winnie, resulting in feelings of extreme jealousy in Wen Fu. Once he and Winnie left the dance, he put a gun to her head to sign divorce papers, and Winnie willingly signed. In the court proceedings against Winnie, there was no evidence of the divorce as Wen Fu had burned down the lawyer's office that held the copy of the divorce certificate. It was quite impossible for women to divorce their husbands, Kim postulates, but men could divorce their wives, especially if she had committed adultery (*"Half of China"*). This contributed to the double standards of the Chinese patriarchal society as men could be in the position to possess more than one wife, but women were expected to maintain loyalty towards their polygamous husbands, who were their fiercest

oppressors. Adams states that the Chinese patriarchal institutions of marriage and law operated to ensure that males, and in this case Wen Fu's, version of events were considered to be the most accurate ("Representing History" 17). Winnie explains:

The judge told me what my charge was... "These are all lies," I said in a quiet voice. I told the judge, "My husband divorced me a long time ago, during the war, when he put a gun to my head and forced me to sign a divorce paper...how could I be accused of deserting my husband for another man, when my husband had divorced me and was now living with another woman?" I said the other man was now my husband. We had already registered as husband and wife. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 373)

The court ruled that Winnie was guilty of abandoning her husband, as she had no evidence to prove their divorce, despite having witnesses who testified in her favour. The judge sentenced Winnie to two years in jail for the crime of infidelity. The Chinese media further accentuated the oppression by reporting biased acts which condemned Winnie and exonerated Wen Fu. "American Romance Ends in Death and Tragedy," ...I read more, all lies from Wen Fu, saying I had given up a respectable life, turned my back on my own father... – all because I was crazy for American sex. Wen Fu knew what the newspapers wanted to hear" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 375). Assisted by powerful institutions as the law and media, Wen Fu succeeded in portraying himself as the victim through the loss of his wife and property. Adams states that because Chinese patriarchal institutions accepted and promulgated Wen Fu's untruths, it effectively permitted a sexual violator to transform himself into the victim ("Representing History" 20). Adams further states that Chinese patriarchal ideology was so powerful that there

was no structure or language for criticizing men or the society they ruled ("Representing History" 20). Women were thus forced to endure the harsh treatment from their husbands, being powerless to speak out against the injustice of gender discrimination, without deviating from their gendered norm of submission.

3.2.5 FEMINIST ANALYSIS

The beginning of Winnie's emancipation occurs when she commences to fight for a better life by her resistance to Wen Fu's demand for subservience:

Maybe my wife has now learned her lesson. If she says she is sorry, I will forgive everything, and she can come home with me... "I would rather sleep on the concrete floor of a jail," I heard myself say in a loud voice... So you see, in the end, Wen Fu was the one who was humiliated. And when they took me away, I was smiling. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 375)

By refusing to perform her gender role of submission by accepting fault and repenting to her husband, and instead talking back to him and standing up for herself, Winnie deviates from her designated gender role. According to Butler's theory of gender, Winnie is not only liberating herself from her required gender and its associated performances, but also freeing herself from the patriarchal system of China that has oppressed females by demanding they act in a submissive manner. Winnie explains the contradictory nature of Chinese gender acts, and how women were required to act and accept blame for any misfortune: "That was the Chinese way, to use yourself as an excuse, to say you were unworthy, when really you mean that you are worth more" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 258). Winnie resisted the patriarchal required performances that dictated women

to speak in riddles and accept blame for accused misbehaviour to show their submission. Instead, she rose above the expectation of women and instilled strength and power into her words and actions. The amount of physical, mental and psychological abuse she endured at the hands of Wen Fu, fueled her resistance to him, and compelled her to stand up to her oppressor through taking on the patriarchal unfeminine qualities of anger, rage and confrontation.

The final act of oppression that Winnie endured from Wen Fu was when he confronted her at the apartment she shared with Helen in Shanghai, days before she was booked to fly out of China for San Francisco to re-unite with her husband, Jimmy Louie.

He yanked me up by the hair and said, "Beg me, beg me to let you be my wife."

He waved his gun in my face... What could I do? I was weak. I was strong. I had hope. I had hope. I couldn't give up my hope. And so I begged him. And in the end, I was right. He lied. He said he was taking my tickets away. He put them in his pants pocket. And then he went to the bathroom, left me on the floor crying. But then I saw the gun on the table I reached for it, held it between my hands, and shouted for him to come back. When he saw me with the gun, his eyes widened; then he frowned. "You don't know how to fire a gun," he sneered. "I will learn killing you," I said. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 393)

Wen Fu sensed Winnie's rage, and for once she had the power to determine life or death for him by holding her own weapon of destruction. In the face of Winnie's rage, Wen Fu relented and returned the airplane tickets that he confiscated from Winnie. It is through rebelling against her gendered role of subordination that Winnie was able to

overpower Wen Fu, and instill the same fear in him that he had once instilled in her. By the end of Winnie's story, she was willing to shoot Wen Fu, an act of disrupting gender heteronormativity in patriarchal China, if he did not return her airplane tickets to America: her passage to freedom.

Winnie's emancipation defied the patriarchal customs in China that were evident in Confucian principles and Taoist philosophy. Winnie mentions to Pearl the Taoist concept of yin and yang, that every baby is born resembling both their mother and father:

Of course, every baby is born with yin and yang. The yin comes from the woman. The yang comes from the man. When you were born, I tried to see whose yang you had. I tried to see your daddy. I would say, look, she has Jimmy Louie's smile. I tried to forget everything else. But inside my heart I saw something else.

(Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 398)

Izgarjan writes even though Winnie quietly acknowledged that Wen Fu was Pearl's biological father, this fact did not deter her from loving and caring for Pearl, as Winnie tells Pearl that in her, she sees all the children she lost but could never forget (244). Winnie also explains to Pearl why she slapped her at the funeral of Jimmy Louie, the man who raised her. Winnie remembers how Pearl refused to cry at the funeral, which angered Winnie as she interpreted it as a sign that Wen Fu's personality traits were beginning to surface in Pearl. Winnie's misinterpretation of Pearl's actions thus highlights her inability to understand Pearl as she and Pearl are products of two different cultures, who speak different languages, each with its own method of interpretation.

Fidder notes that this situation illustrates how Winnie misunderstands Pearl, by accusing her of not caring for her father, when in fact Pearl cared very much for her father and couldn't mourn a corpse who no longer resembled the father she knew and loved (42). It is this misinterpretation that Winnie wants to redress and hopes to re-establish a relationship with her distanced daughter. Not only does Winnie try to make Pearl understand her past, but she also allows Pearl to see her for who she really is, and not the emotionally distant Chinese mother Pearl always thought her to be. Winnie frees herself from the bondage of her horrendous past and the heavy secret of Pearl's biological father, and in doing so she finally liberates herself by discovering her shameful past and showing her daughter her real self: a woman of inner-strength, resilience, and great will.



Winnie interprets the linguistic and cultural differences present in American and Chinese culture through her statement:

Maybe you see things in an American way, and I see the same things in a Chinese way. You are saying, "Look at the pretty fish in the bowl." And I say, "Look at the pretty bowl with the fish." And it does not matter what words we use.

It is the same pretty bowl, the same pretty fish. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 341)

She does, however, conclude by saying that even though the words are different, the meaning is still the same. This is relevant to Winnie and Pearl's static relationship as they could not find common ground between their cultural ideology and behaviour, however, upon closer examination, they are in fact fighting for the same thing, to win each other's trust and love. In terms of Ang's feminist idea, westernized feminists, who

occupy the position of Self, can only relate to Othered women of colour when acknowledging the differences between themselves and women of colour. Because Pearl had rejected her Chinese culture and assumed the position of Self, she first had to notice what made her and her mother, the Othered woman of colour, different before she could connect with her mother and acknowledge her Chinese background. Therefore, instead of writing off each other's differences, they actually find similarities through their differences: the wholeness of their intentions and the motivation behind their thought and actions. Through Winnie's narration of her oppressive life events, Pearl begins to view her mother differently, realizing that Winnie is not a maternal stranger devoid of intelligence, suffering, and emotion, but that her mother is a warrior, a fighter, and a survivor, someone to whom she can relate and respect. It is from Winnie's revelation of Pearl's abusive biological father that Pearl feels safe to confide in her mother about the secret she has been hiding from her: her terminal illness. Once Pearl confides in her mother about her medical condition, Winnie starts to worry about Pearl, but Fidler postulates that Pearl realizes that it is Winnie's way of showing love (48). From understanding the cultural context infusing her mother's actions, she begins to accept her cultural roots. She is inspired by Winnie's revelations of how she faced her fears and overcame her adversaries. She explains her ambivalence: "But all of a sudden I realized: I didn't want her to stop...she was tearing it away, my protective shell, my anger, my deepest fears, my despair. She was putting all this into her own heart, so that I could finally see what was left. Hope" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 402). Fidler writes that this renewed hope is what mends the emotionally distant relationship between Winnie and Pearl, allowing Pearl not only to accept her mother, but also accept

herself as Chinese through appreciating her struggle of becoming through the constant changing of the self, and finding a way to be whole (54). Winnie thus bestows hope in her daughter through telling her story, and it is with this hope that Pearl decides to bridge the emotional and cultural rift that had separated the maternal pair.

It is through Winnie's struggle for independence that initiated her questioning fate as she could not comprehend why some people, like the tyrannical Wen Fu, had undeserved fortune, while some good people, like herself and Jimmy Louie, suffered misfortune. Winnie's final act of emancipation occurred when she renamed an altar known as the Kitchen God that was given to her by a relative. The true tale behind this statue explains that there once lived a man, Zhang, whose nameless wife was very good to him, but he chose to leave her for a more attractive woman who did not take as good care of him, and left him after she exhausted his fortune. Zhang was found on a dirt road by his wife, who saved him from starvation, and when he realized it was his first wife who saved him, and in whose house he was being sheltered, he jumped into the fireplace. Once in heaven, the Jade Emperor awarded the man the position of the Kitchen God, after admitting that he wronged his faithful and docile wife, whose duty it was to watch all year who was good and bad, and then "seven days before New Year fly up the chimney to report to the Jade Emperor so that he can decide whose fate deserves a change for better or worse" (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 55). Izgarjan contends that it frustrated Winnie that the Jade Emperor decided to award Zhang with a god-like status despite his bad behaviour, instead of rewarding his faithful wife, as Winnie could relate to the submissively compliant wife of the Kitchen God (245). Winnie

decided to burn the picture of the Kitchen God attached to the altar, and turned his downtrodden wife into a goddess of her own right, by renaming the altar Lady Sorrowfree, after the long-suffering Kitchen God's Wife, whom she believes should acquire a god-like status:

Nobody worshipped me for living with Wen Fu. I was like that wife of Kitchen God. Nobody worshipped her either...she was forgotten ...she once had many hardships in her life...when you afraid, you can talk to her. She will listen. She will wash away everything sad with her tears...See her name: Lady Sorrowfree, happiness winning over bitterness, no regrets in this world. (Tan *The Kitchen God's Wife* 225; 415)

Lady Sorrowfree represents Winnie's strength and resilience and Winnie is indirectly encouraging Pearl to speak to her about her problems, ensuring that their relationship will not deteriorate despite their previous communication barriers. Winnie's recreating and renaming the altar that previously exalted a man for his misconduct, to a shrine dedicated to her hardships and endurance, also extends to all Chinese women. Izgarjan suggests that this illustrates Winnie's rejection of the treatment of women in China (245). Additionally, Fidler explains that by giving Lady Sorrowfree a name, Winnie supplies Lady Sorrowfree with her own identity, so she does not have to be defined by her husband as a submissive, docile wife (47). Winnie's renaming of the altar acknowledges the suffering wife, and portrays Winnie as finally freeing herself from oppression by defining herself in her own terms, and redefining the Kitchen God's Wife, now known as Lady Sorrowfree, as a goddess to be revered. After Winnie determinedly liberated herself from patriarchal submission in China and divulging to her daughter the

long-held secret of her paternity, Winnie feels that she is now free of any chains of oppression that Wen Fu held over her, directly and indirectly. Through Winnie informing Pearl of her paternity, she finally unshackles herself from Wen Fu's indirect distress on her, and she is finally able to reveal herself to Pearl as a woman of agency, persistence, inner strength, and fierce determination.

In conclusion, *The Kitchen God's Wife* is a moving story of how a woman endures a marriage to a cruel man whose abusive behaviour is deemed acceptable by society. Winnie's character inspires the reader as it is a chronicle from oppression to liberation and from silence to declaration. It is admirable that Winnie survived such oppressive circumstances to start her life afresh in America. Her honesty mends her relationship with Pearl, and promotes the universal message that women are not subordinate beings, but beings of ferocious strength, resilience, and an unwavering willpower. The next section explores Tan's third text, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and focuses on the attainment of agency in females through writing.

CHAPTER THREE (PART THREE)

THE BONSETTER'S DAUGHTER

They write stories of things that are, but should not have been. They write about what could have been, what might still be. They write of a past that can be changed. After all, Bao Bomu says, what is the past but what we choose to remember.... Ruth remembers this as she writes a story. It is for her grandmother, for herself, for the little girl who became her mother (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 338; 339).

The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) continues using the themes of mother-daughter conflict, communication barriers, and ethnic double consciousness present in *The Joy Luck Club*, and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, however, models Tan's and her mother's experiences and their mother-daughter friction more closely than the other two books. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* focuses on written accounts of storytelling, which differs from the previous two texts that explored the significance of oral storytelling.

The Bonesetter's Daughter encompasses the stories of LuLing Liu Young and Ruth Young, a mother and daughter belonging to different cultural contexts. LuLing was born and raised in China, and belonged to a generation of women who experienced oppression from men who held Confucian beliefs. The polarizing experiences that mother and daughter endured during their childhood and adolescence emotionally estranged their mother-daughter relationship, and their cultural differences created barriers which made it difficult for them to form a close relationship.

3.3.1 LULING'S BACKGROUND

LuLing was raised by a woman whom she believed to be her nursemaid, and called her Precious Auntie, the English translation of *Bao Bomu*. In her younger days, Precious Auntie turned down the marriage proposal of a wealthy but violent coffin-maker, Chang, while accepting a proposal from the ink making Liu family. Out of rage for being rejected, Chang killed Precious Auntie's fiancé and widowed father on the day of her wedding. Overcome with grief, Precious Auntie swallowed boiling ink as an attempt to kill herself, causing irreparable damage to her face. LuLing describes her appearance:

...Precious Auntie's mouth. It was a puzzle. Half was bumpy, half was smooth and melted closed. The inside of her right cheek was stiff as leather, the left was moist and soft. Where the gums burned, the teeth had fallen out. And her tongue was like a parched root. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 2; 3)

She did not die, but the physical effects were permanent and she was physically forced into silence. The Liu family nursed her to health, but discovering that she was pregnant, and to avoid family shame and another scandal, the Liu family agreed that a female relation should claim the baby, while Precious Auntie, in her voiceless and deformed state, would be its nurse.

While Precious Auntie was still alive, and LuLing was entering her teenage years, she wrote LuLing a letter, in the form of a manuscript, informing her of the earlier tragedy. Her deformation may have vocally silenced her, but she used writing as her tool of communication. LuLing only pretended to read the manuscript, as she was too romantically preoccupied with Chang's son, and too annoyed with Precious Auntie for

her apparent and unexplained distaste of her boyfriend. LuLing only discovered after Precious Auntie's second and successful attempt at suicide that Precious Auntie was actually her mother. This discovery was compounded by the awful realization that Precious Auntie died because LuLing chose Chang over her own mother.

Due to Precious Auntie's speechless and insignificant status, she represents Spivak's silenced subaltern whose voice could not be heard, as Precious Auntie had no voice with which to communicate. Spivak used the death of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri in her works to represent the subaltern, as Bhaduri failed to voice her discontent to people unwilling to listen ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 103). Tan represents oppressed women of China through the depiction of Precious Auntie in the same way as Spivak represents silenced women in society through the explanation of Bhaduri's suicide. Thus it is through Precious Auntie's suicide, an act that metaphorically screams her frustration of LuLing's marriage proposal with Chang's son, more effectively than her failed attempts at gesturing her unhappiness. Her extreme efforts illustrate Precious Auntie's status of a voiceless and ignored subaltern.

At her mother's death, the Liu family disowned LuLing, forcing her to study and teach at an orphanage, where she fell in love with a man who later died in war. After losing her lover in the war, LuLing followed GaoLing, a close female relative, to America. GaoLing and LuLing were born in the same year, so LuLing had to backdate her year of birth five years, which according to Chinese cosmology, changed her personality from being born

in a Dragon year to a Hog year, to claim siblinghood with GaoLing and gain entry and sponsorship into America.

LuLing decided to write down her memories of China, in the same way as Precious Auntie wrote LuLing her life story and the circumstances behind LuLing's birth. As LuLing was of old age, she suffered from escalating memory loss and was afraid she would soon forget this all important information. What had been worrying LuLing was that she could not remember Precious Auntie's name, and this deeply saddened her as she felt that without a name, Precious Auntie could not be recognized or validated as having lived. "*Never forget this name...Why can't I see it now? Almost all that mattered in my life has disappeared, and the worst is losing Precious Auntie's name*" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 5). By ignoring the importance of the weight of the words attached to the attempted mode of communication, Ruth, LuLing's daughter, discarded the manuscript in the same way as LuLing discarded Precious Auntie's letter. Yet in Ruth's case, she struggled to understand LuLing's manuscript because it was written in Chinese, a language which she could not decipher.

Writing is the form of communication between mother and daughter in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, which contrasts to the talk-story of Tan's previous two novels. Dunick writes that *The Bonesetter's Daughter* focuses on the permanence of written texts which become artifacts once having outlived the writer (11). Whereas oral talk-story lives in one's memory, and dies with the storyteller, writing is eternal as it is documented, and lives beyond the writer. According to Dunick, writing and written texts offer more

accurate representations of cultural identity as they are a conscious and deliberate method of communication making them more powerful in their existence, unlike the haphazard and inconsistent nature of oral talk-story (12). Through their explications of cultural identity, Tan utilizes the original authorship of women in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* to illustrate the importance of writing to connect an estranged mother and daughter.

3.3.2 RUTH'S BACKGROUND

Ruth is a ghost writer of self-help books and cohabits with an Anglo-American man and his two daughters from a previous marriage. In her adult life, Ruth feels overburdened by the constant expectations she is pressured to live up to by different people in her life; her husband complains that she is too complicated and makes any situation difficult, her mother moans that Ruth is too busy to make time for her, while Ruth also has to meet the demands of the publishers for whom she works. Her client describes her weakness: "Face it, sweetheart, you're accommodating. Willing to bend over backward...They walk all over you and you take it. You're easy" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 42).

Through her inability to connect to her culture and her mother, Ruth lacks core beliefs of personhood with which to integrate in her life. She is viewed as a complacent doormat, an easy target, someone who bends whichever ways she is being pushed, and has little control over her own self and feelings.

Focused on pleasing everyone else, Ruth failed to please herself, and thus her over accommodating nature interferes with her own aspirations. She only feels comfortable

writing ideas of other people, as penning her own imaginative thoughts seems fearfully overwhelming:

She wanted to write a novel in the style of Jane Austen...a book that had nothing to do with her own life....writing stories as a way to escape... In her imagination she could change everything, herself, her mother, her past. But the idea of revising her life also frightened her, as if by imagination alone she were condemning what she did not like about herself and others. Writing what you wished was the most dangerous form of wishful thinking. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 27)

Ruth longed to write a book of her own, but feared that documenting her thoughts and visiting the creative, "wishful" part of her mind would only nullify her own life. Instead, Ruth suffered in silence when her books were published without her name, as she was only a ghost writer, someone who subsumed their voice and became only an echo for someone else.

Even though Ruth is the Americanized and modernized version of her mother, Pu argues that she still blindly follows the oppressive silent path that pervaded her mother and her grandmother's lives, as well as all women of China (12): "...when the books were published, Ruth had to sit back quietly at parties while the clients took credit for being brilliant...she wanted some recognition" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 37; 38). By remaining silent and allowing others to take the praise for her own work, Ruth thus reduces herself to a subaltern, as she feels she has no cultivated voice of her own. This

result from her accommodating, self-effacing personality, as she feels inadequate to speak up to the demands that other's place on her.

3.3.3 ETHNIC STUDIES ANALYSIS

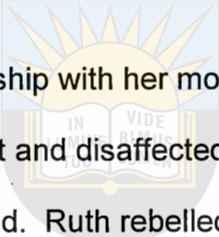
During adolescence, Ruth developed feelings of shame regarding her cultural differences, and desired to be part of the popular white acculturated group at her school, although her ethnic and cultural differences prevented any such inclusion. Ruth thus represents Fanon's acculturated being, someone who alienates his/her own culture and dons the white mask of privilege to be accepted by society through his/her striving to assume white culture. According to Ruth, LuLing always appeared angry and upset, as if her life had been cursed, but Ruth felt that her mother's constantly aggressive state was because no one was able to understand her mother. She recounts: "LuLing got into fights because of her poor English. She didn't understand others, or they didn't understand her. Ruth used to feel she was the one who suffered because of that" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 42). As a result of Ruth assimilating into American culture, and donning the mask of white acculturation, Ruth felt shame at her mother's lack of Americanisms and English language skills, especially when she could not pronounce Ruth's name properly. "It used to mortify Ruth when she shouted for her up and down the block. "Lootie! Lootie!" Why had her mother chosen a name with sounds she couldn't pronounce?" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 42). Ruth remembers how she was teased as a child when her schoolmates heard her mother speak, in a garbled English which was difficult for Ruth and her school mates to understand. "Ruth stood at the top of the slide, frozen with shame...Some of the first-graders were laughing down below.

"Is that your mother?" they shouted. "What's that gobbledy-gook-gook she's saying" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 65). According to Pu, this humiliation formed by LuLing's culturally inappropriate language usage and utterance caused Ruth to distance herself from both her mother and her culture, two giant hurdles that blocked acceptance from American society (13). Thus, it is clear from the resultant shame Ruth experienced that she had Othered her mother, placing her into a position of inferiority based on her mother's lack of English language proficiency and acculturation. Because her mother spoke English differently to society's standards, or what Tan would term a form of "Englishes" in her essay "Mother Tongue", American society labeled LuLing as the Other, possessing inferior qualities from the Self (7). Thus, these qualities formed a huge barrier according to what society validated as the norm and the Self, or invalidated as the Other. Pu argues that as Ruth alienated herself from her culture in early childhood, she never matured emotionally as she held no identity of her own (18). While attempting to gain acceptance into American culture, she instead placed herself in a doubly silenced position. To Ruth's American friends she was viewed as Chinese, while to her mother she was a disobedient daughter. It is clear that Ruth suffered from Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness as she felt unable to connect wholly to one specific culture, disenfranchised from both host and home. Being exposed to American culture at school, while being immersed in Chinese culture at home, Ruth felt the burden of having to switch between these cultural codes depending on her audience, which resulted in feelings of displacement and confusion regarding her own identity.

3.3.4 WRITING AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Tan not only includes the relationship between Ruth and her mother, LuLing, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, but also features the mother-daughter relationship between LuLing and Precious Auntie. Thus Tan illustrates the importance of a strong mother-daughter relationship, the heartache LuLing suffered since Precious Auntie's preventable death, and the confusion Ruth endured from being unable to connect with her culturally different mother. LuLing and Precious Auntie were very close to one another, although at the time, LuLing still believed she was her nursemaid and not her mother. Even though Precious Auntie was mute due to her first attempted suicide, she communicated through signals, facial expressions, and hand gestures which only LuLing could comprehend. "No one else understood Precious Auntie's kind of talk, so I had to say aloud what she meant" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 3). LuLing was the only person who understood Precious Auntie and could translate into words what Precious Auntie failed to voice. Not only did Precious Auntie communicate through non-verbal gestures, but LuLing read meaning into Precious Auntie's words through the art of calligraphy. Through Precious Auntie's calligraphy teachings, Dunick offers, she established that when writing "a person must think about her intentions", and demonstrated this to LuLing as "her *ch'i* flowed from her body into her arm, through the brush and into the stroke", with each stroke representing the energy and character of the writer; a signifier of their intentions (12; Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 226). Therefore, LuLing deciphered Precious Auntie's intentions and deepest feelings through reading her calligraphy. Dunick further states that the characters created by Chinese calligraphy were not only signifiers of communication, but also embodied the life and character of

the writer (12). Thus, it is through writing that LuLing could appreciate the care and effort that Precious Auntie undertook in writing to her daughter. However, this prosperous mother-daughter relationship soured when LuLing was set to marry into the disreputable Chang family. LuLing rebelled against her mother, ignoring her counsel to break from her fiancé. This rejection resulted in Precious Auntie taking her own life, something which LuLing felt responsible for and lived to regret. She hoped to be forgiven by seeking redemption from Precious Auntie's ghost.



While LuLing enjoyed a quality relationship with her mother until its tragic end, Ruth's relationship with her mother was distant and disaffected, far from the close relationship that her mother and Precious Auntie had. Ruth rebelled against her own mother, just as her mother, LuLing, rebelled against Precious Auntie. Ruth did not want to learn anything Chinese orientated, and instead focused her attention to honing her American skills of acculturation. Attempting to forge a bond with her daughter, LuLing tried to teach Ruth the art of Chinese calligraphy, which was so lovingly taught to her by Precious Auntie. Fidler writes that because calligraphy was associated with being Chinese, a distant country and a meaningless culture according to Ruth, she had no interest in acquiring this apparently useless foreign skill (16).

Her mother once drilled Chinese calligraphy into her reluctant brain, and she still recognized some of the characters: 'thing', 'I', 'truth'. But unraveling the rest required her to match LuLing's squiggly radicals to uniform ones in a Chinese-English dictionary. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 12)

In terms of Anzaldua's feminist idea that language and ethnic identity are interrelated, Ruth is unable to establish an ethnic identity for herself stemming from her inability and disinterest to learn Chinese, the language of her mother and heritage. Ruth therefore suffers from insecurity and indecisiveness due to her mental and emotional perplexity exasperated by the exchanging of cultures, neither of which she is fully able to embrace. It is clear that Ruth held the position of Said's Orientalist, a Westernized person who judged non-western cultures according to their biased point of view, and 'apparent' superior knowledge of the Orient. Ruth was not interested in learning Chinese calligraphy as it was steeped in Chinese culture, something she viewed as the insignificant Other that deviated from her privileged Westernized stance as the Self. Her lack of desire to learn Chinese calligraphy, coupled with Ruth's inability to speak the maternal language, resulted in her inability to understand the manuscript her mother wrote to her in careful Chinese calligraphy. Ruth had to get her mother's manuscript translated by Mr. Tang so she could read what her mother wrote to her six years before; feeling a sense of urgency at her mother's deteriorating mental state. Ruth also did not want to ask her mother to help her unravel the Chinese calligraphy into Standard English, as it would only remind her mother how she made little effort to learn Chinese, and then be relabeled a disobedient daughter:

She knew from experience what happened whenever she asked her mother to render Chinese characters into English. First LuLing scolded her for not studying Chinese hard enough...then, to untangle each character, her mother took side routes to her past, going into excruciating detail over the infinite meanings of Chinese words. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 13)

Ruth believed that her mother would make translation unbearable because of her anger that Ruth refused to learn Chinese, however, what Ruth failed to realize was the different cultural contexts of Chinese and American culture, especially in the sphere of encoding and decoding language and communication.

Through writing, each generation is reconciled. After Ruth broke her arm when she was a child and decided to stay silent and not utter a word to anyone, she noticed staying silent garnered her more attention from her mother and school mates. Out of desperation, LuLing negotiated Ruth to communicate to her through writing in a sandbox with chopsticks. One night when Ruth wanted to persuade her mother to buy her a dog, she etched "Doggie" in the sand, which LuLing translated as Precious Auntie speaking to her through Ruth and the sandbox, as "Doggie" was the affectionate name Precious Auntie called LuLing (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 72). Ruth, at first, thought it was preposterous for her mother to think that her dead grandmother was using her as a vessel of communication, as Ruth felt completely in control of what she wrote in the sand. However, Ruth could not explain how her meaningless scribbles made sense to her mother:

She put the chopstick in the sand, and not knowing what to write, she drew a line and another below that. She drew two more lines and made a square. "Mouth!" her mother cried, tracing over the square...You wrote that and you didn't even know how to write Chinese! ...Ruth wondered what she had written. How could a square mean all that? Was there really a ghost in the room? (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 73; 74)

While LuLing and Ruth are unable to understand the other through verbal communication, writing became their mode of contact. Ruth manipulates her mother when she writes in the sand box on behalf of Precious Auntie, as Ruth understood the weight that was attached to Precious Auntie's supposed responses. Instead, Ruth responded to her mother's questions based on her own selfish wants, such as when Ruth wanted a dog. Ruth believes that her mother is deranged to think that a ghost could guide her writing, however, when LuLing understands Ruth's writing, Ruth starts to question her view on ghosts.



Writing is thus heavily featured in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* as a tool to enlighten and manipulate. While the manuscripts written by Precious Auntie and LuLing serve as an enlightening tool for their daughters, Ruth uses words to manipulate her mother. While LuLing believed Precious Auntie communicated to her through Ruth and her sandbox, Ruth uses this assumed misconception to her advantage, and through her "ghost writing" she organized her family's relocation. Thus, Ruth uses writing in the sandbox to communicate to her mother her own selfish desires, and she discovers that she "had never experienced such power with words" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 85). From acknowledging the power of words and gaining her own selfish desires through it, Ruth also discovers how to upset her mother through her selection of words intended for her mother's eyes.

As a teenager, Ruth felt that she could not tell her mother everything as she found her mother in a permanently petulant state and so Ruth possessed a diary in which she

expressed information and emotions which she withheld from her mother. LuLing believed that a mother and daughter should not keep secrets from each other; therefore, she read Ruth's diary, a personal invasion that horrified Ruth who only wanted the "right to privacy [and to] pursue [her] own happiness" that came with being an American citizen (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 134). Outraged by her mother's intense scrutiny, Ruth intentionally wrote hurtful words in her diary aimed at her mother, wanting her mother to read those words and realize what an overbearing mother she was. She writes: "I hate her! She's the worst mother a person could have... You talk about killing yourself, so why don't you ever do it? I wish you would. Just do it... Precious Auntie wants you to, and so do I!" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 135). Ruth viciously activated communicating to her mother through writing, fully aware of the effect that the power of words held over her mother. In reaction to Ruth's vitriolic comments, LuLing jumps out of a window, suffering concussion. LuLing's suicide attempt fills Ruth with guilt as she believes that she nearly killed her mother with her own words. Ruth also develops a fear of the power and importance that words hold, something that affects her for years to come. Through this experience, Ruth realizes that to use words in a clumsy, thoughtless manner may result in emotional, as well as physical damage to people.

3.3.5 FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Agapi Agnos, a parenting expert, and a client of Ruth's for whom she was ghosting a self-help book, explains to Ruth that parents affect their children's lives through their own beliefs and behavioural patterns. "...A parent, intentionally or not, imposes a cosmology on the little child...parents pass along this cosmology to children through

their behaviors, their reactions to daily events..." (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 39; 40). Pu argues that taking into account the nature and character of Precious Auntie, LuLing, and Ruth, reflects their interconnectedness and resistance: they all rebel against either their own mothers or acceptable societal standards (48). Each character understands the power of words and how to convey meaning through the use of words, while they also endure the agony of being misunderstood.

Precious Auntie lived in a time when marriages were to be arranged by one's parents and the bride and groom had no say in the marriage proposal. However, because Precious Auntie's mother died during her childhood, she was raised by her bonesetter father who taught his daughter the art of calligraphy, medicine, and bonesetting; the subjects which were only taught to men. Therefore, according to Pu, Precious Auntie challenged the gendered norms of patriarchal China during her childhood by disregarding the submissive, illiterate role that females were expected to pursue and possess (32). Precious Auntie embodied Butler's Gender Literary Theory as she challenged the required and acceptable gender norms of Chinese society. The fact that Precious Auntie turned down Chang's marriage proposal gives evidence of her rebellion against assigned gender roles. Pu argues that this most likely gave impetus to Chang's violent outburst as he was humiliated by a woman who had no right in patriarchal Chinese society to reject him (32). Another act which proves that Precious Auntie rebelled against her set gender norms was that she engaged in premarital intercourse with Liu, the man to whom she was engaged, which was viewed as disgraceful and immoral in Chinese society. Butler believed that society would punish individuals who

challenged the acts and performances associated with their required gender, in order to orchestrate submission to one's gender ("Performative Acts" 908). Precious Auntie was punished for her rebellious ways by Chang who killed her father and fiancé. She was further punished by the Liu family who took Precious Auntie's child and bestowed motherhood onto another family member, demoting Precious Auntie from a mother to a nursemaid. Even though Precious Auntie knew her rebellious acts were contrary to Chinese society, she privileged LuLing in teaching her how to write Chinese calligraphy, and that "good manners are not enough...they are not the same as a good heart" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 249). Precious Auntie was also instrumental in freeing LuLing from her future of unhappiness and submission at the hands of the evil Chang family. She wrote the Chang's a letter informing them that if LuLing married into the family, she would haunt the family forever. Precious Auntie's choice to kill herself in the hopes of saving her daughter from a lifetime of torture in the Chang family confirms her self-assertive and gender rebelling character. Precious Auntie once again rebelled against her gender assigned submissive role by killing herself to spare LuLing a lifetime of sadness, performing the masculine act of saving her daughter by inflicting pain on herself. Precious Auntie is punished for this heroic act by LuLing's stepmother who felt Precious Auntie inflicted shame onto their family, thereby ordering Precious Auntie's body to be dumped in the End of the World, a place below a cliff where the villagers disposed of their garbage.

LuLing also rebelled against the female norms of patriarchal China. After the Liu family rid itself of LuLing, a haunting reminder of Precious Auntie, LuLing carved out an

independent life for herself, teaching calligraphy at an American funded orphanage. Pu argues that the main prospect for Chinese women was to follow their superior's orders, usually the orders of their husbands, fathers, or brothers, and not to be the one voicing orders or giving instructions (40). However, just as Precious Auntie engaged in pre-marital intercourse, LuLing followed suit with the man she later married but who died in the war. At the orphanage, LuLing was mentored by American missionaries who instilled feminist thought into the Chinese girls. They were referred to as "Girls of New Destiny", and enthusiastically sang: "We can study, we can learn, we can marry whom we choose, we can work, we can earn, and bad fate is all we lose" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 222). Mr. Tang, the man who was entrusted to translate LuLing's manuscript from Chinese to English, echoed this sentiment when he declared that LuLing "was unusual...self-educated, forthright, quite a rebel for her time" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 287). With this fierce independent spirit that LuLing inherited from Precious Auntie, LuLing rebels directly against Precious Auntie's advice, and instead blindly and foolishly follows her own will to her own detriment. When LuLing ignores Precious Auntie's letter, it resulted in the death of her father and fiancé. In turn, Ruth rebels against LuLing, much like LuLing rebelled against Precious Auntie, a decision which leads to Ruth's truncated liminal state.

3.3.6 CULTURAL STUDIES ANALYSIS

LuLing was constantly tortured by a "curse", which Ruth failed to understand, as LuLing never explained this curse to Ruth: "Her mother was that way...nothing but unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and anger. According to her mother's cosmology, the

world was against her and no one could change this, because this was a curse" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 42). Ruth's inability to relate to her mother's world of superstitions, curses, and constant death threats, fueled her anger towards her mother for the constant misunderstandings. According to Fidler, LuLing and Ruth were unable to understand each other because of the differences in their inherent social and cultural codes (29). LuLing also experienced anger towards Ruth for not understanding the heartache and pain she suffered during her childhood, yet LuLing decided to remain silent about her suffering, thinking that her silence would guarantee happiness in Ruth's life. Fidler asserts that Chinese superstition held that not voicing negative thoughts would deter sadness and depression (29; 30). This silence contributes to the cultural and emotional drift between LuLing and Ruth. According to Fidler, LuLing initially did not understand the connection between her silence and her daughter's heartache at their estrangement, and Precious Auntie's silence and the resultant heartache LuLing suffered (30). LuLing wanted a better life for Ruth, free from the oppressive Chinese society she endured, however, by LuLing remaining silent regarding her oppressive past, she was setting a precedent of silence and voicelessness for Ruth. LuLing had to realize the correlation between her subaltern status and its effect on her relationship with her daughter. Once LuLing voiced in her writing her resentment of the mistreatment of women within Chinese society, and revealed her past sufferings, she could reconnect with her daughter. By writing her story, LuLing was now free from the burden of secrets, and could communicate openly and honestly with her daughter, who followed LuLing's wish to be heard.

LuLing had to acknowledge the cultural rift between herself and Ruth before she could mend the emotional rift between them. Due to LuLing and Ruth belonging to different cultural groups, cultural misunderstandings arose between them, which contributed to their festering relationship. Cultural misunderstanding is highlighted in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* when Ruth takes LuLing to the doctor, as she fears her mother has Alzheimer's disease. The doctor asked LuLing simple questions like what year she was born, and the answer LuLing provides the doctor is correct according to her Chinese background. According to Ruth, these answers are incorrect. What she does not understand is that her mother had to change her date of birth when she immigrated to America from China, something Ruth does not know about as she has not yet read her mother's manuscript. Another question that is posed to LuLing is if she could count backwards from 100, subtracting seven each time. Ruth felt it was unfair to formulate a professional opinion on her mother's memory when "she had to convert the numbers in Chinese to do the calculations, then remember that, and put the answer back into English" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 59). This scene is actually recreated from Tan's experience from taking her own mother to see a doctor for her apparent memory loss, and the cultural differences Tan noticed arising between the Western trained medical doctor and her cosmic thinking Chinese mother. Tan writes how she "puzzled over her [mother's] answer" when the doctor asked her mother her age, because "the doctor, of course, had no idea what the correct answer was, but neither did I, unless I knew the context my mother was using" (Tan *The Opposite of Fate* 86).

Aunty GaoLing, LuLing's sister, did not believe the Western diagnosis of Alzheimer's that was cast onto LuLing, and protested that LuLing's memory loss was due to the fact that she was aging, lonely and had no one with whom to talk.

I don't believe this diagnosis, Alzheimer's... Everybody gets old, everybody forgets. When you're old, there's too much to remember. I ask you. Why didn't anyone have this disease twenty, thirty years ago? The problem is, today kids have no time anymore to see parents. Your mommy's lonely, that's all. She has no one to talk to in Chinese. Of course her mind is a little rusted. If you stop speaking, no oil for the squeaky wheel. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 102)

Pu states that according to traditional Chinese medical philosophy, Chinese medicine is "grounded on traditional Chinese cosmic thinking, in which the law of the human body is imagined through the natural law of motion in the universe" (27). The human body, therefore, is expected to live in harmony with the rest of the universe in order to be healthy, and if it falls out of sync with the universe, then illness will occur. However, Pu explains that harbouring negative feelings like anxiety, anger, and sadness can also result in the loss of harmony with the universe from the negative flow of energy in the body (27). Tan writes how she could not find a way to explain to her Chinese side of the family about the western scientifically formulated Alzheimer's disease. Her Chinese sisters perceived it to be "that malady in the head that affects old people, in other words, benign forgetfulness", while Tan could tell that "by my sister's attitude that they had no idea how serious this disease really was" (*The Opposite of Fate* 88). GaoLing, just like Tan's Chinese sisters, thus thinks according to the traditional Chinese medical philosophy and believes that LuLing's memory loss is attributed to her body falling out of

harmony with the universe. GaoLing believed that LuLing suffered memory loss because of the negative feelings of loneliness and sadness created from hardly seeing her only daughter, and never having anyone with whom she can practice speaking her native language. LuLing's memory actually does improve, Pu offers, not because of Western medicine, but as GaoLing predicted, because she can practice speaking Chinese to Mr. Tang (28). It is thus from speaking Chinese, LuLing's mother tongue, that LuLing's memory begins to sharpen. Thus according to Anzaldua's theory regarding the relationship between language and ethnic identity, it is through the use of language that LuLing is able to connect with her culture, restore her ethnic identity, remember details of her past, and become cosmically harmonized with her universe.

3.3.7 THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

While LuLing is able to connect with her language and culture through speaking with Mr. Tang, Ruth's acculturated state and loss of identity is evident in her unhappy relationship with Art, her partner. She has no voice in her relationship with Art, as Art does not even recognize the pressure Ruth has been dealing with from feeling like an outcast in her relationship with him. When Ruth organized supper for her mother, her aunt, Art and his children of a previous marriage at the popular Fountain Court restaurant to celebrate the Full Moon Festival, Art selfishly and unthinkingly invited his ex-wife to celebrate what was meant to be a night with Ruth's Chinese mother and aunt. This made Ruth feel like an intruder at her own gathering.

To Ruth, this particular gathering was not 'just a dinner'. It was their Christmas thanksgiving, the reunion that she was hosting for the first time. She had given

much thought to setting it up, what it should mean, what family meant... She wanted to thank all the celebrants for their contribution to her feeling of family. Miriam [the ex-wife] would be a reminder that the past was not always good and the future was uncertain. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 79)

When Ruth first met Art, she fell in love with the romanticized idea Art held about marriage, that two people in love should want to be together, not because a marriage certificate forced them to be together. However, Ruth soon felt like a pawn that constantly moved to accommodate his needs while suppressing her own needs. When LuLing's memory worsened, Ruth felt that it was her problem, that Art was not worried about the mental state of her mother, nor did he care enough to want to unburden Ruth by helping her mother live easier. "I remember you asked me once what I was going to do about my mother. And it struck me. Yes, what am I going to do? I felt it was all up to me" (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 289). The turning point in Ruth's relationship coincides with the degeneration of her mother's health and memory, and Ruth makes an informed decision to live separately from Art and instead live with her mother as a caretaker. In terms of Irigaray's feminist theory of women resisting oppressive patriarchal definitions, Ruth begins to show agency and autonomy through realizing that she could no longer accept living with a partner who did not treat her and respect her as an equal. Instead of settling for her partner's definition of her as a woman with her own problems, Ruth ventures on a quest for self-discovery to define herself in her own terms.

It is from living with her mother that Ruth begins to recognize her Chinese roots. Furthermore, once having read her mother's manuscript after Mr. Tang finished

translating it, this draws Ruth ever more towards her culture, and essentially her mother. Tan echoes Ruth's transformation and writes how she formed a closer relationship with her own mother after she had moved in with her mother to help her cope with her subsequent memory loss and Alzheimer's disease:

I began to see how much I actually knew about my mother and myself. She was losing her mind, yes, but I was losing the defenses built up and fortified from childhood. The scars were dissolving and our hearts were becoming transparent. How could I have been so stupid not to know this all these years. It had been so simple to make my mother happy. All I had to do was say I appreciated her as my mother. (Tan *The Opposite of Fate* 93)

From spending time with her mother and acknowledging the urgency of understanding her mother before losing her, both Tan, in her personal life, and her character, Ruth, finally realized the true nature of their mothers. By voluntarily caring for her mother, LuLing could eventually see Ruth's love for her by accepting her filial duties as an obedient daughter. LuLing and Ruth's connection results from Ruth demystifying the misconceptions she had associated with her mother's culture. Ruth finally removes her mother from her Othered status, while also stepping down from her privileged association with the Self. According to Ang's feminist idea, Ruth represented a westernized feminist through her engagement with the Self. Only upon accepting her mother's cultural differences and ceasing to fight with her mother about those differences, Ruth was able to view her mother according to her mother's self-definition and accept this definition.

Ruth's relocation back to her mother's home not only strengthens the relationship with her mother, but also with her partner. In turn, Art fearing he will lose Ruth, comes to understand her fear of losing him, and her sense of feeling second best to his needs and an unstable feature in his life. It is this act of filial duty towards her mother that allows Ruth to connect with her roots and her mother. Additionally, Ruth begins to connect with her own voice, and starts to make her own decisions based on what she feels is best for her mother and herself, as evidenced in Irigaray's theory of resistance to being labeled and defined according to masculinist definitions.

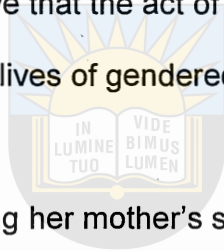
Ruth's cultural and maternal connection is a result of Ruth spending time with her mother, and reading the manuscript written for Ruth. Through reading her mother's manuscript, Ruth learns about her mother's past and begins to learn about Precious Auntie, how much she meant to her mother, and fully begins to understand her mother's obsession with being cursed. Bhavnani and Coulson write:

there is a political edge to story-telling which may come from writing/telling and/or from reading/seeing. Stories have become a significant means of destabilizing boundaries of difference, of speaking into silences and of opening up possibilities for making connections. ("Race" 81)

It is by writing her story that LuLing is able to create agency for herself and enable her voice to be heard, allowing her to speak out against the injustices she suffered.

Heilbrun notes how women's writing represents an autobiographical element, in which women write concerning their own experiences to relive the anger of oppression they endured, and use this anger to fuel their passion for writing (15). Both Precious Auntie

and LuLing were compelled to write stories to their daughters as a result of the anger that they harboured from their oppressed lives. The intention of writing was to connect with their daughters, to inform them of their life history; a history they documented to save their daughters from similar oppression whilst creating a permanent record of their suffering. Dunick writes that the Chinese mothers decide to make use of writing in the style of an autobiography “to reveal and establish lasting conceptions on their individual identities” in order to save their daughters from their previous pain that influenced their writing (13). The mothers believe that the act of writing is their last chance to save their daughters from their oppressed lives of gendered submission and cultural alienation.



Furthermore, it is through reading her mother's story that Ruth embraces her Chinese roots as it allows her to understand and accept her mother's belief: that Precious Auntie and Ruth have a spiritual connection and that Precious Auntie is guiding Ruth in her writing. Instead of believing Precious Auntie to be a ghost whose image haunted her, envisioning her as a “lady with bloody hair” who tried to kill Ruth on the day she broke her arm as a child, Precious Auntie takes an essence of a living family member (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 74). Precious Auntie thus morphs from someone who threatened Ruth's safety to her grandmother. Precious Auntie is finally validated by Ruth when she eventually learns Precious Auntie's name, a name loaded with meaning: “Ruth began to cry. Her grandmother had a name. Gu Liu Xin. She had existed. She still existed. Precious Auntie belonged to a family. LuLing belonged to the same family, and Ruth belonged to them both” (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 336). It is from this moment of self-actualization that Ruth follows Precious Auntie and her mother's tradition

of writing, and begins to start writing her own stories, instead of being an unrecognized ghost writer. According to Dunick, Ruth realizes the importance of original authorship, and acknowledges the permanence of the writing process, knowing that she will always be in the possession of her mother's manuscript long after her mother had passed away (13). It is now due to Ruth's acknowledgment of the permanence of writing and the continuation of the maternal authorship, that she decides to move away from her sheltered position of a ghost writer, and into the spotlight of a fictional writer, who no longer fears tapping into her imagination. Ruth not only connects with her culture, but in terms of De Beauvoir's theory, she also becomes a woman by acknowledging the stifling effects of patriarchy on women and the permanence of women's authorship in protesting women's Othered status. Ruth now joins her mother and grandmother in writing narratives and establishes her own sense of identity in the process. Moreover, she uses her new found inspiration of her grandmother as impetus for writing her own stories:

In the Cubbyhole, Ruth returns to the past. The laptop becomes the sand tray...

"Think about your intentions," Bao Bomu says. "What is in your heart, what you want to put in others". And side by side, Ruth and her grandmother begin. Words flow. They have become the same person, six years old, sixteen, forty-six, eighty-two. (Tan *The Bonesetter's Daughter* 338)

Through learning her name, Ruth acknowledges her grandmother's existence and finally becomes aware of the spiritual influence that she holds over Ruth. Precious Auntie is no longer the haunting figure who scares Ruth in her sleep, but is now her spirit guide – directing her life and writing.

In conclusion, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* confirms the importance of a cherished mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, it illustrates how women hold the key to their own destiny by rejecting patriarchal oppression and embracing one's cultural and gendered self-actualized identity through the art of writing one's story.



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CONCLUSION

In Amy Tan's selected texts, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, she has successfully illustrated female oppression in China, racial discrimination in America, and the identity crisis that second generation Asian Americans face from being immersed in two distinct and contradictory cultures. Chapter One has explored the factors in Chinese society that influence women to occupy the position as inferior beings. Confucian principles, Taoist philosophy and Buddhist religion contribute to the subordinate status of Chinese women, of which all three factors support the oppressive custom of foot-binding.

Chapter One continued with an interrogation of the history of Asian American literature, focusing mainly on the area of Asian American women writers. Asian American literature developed as a response to the prejudiced belief that westerners held regarding Asian culture. While Asian American writers promoted a valid Asian American identity, Asian American women also wanted to share their personal and cultural experiences, which were different to that of Asian American men: being doubly oppressed in Chinese culture and American society. Tan's writings have shared the theme of double oppression through the depiction of the female protagonists in her selected texts wherein the Chinese mothers endured oppressive treatment in Chinese society and racial discrimination in America. Tan's writings further represent second generation Asian Americans who have assimilated themselves into American society to avoid being discriminated on the basis of their cultural Chinese markers of behavior.

However, these second generation Asian Americans still experience a loss of direction in their lives due to their alienation from their maternal culture.

Through reading and researching Tan's selected texts, the theories of Feminist, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories became useful tools for interrogating these texts. Chapter Two was devoted to the examination of these theories and highlighted important theorists whose works are valuable in analysing the selected texts. Feminist Literary Theory focused on the Othered status of women in society, and the contributions of the Third Wave of Feminism. The prominent feminist theorists were Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler. Simone De Beauvoir's text, *The Second Sex*, examined the subordinate position of women in society and the masculinist process of Othering. Women are designated with an inferior status based on their difference to men, suggesting that there is an apparent absence in women that is present in men. Patriarchy intimates that women can only find meaning through their interaction and relations to men, as women are regarded as inadequate beings.

Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Women* and *This Sex Which is Not One* focuses on the representation of women by men in society through psychological oppression and commodification. *The Speculum of The Other Women* questioned the psychoanalytic theorists Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's representation of women. Irigaray believes that women were oppressed through the projections of the above psychoanalytic theorists as they dictate and enslave women to enforce their gender representations imposed by patriarchal society. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray

examines women's inferior status inflicted upon them by men attaching commercial and/or sexual value to their bodies. Women are reduced to objects once value is placed on their bodies, and Irigaray believes that it is only once women stop using language steeped in patriarchal terms, and instead create their own representations through using language on their own terms, that they can rid themselves of the yoke of oppression to which men have enslaved them.

Judith Butler's text *Gender Trouble* examines the gendered acts and performances that each sex was required to maintain and execute in society. Butler held that women were oppressed by society in that they were expected to perform feminine gendered acts that were required of them. She postulates that even though punishment was handed to those who deviated from their gender, women could fight against this silenced and inferior stereotype by collectively deviating from their gendered acts and performances.

The Third Wave Feminists Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Ien Ang, and Gloria Anzaldua have also contributed to this project. Bhavnani and Coulson promoted in their works that white women should seek to understand women of colour and acknowledge the difference between their unique, gendered experiences. Even though women are oppressed globally, white feminists actually further oppress women of colour by assuming unity amongst them. Lim, an Asian American feminist writer, believes that through the creation and awareness of an Asian American identity, Asian American males oppress their female counterparts by depicting them as inferior and attempting to silence them in their writings. Lim believes that Asian American

women should attack their oppressors' claims using the same method: through the use of language and writing. Ang's works focus on the Othering process by which white feminists have enslaved women of colour. White feminists have occupied the position of Self and believe that women of colour are less worthy to share their privileged status. Ang feels that white feminists need to focus on the difference between themselves and women of colour, but not as an Othering tool, instead as a way to try and understand the experiences of women of colour hold, which are so different from privileged white feminists. Anzaldua's writings focused on the *mestiza* who is a female figure who is faced with two contrasting cultures: her original culture and western culture. From constantly vacillating between these two cultures, languages and thought processes, Anzaldua believes that the *mestiza* loses her true identity. In order to regain her identity, Anzaldua stipulates that the *mestiza* should use language to make western culture aware of the oppressive effects of vacillating between cultures. Only people of colour are burdened by the required vacillation between cultures as westerners hold the belief that they are superior to other cultures, and therefore do not have to learn the language of others, instead non-English speaking people are expected to communicate in English.

Cultural Studies Literary Theory examines the manner in which culture affects societal ideology. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the main theorist who contributed to the section of Cultural Studies Literary Theory in this dissertation. Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" examines the silenced status of women in patriarchal society in which they have no voice to speak or to be heard. It is because men are considered superior to women that patriarchal ideology is accepted in society where men are believed to

occupy the dominant hegemonic position over the subordinate position to which women are relegated.

Ethnic Studies Literary Theory is used in this dissertation to examine the nature in which Asian Americans, an ethnic minority group, are treated in American society. Edward Said, W.E.B Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon are the main contributors to this literary area. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism explores the way in which the West makes preconceived and misinformed judgments about Oriental cultures, thereby placing them in the inferior position as the Other. Said feels that people from Othered countries should correct the misguided and arrogant western assumptions by writing about their culture, thus educating the misinformed by providing a valid account of their culture. Du Bois' writing promotes a concept of double-consciousness, in which people of colour have to possess two different cultural codes to use with different audiences: their family and people of their original culture, and western society. Du Bois explains that it is only people of colour who experience double-consciousness, as white American society expect the minority population to conform to their culture. In Fanon's work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, he writes that colonized people assume white culture as a mask, to afford themselves better treatment from white colonial society than if they maintain their cultural roots, language and behaviour.

In Chapter Three, each of Tan's selected texts is analyzed using Feminist, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories. The Chinese mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* have endured an

oppressive past in China, and represent Spivak's silenced subaltern whose voice cannot be heard and whose agency is restricted from displaying any form of deviation from the instilled patriarchal norms. The Chinese mothers also represent the inferior Other, in terms of Simone De Beauvoir's theory, who believe that men, empowered by patriarchal proscriptions, devalue women and thus diminish their status. Suyuan Woo, the deceased mother of Jing-mei Woo in *The Joy Luck Club*, has to leave her babies in China after they flee the Japanese army. It is only through abandonment, she believes, that she will save her daughters from the possibility of death that is guaranteed by her destitute and penniless state. An-mei Hsu has to witness her mother's degrading treatment as a lowly concubine, and she is left motherless when her mother kills herself because she cannot change her position in gender-established society. Lindo Jong's parents arrange her marriage, and she is forced to marry a man she does not love. Ying-ying St. Clair endures the pain of losing her husband to another woman while she is pregnant with his baby, and then suffers further pain from the guilt of aborting her unborn baby, who is the only reminder of her cheating husband. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Winnie suffers immense oppression from her husband who physically abuses her, rapes her, cheats on her with other women, and takes her to court when he knows that the patriarchal infused judicial system accepts his version of events over his wife's. Winnie's oppression is initiated by her father who accepts the marriage proposal to the Wen family, even though he is aware of their dishonest business, illustrating her father's lack of concern for his daughter. LuLing in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, is oppressed by the man who kills her father and fiancé as a result of LuLing rejecting the marriage proposal he offers. Through the multilayered lives of these subjugated Chinese women,

Tan illustrates how the Chinese mothers are oppressed and enslaved by Chinese patriarchal society which has established repressed gender roles that they must perform. These Chinese mothers are intent on changing their subaltern status, and discover and utilize their own voice and agency by defying the rules and norms that favoured men.

It is evident in Tan's selected texts that the Confucian principles have ruled Chinese society for centuries, and the Taoist yin/yang concept and Buddhist religion are embedded in Chinese society to define women according to masculine terms. The socially acceptable patriarchal norms are not accepted by these women, and they create agency for themselves to overcome male domination. While the mothers are trapped in a culture that demeans women, they fervently fight against the fixed stereotypes that are embedded in their patriarchal society, and it is through the mothers resilience and disregard for patriarchal Chinese ideology that they are able to secure freedom for themselves and become liberated from oppressive Chinese customs. Tan has instilled the female protagonist Chinese mothers with feminist qualities to fight for freedom and agency against the backdrop of fixed patriarchal ideology. All of the Chinese mothers leave China to make new lives for themselves in America, but they have to overcome challenges to realize their dream for freedom from oppression. Lindo Jong best exemplifies feminist agency in *The Joy Luck Club* as she acts against her gender norm of submission, and instead is an active instigator in ending her marriage in China and instilling the idea of marriage in her American husband by inserting a message relating to marriage inside his fortune cookie. The character of Winnie in *The Kitchen God's*

Wife portrays feminist ideals in her acts of rebellion against Chinese society and her abusive husband, Wen Fu. Winnie leaves Wen Fu when she has no proof of their divorce; she marries another man, chooses to go to jail instead of apologizing to Wen Fu, and overpowers him when she aims his gun at him, ready to shoot and kill him if he does not return her plane tickets to America. Tan cleverly contrasts the courageous character of Winnie to the cowardly character of her father and Wen Fu who attempt to use their power, authority, and/or violence to gain obedience, respect, and compliance. Tan portrays LuLing in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* with feminist agency when she defies patriarchy's definition of women by teaching women to write at an orphanage in China. Teaching and writing were acts that were considered to be masculine, as females were barred from education in China. The Chinese mothers embody Judith Butler's theory of resistant gendered acts to combat the oppressive nature of their culture and liberate themselves from gendered oppression. The Chinese mothers have shown character in the face of oppression, fueled by their will to live a life devoid of punitive patriarchal thought, in the hope that their resistance will transform the image of women in the country and society in which they live.

Tan's selected novels share the problematic issues faced by women in China: equality and agency. It is evident that Chinese women are classed as inferior beings to men in society. Tan also illustrates how important it is for westerners to respect the culture of other countries instead of forming a judgment relating to their practices. It is this misinformed approach that the West demonstrates towards ethnic minorities that coerce the second generation Asian American daughters to alienate themselves from their

culture and assimilate into white culture in order to avoid being treated as inferior and inconsequential. The American daughters possess Du Bois' state of double consciousness as a result of shifting between cultures. Rose Hsu Jordan in *The Joy Luck Club* best exemplifies this state of double-consciousness when she feels the burden of switching between her original Chinese culture and her assumed American culture, to the point that she battles with indecisiveness as she cannot relate effectively to either culture. Pearl suffers double-consciousness in *The Kitchen God's Wife* when she is confronted with two religions in her household: her father's westernized Christian religion and her mother's Chinese spiritual beliefs. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Ruth inhabits a state of double consciousness when she is unable to identify fully with American society; and yet also unable to relate to her mother's Chinese cultural values, which Ruth abandoned in favour of gaining acceptance into mainstream American society. From suffering double-consciousness, Ruth assumes white western culture like a mask in order to be treated like a privileged acculturated American. Pearl also adopts white culture to relate better to her acculturated American husband, and rejects her mother whom she regards as inferior, based on the different cultural markers she exhibits. Thus, Said's theory on Orientalism is prominent in this area as Pearl, as well as Waverly Jong in *The Joy Luck Club* and Ruth in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, feel that in their acculturated state, they represent the privileged American Self. Therefore, they have the power to undervalue ethnic minorities, represented by their mothers, whose cultural behaviour and thought are different to mainstream American society.

The power of storytelling is an essential theme in Tan's selected texts, and it is through the mothers narrating their oppressive lives in China that their daughters realize their true identities and appreciate their cultural heritage and are able to relate to their mothers. The method of storytelling thus embodies the feminist theories of Irigaray, Lim, and Anzaldua who believe that women should use language to create an awareness and space for them to create their own self-definition. It is through the daughters acknowledging the differences between their advantaged lives in America, and the oppressive lives of their mothers that Ang's theory is applied. The American born daughters recline from their assumed American culture of privilege, thus distancing themselves from the biased Self, and begin to reconcile with their alienated Chinese culture, that they once viewed as the Other. Furthermore, because the daughters are now aware of their mothers' sufferings, they can now view their mothers as the mothers see themselves, and this makes use of Bhavnani and Coulson's theory of storytelling as a means to connect with others.

This research project has successfully investigated the cultural codes of China and America that restricted the freedom of women based on their gender and ethnicity, as well as enforced their subordinate and sacrificial position to men. It has illustrated the feminist principles that the Chinese mothers possessed in their search to advance their destiny in America, while also depicting Asian American women as doubly oppressed due to the cultural and ethnic markers they present. Tan has proven, through the American born daughters, that alienating one's original culture leads to a state of

double-consciousness, a loss of identity and feeling incomplete. Therefore, by embracing one's culture, one shall only experience true wholeness and balance.

Despite the fairly recent inception of Asian American women's literature, Tan's works have reached global success, occupying a place on the New York Times best-sellers list. While Tan's texts have undergone textual analysis, this is the first study comparing Tan's three texts, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, according to Feminist, Cultural Studies and Ethnic Studies Literary Theories. Further studies of these selected texts could include a psychoanalytic analysis on how Tan represents her own relationship with her mother in her texts, or to use social identity theory to interrogate the development of the mothers and daughters' characters in their respective social groups.

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In conclusion, this study of Tan's selected texts have analysed the subjugation of women in Chinese culture, the discrimination of Asian immigrants in American society, and the importance of embracing one's original culture. This study has thus thoroughly investigated Tan's selected texts, illustrating feminist thought of the Chinese immigrant mothers, and the representation of the Self and Other. Finally, Tan's message of embracing one's original culture is made prominent through the American born and culturally alienated daughters reconciling with their Chinese ancestry.

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