

**CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE SELECTED
WORKS OF AMY TAN**

LALRAMMAWII RALTE

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY**

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LALRAMMAWII RALTE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Master in Philosophy in
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DECLARATION

Mizoram University

June, 2011

I, Lalrammawii Ralte, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

(Candidate)

(Head)

(Supervisor)



MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that “Cultural Hybridity in the Selected Works of Amy Tan” written by Lalrammawii Ralte has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigation. Neither the dissertation as a whole nor any part of it was submitted to any other University for any research degree.

(Dr. LALRINDIKI T. FANAI)

Supervisor/Associate Professor,

Department of English

Mizoram University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Amy Tan, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, has taken for her theme the lives of Asian-Americans and the generational and cultural differences among them, concentrating on women's experiences. This research aims to examine and explore the treatment of the concept of cultural hybridity in order to bring to light the portrayal of Chinese immigrants and their American-born children in the United States in selected novels by Amy Tan: The Joy Luck Club (1989), The Kitchen God's Wife (1991), The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), and The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001). The research objectives set out to explore the different relationships between the characters and examine the cultural differences between Chinese immigrants and American-born Chinese. An analysis of four novels by Amy Tan forms the basis of this research.

The Chinese American culture is a phenomenon that has come about as a result of the presence of people from Chinese origin in America. Over the years, many people from China have immigrated to America and have exercised their influence in various domains of society. According to the U.S statistics, the first wave of Chinese immigration began in 1820. Though the number was very low before 1848, more and more Chinese arrived in America over the next few years. The first immigrants were mainly males of young age and a low level of education seeking basic unskilled works. There was a total ban on Chinese immigration from 1885 to 1943 due to the Chinese Exclusion act of 1882. Until

1965, Chinese immigration was heavily restricted. From the year 1966 up until today, there have been many Chinese people making their way to America. Today there are Chinese Americans who have been living in America for many generations.

Chinese immigrants brought to America many of their ideas, ideals and values with them. Some of these have continued to influence later generations. Among them is Confucian respect for elders and filial piety. In Confucian ideals, filial piety is one of the virtues to be held above all else: a respect for the parents and ancestors. It refers to the extreme respect that Chinese children are supposed to show their parents. It involves many different things including taking care of the parents, burying them properly after death, bringing honor to the family, and having a male heir to carry on the family name. Practicing these ideals is a very important part of Chinese culture. And Chinese immigrants, even after living in America, carry these values with them and try to hand it down to their American-born children, thus creating tension between the two cultures as well as between mothers and daughters.

This chapter attempts to describe cultural hybridity with special reference to Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans.

The rhetoric of hybridity, sometimes referred to as “hybrid talk” is fundamentally associated with the emergence of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. This stage in the history of hybridity is characterized by literature and theory that focuses on the effects of mixture

upon identity and culture. Hybridity expresses a state of “in betweenness”, as in a person who stands between two cultures (Habib 750). A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (1994) which analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power.

In more than a century of development, Chinese-American literature has moved from apologetic writing through a period of descriptive realism, to self-confident, albeit varied and often sharply divergent, assertion of “Chinese” identity (Chao 145-148). Here, the word “apologetic” is used because at first, the Chinese-American writers did not really feel comfortable writing about their Chinese experiences or dreams in a language that is not theirs, but they had to start with something the whole world can understand and appreciate. And their achievement and the recognition they gained from writing in a foreign language often made them feel like they had somehow betrayed their cultural origins. So, they felt compelled to distance themselves from their Chinese origins, thus, starting with “apologetic” writing but gradually evolved into a style of their own and asserting their own identity.

Chinese-American literature, traditionally considered “foreign writing” by American mainstream literary critics, and yet not generally viewed as Chinese literature by experts in that field, represents a unique window into the constantly evolving worldview of these diasporic people.

Cultural hybridity can be described as the feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological midpoint that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives. This is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as “unhomeliness”. Being “unhomed” is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak (Tyson 421).

This feeling of “unhomeliness” is seen in most of Chinese Americans, especially in immigrants. While Chinese Americans have a very rich culture, often they suffer from problems of identity crisis. Should one maintain a sense of family history? Or is it better to try to blend in and accept their life with the rest of America? This is a problem many minorities, in general, face, but Chinese/Asian Americans seem to have a particular presence in this problem.

Chinese and American cultures being so different, the Chinese immigrants usually have a hard time adjusting themselves and making themselves at home. From the time that many of them are small children, they are hearing derogatory terms and comments made about them. Whether it is in reference to their slanted eyes or the assumption that they are Chinese because of the way they look, these children fear being different, as do many other children. So, it is not surprising that from this fear comes a kind of resistant towards the people, or the culture, for that matter, that made them feel this way in the first place. It is common

knowledge that children are easily influenced by mass media (television, movies, music) as well as by their home and school environments. Children's attitudes toward their race and ethnic group and other cultural groups begin to form early in the preschool years. Infants can recognize differences in those around them, and young children can easily absorb negative stereotypes. Children are easily influenced by the culture, opinions, and attitudes of their caregivers. Caregivers' perceptions of ethnic and racial groups can affect the child's attitudes toward those minority groups. One major problem for a lot of children is that the opportunities are not even provided to them for them to learn about their culture and other cultures.

Although this problem seems to have subsided quite a bit over the years, most of them are still trying to find themselves and still pursuing that sense of belonging. It seems to be the trend, and hopefully becomes an all-encompassing reality, that Chinese-Americans in America are looking to find who they are and where they come from. It also seems that America in general is changing, although quite slowly, towards becoming a more accepting society. All of this is definitely necessary in order for Chinese-Americans (and other minorities) to have a positive sense of who they are with respect to their current environment, allowing for future growth and expansion that is emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually satisfying.

The home is a place where changes must take place. It is important for parents to continue cultural traditions even after moving to the United States

and becoming a part of the American culture. It provides children with a sense of strong self-value and pride. It is not a hard thing to do, until one stops doing it for a little while.

All these problems and different emotional states are clearly and skillfully portrayed by Amy Tan in her works, giving the readers a vivid picture of how a Chinese immigrant feels out of place in a foreign land, America, and how an American-born Chinese finds oneself trapped in between two completely different cultures.

Because most of Amy Tan's works focus on Chinese immigrants, ethnic identity is an important theme. The elders are constantly misunderstood by Americans because of their strong Chinese accent. Yet they also struggle with their loss of tradition and adaptation into American culture. They feel very distant in America. Balance between traditional and modern life is a common idea among all immigrants. On a much larger scale, all people try to "fit in" with certain social groups, yet wish to retain their individuality. With this, almost every single character in Tan's novels can be seen as struggling with this balance, finding peace in themselves at the end.

A comparison of American and Chinese cultures in the novels hint at the author's valuing of both, and her advocacy on behalf of cultural tolerance and acculturation.

Amy Tan was born on February 19, 1952, to John and Daisy Tan who immigrated to United States to escape from the Chinese civil war in 1949, when

the communist took over the country. Born in Oakland, California, Tan lived and moved several times with her father, who was an electronic engineer and a Baptist minister, and her mother, a vocational nurse. When she was merely fourteen, Tan and her brother Peter moved to Switzerland with Mrs. Tan after John Tan and the eldest son of the family died of brain tumors. There in Switzerland, Tan managed to graduate from high school as a foreigner, striving to live with her mother through arguments and family turmoil. In 1969, the family moved back to States and settled down in Santa Clara, California. The constant conflict between Tan and her mother lasted for some time so that they did not contact nor communicate with each other for half of a year. She grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, graduated from high school in Montreux, Switzerland, and received her master's degree in Linguistics from San Jose State University.

Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. For her first book, The Joy Luck Club (1989), Amy Tan won The National Book Award and the L.A. Times Book Award in 1989.

She has been married for the past twenty-some years to Lou DeMattei. They live in San Francisco and New York with their little dogs, Yorkshire terriers, Bubba and Lilli.

Tan had been mentally troubled and hence began to seek for professional psychological help. After a failure of psychological counseling session, Tan set

her heart to writing for curing herself. She then started to write to share and to cure.

“Great stories resist generalizations or categories” (The Opposite of Fate 352). With this statement, Amy Tan expresses the desire to rid her work of the label, “Asian-American fiction.” Tan’s writing proves to be universal, though all of her stories have modern Chinese characters combined with traditions and historical settings of China. She creates this universality by connecting her own personal experiences to the stories, using relationships, and exploring common literary themes. Her personal experiences mainly include her mother’s and grandmother’s lives and their influences upon her, her experiences as a Chinese-American, and feelings concerning life and death which have always been a part of her life. She also utilizes ordinary relationships by exploring the changes and obstacles that are often encountered through them, allowing a reflection of relationships in general that is able to reach readers and often teach lessons concerning the readers’ lives. Tan also uses common literary themes that allow contemporary readers to relate to her stories, such as sexism, identity, and fate. With all of these things intertwined within her almost mythical storytelling, Tan reaches her goal of breaking through labels.

Amy Tan creates such universal works, in part, because of the connections of her own personal experiences to the stories. She believes a muse is not a person, but the “personal process of synthesizing your life with the work before you” (250). She feels her muse is a combination of her own life, her mother’s life and her grandmother’s life, but also something hidden and unknown.

Through her writing, she tries to answer questions that are worthwhile, and that take a lifetime to answer (297). She uses aspects of her family's lives, her own life as a person of Chinese ancestry, and her link to the "World of Yin" as influences in her stories.

Because of her mother's harsh nature, mother-daughter arguments were inevitable. Daisy, her mother, once even held a knife to her daughter's throat as a teenager because of a boyfriend (213). Yet, she called her daughter about six months before she died, apologizing for something her daughter could hardly remember. Though her mother's strictness was overwhelming to Tan, she had many memories of Daisy that became part of her stories. Her fondest memory of her mother was when she taught her about the idea of "invisible strength" (205). As mentioned in The Joy Luck Club (1989), "invisible strength" is the hope, determination, and passion that so characterized her mother's life during World War II (210). For example, her mother had left an abusive husband, and many of her early children died (Academy of Achievement 1). Amy Tan saw strength through her mother's life and her grandmother's life, which she used through her stories along with their hardship and pain.

Although she admits her culture was a large factor in her writing, Tan has stated that she would like her stories to be treated as meaningful language and literature, not just as Chinese-American culture. She feels that "someone who writes fiction is not necessarily writing a depiction of any generalized group, they're writing a very specific story" (Salon 3). With this in mind, she feels she accomplishes writings that are very close to her own heart. She sees herself

writing more about the nature of human connections, not cultural dichotomies (Salon 4). According to Tan, writers do this by tapping into the familiar emotions of love, hope, and relationships (Salon 4). Therefore, she once labeled her stories “All-American” (The Opposite of Fate 310).

The novel The Joy Luck Club (1989) is anchored firmly in this Chinese-American world, where the daughters are too American for their mothers, and the mothers are too Chinese for their daughters. What this boils down to, in many cases, is that the daughters are not as respectful as their mothers would wish, and the mothers are too critical and old-fashioned according to the daughters. Intermittently throughout the book, however, we see how the bigger American world interacts with this Chinese-American one. In these cases, even Chinese-Americans, like the daughters, are seen as foreign, and occasionally encounter racism.

The popular and critical success of The Joy Luck Club (1989) about the generational conflict between the protagonist, June, and three older Chinese women, members of a social club, establishes Tan’s preeminence as the novelist of Chinese American women—immigrant mothers and their offsprings—who see each other in terms of their struggles to achieve an identity in China and in America.

In this novel, Tan explores many intertwining characters with whom people can connect through various short stories. June, the main character, has many memories about her dead mother, Suyuan. For example, she distinctly

remembers her mother pushing her into piano lessons, feeling she has some “hidden talent” (The Joy Luck Club 133). June feels that her mother had pushed her too hard, believing that in reality she has no talent at all. But, as she reflects on these memories she realizes that Suyuan actually had seen talent in June, and if she had tried harder she could have seen it for herself. This is a good example of self-discovery, a journey all must take through life. Often it is found through others in close relationships, as with June. She also remembers when Suyuan, at a crab dinner with the rest of her family, saved the worst crab for herself and gave the better crabs to everyone else at the table. June is amazed at her selflessness; the crab was so inedible Suyuan just threw it in the trash and enjoyed everyone else’s happiness (208). Later in her life, when Suyuan was a senior, her neighbor accused her of poisoning their cat. June was sure she had done it, yet refused to ask her about it. She is later embarrassed by her own low opinion of her mother when she finds out that Suyuan actually did not poison the cat (209). These three instances explore the idea of rising above expectations, the idea that everyone has someone in their life who surprises them in one way or another, even if not realized immediately.

The Kitchen God’s Wife (1991) concerns one of the same themes: the difficulty of bridging a communication gap between a Chinese mother and a Chinese-American daughter. This time, however, the narrative comes from the mother’s perspective. Amy Tan presents a very thorough set of imagery and patterns of behavior. These techniques fascinate readers a lot. Some people might say Amy Tan keeps switching the perspective of the narrator. It often gets

confusing. However, if one pays particular attention to her novels, one will find out it is very interesting. The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) hooks the readers early, drawing them into a life, a culture and a period in history that exerts a mesmerizing appeal. Amy Tan gives us an intimate and memorable portrait.

Amy Tan wrote The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) about her mother, Daisy. Most of Winnie's story in the novel is drawn from Daisy's life, including the difficult life and marriage she left behind in pre-communist China. The presentation of Winnie's story, as she tells her story to Pearl, is reminiscent of the oral tradition. Tan, like Pearl, had never given much thought to her mother's life in China, and she was amazed at what she learned.

When Tan started on her second novel, she wanted to avoid rehashing material and ideas from her successful first novel, The Joy Luck Club (1989). She isolated herself with soothing music and incense, realizing that solitude was her surest path to the next novel. Although she tried numerous times to write about something different, the story in The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) cried out to be told, and Tan realized that the pursuit of diversity was not a good reason to write about one topic over another. Her mother's eagerness to have her story fictionalized was also a major influence.

And so, The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) shares certain themes with The Joy Luck Club (1989). Both the novels portray strained relationships between immigrant mothers and their American daughters. The theme of alienation also appears in both works. Despite its similarities to the first novel, the second

novel won applause from Tan's readers and critics. Her novels contain a multitude of stories that converge into a cohesive work, and Tan is admired for her ability to move from the past to the present in her storytelling.

The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) contrasts two Chinese half-sisters, one thoroughly Americanized, the other a mystic who can communicate with the spirit world. The novel focuses on the relationship between Chinese-born Kwan and her younger, Chinese-American sister Olivia, who serves as the book's primary narrator. Olivia and Kwan's relationship begins when their father dies. Kwan relates to Olivia through the telling of Chinese tales and superstitions, however Olivia is somewhat embarrassed by Kwan. Kwan believes she has Yin eyes, which means that she can see ghosts. Kwan's stories are not just stories; they are based on her belief that she is part of the Yin world, the world of the ghosts, and recounts tales from her past life. The melding of Olivia's modern Western world and Kwan's yin world come to show the desire and ambivalence of connecting and creating an Asian-American identity for Olivia and Kwan, individually and together. The tension builds when together Kwan schemes to get Olivia and her estranged husband, Simon, back together by traveling to China. Kwan serves as the translator for the two writers on their assignment to discover Olivia and Kwan's connection to the Yin world. Kwan makes Olivia come to see that there are things in this world that we can understand through our five senses but that sometimes the hundred secret senses are where we understand the rest. This story is about the journey of identity, family history, past lives, and ultimately, love.

This story is set in the present time. The story instantly becomes dramatic when Kwan reveals that she has “yin eyes.” Also, the story is very real in the sense that Olivia’s mother ignores her—that is unfortunately a very real problem. Olivia’s father left his first family in China, a problem which must have been encountered by many families. The dialogue in this story and in all of Amy Tan’s stories is very convincing. Kwan speaks with a Chinese accent. Besides sounding real, the dialogue reveals character. The story encounters irony in Olivia’s life experience. Olivia wants her mother’s attention more than anything, but she does not receive it. Kwan becomes the “mother,” and Olivia hates her for it.

The tear-and-repair relationship relates not only to sisterhood, but also to the changes that all relationships undergo. Olivia learned to appreciate Kwan greatly just before she died. The idea expands on the theme that people must always be thankful for what they have, especially their relationships. These are all very universal changes that all people experience, which makes the main story so relatable despite its details concerning Chinese history.

The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001) is a magnificent story based on a Chinese family’s history through the words of three women. These three women have been pulled away from each other over time, make their way slowly back to each other’s souls through the pages. The author does a great job of trying the narrators together through their personalities, yet makes them separate people by demonstrating what they do in hardship. It is very enjoyable how the narrator

is switched every few chapters, to give the reader a new voice to hear and to maybe also help reveal parts of the plot the other narrator would not have known or revealed. The great idea of this book is that each narrator only gives a little known information on the story, yet combined there is barely any of the full story left out.

When considering the characters, they all seem extremely different when one compares their individual stories, yet when considering their characters they each share much in common. Luling has suffered many public hardships, and has to strive to reach her goal to get to America. While her daughter Ruth never shows her true despair to anyone, and tries to never strive for something. On the outside both women seem different, but their lives reflect differently, both women have had to deal with feeling unloved, lost loved ones, and had to overcome all of the people who tried to make them less independent. In the end all the women are alike no matter what they have faced.

To give the readers the occasional rest from one narrator, the author continuously switches narrators. This helps the story tremendously, since each narrator does not have to go into deep explanation about her family. Since the narrators only give small parts of stories or history, the readers get to use their imagination in greater depths. In one of the early chapters Ruth talks about how her mother believed Ruth could communicate with her dead grandma, mentioning how coping with her mother's nervous and emotional personality

was like, “walking on tiny pebbles”. This leads the readers to imagine the turbulent childhood Ruth went through.

There are many gaps in the story left on purpose by the narrators to bring questions and wonder to the readers. The author uses these gaps as mysteries for the readers to think about as they read the novel, always finding out the surprise much later. Early in the book Luling mentions a letter her nursemaid gave her, not only till much later does Ruth reveal that the letter said that the nursemaid was really Luling’s mother. Through mystery, hearing different voices, and the ties these characters share, the author provides a colorful and exciting novel, which will stimulate any reader’s mind. The readers will not just be living one story; they will be living many lives through the novel. This novel will leave everyone with a greater sense of family pride.

In this haunting tale, Amy Tan uses family secrets to convey truth and loss through the characters of Ruth and Luling Young. Ruth and Luling have always had a tumultuous relationship. There is friction because Ruth does not understand her mother. Her mother is from China and, after moving to America, held on to a lot of her Chinese culture. Luling has been in the United States for almost fifty years, yet she does not speak or understand English very well. She is also very secretive of her past. All these situations lead to a very strained relationship that leaves both Ruth and Luling feeling unappreciated and misunderstood by one another.

The imagery and language Tan uses to describe what Luling went through was fantastic. It expressed not only what the character was going through but the myths and beliefs that are part of Chinese culture.

In the novel, Tan also explores the hardships that Chinese women had to endure during the nineteenth century and twentieth century, the system of concubines and much more. Tan uses conflict between Ruth, a first generation American, and Luling, an immigrant, to explore the complex issues that exist between first generation Americans and their immigrant elders.

Along with common relationships that parallel her own life, Amy Tan also uses common literary themes that are universal in all of her works. Her main themes are sexism, identity, and fate. The sexism in her stories relates to readers as all females and males are aware of the “gender gap” between them. Her identity themes are important because she uses specific immigrant stories that are magnified versions of a subject all people experience. Fate is key in her works as well, as she shows the differences and similarities between self-determination and fate versus free will.

In almost all of her works, Tan uses historical backgrounds and traditional Chinese culture to explore a universal theme, sexism and female struggles. In The Joy Luck Club (1989), An-Mei’s mother is raped and is, in turn, forced to marry her rapist to keep her honor when she becomes pregnant (238). However, her husband can choose to marry concubines as he wishes. Ying-Ying also is confined as a woman in that she is forced to marry her vulgar but wealthy suitor

(245). As a child, her nursemaid even told her never to voice her own opinions (63). Also, Lindo Jong tells her daughter Waverly how lucky she is to have a straight nose, because her own crooked one has led her into a life of grief — she feels her looks are more important to men than what is on the inside (257). These are very old-fashioned ideas, but they relate to the evolution of female struggles today and how challenges for women have changed over time but not disappeared.

In The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001), many different stories are told through Luling's life and the sexism she encounters. When she is forced into an orphanage, she finds that it is actually a Christian Missionary House for young girls. Trying to eradicate traditional beliefs, they teach the girls a rhyme: "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" (263). As Luling learns to try and free herself from her previous place in society by learning a new "role", her sister GaoLing visits and brings her back to the reality of women's true positions in the social ladder. GaoLing is married to an abusive opium-addict, and because of her marriage her parents have forgotten her (291). This Missionary House is a perfect example of the opposite of a traditional female role. Just when the reader begins to believe the rhyme as truth, GaoLing is an example of the actual tragic situations women experienced in China.

In The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), female struggles are explored by a minor but key character, Dulili. Kwan retells many parts of Dulili's life to Olivia. She had been deserted, left with no family. Then called "Du Yun," she

found an orphan in the street and tried to support both her and her newfound baby with a slow business. But her baby drowned in a flood, and Dulili was so overcome with grief in her poor and lonely state that she grew hysterical (The Hundred Secret Senses 288). She actually took her daughter's name, calling herself Dulili, and moved on, never mentioning her again. This story is a very small narrative in the whole of The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), yet it gives the reader an illuminative visual of how serious women's situations were. Dulili was so engulfed in grief she actually took her own late daughter's name and mentally forgot her death had even occurred.

Because most of Amy Tan's works focus on Chinese immigrants, ethnic identity is an important theme. In The Joy Luck Club (1989), Ying-Ying is constantly misunderstood by Americans because of her strong Chinese accent. Yet she also struggles with her loss of tradition and fast adaptation into American culture. Waverly also always feels very distant in America, and so when she learns of a trip back to China, she thinks that she will blend in so well that she will never fit back into America. Lindo, her mother, knows better, because she feels they both have already lost their heritage and can never get it back (The Joy Luck Club 258). She was even spotted as a tourist while in China and cried over how America had changed her. June, ignorant of her Chinese history most of her life, finds herself "lost in translation" when visiting her sisters in China (271).

Balance between traditional and modern life is a common idea among all immigrants. On a much larger scale, all people try to "fit in" with certain social

groups, yet wish to retain their individuality. With this, almost every single character in The Joy Luck Club (1989) can be seen as struggling with this balance, finding peace in themselves at the end. Ying-Ying uses her daughter, Lena, to help her to learn to communicate in America. Lindo accepts change, and realizes that she can never “lose” her past because it actually stays with her. June, worried about her accent, finds that words are not even needed when she feels so close to her lost sisters. In The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), Kwan experiences identity problems her entire life. Once she arrives in America, Olivia begins to rebuke her Chinese ways. Olivia’s parents even think that she is crazy, and she is given shock treatments (18). Olivia tries to distance herself from Kwan in order to find friends and acceptance, yet instead misses Kwan deeply after she is gone. She felt that Kwan was actually a part of her, and so in her death she is missing something. She also felt an identity crisis when her husband, Simon, continuously compared her to his dead girlfriend. Olivia feels that she never measured up to her. Yet, she comes to find that this is not true when she stops comparing herself. Her own self-doubt had led her to obsession, and Kwan freed her from that through her unyielding love.

Along with identity, a most important literary theme in Amy Tan’s works is that of fate. It is even overpowering in some stories, such as in The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), in which fate is explored through the character of Kwan. Kwan is very superstitious, even claiming that she can speak to “Yin people.” Mysterious things happened concerning these people through Olivia’s entire childhood with Kwan. Olivia still fought against the idea, even when she had

reoccurring dreams that she was Yin person herself (49). After Olivia's letter came as an answer to her and Simon's proposal for an article about China, she tries to refuse on the basis that she and Simon had already broken up. Yet Kwan insisted that they all go together. She told Olivia that it is fate for them to be together (187). After Kwan dies Olivia becomes convinced that it was indeed meant to happen. Kwan's memory gives Olivia a sense of purpose, that all things happen for a reason and life's "randomness," as she had felt before, is really non-existent.

In The Joy Luck Club (1989) also, there are many instances of superstition, luck, and fate. For instance, Lindo's mother has a crooked nose and thinkst that her fate is, therefore, destined to be an ill one (256). Yet Lindo bumps her own nose on a bus, making it crooked as well. When her daughter, Waverly, was born with the same kink, she worried her life would be as doomed as her own. Yet Waverly became very successful in life. Ying-Ying also expresses her view that everything in her life is "fated," and she has no control over it. However, An-mei, the only Christian character in the book, feels that fate means "doing what you must" (130). She says that it can be shaped by expectation or inattention, and therefore encourages her daughter Rose to fix her marriage because the divorce happened only because of inattention (131). An-mei encourages action and courage, while Ying-Ying has supported negligence and false hope. Lindo's superstitions are false.

Another mother and daughter that question fate and luck are Suyuan and June. Suyuan feels her daughter is fated to be a child prodigy, if she would only

try. June disagrees, saying that she is who she is and it cannot be changed (The Joy Luck Club 138). June actually wonders, later in her life, if she could have been a “prodigy.” This is an answer to a vital question in the book, that of fate versus free will. While some characters such as Ying-Ying and Lindo believe that fate controls them, An-mei and Suyuan believe that they themselves control their own fate. Tan expresses her opinion that the latter is accurate and brings joy, while letting fate control one’s life brings destruction and depression. One cannot let life pass by them, trusting a false hope that something will change their life for them.

In The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001), fate and self-determination also play a prominent role. Luling believes that, because she betrayed her mother, she is fated to ill fortune and to be cursed for the rest of her life (252). Precious Auntie was even believed to have set their family’s home and business on fire, causing them to lose everything and putting Luling into an orphanage (257). This shows the power of fate in the story. Ruth fails to agree, however. She tries to help her mother, and finally helps her feel forgiveness for betraying Precious Auntie. Tan adds detail to this “fate versus self-determination” argument, allowing that curses may be believed to exist, yet Luling cannot live her life wondering or sulking about the past. The future is still undecided.

Almost all of Tan’s stories present an argument between fate and self-determination. Overall, the outcomes of the stories prove that while fate may exist, people must make their own choices and cannot let the idea of fate control their lives. The past does influence the present, as shown through the various

Chinese mothers and their histories. Their daughters learn from them, especially their mistakes. Yet people cannot live in the past, either. They must move on, take risks, and fight for their future. Certain things happen for a reason, but they cannot happen unless one makes choices for oneself.

Amy Tan uses her own personal experiences, relationships, and literary themes to create universal works that still have very original ideas and details. Her mother's and grandmother's lives influenced her own life so much that they are even speculated to be characters in more than one of her stories. Her life allows her to share her own experiences, especially concerning her youth. Her questions concerning life and death are entwined in her works with Chinese lore such as the "World of Yin" and more serious themes. She also uses relationships throughout her stories that are relatable and true-to-life. She explores hope, courage, loss, and especially love and its ability to overcome obstacles. Finally, she threads common literary themes into her works, especially sexism, identity, and fate. Her characters are mostly Chinese-American, which she uses as an anchor to explore changes in culture and how those changes affect one's identity. Fate is an important theme, and Tan clearly expresses her idea that fate does exist, yet one cannot let it take over one's life.

In all of Amy Tan's novels, it is evident that, after there is mutual understanding between the mothers and the daughters about their lives through the stories told by the mothers, the Chinese-born mothers are trying to adapt and assimilate into the American culture while the American-born daughters are trying to accept their Chinese culture.

CHAPTER II

ALIENATION AND DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND ONE'S ROOTS

The experience of alienation, guilt or daydreaming can be said to be just one dimension of the migrant sensibility (Chatterjee 110). Alienation refers to living in a system established by somebody else and being made isolated from the communities, be it the native and the host country (Wright 156). Wright further asserts that the alienation effect has a new perspective associated with an external position and that the perspective is estranged from the familiar perspective. This definition is further extended to the dilemmas that are embodied in one's attempts to seek "home" (156). When one is not accepted by society, he becomes an outsider to everyone around him. He feels alienated and utterly alone. It is understandable that one must try and do anything in one's power to make oneself feel at home. Seeking "home" would mean searching for that feeling of familiarity and peace of mind, and it often creates ambivalence in one. In order to feel at home in the current environment, one must abandon many, if not all, of the customs and tradition formerly followed, but not being able to fully belong to either one. Thus, the idea of alienation could be referred to as accompanying space created by somebody else and is isolated from the native and current community, making a person living in a state of "in-betweenness" (Idrus 4).

From alienation comes displacement. Displacement is viewed as "the separation of people from their native culture, through physical dislocation (as

refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture” (Bammer, 1994). Such a separation may result in a number of diasporic negotiations that include splitting (Litjmaer, 2001), ethnocentric withdrawal, counterphobic assimilation (Deutsch, 1965) and nostalgia, leading to depressive states and isolation. Thus, displacement can be thought of as the separation from one’s native culture that has ripped the notion of home and has one’s identity dictated by one’s otherness and the people one currently lives with, resulting in some diasporic negotiations (Idrus 3).

Asian American literature shares with other literature a theme of concerns, such as love, acceptance, and a desire for personal freedom and a struggle against oppression and injustice. Like African American writing, Asian American literature is shaped by racism, both overt and disguised, and it “corollaries prejudice and discrimination” (Huntley 20). For most Asian American writers, the Old Country and its culture are neither ancient nor buried history. The immigrant experience looms large and consumes a large part of their writing. Amy Tan shares a number of common concerns and themes with other Asian American writers. She writes about the identity of the hyphenated American, about the culture differences between the immigrant parents and their American-born children (23). Tan raises questions about the relationship between ethnicity, gender and identity. She writes about the many facets of biculturalism, cultural dislocation, and the problems that arise when you try to integrate two cultures (30). Tan explores, through her fiction, “the knotty issues

of ethnic identity, and more specifically, the paradoxical nature of ethnic American identity” (35).

In all of the four selected novels by Amy Tan, the immigrant parents are presented as being alienated and being nostalgic for their roots. Finding one’s own self in one’s own place and time is hard enough, but having to do that in a place completely different and foreign to them takes a lot. No doubt they try really hard to fit in and belong in their new community, but they are still holding on to their past, and they still long to connect with it. This clearly brings out the dilemma faced by the immigrant parents and their American-born children who are usually (at first) ignorant of their Chinese roots. The incompleteness they see and feel in their parents (mothers) creates in the children (daughters) confusion as to where they belong, and this feeling of “not belonging” leads to alienation, which often leads to identity crisis.

Amy Tan uses her personal experiences as a Chinese-American to convey loneliness, isolation, and other concepts that she feels create common human connections with all people. Both of Amy Tan’s parents were Chinese immigrants. Being Chinese and constantly on the move made Tan always feel like an outsider. She was embarrassed repeatedly in her childhood by her family’s traditions and customs, yet finally realized as an adult that all people feel isolation (The Opposite of Fate 121). She wanted to communicate these feelings through her stories.

Tan’s novels focus on the tension or intergenerational conflict between the two generations as a result of differences in culture and social environment.

While the daughters find themselves confused and disturbed by the generational conflict, the mothers feel alienated from their own daughters, and this causes mental distress, because the matrilineal tradition of the Chinese establish strong bonds between mothers and daughters. Tan has effectively captured the two categories of Chinese American women separated by culture and generation in her novels.

The cross culture encounter between east and west is played out in the intergenerational conflict between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. The Chinese culture is known for its matrilineal bonds. But in the American social environment the family ties between mothers and daughters are no longer what it was in Chinese culture. While An-Mei, Weili, Lindo in The Joy Luck Club (1989), recollect with fondness the strong ties which they shared with their mothers in China; in America they are alienated from their daughters—Rose, Pearl, Waverly. The reason for this is the cultural impact upon tradition and roles. The traditional role of a Chinese mother has been greatly curtailed in America. If formerly she represented an automatic authority, now she is unsure of herself; defensive, hesitant to impose her own standards on the young. With the mother's role changed, the daughter no longer identifies with her mother, or internalizes her authority in the way as it was in the lives of these Chinese mothers (Eapen 119-20).

Not only do the Americanized daughters in Tan's books not understand the traditional Chinese ways of their mothers, but they also exhibit a preference for the American way of life. Frank Chin labels American society as a "white

supremacist society” (qtd. in Kim 176). Elaine H. Kim, author of Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context, would agree:

“The Asian American...has to bid for acceptance in white society...[he] can never claim more than ‘conditional membership’ in white society: he will have to ‘learn how to be white,’ to ‘deserve’ the privilege of belonging, a privilege white persons view as their inalienable right.” (228)

This idea of becoming an “honorary white person” to accommodate Americans, according to Kim, means “identify[ing] with whites” (228). This is exactly what Tan’s American-born daughters do. The daughters in Tan’s books, through their “critical perspective[s] on their mothers’ li[ves]” (Yglesias 2), demonstrate that they prefer the American way of life over the Chinese. Brought up in an environment where they are constantly surrounded by white people, they ultimately think of themselves as more American than Chinese. But in doing so, they are also reminded everyday of the fact that they are Chinese, either by their mothers or their own appearances. And the ambivalence resulting from this always lights a fire to that little doubt in the back of the heads, creating confusion, caught up between what they want to be and what they really are, and finally, ending up with an identity crisis.

Although the book The Joy Luck Club (1989) is a fiction, much of it is based on her own life experiences of how she has struggled to fit into American culture and still held on to her own heritage. Her life has been full of struggles,

her parents wanted big things for her and yet she wanted the freedom to forge her own path, something that is not readily accepted in her culture. There is a deep struggle that goes on to find a middle ground between still holding true to one's culture and being one's own person as well. Tan is able to write with a feeling of American culture and with Chinese tradition.

“She blends past and present in a collision of stories and voices and personalities, filtered through a point of view of someone who lives between worlds. She inhabits that border country known only to those whose minds and sensibilities cultures clash and battle for dominance” (Huntley 19).

The novel shows us a lot of things about how hard it is to maintain the Chinese culture while adapting to American living as well. The book opens with the story of June. She is the daughter of Suyuan Woo who has just passed away and she has been asked to take her mother's place at the Joy Luck Club. She fears that since she has been spending her life trying to fit in with American culture and pushing her Chinese culture away, she cannot take her mother's place. Her fear increases when she discovers she has two half-sisters and it is her place to tell them of their mother:

“What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything. She was my mother” (The Joy Luck Club 31).

She realizes how ignorant she had been about her mother and who she really was. Unknowingly, she had been alienating herself from her mother, resenting her for pushing her to things she did not bother to care. She finally realizes how

much her mother had sacrificed for her, and how much she had hurt her, only now it is too late. All her life, she had been resenting her Chinese heritage, but when she goes to China with her father, looking for her older half-sisters, she starts to feel strangely Chinese. She understands and accepts the importance of her Chinese heritage. She has changed into a different appearance, becoming Americanized, her Chinese heritage is finally important to her.

Ying-Ying is constantly misunderstood by Americans because of her strong Chinese accent. Yet she also struggles with her loss of tradition and fast adaptation into American culture. Waverly also always feels very distant in America, and so when she learns of a trip back to China, she thinks that she will blend in so well that she will never fit back into America. Lindo, her mother, knows better, because she feels they both have already lost their heritage and can never get it back (258). She was even spotted as a tourist while in China and cried over how America had changed her. June, ignorant of her Chinese history most of her life, finds herself “lost in translation” when visiting her half-sisters in China (271).

Balance between traditional and modern life is a common idea among all immigrants. On a much larger scale, all people try to “fit in” with certain social groups, yet wish to retain their individuality. With this, almost every single character in The Joy Luck Club can be seen as struggling with this equilibrium, finding peace in themselves at the end. Ying-Ying uses her daughter, Lena, to help her to learn to communicate in America. Lindo accepts change, and realizes that she can never “lose” her past because it actually stays with her. June,

worried about her accent, finds that words are not even needed when she feels so close to her lost sisters.

The novel is about the ethnic malaise of four families in San Francisco. This ethnic malaise, or ethnic unease, is a result of the cultural differences between Chinese-born mothers and American-born daughters, who seem to have continuous misunderstanding almost throughout the novel. The Chinese-born mothers are uncomfortable with their American-born daughters' readiness to accept the "new" and "foreign" culture, and likewise, the daughters are uncomfortable with the mothers' persistent hold of their Chinese culture and traditions that, according to them, should have been long forgotten. Focusing on the four pairs of mothers and daughters of the four families: Suyuan Woo and June Woo; An-Mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan; Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong; and Ying-Ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair, the novel tells the stories of these women which are interwoven in four major segments with a vignette and four chapters in each. The conflict depicted here is manifested in the relationship between the four Chinese immigrant mothers, who have formed a mahjong group called the Joy Luck Club and cherished ideologies of old China, and their four American-born daughters who believe in modern American individuality and independence. The generational and intercultural gap between mothers and daughters is unfolded with the daughters getting confused and frustrated with their mothers while growing up. On the one hand, the daughters find Chinese customs puzzling and their mothers' experiences mysterious. On the other hand, with broken English and limited knowledge about American customs, the

mothers are upset with the fact that their daughters do not understand them. Moreover, the mothers, driven by fear and psychological loss, try to control their daughters; and this intensifies the mother-daughter conflict (Zeng 3)

The “ethnic malaise” manifested in the relationship between the Chinese mothers and American daughters is the dilemma which many immigrants, especially their descendants, are faced with, that is, living “between worlds.” The young generation is often split by two different cultures, thus, caught up “between two worlds”.

Although they do not have to frequently choose between “Chineseness” and “Americanness,” as their American-born daughters often do, and are less afflicted with the complexities of being Chinese, American, and women, these Chinese-born mothers are trapped in nostalgia for a lost relation and, therefore, desiring for recreating the cultural connection and relocation. In addition to this geo-political and cultural displacement, these Chinese-born mothers are almost linguistically alienated. Thus, controlled by nostalgia and a sense of loss, the mothers, while exercising their motherly power and authority, try to ensure ethnic continuity within the family by recalling and retelling their suffering and pain of their past experiences. In Tan’s art, the painful memory narratives of the mothers are in many ways seen as ethnic survival mentality of these diasporic women and Suyuan Woo’s experience in wartime China epitomizes this (Zeng 5).

The Kitchen God’s Wife (1991) is very much about the issues that arise out of the immigrant experience and the generation gap between immigrants and

their children. This struggle is mostly illustrated through the character of Pearl, who is American born but is raised in a household with Chinese customs and traditions always coming into play. It is difficult for someone like her to live the space between being fully American and fully Chinese. It seems that she has tried to abandon her Chinese heritage and tries to avoid it at all costs; she does not want to go “home,” and she feels a distance from her mother.

Throughout the novel, Winnie remembers instances when Pearl had been hesitant to learn about her Chinese past. For example, when Pearl was studying the Second World War in school and her mother tried to tell her about World War II in China, Pearl had complained that what her mother was talking about was “Chinese History” not “American History” (The Kitchen God’s Wife 172). Like this there are many other instances, such as the fact that the pair share different ideas of beauty. Winnie had given her daughter a dresser that she thought was beautiful, just like one she had had a long time ago in China, but Pearl had complained and hated the dresser. Pearl’s father was also American-born Chinese but he died when she was so young that she did not have the chance to share her experiences with her or for him to share his similar experiences with her.

Amy Tan is giving the reader a version of her own experience as an Asian-American woman growing up in California, living in a house where there was a language barrier and where misunderstandings and miscommunications were common. For example, in the novel, Winnie has a difficult time understanding what her daughter does for a living. Significantly, Pearl works

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

Winnie also resists becoming Americanized and often scoffs at Western ways of doing things. Describing her uncle, she says that every year he took up a new hobby such as growing flowers. She remarks in chapter six,

“He always called it ‘hobby,’ just like the English, no Chinese word for doing something only to waste time, waste money” (115).

In chapter twelve, she describes putting on her coat and shoes to walk into town, three or four li away. She explains to Pearl that a “li” is about a half-mile, adding,

“And I had to walk that distance. I wasn’t like you, getting into a car to go two blocks to the grocery store” (212).

Similarly, she describes the truck that carried her and the air force group across the country. It pulled a tank of gas behind it because

“that was the only way to get to Kunming back then. We didn’t have gas stations every ten miles, no such thing. And we did not travel on big highways, with seventy-mile-an-hour speed limits” (223).

Winnie means only to express her pride in her native land and to emphasize how difficult life was for her then, especially compared to Pearl's life of convenience. She remarks:

“We didn't complain too much. Chinese people know how to adapt to almost anything. It didn't matter what your background was, rich or poor. We always knew: Our situation could change any minute. You're lucky you were born in this country. You never had to think that way” (225).

Of course, the irony in Winnie's statement is that she has not adapted to American life. Perhaps this is simply a choice, not a matter of not knowing how to adapt; she simply chooses to live as Chinese a life as she can. She longs for her past life and loves to talk about it. Remembering and recalling her experiences in China makes her nostalgic, and this constant day-dreaming hinders her chance of fully adapting to American life.

Many of Winnie's characteristics point to her Chinese heritage and lifestyle. Her reliance on superstition and luck is a critical part of her thinking. Despite marrying a Baptist minister, she adheres to the religion of her past, complete with household deities, like the Kitchen God, and ghosts. Her daughter Pearl recalls a childhood memory of seeing a ghost swirl out of a jack-o-lantern's mouth. She told her mother, who immediately began searching for the ghost. She had not let go of her Chinese superstition. She was holding on to everything that made her “Chinese”. Things like these are what make Winnie

still attached to her root. Winnie's father, on the other hand, explained that there are no such things as ghosts, and that the only ghost is the Holy Ghost, who would never try to scare children.

Symbols also play important roles in portraying alienation and nostalgia. When Winnie lives with her aunt and uncle, she uses the greenhouse in the "western part" of the house as her hiding place. This greenhouse is symbolic of foreign influences on China in the twenties and thirties, because it was where Winnie's uncle had practiced one of his "English hobbies," which was gardening. Soon after the novelty of his new hobby has worn off however, the greenhouse is abandoned and used as a storage room for unwanted possessions. Winnie, while living in her Uncle and Aunt's house, feels unwanted and so she feels at ease among other "unwanted" things. Even when she was in her homeland, China, she always felt like an outsider. Living with her uncle when her father is still alive somehow gave her the impression that her own father rejected her, even though she was too young to realize it at the time. She even admits that she "never felt [she] belonged in that family" (111).

Growing up without a mother, Winnie often feels isolated and uncared for. And after she moves to America, the feeling of isolation turns to alienation from the people and environment surrounding her, and a deeper sense of nostalgia takes over. Pearl finds her mother annoying and old-fashioned at times. This is because of the communication gap between mother and daughter. Pearl grows up in a world where two very different cultures clash and finds herself in-between. When she finds that her mother's way of doing things is so different from the

American way, it confuses her and makes her uncertain of where she comes from. Although there is no doubt that the mother loves the daughter, their formal relationship keeps them further and further apart, alienating them from one another. Mutual understanding can only take place if there is real communication between mother and daughter. So, in their journey towards finding each other, they start to find themselves in their own place, locating their being and identity.

The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) explores the cultural differences of the ancient east and the modern west, through the compelling characters of Kwan and her sister, Olivia. It was written for audiences of all different cultures and nationalities, allowing just about anyone to take away something from its mesmerizing, intertwining story. Tan addresses many backgrounds and situations of life: immigrants mixed racial groups, American versus Chinese culture. The past, present, and future are also closely woven in her story, often crossing the boundaries between each other and questioning what most people see as logic and reality.

Olivia Laguni, half Caucasian and half Chinese, loses her father at a young age and her family discovers that she has a half-sister in China, Kwan Li, who comes to live with Olivia, her two brothers, and her mother. The book explores the significant relationship between Olivia and Kwan, which is defined by their subtle similarities and extreme differences. Tan creates profound interactions between her characters that throw light on the cultural gaps that distance Olivia from Kwan's enthusiastic affection, as well as the sisters'

common ground of love and a sense of family. Kwan tries to give wisdom and advice, with her ability to communicate with the dead with her “yin eyes”, to Olivia, who, on the other hand, is embarrassed by her sister’s bad English and seemingly eccentric beliefs. These sharp observations of American behavior and Chinese philosophy present interesting, alternative ways of thinking about the world that challenge modern cynicism and force the reader to re-conceptualize his or her beliefs and be more open about them.

In the novel, Kwan experiences identity problems her entire life. Once she arrives in America, Olivia begins to rebuke her Chinese ways. Olivia’s parents even think that she is crazy, and she is given shock treatments (The Hundred Secret Senses 17). Olivia tries to distance herself from Kwan in order to find friends and acceptance, yet instead misses Kwan deeply after she is gone. She felt that Kwan was actually a part of her, and so in her death she is missing something. She also felt an identity crisis when her boyfriend, Simon, continuously compared her to his dead girlfriend. Olivia feels that she never measured up to her. Yet, she comes to find that this is not true when she stops comparing herself. Her own self-doubt had led her to obsession, and Kwan freed her from that through her unyielding love.

Kwan always follows Olivia around and Olivia always tries to avoid her. She is embarrassed by Kwan’s silly questions. Kids pick on Kwan and instead of defending her or getting upset that her sister is being bullied, Olivia gets mad that Kwan is so stupid. But Kwan always forgives her and keeps on loving her, and not holding anything against her. Kwan must have felt quite alone. But it

does not stop her from loving her sister. Although she feels isolated and alienated from the others because she does not speak good English, or her perception of things is a bit different, she never lets it get the better of her. Instead, she finds solace in her nostalgia, and she enjoys talking about her life in China. Remembering and talking about her past makes her feel even closer to her roots, and it keeps her identity—her Chineseness—alive.

Again, symbol plays an important role. For instance, in the first chapter, there is a mention of a grasshopper, it is brought by Kwan from China as a pet. The grasshopper incident signifies the fact that Olivia has no appreciation for Kwan and her Chinese heritage. The story becomes dramatic when Kwan reveals that she has “yin eyes”. The yin eyes symbolized the ancestry of Kwan and Olivia. Kwan arrives from China following the death of their father and shakes Olivia’s world. She tries to push Kwan away, embarrassed by Kwan’s ability to make unconscious fool of herself. The fact that Olivia does not like Kwan is a symbol of her indifference toward Chinese culture.

Kwan is not the only one who feels alienated. Olivia, too, admits that she feels alienated from her mother, who does not seem to have time for her. She calls herself “a lonely kid” (8), and silences her frustrated hope for love “by telling myself that there was nothing inside those hopes anyway” (8). She lives between many sets of dual worlds—the Chinese and the American, the internal and the external, the surface and the mysterious. Olivia is susceptible to Kwan not only because she feels somewhat like an outsider as a Chinese-American, but because she feels unloved by her mother. Kwan’s sureness of her roots

brings out her own doubts and uncertainty about hers. Her alienation from her mother turns to alienation from the environment.

But slowly as time passes, Olivia begins to understand her isolation and alienation, with the help of Kwan. Both sisters take an emotional journey and share an understanding of where one stands in society and culture. Their alienation had driven them closer to their root willingly (Kwan) and unwillingly (Olivia), and as a result, they share a stronger bond of sisterhood.

The dislocation Tan exposes here is not so much between the Chinese and the American experience – although Olivia initially assumes it to be so – as between a mystical and a pragmatic world view. (Upon her arrival in China, Olivia discovers that while Kwan’s friends there may be more tolerant of her communion with the spirits, they do not necessarily believe in it.) In appealing to Olivia’s – and the reader’s – unacknowledged mystical urges, Tan taps a rich but risky source: our relationship to the dead is also a measure of our connection to life itself, and Kwan’s belief in eternal cosmic renewal is enticing.

In The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001), Ruth and Luling communicate a strong message of immigrants and their isolation. Ruth constantly called herself her mother’s “mouthpiece” because of her mother’s horrible English. While Luling seemed to be so opposed to adaptation into American life, Ruth had forgotten all of her heritage. Luling felt isolated from the American world, while Ruth was completely absorbed in it. After Ruth found pieces of her

mother's lost history, she hired a translator and learned from them. Ruth felt the knowledge of her family's past was very much a part of her, as Tan had. This parallelism is also interesting in that Ruth learns to help Luling adapt into American life, but also learns to listen to her mother's past and advice. This helped both women's identities, in that Ruth found her past and Luling modernized for the future.

Ruth, as the only child of a Chinese widow, had grown up “[feeling] like an outsider” (The Bonesetter's Daughter 59). This idea appeals to Americans, who as “outsiders” and strangers to the Chinese ways of life, welcome the idea that the daughters still feel uncomfortable in their own culture despite being raised in Chinese families. Walter Shear, in “Generational Differences and the Diaspora”, describes the daughters in a “diaspora”, alienated by “geography, politics, and cultural distinctness” (Shear 195). Similarly, Elaine H. Kim describes Americans as alienated by “language barriers and cultural differences” (Kim 275). American readers who search for someone to identify with would thus be able to do so with “the American” (Caesar 170) – in this case, the first generation daughters. As a result, Americans will welcome the feeling of having a common ground to relate to, and thus be more receptive to Tan's books.

Ruth is an Asian American who has grown up with the belief that curses and ghosts are prevalent in the world, a belief strongly held by her mother, LuLing. During an argument with her mother, Ruth shouts, “I'm an American...I have a right to privacy, to pursue my own happiness, not yours!” (The Bonesetter's Daughter 140). Ruth's outcry for these natural American rights is a

reminder that she thinks of herself as more American than Chinese. Ruth also goes through the “routines of the mainstream American” against her mother’s Chinese ways (Unali 1), demonstrating once again how American she is: she hires a housekeeper, moves in with her boyfriend Art, and finally decides to send her mother to a nursing home. Ruth, despite being ethnically Chinese and raised in a Chinese family, has become the “honorary white person” through her American ways, thus appealing to supremacist Americans.

Ruth grows up coping with her dual identity and invisibility. Being born in America but educated by a Chinese mother, Ruth’s growth involves resolving the tension between two different cultures and reclaiming her silenced voice and identity. Ruth is invisible in many ways at different stages of her life. In her childhood, she is silenced both at home and at school. At home, Ruth’s mother, LuLing, disciplines Ruth in a way that results in Ruth being unable to articulate her voice. LuLing demands total submission of Ruth to her will and does not tell Ruth why. As LuLing persistently resists American values and practice, she projects her will upon Ruth. She teaches Ruth to write Chinese; she does not allow Ruth to eat American food such as chocolate milk, doughnuts, beef, hamburger, and so on; she has high expectations of Ruth’s excellent performance at school; and she fills Ruth’s mind with ghosts and spirits. LuLing’s refusal of American language and food, her belief in ghosts, and her demand of Ruth’s filial obedience create a sense of alienation in Ruth, who was born in America where her mother’s demands and belief do not fit.

LuLing's way of disciplining her American-born daughter is a reflection of LuLing's Chinese upbringing and is rooted in her experiences with her own mother, Liu Xin (Precious Auntie). In a traditional Chinese mother-daughter relationship, the mother has the total control of her daughter, and a good daughter is supposed to be unconditionally obedient to the will of her mother. Although LuLing's strict discipline reveals her deep concern for Ruth's future, it ignores the fact that Ruth is an individual and she has her own thinking, too. In addition, LuLing neither realizes that Ruth is too young to understand her well-meant intention nor tells Ruth the story of herself and her mother. Moreover, LuLing ignores the fact that the historical and cultural context Ruth lives in is quite different from the one in which she used to live. While LuLing is able to enclose herself in an imaginative Chinese space in her own apartment and make a living by writing calligraphy for the discount Chinese stores, Ruth, being born into a different cultural environment, may not be able to survive by doing so. For Ruth, besides gender discrimination within the Chinese community, she has to face racial bias at school.

Being an outsider, Ruth is not popular at school. She is laughed at by her schoolmates for the awkward English of her mother. The kids make fun of her mother. "What's that gobbledy-gook-gook she's saying?" (77) Ruth feels ashamed that her mother does not speak a language her American schoolmates can understand. At this stage of her life, Ruth has not matured enough to appreciate her mother and the Chinese cultural heritage her mother tries to pass on to her. Instead, Ruth wants to be the same as her American schoolmates. She

wishes she were allowed to eat beef and hamburger; to have a dog; to watch TV; not to hear about ghosts, spirits, and curses; and not forced to learn the complicated calligraphy her mother practices. However, Ruth's intention to openly identify herself with her American schoolmates is curbed by her mother even when Ruth reaches adolescence. LuLing forbids Ruth whatever an adolescent may want to try, such as cosmetics, movies, and cigarettes.

Ruth's sense of silence and oblivion continues throughout her adult life. Her living with Art is a process of entering into a foreign environment, losing herself, and being alienated from her cultural roots. She becomes a caretaker of Art and Art's two daughters from his former marriage. None of them really understand or care to learn about the Chinese part of Ruth. Ruth's two American step-daughters, Fia and Dory, never understand why Ruth craves for spicy turnips; instead, they consider it "something farted in the fridge" (38). They see Ruth as "difficult" when Ruth challenges their concept of female beauty by arguing that

"Just because something isn't cute, is its life worthless? If a girl wins a beauty contest, is she better than a girl who doesn't?" (39).

Likewise, being accustomed to the American way of individualism, Art is insensitive to Ruth's inner emotions. When Ruth tells him that her mother is diagnosed with dementia, Art does not respond in an involved way. Even worse, he suggests that Ruth should hire a housekeeper to take care of LuLing so that they can still go to the beach for their annual holiday as planned. Art's reaction violates Ruth's concept of family and upsets Ruth. If Art were sensitive enough

to the Chinese concept of family and filial responsibility, he would have known that it is unacceptable to leave one's mother under the care of a housekeeper to go on a vacation; furthermore, as Ruth's partner he is considered a half son of LuLing and thus has a responsibility to take care of her, too. Ruth becomes more aware of the way she and Art fail to be a family after the Moon Festival get-together. Unconsciously, Ruth, LuLing, and their relations sit at one table; Art, his ex wife, and people in their relation sit at the other table. The table manners of the American kids and their fuss over the Chinese food make Ruth feel an uncomfortable sense of otherness.

Ruth is not only marginalized in her American family but also thwarted in her job. Ruth feels discredited ghostwriting for her American clients.

“And when the books were published, Ruth had to sit back quietly at parties while the clients took the credit for being brilliant. She often claimed she did not need to be acknowledged to feel satisfied, but that was not exactly true. She wanted some recognition...” (43).

Nonetheless, silence, alienation, and dilemma only constitute one side of Ruth's life; the other side of Ruth's life is composed of resistance. In time of stress and crisis, spirituality functions as an intimate power source for Ruth to find her way out of her trouble. The power source comes from both within and without. The internal force is Ruth's inner voice and the external one originates from her grandmother and later on her mother. The internal and external spiritual forces take effect primarily by means of Liu Xin's ghost and Ruth's ghostwriting. Being silenced, writing becomes the avenue for Ruth to vent her

own voice and have it appreciated. The communication between Ruth and her mother by means of writing starts when Ruth is six years old. In that year the tension between Ruth and her mother reaches a peak in the accident in which Ruth's arm is broken. Ruth temporarily loses her voice after the accident. To solve the problem of talking with Ruth, LuLing gives Ruth a sand tray on which Ruth writes down her words. Having less fear of verbal argument with her mother since Ruth cannot speak, Ruth ventures to write down her true opinions. Miraculously, LuLing begins to take Ruth's words seriously. Being encouraged by LuLing's approval, Ruth gradually becomes more articulate and self-confident. More important, sand-writing makes Ruth popular among her American classmates. As social recognition plays a critical role in developing a child's self-esteem, it is safe to say that her sand-writing changes Ruth's recognition of herself.

The ninth year of losing her voice turns out to be a turning point in Ruth's life as well as in the life of LuLing and Liu Xin. For the past eight years, Ruth has been separated from her Chinese mother and grandmother and submerged in an American environment, in which she feels an outsider and unrecognized. However, on the first day of Ruth's recovery from the loss of her voice, "she felt a tug of worry, something she was not supposed to forget" (12), and then she stumbles on a scroll of paper which her mother has given to her a few years ago but which she has ignored. Coincidentally, on the day Ruth pulls the scroll of paper from the bottom of her drawer, her mother is diagnosed with dementia. On the critical verge of losing the memory of LuLing's life and Liu Xin's life,

Ruth decides to move back to live with her mother and listen to the stories of her mother and grandmother.

Going back to her mother is a process of rediscovering herself and re-recognizing her mother and grandmother. Her mother's apartment is still the same as it is before. The familiar space triggers a series of memories. By remembering the past, Ruth comes to realize that she and her mother are the same. Ruth's recollection with her mother and the spirit of her grandmother is a process of regaining her voice in her American family, too. After Ruth moves out of Art's apartment, the girls start to miss her and Art begins to rethink his concept of American individual freedom. By telling the story of her mother and grandmother, Ruth rediscovers herself, too. The story ends with Ruth's still having her voice and ghostwriting in a new sense: writing an account of the life of her grandmother. The ghostwriter has become a primary author at last, ironically, by literally writing for a ghost. In the end, Ruth has come to understand her mother's frustration and anger and thus starts to appreciate the matrilineal heritage passed on from her grandmother to her mother to her, which she has tried to reject in her childhood and adolescence.

Tan's fiction is about Chinese American—both the first generation and the second generation. Her characters both old and young are products of a different time / period, country, geography, culture and architecture. With these she creates a suitable backdrop for her drama of migration, nostalgia for the native land/ people/culture, adaptation and acculturation into the new country.

CHAPTER III

THEME OF MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

Throughout literature, themes involving relationships are used to develop a main idea or conflict, to bring out the message that the writers want to be portrayed, and to paint a picture of what human relationships are according to the writers. The relationships involved in these themes usually consist of bonds between family members, such as mother-daughter relationships, father-son relationships, and relationships between siblings. Mothers and daughters hold different relationships when compared to others. This type of relationship is continuously portrayed in almost every Amy Tan novel. The misunderstanding the daughters experience with their mothers results in the difficulties they develop when concerned with communication and cultural differences. Amy Tan creates mothers who want their daughters to experience the American culture but still stay connected to their Chinese heritage and culture. Furthermore, their mothers have high expectations for their daughters in life. This thus creates a more strained and distant relationship between the mothers and daughters displayed in the novels.

In almost all her works, Amy Tan uses the framing device of mother-daughter relationships. The term “framing device” refers to the usage of the same single action, scene, event, setting, or any element of significance at both the beginning and end of an artistic, musical, or literary work. The repeated element thus creates a ‘frame’ within which the main body of work can develop.

In this case, Tan uses mother-daughter relationship as a frame to develop the action of the story. In this way Tan draws upon a familiar and comforting tradition for the Western reader. Strategically too this theme is central to Western women in that it explores the daughter's desire for freedom and independence, demanding an identity as separate from her mother. This clashes with her intense and fierce attachment to and sense of continuum with her mother's life. In this, Tan's pursuit of mother-daughter relationships, rather than father-son ones, reinscribes the woman in the interrogation of origins, a theme only explored via sons who are the "legitimate" heirs to any notion of origins (Mohanram 1).

Marianne Hirsch points out in The Mother/Daughter Plot (1989) that the mother-daughter narrative varies from the traditional father-son relationship in that the former is marked with opposition and contradiction. She argues that the Western narrative of mother-daughter relationships is located in the Demeter-Persephone myth which enacts the daughter's unbreakable attachment to her mother which is constantly interrupted by her relationship to her husband (Hirsch 5). In Greek mythology, Demeter is the goddess of harvest, and she also controls the seasons. When her daughter, Persephone, was abducted by Hades, god of the underworld, she was able to persuade her husband Zeus into making Hades bring her back. Zeus sent Hermes, but as Persephone had eaten something while she should not have, Hermes could only arrange for Persephone to return to her mother for four months each year. Each spring, Demeter makes sure all the flowers bloom in welcome when her daughter, Persephone, returns to her.

Each fall, when Persephone returns to Hades, Demeter cries, and lets all the crops die until spring, when the cycle starts again. To this extent, the daughters June (along with a host of others) in The Joy Luck Club (1989), Pearl in The Kitchen God's Wife (1991), Olivia in The Hundred Secret Sense (1995) and Ruth in The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) indicate the tremendous difficulties of individuation and the loss of the maternal.

Tan's mother-daughter relationship is an alternative to the determinant father-son themes in American writing as Tan uses the communication gap as the main problem, like most of American writers do. But in Tan's writing, the mother is portrayed as somewhat smothering the daughter with her constant nagging and pressuring her to be more "Chinese", or complaining about how ignorant the daughter is of her Chinese roots. On the other hand, in American writing, the conflict between father and son is, more often than not, depicted as resulting from lack of presence on the father's part, or breakdown in communication. For example, in the plays Long Day's Journey Into Night (1956) by Eugene O'Neill and Buried Child (1979) by Sam Shepard, the relationship between father(s) and son(s) becomes so dysfunctional that at some points of the plays, fathers and sons treat one another as if they were strangers the others have never met. And the sons almost emasculate the fathers, both literally and metaphorically. In this way, Tan creates an alternative to the determinant father-son theme of American writing with her famous theme of mother-daughter relationship.

In Tan's novels, mother-daughter dyads ultimately become a metaphor for the relationship between China and the U.S. In the early part of this century Anzia Yeziarska had written immigrant novels where the mother and daughter embody the old country and the new world respectively and it is within this framework that Tan too explores the Chinese part of a Chinese-American identity. Thus mother-daughter relationships as well as its intersection with the inscription of the old country get played out in the overarching theme of identity. In The Joy Luck Club (1989), as first-generation Americans, June and Pearl signify the assimilation that America requires whereas their mothers, as immigrants, embody a severe sense of displacement. June and Pearl's desire for individuation thus goes beyond a break from the mother. Their lives also mirror the ambiguous relationship that Chinese-Americans have with the two mother-countries, the U.S. and China. In a further turn of the screw, Tan shows Pearl's mother, Winnie, as a daughter, in China. This repetition of mothers as daughters prefigures in the characters of Ying-Ying St. Clair and An-Mei Hsu in The Joy Luck Club (1989). In this foregrounding of mothers as daughters, Tan reveals her ploy, wherein she wrests this particular theme from the Western tradition and locates it squarely within China (Mohanram 1).

It is the constant conflict with Daisy Tan, her mother, and the emotional turmoil that Daisy has bestowed on her that have made Tan discover the resources of scheming her successful novels. Daisy Tan's early life and biographical stories were legends themselves. Growing up in an old esteemed family in Shanghai, she witnessed her mother's tragic life. After her scholar

husband's death, Jingmei, Tan's maternal grandmother, was raped and taken as a low-ranked concubine by a wealthy industrialist. She brought Daisy with her to live in the wealthy family in Shanghai and confided her dilemmatic suffering with her daughter before she committed suicide. Daisy grew up with painful loss of her mother and got married early, but she did not live a happy life afterward; instead, Daisy was maltreated by her violent and abusive chauvinist husband Wang Zo that later took away her right of visiting her three daughters, and further had her persecuted to prison for two years after she escaped and divorced him. During the Sino-Japanese War, she flew with John Tan, a brilliant student who rejected MIT's offer but attended Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, and thereafter, they immigrated to States (Hsieh 1).

Raised by a determined mother whose legendary biographical stories are already fascinating, Amy Tan explicitly expressed her love-hate relationship with her strict mother who had one time mentally tormented her with overloaded expectation and emotional dramatic reactions. Fed with ancient Chinese legends, folk stories, traditions and superstitious beliefs, Tan grew up in a bicultural environment, feeling the complexity and difficulty in her life, just like many second-generation Chinese-Americans.

Tan's well known works put one theme center-staged, that is, the relationship of the traditional immigrant mother and the second generation Chinese-American daughter. In accordance with Daisy's stories and Tan's own childhood hardship, growing up under severe supervision and with high standards for everything, she schematically tells the story of her mother, her

grandmother and other female related or unrelated acquaintance, along with the aids of the ancient folklores, stories and legends that she learned from her father when she was a child. Through her skillful writing techniques and brilliant story-telling, Tan's first publication of the first novel swept the world and her name has become a household one.

In her works, Tan reflects on her memories of her life with her mother, and her rebellion. She defied her mother by abandoning the pre-med course pushed onto her from childhood in favor of linguistics study (Academy of Achievement 1). She had done many things against her mother's wishes, but ultimately realized her mother was actually right in saying, "More important is family" (The Opposite of Fate 150). She finally ended her rebellion, settling down as a writer. Amy Tan learned the importance of family, as well, while visiting her relations in China for the first time and discovering how connected they were through their relationship, despite her lack of knowledge of the Chinese language (157). These experiences are similar to those in almost all of her works. In The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001), Tan parallels herself to Ruth in that she also argued so fiercely with her mother, Luling, throughout her young rebellious years, but learned to value her and especially her rich, detailed life. Ruth is truly able to appreciate Luling at the end of her life, just as Amy Tan did.

Through sixteen interconnected stories told by four immigrants from China and their four American-born daughters, The Joy Luck Club (1989) illuminates the nature of mother-daughter relationships in both cultures. An

important theme in the novel is the impact of past generations on the present. The structure, in which the daughters' eight stories are interwoven with those of the mothers, implies that the older generation may hold a key to resolving the problems of the young. The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) also concerns mother-daughter relationships, but focuses on only one family and the tension between a woman named Winnie Louie and her daughter Pearl, who have persistently kept secrets from each other. Once they begin to reveal their secrets, they establish a connection. In The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) Tan delineates the relationship between two sisters: Olivia, an American-born daughter of a Chinese father, and Kwan, her older Chinese-born sister from her father's first marriage. In this novel, the Chinese-born mother is replaced by a half sister, Kwan, who is a mother-figure for Olivia throughout the novel. In The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) an American-born Chinese woman named Ruth finds two packets of writings in Chinese calligraphy, and learns that they are the memoirs of her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease and has written down events of her life before her disease renders her incapable of doing so. Ruth works with a translator to translate her mother's writing, and discovers details concerning her mother's past in the remote mountains of China.

In The Joy Luck Club (1989), Amy Tan explores mother-daughter relationships through the four pairs of protagonists. The novel is about four women, who escape China and travel to America to create better lives for themselves and their future family. When one of the protagonists, Suyuan Woo immigrates to America, she continues a tradition she had in China, known as the

Joy Luck club, where Chinese women get together to enjoy food, stories, and Chinese culture. She invites three other Chinese immigrant women from her church to this club. Suyuan Woo has recently passed away and her daughter, June, takes over her mother's position in the club. The three other women, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair, all have daughters of their own named, Rose Hsu, Waverly Jong, and Lena St. Clair. All of these eight protagonists' stories are revealed in The Joy Luck Club (1989) and through their stories, one can see the developing mother-daughter relationships between Suyuan and June Woo, An-mei and Rose Hsu, Lindo and Waverly Jong, and Ying-ying and Lena St. Clair.

The mother-daughter relationship exhibited between Suyuan Woo and June Woo gradually changes to form a better connection between them. After Suyuan Woo immigrates to America, she marries and gives birth to a daughter, named June. Because June grew up in a different atmosphere, culture, and environment, the relationship between mother and daughter is strained. Suyuan Woo would continuously educate June about the Chinese culture; however, June did not care about this part of her background. When she was younger, and her mother would tell her about the Joy Luck club, she, "imagined Joy Luck was a shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of the Ku Klux Klan or the tom-tom dances of TV Indians preparing for war," (The Joy Luck Club 28). She did not fully understand the Chinese tradition and failed to learn about it. Suyuan Woo wanted her daughter to live like an American, but at the same time think like a Chinese. June felt humiliated with her mother's Chinese ways,

causing their relationship to be more distant. They did not understand each other's cultural differences. However, this part of their relationship changes when June goes to China to see her half-sisters. After her mother passes away, June travels to China to discover her sisters and encounters her Chinese culture that she never valued, and, "and now [she] sees what part of [her] is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go," (288). Overall, throughout June's life, she and her mother do not seem to connect when it comes to culture because they are not open to each other's thoughts.

In addition their relationship is also shaped by the pressure Suyuan Woo puts on her daughter. When June is growing up, her mother has the need for her daughter to be a good all-around Chinese daughter. She expects her daughter to be smart, talented, and a respectful Chinese daughter. This pressure put on June results in misunderstanding between mother and daughter. June constantly thinks, "that she was disappointing her mother," because she felt as if she failed at everything her mother wanted her to do (209). June does not understand that her mother wants the best for her. Furthermore, Suyuan Woo forces June to play the piano at a recital, and June ends up forgetting the music notes. June blames her embarrassment on her mother and states, "'You want me to be someone that I'm not!' I sobbed. 'I'll never be the kinds of daughter you want me to be!'" (142). Furthermore, Foster states, "perhaps it is a "daughter's" expectations that June uses to judge her mother." Suyuan's high expectations for her daughter cause miscommunication and misunderstanding in their relationship. However,

this relationship gradually changes as June gets older and becomes an adult. She starts to understand her mother's ways and respects her mother's actions and words. June becomes more like her mother and, "Regardless of how much the daughters try to deny it, it is through their mothers that they find their voice, their mind, their selfhood," (Foster 210). Suyuan Woo tries to comfort her daughter when she is insulted by Waverly Jong and presents to her daughter a jade, which represents life's importance. This shows that their mother-daughter relationship has slowly turned to become a closer and more connected relationship. Tan develops a relationship between Suyuan and June that is strained and distant in the beginning due to culture differences and miscommunication, but slowly strengthens with time and understanding.

When examining An-Mei's and Rose Hsu's relationship, one can see the connection mothers and daughters have because of the strength a mother gives to her daughter. An-Mei gives her daughter, Rose, advice and strength indirectly to make her daughter a strong woman. As a child, An-Mei was taught to handle her own problems and face her fears through strength. She experienced the worth of pain at a very young age and she, "could see the pain of the flesh and the worth of the pain," (The Joy Luck Club 48). An-Mei wants her own daughter to experience pain and be strong through it, so when she hears about her daughter's divorce from her husband, she tries to make her daughter face her problem. An-Mei and Rose face cultural differences too for Rose marries an American and not a Chinese man. So when An-Mei tries to help Rose save her marriage she, "think[s] it's ironic that my mother wants me to fight the

divorce,” (117). When Rose is growing up, her mother tells her stories that make Rose have nightmares. An-Mei does this to make her daughter strong and face her fears. Everything An-Mei tries to do is for her daughter’s benefit. When she finds out that Rose is going to go to a psychiatrist, An-Mei tells Rose that she should not tell her problems to strangers and instead confide in her family. Foster explains that,

“Rose’s mother tells her that she must stand tall and listen to her mother standing next to her. If she bends to listen to strangers, she’ll grow weak and be destroyed” (209).

An-Mei wants her daughter to be strong. Rose’s husband, Ted, has been controlling Rose’s life throughout their marriage and finally after taking in her mother’s advice and speaking up to her husband, she learns that, “The power of my words was that strong,” (196). Furthermore, “she listens to her mother and finds her voice—her self,” (Foster 209).

Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong’s mother-daughter relationship is shaped by the pressure Lindo Jong puts on her daughter and the need for her to live vicariously through her daughter. After Waverly discovers her interest in playing chess, her mother, Lindo, puts Waverly in chess tournaments. Waverly’s childhood consists of one thing, which is chess. Her mother forces her to practice everyday and gradually Waverly becomes a chess champion, winning many tournaments. Lindo cannot help but always tell Waverly what to do with her next move in chess or comment on the moves she makes. Waverly becomes

fed up with this pressure and this over excessive interest her mother has in Waverly's fame as a chess champion. Lindo continuously brags about her daughter and eventually Waverly cannot stand this and says,

“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,” (The Joy Luck Club 99).

She takes pride in her daughter and lives through her daughter's accomplishments. Critics, such as Heung, state that, “Much as Lindo possesses a ‘double face,’ she also has access to a ‘double vision.’ Seeing herself mirrored in her daughter” (Heung 303). She lives through her daughters chess success and, “she is moved by her daughter's resemblance to her,” (303). In conclusion, the mother-daughter relationship between Lindo and Waverly is characterized by the pressure and pride Lindo puts on her daughter.

The mother-daughter relationship between Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair is characterized to be very distant and disconnected. As Lena grows up, her mother continuously tells Lena stories that make her scared and fear life. After hearing these stories,

“[she] began to see terrible things. [she] saw these things with my Chinese eyes, the part of me I got from my mother. [she] saw devils dancing feverishly beneath a hole I had dug in the sandbox,” (The Joy Luck Club 103).

Her mother's words are the cause of many of Lena's problems. She makes Lena believe that she killed a boy named Arnold, when in reality she did not and says,

“I thought she could see through me and that she knew I was the one who had caused Arnold to die. I was terrified,” (154).

Her mother becomes insane and does not stay connected with her Americanized daughter. Lena becomes jealous of other mother-daughter relationships and “Lena continually hoped that her mother would someday be well and that she and her mother could have the close relationship she saw in her dreams. Lena felt invisible and alone,” (Heung 208). The mother-daughter relationship that Tan creates between Ying-ying and Lena show how some mother-daughter relationships can be very disconnected.

All in all, Amy Tan develops different mother-daughter relationships by using the characters she creates. Each relationship portrayed in The Joy Luck Club (1989) is characterized differently. June and Suyuan Woo hold a connection that is distorted at first, but ends up becoming strong. Rose and An-Mei Hsu relationship is connected because of the strength An-Mei gives to her daughter. Lindo and Waverly's bond demonstrates how mothers take pride in their daughter's accomplishments as a result of them pressuring their daughters to do well. Finally, mother-daughter relationships are described as distant and this is seen through Lena and Ying-ying St. Clair's relationship. Relationship as a theme is very dominant in many novels and Amy Tan explores a very

interesting one by showing the different connections a mother and daughter can have.

With these main stories, Tan shows the reader many different variations of a universal mother-daughter relationship. Each teaches a lesson. June learns to appreciate her mother for what she is and what she has done. Lena learns through both her mother's past and advice to have hope, as Rose learns through the same means to have strength. These relationships are so common in daily life, often unnoticed or overlooked. Tan causes her readers to value those around them, especially family, and to not take any relationship for granted.

The Kitchen God's Wife (1991) is about a mother and daughter who have mutually reinforcing secrets. Their inability to communicate is based partially on their different backgrounds. The mother was reared in China and immigrated to California later in life, while her daughter was born and reared in the United States. In the beginning, the story is told by the daughter, Pearl, who has informed everyone but her mother that she has multiple sclerosis. Pearl is afraid that her mother, Winnie, will get overexcited by the news. Pearl feels especially guilty about covering up the information because she believes that her mother would never hide anything from her. The story is about how secrets create distance in the relationships that should be closest. Mother and daughter live very separate lives, only seeing or calling each other when absolutely necessary. When an unexpected illness suddenly arises in the family, secrets are forced out into the open. Winnie soon finds herself in the middle of unraveling her past back in China, which was filled with struggles to find true love and happiness.

Through her mother's story, Pearl learns the truth behind her "so-called" family members, her mother's superstitions, but most importantly—her identity. Once Winnie has told Pearl all of her secrets from her life in China, Pearl is free to tell Winnie her own secret — that she has multiple sclerosis. With insight into each other's struggles, these two women come to common ground in a much unexpected way, and they do so without compromising their distinctly Eastern (Winnie) and Western (Pearl) identities.

The novel focuses on a single mother-daughter relationship, and the plot is driven by the mother's confession of her life in China. Beyond plot, however, the novel examines how the American-born daughter comes to construct an identity through her interactions with her mother – specifically, through hearing the mother's stories.

In the novel, Tan demonstrates the ways in which mother-daughter communication is essential to the development of an ethnic identity. The mother-daughter pair faces impediments to intergenerational communication, which must be overcome for the daughter to understand her own identity. She must confront language, literacy and translation barriers, secrecy and silence, and most importantly, the absence of a Chinese cultural context in which to construct an ethnic identity. With Winnie's confession stories, these obstacles are effectively overcome and Pearl can begin to build a new, fuller identity.

Most of the story, however, is given in the voice of the mother, Winnie. Out of an unrealistic fear of her former husband, Wen Fu's reappearance—especially unrealistic since he is in China and she in California—Winnie has

never told her daughter anything but generalities about her first marriage. Now that Wen Fu has died, she tells her story, in the process revealing certain long-veiled circumstances of Pearl's nativity.

The relationship between Winnie and Pearl is strained because the Americanized daughter and her immigrant mother have little in common. The one thing they both understand is their grief, years previously, over the loss of Pearl's father, Jimmy, who was Winnie's great love. At the funeral for Auntie Du, Pearl has a breakthrough in which she finally cries for Jimmy.

Winnie, although she lives in the United States, is still very much a Chinese woman. She lives in San Francisco and co-owns a flower shop in Chinatown with her lifelong friend, Helen. She has found a place in America where she can still feel like she is in her element and resist assimilating without sacrifice. She is displaced; after all, she left China to escape her husband, not because she did not love her country. She has built a life for herself in America, but that life is deeply rooted in her friends and family, who are also Chinese. Many of them are figures from her stormy past and thus perhaps represent the best of the life she led in China.

The story Winnie unfolds to Pearl is a series of secrets, each in turn giving way to yet another surprising revelation. Winnie's understated account—during which she goes from a young woman “full of innocence and hope and dreams” through marriage to a sadistic bully, the loss of three babies, and the horror and privations of the Japanese war on China—is compelling and

heartrending. As Winnie gains insights into the motivations for other people's actions, she herself grows strong enough to conceal her past while building a new life in America, never admitting her deadly hidden fears. Integrated into this mesmerizing story is a view of prewar and wartime China—both the living conditions and the mind-set. Tan draws a vivid picture of the male-dominated culture, the chasm between different classes of society, and the profusion of rules for maintaining respect and dignity. But the novel's immediacy resides in its depiction of human nature, exposing foibles and frailties, dreams and hopes, universal to us all.

Growing up in China, Winnie's life was rather miserable than peaceful. Winnie's mother was gone when she was a little girl, and her rich father abandoned her to her aunts. Although Winnie married when she was a teenager, she was involved in an abusive relationship. Winnie as a character shows vulnerabilities of women in the early 20th centuries, and that men have more power than women do.

One can only imagine the strain on Winnie, a single mother who took care of her daughter, Pearl, with secrets she has been hiding away to keep her daughter living happily, without letting Pearl know about her past. Winnie only has her best friend, Helen, and Pearl, but there are some secrets that Winnie has kept to herself that even Helen does not know about. Before Pearl was born, Winnie lived in China and met Pearl's father. It was not until Winnie knew that she was pregnant that she immigrated to America and gave birth to little Pearl,

the girl who does not know anything of her mom's horrifying past and her own identity.

Overwhelmed by her mother's history and by her courage in revealing it, Pearl reciprocates by informing her mother of her own sickness. The novel ends with a flow of trust between mother and daughter. Each has been brought abreast of the other's heartaches, the mother's found in an unhappy past and the daughter's in a struggling, uncertain future.

As the story closes, Winnie and Pearl have come to understand each other's personal struggles better and, as a result, regard each other with more compassion and respect.

The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) told a sensuous, captivating, and unforgettable story of the deep and unbreakable sisterly bond between Olivia and her very irritating, yet exceptionally affectionate half-sister Kwan. Tan encrypted into her bittersweet narrative the meaning of loyalty, sisterhood, fate, friendship, the supernatural, and extraordinary love. In this novel, the mother-daughter relationship usually seen in the other novels is revealed in the form of sisterhood. The Chinese-born mother is replaced by a Chinese-born half-sister, Kwan, who remains a mother-figure to the American-born daughter, Olivia, throughout the novel. The sisterly bond grows stronger and stronger as a result of Kwan's forgiving nature and unconditional love for Olivia.

The novel shows that Olivia was shaped by American values, materialism, self-centeredness, rationality, skepticism, and rejection of the traditional ways of China. The major complicating factor is, of course, the influence of her sister

Kwan. Their very names suggest this division, one American, the other Chinese. As much as Olivia wants to throw off forever her ethnic past, Kwan is always there as both sister and surrogate mother to remind her of the roots of which Olivia is ashamed. The novel calls attention to the heterogeneity of relationships in Chinese American families. In the Chinese American community, cultural difference is frequently represented in a family narrative, figured as generational conflict between the Chinese-born first generation and the American-born second generation.

Central to the novel is the uncomfortable relationship between American-born Olivia and her Chinese sister, Kwan, who arrived in San Francisco at eighteen. Although sharing a father, the two women are markedly different: Olivia, whose mother is American, is completely westernized; Kwan, born to a Chinese first wife, never completely assimilates, remaining predominantly Chinese. Embarrassed by Kwan's exuberant Chineseness, Olivia resists her sister's attempts to form a close relationship. She declines invitations, evades contact, and refuses all possibilities of friendship. Despite Olivia's coolness, Kwan continues her friendly attempts to be a real sister to Olivia, whose unhappiness is obvious. Maneuvering Olivia and Olivia's estranged husband, Simon, into a trip to the hills beyond Guilin in China, Kwan engineers a situation that forces Olivia and Simon to reassess their relationship and take tentative steps toward reconciliation.

The book starts off with Olivia describing her life as a child and how when her older sister, whom she knew nothing about, comes to live with her and

her family after her father dies. Olivia thinks that Kwan is going to be this tall, skinny, beautiful, amazing, older sister, but is disappointed when she sees her at the airport. Kwan ends up being this short, roundish, Chinese girl with rosy cheeks and long black hair. Right from the start Olivia does not like her. Kids pick on Kwan and instead of defending her or getting upset that her sister is being bullied, Olivia gets mad that Kwan is so stupid.

Olivia grows up never changing her thoughts towards Kwan. Once she gets into college, Olivia meets a guy by the name of Simon, and asks her older sister to help him move on from his dead ex-girlfriend so that he can fall in love with her. From college she moves on to her beautiful new home and her new husband, not to mention the business that the two start together, and yet her attitude does not change. Instead, her anger, growing in the years, turns to irritation.

Though the younger girl finds her half-sister irksome and strange, especially as Kwan has what she calls “yin eyes”, meaning she sees and talks with ghosts as if this were the most natural thing in the world, they are bound together forever. When Olivia tells the adults of Kwan’s strangeness, sadly Kwan is put into a mental facility and given electric shock therapy. The guilt experienced by Olivia prevents her ever telling again and Kwan never ever holds it against Olivia. Instead, her love continues unabated. As their lives progress in modern day America, frequent past events in China are relayed by Kwan. There are hints that Olivia too has “yin eyes” but fears to acknowledge these secret

senses. The story moves seamlessly between China and California, past and present, new and old souls featuring widely. The detail of everyday life is examined and explored. The dead and living come together as Kwan and Olivia live the present and visit the past. Olivia is often unkind and annoyed where Kwan is concerned, while Kwan's love and devotion never wavers. In particular, when Olivia's marriage is failing, Kwan is convinced she can bring them back together, believing that these two are soul mates.

After Simon, her husband, moves out, Olivia agrees to go to China with Kwan and her husband to find out more about her culture. There, Simon and Olivia fall in love again, but only after they get in a fight and Simon gets lost. While in desperation to find her husband Olivia realizes how much she actually loves Kwan. Kwan never let Olivia down, she was always the big sister she had wanted.

All her life Kwan tells Olivia about how things used to be in her past lives, Olivia does not believe her until the end of the book. Kwan's best friend turns out to be Olivia in a past life. She understands and welcomes Kwan into her arms, but, sadly, by that time it is too late. Kwan ventures out into the cave to find her sister's lost husband, but she never comes back.

Drawing from experiences in her life, such as her eye opening trips to China, the violent murder of her best friend, and later, the death of her mentor and mother, Amy Tan wove a breathtaking story of two sisters who, at first, have nothing in common. But as the story goes on, Olivia and Kwan explore and

define their relationship as sisters. Kwan, ever the loving, caring, sister, is there for Olivia through everything. Kwan says, “Libby-ah, my sister, so special, so good to me” (The Hundred Secret Senses 154). With Kwan’s death at the end of the story, she teaches Olivia what love really is and allows her to reconcile with her estranged husband, Simon. She says:

“I once thought love was supposed to be nothing but bliss. I now know it is also worry and grief, hope and trust,” (399).

Eventually, Olivia begins to trust her “secret senses.”

“If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary senses. If we remember, we can find them anytime with our hundred secret senses” (399).

The hate and irritation that she keeps built up comes out as compassion and concern. She realizes she had always loved Kwan, but was too lazy or too proud to admit it. It seems much easier to hate and resent the love and affection showered upon her by Kwan than to just accept it and love her back, but all these should have come from her own mother. Instead, she had taken her anger and frustration out on Kwan, who always forgave and loved her unconditionally. So, in this way, Kwan had become the mother—and sister—that Olivia always wanted.

The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001) is the exploration of a mother and daughter relationship marred by lack of communication and understanding. What one comes to realize upon reading this novel is that memory and the past play important roles in this novel when both mother and daughter feel they need to

express themselves, or to explain themselves. This is significant to all women it seems, and it is interesting how Amy Tan depicts the issue of memory in women.

The novel is written and set up in an unusual way. Different characters 'narrate' it by writing their own stories down. It is about a mother and daughter's struggle to communicate with each other, a daughter who feels spite and anger about what her mother is like, and a mother who is harshly misunderstood by all those around her. This mother and daughter are LuLing and Ruth. The plot of the story is simple to follow, even though it manages to incorporate the complex pasts of three different women, from three generations of the same family. Precious Auntie (whose real name is Liu Xing) is first in the bloodline, then her daughter LuLing, and finally Ruth. The novel is an excellent manifestation of mother-daughter dynamics, how lack of communication threatens it, and how memory and the past affect it. We find out that LuLing has kept many secrets, that she has hidden many things about her life from her daughter, and that the truth is all to be found in the manuscript she wrote in her native tongue of Mandarin Chinese, the story of her life that she wants to record before she loses her memory completely. Her own mother did the same. For her it was too late to acknowledge her mother's past and understand her, for Ruth it will not be. This is why memory is so important in this novel, and the text is woven with metaphors that involve memories and remembering. One thing that becomes apparent about this novel is that many things happen that have their roots in the past.

Ruth's bond to her demented, depressed, and isolated mother overcomes the dictates of pragmatic culture and she finally succeeds where LuLing fails: showing her love to her mother as a daughter before her time is up. Precious Auntie's love for LuLing saved her from subjugation by the Changs, and without whose devotion and good upbringing of LuLing, Ruth may not have had a good life. The mother-daughter bond is deeply rooted within females, and they feel an emotional need for each other throughout life (Neisser, 15). Their relationship is presupposed by the observed innate behavior of females. Women nurture intimate and supportive relationships more than the men (Rudolf & Conley, 115). This bond is a strong factor in family solidarity.

This novel immediately introduces its readers to the mystery surrounding Luling Liu Young and her attempts at remembering the name that will bind her past to her future:

“Precious Auntie, what is our name? I always meant to claim it as my own. Come help me remember” (The Bonesetter's Daughter 6).

Ruth has always thought her mother difficult, oppressive and odd, with her talks of death, bad luck, ghosts and curses. When Ruth was growing up, she resented having to explain to her mother how things worked. She was likewise embarrassed by her mother's eccentric behavior. More often than not, Ruth would complain why her mother could not be more like Auntie Gal, Luling's sister, who is modern, cheerful and not so caught up in the past. Ruth's resentment towards her mother's attitude and Luling's indignation towards her daughter's indifference frequently drive the two to a battle of wills - the mother

threatening suicide, the daughter insistent on doing what the mother forbids. Now, at forty six, Ruth merely tolerates her mother's eccentricities. Yet Ruth observes that her mother's behavior has gone, if possible, still more strange. Bothered by this, Ruth brings Luling to the doctor and the latter tests positive for dementia.

The second part of the novel chronicles the life of Precious Auntie and the life and travails of Luling. Here, the readers encounter yet again a mother-daughter relationship, but it is a relationship of a different level. The bond that connects Precious Auntie and Luling is borne by sadness, pain and deaths. Yet Precious Auntie chooses to live for Luling and this ultimate sacrifice Luling only realizes too late. Luling therefore lives her life in constant regret, forever seeking Precious Auntie's favor and forgiveness. All these Ruth discovers in the manuscript she found hidden in Luling's apartment. The manuscript likewise narrates the sacrifices Luling had undergone, from the death of Precious Auntie to her travel in the United States. Ruth now knows why her mother is how she is, and Ruth is distraught because she can never turn back time and give her mother the understanding Luling deserves. But there is something she can do for her mother, here and now: That is to find out Precious Auntie's name. Silence and secret rule the lives of Luling and her daughter, Ruth. It is only when Luling discovers that she might be losing her memory does she write about everything concerning her and her past. But even this she keeps hidden from Ruth. She shows only the first part of the manuscript, the things she knows are true.

The second part of the manuscript is the meat of Luling's life. Here, the readers understand why she would want to keep this hidden. It is terrible the way Luling treated Precious Auntie; even Luling herself agrees as she writes:

“In the year 1929, my fourteenth year, I became an evil person (201).”

Luling has not forgiven herself for Precious Auntie's fate. She feels more terrible forgetting Precious Auntie's name, the family to which she really belonged. The fault, however, lies in not remembering the past but in remembering a past that will only bring sadness and pain. Towards the end of the novel, there is redemption for Luling. It may be ironic that she remembers Precious Auntie's name at a time when she is suffering from dementia, but Amy Tan so aptly words it thus:

“After all, Bao Bomu says, what is the past but what we choose to remember? They can choose not to hide it, to take what's broken, to feel the pain and to know that it will heal (403).”

This bittersweet novel explores not only a mother-daughter relationship, but focuses more on reconciliation, the beautiful result of being able to ask for forgiveness and the ability to forgive.

Amy Tan managed to explore the mother-daughter relationship very well. It is especially difficult for generations that grew up in such different cultures. On the one hand there is a mother who is practically embedded in the ways of the old days, when so much was forbidden, and on the other hand there is a

daughter who now lives in a land of opportunities. There is bound to be conflict, but perhaps through conflict, they get to know each other better, and they also get to understand themselves a lot more.

Through the mothers' stories, the daughters are able to come to terms with their Chinese heritage and begin to construct an integrated identity. This is the central, ultimate goal of the novels. The daughters learn to be not "Chinese-American" with its problematic hyphen, but Chinese *and* American. Their mothers' stories simultaneously provide a cultural context for understanding, which has been largely absent from their lives, and introduce them to modes of communication that are peculiar to Chinese culture, overcoming both the cultural and linguistic barriers to understanding what they have faced and allowing the gaps and misunderstandings that have plagued their previous attempts at communication to be healed. By incorporating Chinese contexts and communication "codes" into their own identities, the daughters can feel at peace with themselves and their mothers, which they have never before experienced. This integration of the components of their identities is the key to understanding their histories, culture, families, mothers and, ultimately, their selves. Only when they understand the multiple facets of their selves can they truly gain a sense of self (Fidder 8-9).

In these novels, the daughters are raised in a culture different from that of their mothers, speaking a different language, and utterly ignorant of their family histories. The daughters, in their ignorance of Chinese culture and context, "misread" their mothers all of their lives, and are unable to construct a viable

Chinese identity because of it. These misreadings are partly cultural and partly linguistic, and Tan uses these “problems” to illustrate the disconnect between mother and daughter.

Without a solid connection with their mothers – before learning to overcome the barriers to communication that they face – the daughters are, in a sense, adrift. They are neither “authentic Chinese,” because of their American upbringing and lifestyles, nor are they “real” Americans, by virtue of their non-whiteness and the cultural stigma of their Chinese families.

Though it is clear that cultural issues play the major role in the distance between mother and daughter in these novels, on one level the trouble with cross-cultural communication is purely linguistic. Language is one of the primary ways in which Tan illustrates the disconnect in the mother-daughter relationship. They are literally speaking two different languages. The American-born daughters “know” Chinese in that they can hold a conversation (or at least listen to one), but they can neither read it nor speak it fluently, and their true understanding is very limited. Tan herself writes of the misunderstandings that result when Chinese speakers are judged by western standards, resulting in the common conclusion that the Chinese language is circular, indirect, superfluous and unnecessarily complex (Tan, “Language” 84).

In accepting their mothers – their stories, their histories, their cultures, their modes of communication, and their language – they accept themselves as Chinese, too. They can eliminate the hyphen and be both Chinese and American

at the same time. They can accept the struggle of becoming, the constant changing of the self. They find a way to be whole.

CHAPTER IV

GHOST AS A STRATEGY TO CONNECT THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

Along with her heritage, Tan credits her universal writing to her focus on life and death. She feels she has been haunted by death her entire life (Salon 2). She believes that the strange and bizarre occurrences in her life happen because of the “Yin people,” and she gives them credit, for they have made much contribution to her creative thinking. The “Yin people” are an element of Chinese mythology, those who have passed away, yet haunt the modern world like ghosts. She actually credits some of her works to these occurrences of the “World of Yin,” as they made her contemplate the “beyond” and this became a main topic in her works, especially The Hundred Secret Senses (1995). Amy Tan says she writes about what she feels, especially questions of life (Salon 1). She believes that everything is so influenced by death, and the Yin people have always been there to “kick her in the (pants) to write” about it (Salon 2). This focus on life and death allows her to bring both tragic and comic elements to her works, increasing the universal appeal. And Tan uses these “ghosts” to exemplify her “in-between” situation. Ghosts are exorcised by writing and translating the past to construct the future.

In English, “ghost” means “an apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image” (OED). In Mandarin, the transliteration of ghost is “gui”. It has multiple meanings. At one level, it is the same as “ghost” in the English semantic field.

At another level, Chinese people call a child “little ghost,” which is an expression of affection and a slight rebuke. At the third level, foreigners are called “ghosts,” implying that they are not real human beings, in contrast to the Chinese. The third usage is a derogatory term. It also implies a fear of outsiders (Lee 112).

When Tan uses this ghost metaphor, she creates a parody by ironically bringing in the experiences of “alienation” and “de-familiarization” of ethnic people living in the so-called “melting pot” or “salad bowl.” After all, whites are the majority in America. But by calling them and other people of color “ghosts,” the early Chinese immigrants tried to claim their legitimate status and to some extent debased the existence of the others. The early immigrants confronted racist treatment such as the Exclusion Act of 1882 and the discriminatory Immigration Act of 1965. Calling whites “ghosts” becomes a process of othering the non-Chinese people. The ghosts also symbolize the untranslatability within and between cultures.

Amy Tan’s third novel, The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) and her next work, The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001), weave mysterious ghost stories with women’s life experiences. In both novels, ghosts represent the haunting past and the cultural memory of the immigrant sisters and mothers, waiting to be remembered and then exorcised. The Hundred Secret Senses (1995) starts with the claim that “My sister Kwan believes she has yin eyes” (The Hundred Secret Senses 3), a key sentence of this novel. The narrator, Olivia, is half Chinese and half Caucasian. Kwan, her half sister from China, talks about ghosts all the

time, especially the story of the loyal maid, the warlord, and the unfortunate lovers, Miss Banner and half-breed Johnson. According to the narrator, Olivia, Kwan thinks Olivia is actually a reincarnation of Miss Nelly Banner, Simon (Olivia's husband) Half-breed Johnson, and of course, Kwan the loyal companion to Miss Banner, Miss Moo. The setting of their previous lives is in a small village near the city Guilin in southwestern China around 1860 where political and social upheavals lead to the tragic ending of Miss Banner and Johnson's relationship. Throughout the narrative, Kwan and her "yin people" provide Olivia with advice and support in life. Kwan particularly feels responsible for Olivia and Simon's marriage, which, in her mind, is the fulfillment of the tragic love between Miss Banner and Johnson.

In these narratives across different times and places, the reader seems to be both traveling through the tunnel of time and having an exotic experience in a foreign land. Do the ghosts really exist? Or are they just Kwan's imagination? Since arriving in America, she has confronted a different culture and a different language. She might have just made up the ghost stories to find a connection with her new family and new environment. The family she lives with is her late father's American wife, her new husband, and three half siblings whom she has never met before. For Kwan, the ghosts are both the haunting past and the linkage to who she is, and cannot be left behind. Kwan needs to imagine the "I" and locate her "here" to form her own identity on new American soil.

It can be argued that the haunting past and the ghosts from the previous life in Kwan's narrative symbolize cultural memory that a migrant cannot forget

or eradicate. It is worth noting that Tan chooses a particular moment in Chinese history to set up the tragic romance between Miss Banner and Johnson in which Miss Moo is the go-between. In the mid-nineteenth century, China suffered from social upheavals, unstable government, and the military threat posed by Western imperialists. People were so poor that when the news about striking gold on the Golden Mountain reached the southern provinces in China, many men decided to leave their families and find their fortunes in a foreign land. This was the first wave of Chinese immigration to America. In turn, many missionaries came to China to convert the Chinese to Christianity as part of colonization (Lee 117). Kwan's previous life story takes place against the backdrop of the Taiping Revolution Movement. Gwangxi is where the revolution broke out and it later became the main stronghold of the Taipings. As part of a complicated cultural exchange between the Chinese and the West, the Taiping Revolution Movement was even supported by some westerners to fight against the Ching Dynasty. The Taipings' Heavenly King was considered a brother of Jesus who had come to lead the revolution against the oppression of the Manchu regime (Lee 118).

Tan portrays Kwan as the key figure in these narratives who is able to see ghosts, and the author uses wit and parody to expose power relationships at work. For instance, after seven-year-old Olivia told her mother about Kwan's seeing the ghosts, Kwan was sent to the mental hospital. The doctors diagnosed her Chinese ghosts as the sign of a serious mental disorder and gave her electroshock treatments. She is later released but asserts,

“They do this to me, hah, still I don’t change. See? I stay strong”
(The Hundred Secret Senses 18).

In order to consolidate its supreme authority, the dominant discourse may suppress different values or ways of thinking. But her ghost story is like inerasable cultural memory that needs retelling and recollecting. Kathleen Brogan rightly observes that

“Ghosts in contemporary American ethnic literature function similarly: to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present” (Brogan 4).

Brogan further points out that

“through acts of narrative revision – which are very often presented as acts of translation, linguistic or cultural – the cycle of doom is broken and the past digested” (11).

It is through Kwan’s translation that the past finds its link to the present, the Chinese life to the American life and, finally, the hundred senses reveal the secret.

Playing the role of surrogate mother, Kwan looks after her half sister, Olivia, and at the same time learns to speak English from her. When Olivia meets and falls in love with Simon, Kwan makes an effort to help them to be together. With the hundred secret senses, her “yin eyes,” and her communication skills with ghosts, she first convinces Simon that his former girlfriend’s ghost appears and wishes him to forget about her. Through her ghost stories, Kwan

helps Olivia get married to Simon and, again, when their marriage nearly collapses, Kwan helps them to make up.

Tan's ghosts are the spirits of dead persons. These ghosts seem harmless and eager to communicate. Tan brings in mysterious and spiritual aspects of life in her writing according to her own interests. Avoiding the trap of self-orientalizing, and the inscrutable, mystical Chinese stereotype, Tan creates an episode which shows that Simon believes in the appearance of the ghost of his former girlfriend, Elza. It provides a good example of how to break the binary opposition of the superstitious Chinese and the rational American. Kwan explains to Olivia that she can communicate with the dead because she uses her hundred secret senses,

“secret sense not really secret. We just call secret because everyone has, only forgotten.... Memory, seeing, hearing, feeling, all come together, then you know something true in your heart” (113-114).

Since Olivia is desperate to win Simon's heart, she decides to ask Kwan's help to find Elza in the yin world. Through her hundred secret senses, Kwan makes contact with Simon's ex-girlfriend, Elza, and sets up the meeting. As Olivia recalls the incident, she feels guilty that she fooled Simon (115). She does not believe that Kwan really sees the yin people and considers the whole thing to be only Kwan's illusion. However, by pronouncing Elza's name right and citing the names of Elza's favorite composers and the details of her personal life, Kwan convinces Simon that she really talks to Elza. Having gained Simon's trust,

Kwan tells Simon that Elza asks him to forget about her and that Olivia is his true love. Simon looks “sad and grateful at the same time” and accepts Kwan’s advice (119).

In this incident, Simon’s love for Elza and for Olivia makes him believe what Kwan has seen and said. In Olivia’s narrative, it seems that Simon does not see the ghost of Elza and is taken in by Kwan’s words. Olivia thinks that Simon is “fooled” by her and Kwan’s scheme. However, if we turn to Kwan’s explanation of “hundred secret senses,” Simon’s acceptance of the appearance of the ghost of Elza becomes understandable and reasonable. Using memory, seeing, hearing, and feelings altogether, he comes to know something true in his heart. Kwan plays a role of medium/translator in helping him to understand “the truth.” In the name of reason, the communication with ghosts can be easily refuted as “a superstitious act.” Ghosts here symbolize the unknown and the unfamiliar to the over-rationalized mind, which ignores a person’s true feelings and memories. By offering a convincing translation, Kwan leads Simon to believe.

On the other hand, Olivia claims that Kwan is not a reliable medium. When Elza’s ghost turns up, Kwan is not the only one to see it. Olivia sees it too, but she keeps it secret. Interestingly, what she sees and hears is contrary to what Kwan tells Simon. According to Kwan, Elza asks Simon to forget her and start a new life. But Olivia says that actually Elza asks for the opposite; she “was pleading, crying, saying over and over again, ‘Simon, don’t forget me. Wait for me. I’m coming back’” (119).

Although Olivia claims she sees the ghost crying and pleading to Simon, she explains its appearance as a hallucination and refuses to use her “hundred secret senses.” In this incident, is Kwan, as a translator, also a traitor, betraying “the truth” to achieve a more important task, i.e., helping the couple to be together? Or perhaps in this instance of invocation, none of them sees any ghosts. Kwan’s hundred secret senses, as she said, are intuition and sincere feelings used to approach the truth. Yet Olivia is not confident in herself in this relationship from the very beginning. The ghost is actually her own fear. She does not know her own value and does not believe in Simon’s love for her, either. Not knowing who she is and where she is, she blames the ghost of Elza for the near failure of their marriage. It is not until Kwan conducts the exorcizing act for her that she can finally come to terms with Kwan and with Simon. Kwan plays the role of bridging the imaginary world and reality, communicating between the dead and the living, the Chinese life and the American one. In justifying Olivia and Simon’s love and marriage, as the narrative develops, Kwan calls back the haunting past from the previous life and connects the present to the past for them in order to allow for a more promising future.

For Olivia, the exorcism of Elza’s ghost should help to remove the barrier between her and Simon since she always blames the ghost of Elza for her nearly failed marriage. For Kwan, the exorcism of the haunting past may help her to gain peace of mind and fulfill her unfinished task from the previous life. The ghosts in both contexts can be seen to represent the untranslatability and

foreignness within and between language(s)/culture(s). It was mentioned earlier that ghosts to a certain extent spell out incommensurable cultural differences. The cultural memory and the haunting past are suppressed and silenced by the dominant discourse, like the early Chinese immigration history and Kwan's stories. It is through the "talking away" that ghosts can be exorcised and a new balance can be achieved. Here, in Kwan's case, exorcism does not necessarily mean to drive the ghost away. Rather, it is a tentative way of "coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (Benjamin 75). Through Kwan's translation, Olivia comes to know her own place and her love for Simon. The novel ends with Olivia being pregnant and, sadly, Kwan disappearing in China. For Kwan, the ghosts are exorcised and the yin people appeased. As a translator, and sometimes, a medium, she has relayed the messages from the yin people and Chinese cultural memory for the ones she loves. Though the transfer of meaning can never be complete because of the foreignness of language, and the untranslatability intrinsic to any signifying system, a further provisional understanding may be achieved.

Translation releases the foreignness, the unfamiliar part within the text/culture itself. It is through the process of mutual understanding between Kwan and Olivia that two cultures or two worlds come into existence and are endowed with new meanings. Olivia translates American cultures for Kwan but usually in a distorted and unpleasant way. Since English is the language of the powerful, Olivia, as a native speaker, has more power in this respect. For instance, Olivia teaches Kwan English but she is not an enthusiastic teacher. At

the age of seven, she even plays a mean trick on Kwan. When Kwan asks her the name of the pear, Olivia tells her it is called “barf” (13).

Olivia’s translation is more of an imposition of her power/ knowledge upon Kwan rather than a significant performance of cultural translation. Although she learns Chinese from Kwan at the same time, she seems to do so reluctantly. She says,

“Kwan infected me with it. I absorbed her language through my pores while I was sleeping. She pushed her Chinese secrets into my brain and changed how I thought about the world. Soon I was even having nightmares in Chinese” (13).

It is interesting that she has nightmares rather than sweet dreams in Chinese. For Olivia, speaking Chinese is contagious and an act to be ashamed of. We can see the imbalance and inequality between the two languages and cultures. As the story develops, one would find the reversal of roles (when they go to China), or, more accurately, the deeper understanding of two cultures and the significance of cultural translation taking place, and, through the transformation of Olivia, recognition of the haunting past and cultural memory is established, as proven when Olivia changes her surname back to Yep.

Kwan, as a medium/translator, opens up a different world for Olivia. Kwan has a better command of a different culture, be it the ghost world, the previous life, or China. As Olivia acknowledges when they arrive in China,

“[w]e’ve been in China less than eight hours, and already she’s taking control of my life. We’re on her terrain, we have to go by her rules, speak her language” (208).

With the power of knowledge, Kwan “talks the ghosts away”. To some extent she manipulates the narratives and Olivia and Simon’s perception of Chinese culture. But she never debases Olivia the way Olivia previously humiliated her. Against the grain of the stereotype of a shy, quiet, and timid Oriental woman, Kwan presents a vivid image of a cheerful, energetic, and active personality. Kwan seems to be the most successful character that Tan has ever created. As a migrant figure, she teases and imitates the Western “dominant” culture and creates a new space “in a mischievous, displacing sense” (Bhabha 210). In performing the act of translation, the original is simulated, copied, transfigured, and transformed.

The dislocation Tan exposes is not so much between the Chinese and the American experience – although Olivia initially assumes it to be so – as between a mystical and a pragmatic world view. (Upon her arrival in China, Olivia discovers that while Kwan’s friends there may be more tolerant of her communion with the spirits, they do not necessarily believe in it.) In appealing to Olivia’s – and the reader’s – unacknowledged mystical urges, Tan taps a rich but risky source: our relationship to the dead is also a measure of our connection to life itself, and Kwan’s belief in eternal cosmic renewal is enticing.

The difficulty arises from Tan's determination to make actual the links between past and present lives. In the face of physical evidence, Olivia comes to believe not only in the spiritual truth of Kwan's visions but in their literal truth: hence her cringe-making exclamations about love, the soul and ghosts.

Amy Tan's use of ghosts in The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) seemingly introduces readers into a mystical universe. Instead, this study will ask how the belief in ghosts functions in the novel as an alternative perspective through which to understand life, social relations, and the cosmos. Ken-Fang Lee's article "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's Ghost Stories" (2004) argues that in The Bonesetter's Daughter, "ghosts represent the haunting past and the cultural memory of the immigrant sisters and mothers, waiting to be remembered and then exorcised" (116). While Lee's reading points out one of the significant implications of ghosts in Tan's novel, it ignores the fact that LuLing, Liu Xin, LuLing's grandmother, LuLing's surrogate mother, and so on, do believe in ghosts. More important, it is their belief in ghosts that regulates what they say and do in daily life.

As LuLing persistently resists American values and practice, she projects her will upon Ruth. She teaches Ruth to write Chinese; she does not allow Ruth to eat American food such as chocolate milk, doughnuts, beef, hamburger, and so on; she has high expectations of Ruth's excellent performance at school; and she fills Ruth's mind with ghosts and spirits. LuLing's refusal of American language and food, her belief in ghosts, and her demand of Ruth's filial

obedience create a sense of alienation in Ruth, who was born in America where her mother's demands and beliefs do not fit.

For Ruth, writing is spiritual because it is also a way to connect with the Chi, imagined as ghost in Chinese cosmology, of her grandmother. Actually, Ruth's mother's new willingness to ask Ruth's opinion on all kinds of things has a deeper reason. LuLing considers Ruth's accident a sign of the curse on the family. What is more, when Ruth happens to write down "doggie" on the sand tray, LuLing believes the word, which was used by her mother as a nickname for her, is a sign that Ruth can communicate with the invisible spirit of LuLing's mother, Liu Xin. Since then, Ruth has been a ghostwriter for her grandmother. Although sometimes Ruth makes up answers her mother wants to hear, at other times she uses her grandmother to solve her own problems. Ruth may not believe in ghosts the way her mother does but she feels the spirit of her grandmother.

"Most of the time she thought the sand-writing was just a boring chore, that it was her duty to guess what her mother wanted to hear, then move quickly to end the session. Yet Ruth had also gone through times when she believed that a ghost was guiding her arm, telling her what to say" (113).

Like a mother, the ghost of Precious Auntie prevents Ruth from danger. A case in point is the Lance incident. When Ruth naively assumes that she is pregnant with Lance's urine and develops symptoms of anorexia, Ruth dares not to tell her mother. Her stress further heightens when Lance attempts

molestation. At this critical time, Ruth uses the voice of her grandmother to ask her mother to move to Land's End in San Francisco. The name of Land's End, which Ruth happens to write down on the sand tray, coincidentally alludes to the World's End, a pit near her village in China where the body of Precious Auntie is dumped. LuLing agrees to do so not because she knows the danger Ruth is facing but because she believes the ghost of her mother is conducting the hands of her daughter. Through this ghostwriting for her grandmother, the Chi (life force) of her grandmother also becomes Ruth's. Ruth's manipulation of her own spirit and that of her grandmother intensifies Ruth's spiritual power and thus enables Ruth to escape danger.

The ghost of Precious Auntie also serves as a lubricant smoothing for the mother-daughter tension between Ruth and LuLing. In the cigarette-smoking episode, the misunderstanding between the American-born daughter and Chinese mother escalates into a near-suicide as LuLing presumably jumps from a window, giving herself a concussion and other injuries. Afterwards, the mother-daughter relationship undergoes a period of extreme awkwardness. In time of crisis, again, Ruth's grandmother functions as the medium to help Ruth out as well as to help her mature. On Ruth's sixteenth birthday, LuLing gives her, among other things, a Chinese Bible and a picture of Precious Auntie as birthday gifts. Ruth considers those objects, which her mother greatly cherishes, as a sign of her mother's love of her. The mother-daughter tension is loosened for a while. As time goes on, Ruth and LuLing resumes the old habit of disciplining and protesting. However, Ruth's tit-for-tat resistance starts to be

abated by the spirit of her grandmother. Being stricken with a sense that her grandmother knows that she has almost committed the murder of her mother, Ruth writes down her apology to her mother in her diary. Ruth's apology indicates that Ruth has partially outgrown her naivety of simply refusing her Chinese mother by accepting American values without really questioning their negative sides. More important, Ruth's consciousness of the invisible eyes of her grandmother indicates that Ruth has already internalized the spirit of her grandmother. The external spiritual force of Ruth's grandmother has been transformed into Ruth's internal guiding force.

However, the Chi and the supplicant are not always in accord. Ruth's connection with the spirit of her grandmother is almost broken in Ruth's adolescence, during which Ruth has undergone a stage of spiritual loss and quest.

“She used to wonder: Should she believe in God or be a nihilist? Be Buddhist or a beatnik? And whichever it should be, what was the lesson in her mother's being miserable all the time? Were there really ghosts?” (138)

Ruth's puzzles reveal her identity crisis. For her, being an American means to be religious or nihilistic or beatnik like her American friends; being a Chinese means to be associated with misery, ghosts, and Buddhism like her mother. Going to college temporarily enables Ruth to detach herself from her mother and her mother's “superstition” and go on a journey of Americanization. Being left alone, Ruth starts to try non-Chinese values and practice, to hang out with

American boys and girls, to take a fancy to popular songs, to smoke cigarettes, and even to try hashish. Ruth considers her detachment from her mother and association with her American friends and their ways of living a way to assert her freedom and independence. At this stage of her life, Ruth does not realize that to claim herself an American neither frees her nor makes her independent. On the contrary, her intention to counter her Chinese mother by accepting American values delivers her into a doubly silenced situation. In the eyes of her American friends, she is Chinese; in the eyes of her mother, she is a bad daughter.

Ruth writes down her secret feelings and every step she has made in a diary. The reason she writes a diary is that she wants her silenced self, her Chi to be recognized. For Ruth,

“The diary would be proof of her existence, that she mattered, and more important, that someone somewhere would one day understand her, even if it was not in her lifetime” (138).

However, LuLing secretly reads Ruth’s diary. For LuLing, a daughter should not keep secrets from her mother. Ruth feels furious and hides more from LuLing. Keeping secrets to herself becomes Ruth’s habit. Later on, this habit even influences her relation with Art. Indeed, Ruth is not a good communicator either with her mother or Art and her step daughters. Being silenced, Ruth comes to silence herself. Ruth’s silence and self-silencing reaches a crisis when LuLing is diagnosed with dementia.

Nonetheless, like a ghost, the Chi or spirit of an individual cannot be silenced forever. Ruth's will surface somehow. If ghostwriting is an important way to assert Ruth's Chi, another significant method to sustain the Chi is through remembering and reconciliation. Because a mother and ancestors who have the role of mothers are also the Chi of a child, an important step to recall Ruth's self is to fully reconcile with her mother and ancestors and to retrieve the lost memory of those women. The reconciliation and remembering occurs with the aid of Ruth's grandmother's ghost.

Actually, the ghost of Ruth's grandmother has never left Ruth. However, being merged in an American environment, Ruth is not aware of the presence of her grandmother's spirit as its presence is silent. Ruth's chronic loss of voice each year is a mystic sign of her grandmother's presence. Ruth's temporary muteness every year is not only a metaphor of Ruth's own silence but also alludes to the permanent silence of her grandmother. The relation between Ruth and the ghost of her grandmother, Liu Xin, is like body and soul. Being a spirit, Liu Xin is formless, invisible, and silent. However, to have her story remembered, her spirit constantly seeks a mouthpiece. As Liu Xin's own daughter is not fluent in English and thus is silenced in an English-speaking country, her American-born granddaughter, Ruth, becomes her ghostwriter in English.

To ghostwrite for her grandmother is to retrieve the silenced history of generations of women, including Ruth, LuLing, Precious Auntie, women like them, and the first woman of Chinese civilization, Peking woman. Being

silenced, the collective Chi of all those women is like an ancient memory that wanders like a ghost and awaits embodiment. The collective memory travels a long way. Precious Auntie, the bonesetter's daughter who has inherited an oracle bone, becomes the first mother to ghostwrite for the ancestors and thus carries on the memory. As Precious Auntie is mute, LuLing takes the responsibility of speaking for her. However, the chain of memory is not well connected since LuLing moves to an English-Speaking country where her autobiography in Chinese is ignored at first by her American-born daughter, Ruth.

As Ruth does not speak good Chinese, the collective Chinese women ancestors' memory is in danger of loss.

The ninth year of losing her voice turns out to be a turning point in Ruth's life as well as in the life of LuLing and Precious Auntie. For the past eight years, Ruth has been separated from her Chinese mother and grandmother and submerged in an American environment, in which she feels an outsider and unrecognized. However, on the first day of Ruth's recovery from the loss of her voice, "she felt a tug of worry, something she was not supposed to forget" (12), and then she stumbles on a scroll of paper which her mother has given to her a few years ago but which she has ignored. Coincidentally, on the day Ruth pulls the scroll of paper from the bottom of her drawer, her mother is diagnosed with dementia. On the critical verge of losing the memory of LuLing's life and Precious Auntie's life, Ruth decides to move back to live with her mother and listen to the stories of her mother and grandmother.

Ruth's recollection with her mother and the spirit of her grandmother is a process of regaining her voice in her American family, too. After Ruth moves out of Art's apartment, the girls start to miss her and Art begins to rethink his concept of American individual freedom. By telling the story of her mother and grandmother, Ruth rediscovers herself, too. The story ends with Ruth's still having her voice and ghostwriting in a new sense: writing an account of the life of her grandmother. The ghostwriter has become a primary author at last, ironically, by literally writing for a ghost. In the end, Ruth has come to understand her mother's frustration and anger and thus starts to appreciate the matrilineal heritage passed on from her grandmother to her mother to her, which she has tried to reject in her childhood and adolescence.

If Ruth's experience with the ghost of her grandmother is more symbolic than tangible, the life of Ruth's grandmother, Precious Auntie, and Ruth's mother, LuLing, is directly determined by the traditional Chinese belief in ghosts. The concept of ghosts in Chinese cosmology is derived from the belief in the existence of spirits or departed souls, known as Hun Po. Hun and Po refer to the Chinese concept of two souls. While the Hun or Yang soul is imagined as the spirit that ascends to heaven at death, the Po or Yin soul is the one that remains on earth when a person deceases. A ritual is often performed to ferry the souls of a deceased person from the Yang world, or the world of the alive, to the Yin World, or the world of the dead, where the soul of that dead person waits for reincarnation. Furthermore, ancient Chinese believe that the Yin soul of a person will become a restless and vengeful ghost if the person dies wrongly

or is not buried properly. The haunting ghost will not be pacified until the villain is punished, justice is restored, and a proper burial is done (Pu 30-31). The ghost is like the self, or the Chi (life force) of a person; as essence, it cannot be subjugated by means of injustice. If injustice occurs, the ghost will constantly come back to seek every avenue to vent the truth. In addition to the concept of vengeful ghosts, another point is relevant here. In Chinese cosmology, the ghost is not necessarily always malicious but can be protective as well (Pu 32). In the case of The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001), the ghost of Precious Auntie is both vengeful and protective. Moreover, Precious Auntie herself is protected by the ghost of her belated husband. It is safe to say that the story in The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001) could not be developed without the concept of ghosts. Above all, it would have been impossible for Precious Auntie to stay in the Liu family, not to say to give birth to LuLing.

Without her body being properly buried, Precious Auntie becomes a wronged ghost. Being a wronged ghost, she plays the double role of avenger and protector. On the one hand, she avenges herself upon the Liu family. The Liu's ink store in Beijing is burnt down in a fire caused by LuLing's step father, who is chasing the ghost of Precious Auntie away in his dream and accidentally knocks down the oil lamp. The Liu family goes downhill after the fire incident. On the other hand, the ghost of Precious Auntie guides her daughter, LuLing, out of the entrapment. The plot of fire accident in the ink store leads to the ghost-catching episode and the turning point in LuLing's life journey. For fear of the vengeful ghost of Precious Auntie, LuLing's step parents invite a Taoist,

who later turns out to be a fake, to put her ghost in a jar. Afterwards, LuLing's stepmother feels secured from the haunting ghost and sends LuLing to an orphanage. This seeming misfortune turns out to be a blessing in disguise for LuLing. In the orphanage, LuLing develops into a mature and happy woman under the guidance of her mother's spirit. This plot development cannot be simply understood as the clichéd motif of the-evil-is-punished-and-the-good-is-rewarded. Instead, it can be read as a womanist theme: a woman's spirit of love and courage is a navigation light directing an individual out of troubled situations. Moreover, this spirit turns out to be a generational continuity that functions as the essential sustaining internal guidance for a woman like LuLing when she is in the face of external influences and cultural identity erasure.

The ghost of Precious Auntie as spirituality for LuLing is further linked to the Chinese concept of *gu*, bone. As bone is the only part in a dead human body that does not decay with time, ancient Chinese people imagine it as the space where souls reside. By extension, the bone becomes a signifier of ghost, soul, essence, spirit, or Chi. This perception is reflected in the Chinese folk custom of ground burial. According to this custom, it is extremely important to keep the dead body as a whole. If any part is missing from the body, the soul of the dead person will become restless. This concept explains the curse on the Gu family in the novel. Family members in the Gus die one after another because they mistake the bones of their ancestor for Dragon bones and steal them away to use as medicine. With the bones being separated from the body, the ancestor

haunts the living. The only way to pacify the restless ghost is to return the bones to the body.

When Ruth attempts to reject her Chinese mother, her arm is broken. Ruth's bone fracture symbolizes Ruth's disorientation in time of identity crisis. Her wishful claiming of her American identity is another sign of her disorientation. At an emotional crossroads, Ruth is pulled back by the ghost, spirit, or bone of her grandmother, Precious Auntie. To put it another way, Ruth's bone is fixed by Liu Xin. Similarly, when LuLing mistakes material wealth as happiness, Precious Auntie fixes her misconception—in other words, fixes her bone.

There is a significant guiding force in LuLing's spiritual world: the spirit of her mother, Liu Xin (Precious Auntie). In the lonely orphanage, LuLing comes to realize that she and her mother are one unity. The spirit of Precious Auntie lives through LuLing. For LuLing, "though Precious Auntie had been gone for all these years, [she] still heard her words, in happy and sad times, when it was important" (259). LuLing and Precious Auntie are like a body and its shadow. The spirit of Precious Auntie permeates LuLing's consciousness and becomes her own. Whatever LuLing knows and does is what Precious Auntie knew and did and passed on to LuLing. LuLing teaches the girls calligraphy the way her mother taught her; she becomes a good helper with collecting the bones of Peking man with the knowledge of bone collecting that Precious Auntie taught.

In the beginning of LuLing's memoir, LuLing calls on the ghost of Precious Auntie to help her remember her mother's family name which she will claim as her own. To name herself after her mother, LuLing acknowledges the position of a mother in a family. Moreover, LuLing wants Ruth to carry on the family lineage. In nurturing Ruth, LuLing becomes her mother, Precious Auntie. LuLing tries to pass on to Ruth what Precious Auntie taught her, such as the essence of calligraphy and bravery in the face of hardship. LuLing never forgets the first calligraphy class on the character *heart* Precious Auntie gives her:

Watch now, Doggie, she ordered, and drew the character for "heart": See this curving stroke? That's the bottom of the heart, where blood gathers and flows. And the dots, those are the two veins and the artery that carry the blood in and out. As I traced over the character, she asked: Whose dead heart gave shape to this word? How did it begin, Doggie? Did it belong to a woman? Was it drawn in sadness? [...] "Why do we have to know whose heart it was?" I asked as I wrote the character. And Precious Auntie flapped her hands fast: A person should consider how things begin. A particular beginning results in a particular end. (153)

Here calligraphy is significant for Precious Auntie because it is not only a way to preserve the memory of her life and that of her family but also a means to convert her cognition of a woman's life into tangible words and have it understood by her daughter. LuLing comes to a deep understanding of her mother's teaching after she has undergone several turns in her life journey. In

each critical turn, the spirit of her mother sustains her. Realizing the value of Precious Auntie and calligraphy, LuLing wishes to pass on the teachings of her mother to Ruth. LuLing teaches calligraphy to her own daughter, Ruth in a similar way. She says,

“Writing Chinese characters is entirely different from writing English words. You think differently. You feel differently. [...] when you write, she said, you must gather the free-flowing of your heart. [...] each stroke has its own rhythm, its balance, its proper place. [...] everything in life should be the same way. [...] Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one.” (52-53)

In a sense, LuLing’s passion for calligraphy answers the reason for her reluctance to improve her English. In the eyes of LuLing, English words do not provide tangible images for her to think through the unthinkable and to express her understanding of life. On the contrary, the process of writing calligraphy from grinding the ink to feeling for the flow of emotions to making the first stroke on the paper is essentially spiritual. For LuLing, calligraphy is a way to touch and talk with her inner emotions and thoughts. Most important of all, it is a way to commemorate her mother, to understand life, and to comprehend history. Although Ruth does not understand her mother at first, she is finally reconciled with her mother.

The novel is Ruth’s story but also her mother’s and grandmother’s. All of them are rebellious women though in different forms and in the backdrop of

different historical and cultural contexts. Her grandmother is in old feudalist China, her mother partly in China and partly in America, she in America. All of them are silenced in similar and different ways. All of them are womanists in the sense that they are audacious self definers, who follow spirituality in their quest for reclaiming the silenced female voice.

The ghost of Precious Auntie functions as the spiritual guidance in the quest of the three generations of women. Precious Auntie's spirit is the inner strength for Ruth to deal with the dilemma of being both Chinese and American; the lubricant for the mother-daughter tension between Ruth and LuLing; the guidance for LuLing in hardships; and the medium to have the voice of three generations of women heard and the matrilineal heritage preserved.

The novel's spirituality is rooted in women's inner self and Chinese ancestry. The title, The Bonesetter's Daughter, signifies the Chinese-American granddaughter's identification with her Chinese ancestry. The word bone read as *gu* in Chinese is a pun in the Chinese language. It not only refers to the physical structure of the human body but also the metaphorical connotation of *gu chi*, meaning character and courage. The family name of Precious Auntie, Gu, not only alludes to the generational profession of the family but also symbolizes the courage the family members embody. In Chinese cosmology, shooting stars are associated with death, ghosts, and women, who are considered to bring bad luck to their male relations. Seemingly, Liu Xin is a shooting star in the sense that her life is short and bright as a shooting star and that her father and husband die for her sake. However, Liu Xin subverts this negative notion of a woman as a

shooting star. The real meaning of her name is to maintain the heart. The heart here is the heart of a woman as well as her Chinese heart. By burning herself like a shooting star, Liu Xin transcends into everlasting spirituality for herself and her successors.

In the context of Chinese American literature, Amy Tan, straddling two cultures and two languages, negotiates and translates cultural differences into identity formation and foreground the process of hybridization. For Tan, the third space, or “in-betweenness,” opens up possibilities to bring ambiguity to the production of meaning and to challenge wholesale cultural hegemony.

In the struggle between mother and daughter, and sisters, in the case of The Hundred Secret Senses (2001), Tan presents the ghost metaphor as a bridge between the two generations, mending the gap in the relationship and bringing them to a state of mutual understanding in the process. With the help of the ghost, or belief in ghosts, the past finds its way into the present, as does the present into the past, linking and connecting the two worlds as if they were one, and helping the protagonists to better accept their roots and their culture. As the title suggests, Amy Tan uses the ghost metaphor as a tool to connect the past and the present. With this connection, long lost memories are reconstructed and these memories work to shape the protagonists’ identity. The connection is significant because it helps the protagonists—especially the daughter(s)—to come to terms with who they are and where they come from. It connects not only the past and the present, but also the two cultures—Chinese and American—

helping the formerly confused daughters find a sense of belonging to both cultures.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Great stories resist generalizations or categories” (The Opposite of Fate 352). With this statement, Amy Tan expresses the desire to rid her work of the label, “Asian-American fiction.” Tan’s writing proves to be universal, though all of her stories have modern Chinese characters combined with traditions and historical settings of China. She creates this universality by connecting her own personal experiences to the stories, using relationships, and exploring common literary themes. Her personal experiences mainly include her mother’s and grandmother’s lives and their influences upon her, her experiences as a Chinese-American, and feelings concerning life and death which have always been a part of her life. She also utilizes ordinary relationships by exploring the changes and obstacles that are often encountered through them, allowing a reflection of relationships in general that is able to reach readers and often teach lessons concerning the readers’ lives. Tan also uses common literary themes that allow contemporary readers to relate to her stories, such as sexism, identity, and fate. With all of these things intertwined within her almost mythical storytelling, Tan reaches her goal of breaking through labels.

Amy Tan uses her own personal experiences, relationships, and literary themes to create universal works that still have very original ideas and details. Her mother’s and grandmother’s lives influenced her own life so much that they are even speculated to be characters in more than one of her stories. Her life allows her to share her own experiences, especially concerning her youth. Her

questions concerning life and death are entwined in her works with Chinese lore such as the “World of Yin” and more serious themes. She also uses relationships throughout her stories that are relatable and true-to-life. She explores hope, courage, loss, and especially love and its ability to overcome obstacles. Finally, she threads common literary themes into her works, especially sexism, identity, and fate. Her characters are mostly Chinese-American, which she uses as an anchor to explore changes in culture and how those changes affect one’s identity. Fate is an important theme, and Tan clearly expresses her idea that fate does exist, yet one cannot let it take over one’s life.

From all the issues and themes dealt with in the previous chapters, it has become quite obvious how outstanding Amy Tan’s storytelling abilities are. In any oral culture, the storytelling transmits cultural values to a group of listeners, and in Amy Tan’s novels storytelling is used for this purpose. The mothers understand this function of storytelling and use it to provide their daughters with a connection to Chinese culture as well as a method for passing on their personal values and advice. In addition, these narratives illustrate the mothers’ displacement in American society as well as the daughters’ struggle to form an Asian-American identity. Storytelling is the most effective means for the mothers to share their personal histories and “all [their] good intentions” (The Joy Luck Club 4).

As a result of listening to their mothers’ stories, the daughters take action in their own lives by taking control of circumstances and, most importantly, accepting the hyphenated, bi-cultural role of Asian-American, which they have,

after finally seeing their mothers as strong individuals and acknowledging the validity of the advice they express in their narratives. Additionally, they accept their mothers' culture as part of their own. Finally, they take reconstructed Chinese myths and incorporate them into their own Asian-American mythology. All these events happen within the context of storytelling.

Without the stories, the daughters would have no connection to their mothers and a culture from which they are at least partially separated. Not only do the daughters eventually acknowledge the tales and the wisdom found in them, they incorporate them into a personal and collective Asian-American mythology—one that bridges gaps between two conflicting traditions (a dominant culture and a minority culture).

Storytelling in Amy Tan's novels reinforces mother-daughter bonds. Not only is it the most accessible form of communication due to language barriers, but it is a way for mothers and daughters to learn about one another. The mothers use oral tradition to tell their daughters secrets and information that no one else knows. This information exchange is not one-way. The daughters, once they finally realize that their mothers' stories are valid, they realize that they must tell their mothers about themselves.

The daughters never reach a point where they tell their mothers complete stories, but each piece of information is a beginning in the ritual of tale-telling. The daughters' positive responses to their mothers' tales allow them to communicate with one another and to maintain a relationship with each other. The daughters actively engage in a relationship with their mothers, truly

learning to take control of various situations. Rather than being victimized by circumstances, the daughters take an assertive role in making decisions about their lives.

The daughters learn to appreciate their mothers' stories and share more of their personal lives with their mothers. The storytelling ritual, begun by the mothers, encourages trust and interaction between the mothers and daughters, and perhaps these daughters will tell stories to their own children. The storytelling provides the mothers with a voice that allows them to tell their daughters about Chinese values and their personal histories. Orality enables these mothers to share their stories. Furthermore, storytelling furnishes the daughters with a cultural voice. As author and storyteller, Amy Tan narrates the daughters' Asian-American stories. In effect, the daughters' stories are being told to a world-wide audience.

On the surface, the mothers' tales appear only to be about displaced Chinese women in American society who have lived and continue to live lives of hardship and heartache. This is true only to a certain extent. While the mothers in Tan's novels are displaced and feel excluded from American culture and values, they manage to attain voices which speak to their daughters and to a larger community. By finding this voice through tale-telling, the mothers not only share their experiences, they find a means to communicate and be heard. Through storytelling, the mothers not only share their personal histories, they share wisdom and cultural attitudes which the daughters would have no connection to otherwise. Caught in a cultural identity crisis, the daughters must

accept their mothers' culture and make it part of their Asian-American identity. The storytelling enables mothers and daughters to communicate, allowing the mothers to obtain a voice and helping to provide the daughters with an Asian-American mythology comprised of personal narratives, allusions to folklore and myths, and solutions to cultural conflicts.

Amy Tan's fiction challenges traditional Chinese and dominant American cultures' ideologies and values. Her characters do not represent stereotypical images of Asians and Asian-Americans, and they reject traditional, patriarchal Chinese ideologies. Moreover, the mother and daughter narratives describe cultural displacement, identity struggles, and conflicts with either Chinese or dominant American traditions. Neither Chinese nor dominant American myths represent the mothers' marginalization and the daughters need to fit into a hyphenated role. Thus, the stories told by both the mothers and daughters help to create an Asian-American mythology that defines the role of the Asian-American.

In Tan's novels, this hyphenated role of Asian-Americans is addressed in a variety of ways. The mother and daughter narratives clearly illustrate the cultural tension that the Asian-American daughters experience when confronting cultural differences. Moreover, the way Tan addresses stereotypes, dominant culture myths, and Chinese myths indicates an Asian-American literary tradition of challenging both dominant culture and traditional Asian culture ideologies.

For example, Tan portrays strong Asian and Asian-American women who do not exemplify the dominant culture's typical expectations. Her mothers and

daughters are not dragon ladies or geisha girls, and characterizing these women as agents of their own circumstances deconstructs and reconstructs Western stereotypes. Tan engages in deconstruction and reconstruction when addressing Chinese patriarchal myths. Since the cultural attitudes behind certain Chinese myths carry no significance for the mothers and daughters, the myths are re-interpreted and re-written to pertain to displaced Asian and Asian-American women. These instances of deconstruction and reconstruction, as seen through cultural tension and mother-daughter relationships, work to establish an Asian-American identity and mythology. In addition, storytelling is the primary means which Tan uses to create an Asian-American mythology.

For centuries, storytelling has been a means of transmitting myths and traditions from one generation to the next. In Amy Tan's novels, the mothers tell stories to their daughters as a way of communicating their histories and Chinese cultural values. When the daughters have occasion to tell their own stories, the narratives describe their struggle to live as both American and Chinese women.

Although Amy Tan rejects the idea of calling herself an ethnic writer, her works follow a tradition of Asian-American writers who challenge dominant American culture's stereotypes and clichés about Asians and Asian-Americans, and portray how dominant American culture marginalizes and displaces Asians and Asian-Americans. Despite Tan's point against ethnic literary classification, her novels center around Chinese-American society, and they depict Asian-American cultural identity struggles and conflicts. The mother and daughter

narratives represent Asian-American society's need for community and identity. The presence of these stories, how they work in Tan's fiction, and their significance to the Asian-American community show how they contribute to an Asian-American mythology.

Tan's fiction is about Chinese-American – both the first generation and the second generation. Her characters both old and young are products of a different time / period, country, geography, culture and architecture. With these she creates a suitable backdrop for her drama of migration, nostalgia for the native land/ people/culture, adaptation and acculturation into the new country.

“Our grandmothers are our historical links,” writes Connie Young Yu in her essay included in the anthology titled Making Waves (1989). We see these links made by the mothers in Tan's novels: Suyuan Woo, Lindo fong, An-Mei Hsu, Ying-Ying in The Joy Luck Club (1989), Weili in The Kitchen God's Wife (1991), Kwan in The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), and Luling in The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001), who tell their daughters about themselves and what their mothers have explained to them about their lives in China. History is recreated through memory in the ‘Talk- story’ technique popular among Chinese Americans. Walter J. Ong in his Introduction to Three American Literatures (1982) has suggested that the history of Chinese Americans has been preserved through oral transmission into succeeding generations because, until the recent ethnic revivalism in America they were not encouraged to speak about their culture or history: “Silence has been part of the price of the Chinese American's survival in a country that hated them” (xv). Despite a history of seven

generations America does not recognize Asian-Americans as a presence in the country. Kim in her work An Introduction to Asian American literature and the Social Context (1982), has suggested that the ‘contemporary Asian American writer is often forced to try to piece together and sort out the meaning of the past from the shreds of stories heard in childhood or from faded photographs that have never been explained’ (262).

Tan’s use of history and the socio historical conditions of China in 1920’s and 40’s is brought into the present through the mode of memory narratives. In the first two novels, memory is used as a bridge between the past and the present, which in ethnic literature belongs to two worlds: native and dwelling place. The Chinese mothers, through their recollections, provide the historical link both of time and place: between past and present as well as between China and America. In the third novel The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), the ‘link’ is established by ‘Yin people’ who tell Kwan about her past life as well as about those living around her. Even Olivia, who at first is a skeptic, comes to believe in the power of ‘Yin’ people. The sense of the past in the present is ever-present in Tan’s fiction. This is most remarkably seen in The Hundred Secret Senses (1995). In Kwan’s reincarnated existence she makes constant journeys into her past previous life, when she was another person in another place/country with the name Nunumu or even earlier, Buncake. Kwan’s story about her previous life as Nunumu, is pieced together by her gift of the hundred secret senses.

The ethnic backdrop against which Tan locates her narrative is a typical feature of immigrant writing. All her works written about Chinese immigrants –

old and new, reveal the Chinese consciousness, their ethnic ethos, manifested through their living patterns – food, eating, rituals, etc. Human culture is the creations of forms and modes – of behaviour, ritualisation, and representations, which enable people to grasp, give meaning to, and get through their lives.

The cross culture encounter between east and west is played out in the intergenerational conflict between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. The Chinese culture is known for its matrilineal bonds. But in the American social environment the family ties between mothers and daughters are no longer what it was in Chinese culture. While An-Mei, Weili, Lindo, recollect with fondness the strong ties which they shared with their mothers in China; in America they are alienated from their daughters – Rose, Pearl, Waverly. The reason for this is the cultural impact upon traditional roles. The traditional role of a Chinese mother has been greatly curtailed in America. If formerly she represented an automatic authority, now she is unsure of herself; defensive, hesitant to impose her own standards on the young. With the mother's role changed, the daughter no longer identifies with her mother, or internalizes her authority in the way as it was in the lives of these Chinese mothers.

The Chinese women are caught in a cultural transition, which impacts upon their identities in various ways. As time erases the memories of the past, these Chinese American mothers delight their daughters with oral histories, and stories and by doing so endeavour to perpetuate their ethnic culture transmitted through a matrilineal tradition. The Chinese mothers see their daughters impatient about their mother's Chinese culture and ethos. This reminds them of

their past in China, when they enjoyed deep bonding with their own Chinese mothers. The matrilineal tradition was stronger then. It is in danger of being erased now by the American social milieu in which their daughters have gained a foothold, although a low one, by virtue of their education. So the elderly Chinese women tell their daughters stories about their matrilineal tradition in the past in China.

Despite the generational conflicts the ethnic mothers are unwilling to abandon their daughters to the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. Tan portrays this paradoxical dilemma in the great influence exerted by Chinese mothers in the identity formation and psychological, emotional maturity of their daughters. In the absence of mothers other elderly women such as aunt, grandmother or mother-in-law take up this responsibility of educating the young Chinese girls about their cultural role expectations.

Amy Tan's Chinese American mothers are strong characters, who educate their daughters about their ethnicity, through narrations of Chinese myths, legends and stories from the past life and country. For the daughters who have never seen their homeland, their mothers' stories are a way to construct this past, because they explain to them who their forebears were and what their heritage consists of. The daughters begin to understand the "unspeakable tragedies" their mothers and aunts have left behind in China and the anxieties and concerns they have about the cultural continuity between their pasts and their children's future. It is due to these fears that the mothers do not only use stories to help reconstruct a past but also to create and control their present and

future. In an interview, with Susan Kepner, Amy Tan explains that the Chinese mother in her book map out personally their daughter's lives.

The ethnicity of Tan is manifested in the depiction of Asian characters in her fiction. She has portrayed strong women characters who survive hardships and lead successful lives in America. This kind of character delineation can be read as an attempt of resistance to racist stereotyping undertaken by the ethnic writer. The Chinese women of Tan's novels - Suyum Woo, Weili, Lindo Jong, Kwan, and Luling are portrayed as survivors with great inner strength of character and fortitude. Some, like Kwan, also possess mysterious knowledge and prophetic vision. In comparison the American characters are made to appear innocent as well as ignorant.

With the different relationships between all these different characters and their cultural differences, Amy Tan has addressed the problems of cultural hybridity, and at the same time, presenting a solution to these problems. Most of the problems are between the Chinese-born mothers and their American-born daughters—the cultural gaps between the two generations, the misunderstanding and the unreasonable outbursts—and all it takes to bridge this gap is a heart-felt communication, where both mothers and daughters feel at ease and are not bound by rules and regulations. Once there is real communication, there is mutual understanding, and both mothers and daughters find a home—an identity—in each other, where they feel safe and no longer alienated. No doubt cultural hybridization still very much exists, and will continue to exist. But having said that, one must also keep in mind that it is no longer a problem for

those who have come to terms with who they are and where they come from. It does not mean that they have become wholly Chinese or wholly American, but they have simply found peace in themselves, no longer confused or feeling lost, but at home.

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APPENDICES

NAME OF CANDIDATE : LALRAMMAWII RALTE

DEGREE : M.PHIL

DEPARTMENT : ENGLISH

TITLE OF DISSERTATION : CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE
SELECTED WORKS OF AMY TAN

DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION : NO 2001 , 28/07/2009
(Commencement of First Semester)

COMMENCEMENT OF SECOND SEM/ DISSERTATION : 1/1/2010

Approval of Research Proposal

1. BOARD OF STUDIES : Dt. 18/05/2010

2. SCHOOL BOARD : Dt. 04/06/2010

REGISTRATION NO. & DATE : MZU/M.Phil/35 of 4.06.2010

DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION : Dt. 29/06/2011

EXTENSION : June 2011

BIO-DATA

Name : Lalrammawii Ralte
Father's Name : R. Lalawmpuia (L)
Address : Dinthar, Aizawl, House No. D/T-305
Phone no. : (0389) 2300606 / 9089612207

Educational Qualification :

Class	Board/University	Year of Passing	Division/Grade	Percentage
HSLC	MBSE	2002	II	54.8 %
HSSLC	MBSE	2004	I	60.2 %
B.A.	MZU	2007	II	53.38 %
M.A.	MZU	2009	II	56.56 %
M.PHIL	MZU	Course Work Completed in December 2009	'A' Grade awarded 10 pt. scale grading system	Correspondands to 68% in terms of percentage conversion.

M.Phil. Registration Number and Date: MZU/M.Phil/35 of 4.06.2010.

Other relevant information:

- i) Participated in “ National Seminar on The Dynamics of Culture, Society and identity: Emerging Literatures of Northeast India” during March 10 – 11, 2009 at Aizawl, organized by the Department of English, Mizoram University, in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.**
- ii) Secured UGC-MZU Fellowship for a tenure of twelve months from April 2010 to April 2011.**