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**Bridging Generations and Cultures: An Interdisciplinary
Approach to Mother-Daughter Conflict and Storytelling in Amy
Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of master's in
literature and civilization

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all mothers and daughters who find it challenging to coexist yet cannot imagine life apart.

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Abstract

Chinese-Americans, one of the largest ethnic groups contributing to the shaping of the United States as a multicultural society, continue to maintain their cultural traditions despite their settlement in America, a country whose culture is completely different from their own. This group, particularly Chinese women, have endured significant hardships in the New World. One major challenge this thesis seeks to highlight is the conflict that arises between the immigrant Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. Amy Tan, a prominent Chinese-American writer, uses fiction to address this conflict alongside other critical problems mainly encountered by Chinese-American female characters. Significantly, in her 1989 novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan not only problematizes mother-daughter relationship, but also attempts to offer a resolution to this predicament largely by recourse to storytelling and the mother figure. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is undertaken to understand how Amy Tan enables the female characters to transcend intergenerational conflict so as to eventually achieve reconciliation.

Chinese-American literature, Mother-daughter relationship, Intergenerational conflict, Storytelling, Mother legacy.

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General Introduction

General Introduction:

Chinese-American literature first appeared in the latter half of the 20th century, much like many other ethnic literatures. Initially underestimated and overlooked, it actually boasts a history spanning more than a century. This newly recognized literary category has consistently reflected Chinese-American life to mainly portray the hardships endured by Chinese immigrants, their efforts, and their achievements since they first arrived on American shores. One of the key issues most Chinese-American writers, especially women, focus on is the predicaments faced by Chinese immigrant women in the New World. In particular, their stories center around intergenerational conflicts between Chinese mothers, who came to US as immigrants, and their American-born daughters. One of the major factors fueling this kind of conflict is the cultural discrepancy between the two generations. Underlying such discrepancy, one may argue, is the fictional depiction of mothers as characters who maintain strong ties to their homeland and retain a deep sense of cultural and personal belonging to it; whereas their daughters are fashioned to often reject their parents' old lifestyle and feel more connected to the new environment.

Actually, this generational struggle has been a core subject that has drawn the attention of many Chinese-American women writers, who have explored a plethora of themes largely related to and accentuating mother-daughter relationship. In *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother Daughter Conflicts in Asian American Literature* (2009), for instance, [Silvia Schultersmandl](#) uses the trope of struggle as approached and defined by feminist discourses to scrutinize mother-daughter conflicts portrayed in selected texts by Asian- American writers including Amy Tan. In this book, Schultersmandl calls for reading the trope of generational struggle as a worldwide phenomenon that transcends geographical borders. However, by

doing so, Schultermanl has neglected the importance of elements like cultural differences in feeding mother-daughter conflicts. Moreover, studies such as Elaine H. Kim's *Asian-American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (1982) which has explored themes of cultural identity and assimilation, seem to place novels like *The Joy Luck Club* within the broader framework of Asian-American literature. This broad framework, nevertheless, can neither include consideration of the intricacies of mother-daughter conflicts nor does it allow space to explain the ways authors resort to so as to offer solutions to these conflicts. In this dissertation, therefore, we tend to examine how Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* highlights the complexities of mother-daughter conflict and how it manages to provide a resolution to it.

Hence, what interests the current study is how books of fiction such as the novel at hand perceive the generational conflict between mothers and daughters inside immigrant communities and what solutions the writer proposes to resolve it. Amy Tan has established her place in Chinese-American literature through her celebrated novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) in which she delves deeply into the intriguing theme of mother-daughter relationship. The novel portrays the latter through highlighting the intergenerational conflict between Chinese-born mothers and their American-born daughters, while shedding light on their divergent cultural backgrounds. The mothers, shaped by Chinese values and experiences of inequality, aim to transmit these values to their daughters, who embody American ideals of individualism and freedom, leading to a communication gap.

Interestingly, one of the literary strategies Tan resorts to in order to bridge this gap is storytelling alongside the role of the mother figure. Storytelling in fact is regarded as a crucial element in Chinese-American women's writings. Scholars like Bella Adams in her book *Amy*

Tan (2005), published by Manchester University Press, and Mary Snodgrass in her *Amy Tan: A Literary Companion* (2004) emphasize that storytelling is employed as a means of reclaiming heritage, empowering marginalized women, and articulating female experiences against mainstream ideologies. Wendy Ho, in *Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing* (2000), on the other hand, argues that storytelling acts as social protest and a reclamation of voice and memory, which enables women to reshape their cultural and social landscapes. Concerning the trope of motherhood, however, less has been said about the role of the mother figure in Amy Tan's work, especially that it is of an undeniable importance in performing the act/art of storytelling.

Therefore, while our study of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, basically aligns with much of the previous studies mentioned above, it distinguishes itself by undertaking interdisciplinary research that aims to draw insights from three different theories: cultural theory, maternal theory, and intergenerational theory. This approach features a close attention to the intricacy Tan bestows to her distinctive fictional treatment of mother-daughter relationship. By incorporating cultural theory, we seek to examine how cultural symbols, narratives, and institutions shape human behavior and societal structures. The theory under consideration shows how culture impacts social relationships. Moreover, the intergenerational theory is used in this study by focusing on the transmission of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors within families, as well as by emphasizing the role of family history and changing dynamics over time. It also discusses the continuity and transformation of values from one generation to another, thus featuring the significance of family interactions in shaping identities. In addition, this theoretical scope integrates maternal theory to investigate how perceptions of gender, power, and caregiving are reflected in motherhood images. It then inspects the complexities of maternal influence on characters' identities, emotions, and moral growth.

The present study is important because it highlights the significance of understanding maternal legacies and intergenerational conflicts inside immigrant families, namely the Chinese-American experiences. Therefore, it will attempt to foster a deeper understanding of familial ties, cultural diversity, and the tradition/modernity interaction, with a special focus on how storytelling preserves cultural heritage and bridges generational gaps. Moreover, the discussion of maternal legacies and generational misunderstandings in *The Joy Luck Club* transcends fiction to the real-life experiences of immigrant families. The novel allows readers gain insights into family dynamics, cultural adaptation challenges, and the enduring impact of maternal influence across generations in immigrant communities.

Addressing the generational conflict and the role of storytelling between mothers and their daughters arises several practical questions. It is important to identify: to what extent can different cultural backgrounds act as obstacles between mothers and daughters? How are generational disputes portrayed in Tan's novel, particularly those involving Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters? What factors influence the mother-daughter dynamics over time, and how do their relationships evolve throughout the novel? What impact do mothers' legacies have in shaping the identities, morals, and goals of their daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*? Finally, how does storytelling become a crucial vehicle through which the mother characters assert their existence, reclaim their Chinese heritage, and bridge the generational divide with their daughters?

To answer these questions, this paper employs a qualitative approach, using interdisciplinary analysis, which is well-suited for literary works. Specific passages and chapters dedicated to storytelling will be carefully examined. These methods will provide a deeper understanding of the conflicts and legacies depicted in the novel. Additionally, the

qualitative methodology allows for an exploration of the cultural, emotional, and generational dimensions of storytelling within the text.

The paper is organized into three chapters. Chapter One provides the historical background for the entire work. It begins with an exploration of the term ‘Chinese-American’ and then discusses the history of Chinese immigrants in the United States. Additionally, Chapter One examines the development of Chinese-American literature in relation to the various waves of immigration to America. Furthermore, this chapter delves into Amy Tan's significant contributions to Chinese-American literature. It also tackles the contrasts between Chinese and American cultures as key factors in the complexities of intergenerational relationships and the transmission of cultural and familial heritage. This first chapter closes with the importance of intergenerational conflict and material legacies as recurring themes in Chinese-American literature.

Chapter two constitutes the theoretical framework upon which this research is based. It first discusses multidisciplinary theory and offers a general summary about it. Then, cultural theory is examined to clarify how cultural norms, customs, and beliefs influence people and society. Intergenerational theory is also discussed because it emphasizes the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours that are passed down through families between generations. It also discusses maternal theory, examining how societal conceptions of gender, authority, and caregiving affect how people understand motherhood. Our understanding of the book is enhanced by this multidisciplinary approach, which also highlights the complex relationships between individual experiences and larger cultural circumstances. Finally, the chapter explores the psychological impact of stories and storytelling. It highlights how storytelling plays a vital role in these narratives, acting as a means for mother characters to navigate their experiences, bridge intergenerational gaps, and preserve cultural traditions.

Chapter three is entitled Bridging Generations: Intergenerational Conflict, the Role of Mothers, and the Significance of Storytelling in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) investigates the mother-daughter conflicts as a representation of the clash between old Chinese culture and contemporary American culture. Initially, this chapter delves into Amy Tan's work, summarizing its stories and illustrating cultural conflicts. It subsequently examines the continuous conflicts between mothers and daughters, particularly focusing on Lindo and her daughter Waverly, as well as June and her mother Suyuan, to identify the origins of these conflicts. This analysis will be guided by Cultural Theory, Intergenerational Theory, and Maternal Theory. Specifically, Tan is presented in the third chapter as a skillful storyteller, with an overview of the circumstances that shaped her talent. The chapter also addresses linguistic barriers in *The Joy Luck Club*, explaining how characters use 'talk story' as an alternative communication method, highlighting how these barriers function as both obstacles and catalysts for storytelling. Finally, the chapter discusses the functions of storytelling in the novel, from empowering the teller by sharing painful past experiences to providing warnings about present situations. Importantly, it explores how mothers use storytelling to bridge the generational gap with their daughters.

Chapter one:

Foundations of Chinese-American Literature: Exploring Historical Context, Cultural Contrasts, and Intergenerational Dynamics

1. Introduction:

Any literature analysis usually starts with an attempt to pinpoint the work's origins before moving on to trace its development. The term 'Chinese-American literature' itself is a byproduct of a particular historical period. A thorough understanding and appreciation of a work of Chinese-American literature requires an understanding of the historical context of Chinese immigration to the United States. To put it another way, Chinese-American literature is likely to be misinterpreted and undervalued if the historical background is unexplored. Before being identified, the name 'Chinese-Americans' underwent numerous modifications, and the same was true for the literature that was eventually given the Chinese-American moniker. Indeed, as circumstances of the Chinese in America have changed, the limits of Chinese-American literature have fluctuated.

Therefore, this chapter serves several purposes. First, it introduces the historical context of Chinese immigration to America. Second, it highlights the emergence of Chinese-American literature as a direct result of Chinese immigrants' experiences in the United States. It, as well, examines Amy Tan's iconic contribution to Chinese-American literature. Additionally, the chapter explores the contrasts between Chinese and American cultures, which are the main triggers for the complexities of intergenerational relationships and the transmission of cultural and familial heritage within the Chinese-American community. Finally, it aims to illuminate the significance of intergenerational conflict and material legacies as recurring themes in Chinese-American literature.

2. Historical Context of Chinese Immigration to America:

The Chinese-American experience is deeply rooted in the historical context of immigration to the United State. Their journey is remarkably marked by resilience, struggle, and perseverance. From the mid-19th century onwards, Chinese immigrants started making the difficult journeys and arriving in substantial numbers across the Pacific Ocean in search of better opportunities and a brighter future.

Many historians like Him Mark Lai¹ and Jean Pfaelzer²; in their books *Becoming Chinese American; A History of Communities and institutions* (2004) and *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (2007) respectively, believe that the history of Chinese-Americans may be loosely split into three periods: 1849–1882, 1882–1965, and 1965–present. The first phase, sometimes referred to as the "first wave", began soon after the California Gold Rush³. At this point, a significant influx of Chinese people started to arrive in the 1850s for the same reason that a huge number of Americans were moving to California: the finding of gold sparked a massive migration to the state from both inside and outside the United States.

The majority of the Chinese immigrants to California at the beginning were peasant, farmers, and merchants driven by political and economic hardships as well as the civil war in

¹ Known as the "Dean of Chinese American History," Lai extensively researched and wrote about the early Chinese immigrants' experiences in America, including their contributions, challenges, and the development of Chinatowns.

² Her works examines the expulsion of Chinese immigrants from communities across the American West during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

³ The California Gold Rush (1848–1855) was a period in American history which began on January 24, 1848, when gold was found by James W. Marshall at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California.

China. They landed by steamer in the harbor of San Francisco, when the first Chinatown⁴ was established. Although over half of them were married, the majority did not bring their spouses and families. Strong family ties were not maintained by the Chinese in the United States due to a combination of extremely constrained economic situations, cultural norms prohibiting women from traveling overseas, and difficult living circumstances. For most of them, sending money to the family in China from a distance was both safer and less expensive. Despite their contributions to the growing economy, Chinese immigrants faced hostility and discrimination from white settlers, who viewed them as competitors for limited resources. Iris Chang's book *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (2003) offers a thorough account of Chinese immigrants' experiences in the country, including their battles against prejudice and antagonism.

Most of the Chinese who first reached Gum San, also known as, the Gold Mountain⁵ shared the same intention, working hard, securing a lot of money, and most importantly the return to their homelands and hamlets as opulent men. Having in mind all these goals, the Chinese were not really different from many immigrants who came to the United States in the nineteenth century. However, the difference between them became apparent only when Chinese men wanted to bring their families to join them in America and were not allowed from doing so by anti-Chinese immigration laws. Thus, in the nineteenth century, Chinese immigration was characterised by the absence of women which paved the way for a bachelor society, completely distinct from other immigrant groups. The latter was the main issue for many writers at that time for instance, Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore: A*

⁴ Chinatown: the first Chinese neighborhood emerged in San Francisco's ports mouth square.

⁵ The Gold Mountain is a nick name that Chinese immigrants have used for the US. Historically, America has been known to the Chinese as a mountain of gold both because of the 19th century Gold Rush and the nation's image for being a land of opportunity.

History of Asian Americans (1989) explores the history of Asian immigration to the United States, focusing on gender roles and Chinese immigrant families' experiences.

Another pivotal moment in Chinese-American history was the building of the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s. Chinese laborers performed a significant role in building the western segment of the railroad, facing difficult circumstances, low salaries, and endemic discrimination. Chinese laborers faced bigotry and violence despite their vital contributions to the project, which culminated in the historic anti-Chinese riots of the late 19th century. Many Americans consider them as a cultural threat, labor competition, and racial inferiors, simply because China in the view of Americans was a backward, heathen, and degenerate country.⁶ Moreover, the Chinese, especially the poor were considered as part of the dregs of humanity. Consequently, this period was distinguished by the many racist laws and actions that challenged the Chinese from the moment of their arrival.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which essentially prohibited Chinese immigration and naturalization⁷ for several decades, marked the peak of anti-Chinese animosity. This act, being the first significant legislation limiting immigration on the basis of race, was a response to growing concerns about cultural assimilation and economic competitiveness. Racist stereotypes were strengthened and limitations on Chinese immigration were further enforced by later laws. In order to deal with the circumstances in the New World and to resist these unfair laws, the Chinese came up with ways to combine resources in order to start businesses,

⁶ The Chinese were criticized for following a different religion, using opium, and for living in a bachelor society rather than as family men with wives and children.

⁷ Naturalization refers to the legal process by which a non-citizen in a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country.

support boycotts, and organize strikes. Many writers⁸ Eris Chang, for instance, writings highlight the achievements Chinese-Americans have made to American culture as well as the continuous fight for justice and equality. In her book *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture (1860-1910)* (1986) is another example who delves into the prejudice Chinese immigrants encountered in the workplace and in society, as well as their contributions to California's agricultural sector.

The Chinese employed both the legal system and diplomacy to protect their civil rights. This, in fact had a significant influence on the development of the idea of legal justice as well as constitutional jurisdiction. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the equality of protection under the law for all Americans, regardless of race or nationality, in the landmark cases of *Wong Kim Ark vs United States* (1898) and *Yick Wo vs Hopkins* (1886). By the end of the first period the Chinese population in the United States was about one-fifth of one percent, of the US total.

The second period (1882–1965) saw a selective American mindset. Only diplomats, business people, and students were permitted to travel between the United States and China during this time. Furthermore, greater restrictions on the rights of Chinese immigrants continued to be implemented until the Second World War broke out. A significant turning point in the history of Chinese immigration was the war. As it encouraged thousands of young men to enlist in the military, it brought about a profound transformation in the Chinese community in America. China became an important US ally following the Japanese attack on

⁸ Sucheng Chan is an award-winning author on the history of Asian-Americans and Chinese immigrants' experiences in the US.

Pearl Harbor, transforming it from ‘the sick man of Asia’⁹. Meanwhile, hatred of the Japanese could fill in the anti-Chinese feelings that took place for decades.

China became suddenly an ally in the fight, and the Exclusion Act was an embarrassment. The Chinese Exclusion Act was officially repealed as a result of the US-led war alliance. As a result, Chinese nationals who had previously resided in America were now eligible to get citizenship. Iris Chang's book *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (2003) provides insight into how the Second World War affected the Chinese community in America and how U.S.-China ties changed during this time.

The so-called second generation of Chinese Americans eventually emerged during this period. From an economic perspective, the war gave Chinese people who were previously working in Chinatowns at extremely low wages greater jobs in Chinatowns. Chinese labors were given preference in America's massive defense industry, which was eager to hire people of all colors. In addition, Chinese veterans, both male and female, benefited from free college educations following the end of the war. As a result, a middle class composed primarily of educated Chinese people moved from ethnic enclaves to American suburbia where they coexisted with white Americans. In *Asian American History: A Very Short Introduction* (2016) Madeline Y. Hsu offers an overview of Asian-American history, including the experiences of Chinese immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Chapter 4, intitled *The Second World War and Its Aftermath*, scrutinizes the impact of World War II on Asian-Americans, including changes in immigration policies, economic opportunities, and social mobility.

⁹ The term ‘the sick man of Asia’ historically referred to China's perceived weakness and vulnerability, especially during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when China was subject to internal turmoil, colonial exploitation, and significant socio-political challenges.

By the second half of the 20th century towards the beginning of the 21st century, economic globalization facilitated increased mobility and interconnectedness across the globe. China's rapid economic growth and its emergence as a global economic powerhouse created new opportunities and motivations for Chinese nationals to seek employment and investment opportunities abroad. Many Chinese immigrants in the third wave were drawn to the United States by the prospect of better job prospects, higher wages, and entrepreneurial opportunities in sectors such as technology, finance, and academia.

The majority of Chinese students who were pursuing their studies in the new world are part of the third wave of immigrants from China. More Chinese students are choosing to study abroad in search of higher degrees and chances for professional development as a result of the growth of educational exchange programs and the rise of honored American universities as major international academic cores. For Chinese students looking for advanced degrees and educational resources, especially in business, the United States remains to be a desired destination.

Moreover, from a historical point of view being with the family has been the desire for almost all immigrants to the United States. This eagerness is best observed in the third wave of Chinese immigrants. Thanks to the number of measures taken by the authorities like changes in immigration laws and quotas; immigration visa sponsorship given to Chinese-Americans arriving during preceding waves, many families separated by political and geographic limitations have been reunited. This ease has pushed Chinese-American communities across the American nation a step forward. It was considered as another aspect in the growth of Chinese immigrants who can now sponsor their families for immigration.

Besides, an important factor that made the third wave of Chinese immigration distinct from the previous ones, who were mostly motivated by specific historical events or situations,

is a higher variety of backgrounds, drives, and socioeconomic level. People from a variety of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic origins who come from both rural and urban parts of China made up what is referred to as the third wave of Chinese immigrants. The diversity of Chinese-American communities throughout the US is nurtured by this variety, which also strengthens the fabric of Chinese-American identity. A thorough description of the history of Chinese immigration to the United States is provided by Iris Chang in her work *the Chinese in America: A narrative history* (2003) in which she covers several waves of migration and their social, economic, and cultural impacts. Chapter 10, intitled *The New Immigration*, once again, she examines the third wave of Chinese immigrants and their eagerness for coming to the US. Chang emphasizes the reasons encouraging Chinese students to choose the United States as the main destination for their study, the different backgrounds reflected in the third-wave immigrants, and the role of family reconsolidation in immigration development.

The evolution of Chinese-American identity and community dynamics had been deeply affected by the rise of the third wave of Chinese-Americans. As they arrive and settle in the United States they bring with them their own exclusive experiences, standpoints, and ambitions, reshaping existing narratives of Chinese-American identity and contributing to ongoing dialogues about multiculturalism, assimilation, and belonging. The story of the Chinese in the United States is a story knitted by their immigration. Their journey throughout the years has created a rich environment in which the rise of Chinese-American literature may be appreciated. Therefore, Chinese- American literature came in waves following the rhythm created by immigration.

3. The Evolution of Chinese-American Literature:

Like any other ethnic literature¹⁰, Chinese-American literature is a rich tapestry made from the distinctive experiences, hardships, and victories of a certain people. The experiences of Chinese immigrants who came to the US during the mid-19th century Gold Rush and the subsequent construction of the transcontinental railroad were largely reflected in the first wave of Chinese-American literature, which arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fascinating journey of Chinese-American literature's evolution across centuries mirrors the complex interplay of cultural heritage, immigration experiences, and the quest for identity within the Chinese community in the US.

However, stylistically speaking Chinese-American writers, particularly American born authors, were influenced by mainstream culture. They write exactly the same way their American rivals do. As a cultural historian and a Chinese-American in his book *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* (2000), Xiao-Huang Ying explains how Chinese-American writers are influenced by their American peers. He strengthens his view with the careful examination of the prose style of the Chinese-American woman writer Jade Snow Wong's novel *Fifth Chinese Daughters* (1950). Xiao believes that *Fifth Chinese Daughters* is really influenced by American literary works:

By examining carefully the prose style of her work, we find what has really influenced Wong are American autobiographical works such as Henry Adams' *the Education of Henry Adams* and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. Moreover, the fact that earlier Chinese- American writing is in the realm of American-style realism and largely of an

¹⁰ Ethnic literature refers to literary works that examine the viewpoints, experiences, and cultural identities of certain ethnic groups within a broader society.

autobiographical nature, a genre virtually non-existing in traditional Chinese literature, reveals that Chinese American writers are more Americanized... (Yin)

Thus, these stylistic features indicate to what extent the main stream culture influenced the Chinese-American experience.

One of the earliest and most influential works of this period is *The Heathen Chinese* by Bret Harte (1870). Even though it wasn't written by a Chinese-American, this poem perfectly captures the prejudices that were then pervasive in American culture against Chinese immigration. It reinforces racist feelings against Chinese immigrants and perpetuates stereotypes of the "Yellow Peril" by portraying Ah Sin, a Chinese immigrant, as a cunning and dishonest person.

However, as they started to discover their talents, Chinese-Americans begin to question these prejudgments and craft their own accounts via literature. Sui Sin Far, the pen name of Edith Maude Eaton, an Englishwoman and Chinese native, is one of the most prominent figures of this era. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) is a collection of short stories in which Sui Sin Far discusses identity, assimilation, and cultural clash. This collection offers a compound representation of Chinese-American experience in addition to another vital work through which Sui Sin Far explores the difficulties faced by Chinese-American women within a community that commonly marginalized them. This work as well is knitted into a collection of tales such as 'In the Land of the Free' and 'The Inferior Woman',

Besides, the first Chinese graduate of an American university is Yung Wing. His poetry fits to the first wave of Chinese-American literature. In his collection *My Life in China and America* (1909) Yung Wing wrote about his experiences. He uses his poetry as an

expression of the hopes and difficulties met by Chinese immigrants, those facing inequality and rejection in the American society. Generally speaking, the first wave of Chinese-American literature is considered as groundwork for the writings of the coming generations. It paved the way for them to speak about the unspeakable and tackle the themes and experiences coming to the surface at that time. These early pioneers set up the way for other generations to follow their footsteps through questioning biases and demanding their identities using their writings.

Another pivotal moment for Chinese-American writers was the second wave of Chinese-American literature. This wave which typically appeared in the second half of the 20th century allowed the writers of the time to explore and discuss their culture. Also, two other crucial socio-political moves that offered voice to the voiceless and that influenced the rise of the second wave of Chinese-American writing were the feminist movement and the Civil Rights Movement.¹¹ This period was also characterized by a rise of awareness and a call for multiplicity and multiculturalism in American culture, that paved the way for the creation of a more welcoming literary scene that embraced a number of cultural standpoints. Authors started to write about identity, family dynamics¹², clash between generations, and the experience of immigrants. This gave a thorough insight and a detailed portrayal of Chinese-American experiences. Eric Liu's book *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (1998) is one of the key works that provides a detailed examination of this wave. The writer

¹¹ The feminist movement in Chinese-American literature discusses themes of gender equality, identity, and empowerment in the context of Chinese-American female's life.

The Civil Rights Movement in Chinese-American literature scrutinizes problems of racial justice, discrimination, and activism throughout the Chinese-American community.

¹² The motives of family ties, interactions, and behaviors that exist within a family are defined as family dynamics. It includes all of the different ways that the members of the family use including interaction, communication, and deal with the happy moments and difficulties of having a family.

of this memoir speaks about her experiences growing up Chinese-American and the sociopolitical setting that shaped Chinese-American literature in the second half of the 20th century.

Amy Tan is another key Chinese-American writer of this period who deserves consideration. Her works have attracted readers all over the world and have come to symbolize the Chinese-American experience in archetypal ways. Following the release of her novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), one of the most noticeable pieces of Chinese-American literature, Amy Tan obtained honor in the 1980s and 1990s. Tan developed a moving narrative that interweaves the stories of four Chinese immigrant moms and their American-born daughters, inspired from her own experiences as the daughter of Chinese immigrant parents. She skillfully tackled a variety of themes including the everlasting ties of families, cultural clashes and identity formation.

Amy Tans' works of art stand as a monument which lighten the second wave of Chinese-American literature, embody a significant cultural movement that has given a step forward to diversity of narratives and to literary criticism. Her writings are thought provoking over the complications of identity, presence, and intergenerational relationships. Overall, her legacy confirms that, despite the growth and evolution of Chinese-American literature, stories have the lifelong ability to confirm worldwide truths and heal cultural divides.

During the late 20th century a new and active movement appeared and it is still developing in the 21st century. This movement built up what is known as the third wave of Chinese-American literature. This wave was characterized by a diversity of voices, insights, and themes. It as well approaches recent issues and holds a globalized society while standing on the groundwork established by previous waves.

One of the chief characteristics that highlights the third wave of Chinese-American literature is the different voices and features from all over the Chinese community in the United States. Chinese- American literary expression gained its complexity and strength from the influences of writers from other backgrounds, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and Southeast Asia. The diversity that not only provides readers with a more complicated insight of the immigration experience, but also, reflects the diverse nature of the Chinese-American population.

Moreover, the third wave of Chinese-American literature marked itself with a wide range current topic, such as socioeconomic disparity, immigration, racial relations, and gender identity. Writers belonging to this wave explore different issues related to the context of Chinese-American immigrant families. They highlight the complication of identity creation and cultural assimilation. These writings give insights into Chinese-Americans' real-life experiences outside their homeland, examining the difficulties of assimilating into American society and managing multiple cultural identities.

In order not to cite them all few examples of voices within the Chines-American literature are distinguished examples which include Lisa Ko, whose book *The Leavers* (2017) tells the story of a young Chinese-American child adopted by a non- Chinese couple. The book highlights themes of family, identity, and belonging. Jenny Zhang's *Sour Heart* (2017) is another voice that discusses the complications of adolescence and family dynamics through a realistic and emotional description of Chinese-American immigrant households in New York City.

Through their distinguished voices and stories, these writers, and many others, improve the literary landscape by demonstrating the variety of issues and insights found in the

third wave of Chinese-American writing. One of the most recurrent themes highlighted in almost all Chinese- American writings during the three waves is the intergenerational conflict within Chinese-American families in US. To comprehend the roots of the current clash between the two generations, it is important to focus on the significant differences between the Chinese and American cultural backgrounds.

4. Chinese Cultural Background:

Influenced by Taoism¹³, Buddhism, and primarily Confucianism¹⁴, Chinese culture encompasses a comprehensive system of values (Encyclopedia Britannica). In his *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. Cambridge University Press (2010), Ebrey, Patricia Buckley adds that Chinese culture emphasizes conformity and discipline within individuals, the family, and society. Unlike other religions, as Yao, Xinzhong argues in *An Introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge University Press (2000) Confucianism, as the dominant ideology, does not promote the worship of any specific deity; instead, its primary focus is on human behavior. Therefore, Confucianism is considered more as a code of conduct than as a religion. Centered on human behavior, Confucianism teaches three important concepts: the virtue of filial piety (the foundation of human relationships), Jen (goodness and the desire to help others), and Li (the rules of proper behavior). According to Ching, Julia. *Chinese Religions*. Macmillan Publishing Company (1993), these values are instilled in every Chinese child to encourage proper conduct.

¹³ It is an indigenous religio-philosophical tradition that has shaped Chinese life for more than 2,000 years.

¹⁴ Confucianism is a philosophical and ethical system based on the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE), a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher. It emphasizes the importance of morality, social harmony, and proper behavior in personal and public life

Filial piety is regarded as the main pillar of Confucianism and the first of all virtues, encompassing religious worship, family life, social activities, and political affairs. In other words, filial piety greatly influences the Chinese way of life. Nylan and Tu provide detailed insights into the role of filial piety in Confucianism, underscoring the basis of the five human relationships: the relationship between father and son, which considers affection and union; the relationship between governor and subject, which considers loyalty and fairness; the relationship between husband and wife, which considers submission and individual duties; the relationship between the old and the young, which considers love and obedience; and the relationship between good friends, which considers confidence (Nylan 200; Tu 56). Three out of these five relationships are dedicated to family, clearly stressing the importance of the family in Chinese society. In addition, the virtue of filial piety requires children to care for their parents when alive, and when they pass away, to bury them and to sacrifice to them. In the Chinese family, seniors should be respected, and their words should be heard. Consequently, Chinese culture is full of respect, conformity, and gratitude; however, it lacks freedom and individuality.

In terms of family life and the role of women, the Confucian tradition places high value on men, regarding them as the central figure within the family structure (Chan 72). Thus, traditional Chinese society was patriarchal where sons were preferred to daughters, where women were regarded as subordinate to their fathers, husbands, and even to their sons. Women had no decision in the choice of their husbands. Once married the young woman became also subordinate to her in-laws. Family filial piety, i.e., relations directing children with their parents and past generations, authorised major issues and importance to eldest sons. Furthermore, two of the five relationships father/son and husband/wife enhance social

conventions of male supremacy. The woman's position takes place only when she follows and obeys her parents, her husband and husband's parents, and produces grandchildren, mainly male heirs. The ideal woman in this society is the one who is timid, prolific and silent. She is also the woman who owns an inner strength and is known for her toleration, patience and sense of reserve. Although the Chinese appreciated their heritage, and applied its rules with accuracy, they sought freedom elsewhere. For a reason or another, they stretch their necks to the United States.

When they decided to leave their homeland, seeking good life and freedom, Chinese immigrants moved westwards taking with them their Chinese spirit blended with pure traditions and virtues. But once they reached their dreamland, they found an entirely different world. They found themselves surrounded by another culture that is at odds with theirs.

5. American Cultural Background :

Freedom, individualism, pragmatism, mobility, and progress are commonly regarded as the primary values deeply embedded in American history (Smith 34). In this self-centered culture individual goals are emphasized. There is no room for what is called self-sacrificing, dependence, generosity, and being helpful to others that characterize collectivist cultures like Chinese culture where people are motivated by the good of the group, depending on others and placing priority on the group rather than the self. Thus, most people that grew up and were naturalized in America are considered to be independent, self-reliant, and individualist, stimulated only by what is good for them personally.

Americans reduce the authority of the family elders. Children in America may contradict or argue with their parents and present any ideas to the elder in family openly. For Americans the ideal person is the one who is able to freely make his/her own decisions. The viewpoint of kin may be accepted, but as adulthood replaces childhood, adults anticipate and are expected to make decisions about their own lives. In such setting individual choices are encouraged by individual rights and so marital relationships are no more founded on the basis of calculation but rather, marriages, become a matter of inclination not to interfere with. Family life becomes conjugally centered, characterized by equality and democracy between husbands and wives fueled by democracy in society. Besides husband-wife equality, father-son relationships are also founded on the grounds that *all men are created equal* (De Bary and Bloom 45) and they are both God's people. Hence, the inherent relationship between father and son lost its value.

Freedom and individualism that many Americans are proud of can be a source of frustration between parents and their offspring. Old-generation Americans complain about their children's lack of respect, although it is them who taught their children notions of personal freedom and individualism since childhood. It is not strange to meet these sorts of generational conflict where parents try to curb *the independent monster* they have nurtured while their children want to go ahead on the individualistic path they have known. Moreover, many American children feel their parents' speech boring, old-fashioned and irrelevant. All these kinds of malaise are found within the American family and between Americans themselves. One can imagine what will happen if parents are Chinese and their children are American-born.

The two distinct backgrounds mentioned above serve as the environments in which Amy Tan's characters live. The mothers in the novel embody traditional Chinese heritage, while their daughters represent the typical American-born experience. The novel highlights the richness and complexity of Chinese culture and contrasts it with American culture. It portrays the mothers' desire for their daughters to embrace the best aspects of both cultures, and the daughters' resistance to following Chinese traditions. Accordingly, their relations are marked by important communication barriers and deep misunderstandings, resulting in a significant generational gap between the mothers and their daughters.

6. The Significance of Intergenerational Conflict in Chinese-American Literature:

The intergenerational conflict is one of the key and recurrent themes in Chinese-American writings. The latter identifies the clashes and difficulties that come to the surface as a consequence of being an immigrant and navigating cultural identity within the Chinese minority. Many writers highlight the conflict faced by Chinese parents and their American-born children as they discuss the gap between heritage and assimilation through the investigation of familial ties, cultural disputes, and the interaction between tradition and modernity.

The roots of intergenerational conflict in Chinese-American literature are Chinese immigrants and their descendants' historical experiences, which begin when the first wave of Chinese immigrants put their feet on the American land in the middle of the 19th century. The dynamics of intergenerational relationships within Chinese-American families have been a result of the socio-political landscape of America, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to

the racial discrimination and cultural marginalization experienced by early Chinese immigrants. Chinese- American history has been marked by the conflict between preserving cultural legacy and assimilation into American culture. This conflict has given birth to stories that examine the distinctions of identity, belonging, and familial responsibility.

The revolutionary novel *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan that explores the complexity of mother-daughter relationships and the clash between Chinese tradition and American modernity is one of the literary works by Chinese-Americans that portray intergenerational frictions. Another example from the wide range of novels, memoirs, poems, and short tales that examine the generational gap is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* which explores the intergenerational unease by blending Chinese mythology with personal accounts to examine how cultural norms affect personal identity. The protagonist of Kingston's novel struggles with the competing requests of personal autonomy and filial piety¹⁵, which is a common challenge faced by Chinese-American immigrants and their kids.

Additionally, the intergenerational conflict as a theme in Chinese-American literature offers significant consciousness into the complexities of cultural negotiation and identity development within the Chinese community. Via the portrayal of the difficulties faced by parents of immigrants and their offspring born in the United States, writers shed light on the problems of managing two or more cultural identities and the conflicts that arise from opposing cultural norms and values.

¹⁵ For centuries, the core principle of Confucian ethics has been Filial Piety, which focusses on the value of family ties and full respect for ancestors. The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius maintain that parents and children have reciprocal rights and duties. For him it is children's duty to take care of their parents as they got assistance and guidance while being young people.

Besides, as immigrant populations continue to struggle with subjects of assimilation, cultural preservation, and the ongoing legacy of familial heritage, the theme of intergenerational conflict is still important in modern societies. It as well interconnects closely with another major theme in Chinese-American literature which is the significance of maternal legacies offering together insights into the complexities of family dynamics, cultural heritage, and the transmission of values across generations.

7. The significance of maternal legacies:

Cultural transmission within Chinese-American families and maternal legacies serves as a conduit for the preservation of the Chinese heritage. Mothers often bridge the gap between the old and new worlds for their children by transmitting language, habits, and values. The way that mothers are represented in Chinese-American literature as the keepers of cultural identity highlights how central it is to reserve cultural legacy in the face of assimilation forces.

The portrayal of maternal relationships in Chinese-American literature underscores the complexity of intergenerational conflict. The tension between embracing American values and preserving cultural heritage can lead immigrant mothers to clash with their more assimilated children. These disagreements often center on issues like language, marriage, and professional decisions, emphasizing the challenges in bridging two distinct cultural spheres.

Moreover, Gender roles and aspirations are often passed down through maternal legacies, particularly impacting to Chinese-American women who may face pressure to follow traditional norms. An illustration of this might be Pearl, the main character in Lisa See's book *Shanghai Girls*, who struggles with her mother's expectations of sacrifice and

obedience. The fight between personal freedom and filial piety is inspected in the novel in the light of shifting gender roles in Chinese- American culture.

Despite the challenges depicted in Chinese-American literature, mother figures regularly embody strength, resiliency, and wisdom, guiding their offspring to successfully navigate the complications associated with cultural identification. For instance, Maxine Hong Kingston's biography *The Woman Warrior* describes her mother as a strong and inspirational figure who teaches her daughter significant life lessons and folklore. Kingston draws courage from her mother 's stories to confront social norms and create her own identity as a Chinese-American. In this respect, Storytelling serves as a pivotal means of transmitting cultural heritage, personal values, and family legacies. This narrative tradition holds a particular significance for mothers who use stories to connect their children to their roots, impart wisdom, and bridge generational and cultural gaps. Through storytelling, mothers pass on their knowledge, struggles, and triumph, ensuring that their histories and lessons are preserved and continue to shape future generations. Maternal legacies strengthen communication and mutual respect between immigrant parents and their offspring, paving the way decades of reconciliation.

In summary, mother legacies are pivotal themes in Chinese-American literature delving into the exploration of gender identity, empowerment, intergenerational dialogue, cultural transmission, and conflict resolution. Literary illustrations of mother figures and their interactions with their offspring shed light on the intricacies of Chinese-American family dynamics and the permanent influence of cultural heritage in molding both individual and collective identities. To highlight its importance in Chinese-American literature Elaine H. Kim, et al., in their book *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* The representation of parental connections and the passing down of

cultural legacy are just two of the most prevailing themes and motifs that this book looks at in Chinese-American literature.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of maternal legacies and intergenerational conflict in Chinese-American literature provides profound insights into the complexities of cultural identity, family dynamics, and the generational transmission of values. Understanding the historical context of Chinese immigration to America enhances our appreciation of the challenges, flexibility, and perseverance faced by Chinese immigrants and their descendants. Also, the evolution of Chinese-American literature across three distinct waves echoes the changing socio-political landscape and cultural dynamics of the Chinese community in America. Moreover, exploring the pressures between tradition and modernity, the negotiation of cultural identity, and the intricacies of familial relationships offers a deep understanding of these themes. The portrayal of maternal figures in literature underscores their importance as protectors of cultural heritage and sources of strength and wisdom for their Chinese-American children. Through their legacies, mothers bridge the gap between past and present, passing down customs, language, and values to future generations.

Chapter two

Theoretical framework

1. Introduction:

Applying several theoretical frameworks to the large and dynamic field of literary work analysis is highly beneficial. Academics and critics can bring to the surface numerous levels of complex interpretations and visibility within any literary work by using a diverse theoretical framework. The distinct perceptions and viewpoints that each theoretical approach offers nurture our appreciation and comprehension of the human condition. In *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2008) Terry Eagleton summarizes numerous literary theories and critical perspectives that underline the value of how each framework uncovers unique insights into literary texts. He stresses the point that applying a variety of theoretical perspectives can improve our understanding of literature and uncover layers of meaning within texts.

Any piece of literature can be studied and scrutinized through a variety of literary theories. Each theory can offer an exceptional view and analysis of the themes, characters, symbols and narrative structures. Critics and scholars through their examination of different interpretations can help readers to increase their level of comprehension of the literary text.

Moreover, Pamela J. Annas and Robert C. Rosen stated in their book *Literature and Society: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Nonfiction* (2015) that literary creations are the result of their social, political, and cultural settings. Their book examines the relationship between literature and society, stressing the influence of social, political, and cultural elements on literary creations. The writers talk on how themes, characters, and plots in literature are influenced by historical events, cultural movements, and societal systems. Via

the use of theories like historical materialism¹⁶, cultural studies¹⁷, or new historicism¹⁸, scholars can place a text in the context of a larger cultural movement and examine the manner in which social, economic, and ideological elements influence the author's work and how it is perceived. Comprehending the historical and cultural background of a piece of art improves our understanding of its themes.

Also, Terry Eagleton (2008) highlights the idea that literary theory improves reading texts critically and boosts readers to consider power dynamics, reveal prejudices, and challenge presumptions. In other words, there are numerous advantages to employing various theories while examining a literary work. By applying a variety of theoretical insights, scholars can show fresh viewpoints, place texts in their historical and cultural contexts, and acknowledge that readers actively shape meaning. In the end, using a variety of ideas extends our comprehension of literature and helps us appreciate its importance and constant relevance. Therefore, this chapter will first shed light on interdisciplinary theory in general. Second, it will tackle the cultural theory that helps us study the ways in which individuals and society are shaped by cultural norms, practices, and beliefs. Third, it will delve into the passing down of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors within families and communities between generations which is the main emphasis of intergenerational theory. The latter examines the ways in which people are influenced by their family history and the ways in which family dynamics change over time. Last but not least, this chapter will delve, as well, into maternal theory which looks

¹⁶ Historical Materialism: Historical materialism is a theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that forms the foundation of Marxist analysis. It proposes that the material conditions and economic structures of society, including the means of production and the organization of labor, fundamentally shape social relations, institutions, and ideologies.

¹⁷ Cultural studies scholars investigate how culture is produced, consumed, and contested, exploring issues of power, identity, representation, and resistance. This field often examines popular culture, mass media, subcultures, and everyday practices to understand broader social dynamics and cultural processes

¹⁸ New Historicism: New historicism is a literary and cultural theory that emerged in the late 20th century, influenced by poststructuralism and cultural studies. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of literature and history, arguing that literary texts are products of their historical contexts and cultural discourses

at how societal perceptions of gender, power, and caregiving are reflected in images of motherhood. Mother theory, in its essence, investigates at the ways in which characters' identities, emotions, and moral growth are shaped by their mother relationships. Finally, the chapter concludes with stories and storytelling psychological effects. Storytelling that plays a crucial role in these narratives, serving as a conduit for characters to navigate their experiences, reconcile intergenerational differences, and safeguard cultural traditions.

This interdisciplinary approach fosters our interpretation of the novel in hands which is at the heart of this research. Our work has intentionally followed this interdisciplinary approach to show the profound links between individual lives and larger cultural contexts and to unveil hidden meanings.

2. Interdisciplinary Approach:

The interdisciplinary approach analyses literary texts through the use of different literary theories and academic disciplines in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the multiple contexts in which the texts are situated. It is through this approach that the researcher admits the complexity of literature and the wide range of factors that form its creation and interpretation.

Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2006) stressed the importance of situating literary works in their historical, social and cultural contexts. He emphasizes the point that analyzing literature's reflections and response should be linked to wider societal issues and ideologies following insights from disciplines such as sociology, history, political science, gender and cultural studies. This interdisciplinary integration allows scholars to delve into the socio-cultural implications of any literary work and into its various dimensions. It,

furthermore and according to Eagleton, stresses that the historical, social, political, and cultural backgrounds of a text is so crucial for its analysis. When we tackle literary works from this broader angle, we can comprehend how they replicate, react to and influence the cultural dialogues during their time.

Besides, Eagleton unveils that looking at literature from different angles can help readers and scholars to better understand modern-day social, political, and cultural problems. When scholars study literature alongside issues like globalization, identity politics, and environmental concerns, they can see how it relates to current debates and problems. Eagleton, as well, criticizes old ways of studying literature that focus mainly on how it's written or how it looks, ignoring its bigger connections to society and politics. He says we can better understand literature by looking at how it relates to things like who has power, what ideas are important, and what's considered normal in a culture.

3. Cultural theory:

As defined by Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick in their *Cultural theory* (2002), **cultural theory** is a multidisciplinary field that explores cultural practices and phenomena in the context of social, historical, and ideological frames. It is often defined as cultural critique or cultural studies. It came into existence in the middle of the 20th century as a reaction to the limitations of conventional literary analysis¹⁹ which frequently ignored more cultural influences in favor of textual interpretation alone. The aim of cultural theory is to understand

¹⁹ Conventional literary analysis are traditional methods to examining literature and they emphasized mainly on the formal components of literary works, like character development, plot, , themes, and how language is used.

how literature and other types of cultural expressions are influenced by politics, economy, society and power relations.

Philip Smith in his *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (2001), stresses that understanding cultural output is an essential principle of cultural theory and that is the result of historical and social contexts in which it is created. Literary works are therefore considered as locations of controversy and negotiation where several social and ideological forces intersect. Cultural theorists investigate texts not only for their artistic merits but also for how they replicate, reflect, or subvert existing cultural norms and values.

In the field of Chinese-American literature cultural theory suggests a useful framework which sheds light on the complex relationships that exist between culture, identity, and power in the context of the Chinese-American experience. Scholars can explore how Chinese-American literature addresses and echoes topics like immigration, assimilation, hybridity, diaspora, and cultural memory by using cultural theory. Therefore, literature in general and Chinese-American art in particular can be examined through cultural theory using various elements that contribute to its meaning and significance within a cultural context. These elements contain Family and Community Dynamics; Language and Discourse; Cultural Symbols and Imagery; Power Dynamics and Identity.

3.1. Family and Community Dynamics:

The importance of family and community dynamics is often emphasized in Chinese-American literature. Social context effects the portrayal of familial relationships,

intergenerational conflicts, and communal support networks within the accounts. Cultural values such as filial piety, respect for elders, and collective responsibility may be explored in the light of larger social prospects and forces. The idea of the significance of family and community ties in Chinese-American literature is inspected through the portrayal of immigrant experiences. In an article written by Xiaojing Zhou *the Ethics of Authenticity: Melodrama and the Chinese Immigrant Family Romance* (1999) Zhou claims that Chinese immigrant family relations commonly draw attention to the complications of intergenerational conflicts, familial ties, and social support systems. Zhou trusts that these stories invite readers to consider issues of authenticity, identity, and belonging in the context of the immigrant experience in addition to demonstrating personal problems and offering critiques of society norms and values.

3.2. Language and Communication:

In Chinese-American literature, language mirrors social identity and cultural association. Literary works examine the difficulties related to bilingualism, language obstacles, and the preservation or loss of original tongues and dialects in immigrant communities. In *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions* David Palumbo-Liu (1995) stated that:

In Chinese-American literature, language serves as a potent symbol of social identity and cultural affiliation, reflecting the complexities of the immigrant experience. Literary works within this tradition often explore the challenges and dilemmas

associated with bilingualism, language barriers, and the preservation or loss of original tongues and dialects within immigrant communities. Writers grapple with the tension between the desire to maintain cultural heritage and the pressures to assimilate into American society, navigating the intricacies of language acquisition, communication, and identity formation in the process. Through their narratives, they illuminate the profound impact of language on individual and collective experiences of belonging, alienation, and cultural negotiation within the Chinese-American community. (204)

In this respect, books like Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (1992); Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982) reveals respected insights into the interconnection of language, identity, and culture in Chinese-American literature.

3.3. Cultural Symbols and Imagery:

Cultural Symbols and Imagery are other pillars on which cultural theory is based. The unity of themes and the deep levels of meaning can be grasped through the cultural importance of the symbols, concepts, and imagery included in the text. This notion of cultural symbolism and imagery within cultural theory offers a useful framework for grasping the deeper levels of meaning and complexity of theme found in literary works, particularly in the context of Chinese-American literature. As Lisa Lowe asserts in her work *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), “Examining the cultural importance of symbols, concepts, and imagery within literary texts provides a framework for comprehending deeper

levels of meaning and complexity of theme, particularly in the context of Chinese-American literature". (13)

Chinese-American literature frequently employs imagery and symbolism that are resonate deeply with Chinese cultures. These symbols could be traditional Chinese characters or symbols like the lotus flower, or dragon. Through a scrutiny of the symbols application and interpretation in the book, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural identities, values, and beliefs of the characters. Furthermore, Chinese-American literature often explores the interaction between Chinese and American cultures, reflecting the experiences of people managing multiple cultural identities. These cultures are interconnected through cultural symbols and images that emphasize themes of resistance

Moreover, Chinese-American literature frequently portrays the tension between tradition and modernity through the use of cultural symbols and imagery. Integrating traditional Chinese symbols with modern American settings or subjects which allows authors to comment on the difficulties associated with cultural shift and adaptation. Finally, within Chinese-American groups, cultural symbols and imagery can also evoke shared memories and experiences, establishing a sense of collective identity and belonging. Authors might inspire readers to consider how their own cultural heritage influences their identities by delving into cultural symbols.

In her book *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (1992), Yen Le Espiritu stated that "Cultural symbols and imagery within Chinese-American groups evoke shared memories and experiences, fostering a sense of collective identity and belonging. Authors often prompt readers to reflect on how their cultural heritage shapes their identities through the exploration of cultural symbols."(98)

3.4. Language and Discourse:

The investigation of language and discourse in Chinese-American literature offers a higher level of understanding the construction and representation of how cultural identities²⁰ are portrayed and formed, as well as how power dynamics²¹ and societal beliefs²² are represented.

Chinese-American literature regularly explores the complications of language as a cultural identification marker. Characters may switch between speaking Chinese and English, showing their dual cultural identities and assimilation struggles. The linguistic selections made and the delicacies of bilingualism help to depict the cultural ties and sense of place that the characters have. *Asian American Literature and the Writing of Transnational Experience* edited by Yuan Shu (2007) is a collection of essays that addresses how language and discourse form transnational experiences in Asian-American literature, chiefly Chinese-American works. It provides understanding of the ways in which language acts as a symbol of cultural identity and a platform for cross-cultural communication.

4. Intergenerational Theory:

²⁰ Cultural identities: encompasses the shared values, and customs within a cultural or ethnic group. In Chinese-American literature, writers emphasize the complexities of multiple identities shaped by the interplay of Chinese and American cultures.

²¹ Power dynamics is referred to the interactions where power is exercised among people. This includes social, political, economic, and interpersonal power this influence characters actions and relations within the literary work.

²² Societal beliefs encompass the shared believes, attitudes, values, and ideologies within a social group. In Chinese-American literature, they include cultural norms, stereotypes, prejudices, and social hierarchies that influence the characters' experiences and drive the themes tackled in the works.

Studying literary text through the lens of intergenerational theory offers a valuable insight. Initially, examines the relationships, tensions, and continuity between several generations within families or communities. Since Chinese immigrants and their descendants have had such distinct cultural and historical experiences in America, intergenerational relationships are frequently focal subjects in Chinese-American literature. In an article entitled *Intergenerational Dynamics in Chinese American Literature: A Cultural and Historical Analysis* (2019) how intergenerational relationships serves as a pivotal theme in Chinese-American works, drawing upon the unique cultural and historical experiences of Chinese immigrants and their descendants in America. It addresses the ways that intergenerational theory might help us comprehend the relationships, tensions, and continuity between numerous generations in the families and communities depicted in these literary texts. Elaine Kim puts it in her work *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), that “Intergenerational theory might help us comprehend the relationships, tensions, and continuity between several generations...”

Secondly, Chinese-American literature frequently explores the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next. The conflict between preserving traditional values and navigating the needs of a modern culture are frequently portrayed by authors. Language, rituals, and storytelling are among the methods through which this transmission occurs, and it offers insights into the intricacies of cultural continuity and change.

Thirdly, Chinese-American literature also illuminates Intergenerational Trauma, that is often transmitted across generations, usually, happen from situations like discrimination, exile, or loss. Literature frequently explores how these painful histories shape personal identities and familial relationships. Writers explore the way in which memories are transmitted and renegotiated, affecting characters’ perceptions of themselves and the world

around them. This idea is well explained in *Exploring Intergenerational Trauma in Literature: The Impact of Discrimination, Exile, and Loss* an article by Ji-Yeon Kim.

Kim's article explains the manners in which traumatic experiences influence individual identities. She points out that literary characters usually struggle with their own shocks and familial histories, which eventually shapes their identity. It also sheds light on the effects of intergenerational trauma on family dynamics, including how memories and experiences passed down from one generation can result in conflicts or foster unity in families. Kim discusses how characters in literature challenge, reinterpret, or defeat familial narratives of trauma, influencing their perceptions of themselves and the world. She offers an in-depth analysis of how writers portray the complexity of trauma and its consequences on characters' lives using illustrations from a variety of literary works. Kim concludes by considering the broader complications of researching intergenerational trauma, emphasizing the significance of identifying and resolving the permanent effects of past traumas on people and communities both within literary narratives and in real-life experiences.

Fourthly, Chinese-American literature demonstrates the evolution of perspectives on social justice, familial responsibilities, and gender roles over time. writers examine how attitudes and ideas progress throughout time through intergenerational narratives. They from the other hand, examine the tensions that arise when younger generations oppose the norms and expectations of their elders. *Evolution of Social Justice, Familial Responsibilities, and Gender Roles in Chinese American Literature: An Intergenerational Perspective," Asian American Literature: Discourses & Pedagogies* is an article written by Mei Li is where she underlines how attitudes on gender roles, familial duties, and social justice have changed over time and how these changes are reflected in Chinese- American literature. It highlights how writers use intergenerational stories to look at how attitudes and ideas have changed within

Chinese-American communities and how conflicts can happen when newer generations challenge the expectations and conventions of their parents. Eventually, among various complexities and challenges, intergenerational relationships depicted in Chinese-American literature underscore themes of unity, acceptance, and collective assistance in the face of opposing perspectives.

Characters often navigate their identities and challenges within the context of familial networks, drawing support from the relationships between generations and shared experiences. In an article intitled *Solidarity, Tolerance, and Mutual Support: Intergenerational Relationships in Chinese-American Literature*, *Chinese American Studies* written by Chang where he explores a range of Chinese-American literary works to find examples of intergenerational connections that reveal help and solidarity. Characters that overcome hardship or generational divides and nevertheless support one another financially, emotionally, or in other pragmatic ways are also included in this analysis. In Chinese-American literature, intergenerational theory and mother legacy theory interact and support one another to offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending the transmission of culture, values, and identity across the generations, especially through the maternal line.

5. Material Theory:

Maternal theory offers a lens through which to examine the portrayal of mothers, motherhood, and maternal influence in literature. It is also referred to as motherhood theory. In the context of Chinese-American literature, maternal theory offers insights into the roles, experiences, and cultural implication of maternal figures within Chinese-American families and communities. One of the many books by Pamela Thomas that explores maternal theory

within the context of Chinese-American literature is *Asian American Women's Popular Literature: Feminizing Genres and Neoliberal Belonging* (2013) by Pamela Thoma. This book addresses several sides of Asian American women's works, including topics of maternity, maternal influence, and familial ties.

The book, specifically, explores how maternal characters in Chinese-American literature manage their identities and roles within the framework of modern American culture, frequently confronting with conflicting cultural expectations and personal aspirations. She as well explores how these representations interconnect with larger discourses on gender, race, and class, highlighting the complex dynamics of maternal influence in the lives of Chinese-American women.

In addition, the position of women in Chinese-American families as cultural transmitters and protectors is underlined by maternal theory. Mothers are frequently represented in literary works as the preservers of cultural customs, languages, and values, transferring ancestors' knowledge and customs to next generations. The misunderstandings that arise between cultural preservation and assimilation in mother-daughter relationships is examined by authors as daughters debate their multiple identities as Chinese-Americans. In her book *Asian American Women's Popular Literature: Feminizing Genres and Neoliberal Belonging* (2013), Pamela Thoma argues that "...mothers are often portrayed in literary works as the keepers of cultural customs, languages, and values, transferring ancestors' knowledge and customs to the next generations..." (77)

Furthermore, Maternal theory delves into concepts such as love, sacrifice, and providing care that are instinct to motherhood. Chinese-American writers often highlight mothers' unconditional love for their kids, resilience in the face of hardship, and sacrifices for

the family in their works. Mother figures are repeatedly represented as the main providers of stability and strength for the family, symbolizing values, compassion, and strength.

In her work *Asian American Women's Popular Literature: Feminizing Genres and Neoliberal Belonging* (2013), Pamela Thoma states that:

Maternal theory underscores the concepts of love, sacrifice, and caregiving associated with motherhood. Chinese-American writers often depict mothers' unconditional love for their children, resilience in adversity, and sacrifices for the family in their literary works. Mother figures are frequently portrayed as the primary sources of stability and strength within the family, embodying values of selflessness, compassion, and resilience. (103)

Another work Judy Yung *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (1995) in which Judy Yung explores Chinese women's responsibilities in Chinese-American families and communities as well as their experiences living in San Francisco. Yung examines the ways in which women upheld customs, language, and values inside their families and functioned as cultural transmitters and preservers. She talks about the tensions that come up between assimilation and cultural preservation, especially in mother-daughter relationships when daughters are figuring out who they are as Chinese-Americans. In addition, Yung highlights the ideas of love, sacrifice, and caring that are connected to motherhood. She does this by highlighting the fortitude and bravery of Chinese-American moms in the face of hardship by using historical documents and firsthand accounts.

All in all, we can obtain a deeper understanding of how mothers and motherhood are portrayed in Chinese-American literature by utilizing maternal theory. This allows scholars and readers to examine how maternal figures navigate the complex intergenerational relationships, cultural identity, and migration in Chinese-American literary works. Additionally, storytelling and its psychological effects are pivotal in these narratives, as they provide a means for characters to process their experiences, bridge generational gaps, and preserve cultural heritage.

6. Stories and Storytelling's Psychological Effects:

Many psychological studies were conducted to see how much influence stories have on the psychology of the child and the adult. One of which states that storytelling could be an impressive form of education bestowing information for young children, as the woman philosopher Sara Ruddick declares in her book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989) ‘children are shaped by, some would say imprisoned in, the stories they are first told. But it is also true that storytelling at its best enables children to adapt, edit, and invent life stories they can live with’. Another important study that stresses the psychological effect of storytelling on the child is *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976) in which the American Bruno Bettelheim²³ covers fairy tales in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis²⁴. In his book, Bettelheim discusses the importance of fairy tales in the development of the child from childhood to maturity, he as

²³ Bruno Bettelheim, a child psychologist working and writing in the later part of the twentieth century.

²⁴ Freudian psychoanalysis is a theory of psychology and a therapeutic approach developed by Sigmund Freud. It emphasizes the role of unconscious processes and childhood experiences in shaping behavior and personality

well analyses the fairy tale positive psychological usefulness to a child's inner growth to find a way and cope with the emotional insecurities such as fear, anxiety, and helplessness.

Bruno says that traditional tales, which he calls fairy tales, make a "great and positive psychological contribution to the child's inner growth" (Bettelheim 12). He argues that a true fairy tale is a tale of hope. It presents the listener with the struggles of the hero or heroine, which are metaphors for the ordinary struggles of life, and shows that these struggles could be overcome. They are awesomely positive tales that tell the child, or indeed the adult, they can survive this too. In other words, stories are a source of empowerment for both children and adults.

As works of art, fairy tales create a powerful psychological impact on a child but what the child selects from a fairy tale is largely built upon "his interests and needs of the moment" for Bettelheim. Therefore, a fairy tale, a traditional tale, could be of different meanings for each person and different for the same person at various moments of his life (Fox Eades 35). Then, it is significant to know how and when the stories should be related to make a satisfying and meaningful impact on the child. Besides, when parents tell stories to their children in the right manner this can as well transmit impressively cultural heritage and information which is the one of the primary goals of the mother characters in Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

Although the stories in Tan's text are not traditional fairy tales, Bettelheim's study on the role of stories in a child's development reveals how storytelling influences personal growth and why certain stories may fail to impact a listener. Storytelling is an innate human trait, with everyone being a storyteller in some form. However, as an art form, storytelling occupies a special place in literature, exemplified by writers like Amy Tan.

7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the examination of cultural theory, intergenerational theory, mother legacy theory and stories and their psychological effects as theoretical frameworks for examining Chinese-American literary works reveals the complex interaction of familial dynamics, identity, and heritage within the Chinese-American experience. By delving into cultural traditions, societal norms, and human agency through the lens of cultural theory we gain comprehensive understanding of how identity and belonging are negotiated within the context of migration and minority literature on the one hand.

On the other one, Intergenerational theory highlights the dynamics of continuity and change within Chinese-American families, offering valuable insights into the transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and memories across generations. We can achieve a deeper comprehension of the conflicts surrounding cultural preservation, assimilation, and reconciliation within familial relationships.

At the same time, mother legacy theory has a pivotal role in defining cultural identity and familial dynamics. writers represent mothers as essential agents of cultural transmission and preservation, debating the complexities of motherhood within the framework of migration, assimilation, and societal change, via the representation of maternal love, sacrifice, and perseverance.

Moreover, the importance of storytelling and its psychological impact is no less than that of other theories. Storytelling is crucial as it assists characters in understanding their experiences, bridging generational gaps, and preserving cultural traditions.

By merging this theoretical framework in this chapter, we can engage in a thoughtful analysis of our literary work *the Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Through showing the complex stories of parental influence, intergenerational relationships, and cultural heritage. This interdisciplinary approach extends our understanding of literature as a reproduction of the continuing processes of cultural negotiation and transformation within immigrant communities by providing greater insights into the complication of Chinese-American identity and experience.

Chapter Three

**Bridging Generations: Intergenerational
Conflict, the Role of Mothers, and the
Significance of Storytelling in
The Joy Luck Club (1989)**

1. Introduction:

Set in both the United States and China, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* primarily unfolds in San Francisco but includes significant flashbacks to China. The novel centers on four Chinese immigrant mothers Suyuan, An-mei, Lindo, and Ying-ying who came to America as young women, and their grown daughters June (Jing-mei), Rose, Waverly, and Lena who were born in the United States. The mothers, who are war immigrants, fled their tragic pasts in China and sought new lives full of hope for themselves and their daughters in America.

In the 1940s, Suyuan founded the Joy Luck Club, a gathering where the four women meet weekly to play mahjong²⁵, enjoy meals, exchange ideas, and share stories about their lives. These meetings foster strong friendships as they reminisce about their youth and experiences in their homeland.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the mothers and daughters have fundamentally different worldviews. The traditional Chinese mothers struggle to understand their daughters' modern lives, which often conflict with their cultural heritage. The novel, with its rich settings and deeply developed characters, explores the theme of generational conflict, particularly in the interplay between cultural heritage, intergenerational tensions, and the significance of the mother figure. Through storytelling,

²⁵ Mahjong is a traditional game with 136 different pieces. It is played by four players; very popular among Chinese women.

the Chinese immigrant mothers endeavor to instill traditional values in their American-born daughters, who grapple with reconciling these inherited beliefs with their contemporary identities.

Therefore, in this chapter, we will begin by summarizing the stories in Amy Tan's novel. We will then analyze the intergenerational conflict between mothers and daughters, specifically focusing on Lindo and her daughter Waverly, and June and her mother Suyuan, identifying the sources of these conflicts. This analysis will be framed through various theories: Cultural Theory, Intergenerational Theory, and Maternal Theory. Specifically, the discussion will investigate the language barriers between the mothers and daughters, which serve both as obstacles and as a driving force behind the use of storytelling. Furthermore, we will touch upon storytelling both as a talent in Amy Tan's characters as a method of healing and reconciliation.

When delving deeper into their lives, it becomes evident that the mothers strictly adhere to Chinese principles. Despite living in the United States, they remain more connected to their culture of origin than to the new one. In contrast, their daughters, raised in the New World and its culture, reluctantly absorb their mothers' teachings, often without appreciating their significance, while consciously embracing their American lifestyle.

2. Summary of *The Joy Luck Club*:

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is a collection of interwoven stories divided into four sections: "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away," "The Twenty-six Malignant Gates," "American Translation," and "Queen Mother of the Western Skies." Each section opens with a thematic tale or myth, often emphasizing maternal advice. The narratives alternate between the perspectives of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, with June narrating both her story

and that of her recently deceased mother. The stories range in tone from magical to dark and terrifying, centered on the complex relationships between the mothers and daughters. Each story can stand alone without disrupting the novel's overall unity.

The primary plot revolves around Jing-Mei (June) Woo's journey to China to meet her half-sisters and fulfill her late mother Suyuan's lifelong wish. Suyuan was forced to abandon her twin daughters during the Japanese invasion of Kweilin in World War II. Following Suyuan's unexpected death, June aims to reunite the family.

The novel opens with June reflecting on her mother's death. After the funeral, the older members of the Joy Luck Club invite June to take her mother's place at their mahjong table, a tradition of nearly forty years. Feeling out of place, June learns during the game that her half-sisters have been found in China, and it becomes her duty to meet them and share her mother's story. This revelation highlights the older women's concern that their own daughters might struggle to articulate their Chinese heritage.

In the first section, An-Mei, Lindo, and Ying-ying recount their difficult childhoods in China and how these experiences shaped their lives as mothers. An-Mei's story in "Scar" details her childhood with her grandmother after her mother became a concubine. Lindo's "The Red Candle" describes her arranged marriage and her clever escape. Ying-ying's "The Moon Lady" recounts her traumatic near-drowning and loss of self-identity.

The second and third sections main focus is on the American-born daughters Waverly Jong, Rose Hsu Jordan, Lena St. Clair, and June underlining their infancies with immigrant mothers and the influence of Chinese traditions on their adult lives. Waverly becomes a chess star but struggles with her mother Lindo's domineering pride. Rose grapples with her approaching divorce and

remembers her mother's faith during a family tragedy. Lena reflects on her mother Ying-ying's efforts to protect her, which led to her own fears and insecurities. June recalls her mother Suyuan's attempts to mold her into a talented girl, leading to an endless struggle for approval and self-worth.

The last part of the novel comes back to the mothers' perspectives, talking about their current challenges and the cultural gap between generations. An-Mei's mother finds her way in the use of superstition to change her daughter's fate. Ying-ying, interest in Lena's failing marriage, helps her daughter find happiness by releasing her suppressed emotions. Lindo's preparations for Waverly's wedding, helps them confronting their cultural differences. The mothers and daughters progressively learn to appreciate their merged identities.

June's journey to China to meet her half-sisters crafted the concluding story. Upon arrival in Shanghai, she feels a deep connection to her mother's homeland. Meeting her sisters, they together sense their mother's company, representing their shared Chinese heritage. The novel ends with June feeling at peace and connected to her mother's spirit.

Overall, *The Joy Luck Club* complicatedly binds together the experiences of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, examining themes of cultural differences, generational conflict, and the enduring ties of family. Despite their differences, the mothers and daughters struggle to preserve strong family bounds, reflecting on issues like generational disrespect, rebellion, divorce, and the role of women in the family. The novel demonstrates the profound links and confrontations that arise from their shared yet different cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, *The Joy Luck Club* successfully interweaves the narratives of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born children, penetrating into issues of generational conflict, cultural identity, and the undying ties that bind families. Every story offers a separate

viewpoint, resulting in a comprehensive and well-rounded story that underlines the challenges of managing two identities in a multicultural community.

The narratives told from the point of view of both the mothers and the daughters show that the novel examines a serious conflict. A clash between two different generations: those who were born in two different countries, holding different cultures but biologically closely related and specially living under the same roof and eating around the same table. Although both generations live together, they hardly understand the background of each other. There is a tightening and attract between the traditional Chinese based lives the mothers live and modern American lives the daughters enjoy. Despite their constant troubles because of having different cultural settings in the family the mothers and their daughters struggle to maintain strong family ties. It is obvious in the novel that the women have faced many issues including disrespect to the elders in younger generations, the problem of rebellion, the problem of divorce, inequality and the position of women in a family. Lindo and Waverly have started their narration very early.

3. Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*:

Major themes in Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* include miscommunications across cultural boundaries and the impact of mothers, particularly in reference to the connections between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters. By looking at these elements through the lens of cultural theory, one can better understand the complex dynamics at play, with a focus on the tension between traditional Chinese values and modern American principles. In the narrative, Lindo and her daughter Waverly serve as an illustration of the kind of cross-

cultural miscommunication that leads to their initial argument on how to play chess well. In *Chess Conflict*, Lindo's sense of collectivism which holds that a child's accomplishment is a family endeavor is the source of her satisfaction in Waverly's chess talent.

Waverly, however, seeks individual recognition and resents her mother's involvement. "Rules of the Game" ²⁶tells how Lindo has great pride in her daughter's talent in chess that makes her announce to everyone in the market Waverly gaining the chess championship. Waverly misinterprets Lindo's appreciation of her as a prodigy, and believes that her mother is taking advantage of her to "show off", making her feels really embarrassed. Thus, she speaks out her thoughts freely to her mother without fearing that Lindo may feel offended. She states, "I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I am your daughter." (Tan 99) By telling so, Waverly distances herself both from her mother and from her entire family. Waverly also interprets Lindo's pride in her success as pulling attention to herself in public as being part of the victory. The ten-year old daughter expresses her discontent towards her mother and says:

She used to discuss my games as if she had devised the strategies. I told my daughter, use your horses to run over the enemy, she informed one shopkeeper. She won very quickly this way. And of course, she had said this before the game-that and a hundred other useless things that had nothing to do with my winning. I hated the way she tried to take all the credit. And one day...I told her she didn't know anything, so she shouldn't show off. She should shut up.
(170)

It is quite obvious that Lindo and Waverly have completely different ways of seeing things. This, in fact, is a direct result of the distinct cultural backgrounds both characters are raised in. The conflict between them stems primarily from cultural differences, namely, the clash between

²⁶ In *Rules of the Game* Lindo's daughter Waverly recalls her conflict with her mother over the issue of chess.

American and Chinese cultures. Waverly's difficulty in reconciling her Chinese heritage with her longing for American individualism underscores the cultural misunderstanding between them. Lindo's well-intentioned actions, intended to offer encouragement and support, are misinterpreted as domineering and restrictive by Waverly.

3.1 Cultural Theory in Conflict: Individualism versus Collectivism in Mother-Daughter Dynamics:

In old China, where collectivism is cherished, the concept of the individual is completely different from the one in the USA where there is a strong belief in American individualism and independence. Within an ideological scope, collectivism which is the core of Confucianism, defines the individual position precisely in relation to the group around him. However, it is very crucial for everyone, in the United States of America, to be his own person. Everybody is expected to be autonomous, separated from the rest of society, to a certain extent. These individualists' principles are encouraged via state institutions like the media, schools and courts. Waverly, like the other American-born daughters, is instructed in the American school where they were all fostered to be independent.

Waverly's constant criticism of Lindo mirrors the American ideas with their main purpose of reshaping the child from a dependent child to an independent person. On the other hand, children are encouraged to think positively about themselves as superstars and winners. Waverly stresses many of these ideas involving her gaining the chess championship. In her view, chess is her personal gift. It is something that turns her into someone unique and detaches her from her mother and from anyone else. Waverly requires chess to be her own private accomplishment, a portion of her own distinct identity. She is a winner, a star and she wants to be honored as such for her efforts.

Waverly expects compliments from her mother; however, her self-esteem splits when her mother, instead of acknowledging and praising her for her own efforts, states, “You don’t have to be so smart to win chess” (Tan70) She also disagrees with her mother for taking credit for her victory. Waverly interprets her mother’s guidance and instructions while playing chess as a violation of what Waverly considers as a personal strength. It is not strange to feel so because it is human nature and generally people tend to claim the successes of others as their own, but for Waverly, as an American-born, to be recognized has really a great importance. In her situation, Waverly refuses to share her success with others including her own mother. Hence, she expresses her deep dissatisfaction as follows: “At the next tournament, I won again, but it was my mother who wore the triumphant grin,” (97) Without any doubt, personal acknowledgment and praise which Waverly seeks for are purely individualistic thinking.

As opposed to Waverly, Lindo does not share the same ideas with her daughter. She announces to many people in the market Waverly’s victory because she appreciates her daughter’s success. Chinese mother responds with anger to her daughter’s dissatisfaction about her pride. As a result, Lindo decides to stop talking to Waverly and not to interfere with the chess game, leaving her to compete alone. Waverly’s behavior is like a shock to her mother simply because in China parents are the decision makers for their children. Therefore, any sort of achievement the child earns is in a way or another dedicated to his parents. As a sociologist, Che Wai-Kin explains in his work *The Modern Chinese Family* (1979) that the younger generation is still taught to believe in the Chinese traditional value, especially the value of filial piety (Che 45). Accordingly, Waverly’s criticism of her mother is explained as an offending behavior. On the grounds that Lindo is a Chinese-born mother, she considers her daughter as impolite since she argues with her in public.

Mother Lindo Jong once says, "I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese Character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (289). She regrets that she could not instill in her daughter the Chinese character, "How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind..." (289). Lindo has the impression that Waverly is embarrassed about her, and she is sad about her daughter's reaction she declares, "she is my daughter and I am proud of her, and I am her mother but she is not proud of me" (291). Being too much attached to her heritage, Lindo wants to bring her daughter closer to Chinese culture, and teach her how important modesty is in that culture. It is worth mentioning that respect for the seniors in China might restrict parents from lavishing exaggerated praise on children. Perhaps that is the reason for Lindo's refusal to pay any compliment to Waverly over her triumph. Besides, Lindo is eager to make her daughter appreciate her talent as dictated in Chinese norms. As a talented girl, Waverly has to know that she is not allowed to quit chess whenever she wants. This game is not the first and will not be the last issue Lindo and her daughter fight on.

Another clash between Waverly and her mother explodes when Lindo discovers that her teen-age daughter is having a relationship with her high school boyfriend. Lindo with her traditional education feels real sorrow and rejects furiously her daughter's behaviour. Being a purely Chinese daughter, Lindo believes that any relationship between a man and a woman out of the institution of marriage is not acceptable. Thus, Lindo considers her daughter's pregnancy without the approval and the arrangement of a convenient marriage as immoral conduct. Moreover, from Lindo's perspective, marriage should be accepted by both families, not a question of affection between two lovers as defined in the American society. Although Lindo hated the way her marriage was arranged and matchmaking in general, she accepts and marries the man her parents chose for her. Furthermore, women in old China are obedient and possess very little authority. They are brought up to respect their elders' decision and to act as good daughters. Lindo remembers that she was

informed to marry the rich man, and that she accepted her fate too. She says, “I was actually a very obedient child. ...” (45). *An obedient child*, an expression that does not even exist in the dictionary of her American-born daughter.

On the other side of the conflict, there is Waverly who does not accept her mother’s thoughts. She chooses love and a profound relationship without paying any attention to her mother, or to her family as a whole. Her behaviour, in fact, is determined by her American environment. Romantic relationships in American culture are founded on freedom of choice that is taught in schools to children at an early age. A nation that values rights and freedoms of a person. It considers happiness and pleasure as basically very significant. Values that are also encouraged through the media and TV shows. Offending manners of Waverly If compared to ancestors are very strange, since her parents are encouraged to be interdependent and emotionally be attached to the group rather than independent and detached from the group.

From Lindo” Rules of the Game”, a chapter from *The Joy Luck Club*, one can understand that traditional Chinese parents believe that their children’s success is their pride. They are authorised to arrange life, future, and marriage for their children who must be submissive. By contrast, in western culture, the children are pushed to realise their dream, because for them, to be distinct rather than ordinary should be one of the targets of their existence. Their cultural differences result in a severe damage in their mother-daughter relationship.

Waverly resides in-between two completely distinct cultures, the Chinese world indoors and the American world outside the home. It is very difficult for a ten-year old girl to go through such an experience and to handle such a situation. Being incapable of balancing herself between the East and the West, Waverly decides to follow the dominant American culture. As Lindo declares, Waverly follows her mother’s ‘Chinese ways’ only until she learns “how to walk out of the door by

herself and go to school.” (253) Waverly’s choice to put aside her Chinese heritage has affected her identity construction. She grows up disliking the Chinese portion of herself, as her mother painfully expresses, my daughter “would have clapped her hands—hurray” if she was told, “she did not look Chinese.” (253) Discarding her Chinese customs, Waverly never seeks any knowledge about the oriental culture and she never learns its language. As an American-born from Chinese descents, Waverly is not the only daughter who has suffered from this bicultural environment Her peer Jing Mei’s also experiences a conflict with her mother that will be discussed in the next example.

Two kinds is another story in the novel which stresses the childhood of another schoolchild who describes her infancy as uncomfortable and full of pain when not reaching the status of “prodigy” (132) that her mother expects her to get. Once again, the disagreement, in this episode, between the Chinese mother and the American-born daughter is founded on the cultural conflict, with the mother’s efforts to keep mastery and the daughter’s desire to run free. This section is based on June’s piano lesson. June’s lack of interest and skill in addition to her hatred of the piano lessons make her not practice. Consequently, she does very bad when she plays the piano at a talent show. After this incident, June decides that she “never had to play the piano again.” (141) Few days later, when her mother forces her to continue her regular programme of practice, June stands against her and declines. The dispute between them takes place when Suyuan catches June watching TV instead of practicing the piano. She obliges her to turn off the TV and begin exercising. However, June refuses again. She pronounces her thoughts, “I didn’t budge. And then I decided. I didn’t have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China.” (141) After revealing her feelings to herself about the piano lessons, she dares and confronts her mother, “I’m not going to play anymore.” “Why should I?” “I’m not a genius.” (141) Suyuan’s answer is “[w]ho ask you be genius?” “Only ask you be your best. For your sake.” (141) Suyuan, believes strongly in her daughter and her capacity, she refuses to accept this answer. She moves quickly and stands in front

of the TV. June screams “No!” “No! I won’t!” (142) In “Two Kinds” June is narrating the story from her own perspective. She is a ten-year-old child who feels deprived of her own will. She prefers watching TV and not playing the piano and nobody has the right to oblige her to do what she dislikes.

As an American-born daughter June, is nurtured with concepts like individual control, freedom, and choice. In the dispute with her mother, June like her friend Waverly, uses these concepts to stand against her mother. Like Waverly, she resists the way her mother forces her to do things against her own will. The culture that June is exposed to places freedom on the top of imposed constraints. Hence, June interprets her mother’s demands as tough orders, so she immediately responds by stopping the piano sessions. Because she is instructed in the American school June, without any doubt, is highly convinced that the individual’s primary concern is to preserve individual autonomy against infringements from the part of anyone, whether be it a social institution or even the family. She is taught at school that as an American-born child she should have control over her life and that she has the power to decide on what she wants to do or not to do. June insists on her right of freedom, she says, “I am not your slave”. Not only that but she expends her thought. She consciously compares the two cultures and declares that these are not American norms by stating, “this is not China”. Each time she refers to Chinese culture, she associates it with torture (91,141), misery (141,143) and force. However, when speaking about American culture, she associates it with freedom and choice. She describes her mother’s brutality when she forces her to attend the piano sessions, she says:

She yanked me by the arm, pulled me off the floor, snapped off the TV. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me toward the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up and onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now,

looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased, I was crying. (Tan 141-42)

Suyuan is represented as a brutal and an abusive mother both verbally and physically. Influenced by her Chinese heritage, she is the mother who wants to sculpt her daughter's future according to her own ideal, without considering her daughter's preferences. In other words, Suyuan wants to have full control of her daughter's life, in turn this indicates that June has not the free will to choose what she wants to be or what career she wants to pursue. All this is against everything that June has seen at school.

June believes that her mother is very authoritarian, unfair and not good enough, "Why don't you like me the way I am?" (136), rejects her mother's orders, and declares, "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!" (143) Suyuan answers, "Only two kinds of daughters," "those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind!" "Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter" (142), Suyuan is convinced that she has the full authority over her daughter. The fact that Suyuan wants her daughter to be *obedient* does not fit with the concept of freedom, which is highly cherished in American culture.

Like Waverly, June misunderstands her mother's behaviour. Suyuan's wishes to make a successful pianist out of her daughter and to become her become "famous" (136) pianist demands perfection, and perfection demands hard work. Suyuan is Chinese and very influenced by Confucian teaching: she believes that success is a direct result of effort and discipline. She is convinced that if June practices every day, she can improve and perhaps reach the status of perfection and therefore be a prodigy. Based on her perception of the notion of sacrificing, Suyuan does her best to get June all the help that she needs in order to achieve success in life. As dictated in Chinese belief, the success of the individual needs support and sacrifices of the other members.

Suyuan, like Lindo, makes some sacrifices for her daughter. She provides help for June by doing “housework for an old retired piano teacher.” (37) who gave her “lessons and free use of a piano to practice on in exchange.” (38). Instead of admiring her mother’s sacrifices, June confronts her mother by declaring, “I wish I wasn’t your daughter” (142) By saying so June, like Waverly, distances herself from her mother and consequently separates herself from the whole family. Both June and Waverly tend to think that the role of the mother is to be unconditionally lovely, supportive, and permissive. Despite their idealised picture of their mothers, in reality, they often feel criticised and tormented by their mothers, who encourage them to be successful. This controversy has a great effect on June’s life.

In short, ‘Two Kinds’ explores the cultural identities of Chinese-American characters, focusing on the mother, Suyuan, and her daughter, June. The story highlights the clash between Suyuan’s adherence to Chinese cultural values, which emphasize hard work, discipline, and familial duty, and June’s American upbringing, which prioritizes individualism, personal freedom, and self-expression. The mother believes pushing June to be a prodigy is for her benefit, while June resists, declaring her autonomy and rejecting her mother’s vision. This tension emphasizes the conflict between traditional Chinese values and contemporary American beliefs.

Besides, the story sheds light on how societal beliefs have great impact on individual behavior. Suyuan embodies Confucian values, believing her sacrifices and firmness are necessary for June’s triumph and the family’s honor. In contrast, June’s American education implants in her a belief in personal freedom and self-determination. These opposing societal norms create a gap between mother and daughter, as June considers Chinese cultural expectations as oppressive and American values as liberating.

In Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, the daughters, including June, Waverly, Lena, and Rose, confront with the complexities of anaging two distinct cultural worlds. Caught between American and Chinese traditions, they face an alarming choice between the two contrasting lifestyles. Much like Waverly, June finds herself torn between these cultural extremities, ultimately choosing the American way of life over her Chinese heritage. Lena and Rose undergo similar experiences, navigating the conflict between their American upbringing and their mothers' Chinese traditions. Consequently, examining the novel through a cultural theory lens unveils the deep cultural conflicts behind the narrative. These conflicts extend beyond simple personal misunderstandings, reflecting wider clashes between collectivism and individualism, cultural preservation and assimilation, and traditional and modern values. Digging into these cultural dimensions provides a delicate understanding of the novel and stresses the significance of cultural awareness and storytelling in bridging generational and cultural gaps. In addition, all four daughters in the novel intentionally distance themselves from their Chinese roots, refusing to embrace bilingualism that strengthens the language barrier between the first and second generations.

4. Language Barriers in *The Joy Luck Club*:

Throughout *The Joy Luck Club*, language barriers have been highlighted as one of the fundamental triggers behind the many misinterpretations between both Chinese-speaking mothers and English-speaking daughters. This is perfectly suggested in the opening scene "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away", the tale that precedes the first group of stories in the book. It tells the story of the old Chinese woman who decides to move to the United States of America. Before leaving Shanghai, the woman buys a swan from a vendor, who whispered to her that the bird was once a duck. Through an effort to become a goose, the duck stretched its neck so far that it became a swan,

more than what is hoped for. As the woman travels to America, she dreams of bringing up a daughter surrounded by all the opportunities of the New World. She expects that her American-born daughter will be typically like her, except the fact that she will be evaluated according to her husband not according to her own worth, like her Chinese mother in old China. Similar to the swan, the daughter will surpass all expectations, so the woman plans to give her daughter the swan as a gift. Yet, when the woman reaches the new country, the immigration officials take the swan and leave the woman with only one feather. The daughter is born and raised to be the courageous, happy woman her mother had dreamt of. The woman still wishes to grant the feather to her daughter and to explain its symbolic meaning, but for many years she feels unready to do it. She is still waiting “for the day she could [explain it] in perfect American English.” (Tan 17) The old Chinese woman has to wait patiently until she is able to communicate in English, the language that her daughter masters perfectly; she has to wait for so long to make her daughter appreciate her motherly love and affection.

This feather, which stands for the mother’s Chinese heritage, introduces the story of a woman who had struggled hard to offer her daughter the chance and the freedom that she never had. It symbolizes transformation and development as well. Like the old Chinese woman in the parable, the four mothers endure many transformations in the novel as a result of certain circumstances that fundamentally change their characters such as living in America and becoming to a certain degree Americanised. However, this mother-daughter discussion about maternal affection or personal development might never occur. Even if the mother succeeds in learning ‘perfect American English’, she will never be able to translate fully every detail of her story. Simply because translation is not only on the level of words but rather it is a negotiation between two cultures. The incomplete cultural understanding of both the mothers and the daughters, therefore, is the direct result of their incomplete knowledge of language.

In fact, throughout the course of the novel, the different women narrators discuss their weakness in translating concepts and values from one culture to another, which proves that the language gulf that exists between the mothers and their daughters spreads into many aspects of life, and the overcoming of these problems needs more than learning extra vocabulary. The mothers and their daughters should reach the cultural understanding of one another. Since the Chinese mothers are not able to use and to understand American English and its culture, they employ narrations as a means of reconciliation and an attempt to bridge the separation of traditional Chinese culture with that of a contemporary American culture. They use storytelling to communicate with their daughters. The stories the mothers narrate are of high significance because each grants an insight into the Chinese values, language, culture and heritage. Furthermore, the stories they relate are often educational alerting against certain mistakes or in a form of advice based on previous successful and painful experiences.

5. Generational Friction: Understanding Mother-Daughter Conflict through Intergenerational Theory:

“The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates” is another parable that precedes the second group of stories in the book. It is about a mother who wants to teach and instruct her seven –years old daughter, in a traditional way through the traditional Chinese talk story, how to obey parents meekly. She wants to transmit to her daughter one of the main pillars of Chinese culture and heritage that is “obedience”. The woman warns her daughter not to ride her “bicycle around the corner.” (Tan 87) because something bad would happen to her while out of sight. When the daughter rebels and asks, why? The mother refers to a book titled *The Twenty-six Malignant Gates*. For the mother, this book contains every danger that can occur to a child who is “outside of the protection.” of the parents. The daughter demands to see the book, but her mother declines and says,

“It is written in Chinese and you will not understand,” the old women add, “the only way to avoid danger is to listen to your mother.” The daughter then asks to know the twenty-six bad things that can happen, but because the mother is unable to translate the book into English, she refuses to answer. The daughter gets angry and shouts, “You can’t tell me because you don’t know! You don’t know anything!” (Tan 87). At this point there is no room for communication between them if not impossible at all, thus, the mother sits and knits “in silence” (Tan 90).

The rebellious daughter of the parable is speaking on behalf of all the daughters in the novel. At this stage of their lives the daughters try their best to deny their Chinese part. They define themselves as Americans and their mothers as inferior Chinese women, old fashioned, and tale telling. They turn a deaf eared to their mother’s stories. Linguistic and cultural obstacles, generational gulf, and childhood rebellion all help the young daughters' unwillingness to truly listen and respond to their mothers’ stories. As children, the daughters refuse to listen to the stories, considering them without any value and importance. Conversations with their mothers most of the time end with a conflict because the daughters reject their mothers’ advice. Consequently, the daughters hide every piece of information concerning their personal lives and they refuse to share them with their mothers. They refuse to share their personal details because they are convinced that their mothers, because of cultural and generational differences, will not comprehend. This conflict will not come to a real end until the daughters reach the stage when they can overcome generational differences with their mothers and the time they stop seeing themselves as Americans and their mothers as Chinese; the point at which they accept their mothers' culture as part of their own. This can take place only through maturation.

However, when delving deeper and deeper into the novel, it becomes obvious to us as readers that, as adults, the daughters respond completely in a different manner to their mothers’ tales. It is

through time that they come to recognise the meaning of their mothers' stories. They become ready to listen to their mothers for a number of reasons: one of which is their acceptance of their Chinese-American identity that lusts for the fusion of their mothers' stories as part of their culture and heritage. One more reason is when the daughters find themselves in moments of weakness. Listening to their mothers stimulates them to take action because they learn through their mothers' past experiences. As explained by Bruno Bettelheim in the second chapter stories can tell the person what they can do. Therefore, the daughters are able to dominate their lives. This positive response from the part of the daughters allows them to communicate with their mothers and allow them to strengthen their relationships with one another. In short, we can understand that to navigate the divide and foster understanding between them and their daughters, the mothers turn to the time-honored tradition of storytelling, using it not only as a means of healing but also as a cornerstone of their maternal legacy.

6. Amy Tan The Storyteller and the Significance of Storytelling in her Novel *the Joy Luck Club*:

In their works *Reading Amy Tan* and *Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club* (2009) Lan Dong and Harold Bloom respectively describe Amy as a striking storyteller. This talent is best revealed in the complexity of her narrative structure wherein she manages to craft stories told within stories by the mothers to the daughters. The talent which Amy processes has solid roots in her childhood. Tan was brought up in a family in which storytelling was really emphasised as a tradition. Amy acquires her gift of storytelling from her father who was a Baptist minister with whom she was exposed to Bible stories and fairy tales. In addition to her mother, Daisy Tan, who told her stories including tales, myths, gossips, and activities of the family, which were nonsense for little Amy at the moment.

Through time when Amy grew up and she became mature enough, she discovered how much she was surrounded by the activity of storytelling since her early childhood. In one of her interviews Amy confesses: “There was a lot of storytelling going on in our house: family stories, gossip, what happened to the people left behind in China. The gossip about people's character that went around as my aunt and my mother shelled peas on the dining table covered with newspaper” (Shields 21-22) Tan’s mother stories prove to be a source of inspiration for her daughter is story construction as an author as she manages to incorporate some of her mother’s tales in her literary works. Unlike many other Chinese-American writers who write memoirs, Amy Tan crafts primarily fictional stories blended with some autobiographical elements taken from her mother’s tales about herself or people she knows.

Tan’s semi-biographical ²⁷work *The Joy Luck Club* mirrors her problematic relationship with her mother. Her immigrant parents fueled her childhood with expectations for success; however, after her father’s death at the age of fifteen her relationship with her mother worsens severely. When Amy grew up and she espouses writing, she however discovered that her relationship with her mother and the stories she had heard in the past formed a solid ground for her gift as a storyteller. Storytelling becomes a strong tool to soften the tension in the problematic mother-daughter relationship. Through narration, Amy fuses chunks of past stories she had heard with her own imagination to come out with a coherent fictional world, a proof that Amy was able to grasp and accept her mother's Chinese past and her American present, just like her daughter characters in *The Joy Luck Club*.

From a structural point of view any reader who has or will go through the pages of *The Joy Luck Club* can notice that Amy Tan does not follow the norms of what is called the “Once

²⁷ Dealing partly with the writer’s own life but also containing fictional elements.

upon a time” novel i.e. She does not offer her readers a single story that progresses in a simple pattern from A to Z. As a postmodern work *The Joy Luck Club* is considered a challenge to the novel in many ways: form, narrative structure, and narrative techniques. Bloom in his *modern interpretation of Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*, asserts that Tan defies the established norms and conventions of the nineteenth-century novel (Bloom 2009).

The structure of *The Joy Luck Club* is a vivid example, of changing the norms of the traditional novel, because it rejects artificial unity²⁸ that characterizes the traditional novel and embraces fragmentation²⁹. Her stories are not presented by the one single third-person narrator, which allows the reader to see the viewpoint of all individuals in the story, including information other characters may not know. Instead, they are either presented from her own perspective or from the various points of view. The shift from narrator to narrator provides the reader with more detailed information and different understandings. Via language, Tan could even take her readers back and forth through time. In other words, *The Joy Luck Club* employs an unusual narrative strategy (Bloom 3).

Apart from form and structure, Tan's work makes use of the Chinese oral tradition and her characters employ the talk-story to link their Chinese past with their American present. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the use of oral elements is more on a textual level, rather than on a structural one. In other words, it is Tan's literary characters who use talk-story as a narrative strategy a form of narrative therapy for the tense relationship and for the mothers and daughters themselves. Talk-story, thus, performs an integral part and operates as a cultural form of empowerment for characters in *The Joy Luck Club*. Tan, hence, makes use of storytelling

²⁸ Unity: The sense that all the elements in a piece of writing fit together to create a harmonious effect.

²⁹Fragments are bits of narrative linked together by internal signs such as pieces of conversation or passages referring an earlier story or the story about to come next.

mainly as a healing narrative therapy between two different generations that are separated not only because they are from two different backgrounds but also because they speak two different languages.

According to *Encyclopedia of Asian American Folklore and Folk life, Volume 1*, “storytelling is not just an essential form of folklore disseminating cultural knowledge and social experience from generation to generation; it is also an important process of identity construction for such marginalised social group as Asian-American”. Speaking on the behalf of the largest Asian group in the United States, Chinese-American writers, for instance, make use of narration and narrative folktales³⁰ as a basis to fight back any kind of stereotypical representation of this minority by mainstream culture in the United States. Storytelling in Chinese-American literary works often plays an essential role not only in preserving family ties and history but also in maintaining cultural memory and establishing individual and social identity as well. Being purely a Chinese-American work, Tan’s *the Joy Luck Club* makes use of this narrative technique. Much of the book narrative draws upon Chinese folktales which put the reader into contact with a genre of oral storytelling from China, talk story.

7. The Role of Mother Figure in Resolving Cultural Divides Through Storytelling:

As the daughters gain maturity, they learn to acknowledge their mothers' stories and discuss their personal lives with their mothers. This form of tale telling initiated by the mothers fosters

³⁰ Narrative [na-ra-tiv], a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator

Narrative Folktales: are traditional stories passed down orally from generation to generation within a community or culture. These tales typically feature characters, plots, and themes that reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of the people who tell them

confidence and interaction between the two generations and perhaps the second generation will retell the stories to their own children. Storytelling ritual offers the mothers a chance to unfold Chinese values and family histories to their daughters. This will assure the mothers that their lives are remembered and understood by the following generations. In transmitting their stories to their daughters, the mothers seek to gain their daughter's respect for Chinese heritage and Chinese ancestors. Through this oral tradition, the mothers try to pour some Chinese beliefs into their daughters' minds. Once the daughters conceive finally that their mothers' stories are convincing and authentic, they engage in exchanging their personal secrets with their mothers. This pushes the daughters step further to take an active role in various situations in their life rather than being deceived by events around them.

At a larger scale, this method of telling stories orally allows the mothers to share their stories not only with their daughters but with a worldwide audience by means of the author and the storyteller Amy Tan. Storytelling also becomes the only option the mothers use to stand against the language barrier. It is a way for mothers and daughters to learn about each other, and a way to present Chinese traditions and the history of Chinese women both in China and present America, a way once again that empowers mother-daughter bonds. The discussion is not going to end at this point since tale telling has another far-reaching effect on its tellers.

The role of storytelling in Tan's novel is "the unburdening of secrets of the past that heals the traumatic memories and the problematic mother-daughter relationship" (Hui Wing 23). In *The Joy Luck Club*, the talk stories carry out a therapeutic effect on Tan's women characters. Through revealing their burdensome old secrets, the mothers learn to reinterpret and reconstruct their past, while the daughters view of their mothers change completely. As they recall their traumatic experiences to their daughters, the mother characters' talk stories provide them with healing effects.

As Marina Heung remarks, “storytelling heals past experiences of loss and separation; it is also a medium for rewriting stories of oppression and victimization into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment.” (qtd talk-stories 230). Hiding a significant part of their mysterious past prevents the mother characters from talking about their history: ‘They are, in some ways, like the soldiers, who, after returning from the war, grow silent and live in such a state of trauma that they, on the one hand, cannot talk about their war experience because talking about it means reliving the horrible memories; while on the other hand, they would like to hide it from their family members.’(Tan 233) The compressed remembrance and experiences, as a result, become menacing as they are hidden for a long time. Storytelling, then, is more than voicing out past secrets that are buried under the layers of the patriarchal land where the status of the woman is very low, but it moves to be a sort of emotional cure to the mothers, referred to as *talking cure*.

Tan’s characters tell their stories without any external adjustments or change. This help Amy Tan, in her novel, deal with the term *talking cure* from a psychotherapeutic³¹angle i.e. she approaches the term in a more Americanised way, as she manages to reshape the exotic form of talk-story to a more popular fashion of *talking cure* psychotherapy. The twist that Tan adopts is intended to attract American readers as they are more familiar with psychotherapy rather than the traditional talk story. From all this, the road the mothers take to solve their problems with their daughters is not one way; they not only get rid of the secrets of their sorrowful past but also achieve reconciliation between themselves and their daughters, so that the past is left off to model the future.

³¹ Psychotherapy: also called counseling, any form of treatment for psychological, emotional, or behaviour disorders in which a trained person establishes a relationship with one or several patients for the purpose of modifying or removing existing symptoms and promoting personality growth.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the mothers start the process of the unburdening of their past secrets after their friend Suyuan passes away. Precisely, when the daughter of the newly deceased friend, Jing-mei, shocks them with her complete ignorance of who her mother was, June is unable to tell her long lost sisters in China the story of their mother, 'what can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything.'(Tan). As they fear their own daughters may be as strangers to them as June is strange to her mother, the old ladies, finally decide to unfold their pasts to their daughters. June's complete ignorance of her mother motivates these women to talk to their daughters before it is too late. Besides, the narration of the past stories would allow the daughters to see them not as their rivals, but their best supporters from whom they will extract their power to get out of their uncertainties. Ying-ying Saint Clair is one of the mothers whose story is really interesting, attracting and new for both the reader and her daughter Lena. It is in the Saint Clair family that storytelling finds its way as a talking cure for Ying ying who is really tired of her long-kept secrets, it is in their home that storytelling performs the catalyst for Lena to get out of her passivity with her husband, and finally it is under the roof of the Saint Clair's' house that storytelling brings back the long-lost Chinese heritage and culture to the new generation, Lena. The daughter now accepts herself as a Chinese-American.

In brief, applying the Mother Legacy Theory, makes us touch upon the role of storytelling in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. The theory underscores the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and knowledge, primarily through maternal narratives. It clarifies how these narratives shape the daughters' sense of self and belonging within their cultural heritage and American society.

8. Conclusion:

To cut it short, we have been guided over the complex landscape of relationships between generations in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. The chapter has provided us with the groundwork for a more detailed examination of the tensions that exists between mothers and daughters. This has been done by summarizing the stories in the novel; by paying close attention to the relationships between Lindo and her daughter Waverly and June and her mother Suyuan. What helps us scrutinizing the causes of these tensions is the use of a set of various theories: Cultural Theory, Intergenerational Theory, and Maternal Theory as our analytical frameworks.

Additionally, our discussion has gone through the crucial role that language barriers play, showing how they both support and undermine the storytelling tradition, which is a key aspect in intergenerational communication. Storytelling, from the other hand, proved to be both a fundamental skill of Tan's characters and a means of healing and reconciliation in the no

General Conclusion

General conclusion:

The Joy Luck Club illustrates that healing the injuries left by hardship requires confronting the underlying problems and taking courageous actions. The psychological gap between mothers and daughters that results from cultural separation necessitate efforts to be made by both to bridge it. While acknowledging cultural heritage, one needs to see that conflict and reconciliation are integral parts of daily life; they are two sides of the same coin, each dependent on the other. Reconciliation always comes after conflict. To navigate life successfully, one needs to understand and adapt to both conflict and reconciliation, and to determine the most efficient means of resolving conflicts with the least amount of impact. This is particularly important when the impact on the delicate relationship between mothers and their daughters is expected.

One of the biggest problems facing Chinese-American immigrants when they come to the US is a generational division, which upsets the stability of families. Many studies have been conducted on this relationship between moms and daughters in Chinese-American families, which indicate that the underlying source of conflict is the differences in cultures that each generation has come develop. In particular, the conflict between American individualism and Confucian principles produces an underlying tension that both mothers and daughters endure. These hardships in America severely impacts their mutual bonds. Misunderstandings, communication barriers, and language differences, further complicate these relationships. To find effective remedies in the face of this tense environment, mothers return to the authentic practice of storytelling as a way for parents to attract the attention and rehabilitate bonds with their children.

Based on this research, one can say that the age-old storytelling has been successful to a large in bridging the generational gap caused by linguistic and cultural challenges. The characters in *The Joy Luck Club* seem to embody the effectiveness of this social didactic

method that empowers both the storytellers and their audience. Narrating past experiences to the younger generation serves as a therapeutic procedure for storytellers, a kind of talking remedy that helps them release emotional baggage from their past. Equally, stories provide the listeners valuable lessons from previous experiences, aligning with Bruno Bettelheim's notion of 'I can survive this.' Storytelling also connects new generations to their ancestors, filling their experiences with authenticity and significance. Mothers make use of storytelling to instill respect for their Chinese heritage and ancestors in their daughters to help them embrace their hyphenated Chinese-American identity. Thus, narration proves to be a powerful tool for mitigating widespread issues in multicultural environments.

Amy Tan's novel's portrayal of intergenerational dynamics and maternal legacies among Chinese-American families skillfully shows the generational divides and cultural confrontations between Chinese immigrant moms and their children born in the United States. It juxtaposes the conflict between the pursuit of individualism and traditional values, and also emphasizes how complicated mother-daughter relationships can be perceived in the context of immigration, showing how cultural differences may strengthen and complicate family ties. While cultural differences often act as obstacles, they also provide opportunities for understanding and reconciliation.

Finally, *The Joy Luck Club* shows that resolving cultural differences imposes the identification of the fundamental problems and decisive actions. Cultural separation leads to a psychological gap between mothers and daughters which requires efforts to be made by both parties to bridge it. Reconciliation and conflict should be regarded as part of daily life that demands understanding of and ability to work with both mothers and daughters navigating life outside of their home country. There is need to overcome that generational gap which may undermine family stability among the Chinese immigrants as a result of tensions between

American individualism and Confucian values. It is evident that using stories is a powerful strategy to bridge gaps, offer temporary solutions, and preserve cultural heritage. Mothers on the other hand use storytelling to empower themselves and impart valuable lessons.

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Appendices

Appendix One

Amy Tan's Biography

Amy Tan is a Chinese-American novelist who wrote the New York Times-bestselling novel *The Joy Luck Club*. She was born on February 19, 1952 in Oakland, California. Tan grew up in Northern California, but when her father and older brother both died from brain tumors in 1966, she moved with her mother and younger brother to Europe, where she attended high school in Montreux, Switzerland. She returned to the United States for college, attending Linfield College in Oregon, San Jose City College, San Jose State University, the University of California at Santa Cruz and the University of California at Berkeley.

After college, Tan worked as a language development consultant and as a corporate freelance writer. In 1985, she wrote the story "Rules of the Game" for a writing workshop, which formed the early foundation for her first novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Published in 1989, the book explored the relationship between Chinese women and their Chinese-American daughters, and became the longest-running New York Times bestseller for that year. *The Joy Luck Club* received numerous awards, including the Los Angeles Times Book Award. It has been translated into 25 languages, including Chinese, and was made into a major motion picture for which Tan co-wrote the screenplay.

Her other two books, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) and *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), have also appeared on the New York Times bestseller list. Her latest novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, was published in 2001. Tan has also written two children's books: *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994), the latter of which was adapted to television for PBS.

Amy Tan has been married to her husband, Lou DeMattei, for over twenty years. They live in San Francisco and New York.

Author

Biography.com Editors

Website Name

The Biography.com website

Appendix Two

Amy Tan: A Uniquely Personal Storyteller

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California. Her family lived in several communities in Northern California before settling in Santa Clara. Both of her parents were Chinese immigrants. Her father, John Tan, was an electrical engineer and Baptist minister who came to America to escape the turmoil of the Chinese Civil War.

The harrowing early life of her mother, Daisy, inspired Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. In China, Daisy had divorced an abusive husband but lost custody of her three daughters. She was forced to leave them behind when she escaped on the last boat to leave Shanghai before the Communist takeover in 1949. Her marriage to John Tan produced three children, Amy and her two brothers.

Tragedy struck the Tan family when Amy's father and oldest brother both died of brain tumors within a year of each other. Mrs. Tan moved her surviving children to Switzerland, where Amy finished high school, but by this time mother and daughter were in constant conflict.

Mother and daughter did not speak for six months after Amy Tan left the Baptist college her mother had selected for her to follow her boyfriend to San Jose City College. Tan further defied her mother by abandoning the pre-med course her mother had urged to pursue the study of English and linguistics. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in these fields at San Jose State University. In 1974, she and her boyfriend, Louis DeMattei, were married. They were later to settle in San Francisco.

DeMattei, an attorney, took up the practice of tax law, while Tan studied for a doctorate in linguistics, first at the University of California at Santa Cruz, later at Berkeley.

By this time, she had developed an interest in the problems of the developmentally disabled. She left the doctoral program in 1976 and took a job as a language development consultant to the Alameda County Association for Retarded Citizens, and later directed a training project for developmentally disabled children.

With a partner, she started a business writing firm, providing speeches for the salesmen and executives of large corporations. After a dispute with her partner, who believed she should give up writing to concentrate on the management side of the business, she became a full-time freelance writer. Among her business works, written under non-Chinese-sounding pseudonyms, were a 26-chapter booklet called "Telecommunications and You," produced for IBM.

Amy Tan prospered as a business writer. After a few years in business for herself, she had saved enough money to buy a house for her mother. She and her husband lived well on their double income, but the harder Tan worked at her business, the more dissatisfied she became. The work had become a compulsive habit, and she sought relief in creative efforts. She studied jazz piano, hoping to channel the musical training forced on her by her parents in childhood into a more personal expression. She also began to write fiction.

Her first story, "Endgame," won her admission to the Squaw Valley writer's workshop taught by novelist Oakley Hall. The story appeared in *FM* literary magazine, and was reprinted in *Seventeen*. A literary agent, Sandra Dijkstra, was impressed enough with Tan's second story, "Waiting Between the Trees," to take her on as a client. Dijkstra encouraged Tan to complete an entire volume of stories.

Just as she was embarking on this new career, Tan's mother fell ill. Amy Tan promised herself that if her mother recovered, she would take her to China, to see the daughter who had been left behind almost 40 years before. Mrs. Tan regained her health, and mother and daughter departed for China in 1987. The trip was a revelation for Tan. It gave her a new perspective on her often-difficult relationship with her mother, and inspired her to complete the book of stories she had promised her agent.

On the basis of the completed chapters, and a synopsis of the others, Dijkstra found a publisher for the book, now called *The Joy Luck Club*. With a \$50,000 advance from G.P. Putnam's Sons, Tan quit business writing and finished her book in a little more than four months.

Upon its publication in 1989, Tan's book won enthusiastic reviews and spent eight months on *The New York Times* bestseller list. The paperback rights sold for \$1.23 million. The book has been translated into 17 languages, including Chinese. Her subsequent novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), confirmed her reputation and enjoyed excellent sales. In the following years, Amy Tan published two books for children, *The Moon Lady* and *The Sagwa*, and two more novels: *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001).

In 2003, she published *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*, an autobiography in which she disclosed her experience with Lyme disease, a chronic bacterial infection contracted from the bite of a common tick. Amy Tan's case went undiagnosed for years before she received proper treatment, and she suffered intense physical pain, mental impairment and seizures. For years, Lyme disease made it impossible for Amy Tan to continue writing. With medication, she has been able to control the worst symptoms of her illness, and has resumed

writing, but she also spends much of her energy raising awareness of Lyme disease, promoting its early detection and treatment, and advocating for the rights of Lyme disease patients.

With her illness under control, Amy Tan has completed two works of fiction. Her novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* appeared in 2005. In 2013, she published one of her most ambitious books to date, *The Valley of Amazement*, an epic saga told from the point of view of a part-American girl raised among the courtesans of Shanghai in the first years of the 20th century.

Academy of Achievement

ملخص

تعتبر الجالية الصينية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية من أكبر المجموعات التي ساهمت بشكل كبير في بناء أمريكا كمجتمع متعدد الثقافات. ورغم استقرارهم في أمريكا، وهي بلد ذو ثقافة مختلفة تماماً عن ثقافتهم الأصلية، إلا أنهم يواصلون الحفاظ على تقاليدهم الثقافية. لقد تحملت هذه المجموعة، وبالأخص النساء الصينيات، صعوبات كبيرة في العالم الجديد. ومن التحديات الرئيسية التي يسعى هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء عليها هو الصراع الذي ينشأ بين الأمهات الصينيات المهاجرات وبناتهن المولودات في أمريكا. تستخدم أمي تان، وهي كاتبة صينية أمريكية بارزة، الأدب لمعالجة هذا الصراع إلى جانب مشكلات أخرى رئيسية تواجه الشخصيات النسائية الصينية الأمريكية. بشكل خاص، في روايتها "نادي الفرح والحظ" لعام 1989، لا تكتفي تان بطرح مشكلة العلاقة بين الأم وابنتها، بل تحاول أيضاً تقديم حلاً لهذا المأزق بشكل كبير من خلال اللجوء إلى السرد القصصي وشخصية الأم. لذا، يتم تبني نهج متعدد التخصصات لفهم كيف تمكنت أمي تان من جعل الشخصيات النسائية تتجاوز الصراع بين الأجيال لتصل في النهاية إلى المصالحة.