

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta  
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**Listening to our mothers' minds**  
**Intercultural and Intergenerational Conflict**  
**in Amy Tan's Writing**

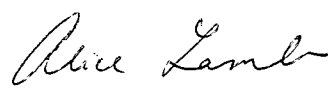
Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alice Lamb".

Alice Lamb

Tímto bych chtěla poděkovat PhDr. Soně Novákové za všechny podněty a připomínky, které mi ukázaly další přístupy k problematice multikulturních prostředí a literárních děl vznikajících na pomezí dvou odlišných světů. Naše dlouhé diskuse k této problematice mi pomohly uvědomit si její podstatu a přispěly k jasnějšímu formulování hlavních argumentů. Děkuji jí za čas, který se mnou nad prací strávila.

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## **I. Introduction**

The notion of Chinese character being a hereditary entity that cannot be changed by any outer circumstances is a complex belief characteristic of any Chinese community both living in mainland China and in any foreign country. It is a primary factor that subconsciously prevents first generation Chinese immigrants from teaching their children Chinese language as their mother tongue and from imposing on them Chinese family traditions and rules that would apply in their home country. It is the character and its distinctive features that cause their deliberate enclosure in “ghettoes” of China Towns, forming Chinese Diasporas that prevent the immigrant parents from assimilating with their new societies. As a consequence, the second generation immigrants become double marginalised and the immigrant communities are troubled by two major contradicting forces: all Chinese immigrant parents face the problem of reconciliation with the cultural assimilation of their children and all children feel the generation gap between themselves and their conservative parents. In every Chinese community today there are thus two elements in continuous tension: the openness towards the outside world, the desire to borrow the good things and, by integrating them with ancient Chinese tradition, to enrich themselves as a result of this fusion (children) and the notion of independence from the outside world, cultural integrity and completeness without any outside sources (parents). This tension has raised a new, fundamental question: How much of the surrounding mass culture can a Chinese first or second generation immigrant absorb without completely giving up the Chinese tradition?

The aim of this diploma thesis is to explore to what extent are upbringing and interaction with the cultural environment relevant in forming a child's character, to what extent is character inherited and to what extent it is affected by the cultural heritage imprinted by and in the ways of any child's upbringing. It will also touch upon the relevance of the confrontation with new cultural environment on changing the already formed characters of the adult immigrants and portray how the first generation's life style shifts when confronted with the surrounding culture. Further, this paper will focus on the portrayal of respect, the notion of courage, love, religious (faith), myth (fate), cultural tradition (democracy versus tyranny), identity, diversity, the choice and consequence both from the Chinese and the American perspective based on a thorough examination and close reading of Amy Tan's first novel *The Joy Luck Club*. The essay will mainly focus on the intercultural and intergenerational aspects and, where relevant, on the ways Tan accentuates specific symbols by reusing and further exploring them in her later works. It will also touch upon the importance of the knowledge of Tan's biography when attempting to identify the autobiographical elements and their relevance for different readings of the studied themes. The diploma thesis will draw upon the theoretical framework of post-colonial cultural theory with regards to the notion of hybridity, diasporic identity and gender writing. It will further explore the universality of the notion of myth in remote cultural contexts. Various approaches to multiculturalism, as defined by Stuart Hall and his followers, will be employed.

For the purpose of this study, the term Asian-American will be used for all Asian or American born members of the American society living in the United

States, citizens or long term residents, who see themselves or are perceived as the members of the Asian ethnic group, based on their physiognomy and the geopolitical distinction of the term Asian continent. Similarly, the term Chinese-American will refer to the members of the American society that are of an ethnic Chinese descent and draw upon the notion of the hyphenated identity, the identity that represents in the person of a hyphenated culture/community member aspects of both cultures joined together in its name. The term Chinese traditional culture will be used for the culture based on the long lasting traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism, isolationism, xenophobia and the notion of the Chinese superiority over the other nations. The American mainstream culture will, on contrary, be used for the mass culture of the United States of the 1960s, culture to a greater extent influenced and dictated by the mass media and the government propaganda, the culture that is perceived as consumerist, monetary and uniform. This division draws upon the portrayal of the Chinese and American cultures in Amy Tan's novels as static and monolithic.

Transcription of the Chinese names in the introductory part will be done in pinyin (the scheme of the Chinese phonetic alphabet) which has since 1958 been the only universally recognised system of transcribing Chinese characters into Roman script.<sup>1</sup> In the quotes from Amy Tan's novels, the author's transcription will be copied.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinyin>. 1 May 2006.

## **II. Historical Context**

### **1) Introduction**

The reasoning behind the belief that the Chinese character is already “in the bones”, to use Amy Tan’s rhetoric, of any child born to the parents of a Chinese origin is to be found in Chinese history. The notion is very complex with a number of various aspects. In order to come to a certain level of understanding the Chinese character and its specifics, we ought to study many historical affairs and examine their influence on the way the Chinese were and still are confronted with the outer world and the ways the world, mainly the world of the leading western nations, apprehended them and attempted to influence or even rule them at different times throughout the modern history. Further, we need to explore to what extent the Chinese character and socio economic specifics limited Chinese migration to the English speaking countries, namely to Britain, Canada and the United States to establish the grounds for the study. The most outstanding features of the Chinese character as perceived by the American mainstream society and factors that were relevant from a historical point of view in its forming will be explored, as the pluralistic approach to multiculturalism states that the knowledge of historical backgrounds of individual cultures forming a multicultural society is vital. Multiculturalism means different things to different people. One of the dictionary entries reads: ‘Multiculturalism is a doctrine that several different cultures (rather than one national culture) can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a single country.’ George Crowder in one of his online articles claims that: “[Multiculturalism is]



public recognition of cultural differences and their effects within a society,” and yet another definition is found in Stuart Hall who claims that: “Multiculturalism celebrates difference without making a difference.” According to George Crowder:

Pluralist multiculturalism is subject to liberal principles, rather than a radical view in which liberal values represent only one legitimate cultural perspective on a moral par with others. Those liberal principles include a strong public commitment to the ideal of individual autonomy that will usually override toleration of individual and group practices.<sup>2</sup>

What Crowder claims can be interpreted in relation to the second generation Chinese immigrants living in the United States. It is with their generation, when individual autonomy as confirmed in the US Constitution wins over individual and group practices and the Chinese traditional culture is altered or lost. This process can be paralleled with the history of foreign presence and its consequences on the Chinese culture in mainland China. To demonstrate this point thoroughly, relevant historical data will be presented further.

China, one of the four oldest civilizations in the world, has a written history of four thousand years. Both the country and the nation are rich in historical sites and in cultural and historical relics. China with its traditional symbols and values such as Buddhism and Confucianism has always been generally accepted as a country that represents rich cultural heritage of a nation that has always had its specifics and that has always been of a global importance (many epoch-making discoveries originated in China – e.g. paper, porcelain, compass and gunpowder to name the most valued ones). Chinese principles and values have been, throughout

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<sup>2</sup> Crowder, George. *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*. New York: Continuum, 2000. (73 -74).

its long history, confronted by the principles valued by other nations in open and non-openly stated conflicts for several times. The confrontations and forced or deliberate interaction with other nations in the field of foreign diplomacy are still relevant and will be even more intensified in the future due to the process of globalisation.

China has always been very reserved in terms of welcoming foreigners, foreign principles and foreign lifestyles. For example, when the Emperor Chienlang ordered the partial rebuilding of Juan-ming-juan, the Emperor's Summer Palace near Beijing, in a western style in 1747, Chinese traditionalists felt deeply insulted.<sup>3</sup> Chinese reformers who advocated more flexibility in China's dealings with the West were often accused of being "Westerners with Chinese faces."<sup>4</sup> There was no room in the Chinese perception of the rest of the world throughout the centuries for the idea of independent nations that would be their equals (this perspective, to a certain degree, still prevails these days). The idea of being a unique country, very different from the others, a country that is predestined to rule over and lead the neighbours, was present in the Chinese view of its international role for many centuries. The place where China located itself in the world political map of the 15<sup>th</sup> century provided extensive grounds for such feelings. Being given the power and ability to do so, the Chinese tried to prove the legitimacy of their superiority. Chinese patriotism is a well known "trade mark" that, I believe, needs no further

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<sup>3</sup> Fairbank, John F. *Dějiny Číny (China, A New History)*, překlad: Martin Hála, Jana Hollanová, Olga Lomová. Praha: Lidové Noviny, 1998. (p. 541).

<sup>4</sup> Kristof, Nicholas; WuDunn Sheryl. *Čína se probouzí. Boj o duši rozvíjející se mocnosti. (China Wakes.)* Praha: Dita, 1996. (p. 37).

explanation. As some of us have experienced: “There was always the rest of the world and then there was China.”<sup>5</sup>

However improbable it might sound in the light of the facts presented above, there has always existed, to a certain extent, a tradition of Chinese contacts with the foreign countries and their representatives, a tradition that started with the caravans travelling the Silk route to deliver Chinese products to the Roman Empire. Regular cultural exchange with the Western civilisations started in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century when China was invaded by Mongols who were more opened to foreign visits in Beijing than the Chinese. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, China had already established regular contacts with the overseas nations and cultures. Western traders, missionaries and soldiers travelled to China on a regular, but regulated basis. Chinese ships during that time also exported silk, porcelain and copper coins to Japan and to South and South East Asia.<sup>6</sup> In 1433, official expeditions to foreign territories were banned due to the isolationist initiatives of the Confucian officers and scholars who opposed the idea of carrying out trade with foreign nations and making contacts with them during the, to that point regular, overseas travels of Chinese traders and envoys.<sup>7</sup> The efforts of the Confucian officers were supported by the state crisis that made it impossible to provide further financial support inevitable for organizing the overseas travels.<sup>8</sup> (Those were the two main reasons for the commencing of the Chinese deliberate isolationism.) After 1447, China once

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<sup>5</sup> Blunden, Caroline; Elvin, Mark. *Svět Číny (Cultural Atlas of China)*, přeložil Dušan Andrš. Praha: Knižní klub, 1997. (p. 14).

<sup>6</sup> Fairbank, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Fairbank, 163.

<sup>8</sup> Fairbank, 164.

again in its history closed itself behind the Great Chinese Wall and withdrew from the world's political scene. Chinese acquired xenophobia thus celebrated another victory that caused stagnation in Chinese evolution<sup>9</sup> that had been to that point unprecedented. China lost contacts with the outer world and accommodated the idea of its own perfection that needed no further development. This conviction led to a decision that it was no longer important to compete with other nations and resulted in Chinese conservation of the status quo. China thus preserved its 15<sup>th</sup> century standards for almost two following centuries.

Representatives of the Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644) felt that the contacts with the Western civilizations, however limited and seemingly controlled by the ruling authority and its appointed bodies, were destabilizing factors endangering their political regime and order applied and followed by them. It is true, that there were still parts of coastal China that refused to break their ties with the foreign partners and secretly carried out a limited amount of foreign trade with the representatives of Western civilisations even during the era of Chinese enclosure, but such activities were only tolerated as the coastal areas were not in the centre of the Emperor's interest and enjoyed a certain degree of independence.<sup>10</sup> The Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911) accommodated very similar principles in terms of foreign trade and ways of treating foreigners.<sup>11</sup> However, the Qing dynasty's approach to foreign policy, which was to make everyone treat the Emperor like the Son of Heaven and not to acknowledge other countries as being equal to China, did not

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<sup>9</sup> Fairbank, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Fairbank, 222.

<sup>11</sup> Fairbank, 168.

discourage British and other traders from attempting to establish their business presence in China.

## **2) Foreign Presence in Mainland China**

### **British Traders**

Despite the fact that parallels can be drawn between China of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century and Great Britain of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in terms of the global importance of both countries at the respective historical points of reference, the two countries opted for entirely contrary ways of using their positions: China shut itself off while Great Britain continued in its expansion. It is thus only logical that Great Britain was among the first countries that in the 1720s slowly started establishing trade links with to that point a mostly isolated China. The East India Company, a powerful British corporation that was originally established to carry out business operations with the British controlled territories in India, wanted to enlarge its sphere of influence and strengthen its position in the Asian market. Therefore, its representatives decided to explore China and its potential business opportunities. The East India Company accumulated the capital gained through its investors in the form of company shares and enabled its members to profit from the advantage of having a monopoly on trade with foreign countries. (In other words, the East India Company had control over the business operations carried out in the overseas territories within the British sphere of influence.<sup>12</sup>) That was how the British traders started to export tea, silk and porcelain from China and to balance it by importing silver, wool textiles and opium into China. Thus the business contacts of British and Chinese traders can be considered the first Chinese contacts with the Western

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<sup>12</sup> Fairbank, 22.

civilizations in the modern era;<sup>13</sup> contacts that were of a strictly economic character and that were further complicated by the Chinese attitude towards anything new or foreign. That was probably why Great Britain was not the first European power that signed a bilateral agreement with China. In 1689, Russia managed to sign the Treaty of Nerchinsk that set the Chinese northern border line with Russia and established trade relations between the two countries.<sup>14</sup> Russia thus became the only foreign power not perceived as inferior by the Chinese court in Beijing and managed to secure its ongoing influence on the Chinese foreign policy.

The circumstances under which was the British-Chinese business conducted were very complicated. According to the Chinese traditional way of perceiving foreigners, there were special business rules introduced for British traders. The Chinese government appointed a group of Chinese families with a history of trade to become middlemen controlling the foreign traders. One Chinese family from the chosen group became responsible for each Western ship. All the families involved formed a community of traders called *kohong*.<sup>15</sup> Their responsibility was not restricted to trade affairs only. They could be fined or sent to prison instead of their Western partners which made the relationship between the British traders and the Chinese guardians even more complicated. (In February 1807, 52 mariners from a British ship Neptune were accused of killing a Chinese man. One of the mariners was fined a symbolic amount of money, but the Canton official representatives decided to fine and send to prison the Hong Kong trader who was responsible for

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<sup>13</sup> Fairbank, 225.

<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Nerchinsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Nerchinsk). 17 March 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Fairbank, 226.

the particular ship instead.<sup>16</sup>) The *kohong* members had to follow the orders of *hoppo*, an officer appointed by the Emperor who was responsible for the rates of the import and export taxes. Together with *hoppo*, *kohong* was responsible for introducing and collecting both the import but mainly export taxes. Special attention was paid to the tea and silk export taxes.<sup>17</sup> Further problems were caused by the phenomenon known as the 17<sup>th</sup> century crisis that resulted in lessening the import of silver into China followed by a sudden price crash. China was not able to pay for the opium supply and offered a system of exchange payments. Exchange rates were introduced that stated how much tea or silk equalled one kilogram of opium. Britain was thus able to buy even larger amounts of tea. One contemporary source stated that at the peak of its existence, from 1759 onwards, the East India Company bought a full 1/7 of the Chinese annual production of tea. The source also estimated that the Commutation Act, introduced in Britain in 1784, encouraged bigger purchase of tea by lowering the import tax and by indirectly supporting competitive environment in the Chinese trade as the East India Company's monopoly on the trade with China was terminated.<sup>18</sup> In 1816, the British East India Company decided to enlarge the amount of opium imported into China every year. This decision resulted in Chinese trade balance's dramatic fall and a consecutive deficit of the import/export balance between 1820 and 1825. The situation in Qing China culminated: At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a civil war broke out in Inner Asia followed by problems in the Canton province. The opium trade had

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<sup>16</sup> Firbank, 225.

<sup>17</sup> Fairbenk, 226.

<sup>18</sup> Fairbank, 226.



already consumed a bigger part of the Chinese silver reserves and China practically lost control over it. As a consequence, there was a sharp rise in the illegal trade of opium in 1830. Densely populated China suffered from famine due to the government's reluctance to modernise the production at places that were traditionally agricultural, but with the introduction of free trade changed their inhabitants' job division and stopped being self sufficient. This caused shortages in food supplies nationwide. The arrival of Christian missionaries undermined the Confucian traditional system of class divisions and inspired young single male Chinese to use the opportunity of free trade in the Guangzhou port and board one of the trade ships in pursue of a better life overseas. The internal economic pressure together with revolts and corrupt bureaucratic and military systems were other factors pointing to the fact that the end of the Qing dynasty was inevitable.

The situation of British traders also became more complicated. The Chinese Emperor did not realise how involved China became in terms of the international trade and repeatedly refused to meet British delegations that stated their attempt to negotiate better trading conditions for their country. The British main objection was that the Chinese middlemen, who often had to pay special taxes introduced by *hoppo*, became an obstacle to successful trade. Due to the extra payments they often lacked money to purchase the contracted amount of tea and silk for British ships. They usually solved the situation by borrowing money from the British traders which in a long term perspective often resulted in their bankruptcy. Members of the British East India Company started to complain.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in 1834, London sent

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<sup>19</sup> Fairbank, 226.

a British High Officer into Canton to assure the supervision over the trade that was now free and highly competitive. The British High Officer refused to negotiate with Chinese traders of *kohong* and insisted on being treated with the appropriate respect. This demand was unacceptable for the Qing Emperor. He could not risk the loss of the exclusive position he had in Chinese hierarchy. (The Emperor's traditionally respected superiority was immensely important in terms of keeping order in densely populated China.) The Chinese Emperor tried to stop British import of opium and solve the problem of Chinese drug addicts by preventing them from purchasing more drugs.<sup>20</sup> In 1839, Beijing decided to appoint Lin Zesu, an officer with a reputation of incorruptibility and no compromise, a governor of the South provinces and sent him to Canton with strict orders to solve the opium problem. Lin Zesu ordered the imprisoning of foreigners in their dwellings and demanded that they burn the opium they had in stock.<sup>21</sup> He also ordered the public destruction of a British ship that carried chests of opium. As a result of Lin Zesu's repressions, British importers opted for the idea of piracy.<sup>22</sup> These, together with some other factors, were the fertile grounds for the military conflicts that were to follow. Dr. William Jardine, the British representative in Hong Kong, went back to Britain where he helped Lord Palmerston with the strategy and defining of the targets in the Opium War, as the conflict is now known. China was forced to capitulate and accept the conditions stated by Britain in one of the many Unequal Treaties signed between Chinese and British Empires.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fairbank, 228 – 232.

<sup>21</sup> Fairbank, 232.

<sup>22</sup> Fairbank, 543 – 544.

<sup>23</sup> Fairbenk, 233.

Subsequently, in January 1841, the British navy claimed Hong Kong territory, a sparsely populated island with nothing but a fishing community. Hong Kong was of a strategic importance to Britain due to its location. It was to serve as a British base enabling connection with inland China. In August 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed. Hong Kong became a British colony and more ports as Canton, Shanghai, Amoy, Fuzhou and Ningbo were opened to opium trade. In 1843, foreigners obtained the extra-territoriality right, which meant that if a British citizen committed a crime in Qing China, he or she would be tried in a British council under British law.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese attitude towards foreigners had not changed in light of this crisis, rather on contrary. The Chinese Emperor called foreigners “the foreign devils or the Barbarians” and tried to separate them from the ethnic Chinese as much as possible. He succeeded mainly thanks to Chinese patriotism and the traditional perception of values worshiped by all Chinese people. The Chinese extensive bureaucratic system also played an important role in the process. The change of the Emperor’s attitude towards foreigners came with the Taiping Rebellion that attempted to use the natural disasters of the time (droughts followed by floods and famine) and people’s dissatisfaction with the help they were getting from Beijing and change the ruling system of China. But the love of tradition and fear of the unknown was stronger and helped to defeat the rebellion together with the military help that came from the French and the British.<sup>25</sup> The Emperor learned his lesson and started to think that he could become more tolerant towards the Western methods and models. He decided

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<sup>24</sup> Bakešová, Ivana. *Československo – Čína 1918 – 1949*. Rakovník: Nový a spol., 1997.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/modern2.html#taiping>. 20 March 2006.

to adopt Western diplomatic practices and adapt them to local needs. China started sending young men to study abroad. (Yung Wing, the first Chinese student abroad, had already graduated from the university of Yale in 1854.<sup>26</sup>)

There were also more armed conflicts during the British presence in Hong Kong (including the presence of their warships and gunboats) that were more or less directly connected with the British business interests. In 1860, British and French armies invaded Peking during the Taiping Rebellion that was directed against the “demon worshippers” in the name of God. During this invasion British troops destroyed the Summer Palace, but they managed to restore order. This conflict was followed by the British Chinese Pact of Informal Mutual Support. Britain wanted to help China keep its inner stability in order to protect its business. Britain also supported China in its activities connected with an introduction of the new system of financial controls and less complicated business regulations. The British army helped to keep the Qing dynasty in power and played its role in Chinese inner affairs.<sup>27</sup> China answered in 1861 by establishing an institution regulating the proceedings of affairs connected with the relationship of China towards foreigners living on its territory (the extra-territoriality status).

The opium trade continued and flourished. In 1873, Britain set a record in the amount of the drugs brought into the country. China, weakened by the war with Japan (1894 – 95), could no longer resist the foreign demands and when Russia, Germany, Britain, Japan and France claimed the zones of their interests, China conformed. Britain executed a 99-year lease of the New Territories; specifically the

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/gyzg/t176042.htm>. 30 March 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Fairbank, 250.

Shandong peninsula with the city of Hong Kong<sup>28</sup> and started introducing its own principles to the inhabitants of its new territories under their jurisdiction. Neither the United States nor Canada were present on the scene. It was not until 1899 when the USA introduced its proposal of “an open door” policy in China, a policy that would grant equal duties and privileges in all treaty ports to all foreign countries present. This proposal was accepted by all foreign nations except Russia that had already enjoyed a privileged status.<sup>29</sup> The Ethnic Chinese opposed the idea of free market and free trading zone principles just as they opposed the presence of foreigners living under different jurisdiction. This was parallel with the opposition of the Ethnic Chinese from the rest of China against the overall foreign presence in the country and the foreigners’ growing influence over the court in Beijing. The protests resulted in the Boxer uprising in 1900 – 1901 aimed against the Chinese Christians and foreign missions. The allied forces marched into Beijing once again and the Qing dynasty was once again defeated by foreigners and had to accept the much hated foreign hegemony over China.

### **British Presence in Hong Kong**

The situation in Hong Kong was and is still different. Hong Kong became a prosperous megalopolis that differed greatly from all other Chinese cities. It did not remind its visitors of the communist China of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the poverty

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<sup>28</sup> Fairbank, 553.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/modern2.html#movement>. 30 March 2006.

Chinese village people lived in, but the British presence in Hong Kong was restricted. Already in 1984, China and Britain signed a contract of reverting of the Hong Kong's territory under the rule of the Beijing government. In 1992, the last British governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten passed on more pro democratic reforms, e.g. suffrage for more voters. The People's Republic of China was strictly against the reforms. In 1995, in the last election to the Hong Kong's Legislature the Democratic Party won. On December 11, 1996 Tung Tien Hua, a rich ship builder, was elected the first Hong Kong's governor of Chinese origin by the 400-member Legislation appointed by Beijing. He chose new members of the Hong Kong government on 24 January 1997; only two of the previous government members stayed at their previous positions.<sup>30</sup>

On July 1, 1997, the territory reverted to Chinese sovereignty after over 150 years under British rule. Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Tong Chee Hwa, was a first Beijing-anointed chief executive of Hong Kong. He held the top office for the first five years and was re-elected on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002. Under his administration, China controlled defence and foreign relations, but Hong Kong remained an economic powerhouse. Its freewheeling, free-market philosophy and entrepreneurial drive are still vigorous, although people started to be more concerned due to the recent economic slowdown. Mr. Tong turned in his resignation on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2005 and stated ill health as the reason. Mr. Donald Cang Yam-kuen was elected on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005 and it was decided that he will only serve the two remaining years of Mr. Tong's term. Some of the other keys to Hong Kong's development that are still relevant are the

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.datamonitor.../product.asp?pid-section4.htm>. 26 April 2002.

lack of trade barriers, clear regulations and the free flow of capital. These economic factors remain intact. English is still, together with Chinese the official language, universally understood in business circles. Three-quarters of the population are Buddhists or Taoists as it was before the arrival of the British.<sup>31</sup>

There are also a few new battlegrounds, but Mr. Tsang will first have to convince the critics who saw Mr. Tong as Beijing's man in Hong Kong, rather than Hong Kong's defender in Beijing that he is more pro Beijing oriented. Mr. Tong's situation was difficult due to a combination of economic and political factors. In October 1997, speculative attacks against the Hong Kong dollar's link to the US dollar forced a sharp rise in interest rates. As the regional crisis spread, demand for Hong Kong's exports also decreased. Hong Kong was then struggling to emerge from its most severe recession in a generation.<sup>32</sup> It is still plagued with falling prices, or deflation, making it harder for businesses to make a profit. Prices had dropped by 4 % annually over the last two years of Mr. Tong's presence in office. It reflected a weak economy, but it made the territory more competitive internationally. Sales to the US and Europe shot up dramatically and demand also rose significantly in Asia. The territory's leadership has now acknowledged the aforementioned problems and started to work on remedies.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong residents before the hand over have survived. In short, day-to-day life for most of the population has changed little. Beijing's decision on strategies applied in Hong Kong was to keep it

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<sup>31</sup> Fairbank, 553.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

the Western metropolis, but to limit its independence. It is, however, evident that the Chinese government will not be able to keep the economic prosperity Hong Kong enjoyed under the British supremacy.

The decline in Hong Kong's economy shows that the Chinese and the British were able to co-exist at the territory, yet unable to merge and learn from each other. Their patriotism prevented them from developing further cultural links and allowing mutual influence. We should not praise Britain for its tolerance towards Chinese traditional way of living, culture and religion as their right to dominate the Chinese people was acquired by the use of military power and their presence tolerated and regarded as the inevitable, but it is just to say that they could have treated the Chinese culture in much harsher way.

### **North American Presence**

The attitude of the Western powers towards China was strangely ambivalent. On the one hand, they did their best to undermine what they considered to be restrictive trading and governmental regulations; the best example of which was the British smuggling of opium into Southern China. Other examples included the rights of foreign navies to sail up Chinese rivers and waterways without any restrictions and control on the Chinese side and last but not least an important privilege was the extra-territoriality status granted to foreign citizens living on Chinese soil. Most of these "rights" were introduced and obtained by force under



a series of treaties that came to be known as the “Unequal Treaties of the 1960s”.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, foreigners kept helping the ailing Qing dynasty to suppress any domestic uprisings and to keep the traditional ruling system unchanged despite the fact that they considered everything Chinese “backward and primitive.” The Western powers were interested in “the carving up of China for their own purposes, and that, paradoxically, required keeping China together.”<sup>35</sup> They had to that point taken over Asian countries and territories (e.g. Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Annam, Chinese Turkistan, Korea, etc.) that traditionally paid tribute to the Chinese Emperor whom they recognized as their “protector” and China thus lost its status of a key Asian power, a loss that has never been fully accepted by the official representatives of China.

US contacts with China were also initially of a strictly economic character. It is believed that Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s grandfather, Warren Delano, made a fortune in China selling opium. The political powers fully came into the scene with the person of Sun Yatzen, called by the Chinese people “The Father of the Revolution of 1911”. Sun Yatzen studied English in Hawaii, was baptised in Hong Kong by an American missionary in around 1885 and, after 1895, was in exile in Europe, the USA, Canada and Japan. When he was expelled from Japan he went to the United States to raise funds for his revolution. He was deeply influenced by Alexander Hamilton and Abraham Lincoln, two of the Founding Fathers of American Democracy. They influenced him to such an extent that he decided to drop his original idea of turning China into a Constitutional Monarchy (following

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<sup>34</sup> Bakešová, Ivana. *Československo – Čína 1918 – 1949*. Rakovník: Nový a spol., 1997. (p. 71).

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

the British model) and attempted to transform it into the People's Republic (government of the people, by the people, for the people as Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg Address).<sup>36</sup> Sun Yazen, the officially recognised founder of the nationalist party Kuomintang, was appointed, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1913, Provisional President of the Republic of China.<sup>37</sup> The United States military presence in mainland China was documented for the first time during World War II when the US troops came to the Chinese aid. Their presence, however, was not of a long term nature. After the war between the Communist and the Nationalist forces broke out, US troops withdrew from China in early 1947 and the USA limited its activities to providing finances for the Nationalists. This was never forgotten by the Communists and it took many years before the US–Chinese diplomatic relations improved.

The Canadian-Chinese situation was slightly different from the US-Chinese one. The Canadian presence in mainland China is not mentioned in connection with early traders or the armed conflicts between the Chinese and the foreign forces during the Taiping rebellion. Canada was not among the countries that claimed their zones of interests in mainland China towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sun Yazen's stay in Canada during his exile may be considered as the first relevant mention of Canadian influence on the Chinese inner affairs. Therefore, it is possible to conceive of the Canadian-Chinese history and foreign relations as a relatively new phenomenon.

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<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun\\_Yat-sen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Yat-sen). 1 April 2006.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

### **3) The Chinese Abroad**

#### **In Britain**

The reasoning behind the low number of Chinese immigrants into Great Britain is even more complicated. China has developed strong feelings against the British and was never able to get over the humiliation caused by the British presence in Hong Kong. The British were, in the eyes of the Chinese, “invaders” who dared to impose their own rules onto the Chinese sovereign empire. Therefore, the orthodox Chinese were reluctant to migrate to a country that refused to treat them as their equals (leaving alone the fact that it were the Chinese who started the notion of the British not being their equals). Significantly, Sun Yazen also strengthened the Chinese reservations towards the British by comparing Great Britain and its treating of the colonised nations to the farmers’ treatment of silkworms.<sup>38</sup> The post-colonial trauma can thus be seen as the major limiting factor in regards to Chinese emigration to Great Britain.

#### **In North America**

There are several reasons explaining why the Chinese presence in North America and elsewhere in the Western world has been and to a certain extent still is so scarce despite the fact that a total of 30 million ethnic Chinese live outside China. Chinese isolationism and xenophobia were already discussed. It is safe to

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<sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun\\_Yat-sen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Yat-sen). 1 April 2006.

say that till the 1840s there were only few privileged envoys and tradesmen who were allowed to travel abroad from mainland China. It is true, that the tradition of the Chinese migration in Asia was long and not unknown to the British traders as it provided rich source of cheap labour in their colonies, but it traditionally originated in the inner social and economic conditions. The immigrants were mostly welcomed by the neighbouring rulers as the labour shortage, a result of a low population, troubled all but Chinese and Indian nations, e.g. Siam, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.<sup>39</sup> With the arrival of the white colonists, the number of Chinese immigrants and the variety of their social and economic roles in many Southeast Asian countries increased. The Chinese were mostly employed in tin and gold mining and in cultivation of commercial crops.<sup>40</sup> However, the phenomenon of Chinese migration to the Western countries arose only with the expansion of the free trade in some of the Chinese southern ports. In 1852, a group of twenty five thousand exclusively male Chinese immigrants arrived in San Francisco with the attempt to improve their life standing, attracted by the Gold Rush. American cheap labour seekers were quick in hiring them for railroad constructions, commercial farms and ranch operations, as well as for the shipping industry, but not in granting them the US citizenship:

1856 In *Hall v. People*, the California Supreme Court overturns the conviction of a white man who had murdered a Chinese man, ruling that the testimony of Chinese witnesses was inadmissible because the Chinese were ‘a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of

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<sup>39</sup> Tarling, Nicholas, General Editor. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: From c. 1800 to the 1930s, volume Three*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. (p. 106).

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point, as their history has shown; differing in language, opinions, color, and physical conformation; between whom and ourselves nature has placed an impassable difference' and as such had no right 'to swear away the life of a citizen' or participate 'with us in administering the affairs of our Government.'<sup>41</sup>

It was thus not surprising that when the last Qing Emperor decided to support the learning of the Western ways and started sending scholars and merchants abroad, the United States answered in 1859 by excluding the Chinese immigrants from American schools and in 1882 by passing the Chinese Exclusion Acts that were supported by subsequent laws enacted by Congress to restrict Chinese immigration.<sup>42</sup> These Acts were repealed in December 1943 only to be replaced by a quota system that only allowed 105 Chinese immigrants per year into the whole of the United States.<sup>43</sup> There was a massive emigration wave reported in post war China, but the emigrants took refuge elsewhere than in the United States. It is true that in 1948 fifteen thousand Chinese scholars were granted refugee status after a Communist government was elected in China, but this act led to the breaking off of diplomatic ties with the newly formed People's Republic of China. The Communist government did not allow people to travel abroad and thus it was almost impossible for the Chinese to emigrate. The situation improved only after 1979 when diplomatic relations were re-established between the United States and the People's Republic of China and both parties decided to honour the 1868 Burlingame–Seward Treaty that recognized the right of US and Chinese citizens to emigrate. Long

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/asian\\_voices/asian\\_timeline.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/asian_voices/asian_timeline.cfm). 27 April 2006.

<sup>42</sup> <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/chinese6.html>. 1 April 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*

separated families thus became reunited.<sup>44</sup> The number of Chinese in the United States has since then continued to grow. Despite the fact that they still represent less than 1 % of the total population of the United States, Chinese communities can nowadays be found in all parts of America. Based on information obtained from the 1990 Census, at 1.645 million, Chinese formed the largest Asian-American ethnic group in the United States. This number, a 104% increase over the 806,000 Chinese counted in the 1980 Census, represented 0.7% of the 1990 U.S. population.<sup>45</sup> Of these, approximately 920,000 ethnic Chinese were foreign-born (including those from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan). 5.6 % of immigrants admitted to the United States between 1995 and 1998 were Chinese. China was thus the second highest ranked country of origin of new immigrants. Next Census showed that the United States population was 281.4 million on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000. Of the total, 11.9 million, or 4.2 %, of respondents marked themselves as Asian-Americans out of which 22.4 % were Chinese-Americans; Chinese were marked the fastest growing racial group in the US. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006 the US Census Bureau reported that full 5 percent, 13.5 million, of the US population are Asian-Americans, 8.7 million of which (65 percent) were born in Asia.<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact, that the Asian-Americans living in the USA form a relatively small group, they have always been very visible due to their way of living in communities.

Similarly, Canada had periods of accepting and limiting Chinese immigration to the country. There were 4 periods of migration: The period of free

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<sup>44</sup> <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/chinese6.html>. 1 April 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, Sam. *A Portrait of America Based on the 1990 Census*. Crown, 1993. (p. 263).

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/history/dec43.htm>. 27 April 2006.

entry: 1858-1884; the period of restricted entry: 1885-1923; the period of exclusion: 1924-1947; and the period of selective entry: 1948 to the present. During the first period, Chinese immigrants were permitted to enter and leave Canada without restriction. During that period, all Canadian Chinatowns were located exclusively in British Columbia. The second period of migration saw the federal government restrict Chinese immigration by means of a head tax. The period of restricted entry ended with the Immigration Act of 1923 (Exclusion Act), which virtually prohibited any Chinese immigrants from entering Canada. During this period, the Chinese population across Canada declined. Some of the Chinatowns were not only depopulated, but disappeared forever. After the Exclusion Act was repealed in 1947, the admission of Chinese immigrants was resumed with restrictions.<sup>47</sup>

Canada of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was a rural society like China and therefore it might have appeared an easy place for the Chinese to get established. The first Chinese community was reported in British Columbia in 1788. It was a community of tradespeople and landless hired hands (sharecroppers, rice peddlers, boatmen and cobblers).<sup>48</sup> The first community of settlers with 3,000 members was encountered in 1858 with reference to the Gold Rush. As the Chinese started arriving not only from mainland China, but also from the United States, the Canadian government started introducing discriminatory laws and regulations which caused that there were restrictions introduced in connection with citizenship rights and occupational competition. In the 1880s, Chinese workers were mainly hired for railroad building and they moved westward with the work. In 1884

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<sup>47</sup> <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/generations/index2.html>. 13 April 2006.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

a demographic report was produced which revealed that there were 10,492 Chinese living in towns and cities in British Columbia. Four thousand of them were railway workers living in makeshift tents along railway lines from the Fraser Canyon to Craigellachie.<sup>49</sup> In 1888, members of the Chinese community living in Toronto started opening their first laundries, but they experienced hostility from Canadian citizens.<sup>50</sup> In 1923, Victoria Chung was the first Chinese immigrant to graduate from the University of Toronto School of Medicine.<sup>51</sup> The Chinese immigrants' situation improved after WW II as the Chinese proved to be valuable members of the Canadian troops. In 1958, the first Chinese-Canadian citizen, Douglas Jung, became a Member of Parliament. In 1986, the Canadian government started an "investor immigration program" that became very popular with wealthy Chinese businessmen from mainland China and the Chinese ethnic group also became the fastest growing racial group in Canada. According to the 2001 Census, there were more than one million ethnic Chinese living in Canada.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/generations/index2.html>. 13 April 2006.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*



#### 4) Summary

To summarise, we can state that the Chinese, in their modern history, have established communities that are able to co-exist with other nations at various territories, both in mainland China (e.g. in Hong Kong and Shanghai) or in the English speaking countries (e.g. London, San Francisco or Toronto China Towns), yet on very limited bases. Their cultural tradition, rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism does not allow for merging with or using adapted parts of any foreign cultures, just as it does not permit moving up the social ladder and changing one's status within the community he or she was born into. Confucianism is traditionally defined as:

A secular code of ethics that up till 1905 strictly governed political and ideological life, that stressed the subordination of the subject to the ruler and that also governed human relationships. It emphasized the family as a key to peace, order and good government in society. The first rule of the Confucian household required that the oldest male be recognized as its head. The patriarchal hierarchy stressed the subordination of the son to the father, wife to the husband, younger brother to older brother. The authority of the oldest male also gave him control over the destiny of his immediate household and families related by kinship, as well as those with clan ties. However, emigration to the New World changed all that.<sup>52</sup>

Buddhism, on the other hand, is learning and philosophy based on the teaching of the Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, who lived in the 5th century BC.<sup>53</sup> It is believed that, through practicing yoga and meditation, Buddha discovered the true nature of

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<sup>52</sup> <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/generations/index2.html>. 17 April 2006.

<sup>53</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>. 20 April 2006.

reality and found way to liberation from all kinds of sufferings in life – the enlightenment. It is also believed that anyone is capable of following Buddha's path and reaching the state of Nirvana. As Nirvana represents the ultimate and only desirable state of one's mind in the Buddhist teaching, it is difficult for the believers to accept any other alternative.

Therefore, first generation immigrants would rather enclose themselves in the China Towns where they can observe their traditions and in relation to their children pretend that the traditions do not apply as the children were born in other/different circumstances. The second generation immigrants are thus troubled by two major contradicting forces: They regret the absence of the home country and cultural tradition (that has been replaced by the Western cultural tradition from the surrounding environment), but at the same time they are unable to merge with the new society without losing the limited amount of national identity based on their physiognomy and their perception by the outer world, which paradoxically results in their artificial adoption of what they perceive as their Chinese specificity. This fact very much prevents any positive effect two or more coexisting cultures can have on one another. Chinese patriotism, which the Chinese character is based on, regardless whether inborn or imposed by upbringing or socio economic circumstances, has always prevented the members of any traditional Chinese society, home or abroad, from developing further cultural links and allowing for mutual influence of the cultures that were or are meeting at the same geopolitical field. One of the means of overcoming this isolationism is tolerance and understanding of the mutual cultural specifics and differences, understanding that

can be mediated through literary texts. As literature is the means through which problematic social, cultural and personal issues can be portrayed without having to face the risk of being accused of politically charged motivations behind one's writing or better said with the risk being minimised by the options of claiming that one's writing's sole purpose is its artistic value.

Many literary critics have for long focused on the portrayal of migration and its influence on the human psychic in seemingly autobiographical novels, short stories and poems. Their main focus was the authors' dealing with the problem how settling in a new cultural environment influences the family life and the ways the immigrants handle their feelings of loss of their homeland. Many psychologists claim that:

The movement from one society to another is often accompanied by intense feelings of psychological dislocation. Migrants often experience a sense of profound loss at leaving their homeland as well as the pangs of adapting to a new society.<sup>54</sup>

It is evident from their novels and short stories that many writers acknowledge the above argument and base their writing around it. Some of them further add to it their genuine belief that migration often inverts generational relationships. It is much easier for the second generation, in other words for the children born in the new country, to learn the language spoken there and to acquire new ways of living than it is for their parents. Many of the authors also suggest that women are often more successful than men in making the transition to a new life style. The knowledge of the language of their new home country is crucial for overcoming the

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<sup>54</sup> [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\\_display.cfm?HHID=435](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=435). 27 April, 2006.

cultural barriers set before the immigrants. It is the lack of language knowledge that makes the first generation immigrants so visible and different in their new host societies and conversely, it is the knowledge of the language that allows the second generation immigrants merge fully with their new societies and cultures, the knowledge that at the same time creates an obstacle in attempting to grasp the culture of their parents' home country, in other words, in building up the awareness of their own ethnicity.

### **III. Amy Tan**

#### **1) Introduction**

Amy Tan, second generation Chinese-American by both parents, is a perfect example of the preceding argument. She often emphasises that she writes first and foremost as an artist and that she began to write fiction solely as a creative release from the exhausting freelance business writing that she used to do for living. However, the generally held opinion is that she writes about the Chinese immigrants to communicate the issue of Chinese-ness in America, to illustrate the Chinese situation, traditions and thoughts to the non-Chinese readers. It is believed that her major objective is to open her readers to new perspectives to their own life as well as to the life of other ethnic or religious groups, in short, that she writes with the aim to portray the Chinese-American social and cultural relations. This Thesis will prove that the critics are mistaken and that Amy Tan writes exclusively for the North American readers both from the American mainstream culture and from the Chinese traditional culture.

Amy Tan was born on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1952 in Oakland, California. She is by no means an example of an orthodox Chinese who would value Chinese cultural heritage above all. When she was six years old, her parents were told that she had a brain to become a doctor and she, according to her own words “accepted the charge”, but it was for the last time in her personal or professional life when she decided to listen to the authorities. She often felt alienated and alone as her family moved to a new neighbourhood nearly every year. She was accepted by her school

mates as the child that wanted to please the adults which, naturally, did not make her very popular in their eyes and went hand in hand with the American stereotypical perception of second generation Chinese-Americans.<sup>55</sup> "I felt ashamed of being different and ashamed of feeling that way," she remarked in a *Los Angeles Times* interview with Elaine Woo.<sup>56</sup> Her feelings were caused to a larger extent by the fact that from the third grade until she graduated from the high school that her parents chose for her, she was the only Chinese-American girl in her class. She said in the same interview about her parents: "They wanted us to have American circumstances and Chinese character."<sup>57</sup> But all they achieved was that their daughter started to hate everything Chinese, her appearance and heritage included. She fully realised her mistake only after a series of life endangering events that happened to her family members. Therefore, after Tan's mother almost died in 1986, Tan decided to take her to China and to change her career of a freelance business writer to a career of a novelist. It was probably in her class of Creative Writing where she realised that her Chinese origin, that is still associated with the touch of exoticism by many readers and thus in fashion, is her advantage over the other future writers. During her trip to China with her mother in 1987, Tan experienced the feelings of alienation from her home land and from her own countrymen. When she realised that she looked Chinese, was perceived as Chinese-American by Americans and resisted by the Chinese, her perspective shifted. She started to focus more on her Chinese side and started to criticise the American

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<sup>55</sup> [http://education.yahoo.com/homework\\_help/cliffsnotes/the\\_joy\\_luck\\_club/1.html](http://education.yahoo.com/homework_help/cliffsnotes/the_joy_luck_club/1.html). 11 May, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Woo, Elaine. "Interview with Amy Tan." *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 1989.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

notion of a seemingly tolerant society towards immigrants. She even said in one of her interviews after the success of her first novel *The Joy Luck Club*: “There is this myth that America is a melting pot, but what happens in assimilation is that we end up deliberately choosing the American things —hot dogs and apple pie— and ignoring the Chinese offerings.”<sup>58</sup> She thus became a stereotypical second generation Chinese-American female writer that managed to grasp the superficial part of her Chinese-ness, add to it what she was able to learn from her mother and present it to her readers in a well structured way. Tan, undoubtedly, has an advantage over any American or British writer who would attempt to write from the Chinese perspective without having the option of consulting people with a first hand life experience. Any non Chinese reader can thus accept her writing as “the Chinese thing,” but to the Chinese readers it must become apparent from the very first page that her writing is only an attempt at writing from the Chinese perspective as she lacks the Chinese experience in reading and familiarising the Chinese literary canon. This is perhaps not what she is attempting to achieve. She has never become fluent in Chinese just as she has never stated that it would be her ambition to have her books published in mainland China. It were others, who wrote that she was able to see the Chinese specifics from the American perspective and vice versa. It is true, that we can identify in her novels and short stories all aspects that a hyphenated writing should possess. There are both Chinese and American elements, but to what extent authentic will be further discussed. She is often accused of adjusting her works to the tastes of the dominant white culture that simplifies and makes exotic

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<sup>58</sup> Wang, Dorothy. “A game of Show and Not Tell.” *Newsweek*, 17 April 1989, p. 68.

the stereotypes of Asian women and thus of becoming inauthentic, yet there are critics who praise her for embracing the concept of multiplicity and heterogeneity.

Amy Tan writes her novels, essays and short stories in English that is of the highest linguistic and artistic level. She has a master's degree in English and linguistics from San Jose City College where she also entered their Ph.D. programme in linguistics, but later decided not to finish it.<sup>59</sup> Her clever use of language together with her humour that at times escalates into sarcasm and her use of symbols and myths are other hallmarks of her writing. Her specific treatment of themes, symbols and metaphors lies in her constancy of their portrayal in her works. She tends to instruct the readers on the reading of the myths and symbols as she usually gives them "users' instructions" in a form of a Chinese fable or parable in which she introduces the theme or topic she is going to explore further. After the initial introduction, the theme is repeated and explained in the following chapter or work with the use of examples and parallels from the American everyday life. As she portrays the cultures as monolithic and static, she portrays the symbols and myths as given and unchangeable. She is herself a product of a stereotypical perception of the Chinese culture and thus tends to treat it in the same way. Rarely, she breaks the stereotypes, but when she does, it is only to strengthen them later. She is able to mediate different cultural experience, but her images are, at times, highly stylised. Her novels are thus immensely popular among readers with other than Chinese cultural background, but as she only portrays China before World War II, her writing cannot even be successfully challenged by the contemporary readers

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<sup>59</sup> Blake, Fanny. "Profile of Amy Tan" in Amy Tan. *The Opposite of Fate*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. (p. 2).



and literary critics from mainland China of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They admit that her China is highly imaginary and stylised, but they still praise her for her ability to speak to her readers' minds and convince them that all her characters proudly sooner or later embrace their Chinese-ness.

## 2) The Joy Luck Club

*The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan's first novel was first published in 1989. Tan intended to name it "Wind & Water" which very well reflects her return to her Chinese heritage as wind and water are two natural elements that play very significant roles in Chinese mythology. As Claude Lévi-Strauss states in his essay "The Structural Study of Myth", similar myths have different meanings in different cultures.<sup>60</sup> It is difficult for readers of different cultural heritages to fully understand foreign myths and mythemes without studying them thoroughly. This, together with other marketing strategies motivated ones, were probably the reasons why Tan's agent suggested that she names her first novel *The Joy Luck Club*.<sup>61</sup>

The novel consists of sixteen interwoven narratives and four very short Chinese fables that can either be read as independent short stories or as a novel with multiple narrators, framed by the story of Suyuan Woo (that is narrated by her daughter Jing-Mei Woo), as a novel in which the notions of time and space are truly post-modern. Amy Tan forces the protagonists to oscillate between China and America, between their adult and juvenile selves. The reading of the novel as a series of 16 short stories and four fables, suggested by some literary critics, will prevent the readers from grasping the overall meaning and message of the book which is the search of the daughters for their mothers. The novel is based around four first-generation-immigrant mothers and second-generation-immigrant

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<sup>60</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Analogy: "The Structural Study of Myth"*. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

<sup>61</sup> Blake, Fanny. "Profile of Amy Tan" in Amy Tan. *The Opposite of Fate*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. (p. 4).

daughters who all know one another and divided into four sections, each section containing of four narratives:

The Mothers:

Suyuan Woo  
An-mei Hsu  
Lindo Jong  
Ying-ying St. Clair

The Daughters:

Jing-mei "June" Woo  
Rose Hsu Jordan  
Waverly Jong  
Lena St. Clair

In the first four stories, that are narrated from the perspective of a grownup first generation immigrant who recalls the time when she as a little girl still lived in China, each mother speaks of her relationship with her mother. The unifying element of the stories is the mothers' fear that their daughters will never cherish the memories of them the same way they cherish the memories of their mothers. This theme is reemployed in Tan's later works, namely in *The Kitchen God's Wife* where Pearl's mother still cherishes the memory of her mother who left her when she was just a little girl because she was "educated against Confucius thinking" and that was "what got her into trouble"<sup>62</sup> and suffers due to her daughter's indifference to her feelings and worries that are to show how much she cares.

In the second part of the book, their daughters retell stories of their childhood and portray their relationship with their mothers. These stories are narrated from the perspective of a second-generation-immigrant child. The choice of a child as a main character enabled Tan to introduce the problem of the Chinese identity in the United States of the twentieth century and introduce the theme of the daughters' search for their own identities in their specific situations. The American-

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<sup>62</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992. (p. 123).

born children are not stigmatised by the problematic identification of their home country the way their parents are and they do not have to come to terms with the fact that they decided to emigrate and escape the suffering endured by the other family members, but, as was already mentioned, second-generation immigrants have to face other dilemma - the dilemma set before them by the easily acceptable and readily available American democracy in the streets and their parents' conservative tradition at home. The children thus end up living two lives. This schizophrenia either brings the two coexisting cultures closer together or causes that the children chose one at the cost of losing the other. By choosing to portray children, Tan provides herself with the opportunity to deal with the parent-child relationship as well as with the issue of social assimilation of the ethnic Chinese in the United States, pointing out that the situation of the Chinese-Americans is further complicated by the fact that they are unable to merge fully with the new society since their ethnicity will always be apparent based on their physiognomy.

In the third section, the daughters have grown up and they reveal their adult dilemmas related to their marriages and professional careers. The daughters share the belief that their mothers still "have their heads in China", however, in their quest for solutions of their own situations, they, paradoxically, turn to their mothers and re-evaluate their mutual relationships.

In the final part, we watch the mothers in their struggle to find solutions and ways out of their daughters' problems in personal or professional lives. The mothers try to show support and understanding and offer solutions that would be acceptable to their daughters. They realise in the process, that they, too, had changed through

their daily interaction with the American mainstream culture and that they no longer see things from the exclusively Chinese perspective as is best seen in “Double Face”. Tan works with this topic again in *The Hundred Secret Senses* where she shows that even Kwan, the girl with Yin eyes, adopts American habits, e.g. buying things on sale and returning them to stores later.

Jing-mei Woo is the only daughter who narrates her stories not only in the daughters’ sections, but also in the mothers’ sections, but the space she is given in the mothers’ sections in fact belongs to her mother Suyuan Woo. Jing-mei tells her mother’s stories as the voice of an already dead person as the story narrator was yet to enter Tan’s writing strategy. *The Joy Luck Club* portrays among the stereotypes traditionally associated with the Chinese minority (traditionally perceived as hard working, passively resistant, with close-knit families and children that are successful at schools), the struggle to maintain the mother-daughter bond despite cultural and generational differences.<sup>63</sup> By travelling to China and fulfilling her mother’s wish, Jing-mei not only overcomes the oppositions between the Chinese and American cultures and generations, but she also brings hope to the lives of the other mothers, hope that one day their daughters, too, will fully understand them.

The opening fable, “Feathers from a Thousand Li Away”, serves as an introduction to the themes and symbols the novel draws upon and establishes the desired reading perspective,<sup>64</sup> this technique is repeated with each section of the novel. Each of the four sections is also introduced by a one-page-long parable

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<sup>63</sup> Broomley, Roger. *Narratives for a New Belonging, Diasporic Cultural Fictions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. (p. 40).

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*

demonstrating the point the author is about to elaborate. Tan is in her way of using themes and symbols consistent. At first she only hints at a particular theme, but later elaborates it in a greater detail. For example the meeting of long lost relatives from the closing scene of *The Joy Luck Club* is further explored in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Tan uses the technique of repetition to accentuate the message and to make her point more obvious to the readers. This narrating strategy does not correspond with the Chinese traditional way of telling stories, writing novels or composing poems. In China, the readers are expected to acquire the meanings of different symbols and the mythological tradition they are based upon in one's childhood.

To summarise, Amy Tan opted for the portrayal of the Chinese cultural aspects through American eyes and vice versa, as some critics claim, but we have to bear in mind that her Chinese experience has always been mediated by her mother's broken English and seen from Tan's Americanised perspective. The critics say that she tried to bring the two already coexisting cultures together and enable the members of the other culture (American mainstream and Chinese traditional, respectively) to see things in a broader context and from new perspectives. Her use of humour helped significantly in the quest of bringing the two and her first novel became a bestseller despite the fact that she operates from the angle of binary oppositions and consecutive simplifications of the two cultures to their most representative aspects. It is also important to realise that her perspective is in fact not of the "insider", but more of a "long term visitor" that never lived in the country

where the Chinese culture was formed and later developed and altered. Therefore, we have to limit her cultural translation only to the North American continent. She is able to translate the American culture for the Chinese living in the United States because she can use everyday objects and practices they are familiar with and draw parallels and comparisons. This advantage would be lost if she attempted to do the same for the Chinese readers living in China. Tan's artistic and language expertise is what makes the readers believe that what she writes are true Chinese stories. It is the possibility to read her novels as autobiographies that makes them more authentic in the readers' eyes.

### 3) Selected Themes and Symbols in Amy Tan's Writing

As was discussed earlier, all themes and symbols used by Amy Tan are introduced in her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* and in the four fables preceding each of the sections the novel is divided into. Tan draws upon the US "melting pot" metaphor and associated politics of assimilation that is to a certain degree supported by the choice of the immigrant mothers. As the result of their day to day confrontations with the linguistic and cultural barriers, they decide to enable their daughters to stand a better chance in life by not teaching them the Chinese language. Their daughter's better starting position in life is thus obtained at the price of sacrificing the mothers' chance to create strong mother-daughter bonds. To their greater shock, the mothers later recognise how their sacrifice prevented their daughters from understanding their complex characters and life philosophies and proved counterproductive:

'What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything. She was my mother.' The aunties are looking at me as if I had become crazy right before their eyes. 'Not know your mother?' cries auntie An-mei with disbelief. 'How can you say? Your mother is in your bones!' (...) And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. (...) They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, in "The Red Candle", Lindo's mother rather parts with her daughter to give her the opportunity to improve her social position and material comfort. This

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<sup>65</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989. (p. 31).



incident, just as the others, shows that the portrayal of the Chinese notion of children-parent love is very problematic. (See also the analysis of “Scar”.)

The novel further explores on themes of the cultural translation challenge, educational power of storytelling, problem of immigrant identity and ability to control one’s destiny both in traditional Chinese setting and in the American host society. The binary opposition between fate and faith, accentuating the belief that faith cannot change fate, and the reversal of gender roles of the immigrant families that are in Tan mostly simplified to mother-daughter relationships, are some of the other themes elaborated in this, as well as, in the other novels by Amy Tan. Her works can be seen as fictions with educational purpose and an exotic touch. Her books deal with themes that are trendy as the entire world is engaged in discussions about multiculturalism and problems connected with it.

The opening story of the first section of the novel “The Joy Luck Club” introduces the theme of ability to control one’s destiny. As Jing-mei retells her mother’s Kweilin story and reveals the motif behind idea of starting The Joy Luck Club, we realise that Suyuan’s actual motivation was her wish to change her fate and improve her desperate situation:

‘People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many people in the city were starving, (...) Others thought we were possessed by demons – to celebrate when even within our own families we had lost generations, had lost homes and fortunes, and were separated, husband from wife, brother from sister, daughter from mother. Hnnnh! How could we laugh, people asked.[’]

‘It’s not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already

lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable. How much can you wish for a favorite warm coat that hangs in the closet of a house that burned down with your mother and father inside of it? (...) What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness?[]<sup>66</sup>

The theme is repeated again in “Scar” where An-mei’s mother chooses to become a concubine instead of living in poverty of her dead husband’s household. Similarly, in “The Red Candle”, Lindo honours her parents’ promise and marries Tyan-yu, but when she discovers a way out of her unhappy marriage, she does not hesitate to take it and trick her mother-in-law into letting her out of the marriage. Lindo is only able to acquire control over her destiny thanks to her knowledge of the Chinese tradition that is based on people’s fear of demons and their blind believing in interpretations and implications of bad omens. The message Tan sends to her readers is that even in the traditional Chinese setting it was possible for women to attempt to change their fate, but, out of fear of being damned for attempting to go against the main stream and the authorities, very few did. When they did so in accordance with traditions, they succeeded; otherwise, they had to pay a very high price for their revolt. Tan contrasts the story of Am-mei’s mother, who loses touch with her children and her own mother as a result of her pursuit of better fortune, with the story of Lindo Jong, who manages to change her situation without dishonouring her parents and disregarding the ancient traditions.

In the American setting, the daughters do not have to fight tradition, but their parents in order to gain their independence, but this motif is rather universal

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<sup>66</sup> Tan, 1989, 31.

than culture specific. What Tan adds to this problematic is the first-second generation gap and misunderstandings that are caused by the cultural and language barriers.

Symbol of strong wind and its metaphorical use for the invisible strength/power that can change one's fate is repeated in the novel on numerous occasions. It is a strong wind that changes Lindo's destiny on her wedding night ("My throat filled with so much hope that it finally burst out and blew out my husband's end of the candle."<sup>67</sup>) and when Meimei talks about the first game of chess she played at a local tournament, she shares with the readers, in a passage that reminds us of a poem, the way a light wind helped her play:

‘A light wind began blowing past my ears. It whispered secrets only I could hear.[’] ‘Blow from the South,’ it murmured. ‘The wind leaves no trail.’ (...) the wind blew stronger. ‘Throw sand from the East to distract him.’ The knight came forward ready for the sacrifice. The wind hissed, louder and louder. ‘Blow, blow, blow. He cannot see. He is blind now. Make him lean away from the wind so he is easier to knock down.’

‘Check,’ I said, as the wind roared with laughter. The wind died down to little puffs, my own breath.<sup>68</sup>

The quote further suggests that there is one more interpretation option for the name of the story – game of chess as a metaphor for a power struggle for one's identity that in which Meimei strictly follows her strategies. Wind with its supernatural powers always plays a significant role in Meimei's descriptions of her chess games. The metaphor of wind as a power changing one's destiny is used again towards the end of the story: "Strongest wind cannot be seen,"<sup>69</sup> claims Meimei's mother during

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<sup>67</sup> Tan, 1989, 56.

<sup>68</sup> Tan, 1989, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Tan, 1989, 103.

their final imaginary game of chess. It is the same wind, that earlier helped Meimei win, which now defeats her. This corresponds with the above argument that only those who observe tradition and honour their parents can change their fate and get help from the supernatural powers that the wind represents. This notion takes us back to the original title that Tan wanted to use for the novel: *Wind & Water*. Fascination with wind and its magic power can be also traced in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Every time, Winnie and Helen are to experience a change in their lives, Tan uses the element of strong wind to bring the change about.

The problem of immigrant identity is most intensified in “The Voice from the Wall” where Lena explains to the readers:

My mother never talked about her life in China, but my father said he saved her from a terrible life there, some tragedy she could not speak about. My father proudly named her in her immigration papers: Betty St. Clair, crossing out her given name of Gu Ying-ying. And then he put down the wrong birthyear, 1916 instead of 1914. So, with the sweep of a pen, my mother lost her name and became a Dragon instead of a Tiger.<sup>70</sup>

This quote shows how easy it was for Lena's father to destroy his wife's integrity. It also shows that he did so with good intentions or out of carelessness, because he, due to the lack of communication between him and his wife, did not manage to understand and respect what was essential for her. He did not realise that with the change of his wife's birthday, he also changed her personality as every Chinese year is connected with one of the 12 animals from Chinese mythology and people born in a respective year possess that year's animal's characteristic features,

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<sup>70</sup> Tan, 1989, 107.

strengths and weaknesses. Tan thus shows that even the closest ones can hurt us the most despite their good intentions.

The problem of immigrant identity is paralleled with the problem of identity of Chinese women who live lives in “pursuit of someone else’s happiness” and are never asked their opinion. Their identity is derived exclusively from their husband’s identity and they are advised, in a brilliant Chinese logic, to “rather keep silent before voicing selfish desires” as “it is wrong for a woman to voice her own desires”. Therefore, it is easier for the Chinese female immigrants to adjust because they are used to accepting different identities and changing them throughout their lives.

The notion of the cultural translation challenge is introduced in the opening fable and repeated in “Double Face” where Lindo Jong asks: “Why does my daughter think she is translating English for me? Before I can even speak, she explains my thoughts.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in Lena St. Clair’s story we learn that her father would “put words into his wife’s mouth” and her daughter, despite her ability to understand Mandarin Chinese, was almost “never able to understand her mother’s meanings.” Lena admits that she often altered the English meaning of what the others said to her mother in order to make her act in a more “mainstream” way. Same translator/mediator role is ascribed to Waverly Jong and, as with many themes, elaborated and further expanded in Tan’s novel *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* where LuLing Liu Young has to translate for her nursemaid, her Precious Auntie, who is mute. Tan thus shows us that translations and mediations of meanings do not

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<sup>71</sup> Tan, 1989, 291.

only happen across cultures, but also within one cultural context. Story telling is extensively used to convey meanings that are not easy to understand. However, one of the problems of Chinese stories is that some symbols traditionally have multiple interpretations. Tan demonstrates this aspect very well in “Rules of the Game” where her last words next move can refer to the game of chess, life or space. Therefore, the role of translators/mediators who operate from the “insider’s” perspective is crucial. If, for example, An-mei did not tell us that her grandmother truly loved her, we would never know as we lack the knowledge of what all constitutes the Chinese Myth. Some narrators of Tan’s stories use American mainstream metaphors when trying to explain/translate a particular meaning or sign in the Chinese traditional culture: In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Pearl compares the Chinese funeral wreaths to “lifesavers thrown out too late”.<sup>72</sup> This brings us back to the argument that Tan only writes for the North American readers. She does not use Chinese everyday objects and metaphors to parallel the American specifics. She does not base her conclusions on American children stories, e.g. on Dr. Seuss. She is only concerned with the Chinese Myth.

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<sup>72</sup> Tan, 1992, 18.

#### 4) Myth in Amy Tan's Writing

“What is myth, today?” asks Roland Barthes in his essay “Myth Today” published in 1957 in his collection of essays called *Mythologies*. The answer given by him is that “Myth is a type of speech.”<sup>73</sup> We can see this very well in Amy Tan’s writing, in her choice of words and phrase. Barthes further expands on the topic by explaining that “myth is a system of communication, a message, a mode of signification, a form.”<sup>74</sup> It is the way in which the message is uttered that defines the myth, he says. Barthes admits that “innumerable other meanings of the word ‘myth’ can be cited against this [the definition given by him].”<sup>75</sup> One of the meanings is that myth is a fictitious, unproven or illusory thing. Tony McNeill states in his abstract describing Barthes’s *Mythologies* that: “Barthes attempts to analyse the ‘myth’ circulating in contemporary society, the false representations and erroneous beliefs current in France of his days. *Mythologies* is about the myths that circulate in everyday life, myths which construct a world for us and our place in it.”<sup>76</sup> Like Barthes, Amy Tan attempts to portray the myths that form an integral part of our everyday lives. This chapter will analyse Amy Tan’s strategy of using the Chinese Myth in the names of her novels and also depict her ways of using myths as the key part of her narrating strategy. It will further be pointed out in what ways the myths used by Tan are the false representations mentioned by Barthes.

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<sup>73</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers. London: Vintage, 2000.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

<sup>76</sup> <http://orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.htm>. 21 April 2006.

Roland Barthes's essay "Myth Today" will be used as the main theoretical foundation.

In his work *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes claims that everyday objects are "adapted to a certain type of consumption and that a type of social *usage* is added to a pure matter."<sup>77</sup> He focuses on ordinary things that surround us in our day to day lives and attempts to demonstrate that even the most trivial objects inherently encompass a deeper meaning. Further he claims that the mass culture that surrounds us is charged with signs that have the potential of expressing of a number of connotations. It is thus the interpretative role of literary criticism, by some referred to as *hermeneutics*,<sup>78</sup> which is expected to question the meanings of the cultural artefacts and practices from our immediate surroundings, within a given cultural context, as they are, inevitably, reflected by and in any literary text. It is the respective cultural context, Barthes claims, that dictates in what ways are the signs depicted, that produces specific supplementary meanings and connotations, in other words 'the secondary signs' (the means through which different meanings are imposed on objects and gestures). As it can be found in Barthes, two objects may perform the same function, but connote different things in different social or cultural contexts; to use Barthes's terminology: "different ways of conveying their secondary meanings." Such objects are in Amy Tan's first novel *The Joy Luck Club* the red candle, the jade pendant or the chess board. The signs and symbols used in literature play a similar, cultural context specific, role. "Barthes wants to stop taking things for granted, wants to bracket or suspend consideration of their function, and

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<sup>77</sup> <http://orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.htm>. 21 April 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Wellek, René. *Destroying Literary Studies*. The New Criterion, December 1983. (p. 1)



concentrate rather on what they mean and how they function as signs. In many respects what Barthes is doing is interrogating the obvious, taking a closer look at that which is generally accepted, making explicit what remains implicit. He begins by making explicit the meanings of apparently neutral objects and then moves on to consider the social and historical conditions they obscure.”<sup>79</sup> As was discussed earlier, this strategy can also be found in Amy Tan’s novels.

The potential danger of constructing our place in life based on myths that surround us lies in the fact that people tend to pick a generally spread belief, for example the belief that all Asian-American children want to please adults, and accentuate only one of the aspects creating the overall picture, in our case their seemingly “sycophantic” character type. The simplification is done in the attempt to eliminate sharp contrasts that would contradict the initial thesis statement; a danger inherent to any theory. In our example, accentuating all aspects of any Asian-American child’s character would reveal that it is the specific way of upbringing that shapes their egos in the traditional Confucian way and makes them very ambitious, but at the same time very respectful people. It is irrelevant which aspect of the myth we decide to accentuate as the relevance of the argument is judged based on our ability to trace it back to the roots of the ancient myth, claims Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay “The Structural Study of Myth”.<sup>80</sup> The sacral past in which the ancient myth was created plays a dominant part in the modern perception of myths and mythemes as it serves as the binary opposition to the profane present.

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<sup>79</sup> <http://orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.htm>. 21 April 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Analogy: “The Structural Study of Myth”*. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

The mythic moment is where the profane present meets a sacred eternity as it was during that era when all important cultural accomplishments were achieved – be it the language, the knowledge of the natural elements, of the life and earth cycles and of the advantages of living in communities. Everything that happened in the sacral past shaped the profane present and to a certain extent, also the near future. It is a historically proven fact that any economical growth and seeming stability, enabled by the improvements in our current life situation, sooner or later, lead to fear and frustration as it has been inherent to human nature, ever since the sacral past, to fear the future and the possible cause of the loss of economic stability, however loosely specified and remote; fear that mostly ensures progress and life improvement, but that in isolated cases results in chaos. Remedy can thus only be found in the myth as “the myth enables us to accept as being ‘natural’ things that are an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power obtaining in society. A mass culture, controlled by the leading powers in the society, then, constructs this mythological reality and encourages conformity to its own values. We inhabit a world of signs which support existing power structures and which purport to be natural. The role of the mythologist, as Barthes sees it, is to expose these signs as the artificial constructs that they are, to reveal their workings and show that what appears to be natural is, in fact, determined by history.”<sup>81</sup> Tan does this in her novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* in relation to the Chinese traditional order. It is only in her last novel, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, where some literary critics trace the possibility of reading it as a political satire on

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<sup>81</sup> <http://orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.htm>. 21 April 2006.

the Bush's administration: "It is tempting to read this morality tale about a group of well-meaning Americans and their hapless 'group leader', blundering into a foreign country, as a satire on the Bush administration's gung-ho foreign policy," suggests Lisa Allardice in her interview with Amy Tan.<sup>82</sup> Tan claims that it was not intentional; however, she "seems to be pleased by the idea".<sup>83</sup>

When attempting to analyse the myth in Amy Tan's writing, we do not need to undertake a long and complicated search for examples as it is already incorporated in the titles of her novels. As was stated earlier, Tan intended to name her first novel *Wind & Water*, but based on her agent's expertise, decided otherwise. She still managed to incorporate the Chinese Myth in the title, but in a way that was more intertwined with the overall message of the book:

I thought up Joy Luck on a summer night [in Kweilin during WW II] that was so hot even the moths fainted to the ground (...) I thought I needed something to do to help me move. My idea was to have a gathering of four women, one for each corner of my mah jong table. (...) Each weak one of us would host a party to raise money and to raise our spirits. The hostess had to serve special *dyansyin* foods to bring good fortune of all kinds. (...) We knew we had luxuries few people could afford. We were the lucky ones. After filling our stomachs, we would then fill a bowl with money and put it where everyone could see. Then we would sit down at the mah jong table. (...) We had to play with seriousness and think of nothing else but adding to our happiness through winning. But after sixteen rounds, we would again feast, this time to celebrate our good fortune. And then we would talk into the night until the morning, saying stories about good times in the past and good times yet to come.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Allardice, Lisa. "All about her mother". *The Guardian*, 5 December, 2005.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> Tan, 1989, 9 - 11.

The expression “Joy Luck” draws upon the Chinese tradition of using different words with similar meanings, but different extra linguistic connotations, for similar and yet different kinds of feelings or experiences (e.g. according to their cause or consequence) based on meanings of the individual elements (radicals) that joined together form a particular character. Tan attempts to simulate this Chinese specificity by putting side by side two synonyms with slightly different, yet in particular contexts similar, connotations and at the same time draw upon the notion of the American Pot Luck Parties thus demonstrating the secondary meaning of objects as suggested in Barthes.

Same strategy of employing the Chinese Myth already in the titles of her novels, was also used with her other works. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, first published in 1991, on page 58, Pearl's mother explains that what Grand Auntie left to her and her husband according to her last will is not a “Chinese dollhouse”, but an “altar for Grand Auntie's good-luck god, Kitchen God”<sup>85</sup> and retells the story to explain the full meaning of the Kitchen God's role and standing within the Chinese Pantheon:

‘Oh, this we call Kitchen God. To my way of thinking, he was not too important. Not like Buddha, not like Kwan Yin, goddess of mercy – not that high level, not even the same level as Money God. Maybe he was like a store manager, important, but still, many, many bosses above him.’ Phil chuckles at my mother's Americanized explanation of the hierarchy of the Chinese deities. I wonder if that's how she really thinks of them, or, if she's used this metaphor for our benefit. ‘(...) people in China knew Kitchen God was watching them. (...) And once a year, seven days before the new year, Kitchen God flew back up the fireplace to report [to the Jade Emperor] whose fate deserved to be

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<sup>85</sup> Tan, 1992, 58.

changed, better for worse, or worse for better.’ (...) ‘More like a spy – FBI Agent, CIA, Mafia (...) All year long you have to show him respect – give him tea and oranges. (...)’<sup>86</sup>

The quote not only demonstrates the Chinese notion of teaching through narrating stories, but also points out Tan’s brilliant way of dealing with the specificity of certain Chinese Myths. She smartly uses a metaphor from the American everyday life that can best parallel the meaning of the story within the Chinese context, drawing upon both Barthes’s notion of a deeper meaning being inherently encompassed in the most trivial objects and by Strauss postulated theory of the structural universality of myth.

Tan’s novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*, first published in 1995, observes the same principles in regards to the choice of the title, this time providing but a “simple” explanation, not deriving it from a conclusion of a story:

‘Secret sense not really secret. We just call secret because everyone has, only forgotten. Same kind of sense like ant feet, elephant trunk, dog nose, cat whisker, whale ear, bat wing, clam shell, snake tongue, little hair on flower. Many things, but mixed up together.’

‘You mean instinct.’

‘Stink? Maybe sometimes stinky— ’

‘Not stink, *instinct*. It’s a kind of knowledge you’re born with.’ (...)

‘How can I say? Memory, seeing, hearing, feeling, all come together, then you know something true in your heart. (...) You use your secret sense, sometimes can get messages back and forth fast between two people, living, dead, doesn’t matter, same sense.’<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Tan, 1992, 58 – 61.

<sup>87</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Hundred Secret Senses*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. (p. 113 - 114).

Tan's use of humour in connection with the Chinese Myth is also one of the characteristic features of her writing. In this particular case she also draws upon the Chinese notion of multiple reincarnations, past lives and the spiritual return to the sacral past, the source of our present knowledge and skills.

With the name of her next novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, first published in 2001, there appears a slight shift. Tan still uses the Chinese Myth, specifically the belief that "the dragon bones LuLing Liu Young's Precious Auntie's father, the Famous Bonesetter from the Mouth of the Mountain, once found in a cave were divine and could cure any pain, except a grieving heart."<sup>88</sup>, but she no longer makes the title a puzzle.

It is only in her most recently published novel, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, first published in 2005, when Tan returns to her original strategy, for the first time leaving out the direct article. With the knowledge of Tan's background in linguistics, we can speculate that the absence of the direct article signifies the less direct connection with the Chinese Myth portrayed in the novel. "The title is an expression to describe the logic used by Buddhist fishermen to avoid bad karma: By removing fish from water, they are saving them from drowning."<sup>89</sup> This is another of Tan's beautiful metaphors based on mundane elements and the Chinese Myth.

As was mentioned above, *The Joy Luck Club* opens "in folk mode"<sup>90</sup> with a story of an old lady that sailed to the United States with "a swan that was once a duck that stretched its neck in hopes of becoming a goose and was now too

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<sup>88</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2001. (p. 3).

<sup>89</sup> Allardice, Lisa. All about her mother. *The Guardian*, 5. December 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Broomley, 40.

beautiful to eat.”<sup>91</sup> The swan was “pulled away from her” at the immigration and all she was left with was “one feather for a memory” and her wish of a daughter that would be “just like her”, but would speak only “perfect American English”. Aboard the ship, she dreams that one day she would be able to give the swan to her daughter together with the knowledge of what it represents: “She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan — a creature that became more than what was hoped for.”<sup>92</sup> This is precisely where the first generation Chinese immigrant mothers make their mistake: They do not teach their children the Chinese language, they do not read them Chinese poetry and they translate the stories that form a major part of the Chinese traditional way of learning into broken English. The adjective broken signifies that the tradition thus also becomes broken.

Based on the use of the Chinese Myth, this opening fable introduces topics and themes that will be further elaborated on both in *The Joy Luck Club* and in Tan’s later novels: The themes of separation and alienation from their home country and their monolingual Americanised daughters experienced by the first generation Chinese-immigrant mothers:

‘I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?

I taught her how American circumstances work, (...) You do not have to sit like a Buddha under a tree letting pigeons drop their dirty business on your head. You can buy umbrella. (...) She learned these things, but I couldn’t

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<sup>91</sup> Tan, 1989, 3.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

teach her about Chinese character. How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind. (...) Why Chinese thinking is best.'<sup>93</sup>

The theme of distance and of the loss of purpose: "And then she had to fill out so many forms she forgot why she had come and what she had left behind."<sup>94</sup> This quote introduces yet another theme, the theme of forgetting that is later in the novel used as the mean of remembering – one must forget the pain to be able to remember. Another way of overcoming the pain caused by the alienation is translation. However, not all things can be translated and interpreted solely on a linguistic base. Similarly to the swan of the opening fable that is reduced to only one feather, various aspects of the Chinese traditional culture are reduced and simplified for the sake of making them comprehensible to the Americanised daughters who, paradoxically, take it upon themselves to serve as their mothers' translators in times of their confrontation with the American society and cultural tradition. The Chinese Myth and cultural tradition is thus twice simplified. Tan attempts to compensate for the simplifications by reemploying the themes later in the texts and expanding on their complexity, which is something that cannot be found in the Chinese traditional writing.

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<sup>93</sup> Tan, 1989, 289.

<sup>94</sup> Tan, 1989, 3.



## 5) Complexity of Tan's Writing

To demonstrate the complexity of Tan's writing, a detailed analysis of two stories from *The Joy Luck Club* will be undertaken: one story with an American setting and one with a Chinese setting. The story narrated from the American perspective is called "Rules of the Game"; the story narrated from the Chinese perspective is called "Scar". Both stories are narrated in first person singular (ich form). The first story is narrated from a little girl's perspective while the second story is narrated from a grown up person's perspective when recalling her childhood memories; female figures play central roles in both stories. The first analysed story shows that immigrant children acquire their Chinese-ness only later in their life, the second story, on contrary, portrays the deeply rooted belief that it is an inherent entity. Here, Tan fails to point out that the setting of the second story is only Chinese and that the children are not confronted with any other cultural tradition than Chinese.

### "Rules of the Game"<sup>95</sup>

There are three different connotations incorporated in the name of the story. This multiplicity is one of the characteristics of Chinese traditional writing that is full of ambiguities and mystery and it, at the same time, takes us back to the argumentation of Roland Barthes. The first reading is the rules of the game of chess as playing chess is the means through which Meimei makes the American dream

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<sup>95</sup> Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989. (p. 89).

come true. The second meaning may be derived from the American rules for Chinese immigrants according to which every immigrant has to *play*, as the rules and paperwork involved are mentioned several times throughout the story, each time in a harsher tone:

Every time people come out from foreign country, must know rules. 'You not know,' judge say, 'Too bad, go back.' They not telling you why so you can use their way go forward. They say, 'Don't know why, you find out yourself.' But they knowing all the time (p. 95).

The third connotation accentuates the parallel between the rules of any game and the family rules that are very different in the traditional Chinese notion of what is acceptable and in modern American society: In the traditional Chinese society, family rules are based on Confucianism and the patriarchal hierarchy. However, as was stated earlier, emigration to the New World changed all that as the family ties were disrupted and the traditional gender roles reversed as the mothers were used to adapting to new circumstances from China where they were prepared all their childhood for the change that will come after they get married and leave their father's house. Similarly to changing their place and way of living with their marriage, they change it as a consequence of their immigration. Mothers are also the ones who have to interact with the new environment the most in order to secure the family smooth functioning (e.g. taking children to schools, meeting with teachers, dealing with government offices).

The game of chess also serves as a metaphor for life, namely for the life in a Western community. (We have all reasons to believe that had the setting been in

China, the central motif would be a game of GO. This inconsistency supports the argument that Tan writes exclusively for the inhabitants of North America.) Parallels can be seen between the game of chess and between one's life in several aspects: first, both can be seen as games with given rules that one has to learn in order to become successful. The rules of life can be learned from several sources – from the Bible, from the US Constitution, from Buddha's teaching, from our teachers, parents or friends. Second, acquiring various tactics (e.g. attack and defence) and their application in appropriate situations is an imperative both in life and in chess playing. Meimei says in the story that playing chess is playing “a game of secrets in which one must show and never tell.” (p. 96). She also tries to explain to her mother that “sometimes you need to lose pieces to get ahead” (p. 98). On a different occasion, she is advised to always think of escape routes. Tan elaborates this game – life metaphor further when she finishes the story with Meimei's sentence: “I closed my eyes and pondered my next move.” (p. 103). The next move may refer to Meimei's next move in life as she has just returned home after her run away, but it can also refer to her next move in another game of chess as she used to imagine her future games before she fell asleep every evening.

Family upbringing and its influence on forming the children's characters is one of the central themes of the story and therefore the family portrayed in the short story will be analysed first. There are only five family members present in the story: mother, father and three children. This immediately makes us aware of the fact that we are reading a story of an immigrant family as in China, several generations live under the same roof and under the rule of the oldest man of the family. In Meimei's

family this is not the case. It is **the mother** who is a central figure and a representation of a central force. She is used as the daughter's opponent in the game of life – she played with black men and in the final game imagined by Meimei she first defeated her daughter only to lift her up another level and enable her to leave her anger behind:

Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile. 'Strongest wind cannot be seen,' she said.

Her black men advanced across the plane, slowly marching to each successive level as a single unit. My white pieces screamed as they scurried and fell of the board one by one. As her men drew closer to my edge, I felt myself growing light. I rose up into the air and flew out the window. Higher and higher, above the alley, over the tops of tiled roofs, where I was gathered up by the wind and pushed up toward the night sky until everything below me disappeared and I was alone

I closed my eyes and pondered my next move (p. 103).

Meimei's mother only speaks broken English and is, at times, forced to use her daughter as her interpreter and mediator. She is a loving and supporting mother who wants to be proud of her children and their achievements (she shows her daughter how to pose for the press and makes her two new dresses to wear to her tournaments), but who can become a very cold, strict and unforgiving person when rejected or embarrassed by her daughter. "We not concerning this girl. This girl not have concerning for us." (p. 103) This incident best demonstrates a typically Chinese way of upbringing children, as in Chinese families children are brought up in the environment of orders, threats and consecutive punishment, in the environment of blind obedience and respect for the elderly and for those higher up

the social or family ladder. As much as the mother attempts to deny her otherness and adapt to her new circumstances, she is not able to change her ways of teaching and attempting to pass onto her children her Chinese wisdom. She does so through narrating stories, the same way she was taught as a little girl, and believes that they would be able to draw the right conclusions – if not immediately, at least one day. Unfortunately, we can see from Meimei’s remarks that on repeated occasions she only managed to scare her children and made them think that their disability to understand her was caused by her limited knowledge of the English language (a story of a girl that was run over by a cab and smashed flat because she did not listen to her mother – p. 91). Here, we can draw a parallel between the mother and children’s inability to understand one another and between the American-Chinese cultural clashes during the social encounters of the Chinese and American parents. Lindo Jong (the mother who is never called by her name in the story which only accentuates the simplification of the family to the mother-child relationship as the father and husband is mostly absent or reduced to the sound of the closing door) also followed her own logic and refused to submit to the American way of thinking: “Next time win more, lose less [pieces].” (p. 98) she told her daughter after she won her first chess tournament. Similarly, she never showed her true feelings (she thanked for the gift in a church, but at home she demanded that they throw it away – p. 94) and she was very reserved in terms of showing her true feelings (when uneasy about a situation, she gave the gracious smile an answer that meant nothing – p. 97). She only showed her “American Face”, as she calls it later in the book, the Face that “the Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand” (p.

291). That was why she was perceived by her daughter as a cold, non affectionate person. In a way, she was adaptable and able to accept her new circumstances, but only when she could apply her own logic and back her thinking by an explanation that she could identify with. When she made her sons do dishes instead of Meimei who had to practice chess and when she allowed her daughter not to finish her meals, in other words, “to throw her blessings away” (p. 290), she told her sons: “Is new American rules.” (p. 99) This was, by far, not the only time she referred to “the American rules.” It is evident that Tan attempted to demonstrate to what extent the mother “still had her head in China” and to what extent she was already changed by the American culture.

**The father** is a remote figure in this story not playing the traditional Chinese prominent role. He is only mentioned twice or three times, but never in connection with an important decision or family function. This is an important aspect of the story as again in the Chinese traditional setting it would not be so. The reversed roles in immigrant families were already discussed. The fathers find it more difficult to find their new place in the American society as in China their place was hereditary and unchangeable. It is more difficult for the immigrant fathers to adapt. Their difficulty consecutively affects their sons as they are made to grow up without a male model.

**The two brothers** Vincent and Winston are already pre-characterised by their American names. It shows their parents’ attempt not to tie them to their Chinese circumstances, but to give them the opportunity to fully use the American cultural tradition they were born to. Later on we learn, that by this particular choice,

the mother only managed to translate the Chinese tradition into the American context as to her the name signifies that its bearer wins ton. The boys are shown as the victims of the new American rules introduced by their mother, which can be paralleled with the victimisation of the first generation immigrants, who are the subjects of the American rules imposed on them. They have to do dishes instead of their sister and they have to move from their bedroom to the noisy living room in order to give their sister room to think and concentrate when practicing her chess playing. This situation would be non-existent in the traditional Chinese setting which accentuates the level of assimilation of the family. Moreover, both brothers wear cowboy hats, speak no Chinese and cannot stand the traditional Chinese roles in the family and the family hierarchy. Had the family lived in China, the mother would serve her sons and would not be able to order them round as there the sons later in their lives move up in the family hierarchy and surpass their mothers. Vincent symbolically attempts to restore this traditional order when he, towards the very end of the story, disobeys his mother and lets his sister, who earlier that day ran away from her mother, back in the house. But as in many Chinese stories, the importance of his gesture is not further analysed and elaborated on. We can see read this incident as the turning point in Vincent's relationship with his mother and as an attempt to put things back into order.

**The daughter** plays an even more central role than the mother. She is the narrator of the story; she becomes the biggest pride of the family (in the American reading of the word) and, at the same time, the biggest disappointment (in the Chinese sense attached to the word). She is the most Americanised family member.

Tan uses her to demonstrate the shifting of perception of the cultural divisions and of the two different cultural contexts that are merging in the characters of the second generation immigrants. (The first generation immigrants create a diasporic identity, the second generation immigrants adopt a hyphenated identity.) Her official name for the American documents is Waverly Place Jong, after the street the family lives on as the mother wanted to tie her daughter even closer to her new environment, but the family members call her Meimei. She is “seven according to the American formula and eight by the Chinese calendar” (p. 92). She becomes the embodiment of the Great American Hope, but she decides to rebel against her mother’s impersonation of the Chinese tradition and loses her trust and support when she publicly insults and embarrasses her during their quarrel over her mother’s showing off.

In terms of portraying religion, Tan has the family attend Mass at the First Chinese Baptist Church, the reason for which is given already in the opening story of the novel: “The Refuge Welcome Society was composed of a group of white-haired American missionary ladies from the First Chinese Baptist Church. And because of their gifts, my parents could not refuse their invitation to join the church.” (p. 6). It thus seems that they had given up their Buddhist learning, but as we can understand from the mother’s reactions, she still prefers the traditional Chinese way of living and interacting. This is another example of the mother’s (or any first generation immigrant’s in general) adaptation to the new circumstances. She is able to do what she is expected to without losing her integrity and beliefs, ability deep-rooted in her by her Chinese upbringing. Her only concession is that



she does not openly reveal her true feelings when in the presence of the Americans, the same way she used to hide her true feelings in China. This passive resistance is a typically Chinese character feature and Amy Tan is very consistent in portraying it.

The family keeps the traditional Chinese way of living in terms of having a flat in Chinatown and in circling their lives around family meals (their diasporic aspect). The mother only buys things at the traditional Chinese markets and in shops owned by Chinese people. It is partially due to the language barrier, but in part also in order to keep the option to buy things in a Chinese way (by bargaining). At the same time, the mother sends her children to American schools and does not teach them the Chinese language (the hyphenated identity). As was said earlier, these constant contradictions of the traditional and of the new form the basis of the story and of Tan's writing in general.

Chinese Myth and the notion of Chinese superiority play a central part of the story. When Meimei describes the surroundings of their house, she talks about old Li's medicinal herb shop where old Li "dole out onto a stiff sheet of white paper the right amount of insect shells, saffron-colored seeds, and pungent leaves for his ailing customers" (p. 90). Meimei also tells us that she and her brothers believed that old Li "once cured a woman dying of an ancestral curse that had eluded the best of American doctors" (p. 90), ancestral curse being talked about as a legitimate illness. Meimei is, in fact, telling us that the Chinese traditional medicine surpassed the American one, pointing out its alternative character, said in the American terminology. Later in the story, Meimei asks her mother what Chinese torture is.

Meimei is in fact being very cheeky as she is asking at the moment her mother is combing her hair, but Meimei's mother does not see through her daughter's sarcasm as Chinese children would never ridicule their parents like that. However, Meimei does not receive an explanation, only an assurance that the Chinese torture is the best torture because Chinese people are "not lazy like American people" (p. 92). Tan uses humour in a very remarkable way when she tries to show the Chinese well-hidden notion of superiority over Americans. It is partially her way of pointing it out to the readers and partially her coming into terms with this character feature as she is herself a Chinese-American and thus cannot impersonate it. We can see this strategy repeated when Meimei says as she keeps describing their neighbourhood that she and her brothers believed bad people emerged at night from the door at Hong Sing's café marked "Tradesmen" (p. 91). She also says that tourists never went to that café "since the menu was printed only in Chinese" (p. 91). Similarly, when Meimei's mother talks about her daughter's achievements in chess playing, she always accentuates the fact that she could beat the American players.

The notion of respect and modesty that is inherent in the Chinese tradition as the society has always been a clearly distinguished class society also plays an important role in the story. Tan contrasts the mother's behaviour that is very much influenced by her Chinese upbringing where "a woman's worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch," (p. 3) with the daughter's behaviour formed by the American environment she lives in. Tan also shows the fact that this notion is observed in all Chinese families as the first example we can quote does not come

from Meimei's family, but from another Chinese family attending the same church: During a Christmas party one of the Chinese mothers slapped the side of her ten-year-old son's face and apologised to the crowd for his bad manners because "he showed undisguised disappointment with the gift he received" (p. 93). Similarly, when Meimei's mother would watch her daughter defeat her opponents one by one, she would tell Meimei's admirers "with proper Chinese humility, 'Is luck.'" (p. 97), but in fact she was as proud as a mother could be which we can deduce from Meimei's ability to use this pride to manipulate her mother into letting her play at the local tournaments: "I said in a small voice that I did not want to play in the local tournament. They would have American rules. If I lost, I would bring shame on my family." (p. 97) We watch Meimei challenge the notion of honouring one's parents again when she talks back to her mother. (When Meimei's mother keeps telling everybody who her daughter is, Meimei, instead of "biting back her tongue" (p. 89), asks her: "Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess?" - p. 101). Such open revelation of her true feelings would in the traditional Chinese setting cause her immediate loss of home. Meimei also secretly makes fun of her mother as was already mentioned earlier. Tan thus uses Meimei as an opposition to the traditional Chinese behavioural patterns, hinting at the fact that her living in an American environment has a greater influence of forming her character than her Chinese origin and upbringing, but, paradoxically, Tan does not denounce Meimei's bad manners as she herself is a product of the American notion of the ways of upbringing.

The gender and generational aspects of the story are also portrayed through contrasting Meimei with her mother. Meimei is the person who asks why there are no women and children among the chess pieces (p. 95), a thing that comes without saying in Chinese culture. She is ambitious and disregards the role traditionally ascribed to women in Chinese families. She also does not feel it inappropriate to ask an old man in a park to play a game of chess with her. This alone in traditional Chinese society would be considered a lack of good manners. Meimei quickly learns how to use her ability to play chess to win favours over her brothers and she is not afraid to use her wits to gain a better position in life. The fact that her mother does not stop her is also an interesting aspect of the overall picture drawn by Tan who sides with Meimei, the impersonation of the American aspect of the story, and confirms the American dream as a positive thing. When Meimei runs away from her mother, she is going her way, in the very Emersonian tradition. In this respect her story relates the ways in which growing up in American cultural context influences second generation immigrants and causes intergenerational conflicts. Why Tan does not interpret Meimei's conduct as negative is a question that is left unanswered which makes it resonate in the readers' minds for a long time after putting the book aside.

### **“Scar”**

This very short story is narrated by a first generation emigrant who recalls the time when she was a little Chinese girl who lived in her uncle's house together with her little brother, their grandmother and their aunt. Tan does her best in her

attempt to create a true Chinese atmosphere by using setting and cultural attributes that we, westerners, perceive as Chinese. At times, she also uses Chinese words that are translated or explained by the narrator. This technique is used also in her other works that are written from the Chinese perspective, mostly for words that are problematically translated: “My [mah jong] table was of a very fragrant red wood, not what you call rosewood, but *hong mu*, which is so fine there’s no English word for it.” (p. 11) Tan’s touch of sarcasm and her use of humour in such situations was discussed earlier.

The name of the story is well chosen as the story is based on the parallel between the scar on An-mei’s neck and the symbolic scar left on her heart by the loss of her mother. It is the scar on An-mei’s neck that her mother rubs to “rub the memory back into [her] skin” (p. 38). Same parallel is drawn between the scar left on An-mei’s mother’s arm after she removed a piece of her flesh in a ritual of cooking soup for her dying mother (p. 41) and the inner pain originating in the loss of her mother. The story draws upon the notion that it is necessary to forget the physical pain, to peel of the layers of the scarred skin to be able to remember what started the pain and what was underneath the layers of skin – what was “in the bones” (p. 41). Tan thus accentuates the Chinese belief in the hereditary pattern of their character. She goes beyond the external racial markers (based on physiognomy) and focuses on the traditional Chinese notion of the inner ethnicity.

The intergenerational dimension of this story is extended by one level as there are three generations of women in the house: the grandmother, the (at first absent and later present) mother, the aunt and the daughter, An-mei. She was not

allowed to say her mother's name as her mother was a ghost, a person people were forbidden to talk about. ("Never say her name. To say her name is to spit on your father's grave." – p. 34). An-mei is symbolically punished by not being able to speak for a long time after she disobeys the order not to talk to her mother when she first returns to her uncle's house to take her daughter with her to her new home. An-mei's neck is burned by boiling soup during that occasion and she becomes speechless for several weeks. An-mei is the narrator and, again, a translator and a mediator of the story, but this time she translates for the readers. The fact that she is made silent during one of the crucial moments of the story is also symbolic as there is no way of explaining to the members of the American democratic society what power would prevent any mother from taking of her daughter in her illness.

The Western values are in the story represented by the missionary ladies at An-mei's school who are "insolent and bossy in their too tall shoes, foreign clothes, and short hair" (p. 36). An-mei's mother is described in a very similar way - as a very tall woman for Chinese who looks like the missionary ladies and who wears the same type of clothes. Whether Amy Tan tries to suggest that she has some western blood in her or whether the comparison is made on the level of similarities, both physical and psychological, are questions that are left unanswered. The significance of the comparison lies in the fact that Tan shows that in the family members' perception, the Westerners were associated with having negative character features and bad influence. This comparison is based on An-mei's grown up experience and analysis of her feelings when she was a child. It is a later interpretation that was not part of her original perception of her mother.

The gender division of the story is also very similar to the previous one, except this time there is only one younger brother and the father is only present in the form of “a big painting of a large unsmiling man that hung in the main hall” (p. 34). However, there is an apparent shift of roles. The father is feared: “his restless eyes followed An-mei around the house as he watched her for any signs of disrespect” (p. 34) and his absent authority is thus more powerful than had he been present. Similarly, An-mei’s younger brother dares to yell at his auntie that she “is a talking chicken without a head” (p. 35) which he is told of and spat on for by her, but his behaviour is not denounced by his sister as disrespectful. With setting the story in China, Tan returns to portraying the traditional family hierarchy.

Respect is mentioned in the story on repeated occasions as the central motif of family life and a central ruling principle of the society: respect for ancestors (p. 35), respect for one’s own mother (p. 35), respect for the elderly in the family (p. 40), respect for one’s husband (p. 35), signs of disrespect the father was watching for (p. 34). The children learned that they must show respect from their grandmother’s scary stories. Similarly to the previous short story, they did not understand the stories that were often very cruel and very scary, but they feared the possible consequences and acted the way they were told to. Cruel and scary might also appear Popo’s way of upbringing the children. She told them that “they had fallen out of the bowels of a stupid goose, two eggs that nobody wanted” (p. 33), but we are immediately assured by An-mei that grandmother only said bad things about them to protect them “from being taken by bad Ghosts who might find liking in them had they been bragged about and praised by her”. An-mei tells us that in

fact they were very precious to their grandmother. Similarly, when An-mei was lying in bed with a burned neck, Popo scared her by telling her that “they have made her dying clothes and shoes” and if “she did not get well soon her own mother would forget her” (p. 39). An-mei got so scared that “she came hurrying back from the other world to find her mother” (p. 39). The readers are immediately assured that it was very smart of Popo to act like that, but whether they fully grasp the depth of the love shown this way is questionable. Respect beyond belief is shown in the final scene where An-mei’s mother tries to cure her mother with a soup cooked “with a piece of meat from her [An-mei’s mother’s] arm” (p. 41). We are told that it is an ancient tradition, a way “how a daughter honors her mother” (p. 41). Tan here produces a sharp contrast between the two portrayed cultures. In China, what An-mei’s mother does is very symbolic, of the highest significance and she is respected for that by the other family members. If the setting was American, An-mei’s mother would be taken to mental institution for attempted self-mutilation, but this is not the conclusion Amy Tan wants the readers to draw.

The mother–daughter relationship is also problematic, but if challenged, then from the mothers’ sides. All daughters in the story love and respect their mothers. An-mei even says: “I worshipped this mother from my dream. But the woman standing by Popo’s bed was not the mother of my memory. Yet I came to love this mother as well.” (p. 40) On the contrary, the mothers either leave their daughters or disown them. This notion is further complicated by the fact that Chinese mothers do not seem to have any rights to their children if their family decides to repudiate them. Tan attempts to demonstrate, that the father is present,



even when he is in fact absent and that the traditional Confucian order is observed by the rest of the family members. Even if it may seem cruel and inhuman to the observers coming from the western social and family tradition, the Chinese family members do not know any different system and thus they willingly conform to the traditional one. It is not in their nature to ask questions or revolt against the given order.

Chinese Myths play a greater part in this story than in the previous one, but it is never pointed out to the reader. Their use makes an integral part of the narrating as it is incorporated in the form of Popo's educational stories that make little sense to the readers with other than Chinese cultural background. It is left up to them whether they accept the stories as a part of another cultural specificity or reject them as nonsensical and absurd. The readers' situation is further complicated by the fact that only fragments of the stories are often told as the Chinese tradition does not recognise the beginning and the ending in the western way. Their lives and stories form a part of an ongoing spiral and therefore Chinese authors traditionally experienced great difficulties when they attempted to write story openings. They very often used dreams as nobody is capable of clearly defining the dream's beginning and ending with regards to the time frame. This notion can only be applied on the Chinese tradition of story telling and mythical narration.

This story supports the idea that character, namely the Chinese character, is an inborn quality that cannot be taken away from somebody based on circumstances. It is true that An-mei grows up to respect her relatives and her future husband, but she does it out of fear from being punished then from her self-imposed

will to observe traditions. Later in the life, Chinese women become accustomed to their way of living and they forget how it was imposed on them. Therefore, they succumb to the illusion that their behavioural patterns as hereditary. Tan constantly juxtaposes these two contradicting principles as if she herself was not able to see the true nature of things and refused to take sides. Her true motivation is probably to support the readers' belief in the true character of her Chinese-ness.

#### IV. Conclusion

Amy Tan's writing, its thorough examination and close reading proved our thesis statement that a person's character is not an inborn entity. No child is born with an imprinted national identity and specific behavioural patterns characteristic of a particular ethnic group. These aspects forming the ethnic/ nationality specific part of one's character are formed by interacting with the social and cultural environment and by the ways of any child's upbringing; ways that might be to a greater extent influenced by the parents' cultural heritage and family tradition, but that might as well be altered and adapted to new circumstances. Amy Tan explores the reasoning behind the adaptations and presents two different principles of perceiving the origin of one's character: In the first part of *The Joy Luck Club*, the first generation immigrant mothers express their genuine belief that they were already born with their Chinese characters. They believe that their characteristic features and life style were already "in their bones" and all their children need to do is to "peel of the layers of the skin" covering and enclosing it. The mothers at first do not realise their role in the process of forming their children's characters as they had already forgotten how their parents imposed their characteristic features on them. Throughout confrontations with their children, they realise that this notion is mistaken. In the closing part of the novel, they are able to see the gap between them and their children. When they remember all details of how their parents moulded their characters, it is already too late. At that point, their children had already formed other than Chinese identities and all attempts to change this state only leads

to frustration on both sides and further conflicts as the children are reluctant to give up their newly acquired identities.

The thesis shows how difficult it is for the second generation immigrants to create their own identity in the environment of double marginalisation as they do not become integral parts of the first generation Diasporas due to their parents decision not to teach them the Chinese language, but at the same time, they are not able to merge fully with the mainstream culture of their new society due to their physiognomy based otherness. Their knowledge of the English language is the main device that helps them significantly in the process of becoming part of the American mainstream culture. This knowledge enables them to integrate in the American society and to interpret and mediate their new culture for their parents who thus also become influenced by it and change their strictly Chinese perspective. Based on this shift, the parents realise that it was a mistake to attempt to isolate their children from the Chinese cultural heritage and thus deprive them of their ethnic based identity. The thesis shows that Amy Tan's mothers allowed their children to absorb too much of the surrounding culture and give up their Chinese tradition. They were not able to keep the balance between their children's personal autonomy and the Chinese national awareness. The mothers, in their attempt to give the children a better starting position in life, lost them. Lindo Jong articulates their frustration in the last but one story of the novel: "How can she be her own person? When did I give her up?"<sup>96</sup> The answer to this question found in Amy Tan's writing is that she gave her daughter up when she refused to teach her the Chinese language

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<sup>96</sup> Tan, 1989, 290.

and started translating the Chinese traditional culture through narrating stories in her broken English and when she started drawing parallels using everyday comparisons from the American mainstream culture to explain the essence of her Chinese-ness.

The thesis suggests that the reason for the Chinese belief that their tradition cannot be changed by any outer influences is based on their knowledge of the history of confrontations with the Western leading nations in mainland China. However, it is important to note that the confrontations happened in their homeland and that the ratio of the Chinese and the Westerners was inversed. It was thus easier for the Westerners to respect their culture and cultural tradition and create an environment of a seeming tolerance. Another reason for the Chinese immigrants' mistake in handling their children upbringing in their new homelands is their lack of experience with migration to the English speaking countries and the absence of behavioural patterns they could apply.

The open portrayal of the adaptation and development of the Chinese culture in the American environment of San Francisco of the twentieth century with all its specifics, contradicting forces and tensions is what gives Amy Tan's writing such wide appeal. The thesis proved that Amy Tan writes exclusively for the American readers. She is herself part of the dominant American culture and judges everything through the prisms of generalisations and stereotypical perception of minority cultures coexisting with the American one on the same geopolitical field. She double simplifies the Chinese culture as she primarily only focuses on its most visible and differentiating elements, staying always solely on the surface level and

portraying it as monolithic and static. Secondly, Tan only portrays isolated incident without providing a broader context. This is most apparent from her portrayal of family relationships as she only presents the mother-daughter side, probably owing to her lack of experience of the daughter-father bond. She thus breaks one aspect of the Chinese stereotype, only to confirm it later on by using a number of examples based on what we, Westerners, perceive as the Chinese myth. The potential danger of such simplifications had been discussed in the chapter on the Chinese Myth in Tan's writing.

Amy Tan's writing appeals to the readers mainly because it is rich in symbolism and charged with the Chinese Myth that adds to it a touch of exoticism so popular these days. She draws upon the theory postulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss of the universality of the notion of myth and upon Roland Barthes's imperative of employing everyday objects in interpretations of the myth and of using their secondary meanings and roles in explaining the traditional order. As it is her goal to serve as a mediator of the Chinese culture for the American readers, she often explains the symbols, myths and themes and provides "the user's instructions" suggesting the ways of reading her stories and novels and accentuating the themes and symbols she is to elaborate on. In a way, she serves everything to the readers "on a silver plate" through detailed analysis and thorough explanations of the traditional Chinese principles portrayed in her stories. Her narrating strategies and language are of the highest linguistic and artistic expertise. Her use of words and idiomatic expressions well corresponds with the Chinese tradition of multiple and hidden meanings, her way of constructing the plot is very clever and her use of

humour unprecedented. We have all reasons to believe that she acquired the technique in the courses of Creative Writing she took in 1986 and 1987 as all her novels and works follow the same pattern of hinting at a theme at first and later providing an explanation supported by examples from day-to-day life. At times, she provides false representations of the Chinese myths due to her lack of its thorough knowledge. Narrating of the Chinese stories plays a crucial part in her quest of bringing the two coexisting cultures closer together as she herself learned all she knows about China and the Chinese cultural heritage and tradition from her mother's stories. As Tan only portrays China before World War II, she counteracts the danger of being accused of lack of authenticity in her works. On contrary, her popularity among readers is still growing despite her simplifications, artificial constructs and occasional misrepresentation of the Chinese cultural heritage as her writing is of a high-level style.

## V. Resumé

### **Naslouchání vnitřnímu hlasu našich matek Kulturní a generační konflikt v pracích Amy Tan**

Mezi příslušníky čínského etnika, žijícími jak na území Číny, tak mimo ně, je velice rozšířená iluze, že jejich charakteristické povahové rysy jsou vrozené. Číňané věří, že ani působení okolního prostředí nemůže změnit základ, na kterém čínský charakter stojí. Tato víra podvědomě ovlivňuje první generaci čínských emigrantů a svádí je k tomu, aby své děti neučili čínštinu jako mateřský jazyk a neuplatňovali při výchově pravidla, která by v Číně platila bez výjimky. Právě tak jsou jejich charakteristické povahové rysy důvodem, proč si v nových působištích zakládají čínské čtvrti, do kterých se uzavírají a vytváří tak v prostředí hostitelských kultur své vlastní, nezávisle fungující, diaspory. V důsledku kombinace této dobrovolné izolace rodičů a jejich nových přístupů k výchově dětí, se děti dostávají do pozice dvojnásobně vykořeněných. První generace čínských přistěhovalců tak čelí problému, jak se vypořádat se začleněním svých dětí do kulturního prostředí hostitelské země, druhá generace je pak postavena před problém, jak překlenout propast vzniklou mezi nimi a jejich konzervativními rodiči. Na všechny čínské komunity žijící mimo území Číny tak působí dvě proti sobě jdoucí síly: na jedné straně otevřenost a vstřícnost vůči okolnímu světu a touha obohatit vlastní kulturu výpůjčkami z hostitelského prostředí a na druhé straně představa čínské nezávislosti na komkoli a čemkoli, spolu se snahou o zachování integrity kultury, která je i bez zásahů z okolního světa dostatečně bohatá. Napětí mezi těmito proti sobě stojícími tendencemi tak nutně vyvolává zcela zásadní otázku: Kolik může příslušník první



nebo druhé generace čínských emigrantů přijmout z kultury okolního prostředí, aniž by se musel vzdát vlastní tradice a osvojených vzorců chování? Cílem této diplomové práce bylo rozebrat a doložit na příkladech, jak významnou roli hrají výchova a interakce s kulturním prostředím ve formování charakteru dítěte, do jaké míry je charakter vrozený a do jaké míry je ovlivněn kulturním dědictvím, které se odráží ve způsobu výchovy, jejím prostřednictvím se přenáší na další generaci. Práce řeší i způsob, jakým nové kulturní prostředí ovlivňuje již zformovaný charakter první generace emigrantů. Na příkladech z prvního románu čínsko-americké spisovatelky Amy Tan, který byl v českém překladu vydán pod názvem *Klub radosti a štěstí (The Joy Luck Club)*, práce studuje vztahy uvnitř čínských komunit napříč generacemi a z toho vyplývající reakce na hostitelskou kulturu, které se promítají v chování a jednání druhé generace emigrantů. Použití symbolů a nosných témat, které autorka dále rozpracovává ve svých pozdějších dílech, je věnována samostatná kapitola. Teoretický rámec pro analýzu jednotlivých symbolů, mýtů, alegorií a témat je vymezen znalostí autorčina životopisu, post koloniální kulturní teorií s ohledem na pojetí hybridity a diasporické existence a přístupy ke studiu multikulturních prostředí obecně. Klíčové pojmy, jsou vymezeny v úvodu práce s přihlédnutím k faktu, že Amy Tan pracuje s kulturami jako se statickými a monolitickými entitami.

V „Historickém úvodu“ se práce zabývá faktory a událostmi, které z pohledu čínské historie ovlivnily formování představy o tom, co dnes vnímáme jako čínský charakter a jeho distinktivní rysy. „Historický úvod“ je rozčleněn do čtyř podkapitol: „Úvod“, „Cizí přítomnost v Číně“ (Britští obchodníci, Britská

přítomnost v Hong Kongu a Přítomnost severoamerických států na území Číny), „Číňané ve vybraných anglicky mluvících zemích“ (v Británii a v Severní Americe) a „Shrnutí“. V této sekci je pro přepis čínských jmen a názvů použito mezinárodní transkripce pinyin.

V „Obecně historickém úvodu“ jsou v chronologickém sledu zdokumentovány kontakty Číny s okolním světem od obchodů s antickým Římem po čínské uzavření se za Velkou zdí po roce 1447. Práce poukazuje na to, že díky čínskému izolacionismu a patriotismu se kontakty s okolním světem tradičně odehrávaly na přísně ekonomické bázi. Oddíl „Cizí přítomnost v Číně“ podává přehled o počátcích, průběhu a důsledcích působení britské Východoindické společnosti v Číně, které vyvrcholilo otevřeným vojenským konfliktem a následnou 99letou nucenou správou Hong Kongu Brity. Oddíl „Britská přítomnost v Hong Kongu“, který podrobněji rozpracovává pozitivní a negativní vlivy britského působení v této části světa, je rozšířen o diskusi nad současným stavem Hong Kongské ekonomiky. V této části práce je uveden i přehled aktivit severoamerických států na území Číny, který rozebírá jak ekonomické, tak politické důsledky působení amerických a kanadských sil v Číně. Přehled začíná vysvětlením pojmu „Nerovné obchodní smlouvy“ uzavřené v 60. letech 20. století, pokračuje zmínkou o vojenské podpoře Qingské dynastie západními mocnostmi během Boxerského povstání a během Druhé světové války. V podkapitole „Číňané v Británii“ jsou zmíněny hlavní důvody pro malou oblibu Británie jako cílové země čínské emigrace. Kromě post koloniálního traumatu v obecné rovině, podpořil zdrženlivý vztah Číňanů k Británii také Sun Yazen, Otec Čínské revoluce roku

1911, který před emigrací do Británie důsledně varoval a Brity opakovaně kritizoval za jejich přístup k národům v jejich područí. Oddíl „Číňané v Severní Americe“ se zaměřuje na důvody pro relativně nízký počet (vezmeme-li v úvahu celkový počet příslušníků čínského etnika trvale žijících mimo území Číny) čínských emigrantů na území Spojených států amerických a Kanady. Pozadí americké a kanadské diskriminace čínských přistěhovalců je doloženo na konkrétních příkladech a podpořeno historickými daty. V závěru oddílů jsou pak uvedeny přehledy počtů příslušníků asijských národů žijících na území Severní Ameriky v současnosti a naznačena jejich vzrůstající tendence. Číňané jsou nejrychleji se rozrůstající etnickou skupinou jak na území Spojených států, tak Kanady. Závěr první kapitoly hodnotí historické důvody pro čínský izolacionismus a pro diskriminaci Číňanů ze stany západních mocností. Tradiční pilíře čínské kultury konfucianismus a buddhismus jsou vysvětleny ve vztahu ke klíčovému postavení rodiny v čínské společnosti. Logickým východiskem z dané situace, kdy hostitelské a hostující kultury pouze koexistují v daném geopolitickém prostoru, se tedy jeví snaha o překlenování rozporů mezi diametrálně odlišnými světy a společnostmi prostřednictvím krásné literatury. Fikce nám dává jedinečnou možnost zprostředkovat a osvětlit situaci příslušníků minoritní kultury představitelům kultury hlavního proudu bez rizika, že autor románu nebo povídky bude obviněn z politizování problému a podpory vládní propagandy.

Amy Tan je jednou z autorek, které jdou touto cestou. Navzdory tomu, že sama za důvod svého psaní označuje uměleckou seberealizaci, je kritiky považována za autorku, která svým čtenářům zprostředkovává pohled do

uzavřených čínských komunit a objasňuje jejich mnohdy nepochopitelné zvyky a rodinné tradice. Tan tak svým čtenářům otevírá nové obzory a umožňuje jim blíže proniknout do problematiky minoritních kultur a diasporické existence. V úvodu k hlavní části práce jsou zmíněny relevantní detaily naznačující motivy, které Amy Tan přivedly k povolání spisovatelky a rozebrány důvody, které vedou kritiky i čtenáře k přesvědčení, že autorka vidí problematiku jak z pohledu etnických Číňanů, tak z pohledu příslušníků americké masové kultury. Tan však zprostředkovává pouze úhel pohledu Čínských přistěhovalců žijících na území Spojených států a ten navíc není její vlastní zkušeností, ale byl jí zprostředkován. Čínská tradiční kultura tak v jejích dílech doznává dvojího zjednodušení, které Tan čtenářům vynahrazuje svou jazykovou erudicí a užitím humoru místy přecházejícího až v sarkasmus.

Práce dále rozebírá první dílo Amy Tan, *Klub radosti a štěstí*, z hlediska členění, vyprávěcí techniky, osoby vypravěče, jednoty místa a času a použití symbolů a metafor, které do značné míry uvozují témata zpracovaná v pozdějších románech spisovatelky. V závěru tohoto oddílu jsou vyzdviženy důvody podporující argument, že Tan píše pouze pro obyvatele severoamerického kontinentu, a že její pozice je nikoliv pozicí znalce problematiky, ale toho, kdo byl s danou problematikou dlouhodobě v kontaktu, ale nikdy do ní detailně nepronikl vzhledem k absenci znalosti čínského literárního kánonu. Rovněž je zdůrazněn význam etnické příslušnosti Amy Tan s ohledem na tendenci čtenářů přijímat na tomto základě její díla za autentická.

Následující kapitola se soustředí na rozbor vybraných témat a symbolů v dílech Amy Tan. Čínskému mýtu je vyčleněna samostatná kapitola. Z témat je zaměřena větší pozornost na volbu první generace emigrantů odtrhnout děti od tradiční čínské kultury a důsledkům, které toto jednání druhé generaci emigrantů způsobuje. Dále je věnován prostor nejen tématům hledání identity u první i druhé generace čínských emigrantů žijících na území Spojených států, možnosti ovlivnit vlastní osud a zlepšit své životní postavení, ale i úskalím spojeným se snahou o přenos jednotlivých kulturních specifíků prostřednictvím alegorií a bajek a docenění hodnoty a významu znalostí ve vyprávěních obsažených. Práce dochází k závěru, že Amy Tan ve svých dílech potvrzuje možnost změnit osud a to jak v prostředí tradičního čínského uspořádání, tak v novém prostředí americké společnosti. Kapitola „Čínské mýty a mystika v dílech Amy Tan“ vychází z teoretického rámce vymezeného díly Rolanda Barthesa a Clauda Lévi-Strausse k dané problematice a srovnává, do jaké míry Tan splňuje jimi postulované teorie a do jaké míry je popírá. Jako konkrétní příklady jsou použity rozbor názvů jednotlivých románů, které ukazují, že Amy Tan již v názvech svých děl předesílá, jak bude s fenoménem čínského mýtu dále zacházet.

Kapitola „Komplexnost děl Amy Tan“ se zabývá detailním rozбором dvou povídek, jedné z prostředí Číny kolem roku 1930 a druhé z prostředí San Franciska kolem roku 1950. Obě povídky se soustředí na vnímání podstaty čínského charakteru a vlivů, které se podílí na jeho utváření během procesu dospívání. První povídka „Jizva“ naznačuje, že čínský charakter je příslušníkům čínského etnika vrozený, a že je součástí samotné podstaty jejich existence a základem pro utváření

rodinných a společenských vztahů. Ve druhé povídce „Pravidla hry“ Tan naopak zdůrazňuje přesvědčení, že děti si svou „čínskost“ osvojí až během procesu dospívání. V případě první povídky Tan opomíjí fakt, že děti nejsou konfrontovány s ničím jiným než s tradiční čínskou kulturou a nemusí se tedy vůči ničemu vymezovat. Lze tedy zodpovědně říci, že i ony si svůj charakter osvojí na základě toho, jak je rodiče směřují a čemu je učí. Z rozboru povídek je patrné, které motivy jsou v díle Amy Tan stěžejní. Jedná se zejména o funkci rodiny, která je v jejích dílech zjednodušená na vztahy matek s dcerami, roli žen v procesu hledání nové identity a přizpůsobování se novému prostředí. Také přístup k tradicím a k otázkám víry a mytologie hraje v dílech Amy Tan jednu z hlavních rolí. Tan volí motivy a symboly tak, aby vyhovovaly jejímu záměru zachytit hlavní kulturní a generační rozdíly mezi první a druhou generací čínských emigrantů.

V závěru práce je vyjádřeno přesvědčení, že se podařilo splnit v úvodu naznačený cíl a prokázat, že typicky čínské charakterové vlastnosti nejsou příslušníkům čínského etnika určeny jejich genofondem, ale jsou zformovány až během procesu výchovy a dále ovlivněny interakcí s kulturním prostředím. Práce poukazuje na omyl čínských matek, které předpokládají, že z dětí i bez jejich zásahu vyrostou Číňané se stejným pohledem na svět, jaký mají ony. Když jsou pak konfrontovány se svými dospívajícími dcerami, uvědomí si, jak se mýlily. Jejich prohlédnutí bohužel přichází příliš pozdě na to, aby mohly změnit již utvořený charakter svých dětí. Ty se z pochopitelných důvodů zdráhají opustit osvojenou identitu ovlivněnou americkou masovou kulturou a změnit svůj pohled na svět, k jehož získání musely překonat množství překážek. Hlavním důvodem

nedorozumění mezi první a druhou generací emigrantů je jazyková bariéra. Dobrá znalost angličtiny na jedné straně umožňuje druhé generaci emigrantů splynout s prostředím hostitelské kultury, do značné míry vystupovat v roli zprostředkovatelů americké zkušenosti pro své rodiče a tak ovlivnit jejich vnímání nového prostředí. Na druhé straně je však překážkou v porozumění čínskému kulturnímu dědictví. Vnímání světa ovlivněné hostitelskou kulturou je zdrojem vědomého i podvědomého přehodnocování tradičních čínských hodnot jak u první, tak u druhé generace emigrantů.

Důvodem, který stojí za rozhodnutím rodičů uměle odtrhnout děti od tradiční čínské kultury, je absence vzorců chování, podle kterých by v dané situaci mohli postupovat vzhledem k obecně malé zkušenosti s migrací do anglicky mluvících zemí. Rodiče pak mylně interpretují podstatu své „čínskosti“ a domnívají se, že i bez znalosti jazyka budou jejich děti schopny si na základě poslechu čínských bajek a podobenství vybrat životní cestu vedoucí zpět ke kořenům a k tradičnímu pojetí světa vycházejícímu z čínské mytologie.

Velká obliba knih Amy Tan spočívá v tom, že otevřeně zobrazují dilema druhé generace emigrantů v novém prostředí a konflikty vznikající při hledání jejich vlastní identity. Vyprávěcí technika Amy Tan je založena na opakování motivů naznačených v prvním románu a na jejich dalším vysvětlování. Tan dává čtenářům jakýsi „návod k použití“, když jim nejprve naznačí s jakými motivy a symboly bude pracovat a následně tyto vysvětlí s použitím vhodně zvolených příměrů z amerického běžného života. Její jazyková erudice a vhodná volba slov velmi věrně odráží mnohoznačnost čínských symbolů a metafor. Tan si tuto techniku

pravděpodobně osvojila v kurzech kreativního psaní, které navštěvovala v letech 1986 a 1987. Za tímto přesvědčením stojí fakt, že Tan používá stejné principy ve všech svých románech a povídkách. Důvodem stojícím za velkou oblibou jejích děl je skutečnost, že Tan velmi chytře zobrazuje pouze Čínu před Druhou světovou válkou a tím brání případným kritikům v tom, aby ji obvinili z nedostatečné znalosti prostředí, o kterém píše.

Vzhledem k tomu, že sama Amy Tan je produktem stereotypního vnímání čínské kultury příslušníky hlavního proudu americké kultury, zobrazuje pouze nejmarkantnější rysy tradiční čínské kultury. Pojetí čínské kultury je pak v jejích dílech dvojnásobně zjednodušeno. První zjednodušení probíhá na rovině výběru pouze určitých aspektů, které zobrazuje (zjednodušení, před kterým v obecné rovině varuje podkapitola věnovaná mýtu u Amy Tan), druhé pak v důsledku zobrazování kultury jako monolitické a statické. Navzdory zmíněným zjednodušením, uměleckým konstrukcím a příležitostným nesprávným interpretacím čínského kulturního dědictví popularita Amy Tan stále roste díky vysoké kvalitě jejího uměleckého projevu.



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