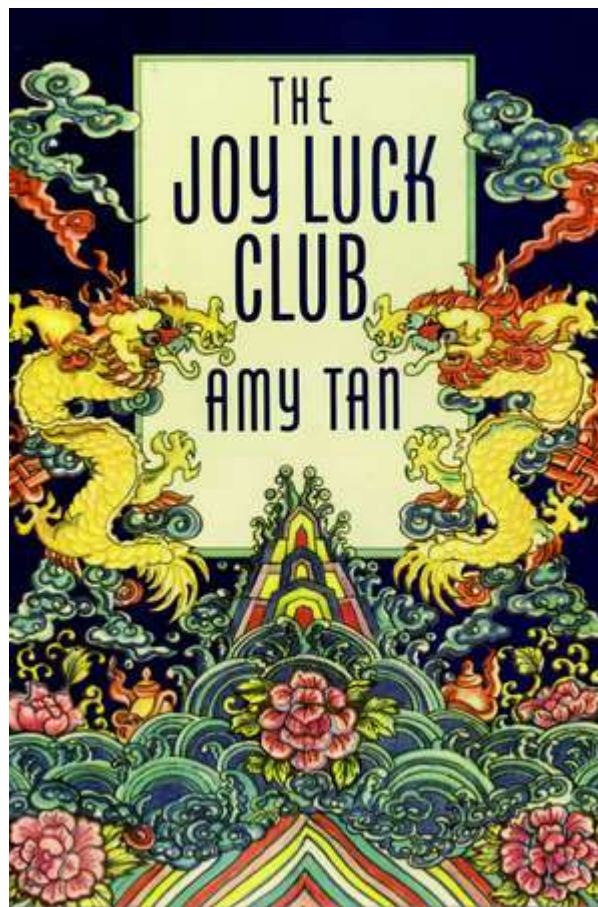


Poetics of Psychological Changes in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

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Courtesy:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/300526/the-joy-luck-club-by-amy-tan/9780143129493/>

Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the psychological evolution in the novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, of Amy Tan. Change may be illustrated as evolution, progress or a movement from one form into another. Change may be physical when growing up and travelling from one place to another are examined. It may be psychological or mental, when there is a change in character, manner, tone or attitude. When there is a change in culture and values, change becomes cultural. One's change from ignorance to divine revelation may be termed spiritual evolution. Amy Tan depicts a refreshing

antidote to the world weariness and uncertainties we face today, thinking how things happen - in her own life and beyond - but always returning to the question of fate and its opposites: the choices, charms, influences, attitudes, and lucky accidents that mould us all.

Keywords: Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, Evolution, Change, Physical, Culture and Values

Amy Tan

Amy Tan is a creative representative of the Chinese American women authors who focuses on the issues of inequality meted out to women in other cultures, the different cultural beliefs of women, friendship, abortion, generation gaps between daughter and mother and the power of women in facing adversity. The novels of Amy Tan have made an indelible mark on the literary scenario portraying the lives of Chinese American women with their cultural and generational differences.

The Joy Luck Club

Amy Tan's debut novel *The Joy Luck Club* affirms her power as a master story-teller. The novel depicts the tales of four mothers and their daughters; it has been divided into four parts, each of has four tales. The Chinese mothers leave China thinking of forgetting all their painful past and begin afresh in America. They dream of a better future for their children which would have nothing to do with the China they realized. The mothers desired that their children would speak good English and lead happy lives without agony. Michael Dorris in his review "Mother and Daughter" remarks,

The Joy Luck Club is that rare, mesmerizing novel one always seeks but seldom finds. Tracing the poignant destinies of two generations of tough, intelligent women, each gorgeously written page welcomes the reader and leads to an enlightenment that, like all true wisdom, sometimes brings pleasure and sometimes sadness. (1)

Mother-Daughter Relationship

The novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, recounts about mother-daughter relationship. In the first section of the novel "Feathers from a thousand Li Away" draws out the legacy and also the mental evolution of the mothers in China, illustrating a heritage that they wanted to bestow on their daughters, which the title implies in the beginning. For years, the mothers do not tell to their daughters about their past until they are assured that their children would listen; and by then, it is almost too late to make the offspring understand their legacy that their mothers left behind, long long ago, when they leave China.

Jing mei and Suyuan Woo

The central character of the novel is Jing mei. Jing mei's tales frame the narrative structure for as Suyuan Woo's life. This is because she acts as a narrator both for herself and her mother Suyuan Woo. Suyuan Woo describing about the life who believes Kweilin is a paradise on earth before visiting it. "I dreamed about Kweilin before I ever saw it; my mother began... If you... feel such happiness it would be enough to never have worries in your life ever again" (21).

Suyuan and her two children are brought there by her husband who is in the army believing that they will be safe there. This is during the war. Suyuan Woo's dreams evolve into grim reality when she finds each day gloomy for them to survive and the place, grotesque and dreadful. Since it is a war time, Suyuan along with her two children used to hide themselves under hopeless conditions to save themselves. Despite the war, Suyuan determines to have small parties in order to keep herself

and the people around cheerful. “I thought up Joy Luck on a summer night that is so hot even the moths fainted to the ground, their wings are so heavy with the damp heat” (23).

Suyuan Woo expounds as to how her life from happiness changes to sadness for she and the others holed-up in caves for their survival. She launches the Joy Luck club with the belief that life would evolve from sadness to happiness again. During the Second World War, Suyuan is inflicted to escape from her home with her twin daughters. From being a caring mother, she is forced into becoming an existentialist. She is pressured to leave the daughters behind when she is too sick to look after them and when she has to get away from that place. It is only at that point that June woo endures an evolution from ignorance to sudden revelation when her mother tells, “Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies” (34).

Moving to America

As aforementioned, Jing Mei Woo or June’s tales build the whole narrative structure. She acts as narrator for both herself and her dead mother, giving voice to her mother’s tale. Jing Mei expounds as to how her mother migrated to America, thinking optimistically that her life will be better in America. Suyuan Woo moved to America in 1949 after losing her husband and two children. Jing Mei usually feels that she was born in America where an individual has her own identity. So, she does not want to go by the words of her mother who is a Chinese. “You want me to be someone that I’m not! I sobbed; I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be” (142).

Recollection of Childhood

Jing-Mei recounts the episodes of her childhood where her mother wanted her to become a famous pianist, but Jing-Mei did not want to obey her. Yet, after her mother’s death, Jing-Mei plays the piano understanding the significance of her mother and her struggle for their identity. Coming to the portrayal of mother and daughter who are eventually the same, now, the other two mothers after Suyuan’s death. June finds that she has twin sisters who are living in China and have written to their mother in hope of meeting her at last. After her mother’s death June takes up the place of her mother in Joy Luck club she believes it as a prideful act by the four women including her mother. But, when she becomes the active member she recognizes the responsibilities in the Joy Luck club and changes herself from an ignorant child, to a responsible girl who wanted to fulfil her mother’s dreams as a daughter. She wanted to find her two sisters and get re-united with them. The three remaining Joy Luck club ladies tell June that she should go to China, to meet her sisters, and tell them about her mother.

June expounds by understanding the significance of her mother as to how she looks after her in spite of long struggle. “You must see your sisters and tell them about your mother’s death,’ says aunty Ying. But most important you must tell them about her life” (40). All the Joy Luck club ladies motivate her for being the member of Joy Luck club. Jing-Mei feels very proud by knowing the true nature of her Joy Luck ladies. When the Joy Luck aunties determine that Jing-Mei can get support from Joy Luck club, and assert that she can get \$1200 from Joy Luck club to visit china and meet her sisters, Jing-Mei’s perspectives evolve for the better life. She believes that the Joy Luck club is a responsible forum that her mother initiated to share each one’s pain and joy to hope for a cheerful and fortunate life. This is in contrast to what she believes earlier.

Did Not Obey Her Mother

Jing-Mei, being an adamant daughter never obeys her mother. Suyuan Woo, her mother asks her to make the most out of the opportunities found in America by probing different subjects to find one in which she shines. Only after her mother’s death, Jing-Mei realizes her significance. Jing-Mei

believes that only her mother would be able to lead her to a better life. Jing-Mei expounds of the life of crab when a crab is taken for cooking it is soaked in hot water. The crab endures a change without knowing that it has been thrown into hot water, ultimately, it loses its life and self-identity. Before dying, Jing-Mei contemplates that the crab pleads for its life. Like a crab, Jing-Mei often pulls back into her shell. This is viewed best in her encounter with Waverly Jong. But Jing-Mei realizes that best protection comes from her mother. Jing-Mei expounds as to how her mother bears so much of agony to make Jing-Mei secure her identity in America. Rather than re-assuring her daughter, Suyuan tells her that she is too lazy to even meet her mother's expectations. This remark intensely affects Jing-Mei's self-esteem it makes her feel that she can never be successful. When her mother compares her with Waverly Jong, who is a chess champion, Jing-Mei gets angry.

Questioning Self Worth and Value

Throughout her life Jing-Mei always questions her worth and value as a woman and as a daughter, constantly feeling as if she has failed her mother. When she goes to An-Mei's house, she sees a photo on the wall, she thinks that the backdrop looks the same as San Francisco there is nothing precisely Chinese about it. But when all the members of the Joy Luck club determine to go to china for a vacation, they all consider it as homecoming.

Return for a Visit and Emotions

As Jing-Mei enters Shanghai, China, she feels Chinese. Jing-Mei endures a psychical change which makes her realize that her mother has always been right. Jing-Mei even feels a change in her father when he earls out for his aunt in Shanghai she could feel the inner thoughts of her father evolving himself into a Chinese youngster. Though her father is very old and also her aunt, they both feel so young by reminiscing their youthful days. Jing-Mei also understands that her every name that which identifies and represents her mother's dream, her history and her character later by having a conversation with her grand-aunt, Jing-Mei comprehends how Chinese women are now. The change in China after the war has given women a better position in the society.

Expounding about the psychical change in Lindo Jong, of all the elderly women in the tale, is an important character who expounds about her childhood days. At the age of sixteen, her life is evolved from a jovial girl to a responsible woman, who now understands that Huang's are everything for her. Lena St. Clair, like other daughters in the novel, is unable to make amiable rapport with her mother Ying-Ying. Her mother finds out only the mischievous things that are yet to happen and later apologizes for not taking steps to stop them. Yet, her views are shattered when she sees Teresa, a girl who lives in the neighbourhood. She sees Teresa and her mother quarrelling and the reconciling. One sees a distinct change is Lena's attitude after that. She feels that such quarrelling is part of the mother-daughter relationship. It is this understanding that helps Lena gets her mother out of trauma that she endures after an abortion. Lena's relationship with Harold is as feeble and frail as the chair he has made. Ying-Ying breaks the table; Lena understands that her mother has always been right in her view. She realizes that her mother is the only person who can shower unconditional love and care. Lena expounds as how her mother used to foretell about her future and she always has warned her to be very cautious in picking her husband. Lena is also lost in her marriage, knowing there is something wrong, but not being able to talk it with her husband. She is awfully insecure about her worth as a woman and as a wife, so she tries to avoid challenging her husband about the inequality in the marriage that she sees as the root-cause of their disputes. Lena believes as to how the world can be in all its choices come with so many coincidences, with so many similarities and exact opposites. After Clifford St. Clair dies Ying-Ying regains part of her identity and tries to help her daughter to regain her identity.

To Conclude

To sum-up, *The Joy Luck Club* opens a new vista towards an understanding of the mother-daughter relationship and also undergoing the psychical changes in each individual woman character. According to Amy Tan, psychical changes is the real change in every human, where as a woman; she has experienced a complete change of being a daughter by undergoing her mother's emotions and by making her mother to feel the real content of life where one experiences change of physical appearances from head to toe by changing the mental attitudes.

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