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The Process of Identity Formation in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

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Abstract

Like most ethnic and multicultural narratives, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* revolves around the development of an identity in which immigrant experience and all the questions of ethno-cultural identity that attend to it play central roles. The aim of this essay is to investigate the process of identity formation of the second-generation Chinese immigrant daughters who encounter Chinese culture at home while having the immediate experience of living in America, with a focus on the cultural, language and generational gaps that exist between the Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. This study is guided by a theoretical framework that combines postcolonial theory and a number of established theories of identity construction including the concept of hybrid identity in order to analyze and explore the American-born daughters' identity creation. Based on this analysis, this paper presents evidence that an identity formation process that involves cultural hybridization has occurred and the outcome of this identity formation is that of a hybrid identity.

Key Words: identity formation process, cultural clashes, language discrepancies, generational gaps, cultural hybridization, hybrid identity.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical framework.....	2
2.1 Identity – how to define and understand it.....	2
2.2 The Construction of Identity.....	4
2.3 Hybridity.....	5
2.4 Hybrid Identity.....	6
3. Cultural differences and its effect on the formation of identity.....	8
4. Language Barriers.....	19
5. Cultural Hybridization.....	29
6. Concluding Thoughts.....	34
7. Works Cited.....	35

Introduction

Amy Tan's short story sequence *The Joy Luck Club* focuses on the dynamics and nature of the relationships between four Chinese immigrant mothers and their four American-born daughters. The mothers in the story represent the mother tongue/land/culture and also symbolically stand for the repository of Chinese cultural values and narratives. The daughters embody America, its language, and its culture. Each mother feels the pain of the cultural separation between herself and her daughter, who is at odds with her mother, her oriental heritage and her mother's wisdom and strength.

All the mothers' stories, which took place in China, were tragedies. Through these stories, we learn that each mother has struggled with oppressive societal structures in the form of patriarchy and attendant sexism; but, nevertheless, each mother surmounts life's disadvantage by having learned the lesson of becoming strong through seeing her own mother suffer or by suffering herself. Because of all the agonies that these Chinese mothers had gone through in their lives, they become very protective of their daughters, constantly trying to save them the pain they themselves endured as girls while growing up in China; but the daughters, often mistake their mothers' love and guidance as a form of critical meddling. They often feel criticized and pressured by their mothers and relate their mothers' interferences with their lives to their inability to understand and accept the American culture, which especially values autonomy and independence.

The mothers immigrated to the USA as adults and in their new country, they encounter a culture that is extremely different from theirs, a culture that marginalizes them and their ways of life, therefore, they are determined to pass their own cultural values and stories on to their daughters. For them this is the way to claim their Chinese cultural identity and ensure their family's heritage. The daughters, on the other hand, believe their mothers want them to become Chinese and only follow Chinese ways; hence, they resent the mothers' stories and their cultural narratives. They reject their mothers, their wisdoms and their Chinese heritage. Cultural differences, linguistic discrepancies and generational gaps become the cause of many conflicts between the immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters.

We are living in a multicultural globalized world. When people immigrate, cultures meet and influence each other. Sometimes the impact of one culture on the other is much greater than the other way around. "Ideas regarding national or even ethnic cultural identity become more difficult to apply in situations where traditional ... cultural norms and identities meet and mix" with that of the host countries (Ryan 2007, 196). When people become exposed to elements of a different culture they have had to redefine their worldview, their way of life and their inner selves. The first-generation immigrants, who usually have comprehensive links with the homeland, remain culturally, and for some, even, politically attached to the mother country. These immigrants do not lose their sense of cultural and personal identity, but this is hardly the case with the second-generation immigrants. For the children of

immigrants, the cross-cultural barriers make it more difficult for them to build a cultural and personal identity.

To construct an identity that incorporates both the Chinese and American cultures preoccupies the characters in the story. The novel places the immigrant experience, and all the questions of ethno-cultural identity that attend to it, at its very center. All four mothers fled China in their adulthoods and therefore they retain much of their Chinese identities and heritage. While the four daughters, who were born in America and their contact with China is limited to the Chinese households in which they have been raised, reject their Chinese inheritance and identify with and feel at home in modern American culture. These daughters have spent most of their childhoods and adolescence trying to escape their Chinese identities. They consider themselves Americans; however, their cultural background and their genetically Chinese features make them non-Americans in the eyes of American people. Jing-mei, also goes by the English name June, the main character, denied during adolescence that she had any internal Chinese aspects, persisting that her Chinese identity was confined only to her external features. The daughters' identification with Americans and their culture displaced the position of their identities as Chinese. The displacement of identities leaves them however neither Americans nor Chinese. This raises a question: what is their identity? This study attempts to explore potential answers to this question. This paper claims that because the daughters draw cultural identities from multiple sources, the possible outcome is the development of a new identity. In order to fulfill the aim of this essay the following questions will be discussed:

- How does the process of identity formation take form especially for the daughters who come from a Chinese cultural background while assimilated into American life and culture?
- What is the outcome of this identity formation?

Identity construction is a very multifaceted concept to study, and thus it calls for an interdisciplinary theoretical approach. In the next section of this paper, I will give a brief introduction to the concept of identity followed by a discussion on the prevailing theory of identity formation important for this study.

2. Theoretical framework

Here, I will use the established theories of identity construction in order to investigate and understand the identity formation of the daughters as well as the outcome of this identity formation in the novel. Before constructing a theoretical framework, it is necessary to ask these questions first: what is identity and how do we comprehend it?

2.1 Identity – how to define and understand it

Identity is a complicated and ambiguous concept. It is not “a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action a still point in the turning world” according to Stuart Hall. “Ethnicity: Identity and

Difference” (1989, 9-20). The question whether identity is something fixed or changeable as Hall suggests is one of the fundamental questions raised by the scholars within the identity research field and in every debate on the meaning of identity. Regarding the meaning of identity something is, however, clear; its definition has changed over time. There are various clarifications of the concept of identity; some of which are listed below:

1. “The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989).
2. Identity is an “umbrella term used to describe an individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity” (*Wikipedia Encyclopedia*).
3. Identity, in this book, “describe[s] the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (Deng 1995, 1).
4. “Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersection discourses....[I]dentity is a process, identity is split. Identity is also the relationship of the other to oneself” (Hall 1989, 9-20).

One can find many more formulations of what identity is. In his book *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities* Chris Barker also emphasizes the fact that identity is not “a fixed thing to be found” but it is “constituted through descriptions of ourselves with which we identify” (1999, 9). Although, there are different clarifications, there are two main traditions of understanding identities. One tradition accentuates identity as naturally given, a concept that intertwined with nationalism and its focus on territorialism, and therefore fixed. The other tradition emphasizes identity as something changeable and more significantly as an ongoing process. According to the first tradition identity is established upon “‘objective’ criteria like religion, language or race” or “‘subjective’ criteria such as self-awareness or solidarity...” (Özkırmli 2000, 58). This understanding of identity was the prevailing one in the second half of the twentieth century, but it has been replaced nowadays by the approach that suggests that identity is a part of an ongoing process and consequently something unfixed and variable.

To recognize identity as something unsettled and as an ongoing process is comprehensible; considering the fact that we are living in a globalized world. Globalization and its many aspects affects our world in different ways, one of which is the development of information and communication technology. The increasing flow of information conveyed to individuals by different means of communication such as: media, Internet, computer networks, makes us realize that the individual’s awareness of himself/herself is very complex. Another effect of globalization is the erosion of national borders, something that has caused a shift in focus from physical space, i.e. from nation to a more global space. This “space is placeless, distanceless and borderless-- and in this sense ‘supraterritorial.’” In global relations, the interactions between people are “pretty much irrespective of their territorial position” (Scholte, qtd in Neil Brenner 2004, 55); thus making the role of national identity less significant, and also making it difficult to create a homogeneous nation. Therefore, there is a need for a

different approach while discussing identity formation– one that allows identity to be understood in terms of evolving processes that take place in a global context.

The change caused by globalization, that is to say, the world as a single place for interactions has brought forward a wider range of “sources and resources available for identity construction, allowing for the production of *hybrid* identities...” (Barker 68, emphasis in the original). This hybrid identity, which is mostly dominant in minority and immigrant communities, allows individuals to draw personal and cultural meaning from multiple sources. Hybrid identity also permits for the continuation of the local, in the context of the global. In the next section, there will be a thorough discussion on hybrid identity, but prior to that, a presentation of the identity formation will be given.

2.2 The Construction of Identity

As argued earlier, many scholars see identity construction as an ongoing process; among these scholars is George Herbert Mead, the American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist. He attempted to demonstrate how the individual’s mind and self arises in the process of social interaction and social surrounding. According to Mead, the self is something that has a “development” and it is “not initially there, at birth...” (1934, 135). He argues:

The self... arises in the development of the behaviour of the social form that is capable of taking the attitude of others involved in the same co-operative activity. The pre condition of such behaviour is the development of the nervous system which enables the individual to take the attitude of the others. ... [O]ne is dealing throughout with the relation of the conduct of the individual to the environment. (1934, 335-36)

This process is known as symbolic interactionism, and it emphasizes the fact that behavior and acts are symbolic and that social interactions take place via shared significant symbols such as words, definitions, roles, gestures, rituals, etc. According to Mead, life experiences form the self and that individuals gain the life experiences mostly through interactions with the others. As Mead stresses, spoken language plays a central role in the development of self. He uses a child as an example and alleges, “through the use of language” the child “can take the role of others” (1934, 160) and guides his/her behavior in terms of the effect his/her contemplated behavior will have on others. In interaction with others a child learns what kind of behavior is expected, what is appropriated in social settings such as the family, in school and later on at work and the whole society in general.

The Self in Mead’s theories pertains to an individual’s own identity. According to Mead, the self is a product of a “reorganization that brings in something that was not there before” (1934, 198). In other words, new identities could be formed as an effect of social interaction processes.

The theory of symbolic interactionism has been utilized by some scholars including Anthony Giddens, who uses this theory, but only as a starting point. The similarities in Mead and Giddens’ theories lie in the individual’s interaction with his/her surroundings. Giddens’ later work concerns modernity and globalization, and the impact of modernity on the individual’s social life. One principal

aspect on which Giddens emphasizes is the constant change of self-identity¹ in our modern world: "... [S]elf identity today is a reflexive achievement. The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale" (1991, 215). As the quotation demonstrates, Giddens gives emphasis to the fact that identity is something non-static, rather it has become a "*reflexive project*" (Giddens 32, emphasis in the original). In previous societies, identity construction was clearly delineated, because cultures remained "more or less the same" for several generations (1991, 33), but in the context of modernity, identity formation has to be created by "a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change" (ibid). Identity construction in our contemporary world has become more uncertain; this is partly due to the "blurring of [cultural] boundaries" (a point that will be discussed in section 2.4) and partly due to the loss of traditional aspects of identity. As Giddens puts it, modernity "confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices" (1991, 80), that is, each individual is free to choose, but s/he has to choose wisely because there will always be a consequence. "What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity..." (1991,70). As we can see, Giddens and Mead share the same ontological starting point that is to say identity is socially constructed and that it is changeable.

The foundation of Giddens' theories regarding the changing identity in our contemporary world is similar to the notion of hybridization, but Giddens uses another term– *disembedding mechanisms* (Giddens' italics). The disembedding applies to "the lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and their recombination across indefinite time/space distances" (1991, 243). Disembedding theory generally could be read as a theory of hybridization. Questions regarding how to define identity or how identity is constructed have been raised and discussed in this paper. In the following section, there will be a comprehensive discussion on what hybrid identity is but before that a brief definition of hybridity itself.

2.3 Hybridity

The term hybridity has its origins in 19th century biological theory. The word refers to "the cross-breeding of two species ... to form a third, 'hybrid' species". Although "Hybridization" takes different forms like "linguistic" or "political", nowadays, the term mostly alludes to the contact between two or more cultures that together create new "transcultural forms" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 118). Hybridity, a key concept that is developed within postcolonial discourse, is the notion that makes possible a cross-cultural identity construction, placing identity in a global context.

¹ Description of self-identity by Giddens: "[T]he self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography" (1991, 244).

2.4 Hybrid Identity

The concept of hybrid identity is used to emphasize the emergence of new forms of identity in the context of a post-traditional global society. This identity formation process, also known as hybridization, is a way “‘in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices’” (Rowe and Schelling, qtd in Pieterse 1995, 49). It is relevant to mention that we do need to differentiate between types of hybridization, between, structural and cultural hybridizations (Pieterse 1995, 49ff). Structural hybridization applies to a “variety of social and institutional *sites* of hybridity,” such as border zones, whereas cultural hybridization “distinguishes between *cultural responses* (Barker’s italics) ranging from assimilation, through forms of separation, to hybrids that destabilize and blur cultural boundaries.” These two types of hybridizations can be considered as evidence for an increased boundary crossing. These boundary crossing do not represent the “erasure of boundaries” hence, we need to be sensitive to both cultural differences and to other forms of “identification that involve recognition of *similarity*” (Barker 70, emphasis in the original). This indicates that there are other forms of identity formation processes and these forms can be based on different grounds, such as “cultural, ethnic and national identities”. These different types of identities are “formed and unformed over time and across a variety of spaces” (1999, 70). Barker distinguishes six different types of identity formation process, of which, three are more relevant to this study, and therefore, they are listed here:

1. “Two distinct cultural traditions are thought of as separate in time and/or space. We would define ourselves as Asian *or* British. This is the domain of nationalism and ethnic absolutism”.
2. “Cultures are translocal and involve global flows”. Hybridization takes place out of acknowledgment of difference and produces something new. For example, British Asian.
3. One cultural tradition “absorbs or obliterates the other and creates effective similarity”. The outcome could involve assimilation “(my parents are Asian but I am British)” or cultural domination and “imperialism” if that is the case one tradition entirely disappears. (Barker 71).

All three types of identity formation process listed by Barker can be applied to establish the kind of identity formation that the novel’s American born daughters have gone through:

Type 1. The American born daughters could define themselves as Chinese or American.

Type 2. The American born daughters could define themselves as Chinese American.

Type 3. The American born daughters consider their parents as Chinese but themselves as Americans.

As it has been suggested, the concept of hybrid identity presumes or indicates the meeting of distinct cultural traditions. For example the notion of a Chinese-American hybrid is established upon the fact that the two separate traditions mix in ‘time’ and ‘space,’ but it ignores the fact that neither the Chinese nor the American culture is homogenous. The fact is both Chinese and American cultures are already a hybrid form, which are “divided along the lines of religion, class, gender, age, nationality, and so on”. Therefore, hybridization is the mixing of that which is already hybrid (Barker 71). The claim regarding the “‘purity’ of cultures [is] untenable”. This statement, made by Homi Bhabha, substantiates

Barker's argument, that is, there is no culture, which is completely pure. Furthermore, Bhabha stresses "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in... [a] contradictory and ambivalent space" that he calls the third space of "enunciation". Accordingly, cultural identity always emerges in this ambiguous space (1994, 37). As it is understood, this space between cultures is the one in which immigrants move and out of which they will construct their personal identity, a so-called hybrid identity. The concept of hybrid identity permits us to establish new forms of identities, such as the Chinese-American identity.

Theories concerning identity and its formation have been presented in this paper. Depending on the type of theoretical framework one chooses to employ in an analysis of a literary work, certain aspects will obviously be highlighted at the expense of others. However, here, I will use a variety of critical postcolonial perspectives relevant to this study, from Bhabha to Gayatri Spivak (a post-colonialist thinker who questions the recovery of the subaltern's voice). As to the theories of identity formation, this paper will apply some of the established theories in order to explore and understand the identity construction of the American-born daughters as well as the outcome of this identity formation.

Giddens states that identity is not a "distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual" (1991, 53), rather identity is a mode of how we think about ourselves, and what we think we are changes from "circumstances to circumstances in time and space" (Barker 15). This infers that identity is something changeable, similar to something in progress rather than an arrival. This study also acknowledges the possibilities for hybrid identities. The concept of hybrid identities will be put to use to highlight the emergence of new forms of identities; for this purpose, I will use Barker's identity formation process list. This paper also recognizes the occurrence of cultural hybridization. As Barker has argued, hybridization can take various forms, but, in any case, in this study the focus will be on the development of a hybrid identity based on cultural aspects. Culture ascribes to the different "ways we make sense of the world," (Barker 11) this interpretation of the world transpires through "practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society" (Hall 1996, 439). These terms refer to various domains of cultural orientations, some of which, including language and language differences, will be discussed here. However, when it comes to culture, without a doubt, Chinese culture is among the world's oldest, richest, and most complex cultures. The complexity and richness of this culture has been beautifully depicted in Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club*. In the next section of this essay, I will discuss the identity formation of the novel's daughters, who encounter Chinese culture at home while growing up in America, with a focus on the cultural clashes between Waverly and Lindo, as well as June and Suyuan. This critical analysis will be done with references to the distinctions between Chinese and American cultures, and the effect of these two extremely diverse cultures on the creation of identity.

3. Cultural differences and its effect on the formation of identity

To understand the reasons behind the cultural clashes, which take place in the novel, requires a comprehensive grasp of main cultural concepts and the practices and institutions that foster and support these concepts in American and Chinese cultures. In American culture, these concepts include “independence, freedom, choice, ability, individual control, individual responsibility, personal expression, success, and happiness,” norms that Americans perform in their everyday social life (Heine, Lehmann, Markus, and Kitayama 1999, 769). In Chinese culture, which is highly influenced by Confucianism,² these concepts include corporation, individual modesty, “propriety, compliance, learning, discipline, industriousness, respect, deference, order, and submission” (Slote and De Vos 1998, 38, 46). As exemplified here, the cultural ideas and values in Chinese and American cultures differ from each other and because of these cultural differences, many misunderstandings occur between the mothers and daughters of the story.

An example of this cross-cultural misunderstanding that causes a conflict between Lindo and her daughter Waverly is their dispute over how to play chess effectively. In the “Rules of the Games” we read that Lindo who takes great pride in Waverly’s talent in chess makes her follow her to every shop that she visits, buying little or nothing, for the purpose of introducing her prodigy daughter to the shopkeepers. Waverly misunderstands her mother’s pride in her achievements, and thinks that her mother is using her to “show off” (99), something that has been seen as an embarrassment by her. Therefore, she declares, “I wish you wouldn’t do that, telling everybody I am your daughter” (99) by saying that Waverly separates herself from her mother, and subsequently from her entire family. She also thinks that her mother wants to take credit for her success and she expresses her resentment towards her mother:

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

It can be said that in this story, the conflict between mother and daughter is constructed as a cultural conflict--American culture vs. Chinese culture. American culture promotes individualism whereas Chinese culture supports collectivism. In collectivistic cultural orientation, the view of the individual is different from that of the individualistic cultural orientation. Within the ontological framework of collectivism, “the sense of self” is “largely external”; one is “identified by the way that others” view her/him. That has “always been the goal of Confucianism”, which defines “the individual’s place strictly in relation to the people around her...” There is “not a tradition [as there is in the West and certainly in the United States] of anchoring one’s identity to a fixed set of values regardless of what

² “Confucianism is an ethico-religious tradition that has shaped the culture of China for 2,500 years. Its influence subsequently spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam” (De Vos 1989, qtd in Slote and De Vos 1998, 37).

others [think]...” (Hessler 2001, 282). As opposed to the Chinese Culture, in American culture, it is of vital importance to be one’s own person: “Within the ontological... framework of individualism, the person is assumed to be a separate and somewhat nonsocial individual who exist independently” (Heine et al. 769). These individualist norms are reflected in and fostered by “key institutions such as schools, courts, and the media”, they are performed in everyday cultural practices such as those of childcare, and they are part of “Western [including American] social science” (ibid). The American- born daughters including Waverly went to school in America and like other American schoolchildren; they too were encouraged to be independent.

The importance of being independent has been further articulated by Heine et al., who argue that in schools, teachers gradually “‘individualize’ and decontextualize children” (ibid). The aim is to turn the dependent child into an “independent person with distinct preferences and unique attributes.” Children are also encouraged to think about themselves “positively as stars” and “as winners...” (Heine et al. 770). These cultural ideas are reflected in Waverly’s criticism of her mother. She brings attention to several of these concepts including her winning chess tournaments. For Waverley, playing chess is her unique talent something that makes her special and separates her from her mother and the others. Waverly wants chess to be strictly her own personal achievement, part of her own separate identity. She is a star and she wants to be acknowledged and praised as such. She also criticizes her mother for taking credit for her success. When her mother hovers over her and guides her during her practice sessions, she feels violated, as though her mother is somehow taking credit for what Waverly sees as her own personal strength. People usually tend to take credit for success regardless of their cultures, but it seems that to be recognized for success is of more significance in American culture and for Americans than that of any other cultures and people, and Waverly is no exception. In her case, she feels that she is sharing her success with someone else even though that someone is her mother; still, she is not happy about it. Waverly puts her dissatisfaction into the words: “At the next tournament, I won again, but it was my mother who wore the triumphant grin” (97), Waverly desires recognition for her talent and wants her success to be only hers--this is the essence of individualistic thinking.

Contrary to American culture, individualism is not supported in Chinese culture. Chinese people “place higher value on corporation and individual modesty” (AIEF).³ Independence, as defined in America as a “personal, culturally supported” goal is unthinkable for Chinese society (Slote 44). Instead, Chinese society promotes group and family. Chinese culture is a family oriented culture and the institution of family is the pinnacle of the society. In this culture, the individual “is not an ‘I,’ rather he/she is an inextricable part of an encompassing ‘we’” (ibid). Lindo, who grew up in that culture, places great importance on the family and its unity. In her mind there is no I, as Waverly sees it, but we. For her, Waverly’s success is the family success; therefore, she disapproves Waverly’s behavior and especially censures her lack of modesty. To Lindo, Waverly is an undeserving girl because she does not

³ AIEF stands for the American International Education Foundation.

appreciate her family, who put the interest of her ahead of their own. Everybody in the family has to sacrifice something in order to help Waverly to achieve her goal. Her brothers, for example, had to give up their comfortable bedrooms and sleep “in a bed in the living room facing the street”, because Waverley needed a room, which was less “noisy” they also had to do Waverly’s “chores” while they preferred to go out and “play” (99). Waverly also received special treatment; Lindo usually asks her “what special thing” she wanted to eat (171), not to mention that she follows her in every tournament to watch her to play. She also functions as her manager, without asking for anything in return. Waverly accepts all the help she gets from the family, but refuses to share her success with them. For the mother, the daughter is vain, because she considers herself as the center of everything.

Lindo, whose view of the individual is different from that of her daughter, cannot understand the importance of being independent for Waverly who lives in America and is growing up in that contemporary American culture. As Lindo sees it, Waverly’s quest for independency is a declaration of rejection of the family. To Lindo this is a threat to the family harmony, and the family harmony is very important in Chinese culture. Lindo does not comprehend the fact that Waverly, who has learned at school to be autonomous, needs to differentiate herself from her mother in order to gain her own sense of self and to create her own identity, and chess is the only thing through which she can claim her separate identity.

American culture also upholds a positive self-perception (because of this or not) more often American’s “self-perceptions tend to be systematically biased toward an overly positive view of the self” (Heine et al. 779). Like any other American Waverly too has a positive view of herself. She is a national chess champion at the age of ten, and according to American culture, she has every right to feel good about herself. Feeling good about herself means that she is an adequate individual. She is proud of her achievements and expects her mother, too, be proud of her. In fact, she anticipates to be complimented over her achievements. Waverly’s self-esteem shatters when her mother, instead of praising and complimenting her on her success, proclaims, “You don’t have to be so smart to win chess” (170). This story is narrated from Waverly’s point of view and the reader never gets to hear Lindo’s perspective on the topic; she is deprived of the power to voice her interpretation of the issue. However to learn about, at least one aspect of Chinese culture may help us to understand Lindo’s point of view. As discussed earlier, American people view themselves as ‘independent’ and ‘separate’ from others and Chinese people, who have a collectivistic cultural orientation, see themselves as “inextricably connected to others”. Because American culture views the self as separate from others, they inspire their members to demonstrate their “uniqueness by engaging in self-enhancement strategies (i.e., presentation of the self as superior to others).” Whereas Chinese culture views the self as connected with others, hence they inspire their members to “maintain interpersonal relationships through self-effacement strategies (i.e., presentation of the self as inferior to others).” This means that, while American individuals “tend to view and present themselves positively” Chinese individuals “tend to view and present themselves

negatively” (qtd in Tsai, Ying, and Lee 2001, 285). This insight into Chinese culture helps us to understand Lindo’s view when she modestly says you do not have to be so smart to win chess. Through the self-effacement, Lindo, as Waverly’s manager, retains interpersonal relationships with whoever involves in the tournaments including sponsors, players, and other managers.

As Waverly’s mother, Lindo wants to teach her daughter about Chinese culture, and the importance of modesty in that culture. It deserves mention that the hierarchal respect for the elderly in China might discourage adults from lavishing excessive praise on children. Perhaps that is the reason why Lindo does not pay any compliment to Waverly over her achievements. Lindo also wants to teach Waverly to be appreciative of her talent. Because mother and daughter are influenced by two different cultural belief systems--the individualistic and collectivistic--regarding their views of the world, they get into an argument. Waverly who is just a child that trying to make sense of the world defies her mother and in order to get her own way she decides to punish her mother. She does this by announcing, she will never play chess again. This was only an empty threat on Waverly’s side who wanted to bring her mother to her knees. She was not serious about quitting chess. Having her plan fail, after a while, Waverly declares her intention to resume chess. She thinks that by changing her strategy, she can reconcile with her mother; but Lindo thinks otherwise, she says, “[y]ou think it is so easy. One day quit, next day play. Everything for you is this way” (171). In her statement, she is refereeing to Waverly’s fickle and ungrateful treatment of her talent for chess. She also criticizes Waverly for disregarding the sacrifices that the family made in order for her to be successful. Her quitting the chess without discussing it with the family suggests that despite all their helps and involvements they have no say in this matter. It is also implied that mother-daughter relationship cannot be so easily mended and that Waverly cannot play her mother like a toy.

After their fight over chess, Lindo decides not to talk to her daughter and she also stops instructing her when she practices her movements. When Waverly goes against her mother, she not only loses the protector and supporter that she had in her, but also loses the power that she calls “the art of invisible strength” (89), a strategy that she learned from her mother. In the art of invisible strength, a person does not disclose his/her secrets until the right moment comes, and then s/he reveals the secrets for her or his own personal gain. Lindo herself had used this strategy to extricate herself from an arranged marriage without dishonoring her parents’ promise to her husband’s family. When a girl growing up in China, Lindo’s mother arranged for her to marry a 13-year-old boy, named Tyan-Yu, who was a pampered and self-centered child. At the age of sixteen, Lindo and Tyan-Yu got married, and Lindo’s mother-in-law planned their wedding.

At the wedding ceremony, according to custom, the matchmaker arranged for the couple to have a “red candle” (59) marked with Lindo’s name on one end, and Tyuan-Yu’s on the other. The couple lit the candle and a servant was instructed to “watch” over “the candle” (ibid) all night, because if the candle burned until dawn without either end extinguishing prematurely, the matchmaker would declare

the marriage indestructible. That night the servant ran from the room where she was watching the candle because she mistook a thunderstorm for an attack by “the Japanese” (60). When Lindo saw the servant girl leaving the room, she went into the room and “blew out” Tyan-Yu’s “end of the candle” (ibid). She did this because she was very unhappy in the Huangs’ house and wanted out of there and also out of the marriage. The next morning, however, the matchmaker displayed the candle’s burnt remains and announced that the marriage was sealed. Lindo realized that the servant girl relit the candle. Months passed and Tyan-Yu, who was just a child with no desire for women, still would not touch Lindo. She was relieved and came to love her husband like a brother, but her mother-in law wanted grandchildren and she blamed Lindo for their lack of children. To make Lindo fertile Huang Taitai took away all Lindo’s gold and “confined” her “to the bed so that her grandchildren’s seeds”, the seeds that her son claimed that had planted in Lindo, “would not spill out so easily” (62). Lindo describes how it felt lying in bed: “Oh, you think it is so much fun to lie in bed all day, never getting up. But I tell you it was worse than a prison” (ibid). Even staying in the bed did not help and Lindo still bore no children. By chance, noticing that a servant girl was pregnant by the deliveryman, Lindo devised a plan to make the Huangs think it was their idea to end the marriage. She pretends that she had a dream in which her ancestors came to her and revealed that the matchmaker’s servant allowed Tyan-Yu’s end of the candle to go out, which meant Tyan-Yu would die if he stayed in the marriage. Furthermore, she said that the ancestors also revealed the servant girl was carrying Tyan-Yu’s baby and that the girl was of royal blood. Lindo announced this news at just the time she could use the revelation of the servant girl’s pregnancy to her own advantage from that miserable marriage without dishonoring her parents’ promise. Lindo was granted a divorce and Tyan-Yu married the servant girl. Later in life, Lindo moved to the United States and married her second husband. Lindo, who had benefited from the art of invisible strength, decides to teach this strategy to her daughter so she too can overcome the difficulties in her life. Waverly’s success in chess was partly due to this strategy and partly due to her mother’s devotion and guidance. Because of their dispute, Lindo ceases teaching her daughter about the strength of hidden truths, silences and self-position. Waverly who does not have her mother’s guidance and support anymore, loses her steady confidence and loses her next tournament and other defeats follow. She finally quits playing chess, and because of this, she loses part of her identity as a future chess champion.

Waverly and Lindo’s relationship is severely damaged because of their cultural differences, a damage that takes years for mother and daughter to repair. Waverly lives in-between two worlds with two diverse cultures, the Chinese culture at home and the American culture outside the home. These two cultures are extremely different from each other and it is very difficult for her, a ten-year-old child, to handle the situation. Unable to balance her life between the two cultures, she chooses to go with the dominant culture, which is the American culture. As Lindo emphasizes, Waverly follows her mother’s “Chinese ways” only until she learns “how to walk out the door by herself and go to school” (253). Waverly’s decision, to ignore her Chinese inheritance has an effect on the construction of her identity.

She grows up resenting that part of herself that is Chinese, as Lindo bitterly expresses, Waverly “would have clapped her hands--hurray” if she was told, “she did not look Chinese” (253). Rejecting her oriental heritage, Waverly never acquires any knowledge about the Chinese culture and she never learns the Chinese language.

There is another story in the book, which involves another schoolchild who describes her childhood as full of pain and resentment connected to not having ever been the “prodigy” (132) that her mother wished her to be. Even in this story, the dispute between the Chinese mother and the American-born daughter is constructed as a cultural conflict, with the mother’s attempts to maintain control and the daughter’s wish to run free. This episode is built around June’s piano lesson. Lacking talent and drive, June, who resented the piano lessons, decided not to practice seriously, as a result, her piano recital debut ended in disaster. Because of the talent show fiasco, June believed that she “never had to play the piano again” (141). A few days later, when Suyuan insists that she carry on her regular schedule of practice, June refuses. When Suyuan finds her daughter sitting in front of the TV instead of practicing piano, a conflict takes place. She demands her daughter to turn off the TV and starts practicing, but June refuses. She articulates her thoughts: “I didn’t budge. And then I decided. I didn’t have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China” (141). After letting the reader know how she feels about the piano lessons, she challenges her mother: “I’m not going to play anymore.” “Why should I?” “I’m not a genius” (ibid). Suyuan’s answer is “[w]ho ask you be genius?” “Only ask you be your best. For your sake” (136). Suyuan, who believes in her daughter and her ability, does not accept no for an answer. She walks over and stands in front of the TV. June screams “No!” “No! I won’t!” (ibid). This story is narrated from the daughter’s point of view, and through her pain comes the sympathy that reader (American reader) feels for her. She is a ten-year-old child who has her own will and opinion. If her ‘preference’ is to watch the TV and not to practice the piano, she should do accordingly.

As discussed earlier, American culture encourages ‘individual control,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘choice’. In the quarrel between mother and daughter, June like Waverly, brings up some of these concepts in her argument. She too resists her mother’s imposing things on her against her own will. The American culture places “high value” on ‘freedom’ from “externally imposed constraints” (AIEF). When June proclaims that she will not continue practicing the piano, it is because she perceives her mother’s demands as an imposition. Individualists are primarily concerned with protecting individual autonomy against obligations imposed by anyone or any institutions social or family alike, and June is aware of that. She has learnt at school that individuals should have control over their lives and that they are free to choose what they want to do or not to do. June resorts to her right of freedom by declaring: I am not your slave. She backs her declaration up by insisting that such imposition is not the norm in the United States--this is not China. June consciously compares the two cultures and associates specific norms with the Chinese and American cultures. She associates individual’s ‘freedom’, ‘control’, and ‘choice’ to the

American culture, and force, “torture” (91,141), and “misery” (141,143) to the Chinese culture. This association is exhibited in her description about how her mother “slap[s]” (136) her and forces her to sit in front of the piano.

She yanked me by the arm, pulled me off the floor, snapped off the TV. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me toward the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up and onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now, looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased I was crying. (141-42)

Here, the mother is represented as abusive, both, verbally and physically. The mother of the story wishes to change her daughter and forces her to “be someone” that she is “not” (142). Suyuan’s wish to change her daughter has the indication that June is inadequate that is to say, she is not measuring up to her mother’s criteria for worth. “[F]eelings of inadequacy, incompetence, or dependency challenge the ‘self-worth’” of Americans and tend to be “accompanied by considerable feelings of psychological discomforts” (Heine and Lehman 1999a, Higgins 1989, Steele 1988 qtd in Heine et al. 770). Suyuan’s criticism of June could be destructive because it could damage her positive view of self. Given the psychological importance of self-esteem in American culture, it is not surprising that June, who has learnt to have high regards for herself, feels that she is adequate and her mother does not have any right to change her. She relates to the reader: “I promised myself, I won’t let her change me...” (134). By changing her, the mother wants to shape her daughter’s future, according to her own ideal without regarding her daughter’s feelings. The indication here is that Suyuan is in control of her daughter’s future, in turn this indicates that June is not free to choose what she wants to be or what career she wants to pursue.

As it is pointed out by Heine et al. “... the individual has a right and responsibility, in fact a moral obligation, to become separate, autonomous, efficacious, and in control” (769). June has no control over herself, her life, and her future and this is against everything that she has learned at school; it is also against every principle for which the American culture stands. June, who thinks her mother is being unfair, thinking that she is not good enough: “Why don’t you like me the way I am?” (136), resists her mother’s demands, and declares, “I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!” (143). Suyuan replies: “Only two kinds of daughters,” “[t]hose who are obedient and those who follow their own mind!” As a mother, Suyuan has the authority over her child by virtue. She can demand her daughter to do as she says. For, it is her house and in her house, her daughter should live by her rules. When she asserts, “Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter” (142), she emphasizes the duties of the daughter. The fact that Suyuan requests her daughter to be ‘obedient’ does not conform with the concept of freedom, which is highly significant in American mainstream culture. Because, the construction of the mother is through the daughter’s eyes, Suyuan, like Lindo, is deprived of the power to voice her clarification of the issue. Therefore, it is difficult for the reader to make sense of her behavior, that is to say, dragging her daughter in that manner to the piano and forcing her to practice. It

would be beneficial to learn something about the concept of hope in the Chinese culture in order to construe Suyuan's perspective, but prior to that, there is a discussion on the reason behind June's decision to quit piano.

Although June claims that she is an adequate individual and her mother is being unfair on her thinking she is not good enough, but the truth is in her sub-conscious June feels that her mother is right. She talks about the "disappointment" her mother "felt in" her:

In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight As. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college. For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me (142). We were again having this argument about my being a failure,.... (37)

This feeling of inadequacy is pronounced by June once again when she takes her mother's place at the Joy Luck Club, a weekly mah jong party. At the Joy Luck Club meeting, June questions her own ability to replace her mother, who was a strong resourceful woman: "[h]ow can I be my mother at Joy Luck?" (27). She remembers her mother's critical attitude toward herself. Suyuan had always compared June with her friend Lindo's daughter, Waverly, a successful tax accountant. June feels insufficient because she never succeeded in becoming the prize daughter that Waverly is. June's remark about how she could ever replace her mother and carry her mother's hope into the future implies that she has doubt about her own strength and ability. Replacing her mother also means to maintain part of her mother's past in her own present. Suyuan created the Joy Luck Club in Kweilin in China because she wanted to create a sense of belonging and "happiness" (25). She describes their mah jong parties to June: "[w]e were not allowed to think a bad thought ... we played games, lost and won.... And each week, we could hope to be lucky (ibid). That hope was our only joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck" (25). Suyuan recommenced the club in the United States, hoping that it would bring a sense of continuity between the club members' old and new cultures and also help them to preserve their identity in this new culture. The club is a symbol of hope, and the responsibility of carrying all the club mothers' hope into the future falls upon June. June, who thinks that she has not met her mother's expectations regarding being a prodigy, finishing the college, and finding a well-paying job like Waverly has, feels that she already represents the failure of her mother's dreams and hopes.

Hope is the value that is highly esteemed in every culture, the world over--especially in Chinese culture. In *The Joy Luck Club*, most of the transformations are accomplished through hope, understanding, and life circumstances. Already in the first vignette, "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away", we read about an old Chinese woman's high hopes for a daughter whom she is dreaming of having in the United States. The woman wants to present her future daughter a gift and that gift is a "swan feather" that "comes from afar and carries with it all [her] good intentions" (17). In many

cultures, a feather⁴ symbolizes a new beginning and hope; hence, the title of this chapter in the book could be interpreted as, hope from a thousand li away. Like the swan, the American-born daughter surpasses all her mother's hopes and expectations. She becomes successful, respectable and happy, but that success and happiness could not be possible if it were not for her mother's help and hard work toward it. Hope is something that people desire, expect, plan, and try for themselves and for their children. In many Asian cultures including Chinese culture "hopes for children are considered as a responsibility of parents" (Yin 2005, 163). Therefore, Suyuan, just like the old Chinese woman in the parable, feels that it is her responsibility to help and plan her daughter's future. Suyuan's plan is to make a successful pianist of her daughter and to become a successful, "famous" (136) pianist requires perfection, and perfection requires hard work. Chinese people are very diligent--a result of Confucian teaching--and Suyuan is no exception. She views achievement as a function of effort and discipline. In her view, if June practices every day she can improve and perhaps reach, if possible, some sort of perfection. Believing in her daughter and her capability to be 'anything that she wants to be,' Suyuan does her best to get June all the help that she needs in order to achieve success in life. Often "a hope for a particular family member would also mean sacrifice on the part of the other members" (Yin 163). Suyuan, like Lindo, makes some sacrifices for her daughter. She provides help for June by doing "housework for an old retired piano teacher" (37) who gave her "lessons and free use of a piano to practice on in exchange" (38). Instead of appreciating her mother's commitment to her success, June defies her mother by saying, "I wish I wasn't your daughter" (142). By saying that June, like Waverly, separates herself from her mother and consequently she disconnects herself from her entire family. Both June and Waverly tend to think that the role of the mother is to be unconditionally kind, supportive, and encouraging. Despite their idealized notion of a mother, in reality, they often feel criticized and pressured by their mothers, who push them towards success.

Filial piety, which means devotion and honor to parents and ancestors, is considered as a central feature of Chinese culture. The Chinese hold family bonds as sacred and honor them accordingly; thus, loyalty to family is of high significance. Family loyalty can be defined as obedience, respect, devotion, solidarity and closeness between the generations in a family. In contrast to Chinese culture, in American culture, filial piety receives "very little attention in Americans' upbringing." Instead, children "learn to 'question authority,' including that of their fathers" (AIEF). That is exactly what has happened in the stories discussed here. The daughters challenge the paternal authority and its expectation of obedience and dependency.

When the two daughters June and Waverly require autonomy, freedom, and control over their lives, their individualistic understanding of family and family life goes against that of their parents. First, they disrespect their mothers by using words such as, 'shut up' or "crazy" (122). Second, they

⁴ "Hope is the thing with feathers/that perches in the soul/ and sings the tune...without the words/and never stops at all..." (1994, 16). In this stanza, Emily Dickinson defines hope by comparing it to a bird. The tune is without words, means hope is not a matter of word, but it is feeling about the future, about desire and expectation.

show no loyalty to their families, in fact, they disconnect themselves from their families when they wished that their mothers were not their mothers. It is a customary belief that daughters usually tend to define themselves in connection rather than separation from the mother, but because the American-born daughters rejected their mothers, they never managed to obtain a strong functioning relationship with them.

To sacrifice one's happiness for the family is another aspect of filial piety. Lindo's first marriage is a testimony to this principle. Lindo stayed in a loveless marriage, for years, to a boy who "had no desire for" her or "any woman" (62) for that matter, out of respect for her parents. Lindo's bed literally became a 'prison' because she was not fulfilling her wifely duty of giving birth. She tolerates the situation without complaining or asking for a divorce, simply because she did not want to dishonor her parents by breaking their promise to Huang Taiti. By staying in an unhappy marriage, which could kill her spirit, she sacrifices her happiness for her family.

In contrast to Chinese culture, the pursuit of happiness is very essential in American culture. To be happy is a "basic value" for most Americans. "The U.S. Declaration of Independence... proclaims that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental right of its citizens. Failing to be happy in America implies that, one is somehow failing to realize the cultural mandate" (Heine, Lehmann, Markus, and Kitayama 774). To find "happiness" is "less important value in China" than e.g. in Australia or in America (Feather 1986, qtd in Heine et al. 775). The reason is that it is critical for individuals in China, which has a collectivistic cultural orientation, to "act in accordance with the wishes of the group" or family, and "not on the basis of their own feelings" (Heine et al. 774). Thus, in Lindo's view, everything had to be done for the sake of the family's well-being and not on the basis of personal happiness. The American-born daughters, June and Waverley, complain about being unhappy, because their mothers force them to work hard toward success. When June failed in her piano recital, she anticipated a reaction from her mother: "I had been waiting for her to start shouting, so I could shout back and cry and blame her for all my misery" (141). The slightest discomfort makes June feel miserable and feeling miserable goes against her right of happiness. Comparing June's misery to that of her mother's, who lost her first husband in the war and had been forced to leave her twin daughters in the road side for someone else to take care. One realizes why the daughter appears as selfish and self-centered in the mother's eyes. It is understandable, why Suyuan is so critic of her daughter, who grumbles about being unhappy.

In fact, Lindo draws a comparison between her treatment of her own parents to that of adult Waverly. She states:

I once sacrificed my life to keep my parents' promise. This means nothing to you, because to you promises mean nothing. A daughter can promise to come to dinner, but if she has a headache, if she has a traffic jam, if she wants to watch a favorite movie on TV, she no longer has a promise. (49)

From Lindo's description, it can be concluded that there are two different assumptions regarding how a

daughter should treat her mother. According to Lindo, a daughter should give higher priority to her mother. Once a promise is made to the mother, it should be kept. Lindo viewed her parents' promise as her own promise, and underwent degradation and humiliation in the Huangs' home for years in order to fulfill it. According to her American-born daughter, breaking an arrangement is not a major issue, and it can scarcely be seen as breaking a serious promise. As far as Waverly's concern, her interest should be given the highest priority. One can see how two different points of view, individualistic and collectivistic, can be the cause of problems in relationships between the Chinese mothers and the American-born daughters. The daughters' resentment originates from what they see as a lack of willingness on their mothers' part to see them as they are, to accept them as having lives both different and separate from those of their own. The "spirit of individualism" makes the "daughters resistant to maternal advice and criticism. Born into a culture in which ... the individual is permitted, even encouraged, to challenge tradition and authority, the younger women are reluctant to accept their mothers' values without question" (Hamilton 1999,126).

However, if American culture promotes the individual right of happiness, June and Waverly, who follow the American cultural traditions and values should put their own needs, interests and happiness above all, regardless of how much tension their behavior can create in their relationships with their mothers and with the entire households. The conflict between June and Suyuan over the piano lesson created a kind of tension that took its toll on their relationship. Because of their cultural differences, mother and daughter cannot maintain a healthy relationship and over the years, they grow even further apart.

June like Waverly wobbles between two worlds, with two different sets of traditions, values, lifestyles, and social expectations. Unable to traverse the cultural distance between the home and the outside world, which embody two contradictory cultural extremities; she chooses the American culture over the Chinese. In Chinese culture, the belief is that self-cultivation begins with the recognition that biological bonds are an important part of one's identity. This is in keeping with the collectivist, cultural idea that "one's identity and sense of self is inextricably established only within the context of the whole" (Slote 44). If the process of building one's identity begins at home then June and Waverly's identities are not complete; neither are the other daughters' identities including Lena and Rose. This is because of their disregard for their families and their Chinese cultural heritage.

Although, the focus of this section has been the formation of identity of Waverly and June, it can be said that Lena and Rose, the other two novel's daughter characters, have gone through the same process of identity construction. Encountering Chinese culture at home while having the immediate experience of living in America, they too are caught in a state of living in-betweenness. Unable to cope with the dichotomies of cultures they decide on total assimilation into the American culture. All four daughters consciously reject their Chinese heritage. They also refuse to learn the Chinese language and in so doing they neglect the social value of being bilingual.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this essay (section 2.2), Anthony Giddens argues that modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices. According to Giddens, the individual is free to choose: ‘What to do?’ ‘How to act?’ ‘Who to be?’ This means that identity is not something we possess or have. Rather, ‘identity is a mode of thinking about ourselves’ as Barker, puts it. To have the freedom to choose who to be, the four daughters of *The Joy Luck Club* decide to be Americans. By choosing America and following only the American culture, the daughters ignore their oriental heritage, something that prevents them from creating an identity that incorporates both their cultures.

Earlier (part 2.3), it has been discussed that Chris Barker distinguishes six different types of identity formation process, one of which reads: one cultural tradition ‘absorbs... the other and creates effective similarity. The outcome could involve assimilation (my parents are Asian but I am British)’. The daughters of the novel identify themselves as Americans but their parents as Chinese; based on that and Barker’s description it can be established that the American-born daughters fall into Barker’s third category of identity formation process. In the process of assimilation into the American culture, the daughters lose part of their identity--the part that is Chinese. This is partially due to the cultural differences and partially due to the lack of a common language between the Chinese mothers and the American-born daughters. Language barriers is another issue brought up by Amy Tan in her novel; this topic will be discussed in the next section of this essay.

4. Language Barriers

Within the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, linguistic barriers have triggered many misunderstandings between both Chinese-speaking mothers and English-speaking daughters and between persons who speak different Chinese dialects. The vignette “Feathers from a Thousand Li Away” that introduces the first group of stories in the book starts with a parable that immediately suggests a language gap between the mother and daughter. Here, we are told that an old Chinese woman needs to wait for a long time to give her daughter a swan feather that she has brought with her from China. This mother wants to tell her daughter that the “feather may look worthless”, but it symbolizes all her love and ‘good intentions.’ “And she waited, year after year, for the day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English” (17). In order to get her daughter to understand her motherly love and devotion the old Chinese woman has to wait patiently until she is able to communicate in her daughter’s language, that is, English.

This feather, which symbolizes the mother’s Chinese heritage, initiates the story of a woman who had fought hard to give her daughter the opportunities and the freedom that she never had. The feather also symbolizes transformation and development. All the mothers in the novel, like the old Chinese woman in the parable, are transformed through certain experiences that fundamentally change their characters, such as living in America and becoming to some degree Americanized. However, this

mother-daughter conversation about maternal love or personal development might never take place. Even if the mother were to learn ‘perfect American English’, she would never be able to translate fully the nuances of her story. The translation of a story or a “literary text” is a “transaction not between two languages”, or an “act of linguistic ‘substitution’”, but rather a “more complex negotiation between two cultures.” In other words, translation of a story or a text is not about substituting a word by its equivalent but rather the “whole language and culture” in which that story or text “was constituted” (Bassnett and Lefevere qtd in Trivedi 280). Translation, as Bhabha puts it, “is the performative nature of cultural communication” (228). Reading the novel, we realize that some individual Chinese words do not have even English equivalents, for example, “*hong-mu*,”⁵ which is a kind of wood, according to Suyuan, there is no “English word for it” (24). The terms “*hulihudu*” and “*heimongmong*” are Chinese words indicating confusion. Rose says that the closest translation for “*hulihudu*” would be “confused” and “*heimongmong*” would be “dark fog”. She further emphasizes, “[b]ut really, the words mean much more than that. Maybe they can’t be easily translated because they refer to a sensation that only Chinese people have...” (188). Although Rose masters the English language and she also knows what the two Chinese words mean yet she fails to describe to the reader how she felt when she received the news that her husband filed for a divorce. This implies that even if the individual words might have English equivalents, ultimately the Chinese and American cultures can never be equivalent.

In fact, throughout the course of the novel, the various narrators meditate on their inability to translate concepts and values from one culture to another. This proves that the language gap that exists between the mothers and daughters extends into many aspects of life, and to subdue these problems requires more than learning extra vocabulary. The mothers and the daughters should attempt a cross-cultural translation whose success depends not only on their mastering the English and Chinese languages but also on their understanding of the American and Chinese cultures. Because the Chinese mothers cannot skillfully use and understand the language, nor the culture of America, their translation often fails to convey the full meaning of their stories. These stories are of high significance because each gives an insight into the Chinese language, culture and heritage. Additionally, the mothers’ narrations serve as a means for creating and an attempt to bridge the separation of traditional Chinese culture with that of a contemporary American culture. The mothers use the function of storytelling as a method for passing on their personal values and advice.

One example of these kinds of stories is the magpies’ story told by An-mei in order to teach her daughter, Rose, a lesson. Rose’s marriage is falling apart and An-mei is distraught about the fact that Rose claims she has “[n]o choice!” (215). She remarks that although Rose believes she has run out of choices, she actually is making a clear choice in declining to speak up for herself. An-mei knows this, she says, because she “was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people’s misery, to eat [her] own

⁵ Unless noted otherwise, from this point on, all the words in slanted type are Tan’s Italic.

bitterness” (215). She learned her first lesson in such passiveness when she was a child living at her uncle’s house in Ningpo, this uncle helped to raise An-mei and her little brother. An-Mei’s mother had been disowned and thrown out of the family home by her own mother because she became a concubine. This happened when An-mei was four years old, so she and her brother went to live with their uncle and grandmother, Popo, who forbade them to speak their mother’s name.

Mother and her children were kept apart for years, until Popo became terminally ill, and An-Mei’s mother came to visit her dying mother. She tried to save Popo by cutting her arm and put the flesh in Popo’s soup. According to “ancient tradition”, such a sacrifice might “cure” a dying family member (48), but her attempt fails and Popo dies. After her death, An-mei’s mother prepared to leave and An-mei began to cry. Seeing her daughter crying, she tells her a story. Her mother told her that once, when she was a child, she had sat crying by the pond when a turtle surfaced, “eating [her] tears as soon as they touched the water” (217). The turtle then said, “I have eaten your tears” therefore, “I know your misery. But I must warn you. If you cry, your life will always be sad.” He spat out the tears in the form of tiny eggs that cracked open to reveal seven fluttering magpies, “birds of joy.” The turtle continued “[n]ow you see, . . . why it is useless to cry. Your tears do not wash away your sorrows. They feed someone else’s joy” (ibid). “And that is why you must learn to swallow your own tears” (217). Through the story of the turtle, An-mei’s mother teaches her daughter to swallow her tears. Because crying and feeling sorry for oneself does not help; but most importantly she teaches her, instead of crying, to stand up and assert herself, and this is exactly what An-mei does; she stands up against the patriarch’s forbiddance. Her uncle forbade her to go with her mother. An-mei, challenging the angry exhortation of her uncle, decided to leave that house and follow her mother. Her uncle finally let her go, but he considered her “[f]inished!” (219), this means that An-mei too had been disowned by the family.

Mother and daughter left the house and travelled to Tientsin, where An-mei’s mother had lived for the past five years in the household of a rich merchant named Wu Tsing. She lived, as a fourth concubine, with him and his other wives. In that household, An-mei learned yet another lesson from her mother. The second wife, a manipulative woman gave An-mei a pearl necklace. An-mei felt honored by the attention, but her mother warned her not to be manipulated by the second wife. Later, An-mei’s mother crushed one pearl of the necklace “under her shoe”, proving that it was made of “glass” (231). Through this necklace, An-mei learned to see beyond appearances, and similarly learned that always be on guard against deception. After her mother’s suicide, she killed herself to force Wu Tsing to promise to give An-mei a respected rank in his household; An-mei confronted the second wife. She showed her “the fake pearl necklace” that she had given her and “crushed it under her foot.” An-mei says, “. . . on that day, Second Wife’s hair began to run white. And on that day, I learned to shout” (240).

Now years after the event, An-mei, a mother herself, wants to pass on these valuable lessons to her daughter, who is unable to voice her opinion, to stand up for herself, or to make decisions. Rose has always allowed, her husband, Ted, to make all the decisions in their marriage, but when he asks her to

take on some of the responsibility, Rose's relationship with her husband crumbles. Ted asks for a divorce and tries to buy his way out of the marriage for ten thousand dollars. When Rose first tells An-mei that Ted sent her a check, An-mei asks if that means he is having an affair, Rose laughs in response to her suggestion. An-mei tries to communicate with her daughter and to make her see through Ted's manipulative ways, but Rose avoids the conversation by telling her mother that they should not talk about Ted. An-mei endeavors to instill Rose with an understanding of her heritage, but also attempts to save her the pain she felt as a girl growing up in China. Rose, on the other hand, sees her mother's attempt at guidance as a form of meddling. Rose is not the only one who feels this way, all the daughters often mistake their mothers' love and guidance as a form of contemptuous interfering. They often feel criticized and pressured by their mothers and relate their mothers' interference with their lives to their inability to understand and consent American culture, which especially values autonomy, independence and personal happiness. This is the core reason that they refuse to listen to their mothers. An-mei is upset by the fact that her daughter can talk about "this with a psyche-atricks" (188), a stranger, but she is unable to confide to her mother. She pleads to her daughter, "[a] mother is best. A mother knows what is inside you" (188). An-mei shows her loving concerns for her daughter by saying:

I know how it is to live your life like a dream. To listen and watch, to wake up and try to understand what has already happened. You do not need a psychiatrist to do this. A psychiatrist does not want you to wake up. He tells you to dream some more, to find the pond and pour more tears into it. And really, he is just another bird drinking from your misery. (240-241)

An-mei does her utmost to reach her daughter, but the question is will Rose listen; or as it is with the other daughters, she too will dismiss her mother's lesson and advice on account of the language gap.

Reading the novel in English, we may forget that the mothers are speaking "Chinese" (39), and this is because their English is "fragile" (20). In an essay titled "Mother Tongue", Tan, herself, daughter of first generation Chinese immigrants, discusses her mother's and her own personal cultural dilemma with bilingualism, as well linguistic and cultural barriers between Chinese immigrants and the dominant discourse. In this article, Tan describes her own mother's English as "limited", "fractured" and "broken" (1995, 188ff). The writer, who has a first-hand experience how the Chinese immigrants especially those who moved to the United States in their adulthood speak English; and we are provided with many examples in her book. To mention but a few:

This my daughter Wave-ly Jong; Aiii-ya. So shame be with mother?; Embarrass you be my daughter? (99); we not want it (93); All day I have no time do nothing but dust off her winnings; Our problem worsen than yours (138); what use for? You don't eat it, only have to throw it away. Wasted! (176); A psyche-atricks will only make you *hulihudu*, make you see *heimongmong* (188); June not sophisticate like you (206); Everybody else want best quality. You thinking different. (208)

As it is exemplified here, the language that the mothers use is a non-standard form of English. The mothers communicate with their daughters through a language where Chinese and Chinese dialects are employed within the English language system, with an accompanying process of reduction/omission of

– grammatical terms—for example, the use of the infinitive, the omission of verbs, subjects, propositions, articles, etc. Tan’s preoccupation with language differences is hardly surprising, considering the divided reality in which her generation of Chinese-Americans grew up.

Tan, furthermore, emphasizes that her “mother’s ‘limited’” English “limited” her “perception” (188ff) of her mother:

I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her (ibid).

This linguistic barrier manifests itself in the novel. The language that the mothers speak is a kind of Chinese-American Pidgin English, which is viewed as deficient or “stupid” (40) by the daughters; whereas the daughters who are all university graduates and professionals speak perfect “white middle-class American English” (Yin 157). The sharp contrast that exists between the two language styles reflects and “reinforces the linguistic prejudice that is prevalent in the American society” (ibid). The American public tends to view pidgin, creole, and minority dialects as corrupted and degenerated. An example of the bias is African American Vernacular, which is stigmatized in mainstream US. The contrary to that is the Standard English of the white middle-class American, which is considered as intelligent and inspiring and any aberration from this standard is seen as stupid, and illiterate. However, in the very same article, Tan, at first, relates when she was young that she was ashamed of her mother’s broken English, however, she admits that later on in life her understanding of her mother, her culture and her use of English language alters. She articulates: some people have problem to understand my mother’s English:

But to me, my mother’s English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It’s my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world (188ff).

Tan’s statement carries the indication that this condescending view of her mother’s English is misguided. Her mother formulated ideas and thoughts that went beyond the standard syntax of American English. She was not stupid. Quite the contrary, she was expressing an intelligence and wisdom in a dialect that represented another worldview.

This linguistic prejudgment that exists in the US mainstream culture has been pointed out by June. She confesses that the daughters think their mothers are stupid because of their “fractured English” (41), while the mothers are “impatient” (40) with their daughters who do not understand the cultural nuances of their language. June recognizes this problem first after she joined the Joy Luck Club. By becoming a member, June gets the opportunity to know the mothers and through them, she comes to know her own mother and the story of her life. She finally understands that the purpose of the club is to create a place to exchange “stories” (41), and that to these mothers, storytelling is a way of controlling their own fate.

Faced with pain of losing husband and children and hardship, her mother, Suyuan, decided to take control of the scheme of her life, thus she created the joy luck club. June realizes that the mothers employ storytelling to pass on their historical legacy to their daughters. By telling their daughters about their family histories, the mothers ensure that their lives are remembered and understood by the succeeding generation. She also realizes that the club does not simply serve as a distraction; it also has enabled transformation of community, of love and support. The Chinese mothers' love and support for each other is especially prominent in their generosity towards June and their recently deceased friend Suyuan. They gave June 1200 dollars to buy a ticket to China to meet her twin stepsisters. It was Suyuan's long cherished wish to be reunited with her twin daughters who she left behind in China. During the Japanese invasion, Suyuan loses almost everything she holds dear. In a desperate attempt to save her twin daughters from the Japanese troops advancing through China, she leaves them by the side of the road. She also leaves her possessions and address with them, in hopes "that her daughters would be found by a kindhearted person who would care for them" (283). Suyuan did not know what the future would hold, but she had to believe that her daughters would survive.

It is in the Joy Luck Club that June learns about yet another important fact that was kept from her by her mother. The aunts tell June that her mother had been secretly searching for her twin daughters throughout her years in America; and just before her death, she had succeeded in locating their address. Because Suyuan died before she could contact them, the aunts decided to write a letter in Suyuan's name, and that they have received a letter from June's twin sisters in response. Much to their regret, as the aunts emphasize, it is too late for Suyuan to reunify with her twin daughters, but it is not for June. Therefore, the aunts want June to travel to China to tell the twins about their mother and her life story: "The mother that they did not know" they "must know now (40) as auntie Ying accentuates.

At first, June is reluctant to travel to China and to meet her twin stepsisters. She is even more apprehensive about telling her mother's life story to the twins--a life story, as she admits, she does not "know anything" about it (40). When June describes not understanding her mother's story about the time Suyuan spent in Kweilin during World War II. June states that she never saw the story as anything more than "Chinese fairy tale" (25); this is because she does not know how to distinguish in the stories what is reality and what is imaginative, or fictional. Suyuan told the Kweilin story many a times but she never told her daughter what really happened to June's older stepsisters. For this reason, June claims that she does not know her mother and her past. When she relates this to the aunts, to their utter "disbelief" (40), they exclaim "Imagine, a daughter not knowing her own mother!" (ibid). June articulates the mothers' fear:

They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just an unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America....They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (41)

June herself had once misunderstood the concept of the Joy Luck Club. When she was a child, she believed that it was a “shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of the Ku Klux Klan...” (28); this type of misunderstanding reflects June’s inadequate knowledge of Chinese culture and of her own mother. The reason that compels the mothers to buy the ticket and send June to China is that they recognize that many of their stories that depict cultural world, with the passing of them and their generation, will no longer exist even in memory.

Linguistic barriers have always been foregrounded in mother-daughter relationships. None of The Joy Luck Club mothers speaks ‘perfect English’, so they are not able to communicate their good intentions in a way that the daughters will understand. The opening parable of “The Twenty-six Malignant Gates” deals with an American-born daughter’s conflict with her mother. The mother warns her seven-year-old daughter not to ride her “bicycle around the corner” (87) because she might suffer an accident while out of sight. When the daughter protests and asks, why, the mother refers to a book titled The Twenty-six Malignant Gates. According to the mother, this book details every danger that can happen to a child who is “outside of the protection” of the home. The daughter demands to see the book, but her mother says that it would be useless: “It is written in Chinese”. The daughter then demands to know the twenty-six bad things that can happen, but because the mother is unable to translate the book into English, she refuses to answer. The daughter gets angry and shouts, “You can’t tell me because you don’t know! You don’t know anything!” (ibid). Further communication at this point is impossible, thus, the mother sits and knits “in silence” (ibid). In a fury, the girl rushes away on her bicycle, and falls before she reaches the corner. This parable presents a conflict between a child and her parent over the issues of independence and the struggle over when a child should obey, listen and admit her parent’s wisdom. Although to the daughter, the mother’s warnings might seem a way of manipulation used to control her, her fall demonstrates her mother’s wisdom. In this episode, neither the reader nor the daughter ever finds out why the mother will not allow her daughter to ride her bike. Is there danger waiting around the corner? We do not know. The mother demands obedience to certain tenets but she does not explain her demands. Despite the fact that there is not any logical explanation for the mother’s warnings and restrictions, the daughter realizes, in her fall, that the dangers her mother fears can often be quite real. In denying her mother’s wisdom, ‘you don’t know anything!’, the daughter suffers the consequence. She falls; this means that if a child does not listen to her/his parent s/he will run into trouble. Here, what the mother expects from her child is that she “listen[s]” to her advice. This episode shows yet another failed attempt to communicate with the American-born daughter. As in many stories in the novel, the Chinese mothers’ attempt to communicate with their daughters usually fail partially due to the linguistic discrepancies and partially due to the daughters’ unwillingness to listen.

Since the mother cannot express the evils that lie in store for her daughter, the child stops listening to her mother, and the mother loses her authority, credibility and control over her daughter. After the mother-daughter dispute over the bike riding, the mother in the parable becomes silent. In the same way

that Lindo and Suyuan became silent after their conflicts with their daughters. The conflicts that took place over Waverly's chess and June's piano lessons demonstrate, among other things, their reluctance to listen. Cultural and language barriers as well as the daughters' refusal to listen to their mothers' advice and guidance are the reasons for many conflicts that occurred between the Chinese mothers and the American-born daughters. Language, as a tool for understanding and creating social validity, plays a vital role in the construction of the mothers' place in America. Because the mothers cannot speak perfect white middle class American English, their place is outside the system. Thrown out into an unfamiliar culture that marginalizes them and their way of life, the mothers gradually become silent. This silence imposed upon them by the society--a society, which leaves little room for the expression of Asian, or Asian-American identities.

In "Can the subaltern speak?" (1995, 24), a highly resonant question is raised by Gayatri Spivak. If any answer should be given to this question, perhaps, that answer would be, no, they cannot. In the chapter titled, "The Voice from the Wall" we read about a mother who cannot speak. Interestingly enough this mother is the only one who is married to a white man. Ying-Ying St. Clair cannot speak to her husband, a man of American English-Irish decent named Clifford. Clifford speaks only "a few Chinese expressions," and Ying-Ying speaks "Mandarin and a little bit of English" (106). Their daughter Lena describes how the couple communicate: "So with him, she spoke in moods and gestures, looks and silences, and sometimes a combination of English punctuated by hesitations and Chinese frustration: "*Shwo buchulai*" – Words cannot come out. So my father would put words in her mouth" (106). There is a danger in silence and Ying-Ying's story demonstrates this peril in the form of the loss of self and cultural identity; a loss that had an immense mental effect on Ying-Ying's spirit from which she never regained herself fully. If Ying-Ying's past emphasizes the silence imposed by traditional patriarchal societies on women the emphasis in her present existence is the silence imposed in American culture on minority ethnic groups.

When Ying-Ying and her husband arrived to the United States, she had to spend some time in "Angel Island Immigration Station" (104). An interview was made in order to determine who she was. After three weeks at the immigration station, in the end, they "declared her a Displaced Person, lost in a sea of immigration categories" (ibid). In this categorization, there is no reference to Ying-Ying's nationality as a Chinese woman. To make matters even worse, her husband altered her identity, without a second thought, by "crossing out her given name of Gu Ying-Ying" and changing it to "Betty St. Clair", an English name. Because Ying-Ying could not speak the language, she did not claim either her nationality or her name. Her husband also put down the "wrong birthyear, 1916 instead of 1914" so, with the sweep of a pen, Ying-Ying "became a Dragon instead of a Tiger"⁶ (104). A tiger according to Chinese astrology is a creature of force, with two natures "gold and black" (248). The golden nature is

⁶ The Chinese zodiac signs are determined by the lunar year in which one was born. The Chinese believe the animal ruling one's birth year has a profound influence on personality, and destiny.

“fierce” and the black nature is “cunning, hiding its gold between trees,” seeing but “not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come” (248). Apparently, the Chinese horoscope holds a vital significance in Chinese culture and in Chinese mentality and this importance has been emphasized in the novel. When Ying-Ying became a dragon, somehow she loses her definition.

Because of all the mishaps that occurred upon their entering in the United States, Ying-Ying loses her cultural identity. Peoples’ identities are rooted in their identification, in what they associate themselves with. Ying-Ying, now Betty, a displaced person, cannot associate herself with either Chinese or American and eventually she became the frightening other in her own home. Ying-Ying entered in a linguistic order that re-identified her as an other to her original being. Through their years together, Ying-Ying allows her husband to control every aspects of her life, and mistranslate her feelings and her thoughts. Clifford loves his wife but he never understands her for they do not speak the same language. He has no clue who his wife is, what is her interest, what kind of life she had in China, or how was her upbringing like. Clifford considers himself as her savior simply because he brought her to the United States. He believes that he has rescued Ying-Ying from a poor miserable life in some remote village in China, while this was not the case. In reality, Ying-Ying was born into a life of privilege and wealth. Clifford has no idea that Ying-Ying married him only because she believed it was fate, which brought them together. In the same way that she believed, it was her destiny to marry her first husband, a man with no scruples, who left her for an opera singer when she was pregnant. Because of his infidelity, Ying-Ying decided to have an abortion. Fate and destiny place Ying-Ying in a position of submission. While in that position she does not believe that she can truly have any impact on her life and that she cannot take control over it. Ying-Ying's profound belief in fate and her personal destiny finally led to a policy of submissiveness and even listlessness something that becomes part of her identity.

Because Ying-Ying does not relate to her husband or to her daughter about her past, neither Clifford nor Lena ever get to know about her first marriage and the abortion that she had in China. Ying-Ying was forever traumatized by those events of her past. These were life experiences that she kept buried and in so doing, she made those feelings speechless. Ying-Ying’s family does not know anything about the guilt and turmoil that she felt throughout her life because she sees herself as a murderer. When Ying-Ying loses her second son due to some medical complications, the old wound opens, and Ying-Ying who blames herself for losing yet another baby begins to speak incoherently of her first son that she had killed sometime in the past. Clifford cannot understand Chinese so he asks his daughter Lena to translate Ying-Ying’s words. Lena, who does not have access to her mother’s past and her deeply buried anxiety, decides that her mother is “crazy” (112). She refuses to tell her father what her mother communicated to her. She changes her mother’s words and translates them into terms of hope and consolation. Even if Lena’s intentions might be considered as good, for she is attempting to preserve family harmony, but the outcome is not. She deprives her mother of getting the help and support that she needs, especially from her husband, in order to deal with the trauma. Throughout her

childhood, Lena interprets her mother's Chinese words for his father, and she gradually becomes her mother's voice. By doing so, Lena helps to "silence" (Yin 157) her mother.

Because Ying-Ying does not get any help and support, her mental situation becomes even worse and finally she falls apart. She just lies on her bed like a statue and does not acknowledge anyone. She refuses to speak even to her family; by keeping silence, she creates a kind of wall, which divides the family into two. Lena and her father are on one side of the wall of silence and Ying-Ying all alone on the other side. The silence of the St. Clair's household kept the family in a state of uncertainty, withdrawal and reticence. Lena and Clifford keep their distances from Ying-Ying and prefer not to break the silence for fear that by searching too deeply into Ying-Ying's anxieties and sorrows they might discover some dark secrets. Clifford tries to convince himself and his daughter that nothing is wrong with the way that Ying-Ying behaves when he exclaims, "[s]he's just tired" (113). In a sense, Ying-Ying is silenced through segregation from the rest of her family. She does not bear sole responsibility for the emotional barrier in her home. This wall, which has been built gradually and over the years, results from problems of communication and translation. Lena, for example, does not really listen to what her mother communicates to her. As her mother's translator, all her life, she has deliberately translated her mother's strange expressions into English words that convey more mainstream thoughts. Ying-Ying's husband, Clifford, admittedly, is among those few characters in the novel that is willing to listen, but his listening is primarily shaped by what he wants to hear. Therefore, he cannot help his wife and lessen her suffering. The loss of two sons has a profound psychological effect on Ying-Ying's spirit. The burden of this guilt is so relentless that she decides that she has no future left. Therefore, she lives like a ghost, not caring about anything or anybody. Ying-Ying, who does not have her tiger fierceness anymore, becomes lost to herself and with that loss follows a life of passivity and fatalism, a life style that she has unintentionally handed down to her daughter. For Lena and her mother, passivity becomes part of their identities, something that prevents them from taking initiative. Lena's inability to take initiative or speak up for herself costs Lena her marriage.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the linguistic barrier is an important reason why the mothers and daughters constantly misinterpret or misunderstand each other. An example of that is when Waverly confuses Taiyuan, her mother's birthplace, with Taiwan, which is a different place altogether. A conversation on this subject, recalled by Waverly, takes place between the mother and daughter:

Waverly: I guess we've evolved to just winning in the toy and electronics market, I said.

Lindo: How do you know this? She asked eagerly.

Waverly: You see it on everything. Made in Taiwan.

Lindo: Ai! she cried loudly. I'm not from Taiwan! I was born in China, in Taiyuan, she said. Taiwan is not in China.

Waverly: Well, I only thought you said Taiwan because it sounds the same, I argued, irritated that she was upset by such an unintentional mistake. (183)

Waverly and her mother are trying to have “an almost normal conversation” (182), but because of the Waverly’s mistake “the fragile connection [they] were starting to build snapped” (183). Despite her efforts, Waverly still misinterprets her mother, causing hurt feelings and a barrier to open conversations and further interactions in the future. As we recall, Mead claims that life experiences form the self and that individuals gain the life experiences mostly through ‘interactions’ with the others. Because of the linguistic barriers, the mothers and daughters cannot have a functioning interaction with each other; for this reason, mothers cannot pass on their life experiences and memories to their daughters. These Chinese mothers’ identities are actuated from their memories and what the mothers are left with from their homeland China and its culture are these memories. The only way for the American-born-daughters to encounter Chinese culture is through their mothers’ memories and stories, since their mothers English is limited their stories become some “Chinese nonsense” to the daughters (108). Linguistic and cultural barriers as well as the daughters’ refusal to listen are the reasons that the daughters reject their Chinese heritage and Chinese language, which affects the construction of their identity. Now, the question is will the American-born daughters be able to overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers that exist between them and their mothers and create an identity, which incorporates both Chinese and American cultures. In other words, will a form of cultural hybridization occur in the story, which can lead to the construction of a hybrid identity? In the next section of this essay, this question will be discussed.

5. Cultural Hybridization

As the American-born daughters mature, they begin to sense that their understanding of who they really are changes. Once they pass the language and cultural barriers that exist between them and their mothers, their perceptions of the Chinese culture as well as of their mothers, who represent this culture, change. Although, it takes quite some time for the daughters to come to this realization, but ultimately they recognize the central place that their mothers have had in and a shaping influence on their life and identity. Eventually, the Chinese mothers and the American-born daughters start building a relationship—a relationship that should have been established a many years ago. Having a good mother-daughter relationship can provide understanding and fulfillment, and this is demonstrated in the novel. The mothers finally make their daughters understand that they do not desire that they be Chinese and follow only Chinese ways, but to find a way to reconcile the two cultures of the United States and traditional China concerning identity and family is what the mothers wish for their daughters. They make their daughters see that what they need from them is to understand and appreciate their mother’s pasts, and adapt their experiences in the past to their American life styles. Learning from their mothers’ past will prepare them to take anything that life throws at them. These mothers wish for their daughters to know the power and advantage of joining the strengths of two cultures--the culture of success and the culture of secrets and wisdoms--instead of embracing only one. The daughters at last begin to listen to their mothers. In so doing, they realize that their mothers have a profound knowledge and life experiences

that they can use. In the end, they decide to let their mothers into their lives and the mothers come into their lives at just the right time to save them and help them in their troubled marriages and relations.

When Rose's husband Ted asks for a divorce, paralyzed with shock and pain, she stays in bed for three days, mostly semi-conscious, with the help of "sleeping pills" (193). Finally, she is wakened by a phone call from her mother, who asks her: "Why do you not speak up for yourself" (ibid). Ted calls a few minutes later to ask why Rose has not yet signed and returned the divorce papers. He announces that he wants the house because he now plans to marry someone else. Once Rose has the necessary information, she decides that she will not allow Ted to bully her into doing what will best suit him. She latches on the metaphor her mother has used to explain the lack of wood in her personality: "If you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away" (191). Inspired by her mother's metaphor and the weeds in her own neglected garden that cannot be removed from the "masonry" without "pulling the whole building down" (195), Rose demands that Ted let her keep their house. She refuses to allow him to uproot her and throw her away. For the first time in her life, she asserts herself and Ted is surprised when Rose stands up and is ready to fight for what she wants. As it turns out, An-mei is right in wanting Rose to listen to her mother rather than to her 'psyche-atricks' in order to be "strong and straight" (191). Ultimately, An-mei's belief that one's destiny "involves making choices instead of being paralyzed as a victim" (Hamilton, 136) is validated by Rose's assertion of her identity.

Lena St. Clair is also trapped in an unhappy marriage to Harold Livotny. Since the beginning of their relationship, he insisted that they keep separate bank accounts and split the cost of everything they shared. He says that keeping their finances separate makes their love purer. However, what he believes will keep them independent and "equal" (164) in fact renders Lena rather powerless. Lena, who has inherited her mother's passivity, unknowingly began to follow Ying-Ying's example, believing herself incapable of control in her marriage and in her career. Once Ying-Ying realizes that, her daughter exhibits the same qualities in her own marriage, she recognizes her weakness. She determines to reclaim her own tiger spirit in order to pass it on to her daughter. Ying-Ying, a deeply depressed woman, realizes that she must face the pain of her past and communicate it to her daughter in order to provide Lena with the "personal and cultural knowledge of her mother's life that she has always lacked" (Hamilton 141). This pain will free her spirit, so, she can cut her daughter's spirit free. Like a tiger, Ying-Ying sits and waits for her daughter. When the time comes, she tells Lena her story for the first time, hoping that she might learn from her mother's own failure to take initiative and instead come to express her thoughts and feelings. Ying-Ying is ashamed that Lena, who was also born under the sign of the tiger, similarly lacks the spirit that should be hers by right of her birth year. By narrating and sharing her painful secret past with her daughter, she cuts Lena's tiger spirit loose. "Mother" and daughter "will in essence "reconstruct" (Hamilton 141) their identities.

Among the daughters, Waverly has had the most problematic relationship with her mother. When she was a child, she came to resent her mother's control and seeming claims of ownership over her successes in chess. When an adult, she becomes ashamed of her mother and misunderstands her as a critical, controlling, and narrow-minded old woman. Waverly is haunted by a lasting fear of her mother's disapproval; she especially fears her mother's criticism of her fiancé, Rich. In the section, "Four Directions" we read that Lindo throws a dinner party, and Waverly brings Rich, her then live-in boyfriend, to the party with the intention to announce the news that they are planning to marry. Because of all the mistakes that Rich makes at the table, Waverly, who believes her mother dislikes her white boyfriend, loses her courage and decides not to mention their marriage plan. Waverly constantly postpones this conversation with her parents, fearing that her mother will ruin her marriage to Rich in the same way that she ruined her first marriage to Marvin. Lindo was very critical of Marvin and Waverly feels that her mother's criticism "poisoned [her] marriage" (174), because her criticism caused Waverly to see only Marvin's fault. Later that night, when they went home, Rich asks Waverly if she has told her parents that they are getting married. When she says no, Rich complains and says "how long does it take to say, Mom, Dad, I'm getting married? (179), after this conversation, Waverly decides to confront her mother and asks her why she dislikes Rich.

At her mother's, Waverly, who has "enough anger to fend off a thousand flying cleavers" (180), finds Lindo asleep. To see her mother looking so innocent and vulnerable, Waverly breaks down and starts crying. When Lindo wakes, she reveals that she has known all along about their engagement, this suggests that even though the mother and daughter do not communicate, nevertheless, the mother does not need some words to know what is going on in her daughter's life. When Waverly declares: "I know you hate him," "I know you think he's not good enough, but I..." (181) Lindo stops her and expresses her surprise at her assumptions that she hates her future husband. This disclosure opens Waverly's eyes. She comes to the realization that she has projected her own anxieties through her mother for a long time, turning her into a malicious, critical, and an uncompromising woman. What happened at the dinner party is a good example of that anxiety, during the dinner it was Waverly and not Lindo who put Rich under the microscope and criticized his every move and every word that he exchanged with the family members, and finally she decides that Rich is culturally ignorant. She also realizes that all these years she has misconstrued her mother, and that Lindo's criticism only expresses her deep concern for her well-being. For the first time, Waverly recognizes her mother's love and her desire for her daughter to be happy in her marriage something that Lindo was deprived of for so many years in China. After their conversation, Waverly recognizes that she has a special connection with her mother and her mother's past. From that moment on, mother and daughter extend their relationship and bond with each other something that results in Waverly's decision to go to China for her honeymoon; and she contemplates inviting Lindo to go with them. Even though she knows a joint trip would prove to be a disaster, she believes the trip could help them to reconcile their differences. To take this journey to her ancestor's

homeland is a testament to Waverly's recognition of her Chinese inheritance and finally her acceptance of her Chinese identity.

Like Waverly, June too grows up believing that her mother's constant criticism conveys a lack of affection and motherly love for her daughter. When in fact Suyuan's rigor and high expectations are expressions of love and faith in her daughter. The reason that Suyuan forced June to practice piano was that she believed her daughter could be a child "prodigy" (132) if only she had worked hard, her persistence leads to a deep resentment in June. Years later, Suyuan gave the family's "piano" to June as a gift for her thirtieth birthday. Suyuan expressed gently that June could have become a skilled pianist if she had tried. Suyuan's statement and her gift show that, contrary to June's belief, her mother never "given up hope" (143) and faith in her daughter.

Another significant gift that June received from her mother was a jade pendant that she gave her after a dinner party. A few months before her death, Suyuan cooked a crab dinner for ten people, to celebrate the Chinese New Year. June had helped her mother shop for the crabs. While choosing the crabs she explained to June that the feistiest crabs are of the best quality and even beggars would reject a crab that has died before being cooked. At the market, when Suyuan was spearing the live crabs from the tank, one of them lost a limb. Suyuan refused to accept it because a mutilated crab is bad luck for the New Year. After a long discussion, the fishmonger threw the limbless crab in for free. Eleven people attended the New Year's celebration. Suyuan had not counted Waverly's daughter, Shoshana, and so she purchased only ten whole crabs. When she sees the extra person, she decides to cook the eleventh crab, the one missing a limb. At the dinner, everyone picked the best crabs until there were two left one of which was the crab with a missing leg. June tried to take the bad crab, but her mother insisted she take the better one. Suyuan then sniffed the crab, and took it into the kitchen, to throw it away.

Later that night, after everyone has left, June asks her mother why she did not eat her crab, her mother tells her that it was already dead before she cooked it and, hence, it was not edible. June asks, "why'd you cook it if you knew it was already dead?" (207). Suyuan answers that she cooked it only because she "thought... maybe only just die. Maybe taste not too bad" (207). Then June questions, what "if someone else had picked that crab? (208). Suyuan laughs and says "Only *you* pick that crab.... Everybody else want best quality. You thinking different" (208). Then Suyuan gives June the jade pendant, and tells her daughter that it was her "life's importance" (193). When Suyuan gives her the pendant, June thinks that the present is meant only as a sign of sympathy after her degrading argument with Waverly. She humiliates June in front of the others at dinner, but Suyuan assures her that that was not the reason and she advised June not to listen to Waverly. June's mother does not value Waverly so highly. She sees Waverly as a crab that always "walking sideways, moving crooked" while June, as her mother says, can make her "legs go the other way" (208). This suggests that Suyuan believes that her daughter can choose the path she wants to take and that she has the ability to think for herself and go against the tide of convention. Besides, Suyuan is proud of her daughter, who picked the bad crab

because she wanted her mother to enjoy the better one. Suyuan sees this as a proof of how generous and selfless June is. She recognizes this as the best quality that one can have, therefore, she gave her the necklace. June describes that at first she did not like the pendant because, in her opinion: It was “too large, too green, too garishly ornate” (197), but since her mother’s death, she has come to realize its meaning. Once signifying only a cultural difference between herself and her mother, the pendant has now become a testimony of maternal wisdom and love that June once misinterpreted for superstition and criticism. June finally understands her mother’s remark: “I wore this on my skin, so when you put it on your skin, then you know my meaning. This is your life’s importance” (208). This suggests that Suyuan believes the necklace will transfer the love that she has for her daughter, but most significantly, she believes it will transfer the family legacy from mother to daughter. This jade pendant symbolizes the Chinese culture and by putting it on, June becomes a bearer of the Chinese culture. It is not only Suyuan who sees June as a culture bearer, even the aunties recognize this fact, for this reason, they decide to send her to China.

As we recollect, Giddens acknowledges the individual as a rational human being with a reflective mind, one can make one’s own choice and decision within the boundaries of social structures. Many individuals’ choices have been made by the mothers as well as by the daughters throughout the course of the novel, but the most important of which is that of June’s decision to travel to China. When she starts her journey towards her mother’s homeland, it is clear that a cross-cultural self is in a state of being made. She describes how excited she was when the train was entering China: “I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead trembling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with familiar old pain. And I think my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese” (267), this implies that June will reconstruct her American ethnic self. As discussed earlier, Chris Barker makes the claim that both American and Chinese cultures are ‘hybrid’. June’s experience in China certainly seems to support Barker’s concept of the cultural hybridity. June comes to see that China itself contains American cultural aspects, just as the part of America she grew up in--San Francisco’s Chinatown--contains Chinese cultural elements. Thus, her first meal in China consists of hamburgers and apple pie, on the request of her Chinese relatives. This also supports Bhabha’s theory, which reads the claim to the ‘purity of cultures [is] untenable’. Under Bhabha and Barker’s definition, everyone has multiple cultures; on that note, it can be concluded that there is no such thing as a pure state of being Chinese, or a pure state of being American. June’s experience in China shows the possibility of a richly mixed identity rather than an identity of warring opposites.

Having journeyed through China for a few days, June finally gets to see her sisters. At first, they look just like her mother. Then, she sees “no trace of [her] mother” (287). Yet they still look familiar” (288). She realizes what makes them look so familiar lies beneath mere facial features. It lies deep in the “blood” (ibid), or as the aunties would say, it is in the bones. Her father takes a picture of the three girls; they look at the picture, and they see that “[t]ogether” [they] look like [their] mother” (ibid). It is clear

that, the sisters will help June to come to know parts of her mother that she never before understood, and thus help her to tell Suyuan's story. June finally takes her first step toward fully discovering, accepting, and appreciating her Chinese heritage. By travelling to her mother's homeland, she creates a bridge between China and America. In the process of building this bridge through her narrative, June learns to become a cultural interpreter and gradually transforms the experience of being torn between two cultures to the enriching experience of being able to flow between the cultures. June ultimately reconciles some of the cultural, linguistic, and generational gaps, providing hope for the other mother-daughter pairs. This brings us to the conclusion that a cultural hybridization takes place in the novel, which in turn will result in the development of an altogether different identity--a hybrid identity.

6. Concluding Thoughts

Scholars such as Stuart Hall and Chris Barker have raised our awareness about the fact that identity is something changeable and an ongoing process. Barker also differentiates between the types of identity formation process (see Barker's list, section 2.4). The fact that the daughters have assumed different identities at different stage of their lives is a testimony to this notion. When they were children, they spent their childhoods trying to escape their Chinese identities. At that stage of their lives, they defined themselves as Americans and their parents as Chinese. As they mature, they come to the realization that their identity is entirely a function of two worlds that have made them, a world within the family that represent China and Chinese culture, and the world outside the family that represent America and the American culture. Their new world includes the culture of the moon lady, the story of the magpies and the spirit of the tigers, but it also includes the American Dream. The daughters, who once forgot who they ethnically were as individuals, start showing cultural consciousness and even regret having neglected their Chinese cultural identities. They come to learn to translate their mothers' narratives in ways that will eventually enable them to go beyond the dichotomies of cultures and to develop a hybrid identity, which integrates their two cultures. At the end of the novel, the daughters recognize that they are as much Chinese as they are Americans. Thus, a new category of identity has emerged and the outcome of the emergence of such new identity formations is that of the Chinese-American identity.

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