

## WISDOM (UN)HEEDED: CHINESE MOTHERS AND AMERICAN DAUGHTERS IN AMY TAN'S *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*\*

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*ABSTRACT.* One of the central themes in the writing of second generation Asian Americans is the search for self-definition and individual acceptance in American society. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is an attempt to synthesize Asian heritage with American aspirations as it presents a group portrait of four mother-daughter relationships that have to endure and bridge both a generational and cultural gap. Tan creates a contrast by separating the stories of the mothers and their daughters in order to demonstrate how the mothers' painful experiences and their daughters' mother-dominated childhoods constantly act upon the present, modifying world-view and cultural sensibility, to dramatize the panorama of a critical transition in cultural values. Ultimately, the novel is the articulation of the Asian American's struggle to come to terms with all the elements of a Chinese background and the relationship with an American self: a struggle that culminates in affirmation.

*RESUMEN.* Uno de los temas principales en la literatura de la segunda generación Asiático-Americana es la búsqueda de una identidad propia y la aceptación como individuos en la sociedad americana. *The Joy Club* (1989), de Amy Tan, es un intento de hacer compatible una herencia asiática con el sueño americano, presentando así un retrato de cuatro grupos de madres e hijas que tienen que superar un salto generacional y cultural. Tan crea un contraste separando las historias de las madres y las de las hijas, para poder demostrar cómo su pasado –las dolorosas experiencias de las madres y la infancia de las hijas dominada por sus madres– constantemente actúa sobre el presente, modificando su visión del mundo y su sensibilidad cultural, para así dramatizar el panorama de una crítica transición de valores culturales. Finalmente, la novela es una articulación de la lucha del asiático-americano por aceptar la relación entre su pasado chino y su presente americano: una lucha que culmina en afirmación.

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One of the central themes in the writing of second generation Asian Americans is the search for self-definition and individual acceptance in American society. In the last few decades, many Asian Americans have entered an era of increased awareness of their racial and cultural identity built on their need to establish their uniquely American identity. Elaine Kim has declared that the main task of these writers is that of “claiming America for the Asian Americans. That does not mean disappearing like raindrops in the ocean of white America, fighting to become ‘normal’, losing ourselves in the process. It means inventing a new reality, defining ourselves according to the truth instead of a racial fantasy, so that we can be reconciled with one another in order to celebrate our marginality” (1987, 88). Young writers attempted to “claim America” for Asian Americans by demonstrating Asian roots in American society and culture. In some cases, this meant rejecting the ethnic community as subject matter, since some writers felt that it limited them and only perpetuated the relegation of Asian American to marginal status. They turned their interest away from community portraiture and towards questions of individual Asian American identity within the context of a larger society. Frank Chin, one of the major promoters of this literature, has asserted that the task of the Asian American writer is to legitimize the language, style, and syntax of his people’s experience, to codify the experiences common to his people into symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerisms, and a sense of humor that emerges from an organic familiarity with the experience (Kim 1982, 188).

Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) continues the tradition that the pioneer writers of Asian American literature had launched. The novel is another attempt to synthesize Asian heritage with American aspirations as it presents a group portrait of four mother-daughter relationships that have to endure and bridge not only a generation gap but that created by the waning influence an older culture and the overwhelming presence of another. In the novel we hear the voices of four Chinese mothers, immigrants to the United States, and their four daughters, born and raised Americans. The novel is divided into four parts, each part further subdivided into four sections, with each of the characters speaking. The only exception is the late Suyuan Woo, whose story is told by her daughter Jing-mei. With this structure, Tan manages to solve what Linda Hunt describes as a basic problem for a Chinese-American woman: “being simultaneously insider (a person who identifies strongly with her cultural group) and outsider (deviant and rebel against that tradition), she cannot figure out from which perspective to speak” (6).

The novel’s structure succeeds in manifesting not merely the individual tragedies of those caught up in the history of Chinese immigration to America, but the difficulties of a culture undergoing transformation. Tan creates a generational contrast by separating the stories of the mothers and their daughters. Each person’s story demonstrates how her past –the mothers’ painful experiences and the daughters’ mother-dominated childhoods– constantly acts upon the present, modifying her world-view and cultural sensibility. Interestingly enough, individual personalities

within each generation are not always very clearly defined. Although the eight characters are divided into four families and given different names, the book itself seems to be concerned more with a simple bifurcation among generational lines: mothers, whose stories took place in China, and daughters, whose stories are being lived in America; mothers who are possessively trying to hold fast and daughters who are battling for autonomy. Marina Heung has pointed out that Tan seems to attempt to undermine the independence of individual narrative units, to the point that even the chapter titles, by connecting motifs between disparate stories, seem interchangeable (611). As a group therefore, these narratives, more than simply recounting personal stories, dramatize the panorama of a critical transition in cultural values.

It is in the relationships between the mothers and the daughters that we see most clearly the interaction between generations and cultures. Throughout their narratives, the mothers are constantly aware of the widening gap between their daughters and themselves. The mothers had all lived painful and tragic experiences in China, which had made them long for America and the opportunities it would provide them and their families. But from the very first prologue, we begin to see the incongruity between the dream and reality. Here we are told of a woman who traveled from China with a beautiful swan, which she wanted to give her daughter as a present. When she arrived in the US, American officials confiscated the swan, leaving her with only one feather and the memory of the beautiful bird. She wants to tell her daughter about the bird, but, though an old woman now, she is still waiting for the day when she can tell her story in “perfect American English.” The swan thus become transmuted into a symbol of the mother’s past life in China, an experience she wants to communicate to her daughter, but because the daughter has achieved the mother’s dream – “Over there, no one will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English” – the mother herself, who has not mastered English, cannot speak with her own daughter. Ironically and tragically, the achievement of the mother’s dreams for her daughter results in the alienation of mother and daughter, for the daughter readily and entirely adapted to the customs and language of the new land while the mother still held on to those of the old (Ling, 133). There is nearly always some tension in the exchange between the mothers and daughters, between old China and the new American environment. The focus is either on a mother, who figures out her world, or on a daughter, who seem caught in a sophisticated cultural trap, knowing possibilities rather than answers, puzzling over the realities that surround them and trying to find their place in what seems an ambivalent world. The daughters cannot even confide in each other and there is a sense of their being thrown back into the families they have grown up in for explanations, validations, identity reinforcement and definition (Shear, 195).

The chasm between mothers and daughters can be thus examined in this light: as caused by the very contrary places and manners in which they were brought up - that has made them very different and almost incapable of understanding each other. Tan

constantly holds up one world against another, in an attempt to delve into its secrets and release its essence. Furthermore, although in *The Joy Luck Club* we hear the voices of the Chinese mothers and their daughters, we feel the presence of yet another generation of mothers - the American daughters' grandmothers. Dead in China at the time of the stories' telling, they were in their turn irrevocable forces in their daughters' lives. And the influence they exerted is, in an ineffable way, passed on to their granddaughters - who could never hope to know them.

The Chinese world Tan portrays, though haunted by pain and tragedy, is governed by a very matter-of-fact attitude, common sense and deep insight into human passions and frailty. There are reasons for everything, reasons that may at times be unendurable but are understood. Tan explains in "Rules of the Game" that secrecy is equivalent to hidden power. "A little knowledge withheld is a great advantage one should store for future use. That is the power of chess. It is a game of secrets in which one must show and never tell"(95). Furthermore, when the child An-mei is told of the rape that led to her mother's being a third concubine, she concludes: "In truth, this was a bad thing that Yan Chang (her mother's maid) had done, telling me my mother's story. Secrets are kept from children, a lid on top of the soup kettle, so they do not boil over with too much truth"(237).

The mothers are depicted, in general, as students learning about the social realities around them and using their experiences to come to conclusions about essential forms of character strength and weakness. An-mei Hsu learns from her mother's suicide how to use the world for her own advantage. She not only traces how her mother makes the Chinese cultural beliefs work for her - "suicide is the way a woman can escape marriage and gain revenge, to come back as a ghost and scatter tea leaves and good fortune"(234)- but she also realizes almost immediately the acute significance of the words of her mother who tells her "she (the mother) would rather kill her own weak spirit so she could give me a stronger one"(240). An-mei's sensitivity, characteristic of all the Chinese mothers, towards the things happening around her, coupled with a willingness to accept what could not be seen, permitted a maturity beyond her years and beyond her daughter's reach. While American Jing-mei admits she could "never remember things I didn't understand in the first place"(6), the Chinese mothers did remember, and, once understanding, grew in the wisdom that would prepare them for the harshness of life.

The novel gives sympathetic explanations for attitudes and events in the Chinese past that may be cause for misunderstanding and hurt. Lindo Jong, in her story "The Red Candle", sees beyond the mother that seems cruel and rejecting. At age two, Lindo was affianced to the Huang family's son, after which she says:

"My own family began treating me as if I belonged to somebody else. My mother would say to me when the rice bowl went up to my face too many times, 'Look at how much Huang Taitai's daughter can eat.' My mother did not treat

me this way because she didn't love me. She would say this biting back her tongue, so she wouldn't wish for something that was no longer hers" (51).

Revealing the motivation behind a hurtful remark leads the Chinese daughter to an understanding of and sympathy for the mother whose seeming rejection is but a self-defensive mask for her own vulnerability and love.

At some point, all the Chinese mothers underwent a process of self-affirmation, or recognition of their worth as people. For An-mei, it was learning the truth about her mother's suicide; for Lindo Jong, it was the reflection of the mirror on her wedding day:

I wiped my eyes and looked at the mirror. I was surprised at what I saw. I had on a beautiful red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside me that no one could see, that no one could ever take away from me. I was like the wind... I threw my head back and smiled proudly to myself. And then I draped the large embroidered red scarf over my face and covered those thoughts up. But underneath the scarf I still knew who I was. I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parent's wishes, but I would never forget myself (53).

Suyuan Woo's fortitude and will to survive allowed her to overcome the horrors of war by forming the Joy Luck Club: "What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness?"(11)

The education the Chinese mothers had received –of strong self-control, keeping face in the midst of humiliation, of sacrifice for one's families, and finding one's worth in one's self, colored by the rich and varied Chinese myths and superstitions–permitted them to confront the hardships they would encounter in their lives. The experiences of war, separation from their families and poverty could not break these women –who were prepared to accept and fight against much more. The only thing their education had not prepared them for was the experience of their daughters. This was a battle they would have a very difficult time winning.

The mothers' unanimous feeling is one of hopelessness in the face of their daughters whom they could not raise the way they were raised. Their unerring confidence in the superiority of Chinese ways and the superficiality of American ones, cause them to impose, to demand and to criticize, fearful all the while because they see their daughters moving farther and farther away. They do not have, in their experience, anything that could have prepared them for the attitudes they see embodied in their daughters. How Lindo Jong gets out of her hateful first marriage, for example, is a delightful combination of feminism and fairy tale: using superstition for her own ends, she terrorizes her mother-in-law until she is pelted with money and begged to go. This memory is sacred to her and does not permit her to comprehend her

daughter's indifference: "I once sacrificed my life to keep my parent's 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" (42). But she blames herself for her daughter's attitude:

I taught her how American circumstances work... but I couldn't teach her about Chinese character. How to obey your parents and listen to your mother's mind. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you could take advantage of hidden opportunities. Why easy things are not worth pursuing. How to know your own worth and polish it, never flashing it around like a cheap ring. Why Chinese thinking is best (289).

Ying-ying St. Clair suffers for the same reason: "I must tell my daughter everything. That she is the daughter of a ghost. She has no *chi*. This is my greatest shame. How can I leave this world without leaving her my spirit?"(83) The *chi* that she refers to may be impossible to render wholly into English, but it involves a fundamental self-respect, a desire to excel, a willingness to stand up for one's self and one's family, to demonstrate something to others (Shear, 197). It may well be a quality that the daughters in the book lack, or that they possess in insufficient amounts. Speaking of her daughter, Ying-ying says:

Her wisdom is like a bottomless pond. You throw stones in and they sink into the darkness and dissolve. Her eyes looking back do not reflect anything. I think this to myself even though I love my daughter. She and I have shared the same body. There is a part of her mind that is part of mine. But when she was born, she sprang from me like a slippery fish, and has been swimming away ever since. All her life, I have watched her as though from another shore. And now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved (274).

Tan's portrayal of the world seen through the American daughters' eyes is harsher, colored less by understanding than by dominance, less by love than by authority. The most important part of the daughters' problems is adjusting to the situation of being a Chinese-American, eating different food, speaking a different language. The absent motherland looms large on the horizon of the immigrant mothers whose "unspeakable tragedies left behind in China"(20) recorded and recounted in vivid detail resonate in their daughters. The childhoods of the daughters of the Joy Luck Club are marked by their mothers' stories, their mothers' mystical and mysterious powers, and by ghosts of the past. They will have to confront this past in order to come to terms with their mothers and the relationships they have built up. Central to these is the novel's title

story: “Joy Luck was an idea my mother remembered from the days of her first marriage in Kweilin, before the Japanese came. That’s why I think of Joy Luck as her Kweilin story. It was the story she would always tell me... Over the years, she told the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine”(7).

One of the critical contradictions facing the daughters is the relationship between their perceptions of their Chinese heritage and American realities. This has contributed to the girls’ seeing double all the time and not comprehending: they have two vantage points that blur their vision. On the one hand, there is the China built around them by their mothers’ stories and on the other is that imposed by the America they grew up in. Strangely enough, this double vantage point did not allow them to see beyond the purely external to really understand their mothers. This is a feeling common to all the daughters, articulated by Jing-Mei: “My mother and I never understood one another. We translated each other’s meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more”(27). The daughters attribute negative aspects of their family and community to Chinese culture and traditions, embodied in the persons of their mothers. But while they were encouraged to seek comfort in the superiority of their cultural heritage, their mental picture of China is only a composite gathered from stories, legends, books and the movies. Their struggle is to find a way to combine these in their own lives –a struggle for “personal balance”, according to Jade Snow Wong, characteristic of Asian Americans.

Each Chinese American like me has the opportunity to assess his talents, define his individual stature, and choose his personal balance of old and new, Chinese and Western ways, hopefully including the best of both. Paradoxically, a combination of the fundamental aspects of the “best” of both means Western civilization - thought, social relation, creative thinking, mental work, way of life - combined with far less critical and pivotal aspects of Chinese civilization, such as food and holiday celebrations (quoted in Kim 1982, 70).

The difficulty in making this reconciliation results in humorous encounters, but none that take away the pain of the adjustment. In one episode, Waverly, in a vain attempt to get back at her mother asked:

“Ma, what is Chinese torture?”

“Who say this word?” she asked without a trace of knowing how wicked I was being.

I shrugged my shoulders and said, “Some boy in my class said Chinese people do Chinese torture.”

“Chinese people do many things,” she said simply. “Chinese people do business, do medicine, do painting. Not lazy like American people. We do torture. Best torture”(92).

Throughout the book, Tan contrasts the strong, domineering mothers’ stories with the daughters’ incapacity for self-definition and inability to make sense of their lives. The daughters need a tradition to lean on, something they cannot find in their mothers because they are from another world. Jing-mei would often dismiss her mother’s advice as “just more of her Chinese superstitions, beliefs that conveniently fit the circumstances” (20). One group of stories concerning the daughters features the struggle for maturity, a rather typical generational tension with the mothers. Generally, the daughters tend to perceive cultural blanks, the absence of clear and definite answers to the problems of family, while the mothers fill in to much, often to provide those kinds of cultural answers and principles that seem to empower them to make strong demands on their daughters. The older women, for the most part, are not portrayed as pushing their daughters into an outmoded or inappropriate set of values and traditions, but they do insist on a basic cultural formulation. Lindo Jong’s comments express a typical attitude: “I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character”(254). This sounds a note of compromise, but in reply to her daughter’s declaration, “I’m my own person,” she thinks, “How can she be her own person? When did I give her up?”(254)

Because the daughters cannot understand why their mothers do things the way they do they are thus constantly hurt and placed on the defensive. There seems to be no way to win. Jing-mei, not understanding that her mother’s criticism was actually a form of encouragement, one explained to Suyuan: “There’s a school of thought”, I said, “that parents shouldn’t criticize children. They should encourage instead. You know, people rise to other people’s expectations. And when you criticize, it just means you’re expecting failure.” “That’s the trouble”, my mother said. “You never rise. Lazy to get up. Lazy to rise to expectations”(20).

Thus, the contrast between the mothers’ expectations and the daughters’ real lives is at the center of the novel. The drama of the mothers’ pushing for success in the land of opportunity and the daughters’ incapacity to do more is at the core of the generational and cultural conflict. The story of the relationship between Jing-mei and her mother moves to the kind of conclusion typical of most of the daughter stories: “Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be, I could only be me.”(142) And there is a feeling that this “me” lacks an essential element, perhaps the *chi* Ying-ying so worried about. The daughters inevitably suffer from an inferiority complex when placed before their mothers. Even as adults, accustomed to being dominated and almost manipulated by their mothers, they cannot avoid that feeling of smallness when faced with their mothers’ superiority. This feeling is well expressed by Lena St. Clair:



To this day, I believe my mother has the mysterious ability to see things before they happen. She has a Chinese saying for what she knows. *Chunwang chihan*: If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold. Which means, I suppose, one thing is always the result of another... I remember this ability of my mother's, because now she is visiting my husband and me in the house we just bought in Woodside. And I wonder what she will see (161-2).

In another episode, Waverly Jong, trying to find away to tell her mother she was remarrying, shows her a mink jacket Rich had given her for Christmas. After running her fingers through the mink, Lindo observes:

“This is not so good”, she said at last. “it is just leftover strips. And the fur is too short, no long hairs.”

“How can you criticize a gift!” I protested. I was deeply wounded. “He gave me this from his heart.”

“That is why I worry”, she said.

And looking at the coat in the mirror, I couldn't fend off the strength of her will anymore, her ability to make me see black where there was once white, white where there was once black. The coat looked shabby, an imitation of romance (186).

Rose Hsu Jordan's impending divorce and the pain she feels is also shadowed by her mother's opinion of the circumstances: “And when I say that it is certainly true, that (my) marriage is over, I know what else she will say: “Then you must save it.” / And even though I know it's hopeless –there's absolutely nothing left to save– I'm afraid that if I tell her that, she'll still persuade me to try”(123). But the depth of misunderstanding between mothers and daughters is underlined by Jing-mei who, having heard the Joy Luck Club story many times over the years, could still think: “I never thought my mother's Kweilin story was anything but a Chinese fairy tale”(12). Only after having mastered the story and her mother's death, would she come to realize the painful truth behind it and take upon herself to finish the task her mother could not.

Apart from the upbringing, there is a radical difference between the mothers and daughters that separate them and their aspirations. The older generation constantly struggles with fate –the circumstances in their lives that brought them to where they are– while the younger generation perceives their main difficulty as the making of choices. It is a palpable fear that runs through both the experiences of the mothers in China, because of what is imposed on them, and the lack of such definition in the daughter's lives, which deprives them of a rudder by which to direct themselves. In this context, the Joy Luck Club itself is the determination to hope in the face of constantly altering social situations and continually shifting rules. The club is formed during the Japanese invasion of China by Suyuan Woo as a deliberate defiance of the darkness of current events: “...to despair was to wish back for something lost. Or to

prolong what was already unbearable”(24). Rose echoes the daughters’ sentiments when she says that: “Over the years, I learned to choose from the best opinions. Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was much better. It was only later that I discovered a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices so it was easy to get confused and pick the wrong thing”(214). In essential fashion, actions and events define and identify the characters, who become what they are because of what they have chosen to do. The mothers manage to surmount the obstacles presented before them and emerge victorious, of their worth as people. The daughters are only more confused by the choices they have made; a great part of this confusion stemming from a systematic rejection of the Chinese way, in the person of their mothers.

The mothers are aware of the differences in the circumstances surrounding themselves and their daughters, and the dangers that await the younger generation. An-Mei Hsu fears for her daughter: “If she doesn’t speak, she is making a choice. If she doesn’t try, she can lose her chance forever. I know this, because I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people’s misery, to eat my own bitterness.”(241) They try to pass on what they have learned, but it mostly falls on deaf ears.

But *The Joy Luck Club* is not essentially a novel about divisions, it is the reconciliation between daughters and mothers: the record of the Asian American’s struggle to come to terms with all the elements of a Chinese background and the relationship with an American self. The final stories in the novel demonstrate that what has made the daughters suffer, not being able to understand their mothers, is what will give them identity and sense of self. Life and living demands meaning, purpose and affirmation: the struggle in the book is an essential struggle culminating in affirmation.

Though the mothers all have different names and individual stories, they seem interchangeable in that the role of mother supersedes all other roles and is performed with the utmost seriousness and determination (Ling, 138). The mothers are so strong that they endure all manner of pain to enforce their will, to show their love in the only way they know how, even at the risk of being misunderstood and resented. In the Woo’s story, in which the mother/daughter bond is broken by the mother’s death, what was once a battle becomes a devastating loss, a loss compensated for by the daughter’s taking the place of the mother and finding mother substitutes. The lost mother is entangled with the story of two lost daughters, who, when found and returned to the family, become a means of recovering the mother.

At the end, the daughters attain the understanding they were long denied. They are thus able to see not only how similar they have become to their mothers, as Rose says: “I thought about how much I seemed like my mother, always worried beyond reason inside, but at the same time talking about the danger as if it were less than it really

was”(131) and how much they need their mothers’ guidance: “But these days, I think about my life’s importance. I wonder what it means, because my mother died three months ago... And she’s the only person I could have asked, to tell me about life’s importance, to help me understand my grief”(221). Finally, with the perspective of the years, they see what sort of battle had really been waged between themselves and their mothers:

And really, I did understand finally. Not what she had just said. But what had been true all along. I saw what I had been fighting for: It was for me, a scared child, who had run away a long time ago to what I had imagined was a safer place. And hiding in this place, behind my invisible barriers, I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited for her daughter to invite her in (203-4).

Once the daughters are aware of their mother’s vulnerability, their weaknesses, then all danger is past and the mother may be invited in. The ultimate surrender, of course, is death. But the death of the mother, far from being a victory for the daughter, is a tremendous loss. Only then can they discover that their mother’s visions of “truth and hope” are grounded not in Chinese convention but in fierce love, which makes them desire their daughter’s freedom and selfhood as well as their own. They also realize how the education they have received has served them; how their Chinese backbone eventually serves them better than their American education. They stand up to husbands and even mothers, learning that cringing is not a form of respect.

Jing-mei’s final story, a paradigm for all the other daughters’, leads her to China to heal posthumously her mother’s deepest hurt and fulfill her deepest longing. Suyuan Woo’s death and the unfulfilled hope of finding her twin daughters moves the Joy Luck Club members to encourage Jing-Mei to finish her mother’s story for her. “You must see your sisters and tell them about your mother’s death,” says Auntie Ying. “But most important, you must tell them about her life. The mother they did not know, they must now know.... Tell them stories she told you, lessons she taught, what you know about her mind that has become your mind”(30-31). Jing-mei is hesitant at first, uncertain of what is wanted of her and overwhelmed by her impotence.

And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mother talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. 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 (31).

*The Joy Luck Club* ends on a note of resolution and reconciliation. The struggles are over and, when the dust settles, what was formerly considered a hated bondage is revealed to be a cherished bond. Furthermore, Tan appears, by her conclusion, to place emphasis on the Chinese identity as the healing factor. To be truly mature, to achieve a balance in the between-world condition then, according to Tan, one cannot cling solely to the new American ways and reject the old Chinese ways, for that is the way of the child. One must reconcile the two and make one's peace with the old. If the old ways cannot be incorporated into the new life, if they do not "mix" as Lindo Jong puts it, then they must nonetheless be respected and preserved in the pictures on one's walls, in the memories in one's head, in the stories that one writes down (Ling, 138).

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