

The Roots of Miserableness in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

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Abstract

The Joy Luck Club, published in 1989, marks a distinct growth of Asian American literature in the world. It explores the mother-daughter relationship in each particular case between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American born daughters. In this novel, people may initially feel empathic with women, who endure husband's betrayal, sustaining survival in wartime more difficultly than men do, easily entrapped into dilemmatic situations which result in social misjudgments on their virtues, and treated as "bearing-machine" without respecting their value. Nevertheless, under the Buddhist view, those unconsciously curtain the roots of miserableness for all the figures. This paper appreciates honoring women's perseverance in all times but lagging behind her selfishness and stubbornness perceived in loving others. This paper intends to explore the human characteristics as reflected in mother-daughter and husband-wife relationship in *The Joy Luck Club* and attempts to clarify the reasons of the characters' misery.

Key words: Root of Miserableness, Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan.

1. Introduction

The Joy Luck Club was published in 1989, marking a distinct growth of Asian American Literature in the world. This book, as universally recognized by a large number of critics as a novel, explores the mother-daughter relationship in each particular case between Chinese immigrant mothers and their ABC daughters. Alice Walker comments: Honest, moving, and beautifully courageous, Amy Tan shows us China, Chinese-American women and their families, and the mystery of the mother-daughter bond in ways that we have not experienced before (Otto 664-7).

The story is manipulatively intertwined with four dominant sub-stories in which mothers and daughters take turns narrating their own circumstantial life as well as how they deal with it. Four pairs of mother-daughter in the book are respectively Suyuan Woo and Jing-mei as the mother dies before the novel begins and Jing-mei is believed to be the top main character out of the other ones; secondly An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan; thirdly Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong; and finally Ying-ying St.Clair and Lena St.Clair. The setting features China, where mothers grow up, and also the USA, where they live as expatriates, giving birth to and bringing up their beloved daughters.

Departing from a mahjong with four players including three mothers and one daughter (Jing-mei), the story leads readers to every player's piece of tortuous life, and explains why they gather regularly to play this game whilst feasting on a variety of their fatherland food, and how The Joy Luck Club is established. The plot is considered to be a part of the author's life as Tan finds out that her mother was wrongly married to an abusive man in China, terribly scarring her heart with four children (a son who died as a toddler and three daughters) and desire to escape from the evil husband to diverge towards another country for happiness. That Tan's mother was forced to leave her

children along with ex-husband behind in Shanghai truly intensifies her curiosity to analyze her mother's psychology in dilemmas. Also, what Aunties' stories naturally penetrate into her head after many times Tan is taken to *The Joy Luck Club* by her mother add up a plenty of different stories in this book. In 1987, Tan traveled to China with her mother; therein, she reunites with her three half-sisters, which is based on to close the book.

In 1993, *The Joy Luck Club* is adapted into a film directed by Wayne Wang, screen-played by Tan and Ronald Bass, and Oliver Stone as an executive producer. The film wins a great American theatrical recognition for The Joy Luck Club filming group and contributes to expanding the prevalence of the book to the ones who do not have time reading but still grappling the pivotal content of the book.

This paper will look at not only the mother-daughter relationship in *The Joy Luck Club* but deeply at the roots of the miserableness underlying each character's tearful story. Tan successfully catches the worldwide readers' interest as she exposes the conflicts frequently happening between Chinese mothers and their Americanized daughters, and the reasons of those conflicts in terms of cultural differences, generational gaps, language barrier, and identity construction. In every character's bitter past, readers may at first feel empathic with the states in which women are generally pushed into the social inferiority as the essence of Old China: a woman is supposed to swallow all the extreme pain from her husband's betrayal, a woman has to struggle for her survival in wartime more difficultly than man does, a woman is trapped and tortured during her life seemingly without any protests or supports from other people, and a woman is destined to be sold as a servant or "child-bearing machine" if her family finds no alternative to save the breath.

However, those fallacies veil the roots of miserableness for all *The Joy Luck Club* figures. This paper will work on the issues of human genuine nature well illustrated in the mother-daughter conflicts.

First, people are drawn to misconceive the definition of love whether it is maternal or romantic. Under the motherhood's view, mothers should control their children and mold them in a way they like, wishing that children could grow up safely and perfectly. To this degree, maternal love is widely recognized and highly honored. Thus, one of the misconceptions about love in this novel is discreetly compatible with the common sense in readers' minds. In love affairs, two "players" are usually influenced from their predecessors' mindset of love. They formulate a definition of an everlasting love, which includes possessing partner and gradually misleading to hurting, not as what real love is supposed to do. So what is the right conception of love?

Second, the way mothers love their children misleads them to the production of selfishness. They may think that they adore their children without any hesitation, devoting their whole life to prospering their children's future but they somehow leave behind how their dears feel and think. Likewise, besides the mother-daughter relationship, it can be demonstrated that humans are masked to be generous and prejudicial. Once they hardly receive the rewards for their efforts, they turn to immerse themselves in disappointment, dispiritedness, and even wrathfulness.

Finally, the roots of most of the miserableness in the novel are triggered from stubbornness. This characteristic is relatively ubiquitous and dominates everyone. To some extent, the mother-daughter conflicts burst out because none of them give up the desire to impose one's own idea on the other. While a wife is meant to obey a husband at that time, the protagonist in each piece of the story appears to vehemently break that

rule in an attempt to change her destiny. However, that ultimately leads her to an unbearable despair, especially when she has not handled with mindfully profound observations in the adventure of finding an unsubmitive life.

In conclusion, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* maintains that the mother-daughter relationship and its conflicts honor women's perseverance in all times but lagging behind her selfishness and stubbornness sensed in loving the others. Hence, misconception of love and ego in motherhood is reciprocally produced. This paper intends to delve into the human characteristics as reflected in mother-daughter and husband-wife relationship in *The Joy Luck Club* and attempts to clarify the reasons of the characters' misery.

1. The Buddhist Influence on Chinese Culture

Wright in his book *Buddhism in Chinese History* states that Eastern Asian history is constituted majorly with the Chinese culture transformed by Buddhism and relevant researching ranged within two millennia can help to see its influence over any aspects of Chinese life (3). Historically, China has embellished its culture with various religions including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (though generally regarded as being more philosophical systems than religions). A study by Pew Research Center - nonpartisan American think tank based in Washington, D.C., that provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the United States and the world- states that 22 percent of Chinese population practice traditional folk religion and 18 percent follow Buddhism, but their boundaries overlap and both systems of belief, teachings as well as organizations are mutually inclusive. It is widely known that Buddhism does not initiate and comes into existence in China, but is imported and has been flourishing with a large amount of Chinese followers by centuries. Buddhism becomes one of the official religions in China for a long time, ubiquitously seen that people there in religiously apply Buddha's teachings in their daily life: Detailed conceptions of heavens and hells, a new pantheon, belief in reincarnation, and the doctrine of karma all eventually worked their way into the fabric of Chinese life as Buddhist ideas took hold and spread (Kieschnick 1).

Accordingly, Tan resorts Buddhist elements to formulate her stories based on the primary targets of practicing Buddhism including suffering, karma, and reincarnation. In the novel, the idea of "suffering" is put: "Only *you* pick that crab. Nobody else take it. I already know this. Everybody else want best quality. You thinking different" (Tan 234). The crab can be misheard as "crap" or rubbish that nobody appreciates due to its uselessness. In this context, "that crab" alludes to Jing-mei's humbleness when she always picks the ordinary piece of food for her while the others desire for the best quality one. The mother points out Jing-mei's sufferability and seems to acclaim her modesty. The main lesson from mother is that if she does something good to others, she will receive the same and vice versa (the doctrine of karma in Buddhism). To a certain extent, it is not adequate to ascribe the clefts between mother-daughter bond to cultural differences, generational gap, language barrier, and identity construction; rather, under Buddhist view, misconception of love, selfishness, and stubbornness should be explored to visualize the roots of miserableness of each character.

3. The Roots of Miserableness

3.1 The Misconception of Love

In Buddhism, love is defined as an action in which the subject wants others to be happy. If somebody (he) has a particularly intimate feeling upon with other (her) or loves her in a Buddhist way, he will think about numerous efforts to bring her joy without setting any conditions on her but he is required to have courage and self-acceptance. According to Shepard, self-acceptance refers to a feeling of satisfaction one has with himself, accompanied with self-understanding, and subjectively realistic awareness of his strengths and weaknesses (139). In brief, self-acceptance means one's possibility of accepting everything, regardless of being good or bad, happy or bitter, in performing an action. Another concept of love which is often misunderstood is attachment or the near-enemy of love. When he loves her with attachment, he hardly avoids the intervention of self-interest. In other words, he can hurt her feeling in case that she is displeased or does not meet his demand. Thus, Buddha recommends people to love with unselfish interest and detachment on the way to the destination of true happiness.

It is commonly thought that there seem no differences between love and attachment. Yet, they are not the same in Buddhist field of observing human emotions. Attachment entails the arousal of craze and dissatisfaction when yearning for someone. He fancies that if he starts relationship with her, he will be happy. On the contrary, love refers to an altruistic part of our being and a connection with others. If he loves her, he wishes that both would be happy and enjoy their wellbeing together. Besides, love can lead people to pleasure and great happiness whereas attachment often webs people in negative emotions of anger, jealousy, and hurt. Therefore, attachment serves as a main source of unhappiness and miserableness. When she comes late, glances over the other boys, or fails to quit bad habits, he reacts to those actions with anger or jealousy because the attachment within him cannot achieve what it really wants such as it wants her to be absolutely faithful, not looking at any other handsome boys; it wants her to go home punctually or earlier than the compromised time; it wants her to practice good habits to make him pleased. Additionally, in attachment, the motivation of what he says he loves her is that she potentially makes him feel good and he loves her as long as she does the things he approves of. Even more, he wants to possess her. The sequential string of sensations caused by attachment destroys people's equanimity, representing that his emotion depends on her emotion and the way she treats him. In that situation, he gets obsessed with many questions like "what does she think of me? Does she love me? Have I offended her with such deed? What am I supposed to do if she wants me to be the way I cannot be?" or "How can I become what she wants me to be so that she loves me even more?" All of those keep his mind stirred up constantly. On the other hand, Buddha gives his followers the Dharma (teachings) of loving instead of attaching because to love is to generate bliss and bring others happiness, simply wishing them to be happy without hoping them to repay us, do at our disposal or expecting them to treat us kindly. This concept is promoted not only to be applied in romantic relationship but also maternal/paternal one.

First, the maternal love conceptualized in *The Joy Luck Club* is investigated that the mothers misuse to their daughters. In the small story of Jing-mei named "Two Kinds," Tan portrays the mother-daughter relationship as being cracked because of the misconception of maternal love. As a child, Jing-mei is interested in singing and dancing with a hope that she will become a Chinese Shirley Temple. This keeps Suyuan contemplating about Jing-mei's genius factor. Suyuan determines to cherish as well as

exploit it in a way of asking her daughter to fulfill many meaningless tests in which the other prodigy children are assigned to do in magazines such as standing on her head and reciting the capitals of various countries in the world. The method seems to be too ineffective to sharpen the daughter's potential genius element while Suyuan's expectation upon her daughter goes higher day by day. Thus, this mother changes to make another decision of buying a piano for her daughter and squeezes her into intense practice to accelerate the formation of child prodigy. Unfortunately, the daughter's talent does not dwell in piano playing that she plays terribly in a performance; yet, Suyuan's belief that Jing-mei can be a piano genius has not been damaged. After that, Suyuan insists that her daughter go to piano class even though Jing-mei obviously proves what the mother locates her talent is wrong and hopes that she can be free from doing anything she is not fond of. Under the mother's constant authority, Jing-mei exclaims: "Then I wish I'd never been born; I wish I were dead!" (Tan 153). The conflict between them arises, especially the pain when being scolded by her own daughter starts to scrape her heart since then. It is understandable that Suyuan is shocked at the daughter's anger with a blank face because she feels hurt and even offended by her very child. Suyuan's background is sent to readers that she is good at swallowing all types of anguish, one of which is leaving her two babies in warring China. From this angle, Suyuan is presumed to digest her daughter's insulting words, controlling her emotion and managing her fury to be unveiled. The collapse of her hope in Jing-mei ensues and submerges everything in despair.

In this case, people may appreciate the maternal love from Suyuan to Jing-mei, for she, like most of the mothers, seeks for the good and advantageous things to cultivate a promising future for her daughter. The mother is worried about her daughter's age which will increase with time elapsing whereas Jing-mei's talent is still on the way to be discovered. It also takes time for any located talent to be completely fostered. As a consequence, Suyuan imposes pressure on her daughter in piano practicing to an extraordinary degree. This analysis shows that mother loves daughter, thinks about the daughter's future life, and wants to make everything well prepared for a prosperous life of the daughter, especially training her to become a child prodigy on a basis of her expectation whilst she never asks about what her daughter likes or dislikes doing and wishes to become. Because when the little Jing-mei performs playing piano successfully, she would be acknowledged as a piano genius or child prodigy, people would congratulate on the child's achievement and also highly value the mother's ability to deliver as well as praise her strategy of nurturing such a child prodigy. It means Suyuan's unconscious desire for Jing-mei's repaying. This mother wrongly loves her daughter with the attachment that after she grants her daughter fine things (such as delicious food, beautiful clothes, education, etc.), the daughter should give her back, specifically the family honor and the glory – so-called non-materialist repaying.

To Suyuan, family honor is important. That she receives the honor her daughter earns can help enforce Suyuan's social status and reputation of being a child prodigy's mother. As an expatriate and a member of a commonplace household in the USA, this mother works hard for daily bread and better life, hoping that her whole family can soar to the upper class world in order to not only honor her ancestry honorable but also bring her social respect and admiration. For instance, mother Lindo "sat proudly on the bench, telling [Waverly's] admirers with proper Chinese humility" and when Waverly won the tournament, "it was [Waverly's] mother who wore the triumphant grin" (Tan 97-9). Lindo is proud of her daughter's winning and happily admits the audience's admiration

because she is a mother of the admirable winner. That is why the mothers resolves to train their daughters to be genius or child prodigy as soon as possible so that the mothers can obtain something from their daughters like admiration, praise, honor, or respect from society, all of which are intangible though.

In the sub-story "The Red Candle," Lindo's suffering also results from her mother's misconception of love. At the age of two, Lindo is promised to get married to a son of Huang Taitai by her mother; the word *Taitai* means the title of mistress in Chinese and refers to a powerful wealthy woman in old Chinese society. Huang Taitai hastily looks for a proper wife for her sole son, who bears a responsibility of keeping bloodline for his ancestry. Because Lindo's family at that time is very needy and unable to afford education as "that was how backward families in the country were. We [Lindo's family] were always the last to give up stupid old-fashioned customs" (Tan 44-5), her mother without any hesitations agrees to "sign a marriage contract" to Huang Taitai that Lindo will become a wife of Huang Taitai's son. Her mother thinks that if Lindo moves to live in the Huangs, she would have a comfortable life and inherit the huge property, for Lindo's husband-to-be is "the leftover of his father's spirit" (Tan 44). In reality, after Lindo turns twelve and officially marries with Huang Taitai's son, she is mistreated with class discrimination. She struggles to satisfy her childish husband and critical mother-in-law; both of them enjoy torturing her. First, we cannot say Lindo's mother does not love her; she does love her, yet conditionally. The mother always wants to furnish her daughter's life with enjoyment but she is too poor to do that. She turns to call help from Huang Taitai, hoping that when Lindo is sold into a wealthy family, she can be raised well-roundedly. Readers may be empathic with this deed of a pitiful mother, who "bites back her tongue" to sell the daughter and never has a chance to reunite. However, the mother asks her daughter a repayment by moving her to another household so that the mother can reduce burden of raising her. Another significant repaying from the daughter is winning honor for the family with an obligation of being an obedient daughter-in-law of Huang family. The maternal love is misconceptualized in a way that mother wishes the best things for her own child but never consults the daughter's idea or agreement in advance. Second, if the mother loves her child rightly, she never thinks about how to get rid of the child out of family to reduce burden of making ends meet and choosing a husband, whose family should be rich, socially high ranked, and powerful, for the daughter so as to polish ancestry's reputation as well as the mother's pride. At this point, the mother wrongly cultivates maternal love in her own child.

About Huang Taitai's maternal love, she also idealizes it in an incorrect manner. Under the pressure of her husband's sickness that he remains no potency to make another son, Huang Taitai decides to search a wife for her son. The mother loves her son but requires him to give something back to them; that is, to replace her to keep bloodline by marrying a girl and making baby. As shown in the story, the innocent son does not have any right to select his wife-to-be from whom he should have sprouted adoration after courting and experiencing a formal romantic relationship. The mother lacks the concern for her son's feeling that she just does what she wants, what the ancestor requires her to do, and how social criticism pushes her to do. Undeniably, the son feels uneasy when he is reluctantly put into the marriage with Lindo: "he was scared and turned his face. He had no desire for [Lindo] [...] he would never touch [Lindo]" (Tan 58). Huang Taitai is in pursuit of joy and happiness for her son on the basis of receiving benefits from him as well. She expects him to repay her whether it is material

or non-material that he must get married to any girl whom mother approves of based on the matchmaker's advice to have baby and maintain bloodline. After all, the consequence of this misconceptualized love is encompassing her son and Lindo with adversity and distress.

Regarding romantic relationship, love and attachment are overlapping in the female character Lena's conceptualization that she undergoes a dilemma in marriage beset with regret and resentment. Harold and she get to know each other in the firm they work for; after a certain time of engaging in romantic relationship, they grow love together and approach a decision of marrying. Exactly from the first moments Lena has meal with Harold, his personality shows her conspicuously that he likes the fairness in every financial business with the other people, even with his lover:

We started seeing each other for working lunches, to talk about the projects, and we would always split the tab right in half [...]. Later, when we started meeting secretly for dinner, we still divided the bill (Tan 168).

Before marriage, Harold does not conceal his equalitarianism but pronounces to share everything by half so that his girlfriend can sympathize with him if she intends to choose him as her husband-to-be. Lena is supposed to know this and that she comes to get married to him demonstrates her sense of accepting an equalitarian husband like him. Their conjugal life begins along with each participant's personal benefit springing up and going criss-cross on each other. At weekends, they calculate and settle the total cost that each of them spends on their own shopping such as who pays whom for what, who owes whom for what, or Lena should give Harold back the amount of money that he spends to help her buy shampoo. On the refrigerator door, a list of buying things is created and pinned on it:

AMERICAN TRANSLATION 175	
<u>Lena</u>	<u>Harold</u>
chicken, veg., bread, broccoli, shampoo, beer \$19.63	Garage stuff \$25.35
Maria (clean + tip) \$65	Bathroom stuff \$5.41
groceries	Car stuff \$6.57
(see shop list) \$55.15	Light Fixtures \$87.26
petunias, potting soil	Road gravel \$19.99
\$14.11	Gas \$22.00
Photo developing	Car Smog Check \$35
\$13.83	Movies & Dinner \$65
	Ice Cream \$4.50

List of things in which Lena and Harold have bought separately
(taken from the novel *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, published by Ivy Books, New York, 1989)

Strikingly, Harold convinces Lena to pay for the cost of exterminating fleas: "You should pay for the exterminators, because Mirugai is your cat and so they're your fleas. It's only fair" (Tan 163). At that time, all possible feelings billowing up inside Lena are madness and hatefulness. She gets impatient with the stingily fair treatment

Harold devises, gradually traumatizing her sense of loving him as well as their conjugal life. Previously, she believes that he would change his habit of dividing everything into two equal parts; especially he would never count the cost with his own wife. Those presuppositions accidentally build up a solid hope in Lena that he would bring her a happy life. In fact, what she expects does not happen; instead, it drives her hope to the brink of demolition, submerging her in negative emotions throughout the spousal time with Harold. Besides, Lena cannot eliminate the fear “that he would tell me [her] smelled bad, that [she] had terrible bathroom habits, that [her] taste in music and television was appalling. [She] worried that Harold would [...] say, ‘Why, gosh, you aren’t the girl I thought you were, are you?’” (Tan 169). Lena is afraid that her husband would feel bored and lose the passion in her; then, he would be displeased with what she does and turns to disappreciate her hobbies, which he used to cherish. She ponders on his feelings, deeds, and reactions when she does something for him because she loves him with attachment that sows a sequential string of emotions in her concept of love. She simply loves him, for she ensures that he would love her back and make her happy. In addition, the attachment increases in correlation to Lena’s misery when she could not exercise self-acceptance in which she should accept the personality Harold has and the truth of their marriage based on balance sheets. Her dissatisfaction is derived from the attachment failing to achieve what it demands including Harold who should give up his habit of counting the cost. Thus, Lena leads an unhappy life surrounded by her misconception of love.

In conclusion, love should be comprehended in Buddhist conceptualization. Maternal love is sacred in the world while in this novel it malfunctions to pull every character to tearful circumstances due to being misconceptualized into attachment. Mother Suyuan misuses the love to daughter that she wishes her daughter to become child prodigy but her daughter is required to give the mother back the family honor. Mother of Lindo wrongly loves Lindo in a way of supplying her with better living conditions in wealthy Huang Taitai’s family whereas this mother unconsciously demands her daughter to repay the ancestry’s social status to upgrade as well as reduce burden of raising a child. Huang Taitai thinks that she loves her son properly, arranging a marriage for him at his early age, but she turns out to distort the maternal love because she means to hopefully receive the benefit from her son, who substitutes her to bear great responsibility of keeping ancestral bloodline. Romantic love is also mistakenly defined. Lena is incapable of self-accepting and lacks courage to chase a true love; rather, she cultivates attachment in the conjugal life with Harold that she remains negative feelings of dread, impatience, annoyance, and eventually anguish.

3.2 Selfishness

“According to Buddha, to live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one’s own in the midst of abundance” (Singh 4). The core message that Buddha wishes to convey to his students is that an individual should practice a lifestyle of generosity to discard the desire of selfishness and attain equanimity in soul. Generosity refers to the situation in which one can forgive other’s mistakes, and does not weigh how much one wins or loses compared with how much the others do.

Theoretically, in Buddhism, the sufferings come from extensions of cognitive assumptions of selfhood (Kumar 40). In other words, Buddha becomes enlightened that the cause of suffering is selfish desire and greed. Aristotle states that everything else is desired for the sake of it (Kenny 1) or human beings tend to fill their life with happiness

and gratification of all their desires, for which they are willing to fight at all costs despite trespassing the others' benefits. The more happiness people receive, the greedier they become to receive it; this phenomenon evolves from human's greed – endless and painful. Greed is compared to a bottomless pit that can never be replenished. When you put items into that pit, you will be disappointed because you realize that you are doing something meaningless and never accomplish the fruits. That is why our limitless desires are the roots of misery. Besides, selfishness serves as an essential component of relationships among humans and refers to whom an individual lives for – for himself or for the others, and what it means is to live for himself. If someone can answer these questions, he will be able to specify the aim of his life, the actions he takes and the attitudes he has towards surrounding people and associated events. A person of selfishness is usually interpreted as one who disregards the others' values and the fairness between them and him because he thinks it is no good returning a value for a value. From this respect, an ultimate behavior is derivative that it could make his pleasure prior to the other's one and his actions would lead to benefiting himself or he is doing this for his own sake. Concisely, to be selfish means to actually adopt and live by the principles that lay one's happiness and benefits above everyone else. Living selfishly may deteriorate one's dignity, increase individual suffering, and even outbreak wars everywhere in the world since "selfishness is acting in your benefit without regard, and often harming other individuals" (Ethan).

The best demonstration for the presence of selfishness lies in the sub-story "Rice Husband" narrated by Lena. Here, Lena describes how she comes to get married to Harold and what happens in their conjugal life. First of all, the author would like to indicate what the exact roles of husband and wife are in their relationship or the stereotypical roles of them which society acknowledges. Harold is an American, raised and growing up right in his native country by which his mindset and lifestyle are all influenced. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) of 2008 found that 76% of the American adult population identified themselves as Christians (Kosmin), so Harold could be a believer of Christianity or at least subconsciously penetrating Christian teachings as his surrounding people practice them. Relating to the mutual duties between husband and wife in a household, the Bible recommends that husbands should play a main role in his home: "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." This means he works and makes money to sufficiently provide all the necessities of life for his wife and children. By contrast, Harold does not follow that advice and seems to break the rules formed by largely-populated religion. He counts the cost with his wife from the smallest thing like fleas to the commonly-used things such as food and necessities: "None of our friends could ever believe we fight over something as stupid as fleas" – Lena says (Tan 163). He makes excuse for sharing everything monetary by half with Lena that "he valued our relationship too much. He didn't want to contaminate it with money" (Tan 171). Lena truly wants to know more about his past beloved woman who dubiously took advantage of his pocket and this seizes him with the hesitation of accepting the latter love. After a long-term relationship, Lena grows intolerable with her husband's notion of pure love solely based on balance sheets and that renders her guess: Harold used to be a generous and responsible man in treating woman. If he was not born with nature of counting the cost with woman, he would be a kind husband who did the same thing as social norms instruct under the impact of Bible. Readers can know, to this extent, Harold's benefit used to be hurt by anyone else; for example, his ex-girlfriend

just spent his money without loving him back or helping him share the housework or release the stress from work. That is why, for this time of choosing Lena as girlfriend and even wife, he becomes wary of his pocket safety and anticipates no one to benefit by the other regardless of the relationship going on or breaking up. Moreover:

Selfish ungodly persons everywhere enter into all kinds of relationships with a desire of serving their own selves, and gratifying their own flesh without knowing or caring what is required of them. [...] They know what they want others to do for them, but do not care what their duty is to do for others. This is the way it is with too many husbands and wives [...](Baxter).

It goes without saying that Harold places his benefit before Lena's in this marriage. He refuses to cover his wife's meals and the like while Lena preserves legal right that "under common law, because it was unusual for a wife to have a job and earn her own money, a husband was obliged to provide his wife with 'necessaries' – which included food, clothing, and shelter – but only the necessities he deemed appropriate" (See *Husband and Wife*). Besides, Harold is unconcerned about his wife's interest in food, for instance:

"Who's ready for dessert?" [Harold] asks, reaching into the freezer.

"I'm full," [Lena] say.

"She cannot eat ice cream," says [Lena's] mother.

"So it seems. She's always on a diet."

"No, she never eat it. She doesn't like."

And now Harold smiles and looks at [Lena] puzzled, expecting [Lena] to translate what [Lena's] mother has said.

"It's true," [Lena] say[s] evenly. "I've hated ice cream almost all my life."

Harold looks at [Lena], as if [Lena], too, were speaking Chinese and he could not understand.

"I guess I assumed you were just trying to lose weight... Oh well" (Tan 177).

Harold does not appreciate Lena's value in lack of equality: "And [they] just continued that way, everything right down the middle. If anything, [Lena] encouraged it. Sometimes [she] insisted on paying for the whole thing: meal, drinks, and tip. And it really didn't bother [her]" (Tan 168). Obviously, Lena esteems Harold as well as their relationship that she tries to protect it in a way of insisting on paying for their meals. Since she is aware of his tendency to dividing the cost fairly, which implicates he is annoyed with the bill being settled totally by him and probably pleased with the bill covered by the others, she decides to pay so as to make him happy. As a consequence, when the endurance reaches its maximum capacity along with the domination of one personal benefit over the other one, Lena starts to cry for her sufferings of such a stingy husband. At the same time, Harold's selfishness arises and makes their quarrel more serious with his anger: "Shit," Harold says. And then he sighs and leans back, as if he were thinking about this. Finally he says in what sounds like a hurt voice [...]" (Tan 180).

"Magpies" told by An-mei is another poignant sub-story highlighting the woman's value being despised until she terminates herself because she cannot release from fully-swallowed pain caused by people's selfishness. The mischief sprouts from Chinese tradition obsessively straining Chinese man to have son for keeping bloodline. Wu Tsing is a polygamic rich man accidentally met and attracted by An-mei's mother's beauty with an appetite for her "unusual skin and lustrous pink color." His Second Wife schemes to force An-mei's mother – newly-widowed beautiful woman – to become

Fourth Wife of Wu Tsing so that she can bear a son for him: “So [Second Wife] conspired with Wu Tsing to lure [An-mei’s mother] to his bed” (Tan 266). As what Second Wife anticipates, An-mei’s mother is plotted to sleep with Wu Tsing and then “Second Wife complained to many people about the shameless widow who had enchanted Wu Tsing into bed” (Tan 267). Consequently, An-mei’s mother is shamefully trapped under social cynicism of being a lustful widow whilst Wu Tsing grabs the opportunity to ask her mother (An-mei’s Popo) for marrying her to be his third concubine. It is pitiful for this widow when she unintentionally decays her virtue. Initially, she is a good woman, who follows Buddhism as her departed husband did. “So [An-mei’s] mother kowtowed in the pagoda, pledging to observe the right harmony of body, thoughts, and speech, to refrain from giving opinions, and to shun wealth” (Tan 266). Even after finding out lying on the same bed with Wu Tsing, passively, not at her will, she always feels remorseful:

When [An-mei’s] mother awoke to find him touching her beneath her undergarments, she jumped out of bed. He grabbed her by her hair and threw her on the floor, then put his foot on her throat and told her to undress. In the early morning, she left in a rickshaw, her hair undone and with tears streaming down her face (Tan 267).

In this case, the widow cries for her weakness that leads to complete entrapment. In addition, she has no other choice to bury the unwilling guilt but accepts it overtly. Her tears also represent an individual’s self-esteem devastated by social criticism as well as the faithfulness to her departed husband, which she has kept so far, now suddenly turning meaningless. All of them devalue the love between her deceased husband and her. Nevertheless, nobody in An-mei’s mother’s family identify her virtue merely because they are selfish. Their first reactions to An-mei’s mother’s circumstance are disdainfulness and unsympathicality that “her brother kicked her, and her own mother banned her from the family house forever” (Tan 267). Selfish people always render a priority for their own benefit; for instance, Popo and uncle are worried about family reputation including theirs and ancestral honor being contaminated by a widowed daughter-in-law/sister-in-law who will be remarrying. They choose to disown An-mei’s mother before allowing her to justify and taking it into their considerations. If they had not been selfish, they would have listened to her in sympathy. Instead, their nature of selfishness takes control of their manner to solve the problem and depreciates the other’s value by physically hurting An-mei’s mother and insulting her: “throw your life away? If you follow this woman, you can never lift your head again” (Tan 245) – warns uncle towards little An-mei. Indeed, that uncle brainwashes An-mei by frequently exposing her mother’s mistake allude to the craving for claiming his self, which lowers the other’s in an attempt to enforce its higher position. Finally, An-mei’s mother moves to Wu Tsing’s household as his fourth wife and endures a tragic life of being unequally treated that Second Wife deprives her son, accordingly her motherhood becomes invalid. Due to the selfishness and lack of compassion from Popo and uncle, An-mei’s mother has to swallow the bitterness of being a petty concubine in Wu Tsing family and kill herself with opium overfeeding.

Shortly, Buddhist tradition holds that selfish craving equals to suffering (Galini 109). The selfishness as one of the negative facets in human nature is cleverly utilized in Tan’s novel through intriguing sorrowful sub-stories that readers hardly realize its existence, which causes the characters to catastrophic life. For Lena and Harold relationship, clearly the selfish essence of Harold makes him disrespect Lena’s love when he, at the beginning of their encounter, does not want to cover Lena’s meal,

referring to his non-responsibility on supporting his wife. Finally, selfishness and their marriage mislead to Lena's tearful desperation. As with An-mei's mother's life, she agrees to swallow pain that the other people do upon her in sexist old Chinese society while her Popo and uncle never feel altruistic towards such a pitiful woman slipped in the psychological battle among her self-esteem, loyalty to family and social criticism. Thus, selfishness needs to be eradicated in whatsoever circumstances and people should not ask the others to live as they wish, but they are encouraged to live as they wish to live (Wilde). Likewise, Harold should have not pushed Lena to follow his lifestyle, which is based on financial sharing; An-mei's mother may have had another happy ending to her life if Popo and uncle had not put their benefit of keeping their own reputation pure foremost.

3.3 Stubbornness

In *The Michael Teaching* – a body of channeled New Age spiritual doctrine as articulated in *Messages from Michael*, published in 1979 by novelist Chelsea Quinn Yabro – based on the degree from most introvertedness to most extrovertedness, there are seven types of human character flaws ranked as follows: self-deprecation, self-destruction, martyrdom, stubbornness, greed, arrogance, and impatience (Barry). Of them, stubbornness is normally surfaced in adolescence to protect the self at the level of false personality. Stubbornness means refusing to move or change one's opinion; in the other dictionary, it is defined as the trait of being difficult to handle or overcome; resolute adherence to your own ideas or desires. Actually, a person who is regarded as stubborn tends to counter any kinds of change while the essence of life is changeable as Heraclitus used to declare: "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." So it turns out that stubbornness resists the life itself. A pig-headed person unwillingly fulfills something forced by the others that he easily gets uncontrolled and even impatient enough to hurt people physically and spiritually. Due to the underground feature that stubbornness sticks to only one form of its presence in accordance with the state in which everything else is threatened to change or lose, it becomes over-sensitive to the potentiality of having sudden or unwanted change imposed upon it. Even the change in question matches the person's interests or brings benign result, stubbornness fails to acquiesce.

The manifestation of stubbornness or obstinacy in the novel is when Suyuan insists that Jing-mei practices piano even though she loses in the recent performance: "'No! I won't' [...]' You want me to be someone that I'm not!' [Jing-mei] sobbed. 'I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!'" (Tan 152-3). Jing-mei is hopefully trained to be a prodigy by what her mother often determines to make all dreams come true because "America was where all [Jing-mei's] mother's hopes lay" and "Of course you can be prodigy, too" (Tan 141) – said Suyuan to Jing-mei. However, Suyuan does not know which seeds of talent she can sow and fruitfully grow in her little daughter, so Jing-mei has to undergo many tests in an attempt to discover her real ability. At the outset, Suyuan assumes that her daughter can become a Chinese Shirley Temple and takes her to join school training upon that idea. After Suyuan's great efforts to make the daughter qualified to be a prodigy, Jing-mei's impatience increases as she imagines that the prodigic element would be gone forever and she will lose pride in her parents' eyes. She fancies about the best way to dig up her talent in order to shine before people's amazement:

I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtains, waiting to hear the right music that would send me floating on my tiptoes. I was like the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger, crying with holy indignity. I was Cinderella stepping from her pumpkin carriage with sparkly cartoon music filling the air (Tan 142).

Moreover, Suyuan crams the daughter with a variety of strangely irrational tests including reciting the capital names of any specified countries, multiplying numbers in head, finding the queen of hearts in a deck of cards, trying to stand on head without using hands, predicting daily temperatures in certain places (Tan 143-4). Then, Suyuan reproaches Jing-mei for not trying hard enough to be a perfect pianist and dispirits her with straightforward laments and uneasy attitude: “She gave a little huff as she let go of the sound dial and sat down on the sofa” (Tan 146). As such a child getting through emotional upheavals, Jing-mei starts to think about the new environment she is supposed to adapt. When she performs playing piano so badly that it leaves her parents in shamefulness and receives Waverly’s humiliation: “You aren’t a genius like me” (Tan 151), she perceives the instability of this new living condition, thus denying to accept the change that Suyuan makes to produce her talent. As a consequence, after Jing-mei hears the negative comment from the audience on her bad performance, her fear develops and she gets more haunted with any kinds of change or the novelty which she has never been familiarized before. At this moment, readers can eye Jing-mei’s stubbornness through the detail of her resisting to her mother’s command: “‘I’m not going to play anymore,’ [Jing-mei] said nonchalantly. ‘Why should I? I’m not a genius’” and “‘I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won’ts. I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not’” (Tan 144-52). Entangled with scare and discouragement, she alternates to look for other desires for her life: permanence, stability, and predictability that she refuses to play piano even when Suyuan asks her to do until all hopes about a child prodigy in the mother are extinguished. In the following years, Jing-mei also appears obstinate against her mother’s advice that she drops out of the recommended college. She tends to reject the change and any possibility of changes she flinches from unfamiliar circumstances. Truly, the stubbornness results in rupturing Suyuan and Jing-mei’s relationship. It makes the mother hopeless and her anger incessantly grows to “its breaking point,” and “her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack, and she backed out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless” (Tan 153). This character flaw is so powerful and prevalent within Jing-mei that throughout the years with her mother, Jing-mei’s obstinacy restrains her from getting to know about her mother’s past and personality because the more she is aware of who her mother is and what she wants from her, the more empathy she shares with her. Then potentially she has to follow her mother’s demands. “What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don’t know anything” (Tan 31) – Jing-mei wonders herself when being informed of her future duty to tell her lost twin sisters in China about Suyuan.

Next, in Buddhist perspective, the leading cause of our self-inflicted suffering as well as the largest blockage to happiness is the inability to see the facts of life as they are and to sense ourselves as we are in operating our conduct concordantly with the realities. This state of denial or lack of realization about existential facts is called *avidya* in Sanskrit – literally meaning “the failure to see or know” and translated in English as “ignorance.” According to Gautama Buddha, ignorance is the chief cause of the sufferings we impose on ourselves and others (Leifer 340). Ignorance represents two

kinds of sensations: first, avarice for loveable being, and second, anger for unloveable being. Unfulfilled craving leads to suffering and the one we hate always being present to us provokes our uncomfortable feeling. In a similar manner, these two types of sufferings come from “stubbornness.” So what exactly is stubbornness? Stubbornness refers to the unacceptability of the reality which opposes our expectation, of what fails to exist as our subjective thinking wants. For example, a person’s lover stops loving her, he goes away and leaves her alone, but her consciousness does not admit this truth, and thus suffering entails. The removal of stubbornness in Buddhism motivates us to accept the reality even though that reality poses negative effects on us; we cannot think or act against what reality suggests.

The second suffering springs from conservativeness, which means one’s idea being incorrect or inappropriate to the reality whereas he/she insists on assuming it true, or idiomatically “sticking to the gun.” This very idea generates his/her unhappiness and even the others’. A representative illustration about conservativeness is the parental arrangement of their daughters/sons’ marriage. As well-known cases in Asian countries go, arranged marriages occur frequently. Arranged marriages account for twenty-five to thirty-five percent of all marriages in Japan nowadays (Applbaum 37). In China, “in the ‘bad old days’ of arranged marriages, according to this view, many people found themselves stuck in marriages with persons decidedly not of their own choosing” (Xiaohe 709). Parents often organize their child’s marriage. However, if these parents apply their idea of arranging marriage to their child in European countries and even in any other countries nowadays, forcing their child to abide by their commands, they would entwine themselves and equally the child with mischief. Moreover, it goes against the law because present conception of marriage no longer matches our Asian ancestor’s in the past. The couples need time to find out each other about characters, personalities, lifestyle, religious views, and concept of love, etc. before they decide to wed. To any valueless concept in society, it should be immediately eliminated from the society; the person who is still conservative to keep it would be isolated soon. Otherwise, he/she induces pain and sadness on his/her own.

Pertaining to “Four Directions,” Waverly becomes upset about her mother’s stubbornness in rearing her up and dealing with problems for her. Mother Lindo is at first judged by her daughter that “She never thinks anybody is good enough for anything” and “[Waverly] couldn’t fend off the strength of her will anymore, her ability to make [Waverly] see black where there was once white, white where there was once black” (Tan 183-6). Obviously, Lindo tries to justify everything right on her own stance. When she deems something black while the daughter sees it white, she tends to make things happen upon what she claims or at least convince the daughter to agree with her. In the first love affair between Waverly and Marvin, Lindo does not acquiesce without searching out any reasons for her dissatisfaction at Marvin and is very critical of him, always pointing out his faults. Soon Waverly could see nothing but his shortcomings, and consequently divorced him: “When [Waverly] was in love with Marvin, he was nearly perfect [...] But by the time [Waverly’s] mother had had her say about him, [Waverly] saw his brain had shrunk from laziness, so that now it was good only for thinking up excuses [...] [Waverly] wondered if perhaps [her] mother had poisoned [her] marriage” (Tan 192). Lindo exerts her idea on the daughter about playing tennis and golf as a tricky method that Marvin uses to elude from family responsibility. However, it is an opportunity for him to build up muscles, keep healthy, and relax after a hard working day. In the USA, playing golf and tennis becomes a hot trend of

spending free time with the effective entertaining level that socialization and contemplating beautiful scenery can be combined simultaneously. In the early twenty-first century, 30,000 golf courses were built up and 55 million people engage in playing golf all over the world, especially the value of American golf club memberships sold in the 1990s was US\$3.2 billion (Farrally 753). Lindo's Chinese generational ideology is incompatibly projected in American environment, thus placing her in the counterclockwise wheel of modern society and irritating her American born daughter: "Well, [Waverly] don't know if it's explicitly stated in the law, but you can't ever tell a Chinese mother to shut up" (Tan 191). Waverly seemingly runs out of her tolerability with her mother under conservative thoughts and maternal oppression which always delays her speed of catching up American life and wanes her passion in marriage: And even if I recognized her strategy, her sneak attack, I was afraid that some unseen speck of truth would fly into my eye, blur what I was seeing and transform him from the divine man I thought he was into someone quite mundane, mortally wounded with tiresome habits and irritating imperfections (Tan 191).

The same case happens to Rich – Waverly's second husband. Rich is adorable and "embarrassingly romantic" in her eyes. He does not require anything or take advantage of her regarding sexual desire and financial issue when their relationship has not been shaped. In addition, Waverly also feels congenial with him, who can read her mind, sympathize and understand her thought. He becomes a completely unscratched pearl to Waverly because she hardly believes that she can afford such a precious asset like him and has never known about a pure love, in which Rich allows her to reveal her weakness, expose her dark side of "pettiness, meanness, and self-loathing" so that he can comprehend and love her with either side of her. Nevertheless, Lindo, at this time, suspends her daughter's marriage plan with Rich after her expression at Rich: "when she opened the door, her forced smile as she scrutinized him from head to toe, checking her appraisal of him against that already given to her by Auntie Suyuan" (Tan 195). This stubborn mother's demand cannot be met in a counter-Chinese-tradition way. Previously, Lindo kept promise with her mother that she would be married to Huang Taitai's little son, indicating individual's marriage preset by parents in Old China; on the contrary, Waverly is her daughter but she – a mother – has twice failed to select a husband for Waverly. First, the manifestation of her stubbornness is decoded as her desire to be right. Wanting to be a decision maker in the daughter's marriage clings to Lindo in many continuous years so that she can maintain her Chinese custom and proves it still proper in the USA. However, it is a backward idea because American parents leave options in marriage to their child. Never yielding to modern American ideology, Lindo manipulates to adjust her daughter's marriage to her willed direction by "suspicions, passing remarks, and innuendos" and criticizing any tiny defects that she can find at Rich. For example, when Waverly interprets Rich's freckles on the basis of Chinese belief as good luck, Lindo agrees in a mocking tone: "Maybe this is true. When you were young, you got the chicken pox. So many spots, you had to stay home for ten days. So lucky, you thought" (Tan 196). At dinnertime, Rich, as an American man, appears clumsy with Chinese utensils and etiquettes. That he holds his chopstick improperly to pick food pitifully astonishes Waverly's family side and makes Shoshana shriek with laughter. Moreover, when Lindo habitually pretends to remark the food she has just made with highest appreciation and pride by self-deprecating such as "Ai! This dish not salty enough, no flavor [...] it is too bad to eat" (Tan 197). Rich thinks her mother-in-law-to-be is saying the truth and obediently actualizes her allusion that he

pours salty black stuff into the target dish, wholly drawing people's worry at supposedly forbidden action from him and badly impressing Lindo afterwards: "he had failed miserably in her eyes" (Tan 198). Cooking, in Lindo's opinion, plays an essential role in expressing her love, pride, power and her greater knowledge than her peer Suyuan, so she highly values all the food she cooks; if anyone disrespects them by complaining about the taste or knowingly reprocessing like Rich's action of putting salty sauce without her permission, she would sensitively perceive such things as criticism. Regardless of Lindo's angry reaction towards imaginary negative comments, her implicit displeasing behavior (horrified eyes) reflects that she cannot accept the reality in which Rich sees her flaws in cooking. Another strategy that Lindo engages in denying the marriage between Rich and her daughter is to underestimate the gifts from Rich to Waverly. The daughter shows the mother the mink jacket that Rich gives her as a Christmas present; instead of gaining good impression at Lindo about Rich's generosity and his whole-heartedness, Waverly is troubled by her mother's blunt criticism: "This is not so good [...] It is just leftover strips. And the fur is too short, no long hairs" (Tan 186). Lindo means to ingrain her subjective judgments about Rich in her daughter's mind as she does not want to have a non-Chinese son-in-law, who potentially puts Waverly's remnant Chinese essence on the verge of annihilation. Emphatically, that Rich is approved to become Waverly's husband is synonymic to her second parental disempowerment in daughter's marriage. Her desire to be right in holding the viewpoint that daughter's marriage should be taken into parents' consideration first and eventually decision compelled by them:

The custom of giving a voluntary gratuity to service providers in restaurants is highly prevalent in the USA. [...] They take the issue of tipping so seriously that they have even published tipping standards for [...] restaurants (waiter 15 per cent of bill, bartender 15 per cent) (Callan 246).

Meanwhile, Lindo, inextricable from her Chinese culture, forgets that she is living in the USA where tipping belongs to indispensable components of its culture. Either on purpose or by chance, the action that this obstinate woman "pulled back the dollar bills and counted out exact change, thirteen cents, and put that on the tray instead, explaining firmly: 'No tip!'" (Tan 184) gives more manifest proofs on her unsubmitiveness to the other's appropriate conduct or the reality. Indeed, Lindo's stubborn personality incites her to do what she personally thinks is right and be ready to protest what happens against her intentions. Especially, this defective trait can be expressed so vigorously that it wounds the others' benefit. The above quotation from the novel shows that Lindo purposefully takes back the tip which Waverly has just put on the tray of the waiter. Her obstinacy prevailing over her good qualities not only stops her from the shortcut to assimilation as an American citizen but also disrupts the possibility of seeing the others' dignity, as "she never thinks anybody is good enough for anything" (Tan 183), and breaks the mother-daughter relationship.

4. Conclusion

As universally known, there are great differences between the East and the West, between China and America, and between the old and the young generations. Such different points in each character's narrations enable us to look at the bittersweet mother-daughter bonds from not only cultural and generational perspectives but also Buddhistone.

To some degree, this novel tries to examine the cultural influence on Chinese expatriates in the USA. Also, the mother-daughter conflicts articulate the distinctness between Chinese and American cultures. All of the mothers go through persistent pasts of a life in China so wrenched that they decide to immigrate to the USA in search of a brighter future. Thus, these mothers increasingly build hopes and ambitions that their ABC daughters could lead a successful life in America; coincidentally, daughters are required to preserve Chinese essences. Nevertheless, the daughters never give up considering themselves as mainstream American and they feel their mothers are a source of embarrassments because of their speaking imperfect English, having Chinese manners, dressing "Chinesely," etc. That is why they want to differentiate themselves from their mothers as well as detach their lifestyle from Chinese traditions. In *The Joy Luck Club*, misunderstandings between mothers and daughters repeatedly happen. Language barrier is recognizably accused of most of their relationship ruptures. Speaking fractured English makes mother employ storytelling as a helpful means to diminish communication gap and educate their daughters. Importantly, the mothers manipulate to tell their daughters educational stories and point out commonly-made serious mistakes along with giving advice established from challenging past in Old China. A majority of immigrants to the USA receive humble education and their English command is rather low so they tend to get stuck in troubles involving linguistic ability. However, they are able to manage to survive with the constant adherence to tradition of their native land.

Cultural differences, generational gap, language barrier, and identity construction are seemingly the primary reasons for mother-daughter skirmishes. Under the Buddhist view, nonetheless, there are some other interpretations on the cracks of their bond and the roots of miserableness such as misconception of love, selfishness, and stubbornness.

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