

Marital Perspectives: Differences in Traditional Gender Role between China and America under Femininity

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Abstract

Chinese immigrants occupy a major section in America. Immigrants continue to practice their own customs and tradition even though they reside in America. Many Chinese American writers have been renowned by the problems reflecting Chinese diaspora in America. Amy Tan is a Chinese American female writer garnered attention in her debut novel *The Joy Luck Club*. It deals about the four pairs of American-born daughter and China-born mother facing psychological and emotional conflicts by their own marital views under different cultural ideology. Marriage is an important part of women's life and it is also an essential topic between American and Chinese cultural communication. The aim is to deeply understand the differences of marital view between China and America culture. The paper discusses traditional gender roles of women in the novel. The analysis carries three traditional gender roles in America, i.e. Responsibility of women on the behalf of the mother at young age; women's rights in marriage; women in expressing her true self; Women and suffering and the last women and suffering. The gender stereotypes are formed by traditional gender roles. The study also deals about how the main character accepts and rejects the traditional gender role. The analysis finds out that the women's work is related to the gender stereotype. The paper also deals about the experience of Chinese immigrant in America through mental and physical illness, loss of alienation and homeland, clashes between different cultures and their quest for identity.

Keyword: marital view, ideology, immigrant, traditional gender role, responsibility, gender stereotype

Introduction

Diaspora is a Greek word used to refer to "dispersion" of Jews from outside their homeland Israel. It is regarded as scattering away from their homeland and original homogenous entity which includes culture, tradition and language. In 1876 the word diaspora has been first documented in English language to determine refugees of Irish famine. After 1980s the term was considered as a 'metaphor destination' to denote different categories of people – political refugees, emigrant, expellees, alien residents, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities. Chinese diaspora is considered as a largest diasporic group in America. Leela Prasad (1999) quotes, "The International Organisation for migration said there are more than 200 migrations around the world today. Europe hosted the largest number of immigrants with more than 70 million and North America with over 46 million followed by Asia, which hosts nearly 26 million immigrants in 2008,"

The Joy Luck Club (1989) was the most popular debut novel written by Chinese American writer Amy Tan. Tan explores the cultural difference and generational gap faced between Chinese born mother and American born Chinese daughter. Bem quotes "Gender role orientation in explaining feminine and masculine can be seen from traditional and non-traditional models". Both feminine and masculine are dichotomy. Traditionally, both feminine and masculine are considered to the two opposing groups.

Gender roles were created since childhood from one generation to the other. This develops the gender stereotypes in society. Gender roles change often from time to time and generation to generation. According to Improving Gender Balance Scotland's Stereotypes: an introduction for practitioners in school and early learning centers (2017) it is stated that gender stereotypes originate from local culture and traditions. This is a reason that the gender roles are developed from childhood to form gender stereotype. The behaviour of the individual is developed

from their surroundings and the environment. Women from strong traditional background generally accept their gender roles without any problem.

This novel deals about the experience of four different Chinese American mother-daughter pairs. It consists of four parts and sixteen related stories as a whole. The book was admired from the perspective of women changes in marital differences between China and America. It mainly talks about the life changes of four women including Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong and Ying-ying St. Clair. They lived China and migrated to America in their young age. They gave birth to the American born daughters including Jin-mei Woo, Rose Hsu, Waverly Jong and Lena St. Clair. According to Amy the metaphor of umbilical mother-daughter relationship is disconnected or developed only to some extent. This is due to differences in culture conflicts and values between China and America. It aims to talk about the mistake of cross-cultural relationship.

Traditional Gender Role in Amy Tan *The Joy Luck Club*

The Joy Luck Club set in America but the story revolves around the life of Chinese Immigrant families. The novel centres around the main character Jing-mei (June). All the mother characters in the novel are living in America, but they practice Chinese culture. Amy Tan says "The absent motherland looms large on the horizon of the emigrant mothers whose unspeakable tragedies left behind in China, resonate recounted in vivid detail in *The Joy Luck Club*, resonate in their daughters, Amy Tan herself being one of the daughters". (438). David Leiwai Li says, "As faithful mothers of China, the mothers may mature and age in America, but their minds and memories are forever mummified in their ancestral land." The traditional gender role is expressed through the characters of mother as a guardian-teachers. American born daughters try to negotiate the assimilation of Chinese. Throughout the novel it is evident that one culture is dominated by the other. The traditional gender roles are reflected through many characters in the novel. This is related through three forms of responsibility of women characters are reflected in the novel. It illustrates how the female characters in the novel express the traditional gender role.

Responsibility of Women at Young Age on the Behalf of the Mother

In increasing contemporary life, it is difficult for the individual to survive after the death of the parents. *The Joy Luck Club* is set in America, but the story reveals around China. Jing-mei (June) is the main protagonist in the novel. All the mother characters are living in America, but follows the Chinese culture. After mother Suyuan's unexpected death, June Woo takes her mother's seat in Mahjong game. She joins as a member in "the joy luck club" with other members An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong and Ying-ying St. Clair. June made a decision to go back China in search of their twin sister's. As soon as she met her twin sister June understood the sufferings of her mother. At the end, she fulfilled her long lasting wish. June takes the responsibilities at young age on behalf of his mother.

"Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine."

Responsibility of Women in Marriage

Gender roles in marriage, has more changes within the society. Spousal relationship is one of the most intimate and a basic relation in a family. This novel deals about the relationship and marriage of those main characters, their marriage has many problems and some unnoticeable crisis. Both China and America evolve two different attitudes on marriage, China follows Confucianism where America follows Christianity. Thus, the marital differences acquire between China and America. It aims to avoid mistakes in cross-cultural relationship.

Suyuan's Marriage

Suyuan Woo died of a brain aneurysm before the novel *The Joy Luck Club* begins. Her daughter, Jin-mei Woo, is the one who is telling her life story. Suyuan Woo had a husband who was a police officer in Chongqing China. Suyuan was a victim of the Japanese invasion. Woo reluctantly cast her two twin baby daughters away. and learned that her husband had died. Later, she remarries and relocates to America, where she establishes a family. Suyuan died with helplessness and regret.

Lindo Jong Marriage

Lindo's marriage, like all other women in Chinese feudal society, was forced upon her by her family. Lindo was only twelve years old when she was forced to marry a neighbor's young son named Huang Tyan Yu, through the machinations of the match maker. She married Tyan-yu after receiving household training from her mother-in-law at sixteen. She quickly realised that her husband was only a boy and had no sexual interest in him. Lindo began to look after things of her husband as a little brother, but her cruel mother-in-law Lindo was expected to give birth to a grandchild by restricting her and denying her freedom. She made the decision to leave this unfortunate situation. She moved to America and married an American man.

An-Mei's Hsu's Mother and Herself

An-Mei was raised in Ningbo by her grandparents and other relatives after her widowed mother became a concubine of a middle-aged wealthy man. Because of the death of her first husband, An-mei has witnessed her mother's marriage. She committed suicide. An-Mei later immigrates to America, marries, and has children (four sons, three daughters). The Bing, the youngest son, drowns when he is four years old.

Marriage of Ying-yong St. Clair

When Ying-Ying was a young girl, her wealthy and conservative family advised her that Chinese girls should be intelligent and gentle. Ying-Ying marries Lin as a result. Xiao, who is a charming man without love, but she believes it is her fate not to marry him. Lin Xiao, her husband, has been discovered to have extramarital affairs with other women. When Ying-Ying discovers that she is pregnant, she decides to have an abortion and be free. A hermit with relatives lived in a small Chinese city. As ten years pass, and she becomes a tailor in a clothing store in Clifford St. Clair, who she meets in Shanghai, is a courtier. Ying-Ying for four years pregnant again and she has agreed to marry him. Ying-Ying is terrified when she realises Lena has inherited her negative behaviours and has trapped herself in a loveless marriage by having a controlling husband.

Differences of Marital View between Two Different Countries

Chinese and American culture clashes arise during the process, and mother-daughter conflicts are especially visible in different ways of life due to disparate lifestyles and cultures. Because of China's differing cultural ideologies. There are various marital views in social life in both China and America. In *The Joy Luck Club*, China-born mothers and American-born daughters have opposing views on marriage. The four mothers were married to Chinese men, they were in China at a young age. The conjugal purpose One of them is almost finished with their duties to form a family, and gave birth to some children, particularly a son, to continue the Family line from a social masculinity orientation. Marriage for Chinese women is like a besieged city without liberty, whereas marriage for American women is more like a grand palace with freedom because, at the start of their marriage, they hold completely different functions.

Responsibility of Women in Expressing her True Self

Lena was not independent in her marriage, which is proved by dividing bills with her husband. After a lot of dialogues with her mother, she realized that she needed to make change her marriage life. She expressed her dislike and resentment to her husband. "She fought in a way that she had never done before" (Tan, 1993, pp. 162-165).

Conclusion

The analysis of traditional gender roles in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* reveals that Traditional gender roles that are derived from traditions. The culture and tradition followed by the mother are not simply easy to avoid. In order to follow the traditions and culture, they live an uneasy life. Women faces various gender stereotypes in the society that exist in environment. Women on the other hand, can respond or learn to cognitive abilities and social learning. By delving into Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*, differences in marital views between China and America can be clearly seen in four immigrant mothers with traditional Chinese marital views and their four American-raised daughters with modern American marital arts view. This paper seeks to clarify the differences between the perspective on conjugal purpose, spouse selection, and a different situation faced by the spouse

stays after marriage, which existed in both Chinese and American society. According to Jade Snow Wong, Tan (American daughter), in order to achieve a balance in the world condition, one cannot cling solely to the new American ways and reject the old Chinese ways, because that is the way of the child. One must reconcile the two and make peace with the past. Unlike her two sisters, she spends most of her time with her mother. They were all carrying their mothers in their face and gestures. The family's unity overcoming geographical and political barriers and highlighting ethnic identity, as well as cultural distinction. As Walter says "The return to the mainland certainly suggests a larger symbolic possibility, one, however, that must still cope with the actual barriers of geography, politics and cultural distinctness." (Kim 1982).

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