CHAPTER – 1

CHINESE – AMERICAN LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

Asian Americans are Americans of Asian descent. The U. S. Census Bureau definition of Asians as "Asian" refers to a person having origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘Asian’ or reported entries such as ‘Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Other Asian’ or provided other detailed Asian responses. They comprise 4.8% of the U.S. population alone, while people who are Asian combined with at least one other race make up 5.6%. The term Asian American was used informally by activists in the 1960s who sought an alternative to the term oriental, arguing that the latter was derogatory and colonialist. Formal usage was introduced by academics in the early 1970s, notably by historian Yuji Ichioka, who is credited with popularizing the term. Today, Asian American is the accepted term for most formal purposes, such as government and academic research, although it is often shortened to Asian in common usage.

As with other racial and ethnicity based terms, formal and common usage have changed markedly through the short history of this term. The most significant change occurred when the Hart – Celler Act of 1965 eliminated highly restrictive ‘national origins’ quotas, designed, among other things, to restrict immigration of those of Asian racial background. The new system, based on skills and family connections to U.S. residents, enabled significant immigration from every nation in Asia, which led to dramatic and ongoing changes in the Asian American population. As a result of these population changes, the formal and common understandings of what defines Asian American have expanded to include more of the people with ancestry from various parts of Asia. Because of their more recent immigration, new Asian immigrants also have had different educational, economic, social, psychological and moral characteristics other
than those of the early 20th century immigrants. They also tend to have different employment and settlement patterns in the United States. As of 2008, Asian Americans had the highest educational attainment level and median household income of any racial demographic in the country, and they attained the highest median personal income overall.

The definition of Asian American has variations that derive from the use of the word American in different contexts. Immigration status, citizenship (by birthright and by naturalization), acculturation, and language ability are some variables that are used to define American for various purposes and may vary in formal and everyday usage. For example, restricting American to include only U.S. citizens conflicts with discussions of Asian American businesses, which generally refer both to citizen and non-citizen owners. In 1763, Filipinos established the small settlement of Saint Malo, Louisiana, after fleeing mistreatment aboard Spanish ships. Since there were no Filipino women with them, the Manilamen, as they were known, married Cajun and Native American women.

Chinese sailors first came to Hawaii in 1778, the same year that Captain James Cook came upon the island. Many settled and married Hawaiian women. Some Island-born Chinese can claim to be 7th generation. Most Chinese, Korean and Japanese immigrants in Hawaii arrived in the 19th century as laborers to work on sugar plantations. Later, Filipinos also came to work as laborers, attracted by the job opportunities, although they were limited.

The growth of Chinese–American literature is itself a product of a specific historical moment. Just as ambiguities surround the term “Chinese Americans”, there exists no consensus on what properly falls within the preview of Chinese–American literature; indeed the boundaries of the field, as inferred from critical practice have fluctuated with changing historical conditions. The usage of “Chinese–Americans” currently accepted by a majority of the community and by the American political structure, to refer to persons of Chinese ancestry residing permanently in the United States regardless of nativity, is of recent coinage.
Before we discuss the significance of Chinese-American literature, it would be worthwhile to discuss the role of women in Chinese society. In China, feet binding, was one of the ways by which Chinese men made women feel inferior to them. This was a practice till the communists had arrived to change the attitude of the people in China. Even the property was bequeathed only to the sons, not to the daughters. Although in early history, Chinese society may have been matrilineal, by the first century B.C, patriarchal power was firmly established. To them the way in which women were portrayed can be illustrated by poems in “The Book of Songs” such as the following, “Black bears and Brown bears” means Men Children.” “Snakes and Serpents” means Girl Children.

There is an anonymous poem that reinforces male superiority:

So he bears a son, / and puts him to sleep upon a bed,/ clothes him in robes,/ gives him a jade sculpture to play with./ The child’s howling is very lusty;/ in red greaves shall he flare,/ be a lord and king of house and home./Then he bears a daughter,/ and puts her upon the ground,/ clothes her in swaddling clothes,/ gives her a loom-whorl to play with./ For her no decorations, no emblems;/ her only care, is the wine and the food,/ and how to give no trouble to father and mother./

This poem shows the favoured treatment of male over female which starts right at birth. In traditional Chinese culture, women were so inferior that they were sometimes thought of as less useful than farm animals that is small humans. Practices such as female slavery, concubinage, female infanticide and foot binding were very normal, though in American society today, most of the people would consider them inhuman. ‘Confucius’ (551-479 B.C) also revealed an attitude towards women which was inferior. He seldom wrote about women, and when he did write about them, he classified women as slaves and small humans. There also existed a code, which controlled the behaviour and instructions of women in the first century B.C. obviously this, did nothing to change the patriarchal position of women. This code consisted of three kinds of obedience and four virtues.
The three kinds of obedience were

1. She Obey her father before marriage,

2. Her husband after marriage, and

3. Her son after her husband’s death.

The four virtues are

1. She be chaste,

2. Her conversation be courteous and not gossipy,

3. Her leisure should be spent in perfecting needle work and

4. Tapestry for beautifying the home.

Returning to the subject on Chinese American literature, one may say that it is closely linked to the history of America. The earliest rendered arrival of the Chinese was during the California Gold Rush. **The California Gold Rush** (1848-1855) started in January 1848, when James W. Marshall found shiny pieces of metal near the sawmill he was building. Tests showed the metal was gold. When James Marshall looked into the American River and saw gold alongside John Sutter's sawmill on 24 January 1848, he unintentionally initiated a set of events that dramatically transformed both California and the United States.

A **gold rush** is a period of feverish migration of workers to an area that has had a dramatic discovery of gold. Major gold rushes took place in the 19th century in Australia, Brazil, Canada, South Africa, and the United States, while smaller gold rushes took place elsewhere. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were several major gold rushes. The permanent wealth that resulted was distributed widely because of reduced migration costs and low barriers to entry. While gold mining itself was unprofitable for most diggers and mine owners, other people made large fortunes, and the merchants and
transportation facilities made large profits. The resulting increase in the world's gold supply stimulated global trade and investment. Historians have written extensively about the migration, trade, colonization, and environmental history associated with gold rushes. Gold rushes were typically marked by a general buoyant feeling of a "free for all" in income mobility, in which any single individual might become abundantly wealthy almost instantly, as expressed in the Californian Dream. Gold rushes helped spur a huge immigration that often led to permanent settlement of new regions and define a significant part of the culture of the Australian and North American frontiers. As well, at a time when the world's money supply was based on gold, the newly-mined gold provided economic stimulus far beyond the gold fields. Gold rushes presumably extend back as far as gold mining, to the Roman Empire, whose gold mining was described by Diodorus Siculus and Pliny the Elder, and probably further back to Ancient Egypt.

Although Marshall and Sutter attempted to prevent news of their discovery from spreading, within a few months word had reached San Francisco. As news of the discovery spread, some 300,000 people came to California from the rest of the United States and abroad. The Chinese were one of the earliest to arrive. To them, San Francisco was their ‘Gum San’ or gold mountain. While few of them made money using the gold, many could only find work in the mines. Others found work in wool and cotton factories.

Gold Mountain (Chinese: Mandarin Pinyin; Wade-Giles: chin shan; Jyutping: gam saan, ‘Gam Saan’ in Cantonese, often rendered in English as Gum Shan or Gumshan) is the name given by the Chinese to western regions of North America, particularly California, USA and British Columbia, Canada. After gold was first discovered, in the state of California, in 1848, thousands of Chinese from Toisan began to travel to California in search of gold and riches during the California Gold Rush. The name Gold Mountain was initially applied to California. Ships full of immigrants docked in San Francisco to disembark passengers, initially bound for the gold fields, but later to remain in the growing Chinese settlement in San Francisco. In the latter part of the 19th century, however, British Columbia also came to be referred to as "Gold Mountain" following the discovery of gold in the Fraser
Canyon in the 1850s and the spread of Chinese settlers in British Columbia (which they also referred to as "The Colonies of T'ang" i.e. China). The term thus broadened to mean "Western North America". The gold seekers in British Columbia first went to Victoria, BC/Chinatown, Victoria, on the Colony of Vancouver Island to obtain supplies. Victoria was the dominant political and economic centre before the economic ascendancy of Vancouver BC/Chinatown, Vancouver. Victoria remains the official seat of political power in British Columbia today. California and British Columbia are still called Gold Mountain by the Chinese today, as evidenced by maps and returned Overseas Chinese. However, because gold was also discovered in Australia but California was known as Old Gold Mountain. However, the name Old Gold Mountain now specifically refers to San Francisco. The massive importation of Chinese labourers to build the transcontinental railroad in the 1860’s is a significant landmark in Chinese American history. Due to this building of the railroad, many Chinese immigrants were employed in the work. During this period women unbound their feet and worked with men proving that they were equally strong. In spite of the various struggle, Chinese worked for Americans for the survival of their families in China.

By 1860, the ratio of Chinese men to Chinese women was eighteen to one (compared to California's overall twelve-to-one ratio). This was caused by a variety of cultural, social, economic, sexist and political factors, which also resulted in a "widow" society in China and a "bachelor" society in America. Parallel to a belief among many Americans in the supposed cultural, moral and racial inferiority of the Chinese, was a xenophobic fear. The term 'xenophobia' is typically used to denote a phobic attitude towards foreigners or strangers, or even of the unknown. Racism in general is described as a form of xenophobia, that explains as

"Why do we have to have white people at the front of the bus, and black people at the back of the bus? Why can't we all be green?" (xu, chin 26)

Later this struggle was called the Yellow Peril. When the economy declined, unemployed white workers accused Chinese workers of causing the nation's demise. Nativistic, anti-Chinese hysteria permeated California’s politics. The state's labour unions
claimed Chinese immigration would drive out "real" Americans and destroy the nation's democratic structure. This xenophobia was realized in murders, exclusion and the total destruction of the Chinese communities by the passage of anti-Chinese legislation.

California’s 1879 Constitution even contained a specific section on how to eliminate the Chinese. Their presence led to the creation of Chinese communities commonly called Chinatown, sometimes Little China or Little Canton. These enclaves were segregated and considered an exotic curiosity by mainstream America. They had their own form of self-government organized under the leadership of merchants’ guilds and district associations called huiguan. Huiguan, Wade-Giles romanization hui-kuan, series of guildhalls established by regional organizations (tongxiang hui) in different areas of China during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911/12) as places where merchants and officials from the same locale or the same dialect groups could obtain food, shelter, and assistance while away from home. Some may have served as gathering places for professionals from the same fields. The huiguan were originated in the early Ming dynasty at Beijing by the provincial guild of the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. Eventually they were constructed in all the major urban centers of the country. In the national and provincial capitals, the huiguan were often used by examination candidates coming to the city to compete in the civil service tests necessary for admission to the government bureaucracy. The huiguan were instrumental in building a feeling of solidarity among the members of a province or a certain region and played an important function in the growth of trade and commerce throughout the Qing dynasty. It was customary for overseas Chinese to set up huiguan in the cities of the countries where they settled. The largest China town is the San Francisco Chinatown which is now the biggest tourist spot.

In 1882, the Exclusion Act was passed to prevent Chinese from forming families in the United States. The most popular way to subvert exclusion laws was the "paper son" system. Since the courts ruled that U.S. citizens were exempt from exclusion, Chinese children born of U.S. citizens were allowed to enter the country because of their derivative citizenship. Chinese Americans going to China would report the birth of children, usually sons; rarely daughters and create slots for sale to those Chinese who did not have an American connection. Assuming the identity of a Chinese American’s son,
such a "paper son" was now eligible to enter the U.S. Fully aware of these fraudulent entries, the government detained Chinese for interrogation at immigration stations at ports of entry. The best known of these stations was on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay.

San Francisco Bay is a shallow, productive estuary through which water draining from approximately forty percent of California, flowing in the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers from the Sierra Nevada Mountains, enters the Pacific Ocean. Specifically, both rivers flow into Suisun Bay, which flows through the Carquinez Strait to meet with the Napa River at the entrance to San Pablo Bay, which connects at its south end to San Francisco Bay. However, the entire group of interconnected bays is often referred to as “San Francisco Bay”. San Francisco Bay is located in the U.S, state of California, surrounded by a contiguous region known as the San Francisco Bay Area (often simply "the Bay Area"), and dominated by the large cities San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose. The waterway entrance to San Francisco Bay from the Pacific Ocean is called the Golden Gate. Across the strait spans the Golden Gate Bridge.

The first recorded European discovery of San Francisco Bay was on November 4, 1769 when Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola, unable to find the port of Monterey, California, continued north close to what is now Pacifica and reached the summit of the 1,200-foot (370 m) high Sweeney Ridge, where he sighted San Francisco Bay. Portola and his party did not realize what they had discovered, thinking they had arrived at a large arm of what is now called Drakes Bay. At the time, Drakes Bay went by the name Bahia de San Francisco and thus both bodies of water became associated with the name. Eventually, the larger, more important body of water fully appropriated the name San Francisco Bay. The first European to enter the bay is believed to have been the Spanish explorer Juan de Ayala, who passed through the Golden Gate on August 5, 1775 in his ship the San Carlos, and moored in a bay of Angel Island now known as Ayala Cove.

This famous bay was the center of American settlement in the Far West during the 19th century. From the 1820s onward, American presidents and expansionists coveted the bay as a great natural harbor in the Pacific. After that many failed efforts to buy the bay
and varying areas around it, the US navy and Army seized the region from Mexico during the Mexican-American War (1845–1848). On February 2, 1848 California was annexed to the U.S. with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. A year and a half later, California requested to join the United States on December 3, 1849 and was accepted as the 31st State of the union on September 9, 1850. During the California gold rush of 1848-1850s, San Francisco Bay instantly became one of the world's greatest seaports, dominating shipping and transportation in the American West until the last years of the 19th century. The bay's regional importance became paramount when the First Transcontinental Railroad reached its western terminus in Alameda on September 6, 1869. The terminus was switched to the Oakland Long Wharf two months later on November 8, 1869. San Francisco Bay continues to support some of the densest industrial production and urban settlement in the United States. The San Francisco Bay Area is the American West's second-largest urban area with approximately 8 million residents.

From 1910 to 1940 all Chinese and Chinese Americans entering the port of San Francisco were subjected to interrogations and physical examinations. Some of these people were confined for as long as two years on the island. The expressions of injustice, frustration, and anger carved on the walls of the station barracks by these people can still be seen today. Chinese on migrating to America carved poems of frustration into the wooden walls of barracks on Angel Island (in San Francisco Bay), which was used as an immigration station.

“Detained in this wooden house for several tens of days,
It is all because of the Mexican exclusion law which implicates me.
It’s a pity heroes have no way of exercising their prowess.
I can only await the word so that I can snap Zu’s whip. From now on, I am departing far from this building. All of my fellow villagers are rejoicing with me.
Don’t say that everything within is Western styled.
Even if it is built of jade, it has turned into a cage.”

– From the walls of Angel Island Immigration Station, author unknown, Poem 69 from Island, p. 134

After the U.S. entered World War II, many Chinese Americans found jobs in war-related industries and at last found the opportunity to put their education and training to
use. An estimated twenty thousand Chinese men and women served in the U.S. military during the war. Further, economic and political factors related to the World War II alliance between China and the United States, as well as a need to diffuse Japan’s anti-American propaganda efforts in Asia, played a crucial role in bringing an end to exclusion. With the Repeal Act, sixty-one years of exclusion came to a close on December 17, 1943.

After the Second World War, the Chinese American community was transformed by the entry of War Brides, which began to correct the gender imbalance in Chinatowns and made nuclear families prevalent for the first time in many years. The glow faded as communism triumphed in China, and the Korean War broke out. Further, and the cold war began to cast suspicious on Chinese Americans – now the ‘bad’ Asians again. It took some time before Chinese were finally accepted as part of the ‘American family’.

In the early nineteenth and twentieth century, Chinese American generally figured as stereotypes. They are, as Cynthia Wong points out, considering them as either docile, grunting brutes or corrupt villains. The setting is usually a phantasmic Chinatown of ornamental orientalia and heathen rituals, of intrigues, savagery and sexual degradation. Therefore, it became a matter of necessity to explain about the Chinese to white readers. This work was taken up by a group of highly educated, often aristocratic Asians, who used their knowledge of the English Language and American culture to dispel negative images about their ethnic group. These Asians were called, “Ambassadors of goodwill.”

**Goodwill Ambassador** is a collective term sometimes used as a substitute honorific title or a title of honor for an Ambassador of Goodwill, but, most appropriately for a generic recognition, it is a job position or description that is usually indicated following the name of the individual recognized in the position. Goodwill ambassadors generally deliver goodwill or promote ideals from one entity to another, or to a population.

A goodwill ambassador may be an individual from one country who resides in or travels to another country, in a diplomatic mission (or international friendship mission) at a peer to peer level; that is: country to country, state to state, city to city; or, as an
intermediary representing the people at the other extreme of an organization. Goodwill Ambassadors have been an official (or unofficial) part of governments and cultures for as long as diplomacy has existed; to exchange gifts and presents; humanitarian relief; or development aid, using well known celebrities, scientists, authors, known activists, and other high society figures. Goodwill missions of countries are usually carried out or overseen by the head of state, and do not necessarily involve diplomatic credentials outside of a letter of presentation (or letter of credence). However some states do issue credentials that include diplomatic immunity for their goodwill ambassadors such as Haiti. Some of these ambassadors are Lee Yan Phou, Wu Tingfang, Lin Yutang, and Chiang Yee.

Early traces of Chinese American Literature as mentioned earlier can be found on wooden walls of Angel Island, San Francisco Bay. Some of the early traces of Chinese-American literature are My Life in China and America (1909) by Yung Wing, the first Chinese to graduate from an American University. Other examples are Lee Yan Phou’s When I Was a Boy in China. Chiang Yee’s A Chinese Childhood, Adet and Anor Lin’s Our Family, Lin Yutang’s My Country and My People, Pardee Lowe’s Father and Glorious Descendant and Jade Snow Wong’s Fifth Chinese Daughter.

As far as Asian American Anthologies are considered, three scholars are considered remarkable. In 1972 Kai-yu Hsu, a distinguished scholar of Chinese literature, and Helen Palubinskas published a slim anthology, Asian American Authors, the first collection of its kind, which brought to light two generations of American writers from three Asian traditions. In 1974 two additional anthologies appeared: Aiieeeeee!, edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong; and Asian American Heritage, edited by David Hsin-fu Wand.

The three anthologies differ in their definition of Asian American. Hsu and Palubinskas included writers of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino origin. The Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans were considered in the order of their length of residence in the United States. Those born and reared in that origin had priority, then came, those who had immigrated when very young and remained in that origin. Some
Filipino writers who had established their careers in the Philippines before coming to the States were included because they had written and published in English.

The angry young editors of Aiiieeeee! tended toward the narrowest and most polemic definition, stressing the seven-generation gap separating Chinese Americans from China and the four generations separating Japanese Americans from Japan. They rejected Americanized Chinese writers like Lin Yutang (A Chinatown Family, 1948) and C. Y. Lee (The Flower Drum Song, 1957), whose sensibilities had been formed in China and who had imbibed “white supremacist” ideology. At the same time, the editors rejected American-born writers Jade Snow Wong (Fifth Chinese Daughter, 1945) and Virginia Lee (The House that Tai Ming Built, 1963) for catering to “white racism” by maintaining the stereotypes of passivity, inoffensiveness, and “cultural superiority.” The classics of Asian American literature for Chin and others are Louis Chu's Eat a Bowl of Tea (1961), John Okada's No-No Boy (1957), and Carlos Bulosan's America is in the Heart.

Wand's definition of Asian American was the most inclusive. To Wand it was unthinkable to reject writers whose sensibilities were formed before they came to the United States, for this would mean omitting some of the finest Asian American writers, like the Korean-born authors Younghill Kang and Richard Kim. Wand extended the term Asian American to include the Asian-born and -educated as well as the American-born. Geographically, Wand extended the boundaries to include Koreans and South Pacific Islanders, arguing that Korea has close cultural ties to China and Japan, Hawaii is a state in the union, and the South Pacific is a part of Southeast Asia. He included in his anthology several Polynesian oral poems that he and Armand Schwerner translated into English, though he excluded translations from the three other Asian languages.

Although immigrants from Asia and Americans of Asian descent have been writing in the United States since the 19th century, Asian American literature as a category of writing only came into existence in the early 1970s. Perhaps the earliest references to "Asian American literature" appeared with David Hsin-fu Wand's Asian American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry, published in 1974, and Aiiieeeee!

Since then, the field of Asian American literature and of Asian American literary criticism has grown remarkably. But defining "Asian American literature" remains a troublesome task. Most critics who have written about Asian American literature implicitly or explicitly define it as being written by Asian Americans, and usually about Asian Americans. This definition poses a number of problems that are an ongoing source of discussion for Asian American literary critics: who is an Asian American? Is "America" only the United States, or does it include the rest of the Americas? if an Asian American writes about characters who are not Asian American, is this Asian American literature? If someone who is not Asian American writes about Asian Americans, is this Asian American literature?

The challenges around defining Asian American literature are not unique to it and indicate difficulties not so much with the field of Asian American literature but with issues of race, culture, and national identity that are endemic to United States history and culture.

Some key Asian American authors include:

List of Asian American writers

✔ Carlos Bulosan
✔ Frank Chin
✔ Louis Chu
✔ Sui Sin Far (1865-1914)
✔ Gish Jen
✔ Maxine Hong Kingston
✔ Jhumpa Lahiri
✔ Toshio Mori (1910-1980)
Although Jade Snow Wong is one of the earliest woman writers, it was “Maxine Hong Kingston’s ‘The Woman Warrior’ (1976) that formed a landmark in Chinese-American woman writing. Closely associated in fame is Amy Tan who is considered one of the foremost Chinese-American woman novelists.

Amy Tan is an inspiring novelist, who as a woman is able to express the importance of being a woman. From the ancient days woman plays a significant role in everyone’s life in the role of a daughter, as a wife, and as a mother. Every man has a woman in his life, no matter what is her role, without a woman the man is lost in his life. Amy Tan brings out the significant aspect of woman in her novels which marks a history of her own mother ‘Daisy Tan’ and her own life. She also brings out the mother-daughter relationship which is universal. Her novels are filled with inspiration, hardwork, hunger to live, the theme of feminity which makes the reader to search for her own self identity. Amy Tan also focuses on learning a language that is not her mother tongue, but still there is a necessity in learning it. She also explains as to how her mother finds it difficult to communicate as she finds English as a necessary language to be learnt, the language in America. Although Amy Tan has written in English, she finds herself very proud and dignified when her mother acknowledges her by saying ‘so easy to read’. This makes Amy Tan the satisfied daughter and a famous novelist.
Amy Tan, the middle child of Daisy and John Tan, whose Chinese name, Anmei, means “blessing from America”, was born in 1952 in Oakland, California, only three years after her mother immigrated to the United States from China. Amy’s brother’s, Peter and John, were born in 1950 an 1954, respectively. Her father who was trained as an Engineer in Beijing, worked for the United States during the World War II who after immigrating to the United States, became a Baptist minister. In 1967, Peter died of a brain tumour. Within a year, Amy’s father died, too, also of a brain malignancy. Their death’s opened a door for Amy into her mother’s past, for it was only then that Daisy Tan revealed that she had three more daughters living in China, who had remained in the custody of an abusive first husband after her divorce. Following the deaths of her husband and son, Daisy moved what was left with her family across the United States and Europe, finally settling in Switzerland, where Amy finished high school.

In 1972, Tan graduated with honours, receiving a B.A., with a double major in English and Linguistics. She was awarded a scholarship to attend the Summer Linguistics Institute at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 1973, she earned her M.A in Linguistics, also from San Jose state University; and then was awarded a Graduate Minority Fellowship under the affirmative action program at the University of California, Berkeley, where she enrolled as a doctoral student in Linguistics. Following the murder of one of her closest friends, Tan left her doctoral program before completing her degree, for the next five years she worked as a language development consultant and as a project director for programs serving disabled children from birth to age five. She then became a freelance business writer specializing in corporate communications for such companies as AT&T, IBM, and Pacific Bell. In 1985, when her psychiatrist treating Tan for her self described workaholism fell asleep for the third time during one of their sessions. Tan quit therapy and decided to write fiction instead. She attended her first writer’s workshop, the Squaw Valley Community of Writer’s, where she met the writer Molly Giles, who later led a small workshop that often made him to Visit Tan’s house.

In 1986, Tan’s first short story, ‘End Game’ appeared in the defunct magazine, FM Five. The story was later reprinted in Seventeen, which attracted the attention of literary agent, Sandra Dijkstra, who encouraged Tan to continue writing fiction. When
Tan had completed three stories, her agent submitted them, along with the proposal for a collection, which was bought by editor FAITH SALE at G.P.Putnam’s Sons. In 1989, The Joy Luck Club was published and, through word – of – mouth endorsements by independent book sellers, became a surprise best seller, logging more than 40 weeks on the NEW YORK TIMES list. Though Tan wrote the book as a collection of linked short stories, reviewers enthusiastically and erroneously referred to the book as an intricately woven “novel”. The Joy Luck Club was nominated for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Award. It received the Commonwealth Gold award and the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award. It was adapted into a feature film in 1994, for which Tan was a co-screen writer with Ron Bass and a co-producer with Bass and Wayne Wang.

Tan’s second book, The Kitchen God’s Wife, was published in 1991, followed by The Hundred Secret Senses in 1995. Both books appeared on The New York Times best seller list. Her latest novel, The Bonesetter’s Daughter, was published in February 2001. The Saving Fish From Drowning, was published in 2005. Tan’s short stories and essays have appeared in The Atlantic, Grand Street, Harper’s, The New Yorker, Threepenny Review, Ski, and others. Her essay, ‘Mother Tongue’ was chosen for Best American Essays in 1991 and has been widely anthologized. Tan’s books are often included as part of the multicultural curriculum of high schools and colleges, an honour which caused, her much ambivalence and led her to writing a speech, “Required Reading and Other Dangerous Subjects,” which she has since delivered in universities across the country. She is an editor for the 1999 edition of Best American Short Stories. Her work has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Catalan, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, Russian, Estonian, Serbo-Croatian, Czech, polish, Hebrew, Greek, Tagalog, and Indonesian.

In addition, Tan has written two children’s books, The Moon lady in 1992 and The Chinese Siamese Cat in 1994. The latter is now being developed into a children’s television series, and is part of a symphony program of words and music produced and conducted by George Daughtery. Along with novelist Steven King and columnist Dave Barry, Tan is a member of the literary garage band, the Rock Bottom Reminders, for
which she sings the Nancy Sinatra classic, “These boots are made for walking,” to raise
money for literary and first amendment rights groups. Tan’s rendition of the pop culture
classic can be heard on the CD album, “Stranger than Fiction,” which benefits the PEN
Writer’s Fund. Tan lives in San Francisco and New York with her husband, Lou De
Mattei, their cat, Sagwa, and their two Yorkshire terriers, Bubba and Lilli.

This thesis seeks to examine the theme of transition in the select novels of Amy
Tan. Transition may be described as change, evolution or a movement from one form
into another. Transition may be physical when growing up and traveling from one place
to another are discussed. It may be mental or psychological, when there is a shift in
color, manner, tone or attitude. When there is a shift in culture and values, transition
becomes cultural. One’s shift from ignorance to divine revelation may be termed spiritual
transition.

The researcher’s chief aim is to bring out the different types of transition, in five
of Amy Tan’s novels – The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God’s Wife, The
Bonesetter’s Daughter, The Hundred Secret Senses, and Saving Fish From
Drowning.