CHAPTER III

THEMATICAL AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF AMY TAN’S NOVELS

Amy Tan’s novels are a collection of interrelated stories, centered on the diverse emotional relationships of mother-daughter pairs. In the United States, they struggle to raise their American-born daughters in a vastly different culture. Each of the mother-daughter pairs has their own personal and cultural conflicts that are unique to their situation that develop the generational conflicts that play a major role in all of the stories. In each relationship, events in the mother’s past deeply affect the daughter. Because Suyuan Woo, Winnie and LuLing lost their marital life in China and were forced to abandon their children during the Japanese invasion of China, they consistently push their American daughters to succeed and make a better life for themselves. But the mother’s high expectations paralyze the daughters who begin to doubt their own talents and abilities.

The major theme in all her novels concerns the nature of mother-daughter relationships, which are complicated not only by age difference, but by vastly different upbringing. The daughters, who have grown up embracing the American emphasis on individuality, feel that their mothers are old. They rebel against the Chinese tradition of heeding to their elders and pleasing parents above all else. The mothers are appalled at their daughter’s insolence. They fear that their daughters’ desire to achieve the American dream will prevent them from ever leaving about or understanding their Chinese heritage. Despite these fears all the mothers attempt to give their children the best of both the worlds. The painful events in their mothers’ past and their Chinese character have a definite impact on their daughters’ present lives. The power and importance of storytelling is another significant theme in the novels. One
reason the mother-daughter relationships suffer is that neither generation speaks the language of the other. The mothers try to compensate for this difficulty in communication by relating information through stories. However, most of the stories only frustrate their daughters who are at a loss to interpret what they really mean. When the daughters are finally able to see the true meaning behind their mothers’ tales, they find that the stories are an important form of instruction and comfort. Issues of identity and self-worth are also central to the novels. All of the women, both mothers and daughters wrestle with their past, their present, their ethnicity, their gender, and how they view themselves, as they struggle to construct their own life story and find a place for themselves in the world.

The first step toward such a construction is to think of ethnicity not simply as essence but as representation, as something linguistically constructed. The importance of a discursive notion of self in thinking about ethnicity is that it provides a powerful indictment of the idea of an essential, abstract biological self beyond language and society. It is a way of retaining the concept of identity, but as a social construct, constantly reformulated and reformulating itself through language. It is also a way of resisting essentialist definitions of ethnicity. In her novels, Amy Tan affirms a politics of resistance and difference and schematizes the construction of a Chinese-American identity. Interestingly, representation plays a key role in the formation of ethnic identity in her works. Her works also emphasize the socially constructed, discursive nature of gender and ethnic identity. Amy Tan uses discursively to show how cultural origins are multiple and complex. In very different ways, the works raise questions about ethnicity, identity, and difference which are crucial to the concerns of women.

Like Maxine Hong Kingston who presents ethnicity as a construct, Amy Tan presents Chinese-American women’s identity as resistance by approaching the rhetoric of Universalist feminism. Within white American
culture, the dichotomies between Western and Asian women are clearly seen as those between activity and passivity, freedom and restraint, independence and submission. Tan is aware of these dichotomies and attempts to undermine the imperialism within Universalist feminism. She records the marginalization and disempowerment of all women within patriarchal institutions—whether in China or America. Tan’s formulation of a common oppression shared by what is traditionally perceived as Chinese-raised and American-raised women again subverts East West cultural dichotomies.

Just as Amy Tan depicts a common oppression of women, she also depicts a resistance through maternal bonding. Throughout all her novels the intensity and power of the mother-daughter bond is felt. This female identity shows that the mother-daughter bond is also connecting the bond to motherland. The return to the mother is also the return to the cultural roots. Thus the Chinese-American daughters wish to understand and unite with the memories of their mother. Their knowledge of family history provides a key to their family identity.

Amy Tan’s novels exhibit repetition. Among her characters, Weili’s and LuLing’s mother possess unique qualities.

My mother was not like the Chinese girls Americans always imagine, the kind who walk around with tiny bound feet, choosing their words as delicately as they choose their steps. My mother was a modern girl. Many girls in Shanghai were. They were not peasants, nothing of the kind. When my mother was eight years old, her feet were already unbound, and some people say that’s why she ran wild. (KGW 100)

Similarly in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* Precious Auntie is shown as different from her peers.

I learned to read and write, to ask questions, to play riddles, to write eight-legged poems, to walk alone and admire nature. The old biddies used to warn him that it was dangerous that I
am so boldly happy, instead of shy and cowering around strangers. And why din’t he bind my feet, they asked. My father was used to seeing pain of the worst kinds. But with me, he was helpless. He couldn’t bear to see me cry. (BD 171)

Weili and Luling share the same tragedy of becoming orphans because of their mothers. Wilie is sent to live with her paternal uncle after her mother’s disgrace. LuLing is sent to orphanage after her mother’s death. Weili is sent away so that she would not remind her mother to father. LuLing is sent away so that she would not remind her mother’s ghost. LuLing is obsessed with the bone to be reunited with the dead body. Weili has her mother’s three foot long hair, to be reunited with her mother’s body.

The friend’s pair, LuLing and GaoLing, Winnie and Helen and the many events happening around them is the replica of one another. The word ‘Yin’ is also repeated in many contexts with different meanings which provide confusion. ‘Yin’ in the same is used in the meaning of the instutive power to communicate with the dead people in the other world. ‘Yin’ in The Kitchen God’s Wife is used in the sense of woman’s essence. ‘Yin’ in The Bonesetter’s Daughter is used altogether in a different way. “The yin and yang of being single. The yin and yang of being married. The yin and yang of being divorced” (BD 40). In another context Precious Auntie’s dead father tells her in her dream, “I have arrived in the world of yin” (BD 185). Here ‘Yin’ again refers to the other world.

In The Joy Luck Club, the portrayal of many characters is confusing. It is not clear who is who and who speaks what. But in The Kitchen God’s Wife, and The Bonesetter’s Daughter, the context and the use of the words through their striking similarity and differences raises the confusion. Yet the close reading of the novel clears the doubt and it avoids the thought of its being repetitive. Each novel is unique and presents a new thought.
Like Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan employs her own brand of Chinese traditional talk-story as a vehicle for exploring the lives of the mothers and the daughters at the centre of her novels. Like the majority of American writers of recent immigrant ancestry, Amy Tan has a natural affinity for issues that are central to the lives of hyphenated Americans who must deal with several cross-cultural sets of expectations. In her work, Tan raises questions about the relationship between ethnicity, gender, and identity. She writes about the diaspora culture as well as the many facets of biculturalism: cultural dislocation, the problems and challenges of integrating two cultures; intergenerational struggles within immigrant families; the conflict between acculturation and adherence to one’s ancestral tradition, and between assimilation and parochialism.

Amy Tan writes about the immigrant and the second-generation America as the embodiment of contested territory, cultural and political crossings, and questions personal and national loyalties. Furthermore, Tan explores through her fiction the knotty issues of ethnic identity, more specifically the paradoxical nature of ethnic-American identity and biracial identity.

Amy Tan does not confine herself to interrogations of the lives of ethnic Americans. In truth, although her fictional landscape is the geography of the immigrants, her novels explore issues of familiar and universal interest: the common human struggle to establish a distinct identity; the search for roots and family connections; the tensions and bonds between generations and related to that issue, the problematic yet richly influential relationship between mothers and daughters; the shape of women’s lives in patriarchal cultures; and the need to connect the past, the present and the future. Tan also writes about individuals coming to terms with the facts of their lives, and about the workings of fate in human existence. In her novels, she celebrates bonding and connections, as well as family ties and friendships.
The fictional landscape that is frequently referred to as “Amy Tan country” covers tremendous geographical territory over the span of decades and—in her third book—even centuries. In this landscape are played out the oppositions between East and West, the conflict between generations within a family, the clash between the past and present. Tan’s American location exists within finite boundaries, in small sections of Oakland and San Francisco that despite their narrow boarders, encompasses within them a multitude of cultures, ethnicities, and identities. Constantly threatened by encroaching Americanization embodied in the younger generation of inhabitants, these landscapes are connected with, yet different from, ancestral locations in a distant homeland. The place of origin is always China, in fact, a variety of China; a country torn by the nineteenth century Japanese army, and feudally stratified society, a gracious and privileged existence behind walls, or a culture uneasily embracing European goods while striving to maintain a Chinese way of life.

Amy Tan’s country is also a landscape of the heart and the mind, and in Tan’s novels the interior setting is as important as the physical locations of the novels’ major events. Tan sets her novels within the circle of the Chinese American family and inside the minds and psyche of the family members; and she takes her readers into pre-communist Chinese society in which the aristocratic family is the visible evidence of unwritten rules that require absolute filial piety, that sanction hierarchies based on gender and class, that condone concubinage and the virtual enslavement of women within arranged marriages. The interior landscapes are connected, for in old China lie the seeds of the conflicts that threaten to rend the fragile bonds holding the immigrant family together, and only when the second generation recognizes and understands the ancestral landscape can the generational tensions be dissipated and replaced with genuine hopes for a future that includes the family’s entire heritage.
In the realm of Asian American women's literature, Amy Tan’s works centre on the dialogic nature of talk-story, function either to create or to bridge gaps between bi-cultural, bi-lingual immigrant mothers and their Americanized second-generation daughters. The tradition of “talk-story” as a major trope in Chinese American women novels was first underscored by Maxine Hong Kingston in her *Woman Warrior*. Focus on this specific oral tradition has become the centre of much of the critical work being done about Chinese American women writers. In the case of Tan's first three novels; *The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God’s Wife and The Hundred Secret Senses*, the focus on the importance of talk-story serves to correctly identify the patterns of tension that result from the conflict between the oral storytelling of Chinese mothers and their American daughters' initial resistance to and eventual acceptance of that mode of narration.

In her article “The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/Texts of Kingston and Tan”, Yuan Yuan recognizes the limits of talk-story in Amy Tan’s novels by arguing that they embody a distinct aspect of loss. Throughout her novels, Tan’s Characters emphasize that their immigration to the United States after World War-II caused an erosion or loss of their cultural memories. Throughout her texts, Chinese-born mothers attempt to perpetuate these cultural memories in the stories told to their American-daughters, but often with mixed results. Initially, for the daughters, these talk-stories do not represent a stable text but depend solely on the mothers’ memories. Thus the mothers’ continual revision of their stories often signals an erasure or loss of China as referent for the American-born learners. As Yuan argues;

> In short, China lies at an absolute distance from the present remembrance, irretrievably lost beyond recall, made present only through a narrative that invites forgetting instead of remembering. (293)
Using China as the missing “prior Text”, Yuan calls attention to the inability of oral talk-story in Tan’s novels to establish and maintain an intergenerational cultural memory of China as a cultural homeland; but she does not attempt to find alternative contexts within Tan’s work.

Besides the “talk-story” technique, Amy Tan has reinforced the importance of literacy, which separates her works from the work of Maxine Hong Kingston. Tan’s works show a variation from “talk-story,” focusing the importance of written texts and the literacy of Chinese mothers, through *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*. This novel’s intense focus on the literary quality of women's writing allows recognizing that literacy in the form of writing and written texts and represents an important and often more effective means of transmitting cultural memories and cultural identity across generational lines than talk story. Furthermore, *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* is not a completely new development in or deviation from Tan's previous themes, but represents a more fully developed reworking of issues about identity and language than in her other three works.

Unlike the oral narratives told by the Joy Luck mothers, Winnie Louie and Kwan in Amy Tan’s first three novels, LuLing written narratives allows Ruth to be prepared to consciously understand and internalize the cultural importance of the story. Tan really succeeds at giving a legitimate voice to the Chinese immigrant mothers in her texts through the representation of their story telling, both oral and written. Her articulation of women’s authorship and the emphasis on the power and importance of written words throughout this novel shows that Tan works from an aesthetic tradition broader than that of talk-story or even of oral narrative; she works also from a literary tradition. In the conclusion of *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the image of Ruth using her recognition of her Chinese identity by actively engaging in the art of writing emphasizes the importance of literary tradition in Tan’s own
work. Ruth remembers this (her mother’s story) as she writes a story. It is for her grandmother, for herself, for the little girl who became her mother.

Throughout Amy Tan's novels, talk-story promotes multiple levels of misunderstanding between both Chinese-speaking mothers and English-speaking daughters and between persons who speak different Chinese dialects. As a linguistic strategy, talk-story in Tan's novels often fails to convey clearly the speaker's message to her audience. Yet Tan's use of a multi-voiced talk-story narrative is noteworthy. Literary critics have found value in Tan's work through an interpretation of Chinese speech as a rhetorical device. Consequently, many critics have recognized talk story as a source of agency for Asian American women writers because it allows them a mode of discourse not constricted to the confines of traditional Western narratives.

The problems caused by talk-story, or oral communication in general, occupy a major place in Amy Tan's first novel. *The Joy Luck Club*, when Jing-Mei describes not understanding her mother's story about the time her mother spent in Kweilin during World War II. Jing-Mei states that she never saw the story as anything more than a "Chinese fairy tale" (JLC 25) because "the endings always changed" (JLC 25). Her mother's constant revision of the story's ending did not provide a narrative that Jing-Mei was able to recognize and claim as her own. Jing-Mei understands what her mother was attempting to tell her only after Suyuan finishes the story for the last time. Gasping with the stunned realization that the story had always been true, Jing-Mei asks her mother what happened to the babies in the story. Suyuan "didn't even pause to think. She simply said in a way that made it clear there was no more to the story: ‘Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies’" (JLC 26). Jing-Mei can only begin to understand the story's significance when her mother gives it a recognizable ending and imposes on it a narrative structure that Jing-Mei recognizes. The misinterpretations and misunderstandings of Suyuan's story are representative of those throughout the
body of Tan's work. Throughout Tan's novels, these failed attempts at communication are in part produced by a tension between persons who have different understandings of how stories, culture, and language are supposed to work.

Far from being complete failures, the tensions produced by competing forms of narration are somewhat alleviated through Tan's portrayal of the didactic nature of the mothers' voices. Winnie Louie's narrative, which comprises the bulk of Amy Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, provides a specific example of a mother who must teach her daughter how to listen and understand her stories as she speaks. In this text, Winnie narrates secret pasts and truths "too complicated" to tell her American daughter, but can only speak in the English she has not wholly mastered. Winnie says that she will tell her daughter "not what happened, but why it happened, how it could not be any other way" (*KGW* 100). In the narrative that follows, Winnie uses talk-story to narrate her own history, but as she talks she must help her daughter understand both her broken English and what remains untranslatable. While the story chronicles the life of a young Winnie from being an orphan to abused wife, the narration consciously draws attention to the language that it uses. Though Winnie speaks to her daughter in English, she must attempt to teach her the Chinese words that when spoken have no translation. When Winnie is in urgent need of money from her dowry account, she sends a telegram to her cousin Peanut that reads "Hurry, we are soon *taonan*" (*KGW* 207). She continues with her explanation of the necessity for funds, but is cut off with a question about what the word means from her listening daughter. Winnie tries to answer her daughter by explaining the significance of the word since she cannot translate its literal meaning. She says:

This word, *taonan*! Oh, there is no American word I can think of that means the same thing. But in China, we have lots of different words to describe all kinds of troubles. No, 'refugee' is not the meaning, not exactly. Refugee is what you are after
you have been *taonan* and are still alive. And if you are alive, you would never want to talk about what made you *taonan*. (KGW 207)

This passage demonstrates the voice that Tan develops for her Chinese mothers by balancing the simplicity of diction with vivid imagery to illustrate the narrative. It also demonstrates the confusion and misunderstanding common in exchanges between Tan's mothers and daughters. However, once she has explained and developed the idea of *taonan*, she can use the word throughout the rest of her narrative in place of a less specific English translation. Later, when she tells her daughter how fear can change a person, she says "you don't know such a person exists inside of you until you become *taonan*" (KGW 270). While the true significance of the word is always missing from the narrative, her daughter can begin to understand the importance of the word through her mother's instruction.

Similarly in *The Joy Luck Club*, An-Mei Hsu finds no better English words to advise her daughter. “A psyche-atricks will only make you *hulihudu*, make you see *heimogmong*” (JLC 184). Later Rose relates the meaning of the words in English could be ‘confused’ and ‘dark fog’. When the meaning is related to suit her convenience, she starts using the Chinese phrases comfortably. She feels her husband becomes *hulihudu* on her refusing to move out of their house; and in her dream she sees *heimogmong*, indicating that she had lost her fears and had become strong and wild.

In *The Joy Luck Club* the differences between Chinese dialects become evident when Lindo Jong cannot communicate with her future husband, Tin, because of his Cantonese dialect. Although they are both in a class to learn English, even that mode of communication is not wholly available because they can only speak the "teacher's English," which consists of simple declarative sentences about cats and rats. During English class, the two must use written Chinese characters to communicate with each other.
Lindo sees those written notes as an important conduit for their relationship. She tells the reader, "at least we had that, a piece of paper to hold us together" (JLC 263). Though Lindo and Tin cannot understand the Chinese dialects that each one speaks they can understand Chinese characters written on paper. While the two may be unable to speak to one another, the universality of a written Chinese character allows them to communicate clearly across the boundaries of speech. This use of written texts reoccurs in the relationship between Lindo and Tin as they use written texts to facilitate their courtship. An-mei tells Lindo that in the movies, people use notes passed in class to "fall into trouble," so they devise a plan to "pass a note" to Tin (JLC 263). Because they work in a fortune cookie factory and can control the fortunes, the women decide to arrange a marriage proposal by putting the message in a cookie. Earlier, these fortunes were seen as both powerful and foolish by Lindo and An-mei, but appropriated for their own use; the fortunes become a valuable form of written communication. Sorting through the many Americanized fortunes, they settle on "A house is not a home when a spouse is not at home" to cross the boundaries of both translation and propriety (JLC 264). Because it breaks with Chinese custom for a woman to initiate a marriage proposal, Lindo uses the fortune cookie to ask Tin to marry her in a language and a custom that is not her own. The English writing must be translated (because Tin does not know the meaning of "spouse"), but the physicality of the text allows Tin to take the message and translate its meaning outside of the immediacy of speech. The use of a text, in this case an English text, allows Lindo to determine her future using the silence of the writing at a point when the vehicle of talk-story could not work, even with another Chinese-speaking person. Lindo's use of the fortune cookie is an example of how it can be found that small, but important places where the tensions and misunderstandings between speakers must be alleviated through writing or written texts.
Like Lindo Jong, Winnie Louie in *The Kitchen God's Wife* is highly aware of the importance of writing and authorship. Winnie demonstrates her ability to create meaning through writing the banners that she designs for her floral business. As Pearl tells the reader, the red banners she includes with each floral arrangement did not contain typical congratulatory sayings. Instead, "all the sayings, written in gold Chinese Characters, are of her own inspiration, her thoughts about life and death, luck and hope" (KGW 23). These inspirational banners with their creative sayings like "Money Smells Good in Your New Restaurant Business" (KGW 23), "First-Class Life for your First Baby" (KGW 23), “Double-Happiness Wedding Triples Family Fortune” (KGW 23) and “Health Returns Fast, Always Hoping” (KGW 23), represent more than a creative outlet. For Winnie Louie, their authorship is the very reason for her business' success and an expression of her identity. Winnie continually stresses the importance of her literacy and that of her mother. As a child on a trip to the market with her mother, Winnie tells the reader that she could not read and therefore could not tell what the paper her mother purchased was. Unable to read, she misses vital information about events that will eventually change her life. However, by the end of her narrative, her ability to write letters to her future husband enables her to escape from China before the Communists take power. In a society where the "traditional way" (KGW 109) deems that "the girl's eyes should never be used for reading, only for sewing" (KGW 109), the fact that Winnie's mother was both highly educated and bi-lingual represents an important difference. Winnie's ability to write in both Chinese and English indicates that her use of oral narrative was a conscious choice rather than the result of some limitation. Winnie can choose between the two languages and modes of expression demonstrates that talk-story works only in selective situations and that it is not the only choice Chinese women have for authentic self expression.
Instead, literacy—the ability to both read and write—marks Amy Tan to assert the voice of Chinese immigrant women through her own writing. Therefore, talk-story cannot be read as a complete failure, nor should it be ignored in Tan's texts. However, talk-story cannot function properly for these Chinese mothers and American daughters without a source of mediation.

Amy Tan is generally charged that her novels portray only mothers and daughters. *The Hundred Secret Senses* marks the transformation in Tan’s characterization. This novel not only challenges the validity and general application of the traditionally idealistic sisterhood but also express a radically alternative figuration of sisterhood. In this novel, the relationship between the sisters is a structuring principle and a space where difference between women is constructed, displayed, and negotiated. Sisterhood serves both an institution and a narrative structure. Amy Tan has given the sister relationship, a complex role to play in the larger context of female identity formation. It is a context that has been revised by feminist psychoanalytic views of women’s psychosexual development, notably by Christine Downing and Luce Irigaray. In her provocative study of sisterly relations, Downing points out the limitation of classical psychoanalytical theory of sibling relationship:

> Although Jung and Freud both attempt to analyze such relationships they never touch on the sisterly relationship. (17)

Because classical psychoanalysis does not allow space for reconstructing female relations, Downing notes that contemporary psychoanalytic feminists such as Irigaray have shown their concern that women must move beyond the mother-daughter relationship into woman-to-woman intimacy and recognize a sister in the mother. Analysis of women’s relations by these feminists has established a positive identificatory model for the development of female subjectivity and allowed women to negotiate new relations with each other. Amy Tan has regarded the functions of sisterhood as ambivalent and paradoxical, for differences between sisters are often both
cultural and racial. Their narratives not only portray the psychological significance of sisters in the development of a sense of self in women but also use the sister bond to problematize the individuals relationship to her community.

Thus in the third novel, Amy Tan shifts her focus from the mother-daughter relationship to the bond between sisters. The novel calls attention to the heterogeneity of relationships in Chinese American families. In the Chinese American community, cultural difference is frequently represented in a family narrative, figured as generational conflict between the Chinese-born first generation and the American-born second generation. Rather than confirming the cultural model in which ethnicity is passed from generation to generation, Tan’s story explores the ethnic relationship between women of the same generation. Unfolding the family drama across the axis of the sibling bond, Tan deals with how, paradoxically, the horizontal crosscut simultaneously holds the identity and threatens its existence.

In particular, Amy Tan uses sisterhood as a structure for the representation and containment of cultural differences among women. *The Hundred Secret Senses* does not offer an idealized construction of sisterhood but provides a sophisticated exploration of the ideology of sisterhood and emphasis the influence of the sister relationship in developing ethnic consciousness and identity. For Tan, sisterhood encompasses not only biological bonds but also emotional and cultural ones. The bond between two half sisters in *the Hundred Secret Senses* is filled with ambiguity caused by simultaneous feelings of sameness and difference. Psychologically, Olivia the sister who embodies the ethnic other has been recognized as integral part of the American self. The key events in her psychological development—her separation from Simon, her denial of her heritage and rejection of her sister, her guilt, her growing appreciation of Chinese culture, and her longing for meaningful relationships—are all connected to her sister Kwan and their
evolving relationships. Kwan becomes in the words of Downing, an unconscious guide to Olivia’s journey toward self and psyche, that is, toward an increased consciousness of her roots and ethnic identity. Ultimately Tan takes advantage of the domestic trope of sisterhood to explore cultural differences among contemporary women. Her novel reveals a feminist anxiety to recognize one’s difference from the other woman and to contain it.

Amy Tan represents the sibling relationship, however, as being more complicated than a traditional sibling rivalry. As Mink and Ward argue;

Sibling relationships in the contemporary family are complicated by various joining and disjoining. (3)

Contrary to the traditional treatment of sisterhood, Tan repaints the Chinese-American family portrait to fit the modern frame, choosing to show how the development of cross-cultural and cross-racial sisterhood influences formation of female identity.

Through striking storytelling, Amy Tan’s novels illuminate the identity construction of hyphenated Americans, the cultural and generational gaps within immigrant groups, and the necessity to discover or recover the past. Similar to Maxine Hong Kingston’s strategy in *The Woman Warrior*, Tan’s fiction retells stories and events in China in the past by way of the mother-daughter dichotomy. Centered on the connection between her female characters, Tan incorporates Asian American’s cross-cultural experiences, identity construction, uncertainties and struggles between cultural heritage and adopted American life, and negotiations between gender and ethnicity. Individual pursuits for a distinct identity, tensions between generations, and family connections addressed in Tan’s novels are of universal concern.

Amy Tan’s novels move alternately back and forth between the lives of immigrant mothers and their American born daughters and are a meditation on the divided nature of this emigrant life. It is out of the
experience of being caught between countries and cultures that Amy Tan has began to create what is, in effect, a new genre of American fiction.

Despite frequently being labeled as Asian American writer, Amy Tan contends that Asian American issues, particularly those of Chinese American life are not the primary driving forces behind her writing. She does not write about the culture and immigrant experience alone. Her books are actually focused on families and relationships; echoing universal themes.

During a public lecture at Barnard College in 1994, Amy Tan told her audience of over a thousand listeners that the works of minority writers should not be labeled as ethnic literature because she prompts readers and critics to focus on work solely as the manifestation of cultural or historical values or specific ethnic qualities. Tan suggested that literary works by minority writers be evaluated as literature rather than as cultural record. Tan argues against ethnic literary label. She spoke against the practice of ethnic labeling. She accepts that, although, Chinese culture forms the background and provides the settings for her novels, her themes are universal in concern.

However she protests, the inescapable fact is that Amy Tan’s novels are indeed about universal concerns and commonly recognized themes, about relationships and familial bonds and self and identity, they are also the members of the ethnic minority, that has over a century or more developed a distinctive diaspora culture that exists within the larger framework of cultures that is known as the United States. Tan’s fiction is ethnic in a sense that it is the product of imagination of an author who is a second generation Chinese American, a writer who is interested in and well-informed about the cultural, historical and geographical borders of her life and that of her immigrant parents. In giving voice to the immigrant community, Tan speaks for and to that community, reflecting its traditional and cultural structures, and articulating its values and concerns.
Ultimately, it can be concluded that Amy Tan is an American novelist, and that the immigrant culture about which she writes is an important pattern in the great tapestry that is the United States, just as her novels are a strand in the web of twentieth century American fiction. The fact that *The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God’s Wife, The Hundred Secret Senses, and The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, have become popular best-sellers, suggests that Tan’s fiction resonates for readers of all backgrounds; the proliferation of scholarly examinations of the novels points to the literary and cultural value of Tan’s work.

Amy Tan’s writing career is still relatively new, but Tan already has earned herself a berth in the canon of contemporary American literature. And certainly all her novels have become a staple curriculum of literature courses. Tan’s novels prove both her literary staying power as well as their broad appeal to a wide readership, and Tan will have a place in American literary history, not as an ethnic writer but as an American writer who illuminates brilliantly and sensitively a distinctive and colorful aspect of the American experience.

With reference to Amy Tan’s novels, this study actively participates in the process of shaping new forms of racial and ethnic identities. Racial multiplicities occur on many levels, as the Asian American protagonists of Tan’s novels make their lives within a complex, multiracial landscape where cross-racial alliances and identification can arise. Shared oppressions as well as racial and historical differences emerge as meaningful themes. For example, Winnie Louie and Pearl Louie in *The Kitchen God’s Wife* excavate buried histories as they describe the little-known interrelations, intersections and historical parallels among Chinese Americans. Tan dramatizes the tenderness and love possible between an American man and a Chinese woman, their historical relations, particularly the parallels between the Chinese Americans in the United States. The differential racial positioning of
Chinese Americans is highlighted in the historical ironies faced by Winnie in a relocated country and the continuing discrimination that she must fight for her survival.

Amy Tan writes a different tale of mother-daughter relationships in *The Joy Luck Club*. The protagonist accepts and idealizes her half sisters. This novel is also a classic narrative of the ambivalent journey of separation from mother and family, exploring the different registers of love. Orville Schell’s review of *The Joy Luck Club* for the *New York Times* emphasizes that;

Those millions of Chinese who were the part of the diaspora of World War II and the fighting that resulted in the triumph of Communists were subsequently cut off from the mainland and after 1949 left to fend for themselves culturally. (3.1)

Though Schell’s review concentrates on the vulnerable status of these Chinese women, the novel indeed magnifies not merely the individual psychic tragedies of those caught up in the history, but the enormous agony of a culture enmeshed in transforming human consciousness torn and rent in a culture’s contortions.

The position of Asian American women and of other people of color in a society where whiteness still indexes a site of privilege is poignantly seen in “*The Bonesetter’s Daughter,*” where Amy Tan details the effects of racism as the articulation of Asian American masculinities. The novel addresses the contradiction and tension within any collective identity, including “Asian American” itself.

All her novels present these dilemmas and tensions among people of different races, and articulate the contradictions and wonders of this multicultural and multiracial heritage. Therefore this study focuses on the outcome of “Intercultural interactions” in Amy Tan’s novels.
Amy Tan has joined the successful literary career along with Edith Winnifred Eaton, Amy Ling, Elaine Kim, Han Suyin and others. In earlier days, despite the growing number of writers, Asian Americans’ works continued for a time to cater to the taste of the predominantly white readership, looking with polite disfavor on Asian culture and enthusiastically embracing the American style. But later the Asian writers started to apologize for their ethnic background while commenting approvingly on western culture.

They are examining the precarious balancing act performed by not only individuals who have both Asian and American blood but also Asians who are involved in interracial relationships. Themselves of mixed blood, they try to assimilate as the prolific writers voicing the problematic relationships between couples of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Despite the tradition or repression and devaluation, Chinese American women writers have demonstrated their talents, have expressed their concerns and their creativity, and have contributed to American literature. As a nation of immigrants, the United States has the opportunity to become acquainted with the peoples of the world within its own borders and its own language. Together they make up the great American chorus.