

**Finding a new home for herself:
A comparison of *The Joy Luck Club* and
*Girl in Translation***

by

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A dissertation submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of
the degree of

Master of Language and Culture

Auckland University of Technology
School of Language and Culture
18th June 2021

Abstract

This study explores two novels written by two contemporary Asian American female writers: *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan and *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwon. Both novels follow the daily experiences and family relationships of Chinese mothers who have emigrated to America and their daughters, who were born either in China or in the USA. By comparing these novels, we can see the different approaches taken by female immigrants as they create new cultural identities. The study explores the differences and similarities in the ways in which the women in these novels are shown to search for cultural identities in their new home. At the same time, it explores how the novels thus represent the images and experiences of Chinese immigrant women as being in a constant process of becoming rather than fully finished. As they struggle to find ways of being 'at home' in the USA, the mothers and daughters in these two novels must negotiate between past and present. They find themselves suspended between their two sides of self: Chinese and American.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted for the Master of Language and Culture is the result of my own work and study, except for where due acknowledgment is made. That to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Signature _____

Date _____ **18-06-2021** _____

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this project. Every one of them has provided me extensive personal and professional guidance and taught me a great deal about both literary research and life in general. I would especially like to thank Professor Sharon Mazer, the supervisor of my dissertation. As my teacher and mentor, she has taught me more than I could ever give her credit for here. She has shown me, by her example, what a good researcher and person one should be. In addition to that, I would like to thank Janne Galbraith for her professional proofreading service. This was helpful for me in editing the content of the dissertation.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this dissertation than the members of my family. I would like to thank my mother, whose love and guidance are with me in whatever I pursue. She is an important inspiration for me to complete this dissertation. She also is the ultimate role model for me in my life.

Introduction

This study selects two novels written by two contemporary Asian-American female writers. The first novel is *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by the American born Chinese author Amy Tan. The other one is *Girl in Translation* (2010) by Chinese born Jean Kwon, who immigrated with her family to the United States when she was five and has lived there ever since. These two novels tell stories about the daily experiences and family relationships of Chinese families in America, and the characters, whether born in China or in America, all still trace their roots back to Chinese culture. *The Joy Luck Club* tells the story from two different perspectives: the first is that of the mothers, who were born in China and immigrated to America, while the other is that of their daughters, who were born in America. *Girl in Translation* tells the story through the eyes of a young Chinese girl born in Hong Kong but who grows up in America.

This study analyzes the images and experiences of Chinese migrant women in these novels. As mentioned by Tabatabai (2021), “telling the story of the self is identity work; that is, people use stories to make sense of themselves and others and give meanings to interactions, helping to build communities” (p. 22). Consequently, this dissertation asks the following questions: What types of characters and experiences of female Chinese immigrants are created in the novels of two different female writers from America and Hong Kong? What do these novels tell us about the cultural identity of female Chinese immigrants in America? According to the sociologist Stuart Hall (1996), identities are temporary attachments to the positions that different discourses construct for us. Thus, in developing a discussion around these questions, this study explores different discourses about the cultural identities of Chinese female immigrants, that have been constructed and reflected in the selected novels, while also exploring the interconnections between the discourses and their wider social and cultural contexts.

Both novels offer stories of Chinese immigrant families. They highlight the dynamics and ongoing journeys of intergenerational change and exploration. The women in these stories are able to transform themselves, construct different experiences and search for new identities in finding their ‘new home’. When I say, ‘new home’, I mean an ongoing process, with which immigrant families may need to engage, explore and adapt to the new cultures, relationships and lifestyles, in order to discover their new selves – some more compatible, and some less compatible with the new community. As a result of such process, an attachment to a new set of cultural identities and to an unfamiliar place might be constructed. The outcomes and developments of these journeys depend on a range of factors, which include the social and historical contexts in which the novels are situated, the interpersonal relationships the women experience, and the personal effort each individual performs.

Some studies have analyzed the two novels as different types of storytelling: while *Girl in Translation* has been seen as a process of cultural identity and cultural dislocation, *The Joy Luck Club* has been seen as a process of self-discovery, integration and tribulation (Hamilton, 1999; Paudel, 2017; Zou, 2019). The process of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in *Girl in Translation* means a process in which “culture, language, religion, ideology and other aspects of life in between the homeland’s country and the new land’s negotiate and leads a person finding himself/herself with new identity” (Wati, et al., 2015 p. 5). The process of self-discovery, integration and tribulation means a process in which assertions of self are shaped by the cultural context and experiences surrounding the characters; such processes can result in fusion and clash between Chinese and American cultures. Such approaches in telling these stories unveil the processes of creating a new home and building a new self, a new cultural identity, as a way of integration to the new environment.

Literature review

The notion of cultural identity is diverse and complex. According to Stuart Hall (1990), there are at least two ways of defining this notion. Firstly, it can be defined as the common historical experiences and cultural codes of a group of people, that provides stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. Secondly, cultural identity can also be treated as an ongoing and constant transformation, concerned with the experiences, cultures and positions from the past as much as in the future. In this sense, for an individual or a group of people, cultural identity is a matter of both being and becoming. Both of these viewpoints might be seen in the chosen novels. Some characters, usually those who struggle to integrate into a new society, see their cultural identity as something fixed and unchangeable. On the other hand, the characters who adapt most successfully in these novels, see their cultural identities as something adjustable, something that is in a constant process of transformation.

It has been widely agreed that migration is not just a type of physical transition. Rather, it is a continuous process of navigating a life course with multiple difficulties, expectations and contested identities, which may change and reformulate the imaginary borders of identity of immigrants (Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema, 2010; Kelley, 2013). Instead of causing impacts for one single generation only, the process of migration generates intergenerational impacts and difficulties for immigrant families. According to some related studies (Fuligni, 1998; Moon and Ruiz-Casares, 2019; Taylor and James, 2015), the second or third generation of some immigrant families in Canada or United States, struggle to adjust to changing financial, cultural, familial and social circumstances when constructing their cultural identity, due to the expectations of both their families and the new society. From the studies reviewed above, it may be seen that for immigrants, the challenges and impacts are intergenerational. Therefore, through the comparison of the selected novels, this current study

tries to explore the challenges of constructing cultural identities for both first- and second-generation immigrants. In doing so, this dissertation presents the interconnections between these discourses in the wider social and cultural contexts.

However, and at the same time, the process of adjustment for younger generations is affected by various circumstances. In her 2004 essay, Chiang-Hom suggests that even with the loss of status and changes in family relationships, friendships and lifestyle, foreign-born Chinese are not at greater risk of having academic, psychological and social problems when compared with their native-born counterparts. She goes further to propose that “individual characteristics tell only part of the story, just as critical are the social factors that facilitate the process of adjustment for foreign-born Chinese youth, such as their development of social support networks and involvement in ethnic institutions” (2004, p. 156). This study further discusses and compares the adjustment processes of American-born and Chinese-born immigrant children, and the ways in which they construct their new cultural identities.

Moving to another country can be a challenging process for many female immigrants; a view which is supported by American sociologists and scholars Erez and Harper. According to Erez and Harper (2018), “Immigrant women and families who arrive in the United States face a variety of political, economic, and social challenges that shape their everyday lives” (p. 460). This study focuses on the changing identities and familial tensions of immigrant women. Many researchers have conducted studies of the changing and contradicting identities of female immigrants (Abraham, 2015; Jamarani, 2018; Kelley, 2013; Mallman, 2019). A majority of the women in those studies have experienced both ambivalence of identity, as well as marginalisation and alienation from the society (Abraham, 2015; Chen and Lawless, 2017; Jamarani, 2018; Kelley, 2013; Mallman, 2019). For example, as suggested by Chen and Lawless (2017) in their study focused on intercultural adaptation,

“adapting can inadvertently further alienate or marginalise immigrant women from themselves, their cultural roots, and/or their host society” (p. 14–15).

Some studies (Abraham, 2015; Jamarani, 2012; Mallman, 2019) have discussed contradicting identities, struggles and difficulties in the lives of female immigrants. For instance, in her study focused on the language maintenance and identity modification of Iranian female immigrants in Australia, Jamarani (2012) proposes that “those women with little English were more reliant on the help and support of their ethnic peers” (p. 187). Due to this issue, it is difficult for them to establish social networks outside the Iranian community, and this becomes a hinderance for those immigrant women in the construction of their new selves. Other studies have been aimed at exploring the changes and challenges to women’s sense of cultural identity and belonging during the lifelong process of migration (Chen and Lawless, 2017; Kelley, 2013). Most of these studies have been conducted by using narratives of the real-life experiences derived from the stories of female immigrants, and by conducting interviews with them. Instead of focusing on real-life stories, this study analyses the experiences and cultural identities of female immigrants through fictional narratives written by two Asian-American female writers. Through analysing their fictional stories, it is proposed, deeper insights into the personal difficulties and struggles of female immigrants in the real world are revealed.

Studies conducted through interviews and narrative analysis indicate that many Chinese female immigrants suffer from the contradictions of contested cultural identities and the tensions between social integration and family relationships (Blair and Liu, 2019; Sinding and Zhou, 2017). Blair and Liu (2019), focusing on the bicultural identities of Chinese American women, suggest that “while they used a variety of approaches to achieve assimilation or accommodation as preferred outcomes, inconsistent and often contradictory statements revealed vulnerabilities, internal conflicts, and ongoing negotiations” (p. 360). In

addition, the maintenance of identity for Chinese immigrant women has been closely connected with constant social and political change (Chun, 2004; Chen et al., 2021). For instance, Chun (2004) suggests that during the 1950s, and due to the political climate of anticommunism, anti-Chinese sentiment, fear of violence and possible internment, Chinese Americans were unable to present the true essence of their own cultural identities; rather, they were forced to pursue integration into white American culture. My study, based on the case of fictional Chinese female immigrants, further explores how the journey of searching for new identities is affected by the various social and political contexts as analysed in my chosen novels.

In addition to the above, the importance of family is a central part of Chinese culture. Thus, the reconciliation of intergenerational conflict and tension has been suggested as the most common challenge for Chinese immigrant families and women in America (Tung, 2000; Zhou, 2009). Zhou (2009) proposes, “relations between parents and children in Chinese immigrant families are characterised by intense bicultural and intergenerational conflicts” (p. 21). According to these studies, contradicted imaginations or expectations of being a Chinese immigrant across generations is the main cause of intergenerational conflict (Tang, 2014; Tung, 2000; Zhou, 2009). Zhou (2009) goes on to propose that in “Chinese immigrant households, a modified version of Confucian values emphasising filial piety, education, hard work, and discipline serve as normative behavioural standards for socialising the younger generation” (p. 21).

This study is focused on the representation of Chinese female immigrants in two novels that are a part of the Asian American literary field. Li (1998) proposes that Asian American literature has been treated as “the product and textual mediation of political, social and economic relations [that] entails a genealogy of the formations of US citizenship” (p. 2). This definition proposed will be a fundamental reference point for this study. However,

instead of being concerned with the formation of US citizenship, this dissertation focuses on transforming cultural identities.

The main concern in Asian American literary studies is the negotiated relationship between Asian American literary forms and dominant ideologies in American contexts (Adams, 2008). An increasing amount of research interest in this field can be seen throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and includes various approaches, such the feminist perspective (Ling, 1998), which is the one in which I am particularly interested. According to Lim (1993),

Reading the different representations of woman by these female writers, we are reminded of how ethnic and gender identities are continuously negotiated in tension against each other, the very act of naming and re-presenting, that is, of writing, composed of strategies of identity that challenge each other in a dialogical mode within the texts themselves. (p. 591)

Personally, I think this dialogical mode, as constructed by Asian American female writers, is mainly for the purpose of representing the diverse, democratised, egalitarian and interrogative experiences of Asian immigrant women.

According to Ling (1998), Asian American literary writings have been “influenced by, responded to and (have) attempted to effect changes in discourses about Asian Americans both as a collective group and as hybrid positionalities interacting with one another and with a society” (p. 11). In this sense, by selecting different effective narratives and writing strategies, many marginalised Asian American writers have aimed to change, transform, reconfigure, and negotiate both the discourses about Asian Americans, and the positions or identities of Asian Americans (Li, 1998; Ling, 1998) This study aims to explore how such changes have been constructed and reflected in the selected novels.

Amy Tan was one of the most successful authors at a time when heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity were emerging as the themes in Asian American literature (Adams,

2008). Intergenerational confrontations and problems of adaption in immigrant families, crises and struggles of identity are the main themes of her novels, along with an emphasis on the process of becoming Chinese and discovering a ‘real China’ (Adams, 2005; Tanritanir, 2017). Based on all these themes mentioned above, Tan’s novels have led to numerous debates about the representation of identity, history and reality in the field of Asian American literary studies (Adams, 2005). This study, however, focuses only on the representation of identity.

The Joy Luck Club is the first and most famous of Tan’s novels. As such, it has attracted a large amount of research interest over the years. Most studies observe that the narrators and characters are situated in-between the Chinese and American worlds (Adams, 2008; Loktongbam, 2012). According to Loktongbam (2012): “they are caught mentally and physically between two worlds, loss of homeland and alienation, clashes of different cultures and their search for identity” (p. 56). In this, many studies suggest that the novel tries to maintain a balance and achieve the reconciliation or assimilation between Chinese traditions and American rules (Fickle, 2014; Hamilton, 1999; Loktongbam, 2012). In other words, according to Adams (2008), the novel tries to maintain a balance between dominant American ideologies and a multicultural celebration of diasporic subjectivity (Adams, 2008). According to Fickle (2014), in reaching towards this balance, Tan’s novel aims to “transform Chinese immigrant ‘victims’ into Asian American ‘victors’” (Fickle, 2014, p. 68). However, other studies focus on the misinterpretations and clashes between cultures that cause struggles for cultural adaption and appreciation, challenges for interpersonal communication and relationships, and confusions of identity (Li, 2019; Manjula & Govindaraj, 2018; Romagnolo, 2003; Tanritanir, 2017). In the context of searching for new cultural identities, all the challenges mentioned here may become actual obstacles. That is, for the mothers and the daughters in this novel, the process of finding new identities in their new environment is

often affected and determined by the mother-daughter relationship, as well as the ways in which the mothers and daughters deal with these challenges.

Despite the all-time emphasis on a multicultural society, according to Adhikari and Paudel (2017): “American society does not give inner relief to the first-generation diasporic people, though it offers modern amenities and aspirations for them” (p. 40). This is due to the way in which imbalances and clashes between Chinese and American cultures ultimately lead to an imposition and manipulation of the American culture (Kareem & Amjad, 2020; Paudel, 2017). Accordingly, the Chinese female immigrants in the novel, and especially the first-generation characters, experience the feeling of being marginalized and homeless (Kareem & Amjad, 2020; Manqoush, 2015; Paudel, 2017).

Because it is a novel composed of stories told by mothers and daughters, it is not surprising that most studies of *The Joy Luck Club* focus on the exploration and analysis of the Chinese-American mother-daughter relationships represented in the novel. To begin with, and as proposed by Manjula and Govindaraj (2020), the two generations experience painful and contradictory relationships due to the lack of efficient communication and understandings caused by the differences in language and culture (Manjula and Govindaraj, 2020; Paudel, 2017). The novel treats the intergenerational conflicts and misunderstandings between mothers and daughters as inevitable, albeit complicated by the stresses of their immigrant histories. These conflicts can be understood as dialogical or interactive negotiations between mothers and daughters. This can be transformed into a process of self-discovery, in which the reconciliation between generations, the collision and fusion of two cultures and the exploration of oneself and each other are all achieved gradually (Hamilton, 1999; Parameswari, 2017; Zou, 2019). In other words, according to Hamilton (1999): “Tan represents the discovery process as arduous and fraught with peril. Each of the eight main

characters faces the task of defining herself in the midst of great personal loss or interpersonal conflict” (p. 125).

Some studies, such as Gallego (1999) and Tangapiwut (2012), propose that in terms of defining herself, storytelling becomes an important strategy that has been used by most of the Chinese-American mothers in the novel. In this way, the mothers are able to communicate and connect with their daughters; they use stories as a ‘tool’ in the process of searching for their new identities. Thus, the mothers gradually construct new hopes for themselves and the next generation. More specifically, Tangapiwut (2012) proposes that:

Storytelling is an important means for the Chinese-immigrant mothers to communicate with their daughters, inuring the children to back to their ethnic roots, to better knowing about themselves thereby ensuring them their right to choose for their own happiness. (p. 35)

At the same time, storytelling can be treated as a means for those mothers to recall collective memories about China and to form a Chinese-American narrative of returning to homeland together with their daughters (Xu, 1994).

In addition, being a novel formed by multiple narratives from different female Chinese American narrators, *The Joy Luck Club* can be treated as representing a process of storytelling in and of itself. Bhattacharya (2019) tells us that Tan tends to construct and represent many layers of gendered, racial and national identities in her multiple narratives. Instead of focusing on the content of those narratives only, the strategic design of the narrative structure is also indispensable for the representations of different themes (Fickle, 2014; Romagnolo, 2003; Souris, 1994). For instance, by designing 16 interwoven narratives, the novel aims to construct a dialogue among mothers and daughters (Souris, 1994). On the other hand, this study explores how both mothers and daughters in the novel search for a new sense of self and hope through storytelling and find ways of surviving in their new home.

Lastly, by expressing the voices of Chinese American women on various matters of social concern (such as familial relationships and tensions, the identity and role of immigrant women) Tan is able to resist the patriarchal oppression of women in both Chinese and American culture (Bhattacharya, 2019; Chintescu, 2020; Zeng, 2019). The current study intends to further explore how those female narrators deal with the challenges posed by patriarchal oppression in both cultures as they search for new cultural identities. In doing so, Tan's position on patriarchal oppression is also discussed.

Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* is the other focus of this study. Scholars of this novel tend to focus on Kwok's representation of the struggle to balance Chinese culture and American ideology, as seen in the way her main character gradually adjusts her behaviour and use of language throughout the story. Chen and Lau (2020) point out that, by reshaping her behaviours, Kimberly successfully negotiates her mother's expectations, which are based on traditional Chinese concepts, a patriarchal love interest and a competitive American environment. Moreover, by adjusting her use of language from mostly Chinese to a combination of Chinese and American English, Kimberly finds a position for herself in American society. According to Ningtyas and Rosyidah (2014), in this way, Kimberly gradually translates her postcolonial and cultural identity from homelessness to 'hybridity'. Homi K. Bhabha (1994), in his *The Location of Culture*, suggests that "Hybrid is the transformational value of change (that,) lies in the rearticulating, or translating, of elements that are neither the one nor the other, but something else besides, which contest the term and territories of both" (p. 28).

In contrast, Rahmadyatri (2019) says that Kimberly has translated her relationship with American society from separation to assimilation. More simply, the novel can be read as an example of the successful social integration of Chinese female immigrants (Rosily, CL. & Shivan, 2020). The problem is that, in the process of adjusting to American culture, Kimberly

not only change her use of language and behaviours, but also her ideology, so that she ultimately loses her Chinese culture and identity at the end (Wati, et al., 2015).

As a relatively new work, both this novel and the writer have not yet received much critical attention. Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap in critical thought on Chinese-American literature by comparing how the female immigrant characters in *Girl in Translation* and *The Joy Luck Club* translate unfamiliar cultures and dynamic mother-daughter relationships as they go through the process of searching for new identities for themselves. Further, as two Asian American novels written by female writers from different cultural backgrounds, and at different periods of time, it is hoped this comparison will provide a new perspective on the experiences and cultural identities of Chinese female immigrants. Finally, despite both these novels being situated in an American context, the results of this study might also reflect the experiences of female immigrants finding and constructing new cultural identities in other countries, such as New Zealand.

Methods and Methodology

This study takes a feminist perspective from my position as a young Chinese woman born and raised in Hong Kong, now living in New Zealand. My methodology draws on critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis, as well as a close reading of the novels framed by the theories of Judith Butler (1990), Gérard Genette (1980) and Theo van Leeuwen (2008). My close readings concentrate on and explore the social practices and mother-daughter relationships seen to affect the construction of cultural identities for Chinese female immigrants.

A post-structural approach to feminism that focuses on examining the basis of society and its social practices and relationships and concentrates on the social process of gender construction has been used (Powell, 2013). According to American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler (1990), sex and gender are identities we choose to perform and are constructed based on the scripts written by a specific society (Botts, 2019). Narrative discourse theory as proposed by Genette (1980) is applied to the construction of images, characters and the experiences of female immigrants in the two novels. Thus, this study focuses on an analysis of the interconnections among the three main aspects: narrative discourse, story and narration. These three aspects refer to the text of a novel, the content information recounted in narrative discourse and the action of producing a narrative by a narrator and narratives respectively (Genette, 1980).

Following on from that, according to Paltridge (2014), critical discourse analysis aims to explore the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs. From the perspective of social semiotics, this type of analysis discusses how different social actions, practices, issues and participants are represented and reconstructed by various discourses in different texts (Van Leeuwen, 2008). In this study, the transformation and construction of different cultural identities are explored as social actions

that occur in specific social contexts. Thus, my methodological approach is a combination of both narrative discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, used to analyse and compare what and how cultural identities of Chinese female immigrants in American society are constructed and reflected through various discourses present in the narratives of these two novels.

Findings and Discussion

Background to the study: *Girl in Translation*

I read this book in English only. When I first saw the title *Girl in Translation*, I assumed the story was simply about a girl who had moved from one country to another. Then, I thought a bit deeper about the meaning of the title. The word ‘girl’ told me that the story was about someone young, not adult, and female. The word ‘translation’ suggested meanings such as misunderstanding, being in the process of a change and being in between. As a young Chinese woman who speaks Cantonese, while my mother speaks Mandarin, and who has been studying literature in an English-speaking country. I know what misunderstanding looks like. Also, I have always been curious about how people adapt to new ways of life. How do they, in order to create a new life, transform themselves, sometimes successfully, but sometimes less successfully?

In the novel, the protagonist, Kimberly Chang, immigrates as an 11-year-old-girl, along with her mother, from Hong Kong to Brooklyn, New York. Kimberly starts her secret double life right at the beginning: she is an exceptional student during the day and an illegal worker in a Chinatown clothing factory at night. The factory is owned by her auntie. This way of life leads to challenges and contradictions for her experiences, personalities and identities, forcing her to choose between two different worlds.

Kimberly works hard to improve her language abilities, to navigate the city and to make sense of the people around her, thereby adjusting herself to the American way of life and culture. The novel is the story, then, of how Kimberly transforms herself from a Chinese newcomer to an Americanised Chinese girl, one who is able to overcome the challenges she faces, to perform well in school and, finally, to make a life for herself. This not only helps her gain popularity in school, it also creates the possibility of a brighter future for her mother and herself. At least, that is how she appears to the people around her.

However, deep inside, Kimberly is a sensitive girl, bearing huge pressures caused by family relationships and poverty. So, Kimberly decides to hide the dark side of her life from her schoolmates. At the same time, and being an impulsive young girl, she longs to enjoy personal freedom, and to have a life that is apart from her daily duties, just like other American teenagers. She falls in love with Matt, a Chinese boy from the factory and becomes pregnant to him. Matt thinks she has an abortion, but in the end, it is revealed that Kimberly has kept the child without telling him, because she wants to grow beyond the limits of her life in Chinatown. Determined to create a new life and leave both Matt and the Chinatown, Kimberly moves away with her mother and son. Twelve years later we see that she has become a successful surgeon.

Analysis: Girl in Translation

According to Wati et al. (2015), culture, language, religion and ideology are the main aspects that influence the creation of an immigrant's new identity. These aspects are the main focus of my analysis because I wish to focus on how the main character, Kimberly, creates a new identity for herself. Following Hall's (1996) cultural identity scheme, the new identity of an immigrant emerges from the negotiation and transformation between one's new culture and old culture (Hall, 1996). Based on this view, I believe that Kwok is showing us the dynamic process through which Kimberly becomes an Americanised Chinese young woman. When we look at Kimberly, we can trace her roots in Chinese culture, and at the same time catch glimpses of American culture. In this way, the reader is able to gain new insights into both cultures, and reevaluate their understandings of them. Even though Kimberley is Chinese, in moving to New York she becomes only 'somewhat' Chinese. Conversely, in the process of moving she becomes only 'somewhat' American, but she cannot be fully Americanised. For me, it is as if Kimberly hovers between Chinese and American societies, trying to mix and

match these substantially different cultures in the construction of her new self, while at the same time establish a new home where she can feel safe and ultimately successful.

Kimberly's first steps: A Chinese misfit

At the beginning of the story, without enough knowledge or understanding of what being in America means, and with no friends to help her, Kimberly feels like an outcast who cannot easily take part in the American society. As she can hardly speak any English, it is very difficult for her to communicate properly with other non-Chinese people, to play with other girls her age and to express her feelings and engage in everyday American life. On the other hand, and surprisingly, due to her very little knowledge in English, Kimberly is also alienated from and marginalised by the American Chinese community, as well. As Kimberly shares with us: "They interspersed their Chinese with English to show off how Americanised they were, and everyone apparently knew I was fresh off the boat" (Kwok, 2011, p. 35). She is left alone, far from any chance to adapt to the new environment.

This situation leads to a sense of homelessness, both for Kimberly and for her mother, who seems in many ways even more helpless in the alien city than her daughter. Thus, Kimberly does not have anyone to protect her or to hide behind. That is why she and her mother, in reaching some mental and spiritual comfort in their new country, seek respite in traditional Chinese culture and the religious rituals that are so strongly engraved in their beings. Kimberly sees in this a safe haven from the new and unknown world around her. This can be seen in Kimberly's description of her and her mother's everyday routines. She tells us they would:

Set up five altars in the kitchen: to the earth god, the ancestors, the heavens, the kitchen god and Kuan Yin. Kuan Yin is the goddess of compassion who cares for all of us. We lit incense and poured tea and rice wine before the altars. We prayed to the

local earth god of the building and apartment to grant us permission to live there in peace, to the ancestors and heavens to keep away troubles and evil people, to the kitchen god to keep us from starving and to Kuan Yin to bring us our hearts' desires. (Kwok, 2011, p. 20)

As a Chinese girl, marginalised by both the mainstream American culture and the Americanised Chinese community, Kimberley turns to her roots and to traditional Chinese culture. She knows she must leave that shelter in order to join her new world, but to do so, she and her mother first create a safe 'Chinese home'. By reconnecting with their old place, they begin to imagine themselves in their new place. In this way, they are better able to build the confidence they need to face their new world and take positive steps towards being able to claim a better life, a new home.

Kimberly is brought up with very traditional ideas about women in the society. As Kimberly recalls: "Ma had taught me never to do anything that could be considered either unladylike or dangerous: a lesson passed down from her own formal upbringing" (Kwok, 2011, p. 124). Kimberly was not exposed to American culture and ideology while growing up in China. On the contrary, from an early age she is introduced to the Confucianism and the collectivist values, very much treasured by some traditional Chinese people. The feeling of being honoured and respected by other people, supporting social harmony, maintaining family obligations and reciprocal relationships, are some of the teachings imparted under a traditional Chinese worldview. Kimberly's mother, Mrs. Chang tells Kimberly that she should never forget that they "owe Aunt Paula and Uncle Bob a great debt" (Kwok, 2011, p. 12), and she goes on to remind Kimberly of the reason for this: "They got us out of Hong Kong and brought us here to America, the Golden Mountain" (Kwok, 2011, p. 12). Kimberly recalls a moment when she does not conduct herself in a way that a well brought-up Chinese girl should do: "I knew it was not what a decent girl did, asking for compliments" (Kwok,

2011, p. 108). This is what we see in the first part of the novel: the way Kimberly thinks and behaves is presented in the lessons she is taught by her mother, whose traditional upbringing is firmly instilled. Brought up within a traditional worldview, Kimberly is represented as a good Chinese girl, who is obedient, humble, hardworking, conservative, and filial. She is not ideal, but she tries to be, even if for no other reason other than she must never embarrass her parents. She never breaks these important links to her roots.

Being deeply rooted to one's culture and tradition is a very important way of being for Chinese people. Leaving one's homeland has been seen, at least in Chinese culture, as a departure from one's own roots. Such a belief might lead a Chinese person to an intense sense of loss. This can be seen most particularly in the immigration story of Kimberly and her mother and their move to the United States of America. The fear of losing one's roots when leaving one's country of birth, leads Kimberly and her mother to maintain an attachment to the past and an especially traditional patriarchal mindset when they first move to United States. The purpose for this is to still feel at home, while not being at home anymore. For Kimberly's mother, keeping the old family photos and playing old Chinese songs on the violin are her ways of keeping a connection to her roots. At the same time, Kimberly talks constantly to her father, who passed away in Hong Kong: "Pa, I wish you are here to help us, please help me perfect my English so I can take care of us" (Kwok, 2011, p. 79). This is Kimberly's way of keeping her father close to her heart, and also of holding on to her roots, keeping them close so she would feel less lost and lonely, while far from her home.

Kimberly is excluded from the 'real world', not only by the not-so-friendly environment around her, but also by her own decision to hold too tightly to her Chinese roots. This situation makes some difficulties in her everyday life. Her lack of fluency in English impacts her progress in the school. Initially, instead of confronting the difficulty actively, Kimberly chooses to escape from it. However, this is a key moment in the novel, for me,

when Kimberly hears her mother saying: “The road we could follow in Hong Kong was a dead one. The only future I could see for us, for you, was here, where you could become whatever you wanted” (Kwok, 2011, p. 21). Being always close to her mother and listening carefully to what she has to teach her, tell her or advise her, is, from my perspective a turning point for Kimberly. Leaving Hong Kong with her daughter, this was a very hard and brave decision for Mrs. Chang. But that decision helps her and her daughter escape the uncertainty and fear about their future in Hong Kong. This brave action becomes an important motivation for Kimberly to activate and change herself. From this point in the novel, Kimberly starts to adapt herself to the foreign world around her. In doing so she begins to create a new and hopeful future for both her mother and herself, knowing now that she “could become whatever she wants?” (Kwok, 2011, p. 21).

The next step: Negotiating toward an Americanized self

For the character of Kimberly, as in real life, language is an essential medium for communication between people. It has been suggested that it “is the result of British expansion that spread English to the colonized land” (Ningtyas & Rosyidah, 2014, p.23). While New York does not have the same history of colonization, the colonizing effect of the demands of the English can still be seen in the novel. For a Chinese immigrant girl coming from Hong Kong, a British colony until 1997, English is not a fully unknown language. But Kimberly finds it somehow harder to communicate in the American context, especially in the early years of her immigrant life in the USA. So, with the basic understandings of English in her mind, Kimberly works hard so she can start communicating and connecting with her classmates and the wider American society. Kimberly points out the importance of working in improving her English:

I had to perfect my English. Not only did I write down and look up the words I didn't know in my textbooks, I started with the A's in my dictionary and tried to memorize all the words. I made a copy of the list and stuck it to the inside of the bathroom door. I had learned phonetic alphabet in Hong Kong and that made it easier for me to figure how the words were pronounced. (Kwok, 2011, p. 86, emphasis in original)

By memorizing those foreign words and improving her pronunciation, Kimberly is not only changing the way she talks, but also changing her concept about how to become an American. From my perspective, these are Kimberly's first steps in creating her new identity in the American context.

As her English is perfected, Kimberly obtains more opportunities to participate in American society. In the part where she talks about her relationship with other boys, Kimberly notes: 'I knew what these boys really wanted – freedom. Freedom from their parents, from their own unsurprising selves, from the heavy weight of the expectations that had been placed upon them. I knew because it was what I wanted too' (Kwok, 2011, pp. 205-206). We can see here glimpses of her new self. As the result of being more and more in contact with the American way of thinking, her behaviors and mindset start to be influenced by individualist culture and future-oriented ideologies. Trying to move forward searching an Americanized self, Kimberly is finding a person in herself who has a growing desire for freedom and independence – one that feels a need for some private time, far from her familial duties. I believe this is not only one of the symbols of her developing American side, but also is a sign to indicate that she has been growing up throughout the journey of searching for her new identity.

In adapting to the new circumstance, as Kimberly tries to lie to her mother and starts ignoring her commitment to her family, she also begins to break the Chinese behavioral rules taught by her mother. Her decision to participate in party at night without the permission

from her mother is an example of breaking her mother's Chinese behavioral rules. Kimberly confesses: "I felt guilty about leaving Ma alone at the factory, but I wanted to have some fun for once, like the other kids my own age" (Kwok, 2011, p. 227). Despite Kimberly's desire for becoming a new self, she is still not able to escape from the obligations and pressures that are coming from her family. Even as she misbehaves she is thinking always of them and their rules. Therefore, even with all the efforts Kimberly puts into transforming herself, she can never become fully American due to the family-oriented Chinese ideologies that still remained influential in the transitional process of creating the new cultural identity. Kimberly recollects: "The blistering reality was the deafening thunder of sewing machines at the factory, the fierce sting of cold against my skin in our unheated apartment" (Kwok, 2011, p. 206). No matter how much she would like to run towards an American version of herself, Kimberly is still tied tightly to her Chinese version of herself.

For becoming part of the American community, Kimberly has tried very hard to hide her dark and Chinese side from other American peers and teachers, as she explains the reason why she never talks about her personal problems with her best friend Annette, she admits that:

Talking about my problems would only illuminate the line of my unhappiness in the cold light of day, showing me, as well as her, the things I had been able to bear only because they had been half hidden in the shadows. (Kwok, 2011, p. 178)

Despite that, deep inside herself, Kimberly is fully aware that her Chinese self is impossible to hide. She says: "no matter how well I did in my classes or how well I managed to fake belonging to the cool circle, I knew I was not one of them" (Kwok, 2011, p. 239). Apart from feeling homeless in the foreign environment, the differences between herself and the others in her American community and distance she could always feel between them, often created a sense of being completely isolated from others. Being isolated and lonely in her new

environment, Kimberly remembers: “I felt at peace in the temple, as if we had never left Hong Kong. As if there were forces of compassion that were watching over Ma and me” (Kwok, 2011, p. 158). That is, in searching for her new American home, Kimberly paradoxically finds spiritual comfort only by relying on her Chinese traditional roots.

For much of the novel, Kimberly’s transition from her Chinese self to her Americanised self does not look fully possible; completely abandoning her Chinese self is not the way for Kimberly to find her new identity, but neither is becoming fully her Americanised self, despite her best efforts. Assimilation is one’s best chance for creation of one’s new identity (Rahmadyatri, 2019), but what does this mean in reality or at least in its representation by Kwok? In the novel, the most suitable way for Kimberly to find her new identity is not to create a new American identity, but to adjust her Chinese self to the new cultural environment. That is, in this case, assimilation might be read as a creation of a self that is suspended between the self that remains rooted in Chinese culture and the desired Americanised self.

The final step: a conversation between the Chinese and Americanised self

Instead of trying to become an American, Kimberly has adjusted herself, she decides to construct a new identity for both herself and her mother made up of both Chinese and American cultures. Such decision is also supported by her mother, as seen when Mrs. Chang says: “Yes. I am afraid but I feel light too. Even if Aunt Paula bathed in grapefruit water, she wouldn't be able to wash the guilt off. It is time for us to make our own way” (Kwok, 2011, p. 257). Kimberly is searching for a new home in her own way, trying to accept American culture, but still being attached to Chinese culture. This approach to both cultures can be referred to as hybridity.

To achieve this goal, Kimberly demonstrates her agency by reinterpreting her old understandings of a good Chinese girl, in relation to the wider social and cultural forces in American society (Chen & Lau, 2020). This point is illustrated further in Kimberly's decision to keep her child without Matt, becoming a single parent and creating an ideal future for her mother and herself. By making such a decision, Kimberly finds a dialogical or meeting point for both her Chinese and American sides. As suggested by Chan and Lau (2020),

Her decision to have her child without Matt is a calculated move to improve her life that fulfils her obligations to her mother. This behaviour resonates with Chinese understandings of the *guai* child as being “useful.” On the other hand, by having a child out of wedlock, she has become “Americanised”. (p. 11)

This simultaneous attachment to both cultures is also seen in Kimberly's use of language. In the novel, she manages to switch easily between Chinese and English:

“Hey, where are you going?” I asked in Chinese.

“I’ve got baseball practice! Mom, I’m going to be late.” His Chinese, although not quite as perfect as his English, was excellent. [...] Then we both switched into English and chanted together, “I love you, give me a whack.” We gave each other a high five. (Kwok, 2011, p. 286)

As one might notice from this quote, the words ‘whack’ and ‘a high five’ have the same meaning, which Kimberly unconsciously translates, as this is also a common way for referring to the same action in Hong Kong. This shows that, although Kimberly has already become an American, she is still attached to her Chinese roots back in Hong Kong (Ningtyas & Rosyidah, 2014). That is, after all her years of living in America, Kimberly still floats somewhere in between American and Chinese cultures, sometimes being closer to her desired Americanised self, and sometimes closer to the self that remains rooted in Chinese culture, depending on which part of herself she needs.

Finally, towards the end of the novel, Kimberly fully accepts her 'hybrid way of thinking' that enables her to dwell between the two worlds. She acknowledges that she has managed to amalgamate two different cultures, no matter how hard it has been: "I knew that someday, I would be able to fully accept it all. In a bittersweet way" (Kwok, 2011, p. 286). While continuing to move forwards into the future, Kimberly still saves all her unforgettable memories and past regrets deep inside. In this way, she continues to negotiate life in her new home, positioned somewhere in the space between Hong Kong and America, in between the past and the present, in between her old cultural roots and new realities.

According to the analysis above, I propose that, with her mother by her side, Kimberly successfully translates her cultural identity from a homeless Chinese girl to a Chinese American woman simultaneously attached to both Chinese and American cultures. This view is similar to the position taken by Ningtyas and Rosyidah. (Ningtyas & Rosyidah, 2014). This simultaneous attachment to both cultures may be the reason for a related study review earlier to suggest that this novel has represented a successful experience of Chinese female immigrants (Rosily, CL. & Shivan, 2020).

At some points during the process of searching for her new cultural identity, Kimberly demonstrates her intention to separate herself from the shadow of her mother. However, the cultural gaps and language differences between Kimberly and her mother are not unmanageable, after all they share the same language and cultural background. Further, even though Mrs. Chang is not able to speak English and stills follow the Chinese way of life most of the time, her way of thinking is still affected by American culture. For instance, she finally decides to speak up for her daughter and herself regarding the unfair treatment they receive from her older sister, Paula, because she thinks that it is time for them to make their own way in the future. As the result, both Kimberly and her mother seem to accept the state of being between two worlds, and begin moving towards the same goal together. That is,

creating a hopeful future in their new home. I suggest this is the main cause behind their success.

However, and from my personal point of view, one result of trying to maintain a simultaneous attachment to both cultures, is that Kimberly can never be fully attached to either culture or place. Instead, she and her family may have to negotiate between the two for the rest of their lives in order to maintain their 'new home', and this will not be easy. I think this might be not only the experience of Kimberly, or Jean Kwok, but of many female immigrants around the world. As a woman living and studying in a foreign country, I have also had a similar experience. So, this story is inspiring to me, as I try my best to make own way in an English-speaking country.

Background of the study: *The Joy Luck Club*

I first read this book in Chinese when living in Hong Kong, and then a second time, when working on this dissertation, I read it in English. I was interested in the story about Chinese history and, when I came to read the English version of this novel what impressed me was how the writer had tried to translate Chinese words and concepts into English. Most of them are translated by pronunciations; others are translated by shallow meanings. These translations are often not accurate and comprehensive enough for me as a native Chinese speaker. This problem of translation can be seen to reflect the difficulties experienced by the characters, the mothers and American-born daughters, who must adapt from and to different cultures and communicate with each other despite their lack of understandings of each other's culture. So, as I read the English version of the novel for this dissertation, it seems to me to be a book written by a woman who has been forced to learn and engage in Chinese language and culture.

My first thoughts, when I saw the title, were that the book would be about a group of people coming together to share stories about happiness and luck: things Chinese people often emphasise in their lives, as happiness and luck bring peacefulness and security to them and their families. Chinese people try to pursue luck and happiness their whole lives, but as no-one knows how exactly to achieve these things, advice is often sought from parents and grandparents. Ancient stories and the experiences of ancestors also tell of possible ways to experience happiness and luck and, in drawing on these sources, such ideals become bigger than ordinary lives and sit in the realms of spirituality.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is set in the 1980s with flashbacks to the 1940s and 1950s. It is centered on four women who gather regularly together to share meals, their family stories and play the Chinese game, *Mahjong*. The stories they share are about their bad experiences back in China, and how they decided to emigrate to USA in search of a better life

and hope for the future – their way of seeking happiness and luck. They tell of wanting their dreams to come true – if not for themselves, then at least for their daughters who have been born in the United States. They realise that it is not that easy to find happiness and luck in their daily lives in USA – daily lives that are full of conflicts with their American-born daughters. The parents represent traditional Chinese culture, while the daughters born in the USA represent American culture, and the intercultural misunderstandings revealed in the novel prove to be very challenging for both sides. For the parents, adapting their traditional Chinese culture to the American way of life is very hard. At the same time, the daughters are seen to struggle with their own battles. They feel conflicted being one part Americanised, and one part still tracing their roots in Chinese culture, or not knowing how to find their Chinese roots at all. For these four women, even though we see some jealousy in their relationships, we also see their very close friendships. The Joy Luck Club is the place where they are free to recall memories from China, to socialise, and to feel at home, while not being physically at home. These moments offer the characters moments of happiness. They feel lucky to belong and to be part of a group.

The novel begins with the story of Jing-Mei Woo, a 36 year-old copywriter, whose mother has died. In taking the position of her mother in the Joy Luck Club, she discovers her mother's secret wish, recalls the conflicts between herself and her mother, and begins to explore both her mother's story and her own. Finally, she decides to fulfil her mother's dream by going back to China with her father to meet her half-sisters. At the end, and throughout her journey, Jing-Mei not only comes to understand more about her mother's life and roots, but also the Chinese parts of herself as an American-born Chinese woman. The story of Jing-Mei Woo and her mother reaching reconciliation is interwoven with the stories of three other mothers and daughters who also struggle to understand each other and find places for happiness and luck. As the novel is quite complex in the way it layers these stories, I will

focus on only one story, that of the St. Clair family, in order to understand better how this novel shows us another perspective of how a Chinese daughter ‘finds herself’ in America.

Analysis: The Joy Luck Club

The St. Clair family story moves between Ying-Ying, a Chinese mother, and her American born daughter, Lena. There are two main reasons for choosing their story to analyse for the purposes of this dissertation. First, because the family stories represented in this novel are interrelated, the stories of the other mothers and daughters can be seen in part to be reflected in the stories of Ying-Ying and Lena. Second, as the chosen story is about the only family with interracial parents (Lena’s father is a white American), the particulars of this family background complicate the way we see the mother and daughter during their process of defining themselves.

According to Hamilton (1999), in *The Joy Luck Club*: “Tan represents the discovery process as arduous and fraught with peril. Each of the eight main characters faces the task of defining herself in the midst of great personal loss or interpersonal conflict” (p. 125). Based on this view, this analysis first explores the discovery process for both the mother and daughter individually. Following that, the analysis moves on to discuss the possible connections between the mother's journey and that of the daughter's. In doing so, one may see the separate ways in which the mother and the daughter tend to search for their new identities, while finding new homes for themselves. Also, it can be seen how they try to influence each other in their process of discovering their new selves.

The Mother’s Journey

At the beginning of her story, Ying-Ying is recovering from the failure of her first marriage. She starts to transform herself as she waits for a new person come into her life who will

promise her a new home and identity. With this intention in mind, she behaves like a tiger: “The black side stands still with cunning, hiding its gold between trees, seeing and not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come” (Tan, 1993, p. 248). She meets an American citizen who wants to marry her and take her to America to start their life together. This man becomes her saviour, and the marriage a haven, a new home where she feels rescued from her sorrow-filled past life in China.

With these intentions in mind, Ying-Ying treats America as a new country, a place she does not really care about or hope for, but it is still a place she can survive safely, away from her troubled time in China. Due to this reason, she accepts and presents a new American identity created by her new husband, but its falseness is revealed in her daughter's account:

My father proudly named her in her immigration papers: Betty St. Clair, crossing out her given name of Gu Ying-Ying. And then he put down the wrong birthyear, 1916 instead of 1914. So, with a sweep of a pen, my mother lost her name and became a Dragon instead of a Tiger (Tan, 1993, p. 104).

According to Chinese astrology each sign of the zodiac serves as a symbol for a particular set of personalities for people born in certain years. So, modifying one's zodiac from Tiger to Dragon, means that Ying-Ying loses part of her true personality. Due to the patriarchal control of her husband, Ying-Ying accepts and lives with this unreal identity with little resistance, and thus an important side of her Chinese identity is hidden. As we learn, this causes many challenges for Ying-Ying in her search for her true self and identity in the American context.

One of challenges Ying-Ying faces is that of not being accurately understood by other people around her, not even by her daughter and husband. So, Ying-Ying is often misinterpreted and misunderstood by her daughter over the years, as she tells us:

When my daughter looks at me, she sees a small old lady. That is because she sees only with her outside eyes. She has no *chuming*, no inside knowing of things. If she had *chuming*, she would see a tiger lady. And she would have careful fear. (Tan, 1993, p. 248, emphasis in original)

Ying-Ying tells how she tries to adapt to the American way of life by adopting a fake identity: “I wore large American clothes. I did servant’s tasks. I learned the western ways. I tried to speak with a thick tongue” (Tan, 1993, p. 251). Despite all these efforts, Ying-Ying can never fully leave her Chinese roots and become an American. This means not only that she is never able to speak fluent English, but that she can never completely understand and accept the American way of life. For example, Ying-Ying tells the reader of her daughter’s choice:

To Chinese way of thinking, the guest bedroom is the best bedroom, where she and her husband sleep. I do not tell her this. Her wisdom is like a bottomless pond. You throw stones in and they sink into the darkness and dissolve. (Tan, 1993, p. 242)

What can be seen here is the fact that Ying-Ying never fully leaves behind her Chinese self, and as a result, the communication and understanding between Ying-Ying, her husband and her daughter are shown not to work as they should.

Instead of trying to increase the interactions between herself and Lena, Ying-Ying decides to deal with the situation by becoming silent. She tells us that “for all these years, I kept my mouth closed so my selfish desires would not fall out” (Tan, 1993, p. 67). This attitude comes from being raised in a traditionally Chinese way. She was taught this behaviour by her parents and her family, as a being the proper way for a good and traditional Chinese woman to deal with problems. In this way, she is supposed to be easily accepted and preferred by the people around her and society in general. However, in this context, Ying-Ying’s silence results in a growing distance between her and her daughter. Ying-Ying tells us

that ‘because I remained quiet for so long now my daughter does not hear me’ (Tan, 1993, p. 67). Even though at the beginning of her new life she thought of America as her safe haven and new home, this new life instead leads her to feelings of being loss and homelessness. Feeling lost in America, makes her recall an event from her childhood in China when she became lost from her family. In this way, not only does she reconnect with her past back in China, but her hopes of survival in her new home and of finding her own identity are revived. As Ying-Ying admits; “I also remember what I asked the Moon Lady so long ago. I wished to be found” (Tan, 1993, p. 83).

With this hope in her mind, instead of being trapped in the pain of losing herself, Ying-Ying has found the way out of it in her need to help her daughter avoid the same fate as her. Because of that, when Lena is faced with the risk of divorce, Ying-Ying decides that “now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved” (Tan, 1993, p. 242). For Ying-Ying, this is the way not only “to fill the gap between present and past generations” (Gallego, 1999, p. 132), but also for “ensuring them their right to choose for their own happiness” (Tangapiwut, 2012, p. 35). With this in Ying-Ying mind, comes up with a new plan for her life, that she shares with the reader:

I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter’s tough skin and her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter. (Tan, 1993, p. 252)

As a woman born in the Year of the Tiger, the tiger becomes the symbol for the Chinese side of Ying-Ying’s true self. As can be seen here, due to her determination to save her daughter from a homeless future, Ying-Ying moves away from the patriarchal control mentioned above and starts to disclose her real Chinese self. In doing so, she is finally able to search for

her own true cultural identity. So, at the end, Ying-Ying becomes a Chinese American woman, constantly fighting and negotiating between past and present, Chinese and American, mother and daughter, in order to maintain her new identity in her new home.

The Daughter's Journey

To begin with, as a child raised by a Chinese mother and an American father, Lena must constantly negotiate between the Chinese and American sides of her life, in order to form a cultural identity and find a home for herself. In the early stages of her life, she tends to hide and misinterpret the Chinese parts of herself. For example, Lena tells us, even though “most people didn't know I was half Chinese, maybe because my last name is St. Clair” (Tan, 1993, p. 104), she still “used to push my eyes in on the sides to make them rounder” (Tan, 1993, p. 104). In doing so, Lena tries to hide the physical and visible signs of her Chinese identity. Further, Lena misinterprets the Chinese culture with her unreal and horrible imagination. She states, “I began to see terrible things. I saw these things with my Chinese eyes, the part of me I got from my mother. I saw devils dancing feverishly beneath a hole I had dug in the sandbox” (Tan, 1993, p. 103). I believe this is the consequence of Lena's lack of accurate understanding of Ying-Ying's journey, as well as of the Chinese culture Ying-Ying represents. There are two main reasons for Lena's inability to understand her mother.

For one thing and, as Lena tells us, “My mother never talked about her life in China” (Tan, 1993, p. 104). In this, Tan shows us how, according to Hamilton (1999), regarding the lack of understandings about the past experiences of their mothers, “it particularly inhibits the daughters from appreciating the delicate negotiations their mothers have performed to sustain their identities across two cultures” (Hamilton, 1999, p.125). On the other hand, it is difficult for Lena to see her own connections with China and Chinese culture. To explain this point

further, I think Lena's description of a photo of her mother shows Lena's inability to fully relate to her:

In this picture you can see why my mother looks displaced. She is clutching a large clam-shaped bag, as though someone might steal this from her as well if she is less watchful. She has on an ankle-length Chinese dress with modest vents at the side. And on top she is wearing a Westernized suit jacket, awkwardly stylish on my mother's body, with its padded shoulders, wide lapels, and oversize cloth buttons.
(Tan, 1993. pp.104–105)

Due to Lena's lack of comprehension and understanding about her mother's Chinese past, she perceives her mother as an awkward, displaced and unapproachable woman, rather than appreciating the efforts her mother has put into transforming herself across two cultures. With this image in her mind, Lena pushes herself further away from the Chinese side of herself as represented by Ying-Ying.

Lastly, according to Gallego (1999), "their problems of communication stem from the fact that they speak two different languages--Chinese for the mothers and English for the daughters" (p. 133). Due to this reason, Lena is not able to translate and understand the Chinese concepts and beliefs told to her by her mother. One of the Chinese concepts that Ying-Ying tries to explain to Lena is the importance for everything to be in balance. As Lena shares with us, Ying-Ying 'whispered something in Chinese about "things not being balanced," and I thought she meant how things looked' (Tan, 1993, p.108). Thus, due to the issues of miscommunication, Lena loses an important reference point of Chinese culture, which becomes a hinderance when Lena tries to explore her Chinese side.

During the later stages of her life, Lena starts to admit and understand how her Chinese side has impacted her relationships and her identity. She begins to accept that the Chinese part, bequeathed her by her mother, is an important part of herself, and that in

searching for a new cultural identity in her American home, she must find a balance between her American and Chinese sides. For instance, Lena realises that her fear of marriage is attached to her identity as a woman: 'I think that feeling of fear never left me, that I would be caught someday, exposed as a shame of a woman' (Tan, 1993, p.156). Later on, she discovers that this fear is based on a Chinese way of thinking, which allows her to adjust her perspective by using the American concepts of equality and independence. In this way, she begins to be able to construct a new identity for herself as woman.

Lena has to learn to balance her American side with her Chinese heritage. This becomes most possible after the death of her father. Once her father has left her life, she has more space not only to explore her Chinese side, but also understand more about her mother's Chinese way of thinking. As Lena tells us: "To this day, I believe my mother has the mysterious ability to see things before they happen. She has a Chinese saying for what she knows. *Chunwang chihan*: if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold. Which means, I suppose, one thing is always the result of another" (Tan, 1993, p.149, emphasis in original).

The process of searching for cultural identity, as exemplified by the story of Ying-Ying and Lena is particular but also not uncommon. In *The Joy Luck Club*, we can see not only the shared experiences of four families, but also the unique challenges demanded of Ying-Ying and Lena themselves. To begin with, despite all the mothers having the same experience of feeling lost and lonely, they all need to reach for an inner relief during the process – which is the reason behind the formation of the Joy Luck Club. However, when compared with other mothers, the sense of loss is much stronger for Ying-Ying. For, not only does she have to face a challenging relationship with her daughter (as do the other mothers), but she is also unable to communicate smoothly with her American husband.

In addition, despite all the daughters having to negotiate between American and Chinese culture in order to find their new identities in their new home, this is more difficult

for Lena because her family roots are not fully Chinese; half of her is American. This means it takes much more time for Lena to discover and accept her connections with both China and the Chinese culture. That is why instead of planning or starting a journey back to China like other daughters in the novel, Lena has not expressed such intention at all.

Lastly, the one thing in common between all the mothers and daughters in this novel is their need to confront the intergenerational conflicts that arise during the searching process. I believe the best way to deal with this issue is to increase and start conversations between the two generations. In this way, it might be possible for them to form conversations between two cultures and to create their new cultural identities together. Despite the language difference and cultural gap between the daughters and mothers being undeniable, the integral bond between mothers and daughters remains a strong and precious one (Parameswari, 2017). So, with the powerful love among them, they may be able to overcome their conflicts through effective and ongoing conversations. I suggest this also is the hope of Amy Tan. And this also is the reason for the author to design 16 interweaved narratives, aiming to construct a dialogue among mothers and daughters (Souris, 1994).

Conclusion

According to Ngan and Chan (2012), “the concept of identity provides an important framework for conceptualising individuality, community, and solidarity, and a tool to understand the complex social experiences” (p. 191). This study has treated the construction of new cultural identities as the way to find a new home for Chinese female immigrants. Both *Girl in Translation* and *The Joy Luck Club* have narrated stories of Chinese immigrant women, using their voices to explore the quest for cultural identity. This analysis has supported the common view that identity is constructed and transformed throughout and within an ongoing, dynamic, fluid and diverse process (Ngan & Chan, 2012). Based on this study, the two selected novels represent similar but different processes of searching for new cultural identities by following the stories of individual women who either have moved from China to America or are the American-born daughters of these women. The novels show how these women are confronted with many different challenges and circumstances, and at personal, family and social levels. By telling stories about the mothers and daughters of Chinese immigrant families, these novels reflect the dynamic experiences of Chinese female immigrants in the real world and, through them, we can see the two slightly different approaches to cultural identities of female immigrants as expressed by the two authors.

In order to find new cultural identities for themselves, the families in these two novels must negotiate between past and present, Chinese and American culture and two sides of the self. As a result, we see that immigrants tend to find their new identities positioned somewhere between the two cultures. Such positions can be treated as zones of ‘in-betweenness’ through which they narrate, describe, and make sense of the many layers of entanglement of cultural, anthropological and political forces between the homeland and the country of settlement (Ngan & Chan, 2012). However, not everyone follows the same set of steps during the searching process. While Kimberly is able to find a balance between her two

cultures, in the end becoming a Chinese American woman able to maintain her hybrid identity, Lena has only just accepted her Chinese side by the novel end. Even in the later stages of her life, she is still trying to discover and confirm her new identity and place in Chinese and American culture. Despite their differences, both characters will need to continue their journey of negotiation between their two sides for the rest of their lives. Neither of them will ever fully belong to any one culture or place. This seems to reflect the common experience for many female immigrants in the real world.

As both novels are stories centered around the mother-daughter relationships of Chinese immigrant women, so family relationships are a common theme. The selected novels represent issues of immigrant female identity through two different kinds of mother-daughter relations, through which the diverse experiences of Chinese immigrant families are reflected. On one hand, *Girl in Translation* represents the relationship between the Chinese mother and the Chinese-born daughter. Both immigrants to New York City, Kimberly and her mother are able to communicate with each other by using the same language, and they also have shared cultural roots from the Chinese culture. Whatever their differences, through their shared language and cultural roots, they are able to understand and support each other efficiently though their journey. With her mother's support, Kimberly is able to build a new cultural identity and create a future for both herself and her mother in their new home.

On the other hand, *The Joy Luck Club* represents the relationships between Chinese American mothers and American-born daughters. Within such relationships, the cultural and language differences between the two sides cannot be ignored. It is much more difficult for the mothers and daughters to understand and communicate with each other, and it is not easy for those daughters to discover their connections with both Chinese culture and their Chinese American mothers. This situation contributes to a feeling of homelessness and hopelessness for those Chinese immigrant mothers. In the case of the immigrant family with interracial

parents, these challenges are even greater. In *The Joy Luck Club*, we see how it becomes even harder for the immigrant women from such families to construct their cultural identities in their new homes.

Despite all the differences discussed above, these novels have one thing in common: just like many other Chinese immigrant mothers in the real world, the main reason for these immigrant mothers to search for new cultural identities, and to survive in their new home is due to their best for the future of their daughters. With these hopes in mind, I believe people like these characters can overcome the challenges during their journeys and successfully build new cultural identities as female immigrants. Being a daughter who was born in mainland China and raised in Hong Kong, I have witnessed my mother going through the same thing for the past twenty years in Hong Kong.

By comparing the narratives of the daughters in both these novels, we can further explore how foreign-born and native-born immigrant children tend to adjust to new cultural identities in different ways and with different attitudes. On one hand, being a Chinese-born immigrant in the American context meant Kimberly had to try very hard to adjust her language, behaviours and way of thinking, to achieve a new cultural identity. This is not only because she is a hardworking girl with a clear goal in her mind, but also due the fact that she needs to be accepted by the American society in which she finds herself. On the other hand, as an American-born child of an interracial immigrant family, Lena had already adapted to a very Americanised way of life and become part of American society from a very early age. At the same time, she makes clear her intention to hide her Chinese self; the need and motivation for Lena to explore her Chinese side is not strong. As a result, Lena only starts to admit and balance both Chinese and American sides of herself in the later stages of her life. Both novels show us that “individual characteristics tell only part of the story, just as critical are the social factors that facilitate the process of adjustment” (Chiang, 2004. p.156).

As two novels written during different periods of time and situated in two different historical contexts, *Girl in Translation* and *The Joy Luck Club* allow us to see how both the experiences and cultural identities of female immigrants can be affected or changed by specific social contexts. On one hand, Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997. This means that a girl coming from such a colonised society would already be somewhat familiar with the English language and western culture, as is the case with Kimberly. Thus, Kimberly is able to approach the American way of life more effectively. On the other hand, part of the stories narrated in *The Joy Luck Club* occur in the period from 1949 and throughout the 1950s. During this period, and due to social climate of anti-Chinese sentiment, Chinese Americans did not have the luxury of being able to present the true essence of their own identities; rather, they were forced to pursue integration into white American culture (Chun, 2004). This is the reason why Ying-Ying accepts the false identity imposed by her American husband.

Lastly, both Jean Kwok and Amy Tan offer the voices of Chinese American women on the issue of identity through their novels. In doing so, they show us a process of coming to terms with and redefining both the gender roles and ethnic identities of Chinese female immigrants. Instead of just being Chinese immigrants who feel lost and marginalised by American society, all the female narrators in these novels are in the process of becoming independent Chinese American women; they all actively negotiate their identities between the two cultures. On one hand, *Girl in Translation* focuses on how Chinese female immigrants are able to reach for and adjust their cultural identities in their new homes and social environments. On the other hand, by representing the process of searching for new identities while coming to terms with the old, Amy Tan shows us resistance to the patriarchal oppression of women in both Chinese and American culture (Bhattacharya, 2019; Chintescu, 2020; Zeng, 2019). Despite the differences in these two novels, by reading the narratives

composed by these two female writers, we can see how Chinese female immigrants successfully carry-on crucial negotiations and conversations between two very different cultures and their diverse ways of creating new identities for themselves in the USA.

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