



رحلة المرأة في البحث عن الهوية في
رواية أمي تان "أبنة مجبر العظام"

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المستخلص

لاحظ الباحثون إن بعض الروائيين ذوي الأصول العرقية يعبرون في كتاباتهم عن شعور الشتات، ويظهرون شخصياتهم الروائية، وهي تنتقل بين حضارتين مختلفتين، واحدة تمثل جذورهم، والأخرى تمثل الثقافة السائدة في البلدان التي يقيمون فيها. وهذا البحث يتناول السعي لإدراك الهوية، كما وردت في روايات الكاتبة الأمريكية ذات الأصل الصيني (أمي تان)، حيث وجد هذا التوتر الناجم عن أصلها الهجين طريقه إلى كتاباتها، فعملت على عقد مقارنة بين مجتمعين مختلفين هما الشرق والغرب.

يحلل هذا البحث مراحل تطور إدراك الهوية لأثنين من الشخصيات في رواية (أبنة مجبر العظام)، الأم وأبنتها اللتان تمران بمسار طويل من الأحداث لاكتشاف الذات وسط حيزين أو بيئتين مختلفتين هما الصين وأمريكا. إذ تمثل الشخصية المولودة في أمريكا، روث (الأبنة) الغرب، فهي تشعر بأن ثقافة عرقها أقل شأنًا ومكانة من الثقافة الأمريكية السائدة. وبناءً عليه تجد نفسها تعاني من أزمة وجود وتعريف كينونتها. من ناحية أخرى تجد شخصية (الأم)، لولنك المولودة في الصين، نفسها غريبة، وهي تربي ابنتها في مجتمع مغاير لديه لغة وأيدولوجيات وقواعد أخلاقية مختلفة. ، تركز الرواية على رحلة أولئك النساء للوصول الى تحقيق الذات بعد حياة حافلة بالأحداث التي تعبر بصورة مصغرة عن واقع الهجرة الصينية إلى القارة الأمريكية. وفي النهاية يدركون استحالة حصولهم على هوية نقية، بل بدلاً من ذلك يعيشون في الحيز الثالث، باعتبارهم صينيين أمريكيين. وتنتهي الرحلة بإنشاء هويات جديدة تجمع حكمة الشرق وحادثة الغرب معاً.



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negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performances that in turn produce a mutual representation of cultural differences. This space witnesses the production of cultural conciliation.⁵¹

Conclusion

In the conclusion of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Ruth continues the tradition of passing her story to the next generation and begins to write her own. These autobiographies illuminate each woman's sense of identity. For Ruth, the Chinese identity recognition is engaged in the act of writing. She finally discovers where happiness lies; it is not in how an individual is seen by others but in how she/he defines her/himself. It is not to live in a cave or in a modern country but it is by taking what's broken and know it can be healed. It is by exchanging love, experiences and to give and take what has been there all along. "Ruth remembers this as she writes a story. It is for her grandmother, for herself, for the little girl who became her mother" (BD, 368).

Above all, one senses a wider significance behind Tan's writing and that is; how to create a healthy global environment to live in. How to create a harmony not only between one family but in one state or, hopefully, the whole world where a symphony of different races, cultures, religions and even sects can be made. It is the universality of Tan's works which gives them the probability to be applied at any nation. The mother-daughter relationship is taken as a vehicle to present the problematic relationship between different cultures. However, this relationship tells the people how possible it is to reconsider and reconcile binaries as a necessity condition for living together in peace so as to change their fate and to fulfill their hope in finding who they really are.

Notes

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Liu lulling in China. This name is connected with the prosperity and protection she enjoys before the death of her mother who also gives her the nickname doggie because LuLing follows her everywhere. This change of names represents character development and transforming statues. For LuLing, changing her name exemplifies her as a different person who lives in a different country. By giving different names for an individual, Tan also pinpoints her characters change in personality. To take Ruth's name into consideration, her name is also changes through the novel, for her mother Ruth is Luyi or Lootie, a nickname that indicates how much her mother loves her but Ruth thinks it is out of wrong pronunciation. By the end of the novel, when the long-lost family identity has been found at the end, Ruth begins to cry. She realizes that her last name is Gu because she belongs to the bonesetter's family as her mother and grandmother do. Ruth's epiphany is like a shooting star that enters the earth's atmosphere, short, quick, and brilliant.⁴⁸ She looks back to her life as if she has two versions of herself, before and after she reads about her family's history. Finally, she finds herself within her mother's memory. She says, "I don't have anything left inside me to figure out where I fit in or what I want. If I want anything, it's to know what's possible to want" (BD, 355). The novel ends with the protagonists' reconciliation, Ruth now understands her mother's suffering and she no longer questions her memory. She is surprised with her mother's vivid memories that are pressed due to traumatic past. Ruth starts to familiarize herself with events lived by both her mother and grandmother. So, this novel is about the connection between Ruth's and her mother's stories not only revolve around Precious Auntie's life.

In the Post-colonial studies, Ruth is seen as a Chinese American who has a hybrid identity. Hybridity is defined as "the creation of new trans-cultural forms or simply cross-cultural 'exchange' within the contact zone".⁴⁹ It involves processes of social interactions that creates a third space in which new meanings and identities are given.⁵⁰ Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* sheds light upon the "luminal" negotiation of cultural identity across differences of cultural traditions and others. He argues that a person with a dual identity cannot be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently. Instead, he suggests that the



“temporal order of human existence whose story begins with birth, has its middle the episodes of a lifespan, and ends with death”. Through recalling the past, even the most traumatic experiences, one’s existence is given meaning and identity is reconstructed.⁴¹

Notably, Tan’s main characters are always women. She is lambasted by critics for a common feminist failing; dismissal of males.⁴² To take among them, Frank Chin, who launched a virulent campaign to discredit Tan’s view of Chinese male as batterers and self-centered. In defiance of stereotypes, Chin declares, “Chinese culture is not any more misogynistic than Western culture. Amy Tan is attacking Chinese myth as teaching misogyny”.⁴³ Without hesitation, Tan riposted that she drew her themes from her own mother’s life not myth.⁴⁴

The journey motif dominates Tan’s fiction. It is a reference to the Chinese diaspora and expatriate life in California’s Chinese American enclave.⁴⁵ In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, Tan illustrates the eye-opening quality of travel to China. It is a mental, emotional, and epiphany journey; it is about characters finding the truth about themselves including their names. Tan values genealogy to affirm herself and reclaim belonging to an extended family. She says in an interview, “I wanted *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* to be about the discovery of our true names, our pasts, and our true natures.” (BD, 375).⁴⁶ Through the life of the three women of the novel, Precious Auntie, LuLing, and Ruth, they have been called different names; each name indicates an identity, a development in their life. The nameless nursemaid, Precious Auntie, is recognized by the end of the novel as Gu Liu Xin which means “shooting star” (BD, 360). It is an image that suggests a short but brilliant existence. Although she ends her life, she leaves a sparkling memory of love and protection to LuLing for ever.⁴⁷

Precious Auntie loses her name, her identity, after the death of her protectors, her father and her husband. She becomes defenseless and mute in the patriarchal society where she is prevented from working as a healer and people give her many awful nicknames like Burnt Wood and Fried Mouth. It is only LuLing who calls her Bao Bomu; meaning “protect...mother” (BD, 348) because she is the only one who pays her attention and shows her love. As for LuLing, she has been called,



has haunted me about Amy's story is that it's about the past," It is the connection to our present, to ourselves. For Chen,

Those of us who lived through the Cultural Revolution have tried to forget our past. The past is always there, so big that you can't compress it. But Amy's approach to memory is to go back and dig it out, like archaeology. She goes back and opens the wounds because they will always haunt you until you come to terms with them. It starts out as Amy's story, but it becomes the story of everyone who's ever had to carry their past with them.³⁷

Interestingly, the three generations, Precious Auntie, LuLing, and Ruth, tend to write autobiographies. Writing offers to express one's feelings in addition to the opportunity to establish a link with the other. Precious Auntie and LuLing's stories focus on history, patriarchy, family, and life story, while Ruth's diary expresses a teenage desire to be left alone without disturbing, struggling to find her identity. For Ruth, reading LuLing's story helps her to reconnect her divided self. This cross-cultural writing strengthens the mother-daughter relationship by "supplementing face-to-face communication and by overcoming obstacles of geography and time".³⁸ Ruth knows for the first time the true identity of her grandmother because Luling is afraid of her daughter's shameful look at her for being illegitimate. The truth is being raised in America where there is difference in social and moral codes, "it is fashionable these days to be born a love child" (BD, 322) which means, Ruth would assure to her mother it is unnecessary to be ashamed at all.

This mother-daughter communication helps LuLing to strengthen a sense of contribution with the contemporary society. For Michael W. Pratt and Fieses, storytelling, as compared to story writing, offers some key advantages sharing stories beyond face-to face situation. They announce, "narrative reconstruction of the past gives rise to the believability and emotionality of a memory and makes possible its essential communicative function".³⁹ The autobiographical memory also contributes to interpreting other's actions, relationship maintenance, and the most important thing, self-definition.⁴⁰ Polkinghorne claims that the self is the



This marriage is the turning point in LuLing's life. She begins to read and learn about others' countries, people, and religions overseas. In her heart, "America [is] the Christian heaven" (BD, 289) where logic defeats Myths and where all dreams come true. Yet, her senses are with China, the land of "Chinese people, unlike foreigners, [do]not try to push their ideas on others." (BD, 250). In fact this is not true since LuLing is trying her best to impose Chinese tradition and ideologies on Ruth.

Unconsciously, LuLing never forgets the curse from the Monkey's Jaw and the body of Precious Auntie which doesn't get "a proper burial" (BD, 260). When her husband dies she thinks it is because of the curse. LuLing is pessimist, sometimes what one expects, comes and this is what comes to her; her husband is killed by the Japanese. Then, the orphanage is attacked and all the men are shot. LuLing and others hide in order not to be raped like some Chinese villages. The war is once again portrayed with its consequences and destructive comings like in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Both of the novels give a deep description of how the female protagonists survive different kinds of obstacles and pain.

When Ruth knows the truth about LuLing, she admires her mother's strength. Ruth also discovers that to find herself she needs to be connected with her mother. This connection is made through a journey to the past.³⁴ Nancy Willard, a reviewer, sees that reading this novel "is like looking into a carved ivory ball that contains numerous smaller balls, each revealing a different design but all worked from a single source".³⁵ That is to say; Tan concentrates on memory that is hidden, as a result a misunderstanding occurs and becomes a recurrent theme in Tan's novels. It is through the process of regaining memory, LuLing and Ruth find a chance to fuse together the Chinese identity with the American one. It has been noticed that "Chinese parents use memory sharing as an instrument to assimilate the child into the larger collective (self), to solve interpersonal conflicts and promote social harmony and to perfect a moral and intellectual being as idealized by traditional Chinese teaching".³⁶ The irony is in LuLing's lost memory because she recalls specific details, dates, and people like her real birthday and the real name of her mother but Ruth thinks she has a dementia. LuLing understands that she is part of her family's history the same way Ruth is part of hers. Chen Shi-Zheng says "What



as how she interprets it, a betrayal. She never feels forgiven until the accident Ruth has in her childhood. Ruth, by her sand tray assures her mother that all her past sins are forgiven.³² This incident explores the otherness between the fear of ghostly intervention that dominates LuLing's life, and Ruth who finds her mother's fears bizarre and tries to give answers she knows her mother wants to hear. Ruth finds herself trapped in the dilemma of negotiating Chinese traditions and the mainstream American culture. Sometimes, she acts as assimilated stereotypical who has racist views describing China as superstitious and uncivilized place that fits into the orientalist discourse of the dominant culture. Nevertheless, Ruth's doubts if "nudges and notion" (BD, 316) from a ghost influenced her replies on an Ouija board.

One could understand LuLing's superstition because she goes through painful events after the death of her mother. To take, for instance, the death of her first husband, Kai Jing, whom she meets in the orphanage. He is a Christian who doesn't believe in "the old gods" (BD, 237). He is taught by the American missionaries of the orphanage where women are respected, self-pity is not allowed, and there is nothing called 'haunting ghosts'. Jing tries to inject his western ideas into LuLing's old thinking by saying, "superstition is a needless fear. The only curses are worries you can't get rid of." (BD, 267) In return, she tries to be more reasonable for the sake of her husband who ensures her that there are "no curses, no bad luck" (BD, 268).

On their wedding day, she accepts to wear a white dress in spite of the bad luck this color represents in the Chinese belief. Moreover, white symbolizing bereavement and death. Shao Lingwei announces, "[s]ince time immemorial, white has been the dominant color displayed at Chinese funerals". Ancient Chinese people wore white clothes only when they mourn for death or while summoning ghosts.³³ Jing tries to enlighten LuLing that these are old fashion ideas and she accepts to wear this color. He also tells her that whatever happens in her life, it has nothing to do to curses because her father dies due to an accident and her mother kills herself with her own will. Unfortunately, her husband is killed shortly after their marriage which shakes her beliefs and makes her come back to Chinese gods and superstitions.



forbidden in China.

The novel drives its title from a Chinese old tradition of collecting bones from mountains to use them as a remedy. These bones are the reason behind Chang's wish to arrange a marriage of LuLing and his son, Fu Nan after fifteen years from causing the death of her father and grandmother.³⁰ Chang wants LuLing to lead him to the fossil cave which no one knows where it is except her and Precious Auntie. Precious Auntie violently refuses this marriage yet she finds that the facial expression and eye contact will not be enough to reveal the truth and the reasons behind her wrath. Accordingly, she writes a manuscript exposing her real identity as being her mother and how the villain, Chang destroys her life.

Secrets are seen in Tan's novels as destructive if not told. When a secret is told, sometimes, it causes a lot of pain and series of traumas. For instance, when LuLing learns the truth of her mother, she realizes that her cold reaction and refusal to read Precious Auntie's words is the reason behind the tragic end of the latter who thinks that her daughter rejects her while in fact LuLing reads the autobiography after her death. Furthermore, LuLing is abandoned by the Liu family to a Christian orphanage where she studies and teaches.

Silence vs. speech is used to create tension in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* where incomplete communication overlays family understanding. Silence causes a chain reaction of tragedies, like Precious Auntie's suicide and the terrible realization that LuLing doesn't legally belong to the prestigious Liu family, but the love child of her nursemaid. According to Marry Ellen Snodgrass, Tan's towering dramatic ironies "illustrate the danger of perpetuating secrets until their revelation through personal disaster".³¹ Like LuLing who suffers from a lifetime loss and self-blame. She is overwhelmed with superstition and fear of the curse.

The supernatural in the presence of Precious Auntie's ghost is used as a reminder to the characters for their ancestors' history. For years, LuLing believes that she is cursed and haunted by Precious Auntie's ghost. And when LuLing misses her mother, she looks for a way to contact her. In LuLing's youth, she asks a blind woman who can see "the unseen" (BD, 228) to speak with Precious Auntie's spirit. LuLing's pain increases when the woman tells her a little verse that defines LuLing



will be no future.

“Things I must not forget” (BD, 159), is the opening statement in LuLing’s autobiography, the centre of the novel. The setting is shifted to early twentieth century China. This contrast in the settings helps to analyze the character’s identities in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* because it is already split into two stories: the tale of Ruth in America, and the narrative of LuLing in China. Each story accentuates its setting.²⁸ LuLing’s part of the story takes place in a Chinese mountainous village called *The Immortal Heart*. It lies in a valley that drops into a deep limestone ravine that is shaped like a heart. The image of this heart is associated with LuLing’s mother’s heart, Precious Auntie, whom LuLing believes is her nursemaid. The truth of this hidden motherhood is revealed after the death of Precious Auntie when LuLing reads her mother’s autobiography which she had resisted to read earlier. Precious Auntie is the daughter of a widowed bonesetter, a healer who shows his daughter a secret cave of ‘dragon bones’ that, when powdered, will cure any pain or can be sold for profit. Liu Hu Sen, a gentle inkmaker from a neighboring village, seeks the bonesetter’s aid after an accident and is soon betrothed to Precious Auntie. Coffinmaker Chang, a fellow suitor, was rejected. At the wedding party, Chang steals the dragon bones, kills her father, and causes the death of her husband. That is how Precious Auntie becomes “a widow and an orphan in the same day” (BD, 180). For Chinese woman, the silencing of sorrows creates unbearable stress and her fears of becoming Chang’s concubine what pushes her to kill herself.²⁹ She attempts to kill herself by drinking boiling oil without realizing that she is already pregnant. She survives but becomes mute and distorted, half of her face is melted and she loses her voice for ever.

Precious Auntie’s story expresses the perversity of gender-based power struggle. After the death of her father she is prevented from working in her father’s field as a healer, she works as a nursemaid to her daughter. The Liu family takes LuLing as their own daughter and gives her a false birthday. The reason behind adopting LuLing is their fear to be haunted by Liu Hu Sen’s ghost if they mistreat Precious Auntie, his beloved and his daughter. In fact, they don’t, but instead they neglect them as a symbol of their disgrace of Precious Auntie’s adultery which is so much





careful in not making their children feel inadequate or worthless, in other words; “Western parents are concerned about their children psyches”.²³ They want their children to depend on themselves. By contrast, the Chinese parents ‘demand’ their children to obey them and the most important thing, make them proud. In a typical Chinese Family “the mother has the total control of her daughter, and a good daughter is supposed to be unconditionally obedient to the will of her mother”.²⁴ So how can the daughters in these novels (or for real) do not feel exotic?

Tan celebrates the power of spoken words In *The Kitchen God's Wife* when she uses story-telling structure which stands as the glue that puts Winnie and Pearl together. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Tan celebrates the power of written words over spoken because they are conscious and deliberate rather than haphazard .²⁵

This novel's intense focus on the literary quality of women's writing may allow us to recognize that literacy in the form of writing and written texts represents an important and often more effective means of transmitting cultural memories and cultural identities across generational lines than talk-story. Furthermore, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is not 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 we can find in many of her works.²⁶

By focusing her attention on the possibilities for communication in written texts, she creates the possibility for the reception of cultural and personal memory in the American daughter because she, in effect, becomes the reader of her mother's text.²⁷ Sharing the mothers' stories, whether they were spoken or written, helps the daughters to reconstruct their Chinese identities. These stories also break the silence between the mothers and daughters that is caused by cultural and linguistic gaps. Ruth is an editor who deals with words every day in her life; But reading about LuLing's life journey from childhood until she comes to America, exemplifies to Ruth the “power” (BD, 78) of her mother's words. The words that mirrors Ruth's heritage which she cannot ran from because without a past there



ship and the Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels says,

Tan emphasizes her conscious desire to give vitality to the voice of those who speak "broken" or non-standardized Englishes in her novels. She tells her reader that she writes her stories with all of the Englishes she has used throughout her life.²¹

As a Chinese American writer it allows her a mode of discourse not constricted to the confines of traditional western narratives. Her characters differ from the western individuals as well. The American friends of Ruth consider her commitment to her mother as just like being her "slave" (BD, 50) while Ruth considers it a familial obligation. She is incapable of explaining the secret behind this mother-daughter bond between them in spite of all the differences in their relationship that cause Ruth's loss of identity.

Since childhood, Ruth has undergone a stage of spiritual loss. She wonders: "[s]hould she believe in God or be a ... Buddhist?" (BD, 143). Her Chinese half means to be associated with misery, ghosts, and Buddhism like her mother. Therefore, being left alone at college enables her to detach herself from her mother's beliefs and superstition. It is like a journey of Americanization to assert her freedom and independence. At this stage of her life, Ruth realizes that to consider herself an American neither frees her nor gives her independence. On the contrary, her intention to counter her Chinese mother by accepting American values delivers her into a doubly silenced situation. She lives 'in-between', for her American friends, she is Chinese; for her mother, she is a bad daughter for adopting western values.²² LuLing often criticizes Ruth's way of living; "[y]ou smoking! ... Why I have daughter like you? Why I live? Why I don't die long time' go?" (BD, 145, 146).

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, criticism is treated as the highest sign of parental love and protection. LuLing, like, Winnie remembers that "giving threats to children was the custom [in China]... this was how you made children behave" (KGW, 163). To their daughters, however, their mothers' codes of raising do not fit with them. According to the Americans, it is entirely different parenting model. They are



tery” (BD, 10) Being silenced, writing becomes her therapy in facing her dilemma similarly to Tan herself.

Tan succeeds in giving the western audience a “finesses representation of the exotic while convincing them of the universality of her themes”. Once she is standing on the inside carrying her Chinese half traditions and beliefs, then she shakes her head in bewilderment.¹⁸ In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Ruth points to her mother's ‘otherness’ when she asserts that her mother is not like other Chinese people in US, she is an extremely superstitious person. According to LuLing's cosmology, the world is against her and no one can change this, because this is a life time “curse” (BD, 46). LuLing believes that she is haunted by her mother's spirit, Precious Auntie, the bonesetter's daughter who is living in the “End of the World” (BD, 79) for committing suicide. This place is near Precious Auntie's village in China where her body is dumped with trash for not dying naturally. Ruth never accepts her mother's ideas about life and death; yet, she cannot leave her alone and be an ungrateful daughter. After LuLing's sickness, Ruth finds out what her mother means to her. Ruth even sacrifices her love to be with her mother.

Chinese concept of family differs from that of the American's. When LuLing is diagnosed with dementia, Art is indifferent; he even suggests hiring somebody to take care of her so that they will not miss the fan on holidays! Ruth becomes more aware of the cultural differences between her and her boyfriend who refuses to marry her for the same reasons. In the Moon Festival, Ruth and her relations find themselves sitting at one table; Art and his relations are sitting on another and when they fuss over the Chinese food, Ruth feels an uncomfortable sense of otherness.¹⁹ Tan stresses the paradox of the first generation Chinese American's assimilation while following the foodways of the old country: the native dishes appears “exotic and distasteful to Caucasian viewers”, who are not used to eat this kind of food or in other words, to have a close contact to this kind of people.²⁰

Being the only child for LuLing, Ruth has “to serve as LuLong's mouthpiece” (BD, 46) explaining to others the meanings behind her mother's broken English. Tan has intentionally fashioned a complexity of voice for her Chinese mother figures. Lisa M. S. Dunick in her essay, *The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Author-*



would never know that when her mother pronounces Ruth's name as "Lootie", she means "all that you wish" (BD, 346) in Chinese.

Ruth is a ghost writer of self-help books or to use LuLing's term, is a "book doctor" (BD, 29) who has spent her life contending with her widowed mother's strange behavior, demands, and threats.¹⁶ Dealing with a mother who has been "depressed and angry all her life" (BD, 48) pushes Ruth to lament the ground of her mother's culture that differs from the American way of living which Ruth endorses. She realizes that this tension with her mother is rooted in her identity crisis living as both American and Chinese.¹⁷

Flashing back to her childhood Ruth knows "what is meant to feel like an outsider" (BD, 61). Ruth tries hardly to assimilate in the dominant culture but she is often reminded that she differs from the rest of the community. Being humiliated for her Chinese half is like an "emotional torture" (BD, 50) for Ruth. Her mother is the representative of this half which she rejects. In her childhood Ruth recalls the day when the American children see her mother,

Ruth stood at the top of the slide, frozen with shame. Her mother was the busybody watcher of kindergartner, whereas Ruth was in the first grade! Some of the other first-graders were laughing down below. "Is that your mother?" they shouted. "What's that gobbled-gook-gook she's saying?", "She is not my mother!" Ruth shouted back. "I don't know who she is!" (BD, 71)

Running from this racial bias causes her physical injuries; she bites her lips, bumps her nose, breaks her arms, and loses her voice for several weeks. Losing her voice is symbolic, it indicates her "absolute rejection" (BD, 147) of her identity. All she wants is to be considered as an American like the rest of children in her school. Why should she feel different? What does she do to be an alien child? Ruth's sense of silence continues throughout her adult life. Now she lives into a foreign environment with her American boyfriend, Art and his two daughters. She finds herself losing her identity by being alienated from her cultural roots. Ruth makes "her voiceless state a decision, a matter of will, and not a disease or a mys-



about her family as a means to find her own identity as an American of Chinese descent.

The *Bonesetter's Daughter* emphasizes the importance of the family in defining the individual identity. Tan spans three generations in this novel, Precious Auntie, the grandmother, LuLing, the mother, and Ruth, the daughter. LuLing's voice is heard in the prologue, entitled "Truth", her story is told in the first person point of view. Yet, Precious Auntie's voice interrupts LuLing's story, which is told like Ruth's story in the third person point of view.¹⁴

The novel starts with LuLing's story which is in-between Ruth's and Precious Auntie's stories. Tan sees that a "mother is always the beginning. She is how things begin" (BD, 299) and this is how she begins *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The prologue is only a part of a manuscript written for Ruth by her mother. It is like a diary full of secrets written in Chinese. Ruth leaves it in her drawer for years until she decides to translate it and read it when she notices her mother's sickness. For LuLing writing Chinese characters is "entirely different from writing English words. You think differently. You feel differently... Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one" (BD, 54, 55). Chinese language is part of her past, her identity which she cannot deny.

Tan always sheds lights on the language barrier between the mothers and their daughters. It is one of the most important reasons behind their detached relationship. Ruth often laments her mother for not learning to speak English well. LuLing's pronunciation makes Ruth feel ashamed of her and the culture she represents. LuLing is incapable even of pronouncing her daughter's name correctly. This linguistic barrier widens the gap between the daughter who speaks perfect English and her mother who sees Chinese language has "all kinds of wisdom" (BD, 70) unlike the direct, simple English language. According to May P. Tung, "the language barrier, marks the distance between the young Chinese American and their immigrant parents. This distance and its effect on parent-child relationships and on Chinese American self-identity can be overstressed".¹⁵ Without reading LuLing's autobiography, Ruth would never understand and respect what Chinese language means to her mother, it is her past, her culture, and her identity. She



of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performance that in turn produce a mutual recognition of cultural difference. This 'liminal' space is a 'hybrid' site that witnesses the production of cultural meaning.¹⁰

The Bonesetter's Daughter

The Bonesetter's Daughter is a tale of a mother-daughter relationship that are raised in different cultures. The novel is divided into three parts with a prologue and an epilogue. The first part is set in present-day California where the narrator is Ruth Young, a 46 Chinese-American woman whose identity always comes into question. Her concerns about her Chinese heritage appears only when her mother shows signs of dementia.¹¹ She suddenly becomes aware of what her mother's memory loss means: the disappearance of stories that helps Ruth understand her family's past and gives her the sense that she is part of a story larger than her own. The middle part of the novel is the memoir written a few years earlier by Ruth's mother, LuLing, so that her daughter will know the truth about LuLing's life in China and how she immigrates to America. The third part focuses once more on Ruth, and what she will do with the knowledge she has gained about her mother and Chinese culture.

Tan is known to use the technique of multiple narratives in her earlier novels, *The Joy Luck Club*(1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife*(1991) and *The Hundred Secret Senses*(1995), so as to show the conflict between overbearing mothers and guilt-ridden daughters. Yet *The Bonesetter's Daughter* differs from Tan's earlier books. She chooses to tell Ruth's story in the third person while LuLing's in the first. By doing so, Tan enlarges the emotional scope of her material. In this way, as Ruth struggles to determine her identity and where she belongs, the reader comes to know her even better than she knows herself, to see her place in a larger narrative shaded by personal memory and historical change.¹²

Tan often uses what Sau-ling Wong calls 'Markers of authenticity' so as to give the audience what they expect from a Chinese American writer. By using these signs she creates an 'Oriental effect' to signal "a reassuring affinity between the given work and American preconceptions of what the Orient is/should be".¹³ These markers can be seen as signs of Tan's ethnic identity. She uses it to write



through social interaction. Erik Erikson's theory describes the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan. According to him, the 'ego identity' is constantly changing due to new experiences and information people acquire in their daily interactions with others.⁵ As people face each new stage of development, they face a new challenge that can help further develop or hinder the development of their identity. Erikson (1902-1994), like Hall, believed that identity is a process that continues throughout life. This is proven in Tan's work whose message behind her writings is that, it is never too late to find your identity.

In Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the Chinese American protagonist, as in real life, is living 'between worlds'. She struggles between the Oriental beliefs and the western values, the traditional culture and the modern civilization. This cultural difference is seen in the communication barrier between the protagonist born in China and the other in America leading them to live 'in-betweenness'.⁶ Lisa Lowe describes the Asian American identity as "constructed and unsettled, as taking place in the movement between sites and in the strategic occupation of heterogeneous and multiple positions".⁷ This imbalance between the first world and the third world cultures indicates the domination of and continuation of western colonial mentality, in which the third world culture is placed at a disadvantage.

The multiple spaces Tan inhabits, Asia and America raise important questions about multiculturalism. As opposed to the assimilationist idea of the melting pot concept, multiculturalism refers to the acceptance of different ethnic groups and creates a harmony with them in one state.⁸ Tan's vitality of writing springs from posing the stark contrast in cultures of the two places that she inhabits. Like Tan, the protagonist's identity in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is not pure but hybrid. Within the main conflict of Ruth's struggle with her identity and its definition, she finds a balance between her American status and her Chinese heritage.

In the context of Chinese American literature, Tan among others, "straddling two cultures and two languages, negotiate[s] and translate[s] cultural differences into identity formation and foreground the process of hybridization".⁹ She uses this "in-betweenness", or the third space, to challenge wholesale cultural hegemony and find a cultural harmony instead. Homi Bhabha suggests that the negotiation



Introduction

Henry James, the American novelist once noted that it takes a lot of history to produce the flowering of literature. In that light, we can consider the Chinese American literature as a form of “encapsulated history” that occupies a visible place in the American literature within a short period of time.¹

Amy Tan is one of the most popular Chinese American female writers in the late 20th century and early 21st century. Mostly, Tan explores in her books the life-time struggles of Chinese women who immigrated to America, as well as the lives of their daughters who suffer from confused identities. Identity issues have a close relationship in analyzing *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and questions of identity are dealt with in multitude ways. In general, the quest for identity has a fixed position in Chinese American literature even in the modern sense which mirrors the debate on the construction of the Chinese American identity as unified and constructed. Stuart Hall, a well known British cultural theorist announces in his article “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” that there is no unified identity but that he would rather use the term “identification”, the process to achieve identity which is seen as a construction, “a process never completed always in process”.²

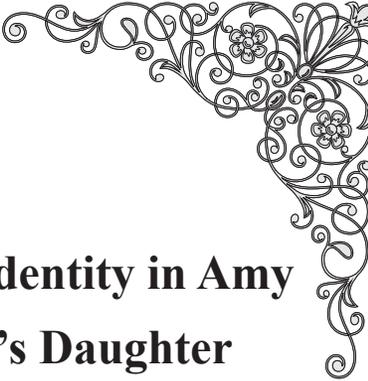
Literally speaking, both identity and the self mean ‘the same as’. Identity was understood as a “disposition of basic personality features acquired mostly during childhood and, once integrated, more or less fixed”.³ In anthropology, the concept of identity is used in the context of ethnic identity. Here it points not simply to self-sameness but to “the sameness of the self with others, that is, to a consciousness of sharing certain characteristics (a language, a culture..etc)within a group”. This consciousness makes up a group’s identity, a group to which a person belongs, which is composed of an important part of the social environment and through which personal identity is formed. Identity then is about how to define who one is, how she/he looks at her/himself among others. It is the ‘ego identity’ what let the one knows who she/he is and how to assimilate into the rest of the society.⁴

The term ‘ego identity’ is the conscious sense of self that people develop

Abstract

It has been noticing for scholars that some ethnic novelists explicate the feeling of diaspora and reveal their characters' juggling between two different cultures, one represents their roots, and the other represents the culture of their residence. The tension in Amy Tan's dual heritage finds its way into her novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. She draws parallels between two different societies, the western, and the eastern. This paper analyzes identity development of two protagonists in this novel; a mother and her daughter going through a long path of discovering the self within multiple spaces, China and America. The American born protagonist, Ruth (the daughter) represents the west. She feels that the culture of her own ethnicity is inferior to the dominant one, that is, the American culture. Accordingly, she goes through an identity crisis. On the other hand, the Chinese born protagonist, LuLing (the mother) finds herself exotic in a society where her daughter is raised with different language, ideologies, and moral codes. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* focuses on women's journey to wholeness after an eventful life replicating the Chinese immigrant experience in microcosm. By the end, they realize that it is impossible to have a pure cultural identity but instead they can live in the 'third space' as a Chinese American. The journey ends by establishing new identities that unite the wisdom of the east and the modernity of the west.

Keywords: identity, clash of cultures, multiculturalism, hybridity.



**Woman's Journey of Identity in Amy
Tan's The Bonesetter's Daughter**

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