

Analysis the Gender Conflicts of *The Joy Luck Club*

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Abstract

Amy Tan shot to fame and became one of the famous best-selling writers for the work *The Joy Luck Club* in America. As a female Chinese-American writer, Amy Tan successfully edged herself into American mainstream culture after Kingston and since then American publishers started paying much more attention to Chinese American writer and more of their works entered into mainstream society which set off a boom of Chinese American literature. The novel describes four women with different characters and fates to immigrate to the USA when facing the disasters of the country and their life and it also covers the growing experience of four daughters of the four women. This paper focuses on this novel and analyzes it from the perspectives of narrative point of view, narrative voice, narrative language features and narrative content; all of it is based on the theories that is the distinguishing features in men's and women's writing in order to find out the writing characteristic, furthermore in some extent, it will provide a new perspective for literature criticism and research on *The Joy Luck Club*.

Key words: *The Joy Luck Club*; Gender; Women writing

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INTRODUCTION

Amy Tan was born in 1952 in the city of Auckland near San Francisco. Tan's father who was an Engineer and once

used to be a pastor of Baptist Church went to American in 1947. Her mother who had married before her leaving for American and given birth to three daughters arrived in American in 1949. The year of 1967, her father and brother died of tumor in succession. At that time, Amy Tan was fifteen years old, and she had no choice but to continue her normal life. After that, because of some misunderstood, she admitted that she was against her mother's will and made her disappointed time and time again. During her growing, her mother told her numerous Chinese stories that she seemed not interested in or fed up.

In 1989, the publication of *The Joy Luck Club* immediately drew much attention and gained numerous praises from American literary critics. Due to those prizes, its author Amy Tan was quickly made a new-rising star in American Literature. The novel describes four women with different characters and fates to immigrate to the USA when facing the disasters of the country and their life and it also covers the growing experience of four daughters of the four women. The researches about *The Joy Luck Club* are mainly from the theme of mothers' and daughters' cultural conflicts, the educational difference between Chinese and American, feminist narratology and symbolism in it. In this paper, it strongly focuses on the gender conflicts existed in the work.

1. FEMINIST NARRATOLOGY AND GENDER

1.1 The Introduction of Feminist Development

It was evitable to connect feminism to feminist critics when the issue referred to gender. In history, the feminism experienced three periods of waves. From the late 18th century to the 1960 s, the first wave of the feminist movement was developed in Europe and the United States; they focus on women's basic human rights, the rights of women and men in pursuit of politics, economy, education, employment equality. From the late 1960s

to 1980s, the second wave of feminism was blustery, at this period, the keywords of feminism is liberation. The goal which feminist is pursuit of this time is Women's comprehensive liberation in the patriarchal society. They fully used Marxism and psychoanalysis as a theoretical weapon, they are fighting around the binary opposition of depression and revolution, class and resistance, taboo and sexual desire, the penis and female writing, family and society, etc. in order to expand and consolidate women's living space. At this period, feminism emphasized on the distinguished difference between men and woman from nature and society perspectives, the relationship between men and women is conflict.

Since the 1980s, the third wave of feminism directly faces the problems left over by the second wave of feminism, the feminist movement of this time pay more attention to analyze the internal complex relationship between the individual and feminism. Its important characteristics are the division of discourse power within the feminism. During this period, the feminist movement topic is the pluralistic difference the postmodernism advocated, and they interested in the copy, strategy, differences, point of view, the text, subversion, politics, parody, performance, homosexuality, identity, desire, active body, etc.. The third wave of feminism emphasizes feminism itself of daily life and mass foundation, against the previous feminism understanding about the essentialism of female gender, feminist think that women's subject consciousness should be changed with different race class and culture.

1.2 The Introduction of Gender

Gender can be divided into nature and society parts. A person's sex contains natural and social unity of both. The efforts should be made to differentiate between the two when western feminism theory into China and has a great influence, especially the loanwords of gender being moved to China, the connotation of gender become much more rich, it is the motivation which forces us to figure out the two difference about its concept. Biological differences between men and women are a natural attribute of the people. The biological diversity which is born with is a kind of objective existence, and the biological differences between men and women existed from human embryonic period. The first natural difference of men and women is the physical structure, men and women have different gonad and genitals.

If the biological differences are born with, then, men's and women's gender differences are acquired by later social experience, gender is a kind of social existence caused by biological nature or a different kind of social identity and status formed by certain social culture, ideology and political system be given to people and it is also a kind of social culture and ideology of male and female identity make different value judgment, therefore, it can be said that sex is natural, it is belong to

nature; the gender is acquired by later time, it belongs to the society.

According to the views of western feminism, the formation of unequal gender relations in human history mainly experienced the three different stages. The first stage, the male's and female's physiological differences led to the social differences between the two. Because women have a uterus, birth and breastfeeding, so she is considered suitable for take care of the children and manage the housework at home. And men had to go out to work to maintain the family's material needs, thereby creating social gender differences, namely the social division of labor; the second stage, men's and women's gender differences lead to differences in values. Man is thought to be more important in work than women, because men's labor is about the survival of the whole family, but a woman that part of the work such as housework, is considered to be minor, leading to the differences in values; the third stage is on the basis of the value differences which led to a kind of social reality that is the inequality of male and female. Because men are generally seen as being more important than women, more valuable, so their roles become a social fact.

1.3 Writing Content Features Because of Gender Difference

The former chapter argues that the physiological differences led to the social differences, especially in the social work, thus woman is restricting to the home. Their responsibility is to give birth, educate children. Their topics are always about love, marriage, family, and children, while men are always interested in money, business, and desire. The reason is that men take the responsibility to feed the family and need women give birth to inherit his good gene.

In the novel, men seldom have the chance to turn up, however, on these several times; they are just talking about business. For example, tonight, there's no mystery. The joy Luck aunties are all wearing slacks, bright print blouses, and different versions of sturdy walking shoes. We are all sitting around the dining room table under a lamp that looks like Spanish candelabra. Uncle George Puts on his bifocals and starts the meeting by reading the minutes: Our Capital account is \$24,825, or about \$6,206 a couple, \$3,103 per person. We sold Subaru for a loss at six and three-quarters. We brought a hundreds shares of Smith International at seven." The Joy Luck uncles begin to talk about stocks they are interested in buying. Uncle Jack, who is Auntie Ying's younger brother, is very keen on a company that mines gold in Canada. "It's great hedge on inflation," he says with Authority. He speaks the best English, almost accentless. We can learn from it that women show little interested in business, and they are just foiling the men's greatness in career. The great work of earning money is doing nothing with them, they just need to play the role of wife and mother well.

2. FIRST PERSONAL NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW

2.1 The Introduction of First Personal Narrative Point of View

First person narrative means the stories are told by “I”. I am both the narrator in the story and be the narrator. In the whole work, it is a changeable, for a while I am “the narrator, telling the stories, for a little while I am the narrator, become a hero or heroine of the story of the narrator.

2.2 The First Personal Narrative Point of View in *The Joy Luck Club*

Throughout the work of *The Joy Luck Club*, the role of I sometimes is a mother, sometimes is the daughter; And I played the role of the daughter identity as the story developed and can be replaced by Jing Mei, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Jong and Lena St. Clair. When I was represented by mothers, they were also constantly changing role in the story, I include Suyuan Woo, Anmei Hsu, and Lindo Jong and Ying ying St.Clair. Between mother and daughter, there will always have a own-his umbilical cord, mother to daughter is not just a life, what is more important is that the strong self-independent conveyed one generation to next, because her mother was once other’s daughter, she will eventually become a mother and daughter. Mothers tell their daughters the life experience which they got by their own feeling, its purpose is that mother hope daughter know as early as possible and seize the possible escape from time to time of “self”, in order to make their escape from the satellite position, daughters will no longer bear the misery of mothers had experienced. Mothers lets daughters know what is you really need, and at what time should be determined to say “no”.

However, this novel is not to highlight Chinese American women’s miserable, but tell us, no matter what your skin color is, modern women’s love and marriage form—or single, or divorced, or led to the loss of self because of love, or because the pursuit of absolute equality is the love itself the biggest inequality—four of the most common marriage paradigm, in four U.S. daughter’s narrative. They together describe the modern women’s survival situation: Even in modern society, it also does not provide an absolute guarantee for each one’s happiness, no matter how real life form change, as long as a woman, she is doomed to misfortune and tightly together. About the four pairs of mother and daughter, eight women’s narrative has almost all the life belongs to a woman, all women’s plight in the novel got display. *The joy luck club* change narrative perspective and all perspectives belong to women, the author in the text rebelled the construction of the world, deconstruction the male-centered culture tradition, by the way of lack of men

and evil, and showed us the weak image of male in order to create a predominantly female world. In this world, women get the biggest women’s self-consciousness and freely expressed what they want to talk about, while men are voiceless and the author tried to subvert the authority of the male. Therefore, the author stood women’s side and gave enough speech right, because women are in marginal position for a long time, they also suffered the patriarchy-centered culture bondage and oppression, and made them unable to tell their thoughts, women are a in a state of aphasia.

3. THE AUTHORITY OF COMMUNITY VOICE

3.1 The Definition of the Communal Voice

Susan lancer said: “The so-called communal voice. I am referring to such a series of actions, or they expressed a group of voices, or included the collection of all kinds of sound.” Communal voice users are the ones who are at the edges and weak position without voice. In such groups, the individual’s voice is weak, so they need to rely on a certain scale of the body to make them be heard. The narrative voice comes from the individual who belongs to one certain group. The individual was authorized by the group to form a collective voice and authority. The personal voice is easy to be suppressed; personal voice is easy to be deprived. It is necessary to select a community voice. In the Chinese and western novels, the narrative form and the structure of plots are male at the center.

However, the communal narrative voice is away from this kind of narrative center of the special subject, it changes the narrative form to develop some kind of women’s communal voice which have political significance, and the western traditional narrative restrict women’s identity, status, this kind of various social restriction should be questioned and subverted. Arguably, communal narrative voice is an effective strategy for female to get discourse authority. Communal voices led to women author perfect the relationship between her and the objects, and then get the group for the refugee.

3.2 The Community Voice in *The Joy Luck Club*

Different voices mixed in a novel which led the women to tear each down. Mothers in the novel, owing to its common life experiences before, they formed *The Joy Luck Club* that contains a certain kind essence of community. In this party, men are in a state of aphasia. Writers have given little opportunity to make to express themselves. It suggests that writer is standing in the position of women, fighting for the rights of women; women have the opportunity to speak freely in the party. However, when mothers set foot on the American land, it

did not change the state of “the other” personal fate which they suffered for a long time because of the traditional culture of patriarchal society. In America, mainstream culture is the white group culture. They still belong to the marginal groups; they still cannot get away from the position of the aphasia and silence. And their daughters who grew up in America accept the mainstream culture of the United States. So when they communicate with their daughters to adopt communal voice, in order to improve its weight and the credibility of speech. For example, Jing was on behalf of her mother and took part in *The Joy Luck Club*. When three other mothers wanted to tell Jing Mei her mother’s early life stories, they has adopted the communal narration, they take turns to tell Jing Mei the story of her mother in China, and her mother lost a pair of twin daughters in mainland China.

4. THE GARRULOUS LANGUAGE IN THE JOY LUCK CLUB

People consider that women are lack of logic which develops the garrulous language style or whisper and sing softly speaking style. It got more fully embodied in the novel. Mothers and daughters in the novel take turns to tell their story fragments. Each person in the work is more than once to speak without any order; most of the story and discourse are not finished at a time. The novel developed through the stories said by mother and daughter. Expressions have strong family’s gabby style, and the incoherent speech also adhere to the female body physiological characteristics. Women bear the family responsibility of the educating child, the role decides her unique way of expression. So when they communicate with children and education them, mother often adopts story telling form. This kind of speech likes harmony drizzle, sometimes their address is euphemistic and mincemeat. Thus it is full of female clever glamour. Amy Tan’s mother often told her some stories about her grandmother during her grew up. In the fiction, it is natural for her to use the women unique narrative rhythm and intonation. On this point, in the author’s writing: She gives the Chinese women who suffered aphasia a chance to speak for themselves and break the long-term silence, through the female voice, they speak out a woman’s feelings, to challenge the patriarchal discourse.

In the novel, Jing Mei woo say

Her mother told her Kweilin story when she was bored, when there was nothing to do, when every bowl hand been washed and the Formica table had been wiped down twice, when my father sat reading the newspaper and smoking one Pall Mall cigarette after another, a warning not to disturb him. This is when my mother would take out a box of old skin sweaters sent to us by unseen relatives from Vancouver. She would snip the bottom of a sweater and pull out a kinky thread of yarn, anchoring it to a piece of cardboard. And as she began to roll with one sweeping rhythm, she would start her story. Over the years,

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

It is obvious that her mother is more than once to speak without any order because of the different endings; and most of the story and discourse are not finished at a time because of mother’s housework. In this story, Jing Mei Woo’s father played the traditional role, the one has the absolute authority and his personal time cannot be disturbed without his permission. Woman was considered to be less important than man and her feelings and ideas cannot be spoken out freely. So the author stands woman’s side and makes it possible by communicating with their daughter. This belongs to female writer’s writing style.

CONCLUSION

Amy Tan who was influenced by both Chinese and American cultures wrote the book about four pairs of mothers and daughters on the base of her own experience. This paper analysis the work’s content, language, narrative point of view, and narrative voice and find out female narrative features. One hand, In male’s history, female are marginal and the others, patriarchal society give women no rights to remark, the author satisfied the women’s desire, thus all the stories be told by women; the other hand, women are always restricting to home, housework and children, its narrative style is always fragment and pieces, because they have no personal time and space, they are always disturbed by all kinds of family trifles. Thus, narrative features obviously own the female characteristics.

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