

Constructive Confrontations: Concept of Yin Yang through Intertextuality in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

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Abstract

Taoist philosophy is deeply rooted in contemporary China. China has a rich tradition of creation of myth. A third creation myth relates that out of primeval vapour, the two cosmic forces of *Yin* and *Yang* emerged. The fourth myth gives more details about the cosmic forces of *Yin* and *Yang*. Taoists, who developed countless formulas and practices, restore the people's complete *Yang* energy to the physical body. This effort, however, made them shift away from the classical ideal of adaptation to the course of nature and attempt a reversal of the natural flow towards death. Thus, the ideal *Yin Yang* as complementary, which implied the alternation of life and death, changed into a desire for the victory of life giving *Yang* over *Yin*. The novel *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan is dealt in Taoist perspective, especially the concept of *Yin Yang*. It is more fully integrated into the structure and content of the novel. The structure of the novel is cyclical. Changes often occur in cycles. The novel deals with eight characters, their life circle and the cycle. The characters represent *Yin* at some point of their life. The guidance of experienced people in the novel help the inexperienced people to find their *Yang* which must be rooted when they are born. As in Julia Kristeva's outlooks of Intertextuality texts imbibe the notions or anecdotes or allusions from previous text or texts. The focal point of this paper is that the theory of *Yin Yang* and its impact in the novel of Tan is nothing but the core point of Intertextuality which is the persuasive tool in writing.

Keywords: *Taoism, China, Yin Yang, Intertextuality, The Joy Luck Club.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Author and the Novel Introduction

One of the lucky minorities of American novelists, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* had garnered enthusiastic reviews. The first novel had sold an astonishing 275,000 hardcover copies upon its 1989 publication. The success of Tan's book increased publishers' willingness to gamble on first book by Asian American writers.

Tan's parents wanted her to be a doctor and a concert pianist. She secretly dreamed of becoming an artist. She began writing fiction when she was 33. Her first short story was published when she was 34, and three years later, she published her first book, a collection of short stories called *The Joy Luck Club*, which the critics reviewed as a novel and it made a major impact in the world of publishing.

1.2 *The Joy Luck Club* – An Overview

The Joy Luck Club hit the New York Times best-seller list and stayed there for nine months longer than any other book that year. It had won the National Book Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Award in 1989.

The novel is a collection of sixteen interrelated stories, centered the diverse emotional relationships of four different mother/daughter pairs. The novel has a balanced structure; this is appropriate because the Chinese value balance and harmony. There are four sections, and there are four tales within each section. The four sections and tales parallel the four directions, which have symbolic value for the Chinese. The novel has extra-marital love affairs, food, laughter, blood, faith, fate, twins, chess, superstition, elopement and much more. The four sections in the novel introduce the theme of each section.

“Feathers from a Thousand Li Away” has the feel of a fairy tale. It is about the mothers’ hope for their daughters and about transformation, “the swan that becomes more than was hoped for” (Tan 18). The feather is the mothers’ Chinese heritage, which they want to pass on to their daughters. This section gives us the mothers’ stories in China.

“The Twenty-Six malignant Gates” introduces the mothers’ protectiveness, which is expressed in warnings. The daughters ignore the warnings, to their own harm. This section presents the daughters’ childhood traumas and development and their lack of communication with their mothers.

“American Translation” refers to the American daughters as the reflections of their Chinese mothers; hence they are translations. The daughters in their adulthood discover that their mothers’ warnings were right and valid.

“Queen Mother of the Western Skies” states mothers are the Queen Mother, the daughters should listen them. The mothers, who lose their innocence through their terrible sufferings, never lose hope for their daughters. The living mothers and daughters come to an understanding, and there is hope for the daughters and their relationship with their mothers; Jing-Mei completes her relationship with her dead mother and experiences her Chinese identity.

2. Taoism

2.1 Chinese Writings

Viewing Chinese Literature is vital to know the value of Chinese writings. The oldest extant works written in late Chou Dynasty (1027-256 BC), although written records are dated from 1400 BC. Important early works including *Wu*

Ching, traditionally attributed to Confucius, made up of five books on chronology. *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang-Tzu* are associated with Taoism.

2.2 Eastern Religions

In east, there are five perpetual religions. They are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Zen. They recognize the individuality of things, but at the same time they are aware that all differences and contrasts are relative within all-embracing unity. The polar opposites and the unity are seen as one of the highest aims of man in the spiritual traditions of the East. In Taoism, the key concept of this idea is notified as *Yin Yang*.

2.3 Taoism and *Yin Yang*

Taoism is a nature-based philosophy and it has its own principles. They are divided as four: Oneness, Dynamic Balance, Cyclic Growth and Harmonious Action. These are the qualities of *Yin Yang*. Since ancient times, there has been a belief in China that all things in the world and their interaction consist of two opposite aspects --*Yin* and *Yang*. For example: male and female, sun and moon, bright and dark, order and chaos and so on. *Yin Yang* is one of the most fundamental concepts of Taoism.

The originator of Taoism is Lao Tzu, whose name literally means the 'old master'. He is the traditional author of *Tao Te Ching*, 'The scripture of the way and its efficacy'. This book is the foundational text of Taoism and it contains many proverbs and paradoxical statements. The second important sacred text is the *Chuang-Tzu* by Chuang Tzu or 'Master Chuang'. It contains stories and anecdotes and philosophy and it remains the Bible of Taoism.

The principal characteristic of the Tao is the cyclic nature of its ceaseless motion and change. The idea of cyclic patterns in the motion of the Tao is given a definite structure by the introduction of the polar opposites *Yin* and *Yang*. They are the two poles, which set the limits for the cycles of change: "The *yang* having reached its climax retreats in favour of the *yin*; the *yin* having reached its climax retreats in favour of the *yang*". (Capra 118)

3 Principle in Novel

3.1 Reflections of *Yin Yang* in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

The novel *The Joy Luck Club* consists of eight different characters, eight different past and present situations. At some point in their life, they are all young, innocent, weak and subservient. All the mothers end up having a tragic youth experience, which scars them emotionally for life. It seems they also could not prevent their daughters from avoiding this stereotypical trap but the vibrant polarity of *Yin Yang* changes them to explore the dynamic polarities in personality.

Overtly, the novel examines the diverse and intricate relationships involve in four daughter/mother pairs; however, the sense of harmony, balance and acceptance

saturate the tale as well. The idea of change as accommodating the past and the present is a facet of *Yin Yang* philosophy.

The mothers use self-affirmation and individual empowerment to emphasize strength in China where they are rendered invisible, powerless and voiceless. They emotionally pack these stories for their daughters to illustrate their history and to emphasize the differences in America. The voices of mothers are again silenced in America so integration and balance remain allusive to the mothers.

As a mother and as a Chinese, Suyuan is sure that her daughter is a failure in the eyes of all but she will inculcate her best quality in future just because she is good. She presents her a jade pendant on a gold chain to mean her that she is worth something. Suyuan's usual sayings about good and bad make no sense for June, so she thinks, "she always said things that didn't make sense, that sounded both good and bad at the same time" (Tan 208). But it means the concept of *Yin Yang* that everyone has their *Yin* outwardly but inwardly their thoughts are filled with *Yang*. Suyuan wants to retain the good of Chinese customs and cleave to the advantages of American life. Unfortunately, as in *Yin Yang*, one is intertwined and a part of the other, best qualities of both cultures would not go together.

The opening words of Waverly's narration are significant: "I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength" (Tan 89). The invisible strength is nothing but the quality of *Yang*, which exists in every human being. Her mother, Lindo dreams herself a lot for her daughter, which has taken as an advantage in the eyes of her daughter. She also realizes, "It is my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (Tan 254)

An-Mei Hsu is noted as an old-fashioned woman but her thoughts are fresh like the concept *Yin Yang* because it means day-to-day life: as Elizabeth Cummins Cogell says, "change is eternal, reality is process" (157). She learns a lot from her mother's life especially the quality of opposite pairs. Her mother is weak, cannot raise her voice but she is a Chinese, she knows to handle life with the beliefs.

An-Mei is a symbol *Yin* to her daughter Rose but after her brother's death in sea, Rose could see her mother's *Yang* which makes to take steps to find out her blood, her son, Rose says, "I wondered the whole time as we drove to the beach how she had learned to drive overnight" (Tan 127). An-Mei feels bad over her daughter's marriage down fall and thinks that she was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness. But she teaches her daughter the opposite; still Rose came out the same way.

The daughter of Ying-Ying is not having prosperous marriage life, which reflects her mother's past. The experience instructs her, the eminent concept as it applies to women and men being equals. "For woman is *Yin* the darkness within, where untempered passions lie. And man is *Yang*, bright truth lightening our minds" (Tan 81). This begins Ying-Ying's estrangement from truth Taoism, weakening her Taoist perspective that would help her to deal with the grief in her life.

In the novel, the daughters embrace the *Yin Yang* of the Chinese and American cultural heritage and discover a balance. When June reunites with her half-sisters and their union is registered in a Polaroid photo. As the three girls watch the picture, Jing Mei is able to see that her mother really is inside of her, as she is inside her sisters and all is balanced at last; the circle of mirrored relationships is completed. Undoubtedly it is the heart of *Yin Yang* philosophy. She completes her novel by completing her balance in harmony.

Waverly Jong is mistaken her mother and she has taken the concept of *Yin Yang* with American eyes. Through her experiences, she states in the end, “I could finally see what was really there: An old woman, a work for her armour, getting a little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in”. It shows her acceptance of *Yin Yang* in Chinese connotation.

Rose Hsu’s change is the best example for the concept *Yin Yang*, in the end, Rose found her own voice and became able to speak for herself. She strongly announced Ted; “You can’t just pull me out of your life and throw me away” (Tan 196). Her decision of not to give divorce as Ted’s wish, is a fine twist, which focuses the cycle and the inter-transformation of *Yin Yang*.

Lena’s childhood lessons are occupied with the philosophical ideas especially the importance of achieving balance in life. When Ying-Ying is about to deliver her second child, she talks to Lena about the heaviness around her, about things being out of her balance, not in harmony with one another.

3.2 Tan’s explicit effects of *Yin Yang*

There is a perception; especially in the West, that *Yin* and *Yang* corresponds to good and evil. But Taoist philosophy generally discounts good/bad distinctions and prefers the idea of balance. This is what Amy Tan has portrayed in her novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Even the topics offered by Tan for her tales in the novel are referring the importance of *Yin Yang*. Under the topic, “The Red Candle”, she exposes the belief in things like candle that too the opposite ends refer to man and woman, which should fuse together and reveals the significant combination of *Yin* and *Yang*. Then the topics like “Half and Half”, “Rules of the Game”, “The voice from the wall” and “Two Kinds” for the daughters’ narration is the symbol that the daughters either follows American culture and way of life or accepts Chinese culture and way of life.

Again “Four Directions” and “Best Quality” recommend that the daughters are inculcating the broad mind to visualize things around them and they start to practice, which is best and helpful for them. In the fourth section, the tale’s name “Double Face” explicates the theme of the novel and the intention of the author to stretch out the old but everlasting ideology *Yin* and *Yang*.

4. Features of Intertextuality in *The Joy Luck Club*

4.1 The preamble of Intertextuality

These correlations between the novel *The Joy Luck Club* and the *Yin Yang* could be deemed in the perspective of the exceptional theory, 'Intertextuality'. In 1966, the literary device 'Intertextuality' was introduced to the literary world, the credit extended to the distinctive Bulgarian-French semiotician, Julia Kristeva. Kristeva coined this term to generate the idea that a text can be looked on and explored with the spectacle of another text. The word 'Intertextuality' had been derived from the Latin *intertexto* which meant the intermingling while weaving. According to Kristeva's essays such as "Word, Dialogue and Novel", literary materials and the concept of a text were the upshots of another literary material. There was no need for the author to be conscious of another text influence and at the same time, writers made note of another text to sculpt their own text.

4.2 Text within Text

Obligatory, optional and accidental are the three types Intertextuality. The spotlight of this paper is that the remarkable writer Amy Tan's background and her origin are the inevitable sources to substantiate her employment of 'obligatory' Intertextuality; it denotes the writers' intentional likeness of his/her texts with other text/texts. Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California. Both of her parents were Chinese immigrants, finally settled in Santa Clara. Her father, John, is an electrical engineer and also a Baptist minister. Her mother, Daisy, had left behind a secret past, including three daughters in China and the ghost of her mother, who had killed herself when Daisy was nine. The Tan family belonged to a small social group called The Joy Luck Club, whose families enacted the immigrant version of the American Dream.

The trip in 1987 to China was a revelation for Tan. It gave her a new perspective on her often-difficult relationship with her mother. Daisy reunited with her daughters in China and Tan met her half-sisters. This memorable experience inspired her to complete the book of stories she had promised to Giles, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). She dedicated her fabulous work to her mother.

In the novel, at last women learn to speak out, be strong and to find power. They are not only released from their sorrow but also able to change their lives as a result. Each daughter, through their listening of mothers' tales is able to expand their *Yin* and embrace their *Yang*. Therefore, this metaphor of *Yin Yang* permeates every level of the novel which draws attention to the considerable function of obligatory Intertextuality.

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