Chapter 4

The Joyluck Club

The Joyluck Club, a novel by Amy Tan provides yet another perspective of the conflicts and problems of self-identity faced by individuals caught between the seemingly irreconcilable worlds of modern American values and Chinese traditions. Tan’s novel however, details this dilemma through the fictional life histories of four mothers and their Chinese American daughters.

Nevertheless, it becomes my concern now to ascertain how the philosophy of Confucius works to circumscribe the positions of women in Chinese society. This is to enable us to understand the motivations of the protagonists in Tan’s novel, in particular the mothers, who create their own personal connections with their own mothers as well as daughters as a means of what Janet Ng defines as “proof of a woman’s breaking through to her own space.” (7).
Confucianism, "a patriarchal religious tradition" (Kelleher 135), in essence derives its principles from the idea of "cosmic order" (135). This harmonious arrangement of things relies on the complementarity or what would be considered the interdependence, of opposite forces in nature. It is an idea that encompasses the belief that while all things in the natural world have their own characteristics, it is the very act of fulfilling their own nature which allows them to complement one another and achieve total harmony. Therefore, the logic deduced from this philosophical belief is that if the sun has its passage during the day, the moon has hers during the night. Consequently, all phenomena in nature, including the structure of human societies as well as human interactions are relational and that nothing stands in isolation:

The call of the human community is not to worship Heaven and earth, but to learn from them, imitate their behaviour, and thus form a human order modeled upon the cosmic order (personal emphasis). ... everything in life is relational. Nothing comes into being in isolation and nothing survives in isolation... The third aspect of the cosmic order which impressed the Confucians was the orderly fashion in which it worked, with harmony rather than conflict prevailing among its parts. Each part seemed patterned to work for the good of the whole and yet at the same time to realize its own nature (personal emphasis). (Kelleher 136 – 7)
Interestingly, Theresa Kelleher views the Confucian world order as an organic entity which is structured and hierarchical in nature. It is this dichotomy that fosters the concept of being ‘‘separate’’ but equal. Being separate refers to the separate and highly specific roles and functions that women and men in Chinese society have. Equality here is relevant to the adherence and fulfillment of the roles and functions, concertedly achieving balanced harmony and stability in society. Thus, because the nature of the feminine is yielding, dark, receptive and weak like the earth; women are best suited to roles and functions within the home.

According to Kelleher:

[from this cosmic pattern it was deduced that the position of women in the human order should be lowly and inferior like the earth, and that the proper behaviour for a woman was to be yielding and weak, passive and still like the earth. It was left for men to be active and strong, to be initiators like Heaven. Though men were considered superior, they could not do without women as their complementary opposites. (140)]

Translated into Confucian rites and ritual, women are exclusively bound to the life cycle roles of daughter, wife and mother within the family. Men, meanwhile, expand their energy in the wider sociopolitical sphere. Kelleher succinctly clarifies the positions of men and women when she says that ‘‘[i]f the Confucian calling for men was ‘the way of sages’ (sheng-tao), for women it was ‘the wifely way’ (fu-
Being the ideal wife together with the adjunct roles of daughter-in-law and mother becomes the epitome of achievement for women in Chinese society. Consequently, according to Heung:

[b]cause of their historical devaluation, women in the Chinese family are regarded as disposable property or detachable appendages despite their crucial roles in maintaining the family line through childbearing. Regarded as expendable "objects to be invested in or bartered," the marginal status of Chinese women shows itself in their forced transfer from natal families to other families through the practice of arranged marriage, concubinage, adoption, and pawning. The position of women as daughters, wives, and mothers in Chinese society is therefore markedly provisional, with their status and expendability fluctuating according to their families' economic circumstances, their ability to bear male heirs, and the proclivities of authority figures in their lives. (601)

What is more important is how Heung reveals that the roles of women in Chinese society are not only circumscribed but are objectified, making them commodities to be exchanged. Moreover, the status and position of women is arbitrary and not secure depending on what Heung has described as "economic circumstances, ability to bear male heirs, and the proclivities of authority figures in their lives."
(601). My next step then is to critically see how the practice of Confucian values have affected the protagonists in Tan’s novel.

The novel which comprises sixteen short histories “is a collage of interwoven stories told from the viewpoints of four Chinese mothers, members of the Joy Luck Club, a mah-jong club, and their Chinese-American daughters.” (Lew). Thus, the mother-daughter narratives, combined with the autobiographical element present in the use of the first person voice, produce multitudinous as well as fluid narratives where one mother’s story, experiences and interpretations of Chinese customary practices are in effect linked and interlaced with the respective daughter’s. Powerful and empowering, the use of the first person “I” narrative method personalizes each voice, giving each an individual character. Marina Heung calls this structure the “mother-daughter dyad” (598). Shirley Geok-lin Lim defines such narrative construction, shared by Asian Americans and Asian Canadian women writers, as one that depicts “multiple presences, ambivalent stories, and circular and fluid narratives.” (qtd. in Heung 597-8). What is more important however is how such a literary method points to a reclamation of the matriarchal through the circular life roles of the daughter and mother. Reclaiming the matriarchal is an assertion of the female individual and the mother-daughter bond. This in effect disclaims Maria-Regina Kech’s view that even though:

[w]riting about mother-daughter relations - in a largely autobiographical mode - generally assumes the force of self-
therapy, a purgative cure, a final attempt at dis- or recovering one's self, \[ \text{the hope that such writing entertains cannot be fulfilled} \] (personal emphasis)...the fictional treatment leads to different findings: the author comes to realize that reason and analytical reflection are ineffective when confronted with the very strong emotional and biological forces that characterize any mother-daughter relation. The conflict cannot be resolved through thought processes. This leaves us with the dilemma of a modern tragedy where the heroine is doomed to reproduce her mother, to be hopelessly caught in a cycle of transmitted identity. Thus she becomes the victim of a kind of socio-biological destiny, deprived of the power of free will. (108)

Granted that Kecht's opinion is formed from her study of mother-daughter relations in recent German women's fiction, her view nevertheless provides an interesting contrast to the positive affirmations of the mother-daughter relations depicted in the novel. Using the metaphor of mirror or mirror-image, Kecht sees maternal love as full of "the schizophrenic duality of submissive-rebellious behaviour on the part of the daughter [where] [s]adism and masochism convert the family nest into a prison full of mirrors without exit." (109). Taking a largely Freudian stand, Kecht feels that the mother-daughter relations as depicted in German novels are "pathological" with the mother as mostly the obsessive oppressor and the daughter as a victim who will eventually turn oppressor when
she in turn becomes a mother. In contrast, Amy Tan’s *The Joy luck Club* celebrates mother-daughter relations where the telling of the individual’s experience is an alternative way of asserting as well as reclaiming matrilineage. Therefore, to trace and acknowledge one’s mother or even ancestress parallels, and offers an option to, the Confucian emphasis on patrilineage and the tracing of one’s ancestral descent from the father.

However, it is the Confucian exhortation to be the faithful and loyal wife and mate that acts as the catalyst for the anguished histories of the mothers in *The Joy luck Club*. The Book of Rites and Ceremonies as the repository of proper Confucian rituals postulates that:

*By the united action of heaven and earth all things spring up.*

*Thus the ceremony of marriage is the beginning of a (line that shall last for a) myriad age.* (Personal emphasis). The parties are of different surnames; thus those who are distant are brought together, and the separation (to be maintained between those who are of the same surname) is emphasised. There must be sincerity in the marriage presents; and all communications (to the woman) must be good. She should be admonished to be upright and sincere.*

*Faithfulness is requisite in all service of others, and faithfulness is (specially) the virtue of a wife. Once mated with her husband, all her life she will not change (her feeling of*
duty to him). And hence when the husband dies she will not marry (again). (personal emphasis)

(Li Chi 1: 439)

Marriage, as stated in the Book of Rites and Ceremonies is a sacrosanct event that seeks to join men and women together in compliance with the harmonious union of heaven and earth. Because woman is symbolized by earth she is thus subordinated to the authority of the man, which is given priority by the Book of Rites and Ceremonies that says:

[the gentleman went in person to meet the bride, the man taking the initiative and not the woman, according to the idea that regulates the relation between the strong and the weak (in all nature). It is according to this same idea that heaven takes precedence of earth, (personal emphasis) and the ruler of the subject. (Li Chi 1: 440)]

It is thus the cultural practice of marriage and the associated idea that women should be weakly compliant to the authority of their husbands that results in the various hardships faced by the characters in Tan's book. An-mei Hsu's account of her mother's experience details the social consequences of what is judged by society as the lapse of strict adherence to the behavioural patterns of the Confucian ideal of the filial wife. Narrated by Yan Chang, her mother's maid, An-
mei finds out how her mother was forced to become the fourth wife and third concubine of Wu Tsing after travelling to a local shrine to Hangzhou in fulfillment of her duties as the faithful widow and in order to affirm her determination to be a good wife and mother:

Five years ago — ...she and I went to Hangchow to visit the Six Harmonies Pagoda. So your mother kowtowed in the pagoda, pledging to observe the right harmony of body, thoughts, and speech... And when we boarded the boat to cross the lake again, we sat opposite a man and a woman. This was Wu Tsing and Second Wife... Even in her white widow's clothes she was beautiful! But because she was a widow, she was worthless in many respects. She could not remarry (personal emphasis)... [Second Wife] was anxious to quiet Wu Tsing's outside appetite. So she conspired with Wu Tsing to lure your mother to his bed (personal emphasis) ... The next night, after a long evening of mah jong, Second Wife yawned and insisted your mother stayed the night... As your mother slept soundly in Second Wife's bed, Second Wife got up in the middle of the night and left the dark room, and Wu Tsing took her place. When your mother awoke to find him touching her beneath her undergarments, she jumped out of bed. He grabbed her by her hair and threw her on the floor, then put his foot on her throat and told her to undress... In the early
morning, she left in a rickshaw, her hair undone and with tears streaming down her face. She told no one but me what happened.

**But Second Wife complained to many people about the shameless widow who had enchanted Wu Tsing into bed. How would a worthless widow accuse a rich woman of lying?** (personal emphasis) (233)

What is more revealing from the above tragic account is how the woman has to bear the burden of upholding and conforming to the Confucian ideal – she must be chaste and faithful to her dead husband, both physically as well as spiritually. A woman without the protection of a husband becomes easy prey for the selfish manipulation of Wu Tsing’s lust and his shrewd Second Wife. Cunningly assessing social taboos for widows and the double standards displayed towards men and women in the sensitive matter of rape, she manages to maneuver An-mei’s mother into becoming Wu Tsing’s fourth wife. As Yan Chang reveals:

So when Wu Tsing asked your mother to be his third concubine, to bear him a son. What choice did she have? She was already as low as a prostitute. And when she returned to her brother’s house and kowtowed three times to say good-bye, her brother kicked her, and her own mother banned her from the family house forever. That is why you did not see your mother again until your grandmother died. Your mother went to live in Tientsin, to hide her shame with
Wu Tsing's wealth. And three years later, she gave birth to a son, which Second Wife claimed as her own. (234)

Social prejudices and biases together with the over-riding importance of family honour does not allow An-mei's mother to find redress, justice nor understanding. Her personal anguish is poignantly expressed in her angry outburst to An-mei:

    She was crying now, rambling like a crazy woman: "You can see now, a fourth wife is less than a fifth wife. An-mei, you must not forget. I was a first wife, yi tai, the wife of a scholar. Your mother was not always Fourth wife, Sz Tai!" (225)

Thus, An-mei's mother has become the unwitting as well as unwilling victim of the austere code of Confucian behaviour for women.

Matrimony for Lindo Jong however, takes the form of arranged marriage at the age of two. As Lindo herself narrates:

So, Taiyuanese mothers continued to choose their *daughters-in-law, ones who would raise proper sons, care for the old people, and faithfully sweep the family burial ground long* (personal emphasis) after the old ladies had gone to their graves.
Because I was promised to the Huangs' son for marriage, my own family began treating me as if I belonged to somebody else (personal emphasis). My mother would say to me when the rice bowl went up to my face too many times, "Look how much Huang Taitai's daughter can eat."

My mother did not treat me this way because she didn't love me. She would say this biting back her tongue, so she wouldn't wish for something that was no longer hers. (personal emphasis) (43)

Marriage is considered as a form of contractual transaction which two families would agree to for mutually practical benefits. What is inherently revealed by Lindo's account is how a 'good' daughter-in-law is one who can perform the various tasks of running a household as well as up-keeping the rituals and ceremonies required in the worship of the ancestors in an efficient manner. Since domestic and reproductive abilities are the prerequisites for the marriage agreement, the woman is best considered and used as a commodity to be exchanged. The most obvious consequence of arranged marriage is the profound change in the family dynamics of the woman's natal family. Once the betrothal contract is secured, the family begins treating Lindo like a guest who will eventually leave. Family ties are completely severed when floods devastate Lindo's parents' wheat crop. The family leaves to live elsewhere while Lindo joins the Huang's household as their little daughter-in-law. Under the guise of
training her to be a good wife, Mrs. Huang exploits Lindo and uses her like a
domestic servant:

"How can a wife keep her husband's household in order if she has
never dirtied her own hands", Huang Taitai used to say as she
introduced me to a new task....

Another time, she told a servant to show me how to clean a
chamber pot: "Make her put her own nose to the barrel to make
sure it's clean." That was how I learned to be an obedient wife....

"Can you see how the Huangs almost washed their thinking
into my skin? I came to think of Tyan-yu as a god, someone whose
opinions were worth much more than my own life. I came to think
of Huang Taitai as my real mother, someone I wanted to please,
someone I should follow and obey without question."

The result of this domestic regiment systematically brainwashes the young
Lindo into believing that her life is set as Tyan-yu's obedient wife.

The first marriage for Ying-ying St. Clair nevertheless, is harsh and
devastating in its effect on her personality. Unlike both An-mei's mother and
Lindo, Ying-ying comes from a wealthy and privileged family. Spoiled, pampered
and loved, Ying-ying herself says:
[w]hen I was a young girl in Wushi, I was lihai. Wild and stubborn. I wore a smirk on my face. Too good to listen. I was small and pretty. I had tiny feet which made me very vain. (241)

However, she loses her “lihai” or her spirited nature when she is married to a brutal man who equates deflowering her to the cutting open of a watermelon or what he calls kai gwa. As Ying-ying confesses in her monologue:

Yes, it is true I was a wild girl, but I was innocent. I did not know what an evil thing he did when he cut open that watermelon. I did not understand until six months later when I was married to this man and he hissed drunkenly to me that he was ready to kai gwa.(243)

What is clearly indicated is how women are often regarded as sexual objects and challenges for men. What is more important to note is that Confucian nuptial rites demand that the woman must remain faithful and obedient to the authority of the husband. This would mean that Ying-ying would have to stoically endure her husband’s philandering as well as promiscuous nature. Nevertheless, her love, honour and pride are devastated when she is abandoned by her husband for an opera singer. An-mei’s mother, Lindo, as well as Ying-ying are women who become unsuspecting victims of the social practices of marriage that radically
remake their family relationships, resulting in circumstances that culminate in their eventual immigration to America.

Thus, the mothers' (An-mei, Lindo, Su-yuan and Ying-ying) move to America is an important event which clearly indicates a radical break with traditional values and ways of life. It also indicates their longing and hope for a better future metaphorically symbolized by the poignant tale entitled "Feathers from a thousand li away". The content of the tale itself bares the conscious transference of the mothers' hopes to their daughters. The daughters, in essence become the projections of their mothers' hopes and lost opportunities:

On her journey she cooed to the swan: "In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan — a creature that became more than what was hoped for. (7)

Imbued with magical overtones, the story of the duck that became a swan becomes a wishful fairytale when the practical realities of American life intrude in the form of immigration procedures that confiscated the swan (7) and the daughter
who grew up "...speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow." (7) It is the mothers' need to impart the legacy of their cultural experiences in view of the overwhelming force of American materialism to their daughters that sparks off the deliberate telling of their experiences.

This telling has several consequences for the daughters and the mothers in particular. The mothers, through telling, not only transcend their suppressive circumstances but more importantly, are able to reassert their individualities. Moreover, the telling allows the mothers to reclaim their lost bonds with their own mothers, thus attesting to the cyclical nature of the mother-daughter bond. In effect, this puts them in unique cultural positions bridging the present and the past, allowing them sensitive perceptions of their daughters' problems. An-mei, in her frustrated vehemence at her daughter, Rose's helpless and passive reaction to her divorce, recounts the story of her own mother who committed suicide in order to give An-mei herself a stronger spirit (237). Thus, by appropriating Chinese superstitious belief and the idea of repaying a debt, An-mei's mother breaks free of the constraining life of a concubine by dying so that An-mei herself breaks free of the Confucian belief in passivity as an ideal trait for women by learning how to shout (237). According to An-mei:

...she whispered to me that she would rather kill her own spirit so she could give me a stronger one.
Because we both knew this: that on the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. In my mother’s case, this would be the first day of the lunar new year. And because it is the new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow.

So on that day, Wu Tsing, fearful of my mother’s vengeful spirit...promised her visiting ghost that he would raise Syaudi and me as his honoured children. He promised to revere her as if she had been First Wife, his only wife.

And on that day, I showed Second Wife the fake pearl necklace she had given me and crushed it under my foot...

And on that day, I learned to shout. (237)

For Ying-ying however, her need to tell her daughter, Lena of her own experiences as a mother stems from her perceptive observations of Lena, who is leading a superficial and shallow life buffered only by her trappings of material wealth (60). Ying-ying’s acute understanding of the nature of the mother-daughter bond is communicated by her acknowledgement that despite the bond between Lena and her, Lena is her own person. It is this that precipitates her need to tell Lena and save her from a meaningless life:

I think this to myself even though I love my daughter. She and I have shared the same body. There is a part of her mind that is part
of mine. But when she was born, she sprang from me like a slippery fish, and has been swimming away ever since. And 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. (240)

Ying-ying learns to rise above her hidden guilt by revealing how she took the drastic measure of aborting the unborn child of her first husband after the revelation of his infidelity and abandonment. In the process of her personal revelation, she manages to reclaim her ‘lihai’ (aggressive) and ‘chuming’ (cunning intelligence) nature, shedding the personality of the frightened old lady that she has become:

So this is what I will do, I will gather together my past and look. I will see a thing that has already happened. The pain that cut my spirit loose. I will hold that pain in my hand until it becomes hard and shiny, more clear. And then my fierceness can come back, my golden side, my black side. I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter’s tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her my spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter. (250)
Interestingly, Ying-ying equates the recovery of both her daughter’s and her own spirit to restoring the essentially strong as well as fearful nature of the tiger, the Chinese animal year in which both mother and daughter were born. This acts as a means to confront her past guilt and fears.

In Lindo’s case, it is through her need to keep her promise to her mother to be a good daughter-in-law that she learns to escape her first marriage by a ruse. She overcomes her fear on her wedding day and rediscovers her inner strength and worth:

I wiped my eyes and looked in the mirror. I was surprised at what I saw. I had on a beautiful red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see, that no one could ever take away from me. I was like the wind.

I threw my head back and smiled proudly to myself...I made a promise to myself; I would always remember my parents’ wishes, but I would never forget myself. (51)

Thus, by clever manipulation, she manages to convinced Huang Taitai that the pregnant servant girl is only Ty-an-yu’s true wife and releases herself from a suffocating marriage while saving her mother’s “face” or honour. More importantly, Lindo’s catalyst for reminiscing about her past is her daughter’s
pending remarriage. The recollection of her first marriage together with the reaffirmation of her close bond to her mother causes Lindo to acutely perceive the egoistically American nature of her daughter Waverly who doesn't seem to value and honour promises:

I once sacrificed my life to keep my parents' promise. This means nothing to you, because to you promises mean nothing. A daughter can promise to come to dinner, but if she has a headache, if she has a traffic jam, if she wants to watch a favorite movie on TV, she no longer has a promise. (41)

Lindo's reflections have allowed her to become aware of the cultural assimilation that her daughter has undergone. Lindo realizes that the above is a consequence of her idealistic wish for the best for Waverly. In Waverly's unnecessary fear of being too "Chinese" when planning for a honeymoon to China, Lindo ironically observes:

....How can she think she can blend in? Only her skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside – she is all American-made.

It's 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?(252)
lindo's observations nonetheless have far-reaching results for herself when she realizes that her own immigration to America and her subsequent social adaptations for survival purposes have effected her own acculturations:

I think about our two faces. I think about my intentions. Which one is American? Which one is Chinese? Which one is better? If you show one, you must always sacrifice the other. (266)

lindo's position is unique as she is aware that her own character now has elements from both the Chinese and American cultures. The cultural symbiosis at she has obtained results in her questioning of how much of Chinese cultural aspects she has lost. Lindo finally surmises that her understanding can only be achieved by communicating with her daughter (266).

Su-yuan's situation however, differs markedly from the rest as her radical alignment of familial relationships is caused by the advent of war. Separated from her first husband, she eventually loses her twin daughters while fleeing Gui in. Moreover, her life-story is narrated by June, her daughter who is requested to keep her place at the mah jong table after her death. It is then through June and continuing search for her lost sisters that the story of Su-yuan begins to unravel. Thus, the need to tell their life-histories reveals the way in which the others have reconfigured relationships in particular with their daughters in
America to replace the severed traditional ties that they left behind in China. What is forged however, is the unique bond amongst the mothers.

This bond among the mothers is manifested in the motivations behind the founding of Joyluck Club itself. According to June, Su-yuan Woo, her mother, upon meeting the Hsus, the Jongs, and the St. Clairs in church instinctively realizes the women's need:

My mother could sense that **the women of these families also had unspeakable tragedies they had left behind in China and hopes they couldn't begin to express in their fragile English.** (personal emphasis) Or at least, my mother recognized the numbness in these women's faces. And she saw how quickly their eyes moved when she told them her idea for the Joy Luck Club.

Joy Luck was an idea my mother remembered from the days of her first marriage in Kweilin, before the Japanese came. (9)

Su-yuan herself, during one of her reminiscences, describes to June the motivations for setting up the mah-jong club:

My idea was to have a gathering of four women, one for each corner of my mah-jong table. I knew which women I wanted to ask. They were all young like me, with wishful faces...
Each week one of us would host a party to raise money and to raise our spirits...

It's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. **We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable...What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness?** (personal emphasis)

So we decided to hold parties and pretend each week had become the new year. **Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us. We weren't allowed to think a bad thought. We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties **Joy Luck.** (personal emphasis) (12 – 14)

The mah-jong club becomes a haven of hope for the mothers as well as an avenue for them to reconstruct and share their past with each other. The positive attitude generated by the mothers' telling and reinventing their past experiences reveals their need to give themselves and their daughters hope for the future.
The daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*, namely June Woo, Rose Hsu, Waverly Jong and Lena St. Clair are important to the understanding of the mother-daughter dyad and the circular narrative links connecting them all. A critical analysis of the daughters’ reactions and interpretations of their respective mothers’ Chinese cultural experiences allows us understanding of the various levels of acceptance, rejection or even assimilation of the maternal experiences. Furthermore, the depictions of the daughters’ responses allow for comparative contrasts of the different levels of cultural symbiosis achieved by the individual characters, beginning with June Woo, who is asked to take her mother, Su-yuan Woo’s place at the mah jong table. The physical replacement takes on emotive and spiritual nuances as June is forced, through her interactions with the other aunties of the club, to reexamine her relationship with her mother. In a moment of awareness, June realizes that underneath the aunties’ appeals to her to continue the search for her half-sisters, is a desperate fear that the connections with their various daughters would be lost:

I hear more choruses of “Tell them, tell them” as each Auntie frantically tries to think what should be passed on.

“Her kindness.”

“Her smartness.”

“Her dutiful nature to family.”

“Her hopes, things that matter to her.”

“The excellent dishes she cooked.”
"Imagine, a daughter not knowing her own mother!"

And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds "joy luck" is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (31)

June now understands that:

[her] mother and [she] never really understood one another. [They] translated each other's meanings and [she] seemed to hear less than what was said, while [her] mother heard more. ...(27)

This linguistic and cultural translation creates misunderstanding and miscommunication between June and Su-yuan. Nevertheless, this translation does have positive effects in affirming the relationships between mothers and daughters, through what Heung has defined as "reclaiming language as an
instrument of intersubjectivity and dialogue, and as a medium of transmission from mothers to daughters.”(604). What is clearly important at this juncture is June’s realization that her mother’s constant aspirations for her to become a child star, a piano prodigy and even for her choosing the best crab during dinner for herself is in actual fact her desperate need to give June the best, as means of assuaging Su-yuan’s guilt at abandoning her twin daughters during the chaos of war. This is expressed through June’s Chinese name as explained by her father (282). Thus, June is to be the essence and hope of her two twin sisters (282). June’s process of re-examining her relationship with her mother reaches a complete circle when she recognizes the fact that there are elements of her mother within herself. This is clearly revealed in her encounter with her two sisters in which they all cry:

"Mama, Mama," we all murmur, as if she is among us.

My sisters look at me, proudly. “Meimei jandale,” says one sister proudly to the other. “Little Sister has grown up.” I look at their faces again and I see no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar. And now I see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go. (289)
For June, the recognition of the bond with her mother is interlaced with the search as well as acknowledgement of her Chinese heritage and identity discovered through her mother, Su-yuan, and her recently found sisters.

Rose Hsu's inability to make concrete and active decisions about her failed marriage as well as her difficult divorce proceedings precipitates her search for her identity and her connections with her mother, An-mei Hsu. Her powerlessness to take action appears to echo that of her grandmother, when the latter was forced to become the concubine of Wu-Tsing. Rose equates her hopeless pessimism about her marriage to the hopelessness and guilt caused by her inability to save her young brother from drowning:

I know now that I had never expected to find Bing, just as I know now I will never find a way to save my marriage. My mother tells me, though, that I should still try.

"What's the point?" I say. "There's no hope. There's no reason to keep trying."

"Because you must," she says. "This is not hope. Not reason. This is your fate. This is your life, what you must do."

"So what can I do?"

And my mother says, "you must think for yourself, what you must do. If someone tells you, then you are not trying."...
I think about Bing, how I knew he was in danger, how I let it happen. I think about my marriage, how I had seen the signs, really I had. But I just let I happen. And I think now that fate is shaped half by expectation, half by inattention. But somehow, when you lose something you love, faith takes over. You have to pay attention to what you lost. You have to undo the expectations. (124-5)

Rose’s attitude changes when she begins to ponder her mother’s reaction and complaint that her psychiatrist only manages to make her ‘hulihudu’(confused and foolish) and ‘heimongmong’(confused and unclear). Her mother’s ability to pinpoint her confusion and lack of mental clarity reflects what Heung has called the use of “hybrid language” to transmit ideas and points of view from mother to daughter (605). Nevertheless, Rose takes these cultural cues as a source of strength as well as realization to reach an understanding about her situation:

Back home, I thought about what she said. And it was true. Lately I had been feeling hulihudu. And everything around me seemed to be heimongmong. These were words I had never thought about in English terms. I suppose the closest in meaning would be “confused” and “dark fog.” (184)
For Rose, it is her recognition and acknowledgement of her Chinese heritage that allows her to recover from the psychological disembodiment caused by American rationalization (187-8). She forges a maternal tie with both her mother and grandmother when she reaches within herself to find the ‘nengkan’ or determination and courage to confront her husband.

Waverly Jong unlike Rose, June and Lena, is more egoistic and cleverly manipulative in nature. Life is a game, a chess game which she will play manipulating events as well as people to achieve her aims. As an interesting contrast to the rest of the daughters, Waverly represents the consequence of what would be deemed as total assimilation of the typically individualistic attitude and material way of life to be found in America. She views the cunning intelligence she has inherited from her mother as a strategic art “for winning arguments, respect from others.”(80) and thinks that Lindo’s “daily truths”(80) about American “rules” (85) are to help her rise above her circumstances. Thus, Waverly views her relationship with her mother as a sort of game in which she needs to ‘win’ her mother over to her side. By deliberately praising Su-yuan’s cooking, she uses her mother’s pride of her own cooking to invite Rich and herself over for dinner as a means of introducing her husband-to-be to her family and to announce her coming marriage to him. In her attempts to win her mother’s acceptance, Waverly fails to recognize or appreciate the frail yet intelligent person that is her mother. Nevertheless, it is in a tearful confrontation with her mother
that Waverly reaches an understanding that her need to win arises from her deep-seated insecurities:

I saw what I had been fighting for: It was for me, a scared child, who had run away a long time ago to what I had imagined was a safer place, behind my invisible barriers, I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was really there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in. (179)

What is inherently obvious in the above confession is how the competitive need to win in any situation becomes a “barrier” hiding Waverly’s insecure self. It is that momentary awareness that allows Waverly to view her mother as someone who is waiting for the “barrier” to fall so that she can communicate with her.

Lena, like Rose in many ways, begins to question her sham of an equal marriage with Harold when Ying-ying moves in to stay with her for a while. What is immediately obvious is how alike both mother and daughter are. Lena’s scared and fearful nature seems to have been derived from Ying-ying herself. Lena remembers how her childhood seems to have been imbued with hidden fears and
confusion about her mother’s mental health. Ying-ying, recovering from a still birth that triggered off her guilt at her deliberate abortion of her first child by her first husband, had been constantly drifting in and out of the reality of daily life. Lena confesses:

I always thought it mattered, to know what is the worst possible thing that can happen to you, to know how you can avoid it, to not be drawn by the magic of the unspeakable. Because, even as a young child, I could sense the unspoken terrors that surround our house, the ones that chased my mother until she hid in a secret dark corner of her mind. And still they found her, I watched, over the years, as they devoured her, piece by piece, until she disappeared and became a ghost. 

Her need for her mother is clearly expressed in the dream she has in which she manages to pull her mother back from the passive and ghost-like life that she has been leading (108). Thus, the presence of Ying-ying in Lena’s life acts as a catalyst to force Lena to confront and acknowledge certain realities about events and people she knows and or fears to confront. This indicates clearly the interdependent link between mother and daughter. Therefore, Ying-ying’s stay in Lena’s house allows Lena to realize how Harold, her husband, has been exploiting her and their marriage under the guise of equality. The reality of her shattered
marriage is incisively brought out by the account of Lena picking up the shards of glasses in the room she has put Ying-ying in:

And then I see my mother sitting by the window, her dark silhouette against the night sky. She turns around in her chair, but I can’t see her face.

"Fallen down," she says simply. She doesn’t apologize.

"It doesn’t matter," I say, and I start to pick up the broken glass shards. "I knew it would happen."

"Then why you don’t stop it?" asks my mother.

And it’s such a simple question. (159)

Ying-ying’s question seems to vibrate with the quiet strength that she wants to bequeath to Lena. Her quiet determination to wait for her daughter is reflected by the similar ending of her own account of how she knows Lena will come when she hears the vase drop:

I know a thing before it happens. She will hear the vase and table crashing to the floor. She will come up the stairs and into my room. Her eyes will see nothing in the darkness, where I am waiting between the trees. (251)
Such parallel narrations not only reveal the bond between Ying-ying and Lena but reminds us of the former’s promise to recuperate her lost tiger spirit which will be given back to her daughter.

The life-histories of the mothers and daughters in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* celebrate the reclamation of matriarchy which is effected through the mother-daughter dyad. More importantly, matriarchy is asserted as an alternative link of familial relationships for women. It also upholds the belief that self-identity consists of the often painful and difficult amalgamation of both the Chinese as well as American cultural heritages to create a cultural symbiosis that celebrates both cultures.