



# Reclaiming Women's Voices: A Feministic Interpretation of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* From An Empowerment Theory Perspective

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## Abstract

Literature is an exploration of empowering voices of the society; here is one such Chinese born American mothers' club: *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) that has the voice of grace and sacrifice. This novel was written by an American author, Amy Tan that discloses the voices of Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hus, Lindo Jong and Ying-ying St. Clair who relate their Chinese life in the United States and their challenging experiences as an immigrant. This story deals with various themes such identity, experience of immigrants and complicated family issues faced by Chinese mothers and American daughters. As said by Simone de Beauvoir, "...her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly", Tan has dealt the novel in a feministic point, in which the cruel nature of the man is revealed and the tragic lives of the women characters give us the actual understanding of how a life should be led in the diasporic community. This also reflects the power of the women's voice that gives hope, love, joy and luck to their daughters that made each one of them define their identity. This paper stresses the importance of the empowered voices of non-Americanised Chinese mothers from the "Feminist Literary Criticism" perspective. Those women strive to go for reconciliation of the self and peaceful coexistence to transform their lamentation into an acclamation of their own selves.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Self-Identity, Suppression, Freedom, Challenges, Power

## Introduction

Empowerment in a feministic lens, is an authority in which a woman can completely be in their own kind, it is a powerful process to become more optimistic and self-assured in managing her life and to claim the rights. The "empowerment theory" was introduced by an American psychologist, Julian Rappaport as the primary focus under the Community Psychology in an article "In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention" in the year 1981. According to him, it is about helping others and to

understand their own situation and gaining more power and showing grace and empathy to oneself.

This aspect is prominently found in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, which was written by an American writer Amy Ruth Tan in the year 1989. According to this novel, the unbearable pain a girl complains is not being seen and that is considered to be the worst experience that a woman could get from the society. Amy Tan stresses on this context and tells the readers that there is no worse possible thing than



being unheard. “We are lost, unseen and not seeing, unheard and not hearing, unknown by others” (Tan 143). She expresses this profound thought through the women characters in the novel.

This also depicts how women find their inner voice and their identity; this process of finding their inner self strengthens and helps them speak up their story. If one who has the capacity to tell their life and speak their mind, it is one of the best remedies they give to themselves and that further radiates power to the vulnerable. One such author whose writing speaks about the “silenced voices” is Amy Tan. She brings a new perspective for each woman character in the novel, and unites them into a single frame to represent the essence of life. Every character in the novel recreates their own life by sharing their experiences with the people around them who strives to support each other. Through recreation of the self, the mothers tend to get real meanings of their lives and pass on the values and Chinese culture to their children.

This also deals with the difficulty of the daughters in coping up with the American society and to fulfil the expectations of their Asian mothers and the mothers too struggle emotionally in the US and with their Americanised daughters. Tan’s novels inculcate the issues faced by the Chinese American women as she goes deep into the characters for the purpose of addressing their personal traumas and history. As a result of the shared experiences, the rising generation develops a sense of empathy towards their mothers and become aware of their dreams in America.

### Theoretical Framework

The descriptive methodology is used to analyse the novel *The Joy Luck Club* to get a clear idea on the feministic characteristics of the daughters and mothers. This further exhibits the role of the women in today’s world and their excelling nature in almost all the fields.

According to Julian Rappaport, it is said that considering people’s requirements, desires and virtues it is significant to make it influential and persuasive so that everyone will receive it rightly. The key aspect of his theory is to support the disempowered groups or individual to attain more strength to face their lives. According to him it’s an

intricate set up that includes skills, capabilities and dynamic perspective towards social change.

With respect to the Empowerment theory and the critical view of feminism, *The Joy Luck Club* deals with the lives of four mothers and their daughters. Their friendship grows in the club called “Joy Luck”. In the little constructed community of their own, the silence of each woman is broken and they get a new voice, which is an empowered voice. Each woman is supported by the other woman and they make sure everyone’s voices are heard. Tan expresses her mother’s view about America, that a person could be anything they wanted to be in America. Thus, Tan believes it is one such place that creates a self-empowered individual, who takes a complete responsibility of their life and make conscious choices.

### Character Analysis

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan explores a nuanced web of Chinese American women whose identities are influenced by cultural displacement, generational conflict, and societal expectations that is shaped by patriarchy, enabling a feminist interpretation that emphasises women’s agency amidst oppressive circumstances. Through narrative, the mothers retrieve muted voices, use memory as resistance, and declare empowerment after enduring patriarchal standards, abandonment, war and gendered expectations in China. Their daughters, directing their freedom and self-identity in American culture, Challenge traditional gender roles, rejecting submissiveness while striving for emotional independence and self-acceptance. Across both generations, female bonding and shared narrative space function as feminist tools of healing and empowerment, illustrating that self-identity develops not in isolation but through reclaiming personal history and redefining womanhood beyond traditional patriarchal confines.

**Voice:** In *The Joy Luck Club*, women find their voices as a way to push back against the silence forced on them by patriarchy. The immigrant mothers, who were once trapped by strict gender expectations and painful pasts in China, begin to share their stories not just to remember, but to heal. Through storytelling, they transform their private struggles



into shared strength, turning pain into wisdom and silence into connection. By speaking their truths to their daughters, they reclaim control over their own lives and identities. Their voices carry both memory and defiance, showing that telling one's story can be a deeply human act of survival and empowerment.

**Identity:** In the novel, the daughters grow up caught between two worlds Chinese traditions that ask for quiet obedience and American ideals that push them toward independence. They spend much of their lives trying to make sense of who they're supposed to be, especially while carrying the emotional burdens their mothers never had the chance to name. As they face this inherited pain and begin to question the rules they were raised with, they slowly shape identities that feel true to them. Instead of living for approval or fulfilling someone else's idea of a "good daughter" or a "good woman," they learn to trust their own worth. In a feminist sense, their identity becomes something they actively create a personal, evolving understanding of womanhood rooted in honesty, choice, and self-respect.

**Relationships:** In the novel, the relationships between women especially mothers and daughters become places where real change begins. Even though these bonds are often tense and full of misunderstandings, they also hold love, memory, and the possibility of healing. The women push one another, comfort one another, and learn from each other in ways no one else can. Their shared stories and struggles become a kind of strength, showing that women don't heal alone they heal together. The novel suggests that this emotional connection, this ability to stand with and for each other, is its own form of power.

### Interpretation and Discussion

Some of the empowering ideas and the intentional choices that a woman can make according to Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club* are: The feministic idea in the process of empowering girls, getting away from a toxic relationship, never showing vulnerability, nourishing oneself with good thoughts, giving you precedence and trusting oneself.

Every girl child is in the process of empowering oneself with their generation and circle of friends they wish to be and share things with. This may not

lead to a healthy empowerment, rather make the girl become more helpless and dependent on others. *The Joy Luck Club*, clearly states that the process of an empowering girl is "...like a young tree that she must stand tall and listen to her mother. This is the only way to grow strong and straight but if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak".

Tan exclaims that, in case a married woman is in toxic relationship it is her right to completely come out of it and show some grace and support to herself and she can guide other women out there, who are trapped in the marital relationship and unable to move forward. Many women are struggling to stand up for themselves to make their own decision. So, they can be of great strength to those who are stagnant like them and dissatisfied in such relationships. When Rose Hsu Jordan shares her marriage experiences to her mother An-mei Hsu that her marriage is falling apart; all she can do is watch it falling and not to be fallen in the emotional trap again.

In this generation, it all depends on us, how we cope up stress within ourselves and to take the time to completely heal internally. Amy Tan also urges us to just swallow our tears and not to make our sorrows visible to others. It is one of the better ways to feel empowered. The author advises this thought through this powerful quote "Your tears do not wash away your sorrows. They feed someone else's joy. And that is why you must learn to swallow your own tears" (Tan 106). It focuses the significance of noticing our inner strength and resilience.

### Conclusion

To be an inspired woman, one has to be strong and to have pure thoughts inside, that allows one to have a good character that is powerful and morally upright as well. The strength that comes from within is the real strength that no one could take away from us. It is very important to remain a righteous person despite all downfall and negative intentions from people that may give us emotional hurt. Everyone who wish to inspire and influence can be an empowered leader who has integrity and not just physical power.

Treating oneself more important than others is one of the best steps to be an empowered person in the point of a feministic approach. In the novel, even



though the daughters are completely influenced by the mothers they are independent and wish to keep them in their first priority. The author appreciates this aspect and she shows the readers that those who are self-actualized will maintain a healthy relationship and will grow in the path of empowering women and themselves. In one of the chapters, *The Red Candle: The mother (Lindo)* talks about her promise to her daughter (Waverly Jong) which helped her feel motivated in many ways. She says that, she had made a promise to herself and she would remember her parents' wishes but, would never forget herself.

Amy Tan expresses her view on companionship through the life of Rose Hsu Jordan when her husband Ted Jordan asks for a divorce. She exclaims that when something violent hit us we can't help us rather; we tend to lose our balance and fall. Later when we pick ourselves up, we struggle to fit in a group and to trust people who made us fall, and other fellow beings with the hopeless heart finally, "you realize you can't trust anybody to save you not your husband, not your mother, not God".

It is important for every woman to be emotionally balanced to become an empowered person with strong feministic characteristics. When being emotionally stable, an individual thinks about the actual self and introspects over it and so, the person creates a better connection with their inner self and they radiate to their closest associates with whom they maintain a harmonious relationship.

Thus, when an individual is truly empowered, they will be nurtured with moral thoughts and as said in Amy Tan's novel those are the ones who will strive to make the silenced voices heard by the people and will maintain a peaceful connection with everyone around. Tan beautifully portrays the importance of feminism through the characters of the novel that truly serves for the feminist literary studies and being an Asian American she contributes much to the field of Asian American literature by focusing on the traditions of Asia and America

and its uniqueness. Thus, she holds a great honour in the field of Literature and her novels carry deep literary significance which emphasises women's empowerment.

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