

Joy Luck Club-A Destruction of Phallocentrism

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Abstract: The well-known work Joy Luck Club tells stories of lives of more than 8 reprehensive women. Through the subtle description, Tan deconstructs the roles of males in the social development and demolish the Phallocentrism and encourage women to obtain equality and their own rights to live independently.

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1 Introduction of Joy Luck Club and Phallocentrism

Amy Tam's work Joy Luck Club show us different destinies of two generations of women, Chinese mothers and America-born-Chinese daughters. A woman plays plenty of roles in the society, mother, daughter, lover, wife, mother-in-law, sister, and friend. These troubling and loving alliances and relationship that Tan made into the stories constitute the most remarkable feature of this book: women centered. Being an American born Chinese, Tan weaves tapestry detailing the miserable lives of four immigrants in old China. They are oppressed by the feudal ethical code and lead a hard and tragic life. But they have similar personality that they resist similar destinies that they fled to American. Tan's subtle and delicate description of their stories impresses a lot of readers. The daughters of these four women are born in America. They are a generation of independence and freedom. The comparison between four mothers in old China and four girls in America draws a moving picture of women's stronger and stronger consciousness of their identities, their struggle for statues in the society and their right

to achieve the equality with men. Males in Joy become attached to all the stories. Tan deconstructs the roles of males in the social development and manages to overthrow the value of Phallocentrism. Phallocentrism concentrates on the idea that masculinity is the central focus and source of power and authority. Because of this, all male interests and needs are exalted while females are made subservient to male desires. Below I analyze how Phallocentrism is demolished in the work.

2 How Phallocentrism is demolished and destructed in the work

China has a feudal history of over 2000 years, and the male-centered culture grew deeply in brain of every Chinese. Men treaded on the neck of women. They were overborne by the society, their husband, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law and a lot of feudal codes. Through the lives of the four immigrants, Tan criticizes the evil of male-centered culture and encourage women to seek their deserved human rights.

2.1 Stories of women in old China

As in one story in the Joy, when at the age of two years old, Lindo became betrothed to Tyan-yu, one year younger than her who she even didn't know. Tyan-yu was very spoiled in his family, and Lindo had known, "I was getting such a bad husband. I had no choice, now or later. That was how backward families in the country were. We were always the last to give up old-fashioned customs."^{[1] 44} She was forced to marry Tyan-yu and can't decide her own destine. Being a daughter, Lindo had to be obedient. According to traditional Chinese idea, "because I promised to the Huang's son for marriage, my own family began treating me as if I belonged to somebody else. 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” [1]45.

When Lindo was twelve years old, she was asked to move to Tyan-yu’s house. Before Leaving, her mother told her “obey your family. Do not disgrace us.” Her mother’s words show how a wife should act in a traditional family. After her arrival, Huang Taiai hurried her upstairs into the kitchen, a place for cooks and servants. She knew her standing in the new family. Her fiance “acted like a big warlord”, and he “complained the soup was not hot enough and then spilled the bowl as if it were an accident. He waited until I had sat down to eat and then would demand another bowl of rice.” Lindo learned how to be an obedient wife. “I came to think of Tyan-yu as a god, someone whose opinion were worth much more than my own life. [1]51,” she said. Women were taught to be at the lower position than men. Women were tools for sex, procreation, and raising the next generation in old society, such an An-Mei’s mother. Until her death, she was still a tool.

Although in the story, women in old China led tragic lives and Tan cried for their unhappiness, misfortune and misery, some positive power was input into the characters. Their lives have turning point. In the wedding of Lindo, she “wondered why my destiny had been decided, why I should have an unhappy life so someone else could have a happy one. [1]53,”

Something powerful was arouse from here soul and she felt “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” [1]54. Women have become conscious of their existence and their identity. This is the first step of struggling for their destiny. Tan criticize the men-centered culture which we will see in the whole story

Four women in old China depend on themselves and immigrate to American. Let’s see what happens there. Ying-ying St. Clair marries a Caucasian citizen. She should have lived equally with men in American as we expect. On the contrary, she is also controlled by her husband. Lena says “my father proudly named her in her immigration papers: Betty St. Clair, crossing out her given name of Gu Ying-ying. And then he put down the wrong birth year, 1916 instead of 1914. So, with the sweep of a pen, my mother lost her name and became a Dragon instead of Tiger. [1]107” Her husband changes everything for her without her permission which is also the reflection of men-centered value.

2.2 The new generation of women born in America

Let’s see the new generation of women born in

America. Lena regards herself as an independent individual with good jobs and supports herself. Such a girl is also hesitant about the value of traditional and modern women. On one hand, Lena believes she and Harold are equal. They work in the same company. Harold is a partner and she is an associate. Even when they have dinner, they still divide the bill. On the other hand, “when I fantasized about moving in with him, I also dredged up my deepest fear: that he would tell me I smelled bad, that I had terrible bathroom habits, and that my taste in music and television was appalling. I worried that Harold would someday get a new prescription for his glasses and he’d put them on one morning, look me up and down, and say, ‘why, gosh, you aren’t the girl I thought you were, are you?’” Her fear shows that she doesn’t feel the real equality between her and Herold. When she talks her fears to her friend Rose, she says, “those kinds of thoughts are commonplace in women like us. [1]169” Finally, “I think I deserve someone like Harold, and I mean in the good sense and not like bad karma. We are equals. [1]170” Lena becomes to realize what equality is gradually. Women are required to act professionally in the job as well as obedient before husband. While obeying husband is the traditional female character. The contradiction is reflected on modern women.

Lena shares almost everything with Herold no matter before or after marriage. There is a list stuck on their refrigerator door.

Lena	Harold
Chicken, veg., bread, broccoli,	Garage stuff \$25.35
Shampoo, beer \$19.63	Bathroom stuff %5.41
Maria (clean-tip) \$65 groceries	Car stuff \$6.57

Lena tells her mother when she pays a visiting, “Harold’s already spent over a hundred dollars more, so I’ll owe him around fifty from my checking account. [1]175” It seems there are absolute equality between them. Lena helps her husband set up the company, but her husband only pays her one seventh of his. She makes spare-no effort for the company. But the return she gets is not equal to her handwork. Why I can’t be promoted just because I am his wife, why he can’t see my contribution to him and to the company. It’s not fair. Lena is confused.

2.3 The male characters in Joy Luck Club

Tan also has an intimate glimpse into the male characters in Joy. Tyan-yu is created as a coward in the book. “He remind me of a young peacock I once saw that acted as if he had just claimed the entire courtyard

by fanning his still-short tail. ^{[1]54}” At the first night of their marriage, “we sat there side by side without words for many minutes, still listening to the laughing outside. When it grew quiet, Tyan-yu said, ‘This is my bed. You sleep on the sofa.’ He threw a pillow and a thin blanket to me. ^{[1]55}” “During the first months, he never touched me. He slept in his bed, I slept on my sofa.” Tyan-yu is sexless. Lindo has a perfect plan to leave. When she cheats them and says in her dream, “our ancestors said Tyan-yu would die if he stayed in this marriage.” Tyan-yu’s face turned white. What a coward!

Another man Harold, Lena’s husband in modern society advocates equality. “He wouldn’t hear of taking any money from me, not as a favor, not as a loan, not as an investment, or even as the down payment on a partnership. He didn’t want to contaminate it with money. He explained, ‘I wouldn’t want a handout any more than you’d want one. As long as we keep the money thing separate, we’ll always be sure of our love for each other.’^{[1]71}” “We can eliminate false dependencies... be equal... Love without obligation.”

This is what love is for Harold.

3 Conclusion

All in all, the occurrence of women is much more than men which deconstruct the writing mode of the mancentered works. Tan tells amazing stories of more than ten women from each circle of the society, focusing upon their human rights, and their equality to men. Through the lacking of male characters, Tan draw a picture of mother-daughter bonds which are tense at the beginning and becomes harmonious at the end. Tan neglects the role of men in the family and the society in many stories for highly praising those women with strong personality who struggled in hard life and strive to get a brightening new life such as the four mothers and those women who make effort to identify themselves and shoot for equality and she demolishes Phallocentrism.

References

- [1] Tan, Amy. Joy Luck Club. Ballantine Books, 1989.