

لن أكون ما لست عليه": تعدد اصوات الثقافات في رواية ايمي تان نادي البهجة "والحظ"

د. قاسم حسن صبيح

جامعة الكوفة / مركز دراسات الكوفة

البريد الإلكتروني Email : qasimh.sabeeh@uokufa.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعدد الأصوات ، الحوار ، ثنائي البؤرة ، الأحادية ، إيمي تان.

كيفية اقتباس البحث

صبيح، قاسم حسن، لن أكون ما لست عليه": تعدد اصوات الثقافات في رواية ايمي تان نادي البهجة والحظ، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، 2023، المجلد: 13، العدد: 2 .

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر (Creative Commons Attribution) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

مسجلة في
Registered ROAD

مفهرسة في
Indexed IASJ





“I won't be what I'm not”: Polyphony of Cultures in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

Lect. Qasem Hassen Sabeeh (Ph.D)
University of Kufa/ Kufa Studies Centre

Keywords : Polyphony, Dialogism, Bifocal, Monologism, Amy Tan .

How To Cite This Article

Sabeeh, Qasem Hassen , “I won't be what I'm not”: Polyphony of Cultures in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, 2023, Volume:13, Issue 2.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

الخلاصة

تعتبر رواية نادي البهجة والحظ واحدة من أنجح روايات إيمي تان. ولقد اكتسبت تان سمعتها ككاتبة بارزة من نفس الرواية. معظم الدراسات حول نادي البهجة والحظ ركزت على مواضيع واسعة مثل حقوق المرأة ، وما بعد الاستعمار ، والشئات. مع ذلك ، تناولت دراسات قليلة تركيب تعدد الأصوات في الرواية. إذا نظرنا إليها من منظور نظرية تعدد الأصوات لمايكل باختين ، فإن الورقة الحالية تدرس كيفية أن الأصوات المختلفة ، كهيكل متعدد الأصوات ، في رواية إيمي تان ، قد تبدو هذه الأصوات المختلفة متضاربة ، وبالتالي تبدو وكأنها نشاز. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن عملية الأصوات المتضاربة هذه لا تؤدي بالضرورة إلى تحسين الموقف الهجين للثقافة ولكنها قد تؤدي إلى مزيد من التهميش. وتركز الدراسة على الاستجابات العاطفية السلبية للأصوات الجدلية الثقافية المزدوجة في الكاتبة ثنائية البؤرة - إيمي تان. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن هذه الأصوات الثقافية المتضاربة تشوه فرصة هؤلاء الكاتبات ثنائيه البؤرة لتشكيل هويتهم ثنائية الثقافة كجيل ثان من النساء المهاجرات. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن الأصوات تمنع النساء من عكس الاختلافات بين الأجيال والثقافات بين العائلات الصينية الأمريكية التي يجد هؤلاء الكتاب ثنائيو البؤرة أنفسهم فيها بسبب العيش في ثقافتين مختلفتين.





Abstract

The Joy Luck Club is one of Amy Tan's most successful novels. Tan builds up her reputation as a notable writer by the same novel. So, studies on Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* have been for the most part composed on broad subjects such as women's rights, postcolonial, and diaspora. Be that as it may, few studies tackled the polyphonic structure of the novel. Viewed through the lens of Michael Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, the present paper, therefore, considers how different voices, as a polyphonic structure, in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* may appear problematic because those various voices seem to be conflicting and thus sound like a cacophony. Moreover, this process of conflicting voices does not necessarily improve the hybrid position of culture but may lead to further marginalization. The study focuses on the negative emotional responses of double cultural dialectic voices on the bifocal writer - Amy Tan. The study concluded that those conflicting cultural voices distort the opportunity of those bifocal women writers to form their bicultural identity as second generations of immigrant women. Moreover, the voices hinder women from reflecting generational and intercultural differences among Chinese-American families that those bifocal writers find themselves in due to living in two different cultures.

1- Introduction

In her influential book *A to Z American Writers*, Carol Kort includes many writers who she asserts, based on Buck's description, are "mentally bifocal life." (xvi) Bifocal women writers (mother or daughters) are the ones who are fully charged with cultural experiences that allow them to be distinctive and different from their non-bifocal peers. Being subjected to dual experiences, worlds, cultures, and everything double, bifocal women writers wedge themselves in real stalemate. Consequently they attuned that they are lost, and have no welcoming space.

The harsh environment has its impacts on the writers themselves and their second generation. Accordingly the gap, or rather the gulf between the two generations extends and finds no harbor. Whether the effects of being bifocal writers are positive or negative are debatable; yet, they represent the starting point from which we can begin our journey of investigating the bifocal writer's world. As Amy Ling writes "The very condition... itself carries both negative and positive charges." (Ling 14) As a well-recognized and the most popular bifocal writer, Amy Tan was seen as a trustworthy messenger to the Chinese- American experience. Tan's won the Commonwealth Golden Award and Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for her work *The Joy Luck Club*. Tan's fiction dwells



on issues like identity crisis , family construction, and feminism. Tan's characters usually reflect the tensions between Chinese traditions and "Americanization" and the position of women in society.

Elements of the conflict, however, do appear as opposed and independent voices in her works. Every character has his/ her viewpoint and independent voice. On the part of the cultural conflict, those dismissive voices have taken different forms at different times with varying intensity depending on the situation. The present paper aims to discuss the cultural polyphonic elements in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in relation to the theory of polyphony. The polyphonic cultures in Tan's novel, as they will be discussed here, undermine and distort the opportunity of those bifocal women writers to form their biculturalism or hybrid identity.

In his book *problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Michael Bakhtin distinguishes the main characteristics of Dostoevsky's fiction in which the characters have independent voices and consciousness. Bakhtin argues that those characters develop independent self-consciousness throughout those fictions. In addition, there is a dynamic negotiation in which each character borrows and lends objects from the present and past. So, in Tan's novel the dialogics of both cultures, Chinese and American, voices or self-consciousness are developed in the novel apart from the author's ideology of being a hybrid identity. The interests and motives that condition this dialogue between the two dominant cultures in the book are examined here in this study.

Again turning back to Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in which a literary text is truly a world of different voices. Not only the voice of the author but also the characters participated in creating the truth. In this way the text is created against the nomologim in which Bakhtin notes that the fact or truth is not born in the mind of one individual, such as an author; instead, it is a cooperation phenomenon in the mind of different individuals or characters. So, the text should be seen as a whole unity and that the characters are introduced with "multiform in style and variform in speech and voice". Thus the text is a matrix of various "social speech types" or languages planned in a structurally aesthetic and literary system (356). Bakhtin further explains that those diverse voices participate in a free dialogue where every character is free to express his/her opinion and hence create what is called by Habermass a public sphere. In what follows a brief review of the Bakhtinian theory of polyphony will be presented regarding the development of some of the aesthetic characteristics of the theory.



2- Polyphony: The theory

Polyphony is borrowed from the world of music, using different musical instruments to form a symphony. It means "multi-voicedness, voices of characters, author and reader or ideas etc. In a literary work, to form a unified text, it is a style of writing in which the author gives a great deal of freedom for his/her characters and readers to interact with each other using different viewpoints. The work encourages argument and negotiation. The concept is seen, moreover, as one of the numerous strands of Bakhtin's complex body of work which is broadly concerned with language, social relations, morals, and aesthetics that had a stamped impact on numerous areas of social and human sciences. In the literary theory, polyphony is concentrated on verbal art which takes fiction as a prototype of speech genre with multiple voices. According to David Lodge, polyphonic fiction is a work "in which a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice" (86). Here, the nature of fiction permits the author to incorporate different ideologies and viewpoints into the story.

For Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel embodies a new turn in fictional narrative. As opposed to monologism and absolute truth, the polyphonic structure is introduced from the characters and the author's relatively independent voices. Those addressed voices, including the author's voice, characterize and express the keys of the narrative structure. Those voices are further established simultaneously through interaction and clashes with each other. They bestow the narrative with aesthetic and artistic unity. Concerning the polyphonic form of a novel, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin presents Dostoevsky's works as "fully polyphonic". He believes so because the characters' viewpoints "possess extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author's word and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters" (7). Bakhtin adds that the "heroes [or characters in the narrative domain] are indeed not only subjects of their author's word, but subjects of their own directly significant word". Each is given a separate or isolated consciousness; however, this does not mean those characters are closed off from others or completely isolated. (Bakhtin 4) The characters dialogue is created by the author, but such dialogue is created in such a way that it could be improved independently away from the author's ideology.





Consequently, each character's independent consciousness is independent of another character. Bakhtin states that "Our point of view in no way assumes a passivity on the part of the author, who would then merely assemble other's points of view, other's truths, completely denying his point of view, his truth". Therefore, Dostoevsky's characters are fully dialogized in the sense that they represent a coherent circle, which Bakhtin calls "an integral ideational position" (Bakhtin, Poetics 252).

Bakhtin accentuates that it isn't sufficient to essentially get the individual's point of view (monological point of view). However, the voice, in the novelistic domain, needs to be mingled with others' voices to form an organic unity(dialogism). Contrary to dialogism, monologism in Bakhtinian philosophy is bounded by a single and narrow worldview. It is, also subjugated by hegemony and extremism of the ideology of an individual. Further, monologism refers to the authorial power that discards "the equal rights of consciousness vis-à-vis truth" (Bakhtin, poetics 285). It is the denial, according to Bakhtin, of all external and outside reality. In other words, it denies the existence of another consciousness in which the latter has equal rights and responsibilities. In monological approach, another consciousness is seen as a passive object of consciousness instead of a separate identity with equal effect in the world truth and no expectation from that another consciousness to change the outside world, Bakhtin states, "a monologically understood the world is an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness." (Bakhtin, poetics 289) According to Christopher Hays, the literal meaning of monology is a "single voice". Thus the monologic discourse is a discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation." (7) Monologism arises wherever and whenever final truth occurs, which does not allow any other sort of truth to be considered.

Socially, the polyphonic structural goal is to display the coexistence, communication, and interdependence of multiple consciousnesses that precisely show the various levels, viewpoints, and contents of reality within a single text. So, it is wise to use the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism to distinguish between monologic reality or a single consciousness and non-monologic or polyphonic reality in a literary work. Furthermore, polyphony aims at rejecting the one-side attitudes of the world. Promoting the dialogical principles simultaneously with introducing the diversity of points of view in the texture. So, everything in a polyphonic novel is "structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable", which Bakhtin named a "great dialogue" or "dialogism" he writes:



[T]o communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end. [...] everything in Dostoevsky's novels tends toward dialogue, toward a dialogic opposition, as if tending toward its centre. All else means; dialogue is the end. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (252)

The above quotation shows that voices, or what Bakhtin calls "speech genres", depend heavily on social interaction depending on the context and situation. Hence, there will be various societal viewpoints. The strength of the social context hangs on the extent to which those opposing meanings with the original meanings. Meanings, produced in polyphonic texts, is open to negotiation based on different context and circumstances. Bakhtin differentiates between "heteroglossia" and "monoglossia", in which the latter means the dominance of a single entity and the truth is neither born nor created inside a single person's mind; it is produced collectively in the process of their dialogic communication. The term "heteroglossia" is derived from the Greek word "other" or "speech". Bakhtin uses it in his theory to denote both the variety of different styles of speaking and the relations between a variety of languages. It is the employment of different "signs" or other consciousness, opposing viewpoints, and the tension between them in a literary work. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin focuses upon the concept of "heteroglossia", the multilingualness of the social world, which demonstrates the role of language in presenting the speakers' different social and cultural situations.

Finally, those self and other consciousness, monologism and dialogism, form the "organic unity", as Bakhtin termed it to describe the final feature presented in Dostoevsky's artistic work. Organic unity implies the unity of multiple consciousness, established by their interdependent communication, reaching the unifying totality. According to Bakhtin, as Pierrette Maluczynski argues, what implies the polyphonic framework of any text is the basic narratological system. In other words, dialogical structure underlines that narrative. For organic unity, it is necessary to have that dialogic quality in polyphonic text. It is a unifying principle; without it, the polyphonic achievement would collapse and be reduced into "anarchic cacophony".(4)

From the preceding theoretical discussion, it can be assumed that thinking about the theory of polyphony is not only heterogeneous but contradictory. Furthermore, Bakhtin's formation of the novel is grounded on the thought that the novel could be a distinct voice established by





numerous voices. Voices form in the communication process, even if that communication is conflicting. The present paper is then taken as an attempt to explain how various points of view appear as conflicting ideologies in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

In essence, nearly all the existing writings on *The Joy Luck Club* is broad and specifically centre on a comprehensive vision of life and the encounter of individuals delineated in it. However, no study has shown how the different voices reflect distortion and conflict within the writer. It is a crucial point of view in the elucidation of the novel since it emphasizes the powerless and expounds on internal conflicts between mother and daughters, promoting a unique feature in terms of conflict of a human being. The present study shows that the addressed novel presents uncertainties and inconsistencies within the complicated interaction of mothers' and daughters' voices. The novel is structured around a familiar script of utilizing and telling stories to pick up self-consciousness. Each story may be a metanarrative that is entirely in agreement with its multi-layered story structure, in which nearly every story outlines or contains another story.

The novel, in the next section, will be read within and against Bakhtin's theory of polyphony to find out the negative side, as an opposite to what had been written about the novel, of mingling different voices and how characters isolated themselves from the author and that the realistic collection of voices in the story can be reduced to the tension of mixing two cultures. The study will focus on the dialogue between characters to prove, opposing the positive strength of polyphony, the negative result of the dialogicity of culture.

3- Discussion

Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is composed in dialogue which consists of sixteen isolated yet connected stories, where each tale encompasses a storyteller. The stories are told by the four mothers and their four daughters, respectively. In the novel, the first few chapters, the four mothers, except Suyuan, whose story is told by her daughter June, narrates their past life and experiences in China and represents the Chinese cultural voice. In the second part of the novel, the four daughters recount their experience, childhood, and the present situation in State.

At first glance, the novel embodies different, or even opposite, cultural attitudes. Critics often try to analyze and interpret the diversity of opposite ideologies in the novel as a hybrid identity. However, in the present study, the focus will be on those attitudes that lead to forming a self-conscious or independent voice. The quest for an independent voice



becomes a stereotypical journey for both mothers and daughters. The mother arrived to the US and had to adjust to a modern culture, rethink their voice, and take a self-mixing. Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is an excellent example of displaying the polyphonic voices of Chinese and American cultures, so this novel is being selected for this study. Those voices highlight the inner feelings and conflicts that are reflected in the mother-daughter endless dialogues and how each dialogue works to awaken self-consciousness in them. According to Marc Singer, "each story[of *The Joy Luck Club*] instead bears its separate narrative frame; most if not all the tales appear to be internal monologues, rehearsed but never spoken" (96). The dialogue in the story is told in the first person narrator the character can relate. This technique of the first-person narrator could promote the self-awareness of those characters and promote self-consciousness of the characters. The first point of view is also a way to separate two groups- daughters and mothers- revealing double cultural practices. Mothers' voices reflect their previous experiences in China, whereas the daughters' voices reflect their struggle to have a separate modern American identity. In other words, the various narrators and viewpoints reveal the gap between the two generations. This led to an incomplete understanding and a barrier that exists between both cultures, Chinese and American. Lindo, the mother, for example, expresses her attitude towards her past life, saying, "If I look upon my whole life, I cannot think of another time when I felt more comfortable: when I had no worries, fears, or desires, my life seemed as soft and lovely as lying inside a cocoon of rose silk." (Tan 45) Moreover, the act of self-narration is Constitutive of a character's accomplishment of self-realization. However, the different storytellers think about their failure to interpret concepts and estimations from one culture to another. The fragmented social understanding of the moms and the daughters, reflected by each voice, owes to their inadequate information of both cultures. Neither mothers nor daughters can translate their native culture, and here the conflict begins. June, the daughter, explains it carefully saying, "[m]y mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more." (Tan 50)

The polyphonic nature of the novel is not limited to the distinction in the narrative style; it is strongly sensed in two levels at each moment in the story, one level of monologism and another of dialogism. The storytellers view their cultures firstly, whether Chinese or American, in a monological way, and secondly commenting on their cultures to each other dialogically. In the level of monologism both mothers and





daughters criticize male dominant ideology and its consequences of oppression of the Chinese American woman. However, in the broadest sense, those fragments of monological voices elevated, throughout the novel, to the level of dialogism between two groups or cultures, as the novel tells the story of connections between Chinese mothers and Chinese-American daughters through an arrangement of monologs that are interconnected by subject or theme. Daughters display certain behaviors in connection to their mothers, and mothers appear to join together by comparable states of mind. The Bakhtinian notion of dialogism proposes a tangible view of a world structured in terms of multiplicity and diversity toward the other voices. Bakhtin has proposed this to dialogize otherness's ideologies in the narrative sphere and that the vision of the truth is open to multiplicity and diversity.

According to Bakhtinian dialogism, the polyphonic structure aims to introduce multiple consciousness within a literary work, showing the diversity of the viewpoints. The dialogic novel is an open structure by ideals of its uncertain nature. So, a single voice indicates nothing and settles nothing. Two voices are the least for life, the least for presence. Here, Bakhtin's thought that language is continuously different is pivotal. Polyphony, in this way, points at dismissing the one-sidedness qualities of the world and instep are advancing the dialogical standards simultaneously with the presentation of differing qualities of focuses within the texture. However, the American-born daughters resist their mothers' endeavor to unite with the bygone memories of the past that they do not belong. That is to say, the daughters' unremitting efforts to clutch to the English language and neglect their mothers' Chinese language has put them amid a particular challenge. Consequently, Jing-Mei Woo declares her refusal to lump two different cultures together and upholds American values. She declares her objection to her mother's project when she says, "I had new thoughts...filled with lots of won't. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not"(Tan 134).

Bakhtin's notion of the novel is predicated on the thought that the novel could be a particular discourse type that is constituted by several speech styles. He acknowledges the social nature of the text and the context of the meaning itself. Language and its variety of styles play another significant role in cultural understanding or sometimes misunderstanding. Those groups of styles are called by Bakhtin "heteroglossia" the multilingualness of the characters in the novel. In Bakhtin's theory, style is utilized to indicate both the variety of distinctive styles of talking and the relations between a variety of languages. It, therefore, implies a synchronous utilization of diverse "signs" or other





awareness, contradicting perspectives, and the pressure between them in a literary work. Agreeing with Bakhtin, all discourse articulations are heteroglot and polyphonic in that they share "different-languages", and resonate with "many voices". In *The Joy Luck Club* mothers' non-stoppable yearning to master two languages is the core of the psychological struggle of mothers that engenders a feeling of "double consciousness" The uniqueness of the novel lies in its depiction of Tan's double life. In an interview with Elaine Woo, Tan speaks of her parents' desire to fit within two different places that "[t]hey wanted us to have American circumstances and Chinese character." (30). She is cognizant that to fit into two cultures simultaneously is an unattainable wish.

Not all the mothers in the novel can speak good English, so they cannot communicate their emotions and feelings in the way the daughters communicate. There is always a self-evident language boundary which will result in negative thoughts, and maybe it becomes a barrier between individuals. Mothers in the novel, for example, undergo a ruthless experience to maintain a balance between their born culture and the host culture by language. To gain a foothold in America and communicate with their American-born daughters, mothers must learn English. At this point, the conflict gradually rises since mothers must act and speak according to the situation and develop a double vision. In this regard, Jing-Mie Woo uncovers the mothers of the joy club's desire to occupy two spaces simultaneously since they "speak in their unique language, half in broken English, half in their Chinese dialect." (Tan 34). She makes it clear also when she adds that "these kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different languages, which we did. I talked to her in English, and she answered in Chinese" (Tan 23).

Bicultural identity is another basic premise of my purpose. Here, Bell argues that each culture can be an organizer of overlapping discussions and tendencies, demeanours and concepts, changing over time. There's no essence in meaning, one common characteristic or condition, but a complicated network of similitudes, covering and crossing each other, a coasting exchange (52). Dialogue within any culture, on the other hand, makes straightforwardness around the person and organizational presumptions that drive how we think and communicate about an issue. Throughout the novel, the narrative voice moves between two types of cultural identity. Each character's double identity, whether mother or daughter, has maintained adds a kind of complication to the original identity, and the binary existence generates a sense of double belongingness. That image of double belongingness is reflected first in the novel chapters such as "Two Kinds", "A Pair of Tickets", "Half and a





Half", "Double face", and "A pair of tickets". That is to say; they are convinced that they do not belong to either culture. The mothers revive the luck club of Kweilin in America to reanimate the Chinese inherited culture. They also wish to guarantee that their daughters on the other hand will not forgo their heritage. That is to say, mah jong table, a table on which mothers play in the club, represents the Chinese memories of the past and part of the identity which connects mothers to their ethnic roots. Besides, mothers have metaphorically a belief that mah jong table may end the fragile relationship and help to heal the internal rift between the daughters and their parents' Chinese roots. June, the daughter, reflects on the distinctive ways she feels she disillusioned her mother, Suyuan. Suyuan expected that June could be effective because she accepted that anybody seemed to do anything they wished in America. In this regard, she says, "unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me." (Tan 50) So, the voices of the two cultures are embedded in character discourse.

Furthermore, in the novel, mothers strive to make their daughters ideal "with a Chinese - mind/character like theirs but in new circumstances" (Woo 156). And there is always a stereotypical representation of the marginalized group expressed by a hegemonic power of western culture. In this way, a double dialectic tradition is revealed. The double dialectic is unfolded through the way the mothers and daughters attempt to merge into American society. The daughters deliberately deny all of their mothers' efforts to create a convergence between them and their parents' cultural roots. The daughters, indeed, regard their mothers' attempts as a cliché. An-Mei's daughter Rose gets married to Ted, an American person, to merge into American society as a native, not as an outsider, and at the same time to disengage herself from her mother Chinese cultural system. In a similar vein, the club is considered a shameful custom by Jing-Mei, June, as she clearly states that she "imagined Joy Luck was a shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of Ku Klux Klan or the tom-tom dances of TV Indians preparing for war." (Tan 28) She insists on her refusal to be a part of the Chinese heritage and says "I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won't. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. won't be what I'm not" (Tan 134). However, the daughters' resistance to their mothers' continuous endeavors to attach them to the Chinese culture do not last long. To find an isolated and independent voice, as Booth Foster points out that "[r]egardless of how much the daughters try to deny it, it is through their mothers that they find their voice, mind, and their selfhood. Voice finds its form in the interaction



process, even if that interaction is conflict" (19). So, the mothers determine to establish a connection between their daughters and China. At this point, June is convinced that she has no alternative, as her mother once told her that "[o]nce you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think ChineseIt is in your blood waiting to be let go" (Tan 267). She has to accept her mother's inherited culture and, at the same time, merge with the American mainstream society.

The voice of the internal conflict of the characters evolves in another way; the female character in the novel thinks of herself in a unique situation to choose between her good and the collective faith. So, polyphonic structure can be found in the level of cultural negotiation of the Chinese old traditional and new American modern way of life, as a dialogue between the various ideological perspectives of the characters who accept or reject their situations. Speech genres or styles, then, are generated from concrete situations of social communication like that dialogue found at the food table in the novel. An example of cultural conflict is elevated by the food the two different cultural groups eat. In her book *Word of Mouth*, Susanne Skubal argues that " food is a language that we speak, for the most part unwittingly." (45) and hence food is one of the factors which may reflect one culture. Other critics take food as a way of expressing self and culture on the one hand, and for emigrants, food is also a way of viewing spiritual attachment to a motherland on the other hand. In the novel, the mahjong table where the mothers serve the Chinese food signifies the firm attachment to Chinese ethics. It is also a table that prompts the daughters of their mother's homeland. Huntley also states that "the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*...attempting to transmit to their daughters the remnants of a culture that is fading even from their lives" (32-33). Mothers, unlike the daughters, used to serve fresh vegetables and fish with heads that distinguish Chinese culture from ready-made and canned food. The daughter, Ying-Ying, also shows her dilemma when she describes her American husband and tries to be in between. In other words, she attempts to connect Chinese and American cultures. She describes her husband as a " bowl full of rice but without my appetite to eat it. No hunger. No fullness." (Tan 251). So, both Chinese mothers and American daughters become victims of double consciousness.

In cultural dimension theory, Geert Hofstede distinguishes between two dimensions: individualism and collectivism. Relatively all cultures place a difference between what is personally independence and success against that of interdependence and the success of one's group or groups. Both individualism and collectivism are related to an individual's





behavior. So how an individual perceives himself is the main issue in any culture. Individualism is then "a social mentality which focuses on the individual, valuing and recognizing individual achievement and encouraging independent thought and action.... whereas collectivism is a social framework" (Arasaratnam 45). In maverick societies, individuals see themselves as having a free concept of self. In contrast, in collectivist societies, individuals see themselves as having a forbidden concept of self, and the self always identifies with the group or groups.

In Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* polyphonic structure refers not indeed to the number of voices, but the collective quality of a person's articulation; that is, the capacity of an utterance to capture somebody else's expression, which subsequently makes a dialogic relationship between two or more voices. So, the terms collectivism and individualism are manifested in the addressed novel. Examples of polyphony occur throughout the novel, serving both to distinguish the culture as individuals and as collectivists. China could be an emphatically collectivistic culture, where parts and social connections are more inflexibly various leveled and less liquid than in any person's society, and rules overseeing social intuition are too more managed by age and sex parts. A collectivistic culture advances interdependency, regard for specialists, progressive parts and connections, and bunch agreement. Collectivists, moreover, see themselves as members of their bunch, whether the family, a social gathering, an organization or another. Unlike individualists, collectivists feel forbidden with individuals of their bunches and are willing to subordinate individual objectives to those of the gather. The family is central in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and to the four moms from the Chinese collectivistic culture. Each person's behavior in China is decided and obliged by family requirements, desires, and duties; in the same time, individuals can depend on the family to be there to help and bolster in any way fundamental to their well-being. Besides, within the story of An-mei's mother, it is clear that a considerable portion of a person's self-identity is set up through the family network and concomitant or typically going within groups. Raised in such a collectivistic culture, the four moms bear the standards in intellect. These critical contrasts between the traditional Chinese and American cultures are explicit within the novel. In traditional Chinese culture, the family also implies that fathers have supreme rights to their children and have common reliance on each other. American culture energizes independence and fortifies people to realize their esteem. The word freedom is one of the foremost regarded well-known words within the United States. So, in the novel, Waverly asked her mother "why you have to use me to show off? if you want to show

off, then why don't you learn to play chess?" (Tan 37) because Waverly wants to have a separate voice apart from her traditional mother and to refuse her parents dominance. Here the character develops, as Bakhtin claims, feelings "in such a way that it can freely develop its inner logic and independence as the word of another person, as the word of the hero himself." (Poetics 51). Those voices speak to the epitomized, and expressive gestures of the novelistic structure created simultaneously through crossing points and clashing with each other.

Seemingly, there is no culture without conventional shapes of group singing, where social components speak vocal polyphony. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan employs stories from Chinese culture and mythology to investigate the voices of mothers and daughters of Chinese-American family lines. The stories serve as Asian- American mythology since each story speaks to a commonplace struggle in which many Asian-American women encounter the conflict of living in one society and being affected by it, whereas the desires of another society interfere with social requests and commitments. In addition, mythology speaks to the need to build up personality by replying to questions that have no self-evident answers. Suyuan, the mother expresses her dissatisfaction with the host culture, saying:

But we never say such things! I said. "These things don't make sense. These are not fortunes, they are wrong instructions". "No, Miss", she said, laughing, "it is our bad fortune to be here making these and somebody else's a bad fortune to pay to get them. [...]. So that is how I met An-mei Hsu (Tan 299-300).

The characters, through verbal and legendary associations of the Chinese and American societies glimpse Asian-American mythology, a culture comprised of two isolated, regularly contradicting standards. Each woman in the novel tells a story as an indication of the uniqueness of her voice. Rejecting the old tradition of China comes through the new generation of daughters. Jing-mei's story, for example, brings a clash between a mother's confidence and conviction in perseverance versus a daughter's internal sense of pointlessness. Suyuan, the mother, believes that individuals can collect money and pick up notoriety quickly in America. She puts trust, subsequently, in her daughter Jing-mei. The colossal vitality that Suyuan gives to inquire about Jing-mei's internal wonder- cleaning for her piano instructor, sparing up for a utilized piano- illustrates her profound adoration for Jing-mei Moreover, she has more confidence in her daughter's capacity than her craving to appear at church each Sunday. Other voices are related to the names. American-born daughters also go with their American names outside Chinatown to





not be marginalized by the dominating culture. For instance, Jing-Mei Woo goes by her American name, June, outside the circle of her Chinese family. Within her family household, she is called Jing-Mei. On the other hand, Waverly contends that her mother, Lindo, chooses a Western name because she "wanted [her] children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character" (Tan 289). Waverly also adds that "her] mother named [her] after the street that [they] lived on: Waverly Place Jong, [her] official name for important American documents" (Tan 90). The daughters frequently feel criticized and influenced by their mothers and relate their mothers' interference with their lives to their failure to get it and acknowledge the American culture, which particularly values independence and freedom.

Subsequently, the shape of any novel is decided by the different discourse classes that are composed of it. The context is the arena in which meaning is presented through text or speech. In the same arena, as Bakhtin believes, several opposing meanings will develop in relation to other alternative meanings. In this sense, any literary text within the polyphonic work domain is heteroglossia. It implicitly or explicitly reflects definite social norms representing a matrix of societal realities. In reality single voice does not exist; what really exists is a collection of voices from different social situations; within those situations, there will be several opposing meanings that make a literary text (321).

4- Conclusion

To sum up, *The Joy Luck Club* could be viewed as a polyphonic work composed of dozens of dialogues. Those dialogues unfold the profound enduring of both mothers and their daughters. They failed to lump the two cultures together. In other words, the endeavours of the mothers to come up with the American culture and language, on the one hand, and obliging their daughters to memorize the Chinese language and culture, on the other hand, have produced a feeling of twofold awareness for both generations. In this way, this sense of twofold awareness has incited smashed personalities, which are represented by the lack of communication between mothers and daughters. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony provided a vocabulary for exploring the powerless and expounding internal conflicts inside the bifocal writer. In other words, the various speech genres and different ideological perspectives embedded in the character dialogue in the novel are a means to understanding the more critical elements of the character and the author's characteristics, motives, and personality. The polyphonic structure in *The Joy Luck Club* combines a multiplicity of distinct and conflicting voices, yet harmonies are found





within the guileful array of different voices. The novel has been discussed as a plurality of self-awareness in which each voice is with its world with its politics. It narrates the dilemma of its Chinese characters, who choose to find their little happy club to pass all the past misfortune and begin their battle to live within the US, first as displaced people and, after that, as foreigners with children born and taught in San Francisco. The struggle of those social and cultural voices subsequently debilitates the opportunity for the bifocal writer Amy Tan, to construct her personality as an immigrated author and to reflect generational and intercultural strife among Chinese- American families that the bifocal writer finds herself as a result of living in two assorted social and cultural orders.

Works Cited

- Amy, Ling. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergmon, 1990.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson, Trans., M.Holquist, Ed.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. R.W. Rotsel. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973.
- Bell, Michael M. and Michael Gardiner, editors. *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998.
- Carol, Kort. *A to Z of American Women Writers*. New York, 2007.
- Hays, Christopher. The Silence of the Wives: Bakhtin's Monologism and Ezra 7-10; Bakhtin and the Biblical Imagination Consultation; *Philadelphia, PA*; November 20, 2005.
- Huntley, Edelma. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport and Connecticut. Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Lodge, David. "Conrad's" Victory" and" The Tempest": An Amplification." *The Modern Language Review*, 1990.





“I won't be what I'm not”: Polyphony of Cultures in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*



Malcuzyński, Pierrette. "Polyphonic Theory and Contemporary Literary Practices," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 7, 1984.

Singer, Marc. "Moving Forward to Reach The Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31.3(2001) 324-352.

Skubal, Susanne. *Word of Mouth. Food and Fiction after Freud*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2008.

Woo, Elaine. "Striking Cultural Sparks : Once Pained by Her Heritage, Amy Tan Has Tapped It for a Piercing First Novel.". *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 1989.

