

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

II.1 Amy Tan and her Works

Amy Tan is a Chinese-American author. She was born and grew up in California. At eight, Tan wrote her first work titled What the Library Means to Me. Amy Tan had various kinds of work before becoming a writer. She was a switchboard operator, Round Table bartender and pizza maker, and Language Development Consultant to programs for developmentally disabled children. As a start for her career as a writer she worked for medical education newsletter as a copywriter. Her next job was a freelance business writer to high-tech companies, specializing in telecommunications. In 1986, Amy Tan published her first story, titled End Game which was later called Rules of the Game. Three years later, She

finished her first book, The Joy Luck Club, followed by the second, The Kitchen God's Wife in 1991 (Fact Sheet of Tan, 1995).

Amy Tan writes not only novels but also children's books: The Moon Lady (1992) and Macmillan, the Chinese Siamese Cat (1994). Amy Tan also got involved in The Joy Luck Club movie as a co-writer and co-producer. Amy Tan admits that film is only another aspect of her career, it is far less important to her than writing. A year later, Tan published her third book, The Hundred Secret Senses (Romine, Memphis Business Journal, vol.174, 35).

Amy Tan is a writer who has strong characteristics. She has an optimistic view of looking at life and death. This comes from her concern regarding life and death resulted in deep distress in Tan's life continued by a serious depression (Briggs, 1995, 2). As a child, Tan questions many things and is skeptical about her life. She feels that her life has not been perfect since she has both Chinese and American side. She also witnessed much death in her life, the death of her grandmother, father, brother and friends who had been close to her. Tan's mother, who has great influence on Tan, helps her to reveal the Chinese in her and to accept it as uniqueness. Tan's mother, who believes in supernatural world, teaches Tan to see no boundaries between life and death. Death is not the final phase of life. For further understanding, Tan reads some books talking about life and death. The teaching and learning make Amy Tan optimistically believes on how life is affected much by death, how it influenced what Tan believes in and what Tan looks for in life.

Another characteristic of Tan is her surrender to life's coincidences (Briggs, 1995, 4). She experienced many coincidences in her life such as a coincidence of

her father, brother and mother having brain tumors. There were so many coincidences in Tan's personal experiences are difficult to explain. However, Amy Tan considers coincidences as circumstances that link people (Briggs, 1995, 3). Coincidences are circumstances where several events happened and are related not under purpose.

Amy Tan is a multicultural writer. She, who was born and raised in America, has Chinese blood streaming from her parents. In 1949, Tan discovered that her mother had three daughters in China from a previous marriage. The fact is deeply affected her and made her realize about how her "Americanness" and her "Chineseness" interacted within her (New York Times, Tan welcomes the unusual, 1996, 2). The multicultural background of Tan helps her in creating her novels.

Tan's characteristics: coincidences in her personal life, her family history, her optimism, and her multicultural background are presented mostly in her fictions. Tan, in The Joy Luck Club, revealed the story of her grandmother who had been raped and forced to live as a concubine and finally killed herself (Briggs, 1995, 5). Tan had a mandate from her mother to tell about that shameful family history to the world through her works. Bowker (1995, 1), in his review, considers the novel as the intersection of Chinese and American female sensibilities. The Joy Luck Club was regarded as an international best seller and was a highly acclaimed film (Giles, The Ghost Writer, 1). Tan deserves to have such a prize for her great works. The Joy Luck Club was nominated for the National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award, and a recipient of the Commonwealth Gold Award and the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award. Tan also received huge critical acclaim and commercial success for her second book, The Kitchen God's Wife (Fecht, 1995,

3). She wrote this novel based on her mother's life. The Kitchen God's Wife, as praised in Briggs's review, is a novel chronicles the relationships between a Chinese mother and her daughter (1995, 2).

According to Giles (1996, 1), Amy Tan, in those two novels, explores the depths of Chinese American ancestry, family ties, love, and compassion. Tan's latest novel, The Hundred Secret Senses is a novel much of which reveals coincidences and connections of life events, but they were not as much as in Tan's life (Briggs, 1995, 4). Briggs observed that Tan probed personal and family connections, responsibility and loyalty. Tan, in her third novel whose theme is about love, explores the boundaries beyond human's physical lives, as said by Giles (1996, 1).

II.2. Literary theories

The thesis writer is going to use literary theories to analyze the novel. The literary theories are the theory of characterization and the theory of conflict

2.2.1. Characterization

Characterization is the portrayal of the lifelike existence of the characters of imaginary persons created by an author of fiction (Holman, 1986, 24). Imaginary persons have similarities with real persons. S/he can be pessimistic or optimistic. Another can be skeptical or superstitious. The character, as described by Roberts and Jacobs (1986), is "a reasonable facsimile of a human being, with all the good

and bad traits of being human”(78). A fictional character may have a principle of life that can be a good trait if it leads her or him to goodness. The principle of life can be a bad trait if it leads him or her to destruction. Amy Tan, the author of *The Hundred Secret Senses*, describes Kwan as a character whose principle of life leads her to goodness.

An author may picture fictional character in two ways: physical and mental descriptions. The reader may know the character easily through the physical descriptions but it can be useful to relate that to the mental descriptions. The mental descriptions can be drawn from the actions and the comments of the characters themselves, the comments and the observations of other characters about the others. Furthermore, Roberts and Jacobs (1986) discuss how the author uses four different ways to convey description about characters in fiction. First, the author presents the characters through what they themselves say or think. Second, the author presents the characters through what they do. Third, the author presents the characters through what other characters say about them. Fourth, the author presents the characters through what the author, as a storyteller or as an observer, says about them. Amy Tan presents the physical and mental descriptions of Kwan through the comment, thought, and observation of Olivia, Kwan’s half sister. The thesis writer will use the third way on how to convey the description of Kwan, to analyze her optimism.

2.2.2. Conflict

Conflict, which is “the raw material out of which plot is constructed”, is the

struggle of two opposing forces in a plot (Holman, 1986, 107). Conflict creates interest, suspense, and tension. There are five types of conflict as discussed by Holman. First is elemental or physical conflict that is a struggle against nature. Second is social conflict that is a struggle against another person. Third is a struggle against society. Fourth is internal or psychological conflict that is a struggle for mastery by two elements within the person. Fifth is a struggle against fate or destiny.

Social conflict is a struggle between a protagonist with another person or another character. Kwan, the main character, has a struggle with Big Ma - - her aunt. She also has conflicts with Olivia caused by their different cultural background. The thesis writer will use this concept of conflict as a basis for her analysis of Kwan's optimism.

II.3. Others Concepts

The thesis writer is going to use other concepts to analyze the novel. The concepts are optimism and Chinese cultural background.

2.3.1. Optimism

Optimists, according to Smith in his book entitled Personality Adjustment, are ones who remember more of "the pleasant than of the unpleasant experiences they had in mind" (1961, 129). As the result, they have no regret for the past. However, people have "different degree of optimism". Sometimes they are more

optimistic or depressed or pessimistic than usual (130). Kwan is an optimist for she has no regret for the past.

Optimism, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of The English Language is “a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or to dwell upon the most hopeful aspects of a situation” (1980, 499). One is able to dwell upon the most hopeful aspects of a situation if one lives life in confidence that there is something good in the situation. Kwan can also do this since she or he can turn negative ideas into positive thoughts.

Optimism is a positive mental attitude that allows a person to live hopefully. Hope is what one leans on when a person’s life is miserable, hope is the reason why one survives in life, hope is where one puts her or his trust on, hope helps one in her or his struggle in life. In sadness, one may be strengthened by hope. In despair, one may be lightened up by hope. In uncertainty, one may put her or his trust on hope. In failure and emptiness, one may come alive again through hope. Hope is a key to one’s life. Therefore, hope can be the principle of one’s life. Hope is Kwan’s principle of life.

Optimism is a positive mental attitude that shows one’s confidence in her/himself and in the way she or he lives. Confidence is like a light for a dark room. Confidence is needed when one faces a terrible situation of life and leads one to the most hopeful aspects of a situation. Confidence, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of The English Language, is “a calm unworried feeling or manner based on a strong belief in one’s ability”(1980, 264). Confidence is a tool used by Kwan in facing a problem.

Optimism is a positive mental attitude that allows a person to turn negative ideas into positive thoughts to dwell upon the most hopeful aspects of a situation. An optimist may change hatred into love, betrayal into loyalty, pessimism into optimism. This way, an optimist can have a great influence over another person. Kwan can change the hatred of Olivia into love, the betrayal of Olivia into loyalty.

Optimism can be taken as “an inclination to put the most favorable construction on actions and happenings or to anticipate the best possible outcome,” (1964, 598) as defined by the Webster’s New Students Dictionary. An optimist does not merely lives life in hopefulness, confidence and positive thoughts, an optimist “constructs” life. An optimist constructs her life or his life and also another person’s life in order to obtain the best possible outcome from what she or he hopes for. The construction of life is actions based on hope. To reach for hope as a worthy cause in life, a person may go through several plans and processes. These are called the construction of life. In a natural way, one constructs only her/his own life to achieve her/his goals. For example, when s/he wants to study to America, s/he joins English lessons or saves money. Kwan constructs others’ life besides her own life, in a long period of time, to reach her goals. In a practice, the construction may affect others’ life and also greatly change others’ fate.

Fate, in a general definition, means something will or must happen to someone. Thus, it is the cause of all events that cannot be controlled by human (Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 1992, 464). A person accepts her or his fate easily for s/he considers fate as an end of what s/he has done which is fix and uncontrolled. S/he probably says “That’s my fate! I cannot do anything to change it. I should not do anything about it”. A boy was born in a rich family. Years

later, he undergoes his adolescence in a poor condition since his family goes bankrupt. He, instead of looking for a work or fighting on something else, probably says, "This is my fate to be born as a rich boy and are to be a poor man". Another example, a young boy walks in a common market and meets a bad guy. They are fighting and the young boy is killed. People may say, "This is his fate to die at such a young age, and in such a place".

Kwan thinks differently about fate. She is an optimist who undergoes many lifetimes. She is wacky and unusual even among Chinese people (THSS, 19) because she lives in the supernatural world and has yin eyes. Kwan will not easily accept unexpected fate such as unlucky events. Fate, according to Kwan, is not the end of everything. Fate is what she believes will happen and is something worth fighting for. One goes to a direction and faces a wall. S/he may turn back to find the right path instead of giving up. There should be optimism to go through all events that lead to the fate. Different acts lead to different fates. A young boy walked in a common market and met a bad guy. They were fighting and the young boy was killed. That event has not yet shown the young boy's fate. Kwan probably will say, "Next lifetime, don't go to any common market. Stays at home for safety, hopes for long lasting life, and starts to change your fate". In this way, fate use no logic and it cannot be debated (THSS, 168).

2.3.2. Chinese Cultural Background

China is a nation with an extraordinary complex civilization shaped from its

culture (Bates, 1969, 26). The ancient and high-developed culture, certainly is the Chinese elements used by Amy Tan to be the background of many-layered story in The Hundred Secret Senses. Based on that, this second concept, The Chinese Cultural Background, describes certain parts of those Chinese elements that are undergone by the main character of the novel. It is designed in order to understand fully what the main character sees and hears.

Chinese culture is unique and attractive to explore (Greene, 1963, 12). The uniqueness of the Chinese culture, as concluded by Bates, comes from the distinctive way of Chinese life, ideas, and outlook (1969, 178) which can be traced clearly throughout thought pattern of Chinese in philosophy and beliefs, and in traditional life.

Taoism, the philosophy of school shows thought pattern of Chinese, uses two elements: Ancestor worship and the worship of the spirit of the Nature (Morton, 29). Ancestor worship that results from Chinese's high respect to ancestors, is practiced by giving sacrifices to dead people to keep their soul alive. The worship of the spirit of the Nature emphasizes on harmony of the nature. Chinese, who put their faith on this worship, usually keep the fertility of their soils by giving sacrifices to gods of Heaven and gods of Earth. By doing so, Chinese have maintain the harmony of the nature. Taoism used the nature-based learning of this worship to be supported element for its taught that stressed on human's position in the natural world. "The secret for man is simply to abandon self-effort and ease himself into the rhythm of the universe, the cycle of the seasons, and the inevitable progression of day and night, life and death"(Morton, 1995, 38). Taoism taught Chinese to come into the harmony of the nature.

Taoism, in turn, divided into a rarefied philosophy and a popular religion cult of superstition and magic called Neo-Taoism. This belief had a pantheon of gods and immortals. It taught that the good and evil things done in this life would surely be recompensed in the uncouth heaven or hells of an afterlife. It had priests, shamans who practiced faith healing, seers, and sorceresses (The Heritage of World Civilizations, 1990, 224). Based on that outlook, Chinese were becoming superstitious people - - those who believe in the supernatural world. Amy Tan creates Kwan, the main character of The Hundred Secret Senses, as a superstitious person.

Chinese were also known as worshippers of the Devotional or Faith sect. This belief taught that Chinese were able to obtain enlightenment by their own efforts, and that one with a pure heart and perfect faith would be saved. This sect deeply affected Chinese popular religion (241). Chinese, influenced by this sect teaching, were being fatalistic people- - those who have fatalistic outlook. Kwan has a fatalistic outlook that makes her optimist with her future.

Chinese can be characterized not only from their philosophies and beliefs but also from their traditional life. Chinese traditional life can be seen through Chinese conception of time, Chinese Morality, Chinese attitude toward the past, and Chinese life confidence that in a whole distinguish Chinese from other cultures.

The Chinese have unusual senses of timing. Their conception of time: they will wait for the best time to act. They are able to act quickly if they think it is necessary to do so. "Chinese won't be pushed"(Greene, 1963, 105). They only can be moved by the motivation comes from within and do not want to be hurried in doing something, and to be forced to do something in the way they dislike. In

short, Chinese are never rushed, never petulant, and never out of patience. They just go their own way and at their own speed regardless of what people may think. Bates even states that Chinese has psychological ability to maintain an objective over “unusually long periods of time” without falling into impatience, and desperation that normally accompanies extended delays of an objective (1969, 29). Kwan also has “unusually long periods of time” in gaining her goals.

Chinese lives in the strict morality teaching and are taught to recognize the five virtues of life: humanity, courtesy, honesty, wisdom, and faithfulness (Morton, 1995, 38). There are also group virtues of steadfastness or loyalty. Kneller studies that Chinese traditional education firstly emphasize on loyalty (1965, 92). Chinese are taught to be loyal to nation, family, and faith. Kwan is loyal. And She tries to be more loyal because she has promised to herself to be Olivia’s loyal sister..

The past is an important element for Chinese’s life because the past pattern of Chinese history greatly affects the thought pattern of Chinese present and tomorrow (Bates, 1969, 16, 20). Chinese have always looked back. This inclination, as said by Wing-tsit Chan, a professor of Chinese Philosophy and Culture in his foreword for Morton’s book titled China, Its History and Culture (1995), emerges because Chinese look for concrete evidence and past experience from a long and fully recorded history. Kwan also has Chinese characteristics. She always uses the past as the lesson for today life and tomorrow.

China is a nation that success in pulling herself up through her own efforts. “She wants to reach the time when she is independent on any outside help, a nation where people are in great ignorance of the outside world they shun” (Greene, A Portrait of China Today, 1963, 345-346). This ability of Chinese in the past to

construct their civilization have shown "a hopeful confidence" (142). "The confidence in the future that one senses everywhere among her people springs from a consciousness of age, of having met wars and invasions and disasters of all kinds through many centuries and survived them all" (367). From the Chinese history, Greene has characterized Chinese's life as a tough life which often lighted by gaiety and "bubbling enthusiasm", and above all, hope for the future (1963, 169). There is an essentially optimistic outlook on life (343). The Chinese filled with self-confidence (345) and has firmness and confidence on matters involving basic issues of principle (395). As Chinese, Kwan is shaped to be a person with optimistic outlook. The thesis writer will use this concept for the analysis.