

Ethnicity and assimilation of immigrants in usa as seen in two kinds by amy tan r...

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



Introduction:

Amy Tan's book is intriguing and interesting as it offers us a new perspective on issues such as ethnicity and the assimilation of immigrants which is obviously not something to be taken lightly. Immigrants can come from various countries and in the texts discussed below one can observe what it is like for those who live in a foreign country and come to the US to find a land of opportunity. This is obviously not always the case but several times, immigration can be considered to have been a huge success although there have been times when this has been an abject failure (Tan 15). The essay also talks about two books which assimilate the problems faced by Chinese and other immigrant workers.

In 1882, Chinese workers were banned from entering the United States on the basis of their class and race. The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed at this time and this was to change the course of American history. In her controversial book, the author, Erika Lee, shows us that due to this law enforcement, Chinese Americans' lives were changed with respect to identities and patterns. America came to be known as a "gatekeeping nation" and Lee tells us about the Chinese immigrants as well as the American immigration officials, some of whom smuggled in the Chinese people illegally. This was done backhandedly because the rules of immigration had been stepped up specifically for the Chinese people, making it near to impossible to enter the United States at this time (Tan 120).

The historical value of the book comes to light through immigration records, histories, interviews and letters. The Chinese were the first nation to become

illegal immigrants. Later on, more nationalities were to follow. The title of the book, *At America's Gate*, suggests people standing and waiting outside the gate to be let in.

In 1860, the Chinese were the largest immigrant group in California. They worked in laundries and restaurants and provided cheap labour. When the act was passed in 1882, the Chinese did not know what to do. They were made very unwelcome in the United States. Should they remain there or try and go back to China? Chinese were being blamed for all sorts of crimes which they had not committed. They became the scapegoats in the search for criminal justice. Many Chinese were beaten because of their nationality and this meant that they were horribly abused as they were only searching for dignity in work (Tan p 55).

What made things even more difficult for the Chinese was that if they opted to leave the United States, they could not gain re-entry. This broke up many families as it was very difficult to re-unite with relatives under the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Restrictions followed the Chinese Exclusion Act and therefore, the Chinese community remained in the same place and did not grow like the other European communities in the United States did. They had to live within their own community shunned by others. In this way, Chinatown was created (De La Torre 88).

The novels “*American Born Chinese*” and “*No No Boy*” are excellent case studies where we have contrasting tales and characters which have several different outcomes. The characters analyzed are those of Jim Wang in “*American Born Chinese*” and Ichiro Yamada in “*No No Boy*” who both have to

grapple with different problems yet face the same sort of problems at the end of the day. Both novels are social commentaries which are important to the understanding and intrinsic reflection of the situation faced by Japanese Americans as well as Chinese Americans in their continual struggle for acceptance (Yang 150).

In *American Born Chinese*, the second character in the story by the name of Jim Wang moves to a new home and he meets an old woman who tells him that he can be everything he wants if he forfeits his own soul. The story continues with the betrothal to the Japanese girl Suzy Nakamura and this indicates the sense of self discovery innate in Wang as he attempts to find himself and what he actually wants in life.

Wang's experience contrasts considerably with that experienced by Ichiro Yamada in "No No Boy" which deals principally with the experience of Nisei Americans in the Second World War where these were interned and suffered horribly as a result. In a sense, Yamada is also finding himself after having taken the decision of not joining the draft and has to deal with inner turmoil and self hate as these issues continue to develop inside him. Wang is substantially different from all this even after his encounter with Wei Chen, the Taiwanese boy who wants to steal his transformer toy although eventually they do end up bonding over the same toy (Okada 211).

The themes in the books also develop continuously especially where Jin Wang and Yamada are concerned. Wang gets into a relationship with a girl called Amelia and the author continuously explores various aspects of this relationship as this continues to intensify. This contrasts substantially with the isolation faced by Yamada in "No No Boy" as he has to come to terms

with his problems on his own and without any hope of redemption. His development could not be more starkly different than that experienced by Jim Wang who can continue to develop his relationship with Amelia as well as his friendship with Wei Chen, the Taiwanese boy.

Jin Wang has certain elements of hubris in his character which is also reflected in a sense by the hubris which is found in Yamada. Although the former has rather more positive experiences, he seems to be unable to get his relationship with Amelia going off on the right foot while Yamada's sheer sense of isolation is a perennial obstacle to his advancement. This is reflected in his reflection on what went completely wrong in his life when he did not accept the draft. Yet his inner self consciousness tells him that he made the right decision in the long run and it seems that he will not turn back from that.

The sense of hubris also informs Jin Wang's experiences when he is no longer allowed to date Amelia. The fact that he was sweating profusely and was not clean has an intense psychological effect on him and all results in a disaster. He is eventually even punched by another woman, Suzy with whom he attempts to confide after his mishap. Yet the hubris which continues to inform his character demonstrates that he will no longer face problems with his usual laissez-faire but will affront them head on.

Unfortunately for Yamada there isn't much love for him when it comes to his situation. He feels ostracized and excluded especially after his prison term where nothing could be further from social exclusion than this. Yamada has absolutely no friends and his only companion is his conscience. Not so Yin Wang who is surrounded by friends and acquaintances although admittedly

they do not do much for him. His dabbling with the old woman to become a transformer is also quite stupid yet the transformer toy assists him to become closer to his Taiwanese friend. In a sense both books attempt to examine the tale of jilted love as Yamada has to re-invent himself in society or else he will go mad whilst Yin Wang manages to lose his girlfriend and even the friendship of the other characters in the book.

The ostracism of Japanese Americans is a theme which is consistent throughout the book and which demonstrates that the effects of the war on this community were singularly devastating. One cannot but argue that the characters of Ying Wang and Yamada are mirror images of what this community went through after most of it was imprisoned in what can be loosely termed as concentration camps. Intrinsically both characters are important life stories of what went on in the hearts and minds of those Nisei Americans as they experienced sheer heartbreak and wilful ostracism. This is surely one of the most powerful themes to be found in both books.

Friendship is an important theme in "American Born Chinese" and it recurs consistently and constantly where Jin Wang is concerned. His friendship with the Taiwanese boy is an important one as it begins with hate and rivalry but everything sort of comes together over the transformer toy. Even the transformer toy is a symbolic force as it brings up the transformation of their friendship up to a point. The same could be said for Yin Wang's friendship with Amelia who blossoms and develops but eventually falls by the wayside. This contrasts with "No No Boy" as Yamada has absolutely no friends but himself and he is faced with a constant and tortuous path towards self-acceptance after weighing the futility of his decision not to join the US Armed

forces. Friendship as a leitmotif is important in both books as it demonstrates the fact that if man has no friends, he/she will fall by the wayside and lead a dejected and hopeless existence (Bauder 125).

Conclusion: different but similar

“ American Born Chinese” and “ No No Boy” explore the problems of Eastern persons living in a Westernized society and all the foibles and obstacles one has to face, almost on a daily basis. Both books are strong social commentaries which reveal the intricacy of personal relationships and the importance of the controlling of hubris in life. All this is a reflection on the situation in which American born Chinese find themselves in and the discrimination which is heavily biased against them.

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