

Two kinds by amy
tan: depiction of
american dream in a
negative aspect



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“ Two Kinds” is a short story, which is a part of the book “ The Joy Luck Club” written by Amy Tan. “ The Joy Luck Club” was published in 1989. The mother-daughter relationship displayed in the short story, has received criticism for perpetuating racist stereotypes about Asian Americans. In this analysis, I would like to interpret the distinctions existing between an Asian immigrant and an Asian-American child, how the American dream can have a negative impact on immigrants and how Amy Tan makes a great usage of symbols.

The short story “ Two Kinds” follow mother and daughter, and the mothers wish for her daughter to become a prodigy. This short story compares the differences between the mothers and a daughter’s generation, but they also compare the differences between American and Chinese culture. In the short story “ Two Kinds” the daughter and her mother lives in America, and her mother is a firm believer in the stereotypical American Dream. She believes that you can become anything in America, and so she chooses her daughter’s path in life. The mother chooses each thing that could make her daughter rich and famous. In China, this wouldn’t have been a possibility, but being in America allows her to push her daughter into a life that isn’t servile. Due to the mother’s hardship in life, she has a hopeful grasp on the American Dream. The mother in the story is both selfish and selfless. She sacrifices a whole lot for her daughter in hope of her getting a better future. “ Mr. Chong was a retired piano teacher, and my mother had traded house cleaning services for weekly lessons and a piano for me to practice on every day, two hours a day from four to six”. But she is also selfish, she wants to experience the American Dream but she does it through her daughter.

The main theme in the story is the cultural distinctions existing between an Asian immigrant and an Asian-American child. The conflict and desires of both the mother and the daughter reflects on the American Dream and how people typically immigrating to America, focus more on acquiring materialistic life that is promised. Because of that the mother raises her daughter, based on the American Dream. This leads to the daughter only focusing on the materialistic life rather than the life that actually makes her happy. The mother raises her daughter in a Chinese way despite living in America. She raises her, like she had been raised. In Asian culture, it is common that the parents choose their child path, but in America it's different. Children choose their own paths in life, and this is the cultural division between an Asian immigrant and Asian-American child. Immigrant parents feel pressure to transform their child into individuals who are easily accepted in society, but the problem is that by doing this they are straining their relationship with their child. Which has a negative impact on their adjustment in society. That is clearly displayed in the short story "Two Kinds". The external conflict in the short story, causes the daughter to have an internal conflict. " And after seeing, once again my mother's disappointed face, something inside me began to die. I hated the test, the raised hopes and failed expectations. Before going to bed that night I looked in the mirror above the bathroom sink, and I saw only my face staring back - and understood that it would always be this ordinary face. I began to cry. Such a sad, ugly girl! I made high - pitched noises like a crazed animal trying to scratch out the face in the mirror." No matter what the daughter did, to make her mother proud, it was never good enough, which caused her to become bitter and stubborn. The daughter gets tired of disappointing her

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mother, which makes her come to the realization that she cannot become a prodigy for her mother. And promise therefore to shield herself from any change her mother wants her to endorse. Which further restrain their relationship.

The title is an important phenomenon, in the short story. It is displayed in various ways through the story. In the beginning of the short story, the daughter was obedient doing everything her mother wanted her to do, but she realized that she needed to follow her own path. "Only two kinds of daughters" she shouted in Chinese "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind!". In America, it's not common that the parents choose the child's path, but in Asian culture it is. In this citation, you can see how the author describes the culture distinction existing between an Asian immigrant and an Asian - American child. Amy Tan uses a lot of these "Two kinds" symbols, in both the song, the title but also the piano. The piano can be a symbol of two things in this short story. The piano is a symbol of the tension between the mother and the daughter, as soon as the piano lessons are talked about it creates tension. "Why don't you like me the way I am? I cried. I'm not a genius! I can't play the piano. And even if I could, I wouldn't go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!" This of course proceed into the disastrous piano recital. But at the end of the story the daughter is given the piano back and she sees it like a trophy. Like a peace offering and the symbolism of the piano has therefore change because the daughter won it back on her own terms. In the end of the short story the daughter realizes that "Pleading Child" and "Perfectly Contented" are two halves of the same song. "Pleading Child" being a symbol of her childhood, her obedience, her

bad memories while, “ Perfectly Contented” being a symbol of her adulthood, her independence, and her wish to follow her own path. These two songs are two halves of the same song because in order for the daughter to find herself, to become who she is today she needed both of them. She would not be who she is today without both the songs. The author also suggests in the story that the daughter towards the end doesn’t have any ill feelings towards her mother, when she’s gone which is the reason why she started playing again. This same kind of symbolism can be used to describe the piano. Because the piano has black and white keys, the black symbolizing the bad memories and her childhood and the white symbolizing her adulthood and independence. But both types of keys make music, so in order to create a good song, she need both the black and the white keys. So, in order to become who, she is today she needed both of them.

On the basis of the analysis, I would like to conclude that the short story “ Two Kinds” uses the American Dream in a negative aspect, by materializing the way the mother thinks in the short story, therefore also impacting the daughter way of thinking about happiness, they also make use of typical stereotypes of Asian-American, by doing so.