

Amy tan questions



Parents are often the entry gate to a child's opinion of themselves and their culture. In the United States, most people find themselves relating to the mainstream, Anglo-American cultural ideals. This leads to what many experts call a 'culture clash', often experienced by first-generation members of immigrant families.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan questions the reasons for the difficulty of acceptance and practice of one's culture while immersed in a societal climate that holds different values. Tan offers insight through this story of four Chinese immigrants, elaborating upon their difficulties in understanding the differences in the mainstream American culture, which in turn reveals the difficulty of immigrant parents' ability to understand their children, leading to the alienation of their daughters to traditional Chinese culture.

Culture is defined as the behaviors and values accepted by a group of people that are passed down from generation to generation, usually through communication and imitation. It is a parent's job to pass their culture down to their children, but there is a difficulty that arises when the family culture does not match the mainstream societal culture. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the Chinese culture embraced by the mothers differs greatly from the Anglo-American culture that they are forced to conform to. Lindo Jong, one of the Chinese mothers says, In America, nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you (Tan 254). This is very different from the way she was raised, where her circumstances were permanent and determined her character and future.

To Lindo, the best combination seemed to be American circumstances and Chinese character, but she soon learns that the two cannot coexist (Tan 254). She is unable to teach her daughter, Waverly, to listen to her mother, while at the same time the American culture tells her to listen only to herself. Lindo cannot understand, and therefore a divide occurs between mother and daughter. It is impossible for Lindo to understand her daughter's culture, and it is impossible for her Waverly to understand her mother's culture. Because of the different social environments of their youths, a culture clash between the two arises.

As Chiu writes, when the culture of a parent does not match the culture of the law the law will typically emerge victorious, and this is exactly what happens in the case of the Jongs (Chiu 1793). American culture that Waverly is immersed in daily takes precedence over a culture that she only ever sees from her family. The American ideals take precedence over cultural values in first-generation children, as they desire to become more like the people around them and fit in.

Asian-Americans make up 5.6% of the American population, and most identify themselves by more specific labels, such as Chinese-American, Korean-American, and Indian-American. They cite themselves as these smaller groups because they call upon a much richer history than that of Asian-Americans. Despite this, it is a common phenomenon for Asian-American children to cast off their culture because it clashes with the societal majority's ideals. Culture clash leads to the alienation of first-generation Asian-American children.

Because of the difference in Eastern and Western culture, parents of first-generation American children generally have trouble understanding the differences between the world that they grew up in and the world that their children are growing up in. Compounded with the difference in technology, many first-generation children become alienated from their parents, especially once they reach schooling age. In these children's lives, friends become a larger influence upon culture because of the children's desire to fit in; they see their parents as strangers in a foreign land, and it is their job to fit in and become truly American.

This can be showcased in a scene in which Waverly Jong is upset that she will not be mistaken for a local in China. Lindo states, she followed my Chinese ways only until she learned how to walk out the door by herself and go to school, after that, American friends taught her to be American, and she lost her cultural identity (Tan 253). Ricky Yean writes that he stopped trying to talk for two years until [he] developed enough fluency to sound just like any ordinary Asian-American kid from Los Angeles (Yean). This cultural erasure continues to happen today, despite cultural pride being thrown to the forefront of the American media.

Tan also writes about this through Jing-Mei Woo's statement that it's even becoming fashionable for American-born Chinese to use their Chinese names (Tan 37). Unfortunately, culture not accepted by the mainstream society of a place, even one as diverse as America, is destroyed through the desire of first-generation children to be more like those around them. Even now, with Asian media rising to take a place in the general public's eyes (to cite a few examples, BTS, Crazy Rich Asians, and the popularization of Japanese

Manga) Asian-Americans are still tentative about embracing their culture because it contrasts so drastically with the mainstream American culture.