

# Suyuan's tragedies in the joy luck club:

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In Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, each female character experiences different degrees of tragedy, but Suyuan Woo's life appears to be the most tragic. Despite suffering many misfortunes in her life, Suyuan is a willful woman who does not focus on the hardships in life but instead attempts to create happiness. With this personality, she creates the Joy Luck Club in China to find happiness while the Japanese invaded China. Later, Suyuan leaves China and comes to America in hopes of starting fresh. Suyuan suffers because of her losses, her miscommunication, and the fear she lived in. During the Japanese invasion, Suyuan loses almost everything she holds dear. While trying to escape to Chungking, Suyuan abandons her twin daughters and leaves her possessions and address with them, in hopes "that her daughters would be found by a kindhearted person who would care for them" (Tan 325). Suyuan did not know what the future would hold, but she had to believe that her daughters would survive. Though Suyuan did not want to leave, she sacrificed herself in hopes that someone would give them a better life because if she had died with them, no one would take such unfortunate babies. In addition, when Suyuan reached Chungking and learned that her husband had died, "she was delirious with madness" (Tan 326). Even though Suyuan had come all the way to Chungking, she gained nothing. Suyuan knew that her husband might die fighting in the war, but after losing her daughters, when she heard her husband's fate, she was shocked to lose him, too. Nothing important remained in Suyuan's life after her journey from Kweilin to Chungking. In America, Suyuan's relationship with her other daughter, Jing-mei, deteriorates due to miscommunication between them. For example, when Suyuan tries to help Jing-mei find her inner prodigy, Jing-mei defies and resents her, thinking that her mother is

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trying to make her "be someone [she's] not" (Tan 153). Jing-mei does not fully appreciate her mother when Suyuan tries to help her, believing that she can only be her self and cannot be forced to accomplish more. The American social pressure causes Jing-mei to try to be like everyone else, so she misunderstands her mother's motive in making Jing-mei work hard to nurture her talents. In addition, at the New Year's dinner, Jing-mei thinks that the reason that her mother had given her the jade pendant was because of Waverly's insults, but Suyuan meant to give Jing-mei the pendant in hopes that her daughter will recognize life's importance. Jing-mei fails to realize that her mother knows that she has the best quality at heart, and even after Jing-mei's failures, Suyuan never expects anything from her. When Suyuan was alive, Jing-mei did not wear the pendant, thinking that it was unstylish, but after Suyuan dies, Jing-mei understands that her mother was trying to convey her deep love and concern for her. Miscommunication caused a gap between mother daughter relationships. Suyuan's life is also tragic due to the constant fear she lived in. For example, Suyuan always feared that she might not be able to find her babies or something might happen to them, and when Canning unintentionally asserted her fears, "he put a terrible thought in her head that her daughters were dead, which grew bigger and bigger until it killed her" (Tan 329). Suyuan was forever hoping that one of her attempts to find her daughter would come true. Suyuan searches for her twin daughters her whole life but she is not reunited and so Suyuan's long cherished wish remains unfulfilled. In addition, Suyuan wants the best for Jing-mei when she "tries to cultivate some hidden genius" (27) in Jing-mei, but she worries that her daughter might not understand this. After failing to excel at each task her mother sets, Jing-mei begins to see them as

expectations and feels like a failure, but Suyuan never expects anything from Jing-mei except for her to try her best. When Suyuan tries to find Jing-mei's inner prodigy, not only was she hoping the best for daughter, but she was also living through Jing-mei's success by having what she could not as young girl in China. As a mother, Suyuan always worries about her daughters' well being. Since Suyuan never displayed her true emotions on her face because she was taught in the Chinese way, she never let anyone know how much she was truly suffering in the inside. Inside, Suyuan suffers because almost nothing remains of her life in China, her declining relationship with Jing-mei, which is caused by the lack of communication between them, and the continuous trepidation in her life in America. Despite all her suffering, Suyuan never loses hope or the motivation to keep trying and never give up. This is shown in Suyuan's life when she never gives up trying to find her daughters and when she tries to mend her relationship with Jing-mei. However, even her strong will could not avert fate, as she dies with her unfulfilled, long cherished wish. Bibliography Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage Books USA, 1991.