

Description of history and events in the joy luck club, written by amy tan

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People should find their own cultural identities and feel proud of and empowered by their origin and identity. However, It is important to acknowledge that once people immigrate and immerse in a new culture, it is more challenging for them to have a clear definition of who they are and what their origins are. Such is the case in *The Joy Luck Club*, written by Amy Tan, which describes the lives of four Chinese women who have immigrated to America and their four daughters who have been raised in America. The novel focuses on the fact that it is hard not only for immigrants but also for their children to find their true cultural identities in a new country. The story of *The Joy Luck Club* was later adapted into a feature film with the same name directed by Wayne Wang in 1993. The movie and the novel are roughly the same; there are some commonalities between them, and of course, there is a little bit difference as well. A detailed comparison of the novel and movie clearly reveals that in both the theme is vividly and successfully conveyed through the strong characterization of the main characters and the revelation of their reflections and feelings. Besides, just like the novel, the movie draws upon the power of the symbol of Mahjong as a traditional Chinese game to show how the mothers respect their traditional Chinese culture. However, despite all the similarities, the movie does not spend as much time on showing the impact of Chinese superstitions on the life of the Chinese as the novel does.

The first similarity between the novel and the film is that they both effectively develop and express the theme of cultural identity. The author and the director develop the theme by telling the stories of 8 different characters and describing their characteristics and mental activities. In the

film. When Rose Hsu is having a conversation about her marriage with her mother, An-Mei, An-Mei realizes her daughter cannot really find her identity. An-Mei admits that even though she “ was raised the Chinese way;” that is, “ was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people’s misery, and to eat own bitterness,” she tried to teach her daughter the American way. Nevertheless, “ even she taught [her] daughter the opposite, but she still came out the same way”. This explains the reason why Rose does not have a happy marriage, since she has learned to live neither the Chinese way nor the American way. Although her mother has tried her best to teach her how to be a true American, she still cannot discover her cultural identity because her mother’s characteristics affect her. In the old society of China, women were supposed to swallow the insult and humiliation silently because they had the lowest status in the society. People often say that mothers are the roots of daughters, so An-Mei’s personality has definitely affected Rose and has made her doubt her own cultural identity although she is being raised in the American way. In the novel, Lindo shows her lack of knowledge of her cultural identity by questioning herself about the way she has raised her daughter Waverly. She blames herself when she says, “ It’s my fault she is in this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?”. This quote reflects that the Chinese style upbringing does not fit in well with the American circumstance, leading to a cultural conflict. Lindo struggles a lot finding her true cultural identity. Because of her Chinese origin and her lack of the knowledge of cultural identity, she raises her child, Waverly, in a way that leads to a cultural identity crisis in her as well.

Through the vivid portrayal of such scenes in both the novel and the movie, the author and the director are successful in developing and expressing the theme of cultural identity crisis among immigrants.

Besides the theme, another similarity between the movie and the novel is that they both draw upon the power of the symbol of Mahjong as a traditional Chinese game to show how the mothers respect and remember their traditional Chinese culture. Just like in the novel, in the movie, the characters are shown to be playing Mahjong in the club with June Woo's narration in the background in the beginning of the movie. The narrator explains the reason why these Chinese mothers play Mahjong in America. They hope they can gain some happiness and luck by playing this traditional Chinese game. The novel also has a similar quote that explains the reason why they play Mahjong, which is narrated by June Woo's mother, An-Mei Woo: " We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy." This quote demonstrates the symbolic power of Mahjong because it shows the audience even though these Chinese women have already immigrated to America, they still try to find their hope and happiness from something that is a part of traditional Chinese culture. They never try to forget the culture, and they show a kind of respect because they see Mahjong as having a magical power, which brings them joy and bridges the gap between the new Western culture and the Chinese culture, which they have in their bones.

However, even though the movie was directed and shot based on the novel, it still is not completely the same as the novel. Despite all the similarities, the movie does not spend as much time showing the impact of Chinese superstitions on the Chinese people's lives as the novel does. In the novel, Lena, who is one of the American-raised daughters, admits that her mother Ying-ying has the ability to see the negative things everywhere. When Ying-ying sees there is some leftover rice in Lena's bowl, she prophesies that Lena will marry a bad man in the future. Even though such a prophecy is only a superstition, Lena tends to remember it years later when she grows up. Lena says, " I remember something else she saw when I was eight years old. My mother had looked in my rice bowl and told me I would marry a bad man". Ying-ying is a typical Chinese woman who believes in superstition. All she says about Lena's future husband is based on the superstition because a mother cannot foretell what kind of person her future son-in-law will be by looking at her daughter's rice bowl. This quote reflects that Ying-ying's absurd prediction actually affects her daughter a lot, as it plays an important role in Lena's life. She is worried that the prediction would come true when she is young. She believes that her obsession with her mother's superstitious prediction ultimately has brought her a bad husband - Harold, a man with a stingy heart. However, in the film, there isn't any scene that shows Ying-ying belief in superstition. Also, there isn't anything in the film that shows how that superstition affects Lena's life. Therefore, comparing the novel and the movie, the novel gives more details about some of the Chinese superstitions than the movie and it describes how such superstitions may influence people.

Considering the limitations of time and resources, it is very normal for a movie to not include all the details from of the novel; however, conveying a similar theme through relating the story and keeping the main elements of the story, such as the symbols, is the main task of any one director, which Wayne Wang has pulled off very successfully. Both the book and the movie reveal that it is hard or almost impossible for the immigrants to forget their past memories and their original culture, but it is also important to learn how to adapt to the new environment. In order to find a sense of belonging in another country, people must learn how to resolve the misunderstandings, how to endure the hardships, and also how to laugh at the setbacks.