

The chinese-american background of amy tan has influenced her works



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An author's cultural background can play a large part in the authors writing. Amy Tan, a Chinese-American woman, uses the cultural values of Chinese women in American culture in her novel, *The Joy Luck Club*. These cultural values shape the outcome of *The Joy Luck Club*. The two cultural value systems create conflict between the characters. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the chapter "Waiting Between the Trees" illustrates major concerns facing Chinese-American women. Chinese culture is a male dominated culture that leaves women little freedom. Their only job is to make their male spouses content. Living with their traditional culture in American society, Chinese-American women suffer a conflict of culture. While their American husbands are active and assertive, they are passive and place their happiness entirely on the goodness of their spouses. In many cases, this passiveness can be seen as a weakness (Chinese-American Women 1-2) . By looking at two characters from the novel, Ying-Ying and Lena St. Clair, a Chinese mother and a half-Chinese daughter, one can see this conflict more clearly. Ying-Ying was born to a rich family. She was very pretty when she was a young girl. She was educated like every Chinese woman used to be: To be obedient, to honor one's parents, one's husband and to try to please him and his family. Ying-Ying was not taught to use her own digression and make her own way through life. The result of this education was a disaster due to the differences in values between the two cultures. Ying-Ying realized that her marriage was a mistake when her husband left her for another woman. Her love for him turned to hate and she killed her unborn baby. She felt great remorse for this and considered herself a murderer. She later remarried a gentleman by the name of St. Clair. With St. Clair she had a daughter. After her second son, which was her third child, died at birth, Ying-Ying had a

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mental breakdown. She saw his death as a punishment for the murdering her first son. Ying-Ying became passive and lifeless after her second son died. She kept the fact that she felt responsible for her second sons death a secret from her husband and daughter, Lena. As shown in this example, Ying-Ying had Chinese cultural values in an American society. This produces the conflict between cultures. Ying-Ying becomes so passive that she lets her husband make all of her decisions for her. Lena St. Clair, on the other hand, was born in America and lives like an American girl. " But when she was born, she sprang from me like a slippery fish, and had been swimming away ever since," Ying-Ying said (Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* 274). Lena knew that her mother kept a secret from her and her father. She saw her mother as a weak-minded woman who needed help. She learned American ways and thought of herself as " more suitable" to American life than her mother. The difference in cultural values between mother and daughter of a first generation immigrant is another problem facing Chinese-American women. Tan herself had also experienced this (Salon Interview 2). For all her life, Ying-Ying lived on a superficial level with St. Clair, her husband. Lena inherited this attitude from her mother. In St. Clair's family, they never had real communication, largely in part to the cultural gap. Lena and her father never knew who Ying-Ying really was. Lena never questioned her mother about Chinese tradition, or about her parents' relationship. Chinese traditional culture was based partly on Confucius's teachings, Taoism and Buddhism. In all three of these teachings, women played a very small role. They were traditionally house wives and servants of their spouses (Chinese-American Women 4) . Ying-Ying, like her mother and grandmother, was taught to take a back seat in family as well as business affairs. This Chinese

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belief and value system does not work well when put in American culture. The writing of Amy Tan reflects the dichotomy between first and second generation immigrants that Tan herself went through (Tan, " In the Canon" 29) . H English 114 December 1997The Chinese-American background of Amy Tan has influenced her worksAn author's cultural background can play a large part in the authors writing. Amy Tan, a Chinese-American woman, uses the cultural values of Chinese women in American culture in her novel, The Joy Luck Club. These cultural values shape the outcome of The Joy Luck Club. The two cultural value systems create conflict between the characters. In The Joy Luck Club, the chapter " Waiting Between the Trees" illustrates major concerns facing Chinese-American women. Chinese culture is a male dominated culture that leaves women little freedom. Their only job is to make their male spouses content. Living with their traditional culture in American society, Chinese-American women suffer a conflict of culture. While their American husbands are active and assertive, they are passive and place their happiness entirely on the goodness of their spouses. In many cases, this passiveness can be seen as a weakness (Chinese-American Women 1-2) . By looking at two characters from the novel, Ying-Ying and Lena St. Clair, a Chinese mother and a half-Chinese daughter, one can see this conflict more clearly. Ying-Ying was born to a rich family. She was very pretty when she was a young girl. She was educated like every Chinese woman used to be: To be obedient, to honor one's parents, one's husband and to try to please him and his family. Ying-Ying was not taught to use her own digression and make her own way through life. The result of this education was a disaster due to the differences in values between the two cultures. Ying-Ying realized that her marriage was a mistake when her

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