

## **CHAPTER III**

### **ANALYSIS ON CULTURAL AND GENERATIONAL GAPS**

This chapter presents an analysis on Jing-mei's struggle to maintain the mother-daughter bond across cultural and generational gaps. In the effort to analyze the struggle of the main character in Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club", the writer will discuss the characterization of Jing-mei Woo, the plot of the story, and also the setting. For further consideration, of carrying out the main character's struggle in the story, the writer will present the analysis from sociological approach.

#### **III.1 INTRINSIC ASPECT**

In trying to find the answers to the statement of the problem stated in chapter I, the writer tends to analyze the struggle of the main character: Jing-mei Woo.

The writer chooses the intrinsic approach to conduct the analysis, in this case the struggle of the main character would be analyzed from three elements. These elements are characterization, plot, and setting.

In conducting the analysis, the method of the study which is used by the writer is descriptive analysis. The result of the analysis will be explained by providing interpretation through actions, dialogues, and events that are available within the story. Furthermore, this interpretation is used to find out what kind of person is the main character; especially when she is facing a trouble or a limited situation. Then the development of the main character when she is facing the trouble deals with the plot of the story, since the plot itself points out the causal relation. In line with the previous intrinsic elements, the setting also provides important information for analyzing the struggle of the main character. Setting could give the description of social life that influence the main character.

### **III.1.1 Characterization**

First of all, the writer will describe the physical identity of Jing-mei Woo, the main character of "The Joy Luck Club". Jing-mei was born in California, USA, in 1951. She is thirty-six years old woman at the moment the story is told.

The first interesting discussion is on Jing-mei's name. In Chinese, her name has a special meaning for her mother, as described by his father:

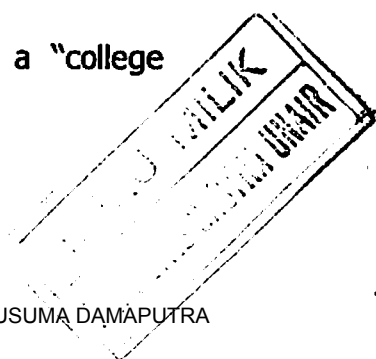
"Jing is good leftover stuff when you take impurities out of something like gold, or rice, or salt. So what is left – just pure essence. And 'Mei', this is a common mei, as in meimei, 'younger sister'."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 281)

This name symbolizes that Jing-mei's name represents her mother's long-cherished wish. It means that Jing-mei is the younger sister who was supposed to be the essence of the other lost sisters. Jing-mei supposed to be the essence of her mother's generational heritage.

Later discussion is on Jing-mei's academic background. She has ever studied in college but never finished it. As a college drop-off, she works as a copywriter in a small advertising agency. She feels that her personal achievement is not good enough and being a 'college drop-off' is a failure, as she says:

"...maybe just six months ago, we were again having this argument about my being failure, a "college drop-off" ("The Joy Luck Club", p. 37)



This illustration represents her vision that her best is not good enough for her mother and that makes her gives up trying. Here we can conclude that Jing-mei has lack of confidence. This lack of confidence is the result of her mother's influence in her personal achievement. Actually Jing-mei's mother only wants her to have a special talent to help her succeed, but however Jing-mei does not understand this.

And now we will discuss Jing-mei's thoughts. By looking at her name, her birthplace, and her cultural background, we can see that Jing-mei Woo is a Chinese-American citizen. Being a Chinese-American citizen makes Jing-mei Woo be raised in a modern society. Here in this modern society, off course, educational process and social interaction have influence her way of thinking. This statement is supported by following quotation:

"There is a school of thoughts," I said, "That parents shouldn't criticize children. They should encourage instead. You know, people rise to other people's expectations. And when you criticize, it just means you're expecting failure."

**("The Joy Luck Club", p. 31)**

The above quotation of Jing-mei's thoughts shows two interesting interpretation in her characterization. The first point is that she has a modern thoughts which are very contrastive with her mother's traditional thoughts. These contrastive thoughts between her and her mother later become the cultural gap between them.

Because she grows with modern way of thinking, Jing-mei loses her Chinese traditional heritage. And her blindness in Chinese tradition leads us to discover her fears of cultural identity. This fear of cultural identity grows when she is decided to see her two lost sisters in Shanghai after her mother's death. Jing-mei is afraid that she is not Chinese enough in the eye of her sisters, as we can see from this quotation:

"As we wave good-bye one more time and enter the waiting area, I get the sense I am going from one funeral to another. In my hand I'm clutching a pair of tickets to Shanghai. In two hours we'll be there."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 287)

Here from the utterance above, it is very obvious the indication of her fears in cultural identity. The symbol of *funeral* represents Jing-mei's fear. The fear of cultural

identity represents her conflicting mind which is to be American and at the same time she has to be Chinese as well.

And now we will discuss the second interpretation of Jing-mei's modern thoughts. Her modern way of thinking has brought her to study in college, as we can see from her utterance:

"...like myself, for having started half a degree in biology, then half a degree in art,... I used to dismiss her criticisms as just more of her Chinese superstitions, beliefs that conveniently fit the circumstances. I tried to tell her why she shouldn't criticize so much, why it didn't lead to a healthy learning environment."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 31)

Jing-mei can provide good comments and she is able to give the scientific reason too. The quotation above represents Jing-mei's genius. Her modern way of thinking has made her genius in analyzing the situation. So we can see here that Jing-mei is an argumentative person. But her modern way of thinking seems to decay the transformation

of cultural and generational bonds between her and her mother.

The writer also discovers that Jing-mei is a strong-willed person. She will only do something by her own choice. Jing-mei will never do anything which is against her mood. This kind of characterization is reflected well in this argument between her mother and Jing-mei:

"I can't play the piano. And even if I could, I wouldn't go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!" I cried."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 136)

This argument occurs when Jing-mei's mother sentences her to practice playing the piano. Here the quotation shows that Jing-mei is a person who holds her principle strongly. And because of this characterization, Jing-mei often has a quarrel with her mother, and further will destruct the transformation of the cultural and generational bond between them. This quarrel between mother and daughter shows the inconsistencies which establish the cultural and generational gaps in the generational line descent.

In addition to the analysis of Jing-mei Woo's characterization, the writer will also identify what category does the main character belong.

The characterization of Jing-mei Woo, the main character in Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club" can be categorized as round, developing, and typical character.

This because the characterization of Jing-mei Woo shows a well-explored possibilities on her life. These possibilities are including her personalities and vision. When we read the story we will find out the unpredictable changing of her personalities. The changing happens when she finds out that she has two lost sisters after her mother's death. First when her mother is still alive, Jing-mei fears can not become like everyone else since she is a Chinese-American daughter.

And then after her mother died, she is afraid that she can not be Chinese enough to meet her sisters in Shanghai. As we can see from this quotation,

"But today I realize I've never really known what it means to be Chinese. I'm thirty-six years old. My mother is dead and I am on a train, carrying with me



her dreams of coming home. I am going to China.”

("The Joy Luck Club"; p. 268)

This quotation above represents the sensitivity of Jing-mei upon her personal identity. For the first time she found that there was nothing crucial as being destined to be a Chinese-American. But right after she heard the news that she had two lost sisters, Jing-mei starts to question her identity. The question of which part of her is Chinese and which part of her is American and slightly come to her mind.

The awareness upon her identity has caused a development in her characterization. The development of the characterization shows when she interacts actively with her environment which further will influence her feelings, behavior, and actions. The changing that happens surround her and the influence of the social relations have increased her sensitivity and as the result, she occurs a changing and developing vision in her life. By deciding to go to China she also takes a big step in her life. Jing-mei seems to encourage herself to destroy her fears of cultural identity by facing it directly. One will not find out the result until challenging it and facing it.

And as the result, the writer finds out a dialogue which can be categorized as a data:

"And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all this years, it can finally be let go."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 288)

As the previous interpretation shows Jing-mei's sensitivity upon her personal identity, the above quotation shows valuable human characterization. It represents the development in her characterization. The things that make it interesting is that Jing-mei's characterization is so alive and dynamic. From the quotation we can see that she finally understands her Chinese heritage. And this understanding is actually the result of her self-exploration, which is stimulated by her cultural and generational gaps.

Based on the reflection to certain individual or society on the real life. The characterization of Jing-mei Woo represents an individual from Chinese-American society, exactly a second generation of Chinese immigrant in America.

"My mother started the San Fransisco version of The Joy Luck Club in 1949, two years before I was born.

This was the year my mother and my father left China with one stiff leather trunk filled only with fancy silk dresses."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 20)

From the above quotation we can see that it shows Jing-mei's origin. She is the daughter of Chinese immigrant couple. But the important information lies on "one stiff leather trunk filled only with fancy silk dresses.". Here the parents carry only silk dresses which symbolize that they can only bring hope, instead of other material objects such as money, gold, or jade. As the heritage undertaker, Jing-mei should be understood this kind of symbol that she has to carry the hope of her parents; especially the hope of her mother. But as an American-raised daughter, she did not understand this cyclical return between generation. And that is why this generational gap makes her feels that she does not know her mother.

As we know that she is a Chinese who was born in America and grown up in America, she does not really understand Chinese culture, as the following describes:

"And she had a daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-cola than sorrow."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 17)

The quotation represents the difference between Jing-mei and her mother is not only in the matter of language and culture, but it is also the difference in experience. Especially from the fact that her mother has experienced a painful life in China. Here we can see the use of the term "*coca-cola*" symbolizes the American culture, which is well known as a modern culture and pretty welfare rather than her mother's life in China. *Coca-cola* is also used as the icon of *Americanized* culture. The contrast between *coca-cola* and *sorrow* shows the cultural and generational gaps between Jing-mei and her mother.

And from this quotation, the writer can capture important interpretation of Jing-mei's characterization. In previous interpretation, the writer has already mentioned that Jing-mei Woo is actually a genius person. Eventhough she is raised in United States, she can interpret Chinese philosophy well. But the cultural and gaps have made her

unable to reflect the meaning of that philosophy within herself.

### **III.1.2 Plot**

From the previous chapter we can emphasize that plot is the chronological structure of events which points out the causal relation (Forster, 1970:93). And here the model of plot which is used by the writer is the model that stated by Little (1966:83).

This model represents five elements of plot which consist of exposition, conflict, suspense, climax, and resolution.

In the exposition, Jing-mei Woo as the main character is introduced. She has a mother who has died two months before by a cerebral aneurysm. Her mother's death has influenced Jing-mei much since it leads her to replace her mother's position in The Joy Luck Club. That is because The Joy Luck Club brings worthful information about her lost identity.

The Joy Luck Club is a mahjong playing club established in 1949 by Jing-mei's mother, Suyuan, in San Fransisco. This club is meant to reaffirm the possibility of

having hope and happiness even in the midst of complex uncertainty and turmoil.

"It's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 25)

Beyond this quotation above, the writer can capture the important message of "The Joy Luck Club". There was a jealousy where the people thought it was wrong to serve banquet every week in The Joy Luck Club while many people starving. But the true meaning of "The Joy Luck Club" is not celebrating party at all. The people in "The Joy Luck Club" feasted, laughed, played games, and shared the best stories just in order to hope for luck.

After Jing-mei's mother died, the time come for Jing-mei to replace her mother in "The Joy Luck Club". Through The Joy Luck Club Jing-mei realizes that actually she does not know much about her own mother.

"But listening to Auntie Lin tonight reminds me once again: My mother and I never really understand one another. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 37)

From this quotation we can see that the cultural and generational gaps between Jing-mei and her mother is emphasized. The cultural and generational gaps have made a lack of understanding between Jing-mei and her mother. This lack of understanding is simply because when her mother gives advice regarding the daughter's problems, the daughter either takes the advice to mean something other than the mother had intended, or the daughter simply ignore it.

Also from The Joy Luck Club, Jing-mei discovers that her lost sisters in China are still alive.

"She knew they were alive, and before she died she wanted to find her daughters in China."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 39)

This illustration represents that as a Chinese woman, Jing-mei should follow the philosophy of cyclical heritage.

She has to fulfill her mother's dream to see her lost sisters in China, to replace her mother.

The people in "The Joy Luck Club" also suggest Jing-mei to see her sisters in order to fulfill her mother's hope before she died.

"You must see your sisters and tell them about your mother's death... but most important, you must tell them about her life. The mother they did not know, they must know."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 40)

In the description above, the duty of Jing-mei to fulfill her mother's dream is emphasized, but the meaning of this command is that Jing-mei should become the representation of her mother towards the lost two sisters. This is the most difficult part for Jing-mei since she has a lack of understanding with her mother.

Jing-mei's duty to visit her lost sisters in China has sets up a psychological conflict in her mind. She has to tell her sisters about her mother but she does not really know her mother well.

"I am crying now, sobbing and laughing at the same time seeing but not understanding this



loyalty to my mother... what will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything. She was my mother ."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 40)

It represents her blindness about her mother leads her to question herself can she carry the past forward into the future. And it means she has a doubt on her ability to carry the hopes of her mother into the next generation, a picture of cultural and generational gaps.

The doubt on her ability to carry the hopes of her mother which supposed to be the earlier conflict that appears in the previous stage is developed. It sets up two opposing forces in Jing-mei's mind. First, she wants to make her mother's dream comes true by seeing her lost sisters in Shanghai.

"She knew they were alive, and before she died she wanted to find her daughters in China."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 39)

And the second, Jing-mei feels that she doesn't know about her mother enough to tell her sisters.

"What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything. She was my mother."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 40)

These two conflicting forces in Jing-mei's mind grow and transform into a fear of her own identity. She realizes that generational heritage emphasizes a cyclical return to the past, and it means that not knowing her mother equals to not knowing herself.

Jing-mei feels that her fear of identity is caused by the cultural and generational gaps between her mother and herself.

"And then it occurs to me. She is frightened. In me, she sees her own daughter, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes she has brought to America. She sees daughter who grows impatient when her mother talks in Chinese, who think she is stupid when she explains things in fractured English."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 40-41)

From Jing-mei's utterance above, the writer finds that Jing-mei starts to explore her own lackness. It

represents how Jing-mei manifests her mother's story upon her self.

As the conflict reaches the climax, Jing-mei Woo makes an essential decision in this stage. She decides to make her mother's dream come true by seeing her lost sisters in Shanghai.

"I am thirty-six years old. My mother is dead and I am on a train, carrying with me her dreams of coming home. I am going to China."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 268)

It represents that seeing her two lost sisters in China is not only to make her mother's dream come true, but it is a biggest step for Jing-mei to struggle in overcoming her cultural and generational gaps. Here Jing-mei makes a great effort to put down all her doubts.

And now that she is in China, for the first time, Jing-mei has to overcome her fears of cultural identity.

"The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enter Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones

aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right, I am becoming Chinese."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 267)

And at the same time she also has to overcome her fears of generational identity.

"But then I started dreaming, too, of my mother and my sisters and how it would be if I arrived in Shanghai. All these years, while they waited to be found, I had lived with my mother and then had lost her."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 270)

Those quotations above represent that Jing-mei keeps struggle by exploring her qualities in her mind. Her mind exploration has caused alarm and nervousness in herself.

In the resolution, the conflict of her cultural and generational gaps that reaching the climax has its answer. This represents that fears about cultural and generational identity are resolved. Jing-mei realizes that she is inevitably Chinese as well as American. Seeing her sisters for the first time makes her realize that belonging to her family makes her Chinese by default.

"Yet they still look familiar. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 288)

Moreover, now that she has met her sisters, she notices that the three of them look like their mothers, Suyuan. The missing piece of the family has ceased to be her sisters. And the true object of Jing-mei's search was Suyuan all along. Having found her mother, Jing-mei ceases to voice doubts about her relationship to Suyuan.

"And although we don't speak, I know we all see it: together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 288)

This utterance represents that even though there is cultural gaps between them, they finally understand each other. It means that although there is a difference in the language and culture, these sisters can still be united by their beloved mother in their hearts.

And for Jing-mei, her struggle to overcome the cultural and generational gaps has increased her mother-daughter bond although her mother has passed away.

### **III.1.3 Setting**

According to Abrams (1981:175), setting refers to the general time, particular physical location, and social environment in which the story takes place. So that is why the writer wants to develop the setting of the story into three aspects.

#### **a. Setting of Place**

The setting of place in "The Joy Luck Club" is divided into two major places. The first place is in China.

"In China, everybody dreamed about Kweilin. And when I arrived, I realized how shabby my dreams were."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 21)

And then after the world war II, the setting of place switches to America.

"My mother started the San Fransisco version of The Joy Luck Club in 1949, two years before I was born."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 20)

So here we find out there are two major places which is to be the setting of "The Joy Luck Club", they are Kweilin in China, and San Francisco, United States.

Kweilin as the first setting of this novel signifies unfamous place. The using of this unfamous place is indicating two meanings.

First, unfamous place represents unprosperous life of Jing-mei's mother in the past. Jing-mei's mother loses everything during the world war II, including loses her two daughters of her first marriage.

In the second interpretation, using unfamous place represents Jing-mei's undiscovered Chinese heritage inside her mind. It means that Jing-mei never really know what it means to be Chinese.

#### **b. Setting of Time**

Generally, there are two main settings of time in "The Joy Luck Club". The first one is in the early twentieth century China, exactly in the year of 1944.

"They are my mother's twin daughters from her first marriage, little babies she was forced to abandon on a road as she was fleeing Kweilin for Chungking in 1944."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 268)

The second setting of time is the present day. From the Jing-mei's utterance the writer finds out that the year of the present day in "The Joy Luck Club" is 1987. This year comes from Jing-mei's age in the present day.

"...my mother died three months ago, six days before my thirty-sixth birthday."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 197)

Plus the year when she is born, 1951.

"Woo", it says at the top, and below that, "June May," who was born in "California, U.S.A." in 1951."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 292)

This two main settings of time in "The Joy Luck Club" represents the two different kinds of life between a mother and a daughter, Jing-mei Woo. The first one is in the early twentieth century China, exactly in the year of 1944, which represents the sorrow of her mother's life and also represents the generational tradition of Chinese heritage. The second setting of time is the present day, which represents Jing-mei's side of vision and culture. The distance between these two settings of time reflects the length of understanding in Jing-mei's



characterization. Setting of time in this novel plays an important role in determining the generational gaps in Jing-mei's characterization.

Setting of time is also the key to interpret Jing-mei's struggle in transforming the cultural and generational bond with her mother. If One can manifest the life of her mother in the first setting of place, she will have a chance to understand the cultural and generational bond between herself and her mother.

### **c. Setting of Social Life**

"The Joy Luck Club" represents the social life of Chinese-American society. They consists of Chinese immigrants that become American citizens.

"She wears the same brown-checked Chinese dress until the Refugee Welcome Society gave her two-hand-down dresses, all too large in sizes for American women."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 20)

In relation with the social stratification, the people in this story are belongs to the upper-middle class. This is

because the writer finds their interest in stock exchange business.

"The Joy Luck uncles begin to talk about stocks they are interested in buying."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 29)

And if the focus of discussion falls to their vision of life, the first generation hold their Chinese tradition well. But on the other hand, the daughters prefer to use modern thoughts.

"I used to dismiss her criticism as just more of her Chinese superstitions, beliefs that conveniently fit the circumstances. In my twenties, while taking introduction in psychology, I tried to tell her why she shouldn't criticize social much, why it didn't lead to a healthy learning environment."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 31)

This two main settings of Social life in "The Joy Luck Club" represents the two different kinds of life between a mother and a daughter, Jing-mei Woo. The first one is in the traditional Chinese, which represents the generational tradition of Chinese heritage. The second setting of Social life is the present Chinese-

American people, which represents Jing-mei's side of vision and culture. The distance between these two settings of Social life reflects the length of understanding in Jing-mei's characterization. Setting of Social life in this novel plays an important role in determining the generational gaps in Jing-mei's characterization.

### **III.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT**

Before the subject of discussion moves to the detailed cultural and generational gaps, it is important to identify the historical notes of Chinese-American society from the National American History.

The first major wave of Chinese immigration to the United States took place around the 1840's. Prompted by the gold rush and westward expansion, Chinese men came to the country to pursue work. Another influx<sup>1</sup> of Chinese immigrants came in the 1860's to work in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Chinese created booming business by taking care of functions such as laundry and cooking. These opportunities were created by the absence of women in mining towns and along the construction sites. Chinese living in San Fransisco were artisans and factory workers.

After the completion of the railroad, the mainstream of Asian immigrants, particularly in California, escalated. Since the Chinese were the first major group of Asians, they suffered the sting of prejudice even more than other Asians. A series of immigration quotas limited the number of new immigrants into the country.

The end of world war II, and the new communist government in China toward the end of the 1940's prompted another major exodus of Chinese as well as a slight reversal of attitude among Euro-Americans. The mothers in "The Joy Luck Club" all came to the United States during this time period.

The main character in "The Joy Luck Club", Jing-mei Woo, represents a typical individual of Chinese-American society. She is a daughter of Chinese immigrant couple. This condition has automatically set up Jing-mei's cultural background. She was raised in a modern environment, which later it would influence her way of thinking.

Being a Chinese-American is not an easy reality to bear. This statement is relevant to Jing-mei's opinion about her cultural background. From Jing-mei's story we can see that living in two different culture has developed mental obstacles, such as the difficulties in adjusting into both American cultural system and also into the Chinese cultural system. The practical evidence of this

mental obstacles is shown in the relationship between Jing-mei and her mother. Jing-mei feels that there are some barriers in her relationship with her mother, which are identified as the cultural and generational gaps.

### **III.2.1 Cultural Gap**

Based on the purpose to analyze Jing-mei's struggle to maintain "the mother-daughter bond" across cultural and generational gaps, it is required to look back at the meanings of cultural gaps as stated below.

According to Macionis (1991:75), cultural gap refers to the inconsistencies within a cultural system resulting from the unequal rates at which different cultural elements change. In Jing-mei's life, this cultural gap happens between her and her mother.

In this matter Jing-mei Woo as the second generation who is born in America, has totally adopted American culture well. She has a cultural gap against her mother, who is the first generation that holds the Chinese culture.

"We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 37)

This cultural gap is not only in the shake of tradition, but also in their way of thinking. If we analyze this point through sociological analysis, cultural gap happens from a long process that started by a group of society that moves to a foreign country. As immigrants, in this case is Jir g-mei's parents, gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture where this process is called assimilation(Macionis, 1991:317). Here in this process, there are difficulties in adjusting the dominant with the minor cultural patterns which leads to some inconsistencies. Unfortunately their daughters, Jing-mei, is categorized in the group of the dominant one. In addition, Jing-mei Woo's cultural gap can be described by Macionis's (1991:97) statement: "Within industrial societies like United States, the family loses much of its traditional significance as the center of social life."

This utterance represents that the decay in traditional significance within the industrial society. It means

that the contrast between traditional and industrial values have established a barrier which is identified as cultural gaps.

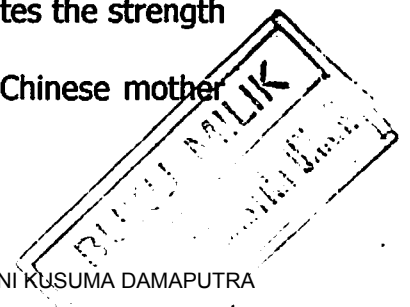
The practical evidence of cultural gap in "The Joy Luck Club" which is shown in the relationship between Jing-mei and her mother can be classified in the matters of language, ritual ceremony, philosophy, and origin.

Language is likely to be the most significant form of cultural gap experienced by Jing-mei. This is because the difference in the matter of language distracts them in communicating their ideas.

" My table was from my family and was of a very fragrant wood, not what you call rosewood, but *hong mu*, which is so fine there's no English word for it."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 24)

The above quotation represents Jing-mei's mother's obstacles in giving specific description of a certain thing. This obstacle arises because Jing-mei's mother does not know the synonym of this "hong mu" term in English. The using of the term "*hong mu*" represents the symbol of Chinese traditional icon of what so called as "strong" which indicates the strength of cultural and generational bond between a Chinese mother



and daughter. The term "*hong mu*" also represents "*fragrance*" which means a good spirit in Chinese culture. And "*hong mu*" wood is described as a *red*-colored wood which symbolizes the color of blood, as the representation of generational heritage in one-blood descent. The quotation might also have the meaning that her mother wants Jing-mei to know that her traditional heritage is the finest thing; as symbolized by the fine wood table from her mother's family. From this interpretations we can see them obviously that language has caused a cultural gap for Jing-mei and her mother. Here we can see that language is a productive stimulus for lack of understanding in this the mother-daughter bond. A single word like "*hong mu*" seems to represents very much and deep meaning for Jing-mei's mother. But unfortunately, Jing-mei does not explore this symbol yet, and find herself drowning in her own fears of identity.

Beside language, other significant form of cultural gap experienced by Jing-mei is the ritual ceremony. In this story, ritual ceremony has created a barrier in the mother-daughter bond between Jing-mei and her mother. The ritual ceremony which is discussed by the writer is the crab dinner



party to celebrate the Chinese New Year. In this crab dinner, Jing-mei experienced a lack of understanding with her mother.

“That left two on the platter: a large crab with a faded orange color, and number eleven, which had the torn-off leg. My mother shook the platter in front of me. “Take it, already cold,” said my mother. I thought I was doing the right thing, taking the crab with the missing leg. But my mother cried, “No! No! Big one, you eat it. I can not finish.”

(“The Joy Luck Club”, p. 202)

This quotation represents the misunderstanding between Jing-mei and her mother which is caused by the cultural gap. As we can see above, Jing-mei’s mother offers her to take the remain two crabs on the platter. Here Jing-mei’s mother wants Jing-mei to take the big crab instead of the one which has the torn-off leg, because a torn-off leg is believed to be a bad sign in the New Year. But what actually happens is that Jing-mei chooses the crab which has a torn-off leg. As her mother realizes that her daughter had made mistake, she forces Jing-mei to take the other crab. The interpretation of this condition is that neither Jing-mei or her

mother have done the wrong thing. It is just the misunderstanding caused by the cultural gap. Each of them have their vision and reason. The reason why Jing-mei chooses the crab with the missing leg is in order that her mother would not have to eat it. While on the other hand, Jing-mei's mother wants her daughter to take the best crab which does not have a torn-off leg, In hopes that her daughter would deserve the best thing.

The third form of cultural gap which is experienced by Jing-mei is philosophy. In "The Joy Luck Club", the traditional Chinese philosophy plays a big role in determining people's personality. Here Jing-mei's mother believes in the philosophy of harmonious balance.

"Each person is made of five elements, she told me... Too much water and you flowed in too many directions, like myself, for having started half a degree in biology, then half a degree in art, and then finishing neither when I went off to work for a small ad agency as a secretary, later becoming a copywriter."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 31)

From the above quotation the writer can describe the meaning that Jing-mei's mother wants Jing-mei to be successful in her life by understanding the philosophy of harmonious balance. But Jing-mei realized that she could do no more than her best, and since her best was not good enough for her mother, she gave up trying. That sentiment seems to be universal among Asian parents; they had been raised to be hard-working, so when her daughter do not seem to be as industrious as expected, she blames her daughter's apparent laziness on bad influences, mostly from American society. Which later would make her daughter having so many desires without making her goal comes true. Here Jing-mei's mother manifests Jing-mei's personality with her philosophy of harmonious balance, but unfortunately Jing-mei did not understand this.

The other form of cultural gap which is experienced by Jing-mei is the matter of origin. Origin seems to be the most severe implication of cultural gap, since we know that Jing-mei is raised in an environment which is largely different from China. As being a Chinese-American daughter, Jing-mei never understands what is the meaning of become a Chinese.

" But instead of feeling relieved, I feel forlorn. I think about what my mother said, about activating my genes and becoming Chinese. And I wonder what she meant."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 278)

This quotation means that Jing-mei's mother was very hopeful that someday her daughter would understand their origin. But Jing-mei's mother can not explain much to her daughter since the cultural gap distracts her in representing the idea. Jing-mei really feels the cultural gap in the matter of origin when she is faced the reality to see her lost sisters in China. Jing-mei does not feel any confidence to see them because she is not afraid that she is not Chinese enough. Here in this discussion we can see that cultural gap has made Jing-mei failed to see her origin in her blood. The things that motivate Jing-mei to resent her nationality is the social pressures to become like everyone else and not to be different among American society.

### **III.2.2 Generational Gap**

Generational gap happens because of the difficulties in tracing the cultural heritage over generations (Macionis, 1991:397). In "The Joy Luck Club" generational

gap occurs between Jing-mei and her mother. Jing-mei is afraid that she does not represent her mother's vision or idea.

"And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 40-41)

This generational gap happens by the influence of the cultural gap which is stated in the previous discussion. The process is started when cultural heritage is traced over the generations in the family. Because of a certain cultural gap, some cultural heritage such as views or ideas are not transformed well (Macionis, 1991:397).

And the practical evidences of generational gap which is occurs in the relationship between Jing-mei and her mother are described in the matter of experience, achievement, and hope.

Experience is one of the aspect in Jing-mei's generational gap. How people overcome difficulties in their

life has occurred cyclically over the generations. Each generation share the same experience of struggle in very different ways.

"I never thought my mother's Kweilin story was anything but a Chinese fairy tale. The ending always changed."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 25)

The above quotation represents the difficulties of Jing-mei in understanding her mother's experience in China. This generational gap has distracted Jing-mei's mother in transferring the heritage over generations. For many years, Jing-mei's mother did not tell her daughter her complete story until she was sure that her daughter would listen. Jing-mei's mother tends to teach Jing-mei about life by telling her sorrowful experience in China, in hopes to give a better life for her daughter. But from the above utterance we can see that Jing-mei failed to understand this, so the cyclical return of transferring the experience stops.

The other aspect of generational gap in Jing-mei's story is achievement. Jing-mei's mother wanted her daughter so much to be a little pianist. Bu when Jing-mei's best is not

enough for her mother, Jing-mei gave up trying and stop practicing piano.

"And then I decided . I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China."

("The Joy Luck Club", p. 141)

This quotation represents Jing-mei's protest in which she does not want to be a pianist as her mother intended. This quarrel between Jing-mei and her mother happens because of the generational gap. Jing-mei does not understand that actually this was her mother's attempt to bring out the hidden genius in her daughter. Jing-mei's mother wanted her daughter to have a special talent to help her daughter succeed in this life, a better life than she had in China. But on the other hand, Jing-mei began to associate herself with the disappointment of her mother's expectations, and that is why Jing-mei gave up trying.

Beside the experience and the achievement, the next practical evidence of Jing-mei's generational gap is the hope. In "The Joy Luck Club", Jing-mei's mother wants to transfer her hope to her daughter. But ever since there was a generational gap between them, her daughter did not

understand this. In this story, the hope of Jing-mei's mother is symbolized by a jade necklace, which ironically Jing-mei really has no idea about what the necklace meant.

"For a longtime, I wanted to give you this necklace. See, I wore this on my skin, so when you put it on your skin, then you know my meaning. This is your life's importance."

("The Joy Luck Club", p.208)

The *jade necklace* in this quotation represents Jing-mei's "life's importance". It is Jing-mei's mother's way of telling her daughter that although she is not sophisticated or rich, she is still worth a lot more than what many people may think. To her mother, giving Jing-mei the necklace is like giving her daughter part of herself to remember her by. Her mother's thinking is that even though Jing-mei did not always choose the best quality things or seem to have the best quality lifestyle that did not necessarily mean that she is not the best quality on the inside. By giving the necklace, her mother wants to transfer the "hope for the best" to Jing-mei.

The using of the "*jade necklace*" term also symbolizes the transfer of cultural and generational bond between Jing-mei and her mother. As we can see that a *jade*



can be created from a very long period process, and this process will make the *jade* become stronger. This things indicates that Jing-mei's mother would like Jing-mei to understand Chinese heritage deeper in order to strengthen their generational bond.

Departed from the intrinsic analysis on Jing-mei's mind conflict, she has two opposing forces in her mind. She wants to make her mother's dream comes true by seeing her lost sisters, but on the other hand she feels that she does not know about her mother enough to tell her sisters.

These two opposing forces are derived from her cultural and generational gaps between herself and her mother. And in order to overcome these two opposing forces in her mind, Jing-mei has to struggle to maintain "the mother-daughter bond" across cultural and generational gaps.

In relation with literature review in the previous chapter , the existence of psychological approach in this analysis is used to explore whether the mind co of the main character is accepted or not.

By looking back at the statement of Karl Jaspers in Harry (1985:71), Jing-mei's mind conflict is categorized as the struggle against themselves. In this kind of struggle, it demands more complex mental activities. Here in this statement means that in order to be

succeeded in the struggle, one has to explore her own qualities and sensitivities. In this case Jing-mei has to find out the answer by looking at herself.

According to the plot of "The Joy Luck Club", Jing-mei chooses to overcome her fears of cultural identity by seeing her two lost sisters. She struggles to fight her fears that resulting the understanding that she is inevitably Chinese as well as American. Jing-mei's struggle also leads to the understanding of her relationship with her mother. This understanding is achieved by reflecting herself in her mother's vision. Having found her mother, Jing-mei ceases to voice doubts about her identity and her relationship to her mother.

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **CONCLUSION**