La famille, un dispositif universel ?

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Is the Family Universal ?

Fantasizing the *Jouissance* of the Chinese M-0ther : *The Joy Luck Club* and Amy Tan's Quest for Stardom in the Market of Neo-Racism

Sinkwan Cheng

« Racism is not receding, but progressing in the contemporary world. »
Balibar, « What is Neo-Racism ? »

I. Jing-Mei Woo's Quest for Her Matrilineal Ethnic Heritage, the Late Consumer Culture's Quest for Multicultural Capital, and Amy Tan's Quest for Stardom and Wealth

With its pluralistic narrative perspectives and fluid time structure, Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* appears at first sight to have resisted the « ideology » of linear narrative. Nevertheless, a closer reading would immediately reveal the participation of Tan's non-mainstream production in the « archetypal » structure of the grand narratives of the West. This archetypal pattern or meta-structure dictates that the quest is intrinsic to « all » narratives, and as such, all narratives are narratives of quest. In this framework, all narratives are in search of a *telos*, to which their beginnings and middles must be reconciled.[1]

What, then, is the *telos* of *The Joy Luck Club* around which its multiple « little narratives » crystallize themselves ? The answer seems to be quite obvious : the reconciliation of the daughter with the mother, superimposed

upon the meeting of the West with the East - a drama which unfolds through the daughter who, American by acculturation,[2] reestablishes her ties to her Sinocentric mother, in the process of which she also rediscovers her « blood ties » to the Chinese culture. The revelation at the end of the story as experienced by Jing-mei Woo, the character standing in for the author, ties together a political quest with a familial quest, when Jing-mei's re-cognition of her Chinese roots coincides with her new understanding of her family :[3]

> ... 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 these years, it can finally be let go. (Tan, 1989 : 288)

It is interesting, though, to note that Tan's textual quest for reunion both with her « Sinocentric » mother and with her ethnic roots[4] coincides with the author's social and economic quest for fame and wealth in the market of postmodern capitalism. In the transition from national to international capitalism, Amy Tan's re-covery of her multicultural matrilineal identity[5] bears a correlation to her participation in late capitalism's re-covery (or cooption) of the market value of gender and ethnic diversities. Tan's narrative inaugurates a trajectory whereby her autobiographical character's quest for her matrilineal ethnic heritage, supporting and supported by the late consumer culture's quest for multicultural capital, facilitates Amy Tan's triumphant quest for stardom and wealth. Julie Lew's report « How Stories Written for Mother Became Amy Tan's Best Seller » can serve as an interesting footnote to the relationship among these three quests. Apparently, « [a]t Ms. Dijkstra's request, Ms. Tan wrote a proposal for a book ... , then took off on a trip to China with her mother. » During Lew's interview with her, Tan declared that « When my feet touched China I knew I was not Chinese, but I felt the connection nevertheless. It was a sense of completeness, like having a mother and a father. I had China and America, and everything was all coming together finally. » This « sense of completeness » and having « everything ... coming together » in the international capitalist market brought Tan her success :

> When she [Tan] returned, she found out her agent had obtained a $50,000 advance from Putnam's for the book. ... *The Joy Luck Club* has won glowing reviews, and paperback rights were sold to Vintage Books for $1.2 million. (Lew, 1989 : 23)

Tan « comes into her own » fame and wealth the moment she « comes into her own » ethnic identity as she « comes to terms with » her mother. The economic, political, and familial[6] quests form a holy trinity in Tan's novel. One might also say that the three-folded *telos* of Tan's project is in fact three sides folding into one : Tan's art of life - her art of acquiring fame and wealth - consists in her turning politics and her family life into art[7] in *The Joy Luck Club*.

II. The Commercial Value of the Chinese (M-)Other in the Market of Neo-Racism

The *telos* of *The Joy Luck Club*, which gathers the different strands of the novel toward a representative Chinese-American daughter's rediscovery of her ethnic identity accomplished through her spiritual reunion with her mother, renders it politically incorrect for any scholar not to hail Tan as a respectable author in the multi-cultural academic establishment.[8] However, it is my argument that the novel's multi-cultural reputation coexists harmoniously with its enactment and executions of popular racist ideologies. Tan's voice, and the voice of late capitalism in general, are double in that they can be discriminatory even as they make the claim to universal acceptance. They recolonize other voices even as they pretend to be championing diversity of humanity and the suppression of imperial hierarchies. Tan's novel pleases not only because she overtly sells her voice, and the voice of the Chinese mother,[9] as the fashionable « alternative » voices in the 1980s and 1990s, but also because her writing covertly effects a new configuration of racial fantasy that resubjugates the Chinese to the superiority of white culture.

Beginning with the next section of my paper, I will show through close textual analysis the ways Tan's narration of an exotic M-Other in the family effectively speaks into being a political Other who is inferior, incomprehensible, and even unacceptable from a « civilized » Western standpoint. In Tan's sensational dramatization, there emerges an archetypal Chinese mother whose eccentric, unreasonable, and almost « savage » personality compels readers to draw the conclusion that the conflicts between the mother and the daughter arise mainly from cultural[10] rather than generational differences.

A. « What Does a Chinese Mother Want ? » : *Joy Luck Club* and its Phantasmatic Account of the Jouissance of the Chinese M-Other

The Joy Luck Club tells the stories of four mothers and four daughters. The four mothers are so similar in character that they are almost interchangeable.[11] The four daughters are more individualized. However, due to the fact that they are brought up by the same kind of mothers and raised in parallel domestic environments, there are also certain characteristics common to all of them.[12] All of the children are persecuted by the mothers' mysterious *jouissance*. The Othering of the Mother - in other words, the construction of the Mother as an exotic Other - is mainly effected through the author and her narrators' fantasies of the *jouissance* of the Other. The

archetypal Chinese Mother in *The Joy Luck Club* stands out prominently as a primal mother who fully enjoys, and from whose mysterious omnipotence and tyrannical rule the daughters struggle to free themselves. The representative daughter-figure in the novel « finds herself » and arrives at an understanding of the mother only with the introjection (an act involving identification and appropriation) of the primal mother by the daughter upon the death of the former.[13]

1. *The Mysterious Malignant Maternal Force*

In the opening narrative, Jing-mei Woo claims that « before my mother told me her Kweilin story, I imagined Joy Luck was a shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of the Ku Klux Klan or the tom-tom dances of TV Indians preparing for war » (Tan, 1989 : 28). Even after hearing her mother's account, the image of her mother as someone belonging to not just a different culture but to practically a secret cult persists. Tan uses every opportunity to sensationalize the Chinese m-other's mysterious possession of a witchcraft-like power. In the preface to « The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates, » Tan presents a short story about the Chinese mother's semi-pseudo prophesying power which turns out to have a strange hold on the daughter's life and prevents the child from acting out her own will :

> « Do not ride your bicycle around the corner, » the mother had told the daughter when she was seven.
> « Why not ! » protested the girl.
> « Because then I cannot see you and you will fall down and cry and I will not hear you. »
> « How do you know I'll fall ? » whined the girl.
> « It is in a book, *The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates*, all the bad things that can happen to you outside the protection of this house. »
> « I don't believe you. Let me see the book. »
> « It is written in Chinese. You cannot understand it. That is why you must listen to me. »
> « What are they, then ? » the girl demanded. « Tell me the twenty-six bad things. »
> But the mother sat knitting in silence.
> « What twenty-six ! » shouted the girl.
> The mother still did not answer her.
> « You can't tell me because you don't know ! You don't know anything ! » And the girl ran outside, jumped on her bicycle, and in her hurry to get away, she fell before she even reached the corner. (Tan, 1989 : 87)

The story seems to invite a « rational » and « common-sensical » psychoanalytic interpretation that reads the daughter as a victim of the self-fulfilling prophecy of an over-protective and even controlling mother.[14] Reluctant to let her child travel beyond her range of control, the mother appeals to Chinese occultism to threaten mishap should the daughter bike beyond « the protection of this house » guarded by the Chinese mother. Exasperated, and in her hurry to get away, the girl « fell before she even reached the corner. » The mother's wish to control the daughter thus turns into a curse. The impact of this curse is so powerful that the mother's psychological game begins to assume the form of psychic energy.

In fact, at some point in the novel, the Chinese maternal force can no longer be that easily subjected to a clear-cut rational analysis, and the readers begin to share the daughter's puzzlement about the source of the Chinese mother's power. One begins to wonder whether the fatal truths told by the mother are indeed (fore-)seen or created by the primal mother's peculiar form of « symbolic order » and performative speech[15] - in other words, whether the magic of the maternal words stem from their being predetermined by, or predetermining, fate itself. As such, the mother emerges as a primal mother whose force is beyond human explanation. Take, for example, Waverly Jong, whose destiny from childhood to adulthood seems to be presided over by a force that is an ambiguous mixture of the will and the prophecy of her mother. Like the little girl in the prefatory story of *Twenty-Six Malignant Gates*, each of Waverly's attempts to rebel against her mother's curse ends up bringing that curse upon herself.

Even as a child, Waverly found herself subjected to her mother's inescapable malevolent spell. When she finally declared that she was ready to play chess again after having gone on strike in protest against her mother's habit of taking all the credit for her chess championship (Tan, 1989 : 170), her mother Lindo Jong predicted that it would be impossible. Oddly enough, Waverly began losing at her tournaments, in response to which her mother « seemed to walk around with this satisfied look, as if it had happened because she had devised this strategy » (Tan, 1989 : 172) :

> I [Waverly] was horrified. I spent many hours every day going over in my mind what I had lost. I knew it was not just the last tournament. I examined every move, every piece, every square. And I could no longer see the secret weapons of each piece, the magic within which the intersection of each square. I could see only my mistakes, my weaknesses. It was as though I had lost my magic armor. And everybody could see this, where it was easy to attack me. (Tan, 1989 : 172)

Waverly diagnosed her defeat to be the result of the destruction of her confidence by her mother :

> Over the next few weeks and later months and years, I continued to play, but never with that same feeling of supreme confidence. I fought hard, with fear and desperation. When I won, I was grateful, relieved. And when I lost, I was filled with growing dread, and then terror that I was no longer a prodigy, that I had lost the gift and had turned into someone quite ordinary. (Tan, 1989 : 172-73)

No matter what the true reason was for her defeat, Waverly did fulfilled her mother's prophecy that it would not be « so easy » for the daughter to regain her former glory as a prodigy in chess :

> When I lost twice to the boy whom I had defeated so easily a few years before, I stopped playing chess altogether. (Tan, 1989 : 172-173)

As Lindo herself predicted, it would be impossible for Waverly to return to chess after having gone on a rebellious strike.

Whereas little Waverly already saw through her mother's « tricks » (Tan, 1989 : 171), interestingly enough, Waverly Jong the adult is sometimes less able to brush aside her mothers' actions as mere psychological games. No matter how much she prepares herself for her mother's attacks, she is still afraid that her mother's mean words would reveal to her a terrible truth that would drain all the positive happenings in her life of their splendor. When Waverly tries to break the news to her mother about her intention to marry Rich Shields, she is plagued by anxiety about the different kinds of faults her mother will be capable of finding in her fiancé :

> I wasn't so much afraid of my mother as I was afraid for Rich. I already knew what she would do, how she would attack him, how she would criticize him. She would be quiet at first. Then she would say a word about something small, something she had noticed, and then another word, and another, each one flung out like a little piece of sand, one from this direction, another from behind, more and more, until his looks, his character, his soul would have eroded away. And *even if I recognized her strategy, her sneak attack, I was afraid that some unseen speck of truth would fly into my eye*, blur what I was seeing and transform him from the divine man I thought he was into someone quite mundane, mortally wounded with tiresome habits and irritating imperfections. (Tan, 1989 : 173-174 ; italics mine)

Indeed, Lindo Jong does succeed in crushing the romantic sentiment Waverly attaches to a special Christmas gift from Richard - the mink jacket that Waverly cherishes dearly :

> « This is not so good, » she [the mother] said at last. « It is just leftover strips. And the fur is too short, no long hairs. »
> « How can you criticize a gift ! » I protested. I was deeply wounded. « He gave me this from his heart. »
> « That is why I worry, » she said.
> And *looking at the coat in the mirror, I couldn't fend off the strength of her will anymore, her ability to make me see black where there was once white, white where there was once black. The coat looked shabby, an imitation of romance.* (Tan, 1989 : 169 ; italics mine)

Waverly Jong's experience of the mysterious power emanating from the Chinese mother's will is shared by the other Chinese-American daughters. Rose Hsu Jordan, for instance, also feels that her reality is ruled by the words of her mother :

> I used to believe everything my mother said, even when I didn't know what she meant. Once when I was little, she told me she knew it would rain because lost ghosts were circling near our windows, calling « Woo-woo » to be let in. She said doors would unlock themselves in the middle of the night unless we checked twice. She said a mirror could see only my face, but she could see me inside out even when I was not in the room.
> And all these things seemed true to me. The power of her words was that strong. (Tan, 1989 : 185)

Waverly compares her mother's words to « smoke bombs and little barbs » (Tan, 1989 : 173). Indeed, even Waverly's Caucasian friend Marlene refers to Lindo Jong's words as if they were formidable torture instruments. This language can be clearly seen in the advice Marlene gives to Waverly :

> « Why don't you tell her to stop torturing you, » said Marlene. « Tell her to stop ruining your life. Tell her to shut up. »...
> « Well, I don't know if it's explicitly stated in the law, but you can't *ever* tell a Chinese mother to shut up. You could be charged as an accessory to your own murder. » (Tan, 1989 : 173)

In the context of Waverly's life, Marlene's charge seems to be no exaggeration. Lindo Jong almost ruins Waverly's second marriage the way she ruined her first one. Moreover, according to Waverly's account of her first marriage, she almost lost her child because of Lindo Jong. When Waverly was in love with her first husband Marvin, « he was nearly perfect » in her eyes. But « by the time my mother had her say about him, I saw his brain

had shrunk from laziness, so that it was good only for thinking up excuses. » Waverly was gradually conditioned to see only the following :

> He chased golf and tennis balls to run away from family responsibilities. His eye wandered up and down other girls' legs, so he didn't know how to drive straight home anymore. He liked to tell big jokes to make other people feel little... (Tan, 1989 : 174)

Waverly's feelings for Marvin « went from disappointment to contempt to apathetic boredom » (Tan, 1989 : 174). At times she « wondered if perhaps my mother had poisoned my marriage » (Tan, 1989 : 174). In fact, her resentment toward her marriage grew so strong that she almost aborted her daughter (Tan, 1989 : 174). The Chinese mother has as much power as that.

The mother does not only control her daughter with strength ; she also manipulates her by putting up a pathetic show of her vulnerability. When Waverly finally decides to confront her mother about « her scheming ways of making me miserable » (Tan, 1989 : 180), she finds her mother asleep on the sofa :

> All her [Lindo Jong] strength was gone. She had no weapons, no demons surrounding her. She looked powerless. Defeated.
> And then I was seized with a fear that she looked like this because she was dead. She had died when I was having terrible thoughts about her. I had wished her out of my life, and she had acquiesced, floating out of her body to escape my terrible hatred. (Tan, 1989 : 180)

The mere thought of having possibly killed the primal mother is enough to fill the daughter with a heavy sense of guilt. The Chinese mother, who is totally outside the order of rationality and predictability, has an uncanny hold on her daughter's psyche. The mother is at one and the same time the strongest and the weakest figure in the eyes of the daughter, and either way the mother succeeds in disarming and even emotionally paralyzing her child :

> In a matter of seconds, it seemed, I had gone from being angered by her strength, to being amazed by her innocence, and then frightened by her vulnerability. And now I felt numb, strangely weak, as if someone had unplugged me and the current running through me had stopped. (Tan, 1989 : 180-181)

Whatever the mother is, she remains the persecutor of the daughter :

> Oh, her strength ! her weakness ! - both pulling me apart. My mind was flying one way, my heart another. (Tan, 1989 : 181)

The Chinese M-Other is always a figure of paradoxical extremes in Tan's novel. While Lindo Jong tyrannizes her daughter with both her excessive strength and frailty, Jing-mei Woo's mother is both a villain and a saint. Suyuan Woo is at one extreme the tyrant who wants to mold her daughter according to her wishes. At the other, she is the sacrificial mother who renounced all of her possessions in wartime China in the hope that someone would rescue her twin babies.[16] In other words, the Mother is characterized by both a lack and an excess which condemns her to an eternal exile outside the norm of humanity. She is the Chinese version of the Wandering Jew, the traumatic remainder left over from the dialectics of the « first death »[17] of her Chinese life in the course of her appropriation by late capitalist multicultural economy.

The issue at stake for the much confused daughter (and the sympathetic readers) is of course the following : « what does a Chinese woman want ? » As the urgency of this question is further driven home by the hovering presence of the dead mother throughout the novel, the mystery of the Chinese woman's desire is given additional complications by her « double-faceness. »

2.*The (Chinese) Mother's Double Face*

Following the story line closely, one will discover that the mysteriousness of the mother - sometimes depicted as multiple personality – is actually closely related to her « double-faceness. » Furthermore, Tan seems to suspect that the Chinese mother actually inherits the double face from the Chinese culture, as is evident in especially the story she entitled « Double Face. » Through her character Lindo Jong, Tan creates the impression that the Chinese are reluctant to show their true face in America.[18] Instead, according to Tan, they would deliberately adopt a face that is confusing and at times even deceptive to the (Caucasian) Americans.[19] Tan seems to be voicing her opinion of the Chinese through the comments of Lindo's Asian-American daughter. « Don't be silly. Our nose isn't so bad, » she says to her mom. « It makes us look devious. » The conversation continues as follows :

> « What is this word, " devious ", » I [Lindo] ask.
> « It means we're looking one way, while following another. We're for one side and also the other. We mean what we say, but our intentions are different. »
> « People can see this in our face ? »
> My daughter laughs. « Well, not everything that we're thinking. They just know we're two-faced. » (Tan, 1989 : 266)

Tan ties together the two generations with « the same cheeks » (Tan, 1989 : 256) and similar facial features only to highlight the two people's cultural differences. Waverly has a strong appreciation for intelligence and respect for professional competence ever since childhood. By contrast, Lindo believes that luck and tricks are more valuable and more important than skills and smartness. « You don't have to be so smart to win chess, » Lindo Jong brags to her friends, « It is just tricks » (Tan, 1989 : 170).

As Ben Xu puts it, against the foil of her daughter's conduct, « Lindo Jong's survivalist strategy of sneakiness » or « trickiness is miserably non-heroic and shamefully Chinese » (Tan, 1989 : 269). Lindo tries to train her daughter «[h]ow not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities » (Tan, 1989 : 254), to which the Western-educated Waverly can only respond with fear, contempt, and resistance.[20]

Once again, Tan makes this double-facedness a characteristic of the Chinese race, as universal as the « Chinese face. » Lindo is by no means a peculiar individual. Ying-ying St. Clair also declares herself to be a tiger, combining two sides (analogous in structure to the two faces) - that is, fierceness and cunning :

> ... a tiger is gold and black. It has two ways. The gold side leaps with its fierce heart. The black side stands still with cunning, hiding its gold between trees, seeing and not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come. (Tan, 1989 : 248)

« Typical » of Chinese women, Ying-ying declares that she « waited between the trees. I had one eye asleep, the other open and watching » (Tan, 1989 : 249). This way she caught a husband and stalks her daughter. She succeeds in manipulating her daughter's family life by hiding in the dark and breaking a vase to attract the attention of her prey :

> She [Lena] will hear the vase and table crashing to the floor. She will come up the stairs and into the room. Her eyes will see nothing in the darkness, where I am waiting between the trees. (Tan, 1989 : 252)

That the Chinese mother is compared to different kinds of animals is by no means surprising. Apart from adding the exotic flavor of oriental horoscope to the novel, this practice caters to the popular racial prejudice that people from non-white cultures operate by animalistic instincts rather than intellect. Nancy Hartsock explains this racist prejudice in the following terms, where « intuition » is comparable to what I call animalistic instincts :

> ... the humanity of the Other becomes "opaque." Colonizers frequently make statements like "You never know what they think. Do they think? Or do they instead operate according to intuition? (Hartsock, 1990 : 22)

To say that the Other (race) are two-faced means that « you never know what they want. » Moreover, the Other are an incomprehensible lot who do not operate according to reason, and as such they exist outside the category of human beings.

3 *The Aversion to the M-Other as the Aversion to One's Own Excess of Enjoyment*

Throughout the novel, the mother stands out prominently as a sadistic abuser. Waverly's opinion well exemplifies all four daughters' feelings about their mothers :

> My mother knows how to hit a nerve. And the pain I feel is worse than any other kind of misery. Because what she does always comes as a shock, exactly like an electric jolt, that grounds itself permanently in my memory. (Tan, 1989 : 170)

Waverly's complaint that the mother tortures her and ruins her life (Tan, 1989 : 173) echoes the feelings of her peers. Little Jing-mei, for instance, once protested against her M-Other's tyranny on the grounds that « I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China » (Tan, 1989 : 141). The daughters are always wondering : « Why does she [my mother] have to spoil everything for me ? » Fantasies of this kind easily polarizes the self and the other into two antagonistic parties. The Nazis, for example, were paranoid that their well-being and livelihood would be eroded by the Jews - that is, their Other.

Indeed, there is a structural resemblance linking the opposition between Nazi and Jew and the opposition between the Asian-American daughters and mothers. In both cases, the conflicts arise from the proximity of the parties involved. Jacques Alain-Miller has a telling analysis on proximity and aggressivity :

> I am willing to see my neighbour in the Other but only on condition that he is not my neighbour. I am prepared to love them as myself only if he is far away, if he is removed. ... When the Other comes too near, when it mingles with you, as Lacan says, new fantasies emerge which concern above all the surplus of enjoyment with the Other. (quoted in Salecl, 1990 : 26)

The nearness of the M-Other oppresses the daughter. The maternal spell closes in upon the daughter in such a way that the latter seems incapable of finding any escape. After little Waverly rebelled against her mother,

for example, her mind was plagued by the image of her mother attacking her with « a triumphant smile. "Strongest wind cannot be seen," she [the mother] said » (Tan, 1989 : 100). Her imagination about herself being stalked by an « opponent » (Tan, 1989 : 100) who is invisible yet constantly watchful intensified into a fantasy of her being cornered and finally a vision of her « radical leap » into another world :

> Her black men advanced across the plane, slowly marching to each successive level as a single unit. My white pieces screamed as they scurried and fell off the board one by one. As her men drew closer to my edge, I felt myself growing light. I rose up into the air and flew out the window. (Tan, 1989 : 101)

What is at stake in this drama is of course the daughter's imputation of an excessive enjoyment to the M-Other. Again, Miller's analysis of racial prejudice proves to be highly pertinent :

> The question of tolerance or intolerance is not at all concerned with the subject of science and its human rights. It is located on the level of tolerance or intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment. (quoted in Salecl, 1990 : 26)

Indeed, Waverly is resentful of her mother for having stolen her enjoyment - that is, the glory of her chess victories (Tan, 1989 : 170).

It is important to note though, that the fantasies concerning the *jouissance* of the Other are not merely caused by spatial proximity. More significantly, they arise from nearness in relation and affinity in nature. The daughters are especially bothered by their blood relationship to their mothers whom they find annoying and even unrefined and ill-bred. Some of them are embarrassed by their resemblance to their mothers, as is the case with Waverly (Tan, 1989 : 256). Such likeness confronts the daughter with the threat that her identity is stolen by her evil double. The M-Other outrages her child's sense of subjectivity insofar as the former is perceived to have stolen the enjoyment of the latter. The M-Other is deemed responsible for preventing the child from becoming a « real » American. She is accountable for the child's failure to achieve her real American identity in two ways - through actively imposing the « Chinese ways » on her daughter, and through passing on to the child her Chinese blood heritage.

But above all, the daughter is threatened by the affinity she bears to her mother in their « nature » - that is, the *jouissance* they secretly share. Their propinquity is so oppressive because « this other is always an Other in my interior, i.e. that my hatred of the Other is really the hatred of the part (the surplus) of *my own* enjoyment which I find unbearable and cannot acknowledge, and which I therefore transpose ("project") into the Other *via* a fantasy of the "Other's enjoyment" » (Salecl, 1990 : 26). As Zizek states, « the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is "in us more than ourselves" and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves » (Zizek, 1993 : 206). The daughter finds herself to be at-home-more-than-at-home in her Chinese family in America. Her Chinese home in the home-land of America is a place afflicted by internal as well as external contradictions. It is a place of anxiety where the daughter cannot quite feel at home with her-self, since home is *internally* split by the cohabitation of a self and a M-Other. More significantly, the M-Other reveals to the daughter the latter's own inner antagonistic nature - that is, her own excess of enjoyment which prevents her from becoming her ideal self, and which she unsuccessfully tries to impute to the Other. In Lacanian terms, the closeness of the M-Other oppresses the daughter with the stark fact that « the hatred of the Other's enjoyment is always the hatred of one's own enjoyment » (Zizek, 1993 : 206).

The novel abounds with illustrations of this extimate logic of (the theft of) enjoyment, of the daughter imputing to the M-Other her own obscene *jouissance*. The most prominent manifestation of this phenomenon is perhaps the daughter's critique of the mother's racial prejudice and of the mother's « fear of the other. » The Mother often comes across as Sinocentric in her ignorance and in her lack of world experience. Ying-ying St. Clair, for instance, comments on her American admirer in a highly prejudiced manner : « he smelled like a foreigner, a lamb-smell stink that can never be washed away » (Tan, 1989 : 250). Rose Hsu Jordan's mother objected to her daughter getting romantically involved with an American, « a *waigoren* (foreigner) » (Tan, 1989 : 117). The lines the author assigns to Lindo Jong in « Double Face » makes it clear that Lindo is also portrayed to be both ignorant of, and resistant to, the American culture : « I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand » (Tan, 1989 : 256).[21] Nor is Suyuan Woo exempted by Tan from racial bias. Jing-mei Woo, Tan's autobiographical character, recounts the following event :

> « What's the difference between Jewish and Chinese mah jong ? » I once asked my mother. I couldn't tell by her answer if the games were different or just her attitude toward Chinese and Jewish people.
> « Entirely different kind of playing, » she said in her English explanation voice. « Jewish mah jong, they watch only for their own tile, play only with their eyes. »
> Then she switched to Chinese : « Chinese mah jong, you must play using your head, very tricky. You must watch what everybody else throws away and keep that in your head as well. And if nobody plays well, then the game becomes like Jewish

> mah jong. Why play? There's no strategy. You're just watching people make mistakes. »
> These kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different languages, which we did. I talked to her in *English*, she answered back in *Chinese*. » (Tan, 1989 : 33-34 ; italics mine)

The last paragraph obviously suggests that Jing-mei does not endorse her mother's opinion. Interestingly enough, toward the end of this episode, Tan compares these two different mentalities to the differences between the English and Chinese languages. The implied message cannot be more obvious : Jing-mei, the English speaker, is the sensible and cosmopolitan thinker free from her mother's ridiculous Chinese bias. The irony, however, is that Jing-mei counters her mother's racism with a higher form of racism. Indeed, one does not have to search far in order to find strongly racist remarks made by the daughters.

Even as a child, Jing-mei already associated China with despotism - an idea she probably gathered from popular opinions in the West. « I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China, » little Jing-mei says, defying her mother like a little (Western) hero (Tan, 1989 : 141). Her friend Rose Jordan Hsu also has very peculiar views about the Chinese. At an early stage, she was attracted to the man who was to become her husband for the following reasons :

> ... what I initially found attractive in Ted were precisely the things that made him different from my brothers and the Chinese boys I had dated : his brashness ; the assuredness in which he asked for things and expected to get them ; his opinionated manner ; his angular face and lanky body ; the thickness of his arms ; the fact that his parents immigrated from Tarrytown, New York, not Tientsin, China. (Tan, 1989 : 117)

For the Chinese-American daughters, Westerners are superior not only in culture but also in features. Lena St. Clair, for example, obviously finds her « Chinese » half to be inferior to her Western half :

> Most people didn't know I was half Chinese, maybe because my last name is St. Clair. When people first saw me, they thought I looked like my father, English-Irish, big-boned and delicate at the same time. But if they looked really close, if they knew that they were there, they could see the Chinese parts. Instead of having cheeks like my father's sharp-edged straw-yellow hair or his white skin, yet my coloring looked too pale, like something that was once darker and had faded in the sun. (Tan, 1989 : 104)

It is no exaggeration to say that Lena is mortified by the features she inherits from her Chinese M-Other, since she even tries to « correct » them and make them look more Western :[22]

> And my eyes, my mother gave me my eyes, no eyelids, as if they were carved on a jack-o'-lantern with two swift cuts of a short knife. I used to push my eyes in on the sides to make them rounder. Or I'd open them very wide until I could see the white parts. But when I walked around the house like that, my father asked me why I looked so scared. (Tan, 1989 : 104)

Lena's description of her Chinese features recalls immediately certain popular racist characterization of Chinese people. As a matter of fact, Lena's little sketch of her Chinese features can be more appropriately called caricature than a neutral statement.[23]

It is also interesting to observe that while Jing-mei feels uncomfortable about her mother's scorn for non-Chinese (for example, Jewish) communities, the daughters keep mentioning only Caucasians whenever they refer to their own friends outside the Chinese circle, as if the whites and the Chinese were the only ethnic groups that existed in America. Jing-mei, for example, refers to only « Caucasian friends » at Galileo High in San Francisco (Tan, 1989 : 267). Waverly quotes the authority of her Caucasian friend Marlene in her complaint about her mother (Tan, 1989 : 173). Lena St. Clair also shows her own discrimination when she alludes to exclusively the « Caucasian girls at school » (Tan, 1989 : 103).[24]

Upon close scrutiny, one begins to wonder : isn't the (M)-Other's bigotry and provinciality to a certain extent the daughter's projection of her own intolerance ? To adopt Žižek's argument, doesn't the M-Other's enjoyment exert such a powerful fascination because in it the daughter represents to herself her own innermost relationship toward enjoyment ?[25] The daughter belittles the M-Other for her Chinese resistance to American culture and for her hopeless small-mindedness. In fact, the daughter's image of her M-Other is the reversal of the former's own « American » resistance to the Chinese culture and her failure to respect the otherness of the M-Other.

Time and again in the novel, the daughter is confronted by the truth of her message (that is, her *jouissance*) returned from the M-Other in inverted form. The daughter's complaint about the M-Other turns out to be her complaint of her own innermost, essential feature can also be demonstrated by the daughter's caricature of her Chinese mom as a frightened, paranoid woman. Lena speaks of her mother's « scared look, » and comments to the following effect : « I knew my mother made up anything to warn me, to help me avoid some unknown danger. My mother saw danger in everything,

even in other Chinese people » (Tan, 1989 : 105). However, aren't the tyranny and mysterious power ascribed to the mother by the daughter in different stories themselves rooted in paranoia ? Again, in Žižekian language, isn't the daughter's criticism of the M-Other the hatred of the excess that pertains to the daughter herself, that is, of the excess produced by the inner antagonism inherent in herself ? And doesn't the daughter obtain satisfaction by virtue of the fact that her own enjoyment is concealed by the very supposition that the M-Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to the daughter ? (Žižek, 1995 : 206)

Ironically, then, Lindo Jong's protest against her daughter's accusation turns out to be an insightful remark. When Waverly charges her mother with intentionally ruining the joy of her life, Lindo responds in the following manner :

> « Ai-ya, why do you think these bad things about me ? » Her face looked old and full of sorrow. « So you think your mother is this bad. You think I have a *secret* meaning. *But it is you who has this meaning*. Ai-ya ! She thinks I am this bad ! » She sat straight and proud on the sofa, her mouth clamped tight, her hands clasped together, her eyes sparkling with angry tears. (Tan, 1989 : 181 ; italics mine)

Lindo Jong's complaint is registered by Waverly as yet another great performance staged by her manipulative mother.

4.*Conclusion : Persecuted by the M-Other Who is In-Me-More-Than-Me*

Since the mother is in-the-daughter-more-than-the-daughter, the propinquity of the mother tortures the daughter in two ways. On the one hand, the mother is *more* than the daughter, and as such the latter feels overwhelmed, dominated, and tortured by the M-Other. The M-Other is held responsible for stealing the daughter's enjoyment, and disrupting her subjectivity, in the sense that the Chinese M-Other is preventing her young one from acting out her American identity.

On the other hand, the mother is also « *in* » the daughter, so that the latter can never get rid of her. Whether the child likes it or not, she always finds herself acting out her mother's wishes. Marina Heung summarizes succinctly how the daughter involuntarily identifies with her mother :

> Even while protesting that she doesn't know enough to tell her mother's story, June [Jing-mei] nevertheless proves correct her aunties' insistence : " Your mother is in your bones ! ... her mind ... has become your mind " (p.40). She starts cooking the same dishes for her father as her mother did ; one evening she finds herself standing at the kitchen window, in imitation of her mother, rapping at a neighborhood cat (p. 209). (Heung, 1993 : 609)[26]

However, this bond between the two is not necessarily gladly embraced by the daughter. Because the mother « dwells inside » the daughter, the latter bears through her mother the burden of the Chinese baggage. The Chinese heritage, which the daughter deems to be an embarrassment and even a disgrace, clings to her with a mysterious power which she cannot easily dismiss as mere superstition. Suyuan Woo's outlandish version of genetics, for example, as unscientific as it sounds, does seem to condition Jing-mei's life and shape her destiny. Thus the mother keeps reminding the daughter of her Chinese blood :

> ... my mother had studied at a famous nursing school in Shanghai, and she said she knew all about genetics. So there was no doubt in her mind, whether I agreed or not : Once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese.
> « Someday you will see, » said my mother. « It is in your blood, waiting to be let go. » (Tan, 1989 : 267)

In response, Jing-mei seems to be quite terrified by her Chinese genes :

> And when she [the mother] said this, I saw myself transforming like a werewolf, a mutant tag of DNA suddenly triggered, replicating itself insidiously into a *syndrome*, a cluster of telltale Chinese behaviors, all those things my mother did to embarrass me - haggling with store owners, pecking her mouth with a toothpick in public, being color-blind to the fact that lemon yellow and pale pink are not good combinations for winter clothes. (Tan, 1989 : 267)

As nonsensical as the mother's theory about Chinese genes sounds, her prediction does turn out to be true. The minute the train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, Jing-mei starts to 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 » (Tan, 1989 : 267). Even though Jing-mei once imagined that her dead mother had left her and « gone back to China to get these babies » (Tan, 1989 : 39), it turns out that her mother's wishes are fulfilled by Jing-mei who acts as her mother's emissary in her return to China. This episode again confirms the assertion of An-mei, another Joy Luck mother, that « your mother is in your bones ! » (Tan, 1989 : 40 ; 48).[27] The M-Other is the foreign element inhabiting the daughter, thereby disrupting the daughter's « American » identity.

Ⅲ. Home and the Re-Worlding of the Third World

One may ask at this point, what does it mean to say that the daughter's Chinese identity is in her blood because her mother is in her bones? Why does the Chinese side of the daughter, unlike her American side, take on such a color of fate, as if she could not deny it - better put, could not escape from it - because she inherited it in her bone-and-blood?

The fact that the mother is « in » the daughter turns out to carry a political significance. Chinese-Americans are portrayed to be Chinese through biological predetermination (in the same way as one is predetermined to be the mother's child through an intimate biological bond), whereas as immigrants, they are Americans by choice.[28] However, the disturbing message is yet to come. The novel is filled with descriptions suggesting that the Chinese culture is as deterministic as brute biological facts - one that leaves people (especially women) with next to no room for individual struggles except by resorting to the most base forms of tricks and superstitiously entrusting in « Luck » (as in « Joy Luck Club »)[29] for survival. By contrast, America is a land of freedom and opportunity. As Rose Hsu Jordan observes, in contrast to the absence of choice in the Chinese culture,[30] American society offers too many choices (Tan, 1989: 191). The daughter's Chinese matrilineage, in other words, becomes part of the novel's metaphorical expressions for the determinism and the absence of freedom associated with Chinese culture.

A. The Home and the World: From Matrilineage to the Chinese Heritage

Throughout the book, Tan cannot stress enough the strength of the tie that binds the daughter to the mother. Time and again, the uncanny resemblances between the daughter and the mother are highlighted - for example, between Jing-mei and Suyuan Woo (Tan, 1989: 27), between Lindo and Waverly Jong (Tan, 1989: 255-256), and between Lena and Ying-ying St. Clair (Tan, 1989: 256). The features shared by mother and daughter in these Chinese-American families, as Ben Xu points out, « are not something to be proud of, but rather something that causes embarrassment on one side or the other, and often on both sides » (Tan, 1989: 272). Actually, the uneasiness caused to both parties by their resemblance is more than mere embarrassment. Oftentimes, their similarities weigh on them like fate,[31] as if they were yoked together by a curse that is being passed on from generation to generation.

In fact, it turns out that the fateful tie between mother and daughter extends beyond the current two generations to the Joy Luck mothers' relationships to their own mothers. Marina Heung focuses on the following scene:

> Recalling her first sight of her mother after a long separation, An-Mei describes how their exchange of gazes locks them into instant identification: "[My mother] looked up. And when she did, I saw my own face looking back at me" (p.45). (Heung, 1993: 602)

Likewise, Lindo also apprehends a special bonding to her mother:

> Similarly, instead of feeling outrage at her mother's collaboration in her arranged betrothal and marriage, Lindo actually chooses collusion with her mother, behaving as her proper daughter-in-law so that her mother will not lose face (p.55). (Heung, 1993: 602)

In other words, both generations at the Joy Luck Club have a strong sense of their mothers being « in-me-more-than-me. » They simply cannot help resembling their mothers in their looks and in their destinies. There remains one big difference, though, between the Joy Luck mothers and their daughters. According to Heung, « An-Mei, Lindo, and Ying-Ying construct consoling tales enacting a fantasy of symbiosis with the maternal. [...] An-Mei transforms common experiences of pain and victimization into testimonials of mother/daughter bonding » (Heung, 1993: 603). What Heung fails to point out, though, is that the Asian-American daughters, unlike their mothers, by no means romanticize their fateful Chinese matrilineal bonding. While the mothers draw themselves closer to their mothers by submitting themselves to the Chinese fate they share together, the Asian-American daughters rebel against that maternal tie in defiance of the Chinese determinism that threatens to encroach upon their Western « enlightened » beliefs in human freedom and dignity.

The Chinese fate seems to be too formidable a curse to be so easily broken by the daughters even given their American education. The daughters too, to some extent, are « doomed » by their Chinese blood. An-mei, for example, feels the enormous weight of fate common to the lives of all woman who are Chinese by blood, including her Asian-American daughter:

> I was raised the Chinese way; I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness. And *even though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way!* Maybe it is because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way (Tan, 1989: 215; italics mine).

Seemingly a protest against fate, An-mei's statement in actuality stages the blindness of Chinese women to the « actual » social and political

cause of their misery. Tan's message cannot be clearer : *the so-called constriction of fate turns out to be the naturalization of generations of injustice inflicted upon women by barbaric China*. In other words, behind the Chinese home there is the Chinese society or world ; the oppressive domestic atmosphere is virtually created by « Asiatic despotism. » Which is to say, behind the Joy Luck mothers there stands the Chinese society as the fatal mother (*la mère fatale*), as the « true » Primal M-Other who fully enjoys abusing and manipulating all her Chinese daughters/women.[32]

That the Chinese culture is the malicious M-Other of all the little mean Chinese (m)-others is intimated not just through the stories of the Joy Luck mothers but also stories told by them of their mothers or their mothers' mothers.These tales of abuse reaching back from generation to generation create the impression of a sickly, perverted culture wherein women, born to occupy the position of the victimized, in turn take out their frustrations on those who have even less power. Their most likely immediate targets are often the younger women around them - that is, their own daughters or younger concubines. If the Joy Luck mothers are already more or less reduced to a monolithic collective entity, (the mothers of) the mothers of the Joy Luck mothers are further abstractized into a mass of faceless malignant maternal force or a disembodied maternal voice.[33] An-mei Hsu, for example, talks about her grandmother who appears more as a mean and vicious spirit than as a being with a visible human face :

> I often heard stories of a ghost who tried to take children away, especially *strong-willed little girls* who were disobedient. Many times Popo [grandmother] said aloud to all who could hear that my brother and I had fallen out of the bowels of a stupid goose, two eggs that nobody wanted, not even good enough to crack over rice porridge. She said this so that the ghosts would not steal us away. So you see, to Popo we were also very precious. (Tan, 1989 : 42 ; italics mine)

Popo is bent on breaking the will of little girls and takes pleasure in frightening her granddaughter with the most perverted kind of horror stories like the following :

> She [Popo] told me stories I could not understand.
> One was about a greedy girl whose belly grew fatter and fatter. This girl poisoned herself after refusing to say whose child she carried. When the monks cut open her body, they found inside a large white winter melon.
> « If you are greedy, what is inside you is what makes you always hungry, » said Popo.
> Another time, Popo told me about a girl who refused to listen to her elders. One day this bad girl shook her head so vigorously to refuse her auntie's simple request that a little white ball fell from her ear and out poured all her brains, as clear as chicken broth. (Tan, 1989 : 42-43)

The sickness of Popo's mind is matched by her physical sickness (Tan, 1989 : 42), a perfect image for the author to suggest the unhealthiness of the Chinese culture. When An-mei fell seriously ill, burned by a pot of hot soup, instead of comforting her, Popo told An-mei about the funeral clothes prepared for her :

> « An-mei, listen carefully. » Her [Popo's] voice had the same scolding tone she used when I ran up and down the hallway.
> « An-mei, we have made your dying clothes and shoes for you. They are all white cotton. »
> I listened, scared.
> « An-mei, » she murmured, now more gently. « Your dying clothes are very plain. They are not fancy, because you are still a child. If you die, you will have a short life and you will still owe your family a debt. You funeral will be very small. Our mourning time for you will be very short. » (Tan, 1989 : 47)

With episodes of this kind, Tan subtly translates the Chinese belief in fate into the Western vocabulary of « psychological manipulation. »[34] Moreover, incidents of this kind in *The Joy Luck Club* are structured in a way that is suggestive of the following psychoanalytic solution to the mystery of Chinese maternal malignity : a tyrannical society is prone to produce ruthless individuals, and abusive adults are likely to bring up abusive children, with the cycle of assault continuing from generation to generation. The intimidation to which Ying-ying St. Clair subjects little Lena, for example, corresponds closely to Popo's strategy for procuring conformity from An-mei :[35]

> « Aii, Lena, » she [Ying-ying] had said after that dinner so many years ago, « your future husband have one pock mark for every rice you not finish. » ... I picked up that cold bowl of rice and scraped the last few grains into my mouth, then smiled at my mother, confident my future husband would be not Arnold but someone whose face was as smooth as the porcelain in my now clean bowl.
> But my mother sighed. « Yesterday, you not finish rice either. » I thought of those unfinished mouthfuls of rice, and then the grains that lined my bowl the day before, and the day before that. By the minute, my eight-year-old heart grew more and more terror-stricken over the growing possibility that my future husband was fated to be this mean boy Arnold. (Tan, 1989 : 152)

Indeed, Tan has a way of dramatizing how a daughter can be driven almost insane by her mother's manipulations. Lena, for example, was brutally frightened by her mother at the age of five. In order to prevent her daughter from entering the basement, Ying-ying threatened her with a story about a bad man dwelling down there who could « [plant] five babies in me and then [eat] us all in a six-course meal, tossing our bones on the dirty floor » :

> ... after that I began to see terrible things. I saw these things with *my Chinese eyes, the part of me I got from my mother*. I saw devils dancing feverishly beneath a hole I had dug in the sandbox. I saw that lightning had eyes and searched to strike down little children. I saw a beetle wearing the face of a child, which I promptly squashed with the wheel of my tricycle. And when I became older, I could see things that *Caucasian girls* at school did not. Monkey rings that would split in two and send a swinging child hurtling through space. Tether balls that could splash a girl's head all over the playground in front of laughing friends. (Tan, 1989 : 103-104 ; italics mine)

Note how Tan emphasizes this aberrant vision as pertaining to the « Chinese » only. Tan certainly deserves applause for skillfully bending and fitting the Chinese culture into the discourse of the Western science of abnormal psychology. Under the scrutiny of the authoritative psychoanalytic eye adopted by Tan, the Chinese emerge as a psychotic people from a deviant society exemplified by the reprehensible conduct of the Joy Luck mothers. This political undercurrent of the novel surfaces quite conspicuously as Tan has Waverly preface her narrative of her nightmarish childhood with a rather hair-raising anecdote. Lindo Jong is reported to have made the following remark : « Chinese people do business [...] Not lazy like American people. We do torture. Best torture » (Tan, 1989 : 91). Because Lindo speak for the « Chinese people, » the horror story that is to come becomes representative of the sadism prevalent in China. Lindo misuses her child, because, as one recalls from Lindo's own story in « Feathers from a Thousand Li Away, » she had been subjected to the spite of her mother-in-law who, as Tan herself repeatedly emphasizes, is customarily regarded as a Chinese woman's « real » mother after the day of her betrothal (Tan, 1989 : 50-51).

Tan thus provides a clue to why the Chinese mother is at once a strong and a weak figure, as in Waverly's descriptions of Lindo Jong (Tan, 1989 : 180-181). The mother victimizes her daughter, because she has been victimized and thus predisposed to mean-spiritedness and spitefulness. The very force with which she persecutes her daughter betrays her own emotional disorder. She is a formidable bully, only because she cannot help being so.[36] She is a victim of fate - that is, a victim of the Chinese circumstances into which she was born, and in which she involuntarily implicates her daughter :

> I look at my face in the beauty parlor mirror. I see my reflection. I cannot see my faults, but I know they are there. *I gave my daughter three faults*. The same eyes, the same cheeks, the same chin. *Her character, it came from my circumstances*. I look at my daughter and now it is the first time I have seen it. (Tan, 1989 : 265 ; italics mine)

The Chinese « circumstances » are the Fatal (M-)other, the Chinese Primal M-Other, the Mother of all Chinese mothers controlling not only the daughters but also their mothers. If Waverly has a hard time figuring out what her (m-)other wants, it is because Lindo does not know what her (m-)other (-in-law) wants. Ultimately, no Chinese woman can understand the demands of the Chinese Primal (M-)other. No matter what a Chinese woman does, it seems that she can never satisfy the commands her culture places upon her.[37] In other words, the Chinese woman, as Tan depicts her, is constantly plagued by the injunctions of an insatiable sadistic superego.

The Joy Luck women's story-telling hence contributes toward the development of cultural memory rather than of their personal identities. The different women are given chances to speak not so much to develop their individual character as to hammer through their collective identity as products of the Chinese culture.[38] They speak as co-victims of a barbaric society, with each individual bearing witness to her participation in that general cycle of female sufferings. What this network of little narratives amount to is a collaborative indictment of the injustice « intrinsic » to Chinese society. At the same time, however, the grip of the Primal M-Other on the Chinese women is described as being so strong that it seems all women bearing the Chinese blood are bound to display some degree of Chinese perversion. Tan believes in cultural determinism no less than the Joy Luck mothers believe in fate. To appropriate Balibar's wording, what we witness in *The Joy Luck Club* is that « biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities » :

> At the cost of abandoning the hierarchical model [of biological determinism] (though the abandonment is more apparent than real, as we shall see), *culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of *locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin*. (Tan, 1989 : 21 ; italics mine)

To build on Balibar's insight, one can see how, at the cost of abandoning Chinese superstition, Tan can make culture function like fate in her representation of the « Chinese » family. Interestingly enough, Tan's novel adds a new angle for further considering Balibar's theory of neo-racism[39] :

Tan is quite unique in targeting the family in her promotion of the ideology of neo-racism.

In Between Nature and Culture : Tan's Use of the Family as Her « Home Institution » for Propagating Neo-Racist Ideologies

The family occupies an indeterminate space between the biological and the cultural, based as it is on blood ties on the one hand, and on the other hand, as an instance of the barest minimum of a social relation presided over by the Name-of-the-Father.[40] Situated as it is in this ambiguous space between the private and the public, the imaginary and the symbolic, the family is a potentially ideal site for substantiating and verifying theories of neo-racism that attempt to support claims of the « insurmountability of cultural differences » (Balibar, 1991 : 21) with a biologism displaced one degree. The reason is, even as neo-racists make claims to neutrality by surrendering biological essentialism in favor of scientific investigations of cultural differences, as far as studies about the family are concerned, biological determinism (such as « heredity ») can be « legitimately » brought back to support arguments for cultural inequality. Discriminatory theories about culture can be conveniently backed up by biologism rewritten in the service of cultural differences - in other words, by arguments such as « the biological causes and effects of cultural differences. » In other words, the family is the perfect ground for breeding the kind of neo-racist rhetoric similar to the following :

> « There are of course no " races, " there are only populations and cultures, but there are *biological (and biophysical) causes and effects of culture, and biological reactions to cultural difference* (which could be said to constitute something like the indelible trace of the " animality " of man, still bound as ever to his extended " family " and his " territory. ") » (expropriated from Balibar, 1991 : 26 ; italics mine)

The important functions assumed by the family in the transmission of culture and the initiation of the children into the symbolic order is complicated by the family's foundation upon blood relations. In *The Joy Luck Club*, despite the daughter's rebellion against the Chinese culture[41] imposed upon her by her parent, she nonetheless finds herself trapped by the family blood she inherits. Jing-mei's revelation toward the very end of the novel transforms cu]ture into biology - that is, the Chinese culture into a blood heritage - through her discourse on the family :

> ... 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 these years, it can finally be let go. (Tan, 1989 : 288 ; italics mine)

The grand epiphany of the book is this revelation that the Chinese culture is inevitably different from that of the West due to their disparate biological roots. *This act of reimporting biological determinism to naturalize cultural discriminations is indeed the* Telos *of all three* « teloi » *of the novel*. The three quests realized at the end of the novel - that is, Jing-mei Woo's reconciliation with her mother, Amy Tan's acquisition of stardom and wealth, and the late consumer society's appropriation of multi-cultural capital - all pivot upon this naturalization. The daughter's recovery of her ethnic identity through her acceptance of her blood tie to her mother - in other words, the daughter redeeming her « *cultural* differences » from the white majority through her new understanding of her *biological* roots - structurally parallels and underpins *The Joy Luck Club's* political rediscovery of *cultural* inequality through its re-cognition of the *biological* basis of cultural differences. And it is this political naturalization of cultural differences that grants Amy Tan her economic success, and enables late capitalism to sublate marginal voices into neo-racist multi-cultural capital.[42]

From Othering the Mother to Mothering the Other : the Transformation of Third-World Citizens into Third-Class First-World Subjects

Of all members in a Chinese-American family, the mother seems to be the figure most easily appropriated by neo-racists to provide biological bases for cultural discriminations. No matter how Westernized the children are, they will continue to carry the stigmata of otherness since their mother, the person to whom they bear the closest biological bonds, is absolutely « Other. » *By Othering the mother at home, Tan thus succeeds in mothering the Other in the world*. This is to say, by painting the mother as an exotic Chinese, Tan generates a whole race which is destined to be always Other, eternally exotic - a race which will remain invariably « Chinese » - meaning that it will forever bear separate symbolic structures unequal to those of the West.[43] Moreover, as an entity that is always to remain foreign to the white American discourse, the Chinese culture is doomed by the authority of Tan's authorship to be « constitut[ing] obstacles, » or is itself « established as obstacles (by schools or the norms of international communication) to the acquisition of [respectable Western] culture » (appropriated from Balibar, 1991 : 25). In other words, Tan's narrative of the exotic M-Other in the Chinese-American family subtly effects a *transformation of former third-world citizens into third-class first-world subjects*. It succeeds in *maintaining the « otherness of the other »*[44] *by transforming these insiders from the outside into outsiders on the inside.*

II. Conclusion : Where Will the *Joy Luck Club* Be Without its « Primal » M-Other ?

It is not surprising that Tan dedicates her book « To my mother/and the memory of her mother. » So much hinges on the M-Other. The Mother is the biological bond through which the cultural Other is brought *home* into the Asian-American family, and yet the otherness of the Other is the reason why the Mother must be expelled from the *home-land* of America and be returned to China at the end of the novel. In other words, the M-Other is the phantasmatic point where the familial (mother) crosses the political (other), and where questions about home is traversed by issues about the home-land. By combining the Mother with the Other, biological intimacy with cultural unfamiliarity, Tan successfully sells a discriminatory tale about the absolute incommensurability between the American and the Chinese cultures in the form of a harmless family romance.[2]

That the *M-Other* is « *primal* » to the Joy Luck project is undeniable : she is the « lucky » spot where « everything [...] com[es] together »[45] for Tan - where Jing-mei's quest for her mother coincides with neo-racism's appropriation of multi-cultural capital, the combination of which brings Amy Tan stardom and wealth.

Notes

[1] Tan's employment of the decentered, multi-perspectival form has been hastily read by some critics as a sign of the author's openness to diversity and a proof of her commitment to cultural and ethnic difference. See, for example, Stephen Souris's use of Bakhtin and Iser to analyze the « inter-monologue dialogicity in *The Joy Luck Club* » in his article published in 1994.

It is my contention that, while Tan's literary practice seems to *exemplify* the principles outlined by certain contemporary critical theory - especially that proposed by Lyotard and Bakhtin - the radicality of her literary form is deceptive. At first sight, Tan's novel seems to be comprised of little narratives, each of which seems to make no claim to telling « *the* story » or « put[ting] an end to narrative. » Rather, as Bill Readings describes Jean-François Lyotard's little narratives, each of Tan's tales « evoke seems to new stories by the manner in which in its turn it has displaced preceding narratives in telling *a* story » (Readings : 69). However, the politics of Tan's novel is markedly different from Lyotard's. Tan's little narratives lend themselves to, rather than resist, incorporation into the « totalizing histories of cultural representation or projects for culture » (Readings : 63) - in particular, the mythical project of the *Bildungsroman*. The entire novel unfolds toward the fulfillment of the quest of Jing-mei Woo, itself standing for the quest of all Asian-American daughters for their ethnic identity, and this task is to be accomplished in the final reconciliation of the daughters with their mothers. This grand mission taken up by the daughter is the « metanarrative of cognition and of knowledge » always already governing all the small narratives in the novel, abstracting them from their particularities and their individual temporal durations. It is thus my argument that Tan's work supports, rather than disrupts, « the claims of narratology to offer a positive *critical* knowledge of narrative as a rational concept structuring the organization of signs » (Readings : 71).

My point can be further proved by Tan's ideological preoccupation with truth. Tan takes pride in the way she uses her multiple narratives to serve the enterprise of truth : « And when you talk to 100 different people to get their stories on a situation, that's what the truth is. So it's really a multiple story » (Seaman,1990 : 256).

[2] The politics of the contrast set up by Tan between « culture » and « nature » - or, more precisely put, between the American culture which Tan reveres as the «true» symbolic order, and the Chinese culture which appears in the novel to remain caught in the imaginary circle emphasizing « blood ties » and biological relations - will be discussed at greater length in n. 27 in Part III, « Home and the Re-Worlding of the Third World. »

[3] This majestic « coming together » of the East and the West, of the daughter and the mother, is effected through the resurrection of Suyuan Woo by the grand reunion of her « American daughter » with her « Chinese daughters » : « Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish » (Tan, 1989 : 288).

[4] Marina Heung discusses at one point in her « Daughter-Text/Mother-Text » the autobiographical aspect of Tan's novel :

> In an interview, Tan describes how she was moved to establish a dialogue with her mother : " When I was writing, it was so much for my mother and myself...I wanted her to know what I thought about China and what I thought about growing up in this country " (Lew : 23). (Heung, 1993 : 598-599)

[5] The popularity of ethnic identity in late capitalist America is mentioned by both the daughters and the mothers in the novel. Jin-mei Woo invites others to address her by her Chinese name since « it's even becoming fashionable for American-born Chinese to use their Chinese names » (Tan, 1989 : 37). Lindo Jong observes of her daughter Waverly that « now she wants to be Chinese, it is so fashionable » (Tan, 1989 : 253).

[6] Even though "economy" denotes the management of the household in ancient Greek society, the late capitalist family bears a complicated relationship to not just the economic but also the political spheres, due to the absorption of the political into the economic in modernity. My analysis of Tan's novel will dramatize their intricate connections.

[7] Obviously, I am borrowing Benjamin's slogan to fault Tan for aestheticizing politics. I am also adopting a 1985 Jamesonian position in this essay in my critique of the postmodern leveling of all critical distinctions.

[8] Ben Xu's idealization of the ending of Tan's novel, for example, is not uncommon among critics :

> These two frame stories [the first and the last stories], ending with a family reunion in China, suggest strongly a journey of maturity, ethnic awakening, and

return-to-home, not just for Jing-mei Woo, but metaphorically for all the daughters in the book. This experience is like a revelation - a sudden unveiling of the authentic meaning of being " Chinese. " (Xu, 1994 : 273)

[9] Note that even though Amy Tan packages her Joy Luck mothers as Chinese women, they are by no means representative of women in China. The Joy Luck mothers were a highly select group, usually from rich families in China, who emigrated to America involuntarily during the Sino-Japanese War. People from this class are more anxious about keeping the appearances of propriety and adhering strictly to Chinese customs - a practice made even more stilted by the defensiveness generated from these women's traumatic immigration from China to a country whose language and culture remain alien to them, and where they suffer from both racial and sexual discriminations. Chi-Kwan Ho, for example, comments in her dissertation that

> In the face of limited resources and racial discriminations, many Chinese American women are made dependent on their family for support and protection. Many have been found to cling to a socio-cultural legacy as a life-giving source of ethnic identity and personal dignity ... (Ho, 1993 : 51-52)

Judy Yung also points out in her *Chinese Women of America* that the immigrant mothers hold firmly onto the Chinese tradition « primarily out of cultural pride, but also because *they felt unwelcome in America* » (Yung, 1986 : 48).

This is why I am quite disturbed by Amy Tan's attempt to pass off the *Joy Luck Club* as China itself, as is evident in the way she describes her book during an interview : « When I was writing, it was so much for my mother and myself [...] I wanted her to know what I thought about *China* and what I thought about growing up in this country » (Lew, 1989 : 23 ; italics mine). Compared to Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston is far more honest. Kingston makes it clear that her picture of Chinese culture must not be confused with the Chinese culture in China itself. She is much more interested in showing how Chinese Americans shape and alter the original cultural heritage :

> The China that's in my stories can't be the one that's actually there. The Chinese Americans have a myth of China that we pass around to one another and that we talk about and that hovers over us. I thought it was very important to write that down, that mythic China that influences some people's lives so strongly that they live for it or live by it. (Donnerstag, 1992 : 608).

[10] Note that while the mothers, being the first generation immigrants, usually think of themselves as Chinese, their daughters, born in America, tend to identify themselves as Chinese-Americans or Americans. See Chi-Kwan Ho's dissertation.

[11] This is partly why the Joy Luck aunties can easily act as Jing-mei's surrogate mothers. Tan's will-to-stereotype the Chinese m-others is continuous with her eagerness to make the point that the Chinese society denies its people, especially women, their individuality. To appropriate Nancy Hartsock's expression, the m-others are portrayed by Tan to be « part of a chaotic, disorganized, and anonymous collectivity. They carry, Memmi states, " the mark of the plural " (CC 85). In more colloquial terms, they all look alike » (Hartsock, 1990 : 22).

[12] Like their mothers, all four daughters engage in petty rivalries against each other. Through her autobiographical character Jing-mei Woo, Tan stresses from time to time, citing the authority of the « scientific » discipline of psychology, the importance of nurture and cultivation. (See p. 31, for instance.)

Tan's emphasis on the influence of environment on the human psyche is significant, since, as I will argue in § III, B, 1 of this essay, what I find disturbing in Tan's book is a racism whose dominant theme, according to Balibar, « is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences. » According to this form of racism (named « neo-racism » by Balibar), « *culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin » (Balibar, 1991 : 21).

[13] I am of course alluding to the cannibalistic incorporation of the primal father by the brothers in *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's description goes as follows :

> The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers : and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. (Freud, *Standard Edition*, 1953-74 : XIII :142).

[14] Amy Tan, not unlike her autobiographical character, Jing-mei Woo, took some classes in psychology. Tan seems to enjoy making rudimentary psychological observations from time to time in her novel.

[15] I put « symbolic order » inside quotation marks since, contrary to the symbolic order of the good father which is made possible by castration, the one pertaining to the primal mother comes into being not through a subtraction but rather, through an addition of something to « reality. » This addition of course is closely connected to the positivization of the *objet a* and the excess of *jouissance*.

[16] The idea of the other as a combination of extreme contradictory attributes is frequently invoked by racist propaganda. The Jews, for example, were described by the Nazis to be both subhuman and superhuman. On the one hand, the Jews were mere vermin and can never rise to the level of humanity. Yet on the other, they were in possession of certain superhuman power that allowed them to control the economy and the social-political structure of the country. (In Lacanian terms, the racists hate the Other because the latter is guilty of the theft of enjoyment.) ... The Other is not human precisely because s/he is both less and more than human.

[17] I am playing on the Lacanian notion of « in-between-two-deaths, » and Freud's story about the dead father who comes back in ignorance of his own death (See Freud, « Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning, » *Standard Edition*, XII : 225. See also Lacan's discussion in « Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious », *Écrits*.) The analogy is especially pertinent to this part of my analysis in that Jing-mei Woo's mother is indeed dead, and yet she « comes back » demanding to have her desire read. Her refusal to acknowledge the death of her Chinese identity is one of the factors that turns her into a remnant of « the Chinese » in its American sublation.

[18] In one of her reveries, Lindo Jong imagines herself telling her daughter the following : « It's hard to keep your Chinese face in America. At the beginning, before I even arrived, I had to hide my true self » (Tan, 1989 : 258).

[19] The « American face » that Lindo Jong wears at the barber shop, for example, is intended to be misleading : « I smile. I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand » (Tan, 1989 : 255).

[20] A fair assessment of the behaviors of the Chinese mothers would place their « eccentricity » within the context of the history of discriminations *(especially before the 1970s)* undergone by Chinese immigrants in the United States. The ahistorical contrast Tan sets up between the Joy Luck mothers and daughters obscures the background memory of a prior racial discrimination by displacing it into a so-called intractable « cultural difference » between the *Chinese* and the *Chinese-American*, thereby *furthering* racist image of the superiority of the Western civilization to the East.

[21] Once again, I have to take Tan to task for abstracting the immigrant mothers' « paranoia » and prejudices from the history of anti-Chinese laws and the intolerance demonstrated against Asians by a certain part of the white American population. Tan's insensitivity toward the sufferings of the Chinese immigrants is especially blatant when she, through the voice of Lena St. Clair, presents a caricature of Ying-ying St. Clair, as the daughter comments on the look of her scared mother after the latter's release from Angel Island Immigration Station. Lena even refers to the « scared look » in this photograph as illustrative of her mother's imbalance psychology and her status as a « Displaced Person » :

> In this picture you can see why my mother looks displaced. She is clutching a large clam-shaped bag, as though someone might steal this from her as well if she is less watchful. She has on an ankle-length Chinese dress. ... In this outfit she looks as if she were neither coming from nor going to some place...

And even though her head is bowed, humble in defeat, her eyes are staring up past the camera, wide open...

My mother often looked this way, waiting for something to happen, wearing this scared look. Only later she lost the struggle to keep her eyes open. (Tan, 1989 : 104-105)

[22] Of course, to make them look more Western is to make them look less exotic, less like the M-Other. In other words, she regards her « real self » to be her Western half which, by a stroke of misfortune, has been contaminated by her Chinese M-Other.

[23] Lena is speaking as negatively about her Chinese features as the American media of her time. Judy Yung in *Chinese Women of America* points out how the self-image of American-born Chinese women during the period of 1945-1985 suffer from the damaging messages they receive from the American media :

> Bombarded by the billboards and magazines that reinforced American standards of beauty as blond, blue eyed, and big breasted, young Chinese American women of this era received a message of inferiority from mass media... (Yung, 1986 : 88)

[24] There is only one allusion to African-Americans made in the book. It provides a most intriguing occasion for studying the racist « dialectic » between the mother and the daughter as one's bigotry surpasses the other. Suyuan was disappointed by the cheap perm she gave her daughter at a beauty training school, and Jing-mei reports the following :

> " You look like a Negro Chinese, " she [Suyuan Woo] lamented, as if I [Jing-mei] had done this on purpose. (Tan, 1989 : 133)

Obviously, the mother is depicted as a bigot. However, Jing-mei is not really offended by Suyuan's opinion of African-Americans. Rather, she is prejudiced enough against the « Negroes » to deem it an insult for her mother to associate her with inferior race.

[25] Zizek's own text goes as follows :

> Do we not obtain satisfaction by means of the very supposition that the Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us ? Does not the Other's enjoyment exert such a powerful fascination because in it we represent to ourselves our own innermost relationship toward enjoyment ? And, conversely, is the anti-Semitic capitalist's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of the excess that pertains to capitalism itself, i.e., of the excess produced by its inherent antagonistic nature ? Is capitalism's hatred of the Jew not the hated of its own innermost, essential feature ? For this reason, it is not sufficient to point out how the racist's Other presents a threat to our identity. (Zizek, 1993 : 206)

[26] Note that Jing-mei's identification and appropriation of her mother's role parallel the brothers' devouring act of identification after their murder of the primal father in *Totem and Taboo*.

[27] This line has gained so much reputation that Orville Schell names his review article in the *New York Times* « Your Mother is in Your Bones. »

[28] Even though some Sinocentric parents may deny this, the fact that they chose to emigrate to America amounts to a tacit consent that American life is preferable to Chinese life.

It is interesting to note that while the Asian-American daughter constantly questions and wrestles with her biologically predetermined Chinese « identity, » she never finds her American side problematic, as if it were the latter, rather than the former, that was her « natural » and objective » identity. In other words, the « choice » to be American (that everything Caucasian is superior to Chinese, see p. 191, for example) has been naturalized by the daughter, as if her American identity were a matter of fact.

[29] Suyuan Woo describes the mentality shared by all four Joy Luck mothers : « we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy » (Tan, 1989 : 25).

[30] The point that the Chinese culture offers its people (especially women) no choice is repeatedly emphasized in the book. Auntie An-mei, for example, makes a similar observation when recounting her mother's life-story : « That was China.

That was what people did back then. *They had no choice*. They could not speak up. They could not run away. That was their *fate* » (Tan, 1989 : 241 ; italics mine).

[31] I will soon turn to explain how it is implied in the novel that fate is actually the superstition that disguises the tyranny exercised against (female) individuals by the « backward » Chinese society.

[32] My readers may be surprised by my choosing the term Primal Mother rather than Primal Father to refer to the Chinese society as represented by Tan, given her apparent criticism of Chinese patriarchy. In another essay of mine, I develop in detail the argument that, despite the blatant lip service paid by Tan's novel to feminism, the author herself is a covert subscriber to patriarchy - *Western* patriarchy, that is. The fact that she sets the father above the mother can be gathered from the way she assigns paternal authority to America and maternal authority to China. It is because paternity is associated with superiority that, in the novel, America is honored by the daughter as her «rightful» Name-of-the-Father who grants her subjectivity, language, law, and civilization, while the daughter's biological Chinese father silently retreats into the background and becomes barely visible. In an interview, Tan again makes clear her comparison of China to a mother and America to a father : « When my feet touched China I knew I was not Chinese, but I felt the connection nevertheless. It was a sense of completeness, like having *a mother and a father. I had China and America*, and everything was all coming together finally » (Lew, 1989 : 25 ; italics mine).

Throughout the novel, Chinese culture is associated not just with the mothers but also with some female attributes that come across as highly ludicrous and even repulsive. Chinese culture, like the Joy Luck mothers, is characterized by the kind of cunning, small-mindedness, and petty malignity commonly ascribed to the female by misogynous writers. American culture, on the other hand, is enlightenment and civilization *per se*. In the case of Lena, the child of an interracial marriage, it is no accident that her father is American and her mother Chinese. Of the two parents, the former is generous and innocent, in contrast to the latter who refers to herself as a cunning tiger « waiting between the trees » (Tan, 1989 : 251-252).

This dichotomy can be conveniently grafted onto classical Western political thought that privileges humanity above raw nature, the dignity of civilization and human freedom above « prepolitical » societies where human beings are still constrained by limitations imposed upon them by the needs of biological life. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the Chinese mother is very much survival-driven and conservation-minded because her society has not yet been liberated from the prepolitical stage of « eat or be eaten » ; by contrast, American ease and liberty are evidence of the West having mastered necessity and having truly evolved into the stage of the « human. » (See, for example, writings by Aristotle, St. Thomas Acquinas, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Arendt, to name just a few thinkers.) Again, Tan is not only racist in associating Chinese society with prepolitical brutality and inequality while depicting America the land of culture and sophistication ; she is also sexist in superimposing the hierarchy of male/female on that of civilization/biological necessity.

Tan's confinement of (Chinese) women to the female imaginary between mother and daughter also raises a highly disturbing question : Is Tan's book a feminist statement that aims at rescuing Chinese women from repression by their society ? Or is it ultimately an anti-feminist commodity that resubjects women to the « tyranny of intimacy » and reinscribes them in the world of presymbolic aggressivity ?

[33] I am evoking the Lacanian notion of the voice of the superego which commands enjoyment. This voice is associated with the drive whose entry into the symbolic order has been foreclosed.

[34] Tan's privileging of the Western science of psychology over the « backwardness » of Chinese superstition is quite naive. Derrida in « My Chances/Mes Chances » specifically questions « the difference between superstition or paranoia on the one hand, and science on the other, if they all mark a compulsive tendency to interpret random signs in order to reconstitute a meaning, a necessity, or a destination » (Derrida, 1984 : 20). Despite Freud's insistence on distinguishing himself from a superstitious person, he also acknowledges the hermeneutic compulsion he shares with the superstitious, that is, the compulsion « not to let chance count as chance but to interpret it. » See especially Freud's « Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition, » *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

[35] The fact that Lena can occupy An-mei's position on the signifying chain is another example of how, for Tan, the Joy Luck mothers, or « Chinese » women « in general, » are highly interchangeable, since they are all « raised the same way » - to be obedient (Tan, 1989 : 142), and to have no will of their own (Tan, 1989 : 42-43).

[36] Many of the scenes between the mother and the daughter in *The Joy Luck Club* make sense in this light. It seems that the mother's will to control her child stems from her sense of insecurity. Lindo Jong, for example, insists that she has never given up (her control of) her daughter (Tan, 1989 : 254), and hence is troubled by Waverly's statement that she is « [her] own person » (Tan, 1989 : 254). Likewise, Suyuan Woo also demands humble submission from her daughter (Tan, 1989 : 142). Ultimately, it seems that the mother's refusal to allow her daughter independence is caused by her fear and her own inability to be independent as a result of her Chinese upbringing.

Since the mother is deprived of a chance to develop an identity and a career of her own, she tries to make up for that loss by forcing her daughter to become what she wants. The daughters are made into mere extensions or slaves (Tan, 1989 : 141) of the mother. For example, Waverly was encouraged to play chess while her mother stole all the credit (Tan, 1989 : 99 ; 170), and Suyuan Woo desperately attempted to turn her daughter into another Shirley Temple (Tan, 1989 : 133), and told Lindo that Jing-mei was going back to school to get a doctorate (Tan, 1989 : 37) even though such were not her daughter's wishes. The mothers' glory depends so much on their children that they spent a lifetime « comparing » their children's accomplishments (Tan, 1989 : 37).

[37] Jing-mei's description of her mother projects a « miniature » version of the insatiable demands of the sadistic M-Other :

> ...it seemed my mother was always displeased with all her friends, with me, and even with my father. Something was always missing. Something always needed improving. Something was not in balance. This one or that had too much of one element, not enough of another. (Tan, 1989 : 30-31)

[38] It is interesting to note that while the novel implicitly criticizes Chinese mothers for depriving their daughters of their independence, Tan herself should have no scruples stereotyping her Chinese characters and depriving them of their individual identities. Tan's criticism of Chinese culture is as much a part of her racism as her will to stereotype the Chinese (m-)others. Balibar points out that in racist writings, « the cultures supposed implicitly superior are those which appreciate and promote " individual " enterprise, social and political individualism, as against those which inhibit these things » (, 19 : 25). At the same time, writers with such racial biases would see no self-contradictions as they themselves in their own works suppress the individuality of third-world characters. To borrow Mohanty's expression, it is quite disturbing that people who honor Western individualism should show little hesitation « appropriat[ing] and coloniz[ing] the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in [the third world] » (Mohanty, 1994 : 198).

[39] Balibar explains that the dominant theme of neo-racism is « the insurmountability of cultural differences. » It postulates « the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions ; in short, it is what P. A. Taguieff has rightly called a *differentialist racism* » (Balibar, 1991 : 21). Neo-racism is highly pertinent to ethnic studies, since it refers to the « racism of the era of " decolonization, " of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space » (Balibar, 1991 : 21).

[40] By emphasizing the mother in her depiction of Chinese culture, Tan seems to suggest that Chinese families are still quite confined to the imaginary and have not yet successfully entered the symbolic order. The fact that Tan criticizes Chinese society for being patriarchal by no means poses a problem for my argument. The reason is that despotic patriarchy is not the same as the « good father » associated with the Name-of-the-Father. Borrowing Arendt's vocabulary, one can say that despotic patriarchy « is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity » (Arendt, 1988 » : 31). By contrast, the Name-of-the-Father is located in what Arendt would call the « political » realm, which is strictly « the sphere of freedom » (Arendt, 1988 : 30).

[41] The degree of contempt and revulsion the daughter bears toward Chinese culture can be read clearly in Jing-mei Woo's reflection on the « China *syndrome*, » which she associates with the following :

> ...a cluster of telltale Chinese behaviors, all those things my mother did to embarrass me - haggling with store owners, pecking her mouth with a toothpick in public, being color-blind to the fact that lemon yellow and pale pink are not good combinations for winter clothes. (Tan, 1989 : 267)

[42] In addition to my analysis, there are also other good reasons why Tan's denigrating portrayal of the Chinese family is so damaging to the image of the Chinese culture as a whole. C. K. Yang has a telling analysis of the ways the Chinese family acts as the backbone of the Chinese culture :

> In the early years of the twentieth century many of [Chinese] society's economic, educational, religious, recreational, and even political functions were intimately tied to the family institution. From cradle to grave the individual was under the uninterrupted influence of the family regarding his physical and moral upbringing, the formation of his sentiments and attitudes, his educational training, his public career, his social associations, his emotional and material security. In the Chinese community, particularly in the rural areas, there have been only a few social organizations or associations outside the family to serve the individual's social needs. Consequently, throughout his life the individual constantly struggled with problems concerned with the relations of parent and children, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, the " in-laws, " uncles, cousins, nephews, grandparents and grandchildren, and other members in the complex kinship circle.
>
> Beyond the kinship circle the individual might have to deal with government officials, with his teacher or craft master, his colleagues, his employer or employees, and his neighbors and friends. But many of these social relations came through direct or indirect kinship contacts, and they were often patterned after the family system in structure and in values. Hence government officials were often referred to as " parent-officials " (*fu mu kuan*) and the people as " children people " (*tzu min*). The relationship between master and apprentice, or between teacher and student, operated on a stimulated father-and-son basis... (Yang, 1959 : 5-7)

[43] The novel abounds with episodes organizing affects that confer upon the Mother - and hence the Other (race) - « obsessive character » and « " irrational " ambivalence » (appropriated from Balibar, 1991 : 17). In addition to the fact that the mother is always dissatisfied with her children and would have no scruples insulting them (Tan, 1989 : 30-31), she is also described to be notoriously « cheap » and crude. Suyuan Woo ruined little Jing-mei's hair by giving her a perm at a beauty training school (Tan, 1989 : 133), in addition to « haggling with store owners, pecking her mouth with a toothpick in public, being color-blind to the fact that lemon yellow and pale pink are not good combinations for winter clothes » (Tan, 1989 : 267). Ying-ying St. Clair embarrasses her daughter with her habit of « opening up jars » at grocery stores « to smell the insides » (Tan, 1989 : 106). Likewise, Waverly Jong is mortified by her mother's « Chinese » manners at the restaurant :

> She [Lindo Jong] wore her tight-lipped, pinched-nose look as she scanned the menu, muttering, ' Not too many good things, this menu.' Then she tapped the waiter's arm, wiped the length of her chopsticks with her finger, and sniffed : ' This greasy thing, do you expect me to eat with it ? ' She made a show of washing out her rice bowl with hot tea, and then warned other restaurant patrons seated near us to do the same. She told the waiter to make sure the soup was very hot, and of course, it was by her tongue's expert estimate " not even *lukewarm*. " (Tan, 1989 : 166)

In addition to all this, Lindo Jong is reported to have made it a custom not to pay tips. Nor is she much more considerate toward her daughter. Waverly recalls that her mother « used to drop by unannounced » when Waverly was first married,

« until one day I suggested she should call ahead of time. Ever since then, she has refused to come unless I issue an official invitation » (Tan, 1989 : 168).

[44] I put « otherness of the other » inside quotation marks to draw attention to its difference from the otherness of the other proposed by Levinasian ethics.

[45] This is a phrase expropriated from the interview Tan held with Julie Lew (1989 : 23).

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Résumé

En créant une mère qui est, culturellement, « L'Autre absolu » de sa fille, Amy Tan réussit à vendre, sous l'apparence d'un « roman de famille » banal, un conte discriminatoire qui propage non seulement l'incompatibilité des cultures américaines et chinoises, mais même l'infériorité de l'une par rapport à l'autre. En opposant la plupart des critiques qui ont applaudi le livre de Amy Tan comme un défi important à la littérature conventionnelle des blancs, mon article défend la thèse que le succès du roman est dû à un fantasme néo-raciste, que Tan construit autour de l'image de la mère chinoise et de l'altérité chinoise.

Abstract

By creating a Mother who is culturally an "absolute Other" to her daughter, Amy Tan successfully sells, under the guise of a harmless family romance, a discriminatory tale about the incompatibility and even inequality between American and Chinese culture. Although most critics celebrate Tan's book as an important challenge to white mainstream literature, my paper contests that the popularity of the novel stems from a neo-racist (to use the term of Balibar) fantasy Tan constructs around the image of the Chinese M-Other.

Date: Mon, 26 Jan 1998 10:46:43 -0800 (PST)
From: Sinkwan Cheng <scheng@benfranklin.hnet.uci.edu>
To: scheng@coyote.csusm.edu
cc: test <chengs@uci.edu>
Subject: Re: Publications (fwd)
X-Status:

---------- Forwarded message ----------
Date: Mon, 22 Dec 1997 09:38:02 -0800
From: Juliet Flower MacCannell <jfmaccan@uci.edu>
To: Sinkwan Cheng <scheng@benfranklin.hnet.uci.edu>
Subject: Re: Publications

Dear Sinkwan,

JPCS won the second place award from the MLA for being the "best new journal"--so its standing is high.

The American Journal of Semiotics was highly regarded under our editorship from 1981-93 or so. It is a peer reviewed journal and it is the official publication of the Semiotic Society of America, a scholarly society.

Savoir is the publication of GIFRIC and is the only bilingual (French English) psychoanalytically oriented publication on this continent. Its board members range from Quebec to Paris, from New York and San Francisco to Buenos Aires.

More later,

Juliet

Juliet Flower MacCannell

Date: Tue, 27 Jan 1998 00:14:35 -0800 (PST)
From: Sinkwan Cheng <scheng@benfranklin.hnet.uci.edu>
To: scheng@coyote.csusm.edu
cc: chengs@e4e.oac.uci.edu
Subject: Re: Rejection Rate of _The American Journal of Semiotics_ and _Savoir_ (fwd)
X-Status:

---------- Forwarded message ----------
Date: Mon, 26 Jan 1998 09:15:41 -0800
From: Juliet Flower MacCannell <jfmaccan@uci.edu>
To: Sinkwan Cheng <scheng@benfranklin.hnet.uci.edu>
Subject: Re: Rejection Rate of _The American Journal of Semiotics_ and
Savoir

Dear Sinkwan,

There is no central compilation of statistics. Our rejection rate at AJS was fairly high; only about 20% of the submissions were accepted, as I recall, but there was no systematic record keeping. I do have everything on a computer disk--all the rejections, but it would really be difficult to compile right now. Your paper was read by an outside expert on the psychology of gambling, and a cofounder of a Lacanian school.

In respect to Savoir, the issue is created by a call for papers on a special topic. The papers are solicited from well known experts in the field (I just got a postcard from Jean Francois Lyotard saying that illness prevented him from participating, for example), then the editors, who are highly knowledgeable, invite people with expertise to submit. This is what happened in your case; I was the North American representative who nominated you, but the international review board decided on acceptance or rejection, not I.

Juliet

Juliet Flower MacCannell