Women's Issues in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club

Gary Wiener, Book Editor
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Chapter 1: Background on Amy Tan

1. The Life of Amy Tan 16
   Laurie Champion
   Driven by her demanding immigrant Asian mother, Amy Tan parlayed her early vocation as a technical writer into a career as one of the major voices in Asian American fiction by writing of the mother-daughter conflicts she experienced during her youth.

2. Tan Turns Autobiography into Powerful Fiction 25
   Amy Ling
   Amy Tan used material mined from her own life to create the mother-daughter tales of The Joy Luck Club, crafting a powerful tale of tragedy and reconciliation.

3. The Joy Luck Club Is Not 35 Strictly Autobiographical
   Amy Tan
   Tan’s writings are not autobiographical in the sense that many readers expect. Her stories are not childhood memories, but instead are written through the lens of a child’s mind.

Chapter 2: The Joy Luck Club and Women’s Issues

1. Tan’s Young Women Must Rediscover Their Chinese Identity 41
   Walter Shear
   A major theme in The Joy Luck Club is that of being lost. The younger women must reconnect with their lost Chinese roots in order to achieve selfhood.
2. June's Symbolic Journey to Discover Her Ethnic Identity
   Zenobia Mistri
   June Woo's China journey to meet her mother's daughters serves as a metaphor for all ethnic women who must affirm, rather than reject, their cultural heritage.

3. Damaged by Their Mothers' High Expectations
   Wendy Ho
   The mothers in The Joy Luck Club, having all experienced hardship and loss, place high expectations on their daughters, who are unequal to the task, and become victims of their mother's lofty goals.

4. Storytelling Reconciles Mothers and Daughters
   Gloria Shen
   As immigrant mothers and second-generation American daughters grow further apart, the mothers use stories to bridge the generation gap and help the daughters understand their mothers' actions as well as their cultural heritage.

5. The Maternal Line of Descent Dominates
   The Joy Luck Club
   Helena Grice
   In The Joy Luck Club, as in many contemporary women's Asian American novels, matrilineage, or the maternal line of descent in a family, is a major theme.

6. Mother/Daughter Relationships in the Post Women's Liberation Era
   Bonnie Braendlin
   Early feminist novels appearing in the wake of the women's liberation movements suggested rebellious ways for women to gain freedom, but novels such as The Joy Luck Club assert that through dialogism, women can resolve complicated issues.

7. Female Empowerment in The Joy Luck Club
   Patricia P. Chu
   Tan blends the mother-daughter romance with the utopian myth of immigration to form a tale of female empowerment in a new world.
8. Tan’s Beginning Rejects Stereotypes About Immigrant Women

*Catherine Romagnolo*

The opening of *The Joy Luck Club* has been criticized for distorting Chinese culture, but Tan’s book is consciously an attempt to counter traditional stereotypes about Asian immigrant women.

9. Empowerment Through Woman-to-Woman Bonding

*Leslie Bow*

*The Joy Luck Club* upholds the feminist notion that women can become empowered through bonding with other women.

10. Asian American Gender Stereotypes in *The Joy Luck Club*

*Yuan Shu*

Ethnic writers must be careful of the consequences of their writing strategies, as certain details in *The Joy Luck Club* may reinforce negative cultural stereotypes about Asian American men and women.

11. Tan Portrays Strong Asian Women

*Jean Lau Chin*

*The Joy Luck Club*’s popularity among Chinese Americans owes in part to its depiction of strong Asian women, as opposed to Western stories that often depict Asian women in meek, subservient roles.

**Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on Women’s Issues**

1. Mothers Are Society’s Scapegoats

*Paula Caplan*

Mothers are usually blamed for all of their children’s problems, while fathers often escape such criticism.
2. Asian American Women Must Overcome Limiting Cultural Stereotypes  
*Nikki A. Toyama*
Asian American women are so much more than the domestic servants that cultural stereotypes would have people believe.

3. Biculturalism Leads to One Woman’s Acceptance of Bisexuality  
*Beverly Yuen Thompson*
The “otherness” of being a racially bifurcated woman has made one woman’s acceptance of bisexuality seem less radical than it might otherwise be.

4. Asian Women Are Still Not Completely Accepted in the United States  
*Iris Chang*
Despite the remarkable success of many Asian-American women, full acceptance into mainstream American society is slow in coming.

5. More Women are Working, but Job Equality Remains Elusive  
*International Labour Organization (ILO)*
Societal views of women in the workplace are changing, but men continue to garner more prestige and income than their female counterparts.

6. Feminism Is Not Dead, Just Evolving  
*Eleanor Holmes Norton*
Young women may not consider themselves feminists, but the opportunities they have are based on a movement that still exists in the everyday choices and lives of today’s women.

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