College of Basic Education Research Journal

www.berj.mosuljournals.com

Interplay of Memory and Place in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club

Herjin Fadil Abdullah
University of Zakho/College of Humanities
Hassan Muayad Hamid
University of Mosul /College of Education for Humanities

Article Information

Article history:

Received: September 17.2024

Reviewer: September 29.2024

Accepted: October 13.2024

Key words : Collective memory, Identity, Memory, Personal memory, Place, Trauma.

Correspondence:

Abstract

This paper investigates memory and place in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). It unfolds the suffering of first-generation of Chinese immigrants from Sino-Japanese War. It draws upon concepts such as the relation between memory and place, mother-daughter conflict, formation of identity, and immigrant experience. *The Joy Luck Club* is an interlinking collection of traumatic narratives and memories paired with their places of occurrence. It revolves around four Chinese mothers who narrate their personal and collective experiences and memories to their daughters and how daughters endeavor to balance their dual cultural identities. Paper adopts Maurice Halbwachs's concept of "mémoir collective". It tackles Susanne Langer's and John Sutton's emphasis on social and collective nature of memory, which functions as an organiser of consciousness that shapes individual's current actions , experiences and forms his identity. It further adopts Pierre Nora's concept of "memory places", which act as metaphorical locations where communities store their memories and recognise them as integral parts of their identity. Different maternal memories and places in Tan's novel function as a means of connection so daughters can better understand their mothers' backgrounds, sacrifices made for their families, and values that guide their actions. The paper concludes that intergenerational exchange of personal and collective memories becomes a powerful tool for developing empathy, bridging cultural gaps between Chinese ancestral and domicile American cultures, and thus, strengthening bonds between mothers and daughters.

ISSN: 1992 – 7452

تفاعل الذكرة والمكان في رواية "نادي البهجة و الحظ " لإيمي تان

هرجين فاضل عبدالله
جامعة زاخو/ كلية العلوم الإنسانية

حسن مؤيد حامد
جامعة الموصل/كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مستخلص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث موضوع الذاكرة والمكان في رواية "نادي البهجة و الحظ" لإيمي تان (١٩٨٩). يكشف البحث عن معاناة الجيل الأول من المهاجرين الصينيين من الحرب الصينية اليابانية. يعتمد البحث على مفاهيم مثل العلاقة بين الذاكرة والمكان، والصراع بين الأم والابنة، وتشكيل الهوية، والتجربة التي عاشها المهاجر. الرواية عبارة عن مجموعة مترابطة من السرديات المؤلمة والذكريات المقترنة بأماكن حدوثها. تدور أحداث الرواية حول أربع أمهات صينيات يروين تجاربهن وذكرياتهن الشخصية والجمعية لبناتهن وسعيهن لتحقيق التوازن بين هوياتهن الثقافية المزدوجة. يتبنى البحث مفهوم موريس هالبواكس حول "الذاكرة الجمعية", وكذلك يركز البحث على مفهوم سوزان لانجر وجون ساتون للطبيعة الاجتماعية والجمعية للذاكرة اللذان يعملان كمنظم للوعي الذي يقرر أفعال الفرد وتجاربه الحالية ويشكل هويته. كما يتبنى البحث مفهوم بيير نورا حول "أماكن الذاكرة"، والتي تعمل كمواقع مجازية تخزن فيها المجتمعات ذكرياتها بوصفها جزء لا يتجزأ من هويتها. تبرز الذكريات والأماكن الأمومية المختلفة في رواية تان كوسيلة للتواصل حيث تفهم البنات بشكل أفضل اصول أمهاتهن، والتضحيات التي يقدمن لعائلاتهن، والقيم التي تحدد أفعالهن. ويخلص البحث إلى أن تبادل الذكريات الشخصية والجمعية بين الأجيال يصبح أداة قوية لتنمية التعاطف، وسد الفجوات الثقافية بين ثقافات الأجداد الصينيين والثقافة الأمريكية المحلية، وبالتالي تعزيز الروابط بين الأمهات وبناتهن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذاكرة الجمعية, الهوية, الذاكرة, الذاكرة الشخصية, المكان, الصدمة.

1. Introduction

Memory is intricately linked to space and place. It refers to a specific location with physical and often symbolic attributes, including natural and artificial features. It involves the sense of space, identity, and the collections people form with the surroundings that contribute to a unique and meaningful context. Memory is a controversial concept in which it is not agreed on whether it belongs to the individual or is more a part of a general origin, intertwining their experience, feelings, thoughts, social, cultural, and historical milieu and settings to form a collective memory. To understand humans, one should know how they interpret their memories, translating them into the spacio-temporal context to provide a ground for the future. Humans are social beings, and knowing what affects them and how they respond to all aspects of human existence is requisite.

Maurice Halbwachs's interest in collective memory is significant due to his exploration of this concept in 1925. Halbwachs, a sociologist, emphasised the social and collective nature of memory, arguing that social frameworks and group identities shape individual memory. He pinpoints that memory is not solely an individual experience, but the collective memory of a community or society influences it. It is seen as a means of nursing, establishing, and passing on the collective knowledge of the past, which forms the basis of a group's awareness of its unity and specificity (1992: p.182).

The concept of "mémoir collective" has been the subject of numerous investigations. It is essential to comprehend the places people live in and their physical and mental relationships with them. Sumaiyah Othman et al., claimed that social memory, or collective memory, is the shared memory that ties members of a social group based on similarity, class, or religion. A social group's ability to preserve its collective identity across time is facilitated by collective memory, which people access through shared experiences (2013: p. 557).

According to Nigel C. Hunt, memory is subjective and depicts different responses from one individual to another. For him, memory is

> flexible, permeable, changeable, and –critically– affected by the social and cultural world in which people live. We live in the world as social beings; we do not and cannot live in

> isolation. […] In the end, we depend on culture and […] each other. These are essential to psychological health. This is why social support consistently comes out as being the most important factor concerning how people deal with stress and difficulties. (pp. 2-3)

The notion of pure personal memory has become problematic as cultures and nations are constructed of various distinct nuances of people. Critics agree on the subjectivity of memory, something not shared with the collective consciousness. Memories have enormous contradictions: some disappear or are more repressed in the subconscious part of the mind, whereas others are enormously intensified, like traumatic memories, which invade man's conscious self unwillingly. Throughout time, they have been perceived with different interpretations. In this respect, Susanne Langer, an American philosopher of mind and art, claims in *Feeling and Form* (1973) that "memory is the great organiser of consciousness. It simplifies and composes people's perceptions into units of personal knowledge. It is the real maker of history" (p. 412). In his article on the subject of memory in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010), John Sutton writes:

> Memory labels a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which we retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes. Memory is one of the most important ways […] our histories animate our current actions and experiences. Most notably, the human ability to conjure up long-gone but specific episodes of our lives is both familiar and puzzling, and is a key aspect of personal identity. Memory [is] a source of knowledge. (p.1)

Sutton uncovers the complex nature of memory, emphasising its role in retaining information and reconstructing experiences for present purposes. For him, memory is a crucial element shaping current actions and experiences, playing a key role in forming personal identity. While memory is a source of knowledge, it differs from perception and imagination. The complex interactions between remembering, perceiving, and imagining are often infused with emotions. Memory is integral to extended affective states, social practices like promising and honouring, and various forms of reasoning and decision-making.

As for the concept of place, its origins can be found in Aristotle's philosophical treatises. According to him, place, or *topos*, evokes a sense of "belonging" and is the "where" component in people's relationships with their physical surroundings. Centuries later, the Romans used the phrase *genius loci*, which means "spirit of a place" or "genius spirit" of a specific site. By definition, "place" essentially extends attention to include people's experiences within a certain landscape context and geographic location. They are pinpointing that a particular environment's "sense of identity" is what makes the term "sense of place" valuable (Assi, 2009: p. 2). Therefore, according to Proshansky, the primary purpose of "place" is to foster a sense of identification and belonging. A person's place attachment is at its highest when it comes to their home. Thus, "place" connotatively means deep, enduring emotional connections between an individual and a specific physical location (Assi, 2009: p. 3).

In "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989), Pierre Nora, a French historian, investigated the collective memory of France as seen in its representations and carefully studied the "memory places" of French national identity from the Middle Ages to the present. To create a social and cultural identity, Nora claims that these "memory places" are symbolic locations, monuments, buildings, artefacts, historical individuals, and texts connected to imagined and actual historical representations simultaneously (p.7). These ties get increasingly complex over time, to the point where they represent people's collective memory. Their function as symbolic "memory places" is complementary. Initially, the subject must preserve this "memory" and pass it on from generation to generation by remembering those places or objects. By nature of their sheer existence, "memory places", in turn, force people to acknowledge the significance of the memories they represent and consider their responsibility. This process of remembering produces collective memory. People create connections with exact places or objects and a particular time or historical event, and they recall these connections as being inseparable (Hendrix, 2002: pp. 7-8).

The place is a physical or metaphorical location where communities store their memories and recognise them as integral parts of their identity. Places of memory can be literal, such as archives, libraries, museums, monuments, cemeteries, or symbolic sites of anniversaries and commemorations. They can be understood metaphorically, representing the

intertextual storage of cultural heritage and serving as a reminder of forgotten or repressed aspects of history.

Memory and place play an invaluable role in literature, allowing authors to explore themes of identity, human experience, and history. *The Joy Luck Club* employs the concept of memory and place to evoke emotions, create connections between past and present, and preserve collective and cultural memories. By delving into personal memories, it highlights broader societal issues and contributes to the collective memory of a culture or community.

2. Memory and Place in *The Joy Luck Club*

Tan is a second-generation Chinese-American born in 1952 and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. After significant losses, Tan's mother and younger brother relocated to Europe and briefly settled in Switzerland. In her writings, Tan uncovers how her family's painful past has impacted her writing. Her life experiences significantly influence *The Joy Luck Club*. The novel draws from Tan's relationship with her mother and her exploration of Chinese-American identity.

> Yet today, I can remember a time when I ran and shouted, when I could not stand still. It is my earliest recollection: telling the Moon Lady my secret wish. And because I forgot what I wished for, that memory remained hidden from me all these many years.[1]

Like her characters, Tan is a first-generation Chinese-American, and her mother was an immigrant from China. The generational and cultural clashes portrayed in the novel, like the "Moon lady", mirror Tan's experiences, and her unique traditions provide a personal and intimate hue to the narrative.

Tan's narrative technique involves interweaving different perspectives and timelines, emphasising literature's role in preserving and transmitting memories. In her memoir "*Where the Past Begins*" (2017), Tan expressed her sense of bewilderment while writing *The Joy Luck Club*, saying:

[1] Amy Tan. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Penguin Books. 2006. P. 34. Subsequent references to this text will be cited by short title *TJLC* and page number parenthetically.

> As I continue to write, I don't know what will happen, and yet I do. It is inevitable, like déjà vu moments, experienced as familiar as soon as I write them, the revelation of my spiritual twin—the intuitive part of me made conscious. That was what I sensed while writing *The Joy Luck Club.* When the metaphoric understanding came, I felt astonishment similar to what I experienced when I emerged from my spell in a lightless room to find the sun rising at dawn. (P: 38)

The experiences of four Chinese-American immigrant families in San Francisco are the subject of her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*. It tells the story of four Asian mothers and their four Americanised daughters who left China in the 1940s. The protagonist is 36-year-old Jing-mei "June" Woo, who replaces her at Joy Luck Club meetings after her mother's death. The older women tell stories, myths and fables, which are part of their lives to recall memories about their ancestral land and lament the gaps in their daughters' and their relationships as they play mahjong (the meanings of which are sparrows or a flock of sparrows) and eat delicious Chinese food and gambling. The daughters of immigrant women, who are influenced by American culture, will learn to value the hue of the ancestral heritage via their mothers' stories that glorify their past and resist that sense of exile.

The Joy Luck Club's founder, Suyuan Woo, had to leave her twin young daughters behind and barely made it out of war-torn China alive. Jing-mei, her daughter, was born in America and is a copywriter for a small advertising agency. She lacks the ambition and self-assurance of her mother, but when she meets her twin half-sisters in China following her mother's passing, she discovers part of her identity. Wu Tsing, a wealthy trader, was the home of An-mei Hsu's upbringing. Since her mother was only the third wife, she had no social standing. An-mei immigrated to America, got married, and had seven kids after her mother committed herself.

Memory in *The Joy Luck Club* is a central theme as the characters struggle with their pasts and cultural heritage that influence their identities. The intergenerational conflicts highlight the way memories shape relationships and influence the characters' understanding of themselves

and each other. Tan explores how individual memory and collective individual function in shaping the characters' perspectives on life, family, and cultural identity. In the context of the novel, these insights into memory bestow a lens for understanding the characters' actions, emotions, and the overall narrative structure. The character Jing-mei (June) Woo reflects on her mother Suyuan's memories of the hardships in China, particularly during the Japanese invasion. These memories influence Suyuan's expectations for Jing-mei and her pursuit of success in America. Jing-Mei said to her mother:

> You want me to be something that I'm not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be […] I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother," I shouted. As I said these things I got scared. It felt [….] as if this awful side of me had surfaced at last [....] And that's when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about.
>
> "I wish I'd never been born!" I shouted. "I wish I were dead! Like them."
>
> "It was as if I had said the magic words Alakazam! — and her face went blank". (*TJLC*: p.78)

Jing-Mei wishes she were dead because she feels forced to live up to her mother's expectations, much as people believe Suyuan's first daughters are dead. After all, her daughters were abandoned in China years ago. Suyuan, who spends the rest of her life trying to find her other daughters, is deeply affected by this. This exchange fortifies the wall between mother and daughter. She feels constantly entangled in the memories of her mother and the high expectations she has for her.

Jing-mei's memories of her mother became the fruitful promise she had to make for her mother's friends. The internal conflict Jing-mei was remembering her mother's story to prove that her generation would not lose the inherent Chinese culture.

> I will remember everything about her and tell them," I say more firmly. And gradually, one by one, they smile and pat my hand. They still look troubled, as if something were out of balance. But they also look hopeful that what I say will become true. What more can they ask? What more can I promise? (*TJLC*: p. 29)

The memorial promise she made in the quotation above is an attempt to bridge the gap between the mother and her daughter. The gap that immigrants suffer from is fluctuating between two different cultures; subsequently, two different perspectives about life emerged. These interactions can be avoided by this memorial promise, the one that revives an entire Chinese heritage.

By recalling the entire story of her mother, Jing-mei used storytelling as a pivotal memorial tool. She ensures that the historical legacy of her mother will be remembered and understood for the future generations. Jing-mei's role is to reconstruct the Chinese identity and bridge it with the American one by demonstrating that immigrants have a collective memory, nursing their psychological wounds caused by immigration.

> And then I could feel her long, smooth fingers rubbing and searching under my chin, finding the spot that was my smooth-neck scar. As she rubbed this spot, I became very still. It was as though she were rubbing the memory back into my skin. And then her hand dropped, and she began to cry, wrapping her hands around her own neck. She cried with a wailing voice that was so sad. And then I remembered the dream with my mother's voice. (*TJLC*: p. 20)

Jing-mei's wound is the polluted memory she tries to pass on in her storytelling mission. The scar on her neck is an identity scar, which is instilled in Chinese habits she will bear her entire life. Memory determines people's identity since it categorises generations into a list of collective voices. These collective voices share the memory of their ancestors, transforming them in their way of storytelling through the strategy of postmemory to reinforce them into their daughters' consciousness. It is Marianne Hirsch who coined "postmenory" strategy to

describe “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (2002, p. 13). In “The Representation of Trauma in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*” (2023), Samar Sayed Mohammed argues that the diaspora experience leaves people apart from their home nation for an extended period. Therefore, recollections are usually thoughtful. In Tan's text, China remains a source of ancestral culture for the Chinese diaspora and a memory for the first-generation Chinese Americans. Notably, their works clarify the perceptions of harsh living conditions in China that gave rise to aspirations of immigration to the New World (pp. 21-2).

Z.S Monir (2018) argues that even though the postmemory strategy can help descendants create a creative link with their ancestors’ memories and promote empathy, second-generation people find it more challenging to process post-memory than to process traumatic events they experienced. They will never be able to witness or comprehend the atrocities that the previous generation endured because of their distance from the trauma scene (p. 859). The mothers realise that even though many of their memories are painful, the daughters must hear their stories. This realisation is partly brought about by going back and reflecting on the memories of their relationships with their mothers and how those memories have impacted their lives. The mothers believe that they are drifting more and more away from their daughters:

> They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds, joy luck is not a word; it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (*TJLC*: p. 31)

However, their memory narrative is what makes them survive. It further makes them feel they have a separate identity that balances their life between China and America. The collective memory that combines the two generations acts as a communication tool. The mothers believe that through their stories, they will protect other generations from the harshness of their experiences since their stories provide a benchmark traumatic shield in the psyche of the daughters. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud argue that “remembering the experience, whether

real or imagined, is the healing" (White, 2008: p. 44). In the last chapter of the novel "Queen Mother of the Western Skies" a grandmother tells her granddaughter that she "threw away [her] foolish innocence to protect [her]self" (*TJLC*: p. 120). An-mei recalls a story of herself throwing her innocence away as a lesson to her daughter not to experience suffering anymore. She suggests to her daughter Rose not to visit a psychiatrist because "A mother is best. A mother knows what is inside you" (*TJLC*, p. 106). As a mother, she believes that no psychiatrist will analyse her daughter's character as she will because An-mei knows the secrets of Rose's self more than anyone else. An-mei recalls her mother's death Popo when she commits suicide: "Mother was a stranger to [her]. […] But I knew she was my mother because I could feel her pain" (*TJLC*: p. 258). The pain she feels is a traumatic storage about her mother; an individual memory cannot leave her mind, and she feels afraid that she will be a stranger to her daughter, which is why she always attempts to understand her firmly.

The recollections of traumatic memories will not erase the individuality of one's self; it will scatter it between protection and restriction. In her recollections, Lindo, Waverly's mother, remembers her parents, comparing her behaviours with Waverly's behaviours. Her mother made her a red scarf and asked her to wear it wherever she went to protect herself from getting cold. Lindo wears it until she becomes old. She said:

> I threw my head back and smiled proudly to myself. And then, I draped the large embroidered red scarf over my face and covered these thoughts up. But underneath the scarf I still knew who I was. I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parents' wishes, but I would never forget myself. (*TJLC*: p. 28)

The red scarf is the memorial symbol of a stable adulthood in China before the Chinese-Japanese war. The gap between Lindo and Waverly is not only a gap between mother and daughter; it is the gap between stability and instability. Her daughter's unstable identity, caught between the ancestral land and the domicile land, is constructed by a false intergenerational comparison of traumatic events.

The second generation aims to gain independence from the strict conventions of their mothers as an effect of American society. They want to make their decisions and bear the

consequences and outcomes. Angrily, Lindo threatens her daughter: "Only two kinds of daughters. Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" (*TJLC*: p. 78). This obedience is a result of a traumatic experience that leads Lindo not to accept the American culture and behave strictly because she sees Waverly drifting away from the Chinese norms. This gap between these generations is symbolically reflected when Ying-ying explains Lena's birth, "She sprang from me like a slippery fish, and has been swimming away ever since (*TJLC*: p. 138). The traumatic events of the war led the daughters to "swim away" from their mother's hands, living with a diasporic identity crisis and a scattered memory. The daughters believe that gaining independence from their mothers is the best way to recover from old traditions. Birgit Neumann summarises the way literature tends to explore the workings of memory:

> Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities [based on] the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, […] re-examine the relationship between the past and the present, and […] illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfil for the constitution of identity. Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present, his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events. (2008: p. 333)

According to the above quotation, the novel is concerned with the personal memories of each character, particularly the Chinese-American daughters and their immigrant mothers. Each character carries memories of their past in China and struggles and triumphs in the host land. The narration of private memory is evident as characters reflect on their personal experiences, shaping their identities and influencing their relationships.

At the opening of chapter three, Lindo Jong perceives that numerous people do not take promises seriously. However, Lindo is different; she keeps her promises, especially the ones that do not bring shame to her parents. She feels she must follow the rules of her arranged husband's family, which reflects cultural expectations and the role of tradition in shaping her

actions. Despite seeing others not valuing promises as she does, she stays true to her beliefs. This part of the text shows how personal and cultural memories affect what people believe is essential and how literature reflects multifaceted memory.

> This means nothing to you, because to you promises mean nothing. A daughter can promise to come to dinner, but if she has a headache, […] a traffic jam, [or] wants to watch a favourite movie on TV, she no longer has a promise [...] [However], she will forget her promise. (*TJLC*: p.49)

Lindo Jong's commitment to keeping promises reflects her individual memory and the cultural values instilled in her. Her sense of duty to her family and adherence to promises are rooted in her cultural background. Thus, the concept of cultural memory identifies the identical behaviour and duty passed across generations.

The stories shared among the characters contribute to constructing a collective identity, aligning with the concept of literature as a medium of memory. The characters' struggles and triumphs, shaped by their memories, collectively form a narrative that addresses the broader immigrant experience. The power of memory transmission, particularly from mothers to daughters, shapes the ethnic identity that stems from ethnic dissatisfaction due to living in dual cultures, i.e., the Chinese and the American (Loktongbam, 2012: p. 58). The mothers' recollections in the novel inspire endurance, survival, and triumph. Memory is portrayed as a curative force, and storytelling is employed as a technique to convey the necessity of the therapeutic nature of memory in the narrative of survival that functions as a psychological exit for traumatised immigrants (Fadla & Awad, 2021: p. 4).

As for the concept of place, it is intricately woven into the text's narrative as the characters navigate their dual cultural identities between China and America. Places like San Francisco's Chinatown and China become symbolic, representing the characters' struggles with belonging and cultural conflicts as they feel uprooted, fragmented, and alienated. The different settings highlight the tension between traditional Chinese values and the American lifestyle, creating a rich exploration of place as a dynamic element in the characters' lives. This is seen mainly with the mothers identified as Chinese as they hold on to their memories. They often refer to their experiences in China, particularly during significant historical events like

the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. These memories designate a framework for understanding their resilience and the challenges they confront. Accordingly, they lead to conflicts between the mothers and the daughters. Specific regions and towns in China are mentioned, offering glimpses into the diverse cultural backgrounds of the characters, such as June's mother reminisces about her homeland, which June herself remembers after her death when she is narrating the story,

> I dreamed about Kweilin before I ever saw it," my mother began, speaking Chinese. "I dreamed of jagged peaks lining a curving river, with magic moss greening the banks. At the tops of these peaks were white mists. And if you could float down this river and eat the moss for food, you would be strong enough to climb the peak. If you slipped, you would only fall into a bed of soft moss and laugh. And once you reached the top, you would be able to see everything and feel such happiness it would be enough to never have worries in your life ever again. In China, everybody dreamed about Kweilin. (*TJLC*: p. 2)

The references to Kweilin deepen the cultural context of the stories. The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* carry memories profoundly rooted and reflected upon their daughters. The memory of Kweilin is often intertwined with personal experiences, family traditions, and the challenges jing-mei encounters in her homeland. Through storytelling and counter-memory strategy, the mothers un-silence their repressed voices and share their memories with their daughters, which offer insights into their past and the cultural context that shaped their identities.

The Joy Luck Club is the metaphorical place to exchange stories by the mothers. It is the "Place of memory" created by Suyuan to enable the transformation of a whole community and the events she and her friends have passed through. Stories in the Joy Luck Club evoke a sense of belonging to their Chinese culture, serving to recall their happy or traumatic memories in China.

> My mother could sense that the women of these families also had unspeakable tragedies they had left behind in China and hopes they couldn't begin to express in their fragile English. [Alternatively] at least, my mother recognized the numbness in these women's faces. And she saw how quickly their eyes moved when she told them her idea for the Joy Luck Club. (*TJLC*: p. 4)

Accordingly, the unspeakable tragedies of the Chinese women are now spoken by The Joy Club version of San Francisco. While playing Mahjong, a traditional Chinese game, the four women exchange their collective memory with each other, recounting every incident at one table, which is the Joy Luck Club, the place of their memory.

Homi Bhabha details on post-colonial minorities living in "liminal spaces" or "in-between spaces". This liminal space, where several cultures come together, is where these people find themselves in a state of identity crises as they work to create a "new identity" and emerge as a "cultural hybrid." They give culture a new distinctiveness. Furthermore, all cultures evolve and undergo hybridisation, depending on time and place (1994: p.9). This is perceived with the four Chinese mothers as they have migrated to another country and attempted to assimilate with the new culture of the domicile land, which comes with strenuous efforts and grave issues,

> I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these things do not mix? I taught [my daughter] how American circumstances work. If you are born poor here, it's no lasting shame [….] In America, nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you. She learned these things, but I couldn't teach her about Chinese character […] How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities. [….] Why Chinese thinking is best. (*TJLC*: p. 145)

In the above excerpt, Lindo Jong doubts that her daughter's desire for a mixed-race identity is still realistic. She worries that Waverly's Chinese identity now only makes up her outside appearance, with her American identity controlling her inner being. Lindo holds herself responsible for Waverly's distorted dualities. As they get more used to their life in the United States, Waverly and all of the other daughters, even the mothers, encounter difficulty in finding out how to blend elements of both cultures into their unique personalities and finding a place that permits this espousing of cultures and the division in identities.

In the context of the novel, the concept of place is further multifaceted, encompassing physical and emotional dimensions. It navigates between settings in China and America, highlighting the significance of place in shaping the characters' identities. The contrast between the old world of China and the new world of America underscores the cultural and generational gaps experienced by the characters. The characters deal with the lasting effects of traumatic events on their ancestors. They have to navigate through powerful memories of their parents and grandparents, even though they do not have direct access to those events through their memories. This complicates their journey of understanding and finding their place and identity within their family's history (Monir, 2018: p. 858).

The significance of specific locations, like the mahjong table or the ancestral home in China, is a backdrop for the interwoven narratives, emphasising the influence of place on the characters' memories, relationships, and understanding of self. "My idea was to [gather] four women, one for each corner of my mahjong table. I knew which women I wanted to ask. They were all young like me, with wishful faces" (*TJLC*: p. 6). The mahjong table becomes a recurring setting for the characters to share their stories and experiences. It is a symbolic space where the generational and cultural gaps are navigated, nurturing communication between mothers and daughters.

After the death of her mother, Jing-mei takes her place in the Joy Luck Club at the same table surrounded by her mother's friends in a metaphorical replacement of her mother's place of memory. The Chinese recalling on this table still exists in a frame of "postmemory", transmitted from one generation to the other.

> Nobody says to me, "Sit here; this is where your mother used to sit." But I can tell even before everyone sits down. The chair closest to the door has an emptiness to it. But the feeling doesn't really have to do with the chair. It's her place on the table. Without having anyone tell me, I know her corner on the table was the East. The East is where things begin, my mother once told me, the direction from which the sun rises, where the wind comes from. (*TJLC*: p. 12)

"Where the wind comes from" is the right place for Jing-mei to sit, and it is a symbolic reference to China. As an American-Chinese, she knows what to do in her memorial mission. She has to return to her mother's place of memory, China, to find her twins. "And I am sitting at my mother's place at the mahjong table, on the East, where things begin" (*TJLC*: p. 17). Replacing her mother in this game is the replacement of her psyche, too. Being responsible for this place can change the perspectives of the young generation, like Jing-mei, about the old generation. Jing-mei hesitates to take her seat at the mahjong table during the Joy Luck Club meetings as she fears the judgment of the other women. This hesitation is the result of postmemory fears and burdens. She must continue the bonds and traditions that her mother cherished. Initially feeling distant from her Chinese roots, Jing-mei gradually embraces her identity and the memories associated with her mother, the place her mother holds in her community and memories. Thus, passing on cultural and familial legacies is central to the Joy Luck Club.

Places like Chinatown in San Francisco become symbolic spaces where characters exchange their cultural heritage and attempt to bridge the gap between their Chinese roots and American lives. This town is transformed into an example of the ancestral home in China, which holds deep emotional and cultural significance for the characters. The memories of this place influence the characters' sense of identity and their relationships with their past and present. Chinatown in San Francisco is a significant setting, representing the intersection of Chinese and American cultures.

> We lived in San Francisco's Chinatown. Like most […] other Chinese children who played in the back alleys of restaurants and curio shops, I didn't think we were poor. My bowl was always full, three five-course meals every day, beginning with a soup full of mysterious things I didn't want to know the names of. (*TJLC*: p. 45)

Waverly navigates this space as she grapples with the challenges of assimilation, cultural preservation, and the complexities of belonging to two worlds. This example illustrates how the concept of place depicts the characters' experiences, memories, and cultural identity.

The jade pendant is a revival tool for the Chinese heritage. It was left by Suyuan to represent a symbolic place of memory. The pedant mirrors the Chinese soul and identity that embraces the American neck of her daughter Jing-mei. "Five months ago, after a crab dinner celebrating Chinese New Year, my mother gave me my "life's importance," a jade pendant on a gold chain." (*TJLC*: p. 112) This tool reflects the third space between the Chinese past and the American present out of incongruent pieces of self. The green pedant that Suyuan gifted to Jing-mei is one of Tan's various tools utilised to combine the two cultures and bridge the gap between the first and the second generation.

The Joy Luck Club is a place of recollecting memory for Tan. Every incident Jing-mei passes through is a parallel to Tan's life as an immigrant in America. She mirrors the collective memory of each Chinese immigrant from an optimistic view, recalling their culture to construct a solid identity that can face the variables of the American culture. Each place in the novel is a place of Tan's memory, combining a literary work filled with the Chinese sense of place through history. She explained in her memoir the reaction of one of her Chinese relatives to her novel:

> A few months after *The Joy Luck Club* was published, a relative complained to my mother that she should not be telling me all these useless stories. "She can't change the past," he said. My mother told him: "It can be changed. I tell her so she can tell everyone, tell the whole world, so they know what my mother suffered. That's how it can be changed. (2017: p.133)

Changing the past through recalling it is the main ironic aim of the novel. If memories can affect the American-Chinese society and convey their messages, her mother would be proud.

Tan has a futuristic view of how using her collective memory will be a drastic construction for the identity of the next generations. Therefore, the mothers' memories in China significantly impact their parenting styles and expectations for their American-born daughters. The characters' memories of cultural traditions and hardships contribute to their sense of identity and the conflicts they encounter. Moreover, the novel explores how the characters' memories of tragic struggles shape their resilience and perspectives on life, fostering a complex interplay between the past and present in defining their journeys.

3. Conclusion

In *The Joy Luck Club*, manifestations of memory are depicted, contributing to the fecundity of the narrative. These include cultural memory; the characters struggle with memories of their Chinese cultural heritage, traditions, and customs. The clash between Chinese cultural values and American influences shapes the characters' identities and interactions. The novel delves into the effect of historical events, particularly those in China, that have left a lasting impact on the characters' psyche. Memories of war, displacement, and societal upheavals influence their perspectives and behaviours. Memories within relationships between the immigrant mothers and their daughters help them to terms with their true selves. The intergenerational dynamics highlight the transference of values, expectations, and emotional heritages from generation to generation. Individual characters contend with personal memories of trauma, loss, or critical life moments. These memories function as active agents in shaping their personalities and inspiring their responses to challenges. The experiences of immigration and the challenges of adapting to a new culture help to shape the characters' memories. Navigating the complexities of being Chinese and American shapes their sense of self and fragmented identity. By exploring these various types of memory and the concept of place, the results disclose that Tan weaves the narrative threads that reflect the intricate layers of identity, culture, and familial connections.

References

Assi, E. (2009) “Memory and Place” in Spirit of Place: between tangible and intangible heritage. Lurier Turgan (ed.), les Presses de I” Universite Laval, Canada. 121-123.

Bhabha, H. (1994) *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Chinese-Americans 1785. (May 18, 2023). Available online: https://libguides.southernct.edu/Chinese-Americans. [Accessed 24/6/2024].

Fadla, S. & Awad, Y. (2021) Memory mechanisms in Tan’s *the joy luck club* and Darraj’s *The inheritance of exile*. *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, 2(2), 11-21. Available online: https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsll.v2i2.54 [Accessed 9/7/2024].

Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On collective memory*. Edited, translated from French, and with an introduction by Jo’ Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Hendrix, J.D. E. (2002) Memory and history in the modern French novel: Patrick Modiano and the new orientation. EdD thesis. University of Tennessee. Available online: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/2063 [Accessed 1/8/2024].

Hirsch, M. and Smith, V. (2002) Feminism and cultural memory: an introduction. *Signs*. Gender and Cultural Memory Special Issue 28(1), 1-19. Published by The University of Chicago Press. Available online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/340890 [Accessed 6/8/2024].

Langer, S. (1973) *Feeling and form*. London: Routledge.

Library of Congress. Immigration and relocation in U.S. history: Chinese. Available online: https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/chinese/ [Accessed 6/8/2024].

Loktongbam, N. (2012) Chinese diaspora: a study of Amy Tan’s *the joy luck club IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(19), 56-59. Available online: https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/NCSCRCL/Volume-2/19.pdf [Accessed 10/8/2024].

Mohamed, S.S. (2023) The representation of trauma in Amy Tan’s *the joy luck club (1989)*. *Transcultural Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences (TJHSS)*, 4(2), 1-17.

Available online: https://tjhss.journals.ekb.eg/article_294735.html [Accessed 7/8/2024].

Monir, Z.S. (2018) Testimony and memory narrative of traumatic events as a way to survive in Amy Tan's *the joy luck club*. *AlMandumah*, 18(1), 855-883. Available online: http://demo.mandumah.com/Record/1021307/Description [Accessed 18/7/2024].

Morris, M. (2001) *Curriculum and the holocaust: competing sites of memory and representation*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. Available online: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2001-01070-000 [Accessed 7/7/2024].

Neumann, B. (2008) *The literary representation of memory*. In Erl, A. & Nünning, A. (eds.) *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 333-344. Available online: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.5.333 [Accessed 11/8/2024].

Nora, P. (1989) Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire. representations, 26(1), Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory*. (Spring), 7-24. Available online: http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=07346018%28198921%290%3A26%3C7%3ABMAHLL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N [Accessed 23/7/2024].

Othman, S. et. al. (2013) Memory association in place making: A Review. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 85(1), 554-563. Available online:https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270849135_Memory_Association_in_Place_Making_A_review [Accessed 5/8/2024].

Sutton, J. (2010) Memory. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Zalta, N., Nodelman, U, & Alle, C. (eds.) Available online: https://plato.stanford.edu/ARCHIVES/WIN2009/entries/memory/

Tan, A. (2006) *The joy luck club*. New York: Penguin Books.

_____ (2017) *Where the past begins: a writer's memoir*. New York: Harper Luxe.

White, R. (2008) *Freud's memory: psychoanalysis, mourning and the foreign body*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.