



## Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

Vol: 1(3), 2019

REST Publisher

ISBN: 978-81-936097-3-6

Website: <http://restpublisher.com/books/cllrm/>

### Memoir of Jung Chang and Amy Tan - A Comparative Study

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#### Abstract

Jung Chang's "Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China," and Amy Tan's "The Opposite of Fate" is a memoir. The love and loyalty shown by the family is the central theme of Chang's Wild Swans. It brings out the value of Chinese culture. The book moves on to tell the story of the author's mother, Bao Qin. In Tan's "The Opposite of Fate" deals with different generations of women, typically Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters, their fate and hope, as they look towards an uncertain future is clearly noted. It is a non-fictional text that collects together "musings", "casual pieces" and "formal essays", some previously published, on Tan's life and some passed to her through her mother's stories. In this Tan reveals the events of her life that spurred her to write her most notable novels while Chang narrates the fact that women are literally owned as slaves. This shows the historical need for women's rights movements in China, and is an attempt to frame the social changes in China during the Mao Zedong era. Being women both could go deep into the mentality of women and successfully depict their emotions and feelings. Both the writers try to express their Chinese views on the woman based traditional values.

**Key words :** Memoir, love, loyalty, fate and hope, non-fictional, historical, Mao Zedong era, Chinese.

#### Full Paper

For me, writing from memory is more about remembering my Psychological place in the world at different stage life. - Amy Tan

Memoir according to Cambridge dictionary is a written record of a usually famous person's own life and experiences. A memoir in French (meaning memory or reminiscence) is a collection of memories that an individual writes about moments or events, both public or private, that took place in the subject's/person's life. The assertions made in the work are understood to be factual., memoir often tells a story "from a life". The author of a memoir may be referred to as a *memoirist* or a *memorialist*. Autobiography is a record of a known life; memoir is a probe into an aspect of experience, in which the person himself or herself is not of automatic public interest. It's also good precisely for expressing the internal and external life. But the memoir can combine narrative with stylistic writing. 'The Story of My Life' by Helen Keller, 'A moveable Feast' by Ernest Hemingway are good examples of Memoir.

Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China, by Jung Chang, is a memoir that tells about the author's great grandfather, Yang Ru-shan. He was born in 1894 and was the only son, so the responsibility to continue the family name was bestowed on him. When he was fourteen years old, he married a woman who was twenty years elder to him. She has no name, but is simply called "Two Girl." A daughter is born to them and she is named Yu-Fang. Yu-Fang is the Jung Chang's grandmother and one of the wild swans. When she's only fifteen years old, Yu-Fang becomes a concubine to a warlord against her will. He spent a few days with her and goes for war then and nothing about him is known for six years. Yu-Fang is unhappy in her life. During those six years, even though he's far away, the warlord is still able to control her. There is no freedom for her and she also lacks the security of him. When he returns, he impregnates Yu-Fang. The baby is a girl, whom they name Bao Qin. But little later the warlord dies and Yu-Fang moves to her father's house. Unfortunately, her father Yang Ru-shan doesn't welcome her. She has a nervous breakdown. At that time she meets Dr. Xia. They fall in love and Dr. Xia plans to marry Yu-Fang but his family disapproves of the match, and advises him not to marry but to have Yu-Fang as a concubine. Dr. Xia insists on marrying Yu-Fang because he's in love with her, and after they marry, he adopts Bao Qin and renames her De-hong. Yu-Fang is happy but the political unrest in China because of communism creates a disturbance in his life. While De-hong starts to work with the Communists and falls in love with a man named Chang Shou-yu. The two get married, but after marriage Chang Shou-yu doesn't care about De-hong's happiness. He only cares about the success of the Communist Party. Because of the political unrest, he is imprisoned and after his release he becomes a loving husband. De-hong's and Chang Shou-yu's eldest daughter, Jung focus on studying and reading. She is criticised for not moving with others, but she seems to interact only with those whom she considers as friends. Chang Shou-yu dies, disillusioned and confused by his party's betrayal, despite his loyal service. At the end, Jung is invited to study in Britain, and ultimately takes the opportunity. She doesn't return to China, but rather stays in the West. Yang-fu, De-hong, and Jung are the three daughters of China; they are wild swans because they did not adhere to social expectations of women. The theme of Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China deals with family and the love that exists among the members of the family. Chang Shou-yu might be a demanding husband and father, but he loves his family. Incidents like when Chang is arrested the siblings try to visit him as frequently as they can. When he's hospitalized after a nervous breakdown, Jung stays with him. All these show the family love in this memoir. Loyalty is another central theme, and it plays out in various ways. For example, loyalty to family is a prized value in Chinese culture. Another example of loyalty is Chang Shou-yu's and De-hong's loyalty to the Communist Party. Self-sacrifice is also an important theme which is noted when Yu Fang accepts to be a concubine. Marriage provides an example of the connection between family loyalty and self-sacrifice, as women, and in some cases men, were expected to marry to

better their families, not for love. The book starts by telling the story of the author's grandmother, At the age of two her feet were bound, an extremely painful process that prevented the feet from growing in the normal way, a common practice inflicted on female children in China where tiny feet are considered beautiful. As the family was relatively poor, Yu-Fang's father decided a scheme to have his daughter taken as a concubine to a high-ranking warlord, Generak Xue Zhi-heng, in order to gain status which was incredibly important in dictating quality of life. At university Chang studied English which ultimately allowed her to escape China all together. After graduation she worked briefly as an assistant lecturer before winning a scholarship to study in England where she settled, only occasionally visiting China with permission from the Communist authorities. In Amy Tan's *The Opposite of Fate* The truth is, I borrowed that phrase from my mother, who used to say something like it to me whenever I was whining out loud. She'd say, 'Fang pi bu-cho, cho pi bu-fang,' which is commonly uttered by Chinese parents, and which translates approximately to: "There's more power in silence.' (TOF 9). The opposite of Fate elucidates many elements of her previous works. In the diversity of thought and reflections, which traces back to 1960 and a prize winning essay on the library, Tan covers much of her autobiography. Through her autobiographical fiction, she creates natural instances of mother daughter relationships and an opportunity to speak freely. As described by critic Wendy Ho in his work 'In Her Mother's House'(1999), a complicated vocabulary of rupture- heavy sighs, silences, trembling lips, downcast eyes, weeping and wringing of hands.(Ho 19). Amy Tan in her work says, What my mother intended that I understand, however, was precisely this: "No one wants to hear you make a big stink over nothing, so shut up." The strict linguist might want to note that the literal translation of that Chinese phrase runs along these noble lines: "Loud farts don't smell, the really smelly ones are deadly silent."(TOF 10). When she shares her personal life in her memoir she says 'The truth is, when I write, I begin with a simple question: How do things happen? ...And in my family, there were two pillars of beliefs: Christian faith on my father's side, Chinese fate on my mother's... faith at one end, fate at the other, and me running between them trying to duck whatever dangerous missile had been launched in the air'(TOF 11).

Tan says that her father's faith had been nurtured by his family and he was the oldest of twelve children, to a mother who was a Chinese traditional healer and a father who was a Presbyterian minister. My grandfather Hugh Tan had been converted by missionaries in Canton and educated in their English-speaking schools was thoroughly Western that he could read and write English before he could his native tongue of Cantonese. He had written a letter, shortly before he died of a stroke in Shanghai. His English was impeccable, and he prefaced his remarks with Christian feeling: "We thank the good Lord we are still in good health."(TOF 11).

The Christian influence ran so deep and strong in the Tan family that all twelve children became evangelists of one sort or another. Tan's father was a latecomer to the ministry, but at the age of thirty-four, he suffered a crisis of morals. A few years earlier, he had fallen in love with a beautiful woman who was unhappily married and had three young children. They started an affair, which led to the woman's being thrown in jail for adultery. Shortly afterward, her father left China for the United States, where he had been offered a scholarship to study at MIT.

In Jung Chang 'Wild Swan's The Three Daughters of China' and Amy Tan's 'The Bonesetter's Daughter' Old Chinese culture is noted. As part of their culture women were made to wrap their feet from infancy almost, to prevent the girls' feet from becoming big; according to fashion, big-footed women were not considered attractive. In a desperate attempt to marry away their daughter to a good family, Chinese families destroyed the feet of the girls in China by wrapping them tightly and restricting their growth. Both the authors depict the Chinese tradition followed in their grandmothers' life. The fact that in these stories women are literally owned as slaves in this way shows the historical need for women's rights movements in China. It signifies that Chinese culture has continued to put strain on the women's lives who live there and want to be involved somehow in the course of Chinese history. In other words, Bao's trek and Precious Auntie the two grandmothers in the memoirs written by Jung Chang and Amy Tan is like a symbolic reminder of their own wayward relationship with Chinese policy. Absolutely used up by Chinese society and it comes at the cost of her family. This literally represented the essential human ways.

China was no longer a place for the mothers of both the writers to reside in good conscious.; the decision to leave is no doubt painful but redemptive, because in Europe, life is different in every way. The writers through their memoir make it clear that they don't hate China but they feel hopeful when they want to escape from there. That means they feel that education is the best shot at escaping China and making a good life for themselves in Europe. They feel that in order to be successful in that transition, they should prepare by focusing on English and learning to speak and understand English speakers.

The attempt to visualise the total mental sorrows and pain of a woman's life in modern society by Chinese is quite praiseworthy. They express one of the important problems of our present society by materializing the mental agony and deficiencies of a woman. All their writings are related to the relationship between a man and a woman and their mental struggle and distress. Being a woman they could go deep into the woman's mentality and successfully depict the minute disputes that existed in women.

But the majority of women are superstitious and could do nothing against the patriarchal domination. Even if volcanoes of revolutions erupt in the hearts of women they can never reveal them. They are exploited and deprived of globalization. They are like fire which does not burn nor extinguish. They simply spend their lives only with hopes to revolt against tradition. But tradition and values are two indispensable elements of culture, as they change according to time, they remain reformed and enlarged. From the energetic expression of the feminist against traditionalism, one thing is clearly exposed that the traditions and customs touch only the women. Everywhere, whether it is social custom or a personal problem of widowhood, or of widow remarriage only a woman is oppressed. Therefore a feminist writer has to fight against social injustice by raising voice against traditionalism.

As stated, there has been a change in the viewpoint towards a woman as reflected in the memoirs. This change is evident in both direct and indirect ways, the reflection of which is evident on family, marriage religion and the society. A timely and progressive womankind is growing out of the traditional one. Like a man, a woman is being established as an individual. Now first of all she is a woman and then she is something else later. In the memoir under our consideration, both the writers expressed their views on the woman based traditional values and how they opposed the traditions which stood their ways. In their writings there are self- realization and search for self. The creativity of the memoir by both the writers picturises the social situation through modern view point as to how they are not governed by fate and fear but have hope to change what is right.

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