The Mother-Daughter Legacy in the New World

Amy Tan, the daughter of a Chinese immigrant to the United States, portrays the similarities in thought between mothers and daughters despite the generational and cultural gap in their upbringing through her fictional novel, *The Joy Luck Club*. Daughters of Chinese growing up in America are faced with contrasting environments in their homes and the society outside. The connection between a mother-daughter pair surmounts the challenges posed by American society ever pushing the pair towards assimilation and the loss of cultural background. Though the daughters of the newer generation go through different experiences in land a “Thousand Li Away” from the country of their familial origin, these daughters grow up to idolize and akin to their mothers’ perspectives on life. Both Waverly Jong and Jing-Mei Woo serve as examples of daughters who have been raised in a world generationally and ethnically polar to their mothers’ but have matured to resemble their respective mother’s strive towards a sense of belonging and overall world views. Daughters, though not exact portraits of their mothers, grow up to bear similar mental outlook on life.

For example, Lindo Jong’s desire of finding a rightful place in the world along with the pessimistic viewpoint towards life and society are engraved into the Waverly’s mentality from a young age. Married at a tender age to a richer family with higher social standings, Lindo Jong faces the desperation of discovering a sense of belonging when “[Her] own family began[s]
treating [her] as if [she] belong[s] to somebody else” (Tan, 45). To end up living in a house where she possesses no social standings or manner of respect and love, Jong becomes desperate for acceptance, “I came to think Huang Tai Tai is my real mother, someone I wanted to please” (51). The newfound devotion to the new family deviates her from her original identity and independence. The motivation of becoming an obedient wife in order to portray her loyalty and prevent disgrace upon her original family gains her a perception of association to a new social order into which she integrates at the loss of her primary relations. Waverly, along similar lines, overcomes the hindrance of growing up in two conflicting traditions by receiving the honors of being the National Chess Champion for her age group by her ninth birthday. Though the newborn affiliation with the Chess group of the American Society opposes her mother’s fears of assimilation into the American culture, “Chinese people do many things. Chinese people do business, do medicine, do painting, not lazy like American people,” (92) Waverly, like her mother, realizes that for her to fit in with the rest of society and the social order around her, she has to give up her foremost loyalties. Additionally, the pessimistic viewpoint towards society possessed by Lindo integrates into Waverly’s mindset. The belief that one must shed “One’s innocence to prevent emotional injury” and the need of recognizing “The evil within oneself” (239) cause Lindo to always express caution and fear to any exposure to the society. She notes the similarities between Waverly’s and her face, “You can see your character in your face [...] you can see your future” (292) to warn her of facing similar joys and pains. Though initially persistent over Waverly’s need to “Get plastic surgery and correct” (304) the alike crooked nose to prevent her daughter’s life swaying in the wrong direction, she is assured of the benefits of having a “Double face” in keeping human society clear from interpreting their true intentions and its service as a protective cover to prevent the pair from the judgments of the society. Waverly
has also matured to harbor cynical feelings towards this society. The “New World” cultural barriers and the generational gap between the two serve insufficient in retaining this “Double Face” phenomenon that symbolizes the strength of the legacy of a mother-daughter bond.

Furthermore, Jing-Mei Woo develops to embrace similar optimistic desires out of life as her mother, Suyan Woo, had wished for in her daughters despite the gap in communication and the disparity in the cultures Suyan and Jing-Mei grew up in. The Joy Luck Club created by Suyan Woo during the poverty stricken life before Japanese invasion of China was a hope “That could not be expressed” (6). The “Wishful faces” hoped to “Raise spirits” and “Celebrate when even within [their] own families, [they] had lost generations” (11). The gathering serves as more than a means of simply trying to forget the struggles but actually as a means of surmounting them through an optimistic vision of the future. The continuation of the Joy Luck Club in the United States as a means of collectively overcoming the communication struggles and assimilation in the New World is a hope possessed by Suyan for the future of her daughters. Jing-Mei, though initially adamant with the strong tendency to believe that she can only be as good as she is presently, is pushed towards an optimistic view of life with the knowledge of her lost sisters. The opportunity of finally being able to fulfill the lone wish of her late mother ignites the very sentiment that the Joy Luck Club had been built for: hopefulness, “‘I will remember everything about her and tell them,’ I say more firmly. […] But they also look hopeful that what I say will become true. […] And I am sitting at my mother’s place at the mah jong table, on the East, where things begin” (32). Despite having always being separated from her mother on grounds of cultural beliefs and optimism, Jing-Mei becomes one with her by inevitably realizing the power behind the “Feather from a Thousand Li Away;” The feather of a swan that become more than what was hoped for.
“All mothers serve as their daughters’ role models, their biological and emotional road map” (Victoria Secunda, American psychologist and author). Amy Tan’s novel emphasizes the specialty of such mother-daughter relationships, the ability of a mother’s life to influence and guide her daughter towards the best perceived path. Though immigrant Chinese mothers like as Lindo and Suyan face the fears of losing their child to the generational and cultural differences in their rearing, the emotional and psychological link in the mother daughter relationship possesses the ability to prevail over any physical or social partition.