

Cultural tensions as the catalyst of intergenerational trauma in *The Joy Luck Club*

¹Navisya Avni Zulvana, ²Sri Sumaryani

^{1,2}Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

¹navisyaavni@students.unnes.ac.id

²srisumaryani@mail.unnes.ac.id

Article History: Submitted March 24th, 2026; Accepted May 13th, 2026; Published June 3rd, 2026

Abstract. This study examines the dynamics of mother-daughter interactions in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* through the lens of intergenerational cultural conflict and Brave Heart's theory of historical trauma. This analysis investigates how mothers' past experiences influence their relationships with their daughters in America and focuses on four mother-daughter pairs. The relationship between Suyuan Woo and Jing-mei Woo is characterized by high aspirations that Jing-mei interprets as emotional suffering due to loss and deferred dreams. Unspoken pain is transmitted through silence and emotional distance in the relationship between Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair, which encourages passivity and a sense of powerlessness in the next generation. Meanwhile, the relationship between Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong shows how conflict arises from past trauma that emphasizes control and reputation through excessive pride and creates pressure for the daughter. As in the relationship between An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan, the experience of loss shapes the need for assertiveness and inner strength, but this conflicts with the daughter's values of independence. Overall, this study suggests that the tension between mother and daughter in the novel stems from inherited emotional trauma stemming from differences in cultural values between first and second-generation immigrants.

Keywords: cultural tensions; intergenerational trauma; historical trauma; mother-daughter relationship

Abstrak. Studi ini meneliti dinamika interaksi ibu-anak perempuan dalam *The Joy Luck Club* karya Amy Tan melalui lensa konflik budaya antargenerasi dan teori trauma historis Brave Heart. Analisis ini menyelidiki bagaimana pengalaman masa lalu para ibu memengaruhi hubungan mereka dengan anak perempuan mereka di Amerika dan berfokus pada empat pasangan ibu-anak perempuan. Hubungan antara Suyuan Woo dan Jing-mei Woo ditandai dengan aspirasi tinggi yang ditafsirkan Jing-mei sebagai penderitaan emosional akibat kehilangan dan mimpi yang tertunda. Rasa sakit yang tak terucapkan ditransmisikan melalui kehilangan dan jarak emosional dalam hubungan antara Ying-ying St. Clair dan Lena St. Clair, yang mendorong kepasifan dan rasa ketidakberdayaan pada generasi berikutnya. Sementara itu, hubungan antara Lindo Jong dan Waverly Jong menunjukkan bagaimana konflik muncul dari kebanggaan yang berlebihan dan menciptakan tekanan bagi anak perempuan. Seperti dalam hubungan antara An-mei Hsu dan Rose Hsu Jordan, pengalaman kehilangan membentuk kebutuhan akan ketegangan dan kekuatan batin, tetapi ini bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai kemandirian anak perempuan. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ketegangan antara ibu dan anak perempuan dalam novel tersebut berakar dari trauma emosional yang diwariskan akibat perbedaan nilai-nilai budaya antara generasi pertama dan kedua imigran.

Kata kunci: ketegangan budaya; trauma antargenerasi; trauma historis; hubungan ibu-anak perempuan

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th century, between 1849 and 1882, approximately 110,000 Chinese immigrants settled on the West Coast of the United States, part of Asian American families, lured by California gold, the “Gold Mountain,” and the construction of railroads that offered them a better life (Guo, 2019). Migration was viewed as a means of escaping trauma and offering better opportunities for future generations, such as the major event of the Chinese Civil War, the impact of which is still less recognized by generations of Asian Americans (Cai & Lee, 2022). However, migration to the United States is primarily driven by extreme historical circumstances, including war, famine, political unrest, and social oppression, rather than cultural values. Migration is often seen as an opportunity to start a new life. However, research shows that migration can also give rise to new psychological problems, such as post-migration trauma, discrimination, and the need to adapt to new circumstances (Sangalang et al., 2019). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which imposed restrictions on Chinese labor immigration, was another issue that Chinese immigrants had to contend with for ten years. However, after the relaxation of this act, the number of immigrants increased, including in 2019, an increase of more than 2.5 percent (Greene & Batalova, 2026). America, being a multicultural country, is the primary choice for Chinese immigrants to escape, although they have to face various challenges.

As a multicultural country, America requires many immigrants to adapt again upon entering (ahirai, 2026). The first generation of immigrants will definitely experience struggles in adapting to the culture and social environment, whereas the second generation can assimilate into the country’s culture; this is what causes intergenerational conflict (Harris & Chen, 2023). As these differing values shape everyday interactions, such as perspectives on behavior, emotional expression, and language use, they gradually give rise to misunderstandings (Sadiqzade, 2025). This is where the gap between the two generations arises, where parents’ expectations do not align with those of children from different generations. This leads to misunderstandings and cultural conflicts stemming from gaps within immigrant families. Intergenerational relationships are inevitably affected by these differences. Stress or conflict in a parent-child relationship can arise from acculturation gaps caused by these cultural differences (Shukla et al., 2025). Understanding the origins of intergenerational conflict is crucial for immigrant families, as cultural and emotional differences can lead to misunderstandings and intergenerational conflicts.

According to Wahab et al. (2022), significant generational differences in immigrant families arise from parents’ expectations of their children as they form their identities. Children’s desire for independence often clashes with parents’ conventional beliefs that children should be obedient and controlled, hindering communication and creating emotional distance between generations. This conflict is even deeper in immigrant families, as the first generation must adapt to a new cultural environment while their experiences and perspectives are shaped by diverse generational backgrounds (Kalmijn, 2019). The protective behaviors and high standards of expectation that many immigrant parents place on their children are rooted in pre-migration trauma, including social upheaval, conflict, and loss, which impact their emotional well-being in the new country (Han, 2019).

Unresolved trauma from parents’ pre-migration lives, whether rooted in war, loss, patriarchal oppression, or displacement, significantly impacts life in a new place (Khan, 2024). Through mother-daughter conflict, *The Joy Luck Club* clearly illustrates how trauma is emotionally transmitted and fuels cultural tensions. First-generation mothers’ traumatic experiences, patriarchal pressure, and forced migration not only drove them to migrate to the United States but also continue to influence their subsequent parenting (Curran & Hill, 2022). For example, Suyuan Woo’s expectations and pressures toward Jing-mei are influenced by past trauma from the Japanese invasion and the death of

her twins. In Chinese patriarchal culture, daughters are often seen as inheritors of their mothers' emotional roots, making it easier to transfer past sacrifices and anxieties to them (Miao, 2024). A daughter raised in an American culture that values freedom must confront her mother from a different culture, who is often emotionally domineering. This creates cultural friction, intergenerational conflict, and misunderstandings (Ceciu, 2020).

Previous research on the novel *The Joy Luck Club* has not discussed much about the relationship between first-generation trauma and the influence of cultural variation on the second generation, although identity, trauma, and language have been prominent topics. Research on trauma has been conducted, but it has focused on how trauma affects immigrant family relationships (Chou et al., 2023; Wei, 2022), while this study will also examine how cultural tension arises in the relationship between two generations of immigrants. Other studies have examined hybrid identity, focusing on the character Jing-mei Woo (Novitasari et al., 2018), and how different language use can cause conflict in a mother-daughter relationship (Liu, 2025). Furthermore, Bhattacharya (2022) examines how trauma and cultural memory are expressed through the metaphor of “ghosts” in several of Amy Tan's works, including *The Joy Luck Club*. However, none of these previous studies have discussed the cultural tension caused by intergenerational trauma in the mother-daughter relationship in *The Joy Luck Club*. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how intergenerational relationships from different cultures and the trauma experienced by the first generation can cause conflict, as depicted in *The Joy Luck Club*, resulting from the mother's unresolved trauma. This research will focus on the cultural tensions that can arise in the mother-daughter relationship due to the two-generation gap and unresolved trauma, using the theory of historical trauma by Brave Heart. This is what causes the distance between mother and daughter across generations in the novel.

The research focuses on using the historical trauma theory by Brave Heart, which explains that collective trauma caused by massive group traumas such as war, loss, and migration will have an impact across generations, which will be affected by the psychological impact and unresolved trauma, causing a certain reaction called the historical trauma response (Brave Heart, 2003). This theory served as the main basis for the intention that the influence of cultural tension in the mother-daughter relationship in the novel is not only due to cultural differences but also to past trauma that is still embedded and has not been resolved. The study examines how the historical trauma experienced by Chinese immigrant mothers as first-generation immigrants affects family relationships, particularly the emotional dynamics built within *The Joy Luck Club*, and uses this theory as an analytical framework. Based on the theory of historical trauma by Brave Heart, this study argues that several aspects, such as unresolved past experiences, loss, war, and migration, influence how mothers view their daughters across generations and cultures. This influence is passed down to the next generation through behavioral patterns, communication styles, and high expectations for their daughters. Therefore, this study focuses on cultural tensions and intergenerational conflicts that arise from how historical trauma continues to influence daily interactions and shape the parenting patterns between mothers and daughters from different cultures and generations.

METHOD

The study uses a qualitative method to analyze. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative methods analyze the exploration and understanding of meanings by individuals or groups within a social or humanitarian context. It can also be applied to these relations, and the characters' experiences in the literary work can be analyzed using this qualitative research method. The complexity of the relations between the four Chinese mothers and their daughters. Using the

qualitative analysis method, the data collection process began with close and repeated readings of the novel to better understand its content. This technique was used to identify relevant textual criteria aligned with the study focus, such as unspoken trauma, loss, and excessive pride, as a form of historical trauma response, to be grouped into predetermined themes for the thematic coding process. By applying the historical trauma theory by Brave Heart as a framework to analyze the data and examining how the mothers' expectations and communication styles can be influenced by past experiences in navigating cultural norms with every daughter, using this theory can help state the collective traumatic event passed down from generation to generation based on previous events, and cause unresolved trauma, which influences individual behavior and family interactions. In this study, we can examine how communication and a mother's parenting style can influence expectations for each child, due to the influence of the past that is still being experienced.

In this study, we use *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan as primary data, specifically the printed edition published by G.P. Putnam's Sons. Primary data were collected from a selection of passages focusing on cultural tensions, misunderstandings, intergenerational relationships, and past trauma, drawn from the monologues and dialogues of the novel's characters. Supporting data were taken from previous studies and publications related to the discussion. After all the data were collected, they were sorted and analyzed according to the discussion themes, such as past trauma, stress, misunderstanding, and cultural identity. This study focuses on the horrific pasts of first-generation immigrant mothers. To understand the unresolved past trauma that carries over into their daughters' parenting styles, this study will be examined using Brave Heart's historical trauma theory as a theoretical framework. This approach demonstrates how past trauma from the first generation and cultural differences create tensions in the relationships between the four Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that past trauma is the primary cause of conflict between mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*. In the first section, the initial causes of mother-daughter interactions are examined in relation to their prior experiences. The stories of these characters highlight the psychological impact of loss, conflict, and hope in China's patriarchal society. First-generation Chinese migrants' expectations of America are shaped by the psychological scars of suffering, loss, and patriarchy that remain in their memories, and these scars indirectly impact how they raise their daughters (Ma, 2023). According to historical trauma theory, this often unspoken and inherited trauma leads to cultural misunderstandings, emotional alienation, and a lack of communication (Soni & Tiwari, 2024). Daughters growing up in an American cultural environment often recall that these conflicts stem from their mothers' past trauma. These findings suggest that, in addition to generational or cultural differences, mothers' unresolved pasts also place a burden on their daughters, which in turn leads to cultural tensions. This demonstrates that trauma is a hidden force that impacts cross-generational communication and identity (Talley, 2018). The relationship of each mother and daughter that causes intergenerational conflict will be divided into three categories: (1) the shadow of unspoken loss, (2) excessive display of pride, and (3) pressure-driven growth without support. This structure will discuss how past experiences of trauma, cultural differences, and intergenerational interactions each contribute to the tensions depicted in *The Joy Luck Club*.

The Shadow of Unspoken Loss

Loss is a profoundly impactful experience in life (Antony & Kapoor, 2024). In *The Joy Luck Club*, the characters experience physical and emotional devastation, leaving behind unresolved and unacknowledged wounds. Suyuan Woo's unresolved historical trauma stemming from her experiences during the war in China and her forced separation from her twin daughters is the root cause of the emotional barrier that underlies the relationship between her and her daughter, Jing-mei. That is what influences Jing-mei's relationship with her mother, which Jing-mei finally realizes, as can be seen from the quote below:

"But today I realize I've never really known what it means to be Chinese. I am thirty-six years old. My mother is dead, and I am on a train, carrying with me her dreams of coming home. I am going to China." (Tan, 1989, P. 307)

Suyuan's unspoken past trauma, including grief and suffering, is only realized by her daughter, Jing-mei, after her death. Viewed through the lens of historical trauma theory, her mother's experience of loss due to the past war does not stop with the first-generation. Jing-mei, as the second generation, was not directly affected by the trauma. She must carry her mother's dream by returning to China to understand what her late mother experienced.

Suyuan never spoke about it to Jing-mei, which caused her considerable confusion. As Jing-mei hangs out with the "Joy Luck Club Aunts," her mother's friends who always talk about her mother, she begins to realize that her mother is experiencing pain due to the past trauma she suffered. She also began to understand the suffering that the aunts experienced due to war, loss, patriarchy, and being refugees until they finally migrated. Jing-mei begins to understand the depth of the pain that shaped her mother's generation as their community becomes a place where unspoken burdens are accepted.

"I had always assumed we had an unspoken understanding about these things: that she didn't really mean I was a failure, and I really meant I would try to respect her opinions more. But listening to Auntie Lin tonight reminds me once again: My mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other's meanings, and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more. No doubt she told Auntie Lin I was going back to school to get a doctorate." (Tan, 1989, P. 27)

The excerpt above depicts Jing-mei frequently misinterpreting her mother's intentions and, ultimately, carrying the burden of hidden grief and suffering. The differences between Jing-mei and Suyuan reflect the notion of historical trauma, which holds that unresolved grief makes it impossible for different generations to understand one another. However, the mothers have a sense of unity that their American-born daughters lack, and the latter lack the emotional and cultural understanding necessary to fully grasp them, also highlighting the intergenerational divide. For example, Suyuan has high expectations for Jing-mei, rooted in unresolved trauma rather than mere desire. This further highlights the interplay between these generations.

"I used to dismiss her criticisms as just more of her Chinese superstitions, beliefs that conveniently fit the circumstances. In my twenties, while talking introduction to Psychology, I tried to tell her why she shouldn't criticize so much, why it didn't lead to a healthy learning environment." (Tan, 1989, P. 20)

As in this quote, Jing-mei recalls the time she dismissed her mother's judgment as "Chinese superstitions," called *mixin* in Chinese, or, in other words, "delusional beliefs," which revealed the

cultural gap that separated them (Ko-wu, 2016). Suyuan's traditional emotions have provided insight into Jing-mei's transition and emotional knowledge, helping her understand the risks she faces. This describes the trauma experienced by the mother and daughter through cultural individuals, based on historical trauma theory, which can explain the conversations, messages, and Jing-mei, making it possible to interpret them not only to understand their origins but also to understand the effects of differences in thinking across generations. Beliefs that Suyuan continues to carry are due to past trauma.

The relationship between Suyuan and Jing-mei may symbolize deeper tensions. The psychological impact of the war and the loss of her twins, experienced by Suyuan, contributes to her loss of life experience. Scarred by her past, Suyuan must adjust to the emotional pressures of life in America and the weight of historical memory. In contrast, Jing-mei was raised in an American Culture that values emotional freedom and self-determination. However, Jing-mei eventually comes to understand the tragedy's impact, and she visits China to learn more about her aunt's other experiences.

Another trauma experienced by an immigrant mother, Ying-ying St. Clair, is characterized by emotional indifference and apathy, in contrast to Suyuan. The loss of her first child and an oppressive marriage in China caused Ying-ying great psychological pain.

"For all these years I kept my mouth closed so selfish desires would not fall out. And because I remained quiet for so long, now my daughter does not hear me." (Tan, 1989, P. 64).

The quote highlights the growing patriarchy in Chinese society, which has oppressed women emotionally, causing trauma to speak out about the pressure they faced as a form of historical trauma response. Ying-ying's habit of remaining silent and not revealing her pain has created a defense mechanism that affects her daughter, Lena. According to Lee et al. (2025), this silence interferes with how emotions and empathy are interpreted differently in American culture. A culture that emphasizes Chinese customs while imposing limits on freedom, self-expression, and communication creates emotional tension in mother-daughter relationships.

Persistent silence creates difficulties in multicultural relationships because it leads to a lack of understanding of each other's intentions. This relationship will continue to lead to a reluctance to express each other's feelings, a tendency to keep them up, which can be reflected in confessions.

"None of our friends could ever believe we fight over something as stupid as fleas, but they would also never believe that our problems are much, much deeper than that, so deep I don't even know where the bottom is" (Tan, 1989, P. 163)

The above citation suggests that the arguments and discord in Lena's marriage are implicitly driven by unexpressed emotions. The trauma she endured from her mother's upbringing made it difficult for her to adapt to the new American culture. This made it difficult for her to express her own struggles, and the trauma her mother experienced resurfaced in her inability to achieve emotional stability and healthy relationships. The following statement shows how Ying-ying hides her emotions, which affects her relationship with her daughter, Lena. Ying-ying prefers to avoid facing her problems rather than confronting them. Lena is influenced by Ying-ying's past, which shapes her parenting style. Lena is aware of her emotional problems but is unable to communicate them due to this cultural paradox.

“And now that my mother is here-she is staying for a week, or until the electricians are done rewiring her building in San Francisco-we have to pretend nothing is the matter.” (Tan, 1989, P. 163)

The relationship between Ying-ying and Lena illustrates how emotional rejection and silence are patterns used to transmit trauma influenced by China’s patriarchal culture. Ying-ying’s apathy and emotional suppression became a pattern of personal interaction with family, rooted in her experiences with abusive things about the marriage and the loss of her child. Lena, raised with the expectation of open communication, felt confused and emotionally alienated when the concept of silence was introduced into American culture. As a result, Lena struggled to identify and express her own issues. One of the main causes of conflict and alienation in both mother-daughter relations was the cultural difference between the Chinese ideal of silence and the American aspiration for self-expression.

Excessive Display of Pride

Pride often serves as a survival strategy, shaped by past experiences of humiliation, powerlessness, and social restrictions in their home countries. The conflict between Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong is shaped by their cultural differences in their relationships at *The Joy Luck Club*, with the complexity of the generations being a key factor. Lindo’s experience shows a historical trauma response, as growing up in China, a widely held patriarchy marked by forced marriage at a young age, loss of personal freedom, and escapism, provides a psychological foundation for her own self-esteem within the country’s patriarchal system. Waverly as a daughter was indirectly affected by the trauma response by her mother, in one of her monologues she said:

“I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength. It was a strategy for winning arguments, respect from others, and eventually, though neither of us knew it at the time, chess games.” (Tan 1989, P. 89)

The excerpt demonstrates that, driven by the deeper past trauma her mother brought to America, she aims to shape her daughter through nurturing, self-control, and discipline. This ensures Waverly’s survival, as she must achieve victory in accordance with Lindo’s expectations.

Lindo views motherhood as an effort to provide her children with the freedom, wealth, and liberation from repressive Chinese patriarchal customs that she herself could never achieve.

“And my mother loved to show me off, like one of my many trophies she polished. She used to my games as if she had devised the strategies.” (Tan, 1989, P. 187).

The above quote shows how Waverly’s chess prowess is interpreted as a personal achievement for the young woman and as a representation of Lindo’s hope of overcoming the trauma she endured as a woman in a patriarchal Chinese society. Lindo projects her own suffering and powerlessness onto her daughter’s identity without realizing it, and she boasts about Waverly and demands her participation in the game’s strategy. However, Waverly feels that she is being used as a tool for her mother to show off, rather than as a source of genuine pride, because she was raised in an American culture that prioritizes possessions over personal achievement. It is here that cultural tensions arise when the child’s beliefs about independence and freedom collide with the excessive pride stemming from his mother’s past traumatic experiences (Baser & Toivanen, 2024).

“I realized my mother knew more tricks than I had thought. But now I have tired of her game. I wanted to start practicing for the next tournament. So I decided to pretend to let her win. I would be the one to speak first.” (Tan, 1989, P. 189)

The citation shows that Waverly has recognized her mother's mindset, which pressures her to always win. This mindset is influenced by Lindo's past trauma due to pressure that prevented her to achieve what she wants and ends up emphasizing it to Waverly. The phrase "knew more tricks" means Lindo has the ability in that matter but her past trauma makes her pass on to Waverly to achieve what she wants. This is where the conflict arises, influenced by cultural, thought, and emotional differences where Waverly wants the freedom to achieve what she wants without pressure from Lindo. The tension that Waverly experiences is further evident in the following quote,

"At my next tournament, while I had done well overall, in the end, the points were not enough. I lost. And what was worse, my mother said nothing. She seemed to walk around with this satisfied look, as if it had happened because she had devised this strategy." (Tan, 1989, P. 190)

In this quote, Waverly's defeat in the tournament and Lindo's reaction to her mother demonstrate that she views every achievement her child has achieved as part of her original plan. This defeat forces Waverly to confront her mother's silence, who seems to disregard her achievements in favor of the work she has done. Over time, she realizes that her mother is constantly controlling her, pressuring her to limit her freedom and self-esteem. This parenting style is influenced by Lindo's past trauma, a form of historical trauma response, which stemmed from not being able to achieve what she desired.

The tension between Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong stems not only from the conflict between achievement and control but also from Lindo's own self-awareness. Lindo began to realize the difficulties of raising a child across different cultures as shown in the following quote:

"It's my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (Tan, 1989, P. 289)

Lindo's confusion and guilt about the parenting style she imposed, pressuring her child to grow up in a high-achieving environment, to achieve the success she desired. This greatly affected Waverly, who was raised in American culture and struggled to accept the pressures her mother imposed. The influence of cultural differences from the first generation, who had past trauma, passed on suffering to the second generation, who were affected.

The cultural tension in the relationship between Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong arises from different desires and goals. Lindo, as a mother who has lived in a patriarchal environment, aims to show her daughter that she can achieve and take pride in herself by emphasizing her parenting style. Meanwhile, Waverly wants freedom to live her life, having grown up in an environment that prioritizes it, making her want to avoid the pressure and oppression of her mother. Waverly's achievements are not purely what she wants; it is Lindo's intervention that makes her dissatisfied with them. This mother-daughter conflict represents personal and social tensions between generations.

Pressure-Driven Growth without Support

A lack of emotional support often stems from stressful environments that prioritize achievement over empathy (Wu, 2024). For example, a family's parenting pattern can only encourage resilience, strength, and success without support. The relationship between An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan clearly illustrates this dynamic. Having someone struggling to survive yet still deeply traumatized by China's patriarchal culture further deepens the difficulties of reconciling their relationship.

"And even though I know it's hopeless—there's absolutely nothing left to save—I'm afraid if I tell her that, she'll still persuade me to try." (Tan, 1989, P. 123).

The above excerpt demonstrates the emotional pressure that causes suffering due to the perspective imposed by An-mei's own trauma. Rose feels exhausted by everything she has experienced. Rose has a habitual side, a true emotional side, and each is driven by An-mei's past events, by suffering, and by the ignored demands of patriarchal culture. After the conflict, it is as if tragedy is born from trauma, as if An-mei can see the extreme as resilience, which has a protective motherly love, and can see it as emotional destruction due to their relationship formed from two different cultures.

The relationship between An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan reflects the cultural tensions that arise from intense psychological pressure and a lack of empathetic support.

"'He is American,' warned my mother, as if I had been too blind to notice. A *waigoren*." "'I'm American too,' I said. 'And it's not as if I'm going to marry him or something.'" (Tan, 1989, P. 124).

From the above excerpt, we can see a cultural clash, a difference in thinking between mother and daughter. An-mei views her American identity as a threat to her daughter Rose's, which she considers natural because she was raised and born in America. This contrast can be explained and influenced by cultural norms and the trauma her mother experienced. Rose perceives this as stressful, and the lack of emotional support she receives exacerbates the cultural tension in their relationship.

Not only Rose, but An-mei also experienced similar mental stress as a child and lived in a harsh environment with little emotional support.

"I sat quietly, trying not to listen to my mother. I was thinking how much my mother complained, that perhaps all of her unhappiness sprang from her complaints. I was thinking how I should not listen to her." (Tan, 1989, P. 260).

According to this quote, An-mei experienced emotional exhaustion, depression, and overburdening as a child. Both mother and daughter experience cultural conflict resulting from the historical trauma response from the first-generation, in which they were unable to provide or receive appropriate emotional support while feeling harmed by excessive demands. The following quote shows that Rose was deeply affected by her mother's pressure from an early age and was raised to prioritize her mother's wishes over her own feelings.

"She said that if I listened to her, later I would know what she knew: where true words came from, always from up high, above anything else." (Tan, 1989, P. 206).

The above quote suggests that Rose repressed her thoughts and emotions because, from a young age, she was influenced by the belief that her mother's opinion was her priority. Thus, these events align with An-mei's earlier description of being raised in a culture with limited emotional support and reflect a pattern she herself experienced. The cultural tension An-mei and Rose experience arises when Rose perceives her mother's actions as a hindrance to her life, while An-mei, as a mother, sees them as the parenting style Rose needs. As a child, Rose felt she didn't have the freedom to express her desires and make decisions about who she was.

The relationship between An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan experiences cultural tension due to An-mei's unresolved past trauma from the patriarchal culture in which she was raised. An-mei's survival with the sacrifices and suffering of grief, loss, and patriarchy influences her parenting style towards

Rose. As a daughter growing up in a culture that values freedom and differs greatly from her mother's, she must bear her mother's burden. Because past trauma creates emotional distance, misunderstandings, and identity issues, both mother and daughter exemplify cultural differences and historical trauma, and this can help illustrate the intergenerational tensions in intercultural relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study, which examines the relationships between four mothers and their children, speculates how the first-generation continues to experience past trauma through the lens of historical trauma theory. Not only that, but also how these traumas are transmitted through different means and how they can be passed down between generations.

The relationship between Suyuan Woo and Jing-mei Woo can explain how a mother can expect something from her child and how it is formed from past trauma when she lost her twins during the war. Suyuan urges Jing-mei to understand her situation, an unspoken trauma that often leads to misunderstandings, but Jing-mei has difficulty because of cultural pressure from Suyuan. Based on the relationship between Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair, which is marked by the recognition that loss is caused by the emotion of isolation and by silence. Based on that, trauma can have an impact on Lena's marriage relationship, where Ying-ying is haunted by her past situation, and it causes anxiety and negative habits in Lena's marriage relationship.

The relationship between Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong, an immigrant mother and an American-born daughter, can be explained by Lindo's parenting style, which conflicts with Waverly's identity. Lindo's excessive pride in Waverly, whom she perceives as insecure and lacking freedom, leads her to reject the pressure Lindo imposes through mechanisms used to maintain and control. Another relationship is that of An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan, characterized by loss and sacrifice, a lack of support, and the many pressures Rose faces. However, growing up in an American cultural environment, Rose finds herself in a position of surrender and free choice.

These four mother-daughter relationships demonstrate how historical trauma responses stemming from past trauma caused by loss, war, migration, and encountering different cultural norms can create intergenerational dynamics that can be both a source of conflict and a platform for reflection. Intergenerational relationships can be understood using a historical trauma perspective, leading to the conclusion that unresolved past trauma influences tensions between mothers and daughters. However, this study has limitations because it focuses on only one literary work and a specific character that discusses immigrants and cross-generational relationships. Therefore, suggestions for further research may provide broader insights into intergenerational and cultural relationships with multiple literary works and theoretical frameworks.

REFERENCES

Ahirai. (2026). *Understanding multicultural societies*. Diversity Insights.

Antony, T. A., & Kapoor, B. (2024). Portraits of life after loss: Understanding parental loss within a social context. *Journal of Family Issues*, 45(10), 2473–2499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X231204981>

- Baser, B., & Toivanen, M. (2024). Inherited traumas in diaspora: Postmemory, past-presencing and mobilisation of second-generation Kurds in Europe. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 47(2), 297–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2261288>
- Bhattacharya, R. (2022). Haunted by cultural memory: Analysing spectral presence in select novels of Amy Tan. *Media Watch*, 13(2), 184–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911221092826>
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2003). The historical trauma response among natives and its relationship with substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35(1), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2003.10399988>
- Cai, J., & Lee, R. M. (2022). Intergenerational communication about historical trauma in Asian American families. *Adversity and Resilience Science*, 3(3), 233–245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-022-00064-y>
- Ceciu, R. (2020). Trauma, identity and culture: An interdisciplinary and multicultural exploration. *University of Bucharest Review. Literary and Cultural Studies Series*, 9(2), 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.31178/UBR.9.2.7>
- Chou, F., Buchanan, M., McDonald, M., Westwood, M., & Huang, C. (2023). Narrative themes of Chinese Canadian intergenerational trauma: Parental experiences. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 36(4), 696–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2022.2160431>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2022). Young people’s perceptions of their parents’ expectations and criticism are increasing over time: Implications for perfectionism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 148(1–2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000347>
- Greene, M., & Batalova, J. (2026). *Chinese immigrants in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Guo, Q. (2019). Chinese immigration during the 1800s in the United States. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 3(6). <https://doi.org/10.26689/jcer.v3i6.935>
- Han, H. (2019). Making “Second Generation,” inflicting linguistic injuries: An ethnography of a Mainland Chinese church in Canada. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 18(1), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2019.1569524>
- Harris, K. M., & Chen, P. (2023). The acculturation gap of parent–child relationships in immigrant families: A national study. *Family Relations*, 72(4), 1748–1772. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12760>
- Kalmijn, M. (2019). Contact and conflict between adult children and their parents in immigrant families: is integration problematic for family relationships? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(9), 1419–1438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1522245>
- Khan, N. (2024). Colonial trauma: Terrains of disappearance, traumatic reflexivity, and historicizing countertransference. *Ethos*, 52(3), 384–400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12428>

- Ko-wu, H. (2016). The origin and evolution of the concept of *mixin* (superstition): A review of May Fourth scientific views. *Chinese Studies in History*, 49(2), 54–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2015.1132922>
- Lee, S., Matthews, B., & Torres, J. (2025). Cultural silence and emotional suppression in Asian-American families: A phenomenological exploration. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(2), 135–144. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.6.2.14>
- Liu, K. (2025). A detour in English language: Reading The Joy Luck Club with Rey Chow. *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 38(1), 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2023.2263521>
- Ma, H. (2023). Seeing the struggle of relationship between Chinese mothers and America-born daughters through languages in Joy Luck Club. *Advances in Education, Humanities and Social Science Research*, 4(1), 289. <https://doi.org/10.56028/aehtsr.4.1.289.2023>
- Miao, G. (2024). The negative effects of patriarchy on offspring: A Chinese family focused study. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 33(1), 287–291. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/33/20231843>
- Novitasari, A., Sunggingwati, D., & Lubis, I. S. (2018). Jing-mei Woo's hybrid identity in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club novel. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya*, 2(4), 347. <https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v2i4.1469>
- Sadiqzade, Z. (2025). The linguistic expression of emotion: A cross-cultural analysis. *EuroGlobal Journal of Linguistics and Language Education*, 2(3), 42–54. <https://doi.org/10.69760/egjlle.2500195>
- Shukla, S., Smith, R. J., Burik, A., Browne, D. T., & Kil, H. (2025). When and how do parent-child acculturation gaps matter? A systematic review and recommendations for research and practice. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 117, 102568. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2025.102568>
- Soni, C., & Tiwari, A. K. (2024). Echoes of violence: Intergenerational trauma and the memory of partition in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1). <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i1.10070>
- Talley, S. D. (2018). Healing historical trauma through intergenerational bonds in attachment. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 110(4), 14–21. <https://doi.org/10.14307/JFCS110.4.14>
- Tan, A. (1989). *The Joy Luck Club*. Ivy Books.
- Wahab, P., Din, S. U., Pasha, K., Ahmed, M., Hussain, M., & Khan, J. (2022). A generation gap between children and their parents in Pashtun community Buner District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 35(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V35I12022.1-13>
- Wei, J. (2022). The impact of the characters' Traumatic memories on their family patterns in The Joy Luck Club. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(2), 388–394. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1202.23>

Wu, S. (2024). The influence of family nurturing environment on children's emotions and behaviors. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 14(2), 274–278. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ca4kqt80>