

## **Adjustment and Displacement in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*: An Analytical Study**

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### **Abstract:**

The paper investigates the impact of the materialistic American life upon the second generation Chinese American protagonists whose cultural roots are uprooted to adapt to the Western values, faith and orientation. The paper traces the failure of the second generation Asian American protagonists in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) to adapt to and assimilate into the new life in America as a result of the lacking harmony between their Chinese legacy and their American culture. They cannot attain real happiness or peace of mind till they reconcile with their authentic Chinese self represented in mutual **understanding**, sympathy and kindness, values that constitute the way out for Chinese American protagonists to survive modern crises of displacement and alienation. Indeed, they cannot separate themselves from this American hegemonic culture, as they consider the host country a shelter against homelessness and poverty. Consequently, they fall easy prey to the American myth of easy and swift materialistic success that alienates whole families . The paper highlights the danger of modern materialism and absolute selfishness which ignore familial and spiritual salvation exemplified in Amy Tan's novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, attempting, in vain, to fulfill the materialistic American dream, ignoring the indispensable values of the ancestors like familial unity.

Duality of nationality with biculturalism constitute a paralyzing crisis for the Chinese figures with whom the author identifies. The writer has successfully dismantled the Self/Other duality through mirroring the misery and conflict of the second generation characters in addition to the protagonist's striving to define new borders unexplored yet. Living with difference was explored in the research

on the cultural level to denote the importance of accepting the other who is part Chinese and part American. Ruth decided to reconcile with the once rejected Chinese self. LuLing had to show submissiveness to the whites, otherwise they had no place for shelter. Life's hardships and racism in China and the States obliged LuLing to be eager to what she left behind not existing anywhere else; namely love and recognition through writing memoirs in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. This influences the protagonists' quest for identity and mapping the self. There must be some midway between the American and Chinese cultures; however, the protagonist is torn between her American way of living and responsibilities towards her Chinese family whose leaders sometimes have difficulty in assimilating into the American way of living such as speaking the language of the host country to exemplify the lack of cultural harmony. The past of the protagonist using flashbacks focused on the ethnic past highlighting Said's theory of exile and nostalgia to purity and simplicity values.

### Keywords:

Assimilation- Adjustment- Displacement- Diaspora- Chinese-American- Hegemony- Duality- Nostalgia

### المخلص:

الهدف الرئيس من هذا البحث هو القاء الضوء على رؤية الكاتبة الأمريكية من أصل صيني وهي امى تان سنة (١٩٥٢). فى عملها المختار (ابنة المجراتى) عام ٢٠٠١ الذى يتناول أزمة الإنسان الأمريكى خاصة من غير السكان البيض فيما يخص هويتهم وفيما يتعلق بالكيان الثقافى لهم والاختلافات الثقافية بينهم وبين الثقافة الأمريكية السائدة والمهيمنة على المجتمع الأمريكى من جهة، والاختلافات بين جيل المهاجرين وأولادهم من جهة أخرى .

. يتبنى البحث المنهج التحليلى لدراسة رواية (ابنة المجراتى) للأبطال الأمريكين من أصل صيني وفى هذا الإطار يبرز البحث الأدوات الفنية التى تستخدمها كاتبة الرواية امى تان من الاسترجاع وصورة السكن لدى ابطال الرواية .

. ويشير البحث إلى العوامل التى أدت إلى ظهور المجتمع الأمريكى المعاصر وهى موجات الهجرة من جميع أنحاء العالم لتحقيق الحلم الأمريكى المتمثل فى السعادة فى الحياة الأفضل للأسويين ومن أمريكا الجنوبية حتى اليهود مما أسفر عن وجود مجتمع متعدد الثقافات كما هو عليه الآن وهى الظاهرة التى تلقى بظلالها على الجيلين الأول والثاني من المهاجرين أمريكين الصينيين .

ويوضح البحث قدرة المواطن الأمريكى من أصل صيني على التأقلم على الحياة بتحدياتها وتناقضاتها الثقافية من خلال الشخصيات الرئيسية وهى روث ولولنج ، كما يدرس البحث مدى هذا

التأقلم أو فشله من خلال مدى ارتباط الجيل الثانى من الأمريكيين الصينيين بثقافة أجداده أم بالثقافة الأمريكية أن وجدت بالفعل بشكل محدد المعالم داخل الشخصية الروائية . ويخلص البحث إلى دور الثقافة الأمريكية المهيمنة على الشخصية الروائية من أصل صينى حتى يحدث الصراع داخله ليصل إلى هوية ثقافية تصل به إلى الأمان ولينجو بنفسه وبذويه من أجل البقاء واستمرار الحياة .

#### الكلمات الدالة :

الاستيعاب - الانسجام - تشرد - الشتات - الصينى الاميركى - الهيمنة - الازدواجية - الحنين للوطن

This paper traces the failure of the second generation Asian American protagonists in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) to adapt to and assimilate into the new life in America as a result of the lack of harmony between their Chinese legacy and their American culture. The paper investigates the impact of the materialistic American life upon the second generation Chinese American protagonists whose cultural roots are uprooted to adapt to Western values, faith and orientation. They cannot attain real happiness or peace of mind till they reconcile with their authentic Chinese self represented in mutual understanding, sympathy and kindness, values that constitute the way for Chinese American protagonists to survive modern crises of displacement and alienation. They cannot separate themselves from American hegemonic culture, as they consider the host country a shelter against homelessness and poverty. Consequently, they fall easy prey to the American myth of easy and swift materialistic success that alienates whole families . The paper highlights the dangers of modern materialism and selfishness which ignore familial and spiritual salvation exemplified in Amy Tan's novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, attempting, in vain, to fulfill the materialistic American dream, ignoring indispensable ancestral values like familial unity.

The meanings of cultural concepts of religion, nationality, and behavior in addition to others intermingle in the fiction of the second generation Chinese American writers including Amy Tan (1952-), who are considered by Carole Noreen Moe to be "minority writers" who write "minority literatures" (4) in which the individual attempts to recreate the self in a multicultural age. Amy Tan may be considered the spokesperson for tormented and underestimated women in Asian American fiction. She was born in Oakland, California and has

become one of the best-selling novelists not only in the U.S. but also abroad. Her fiction constitutes a dichotomy between the past and present, the old country of China and the modern day U.S. She tackles the themes of intergenerational conflicts resulting from cultural differences between the two generations, particularly among mothers and daughters who seek cultural identity while recreating the self the present. Also, she has written short stories and children's literature.

Assimilation, as a form of acculturation, worsens the crisis for the second generation Chinese – Americans. According to the argument of Milton Gordon in his *Assimilation in American Life*, the second generation Chinese - Americans adopted the cultural patterns of the host American society such as the acquisition of the English language, emotion expression, values and life's goals ( Milton Gordon qtd. In Alba 23). Hong Liu, in his dissertation "Representing the Other", refers to the works of the novelists Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan as a reflection of the separation between one and his/her native culture:

Instead of reconciling with their parents and their parents' culture, these three second-generation Chinese American writers detach themselves from them. Their works depict the Chinese in oppositional terms and present them as the "other" as opposed to the writers themselves being Americans (Liu iii).

Asian culture is subsumed by the cultural hegemony of the West "The important point – a very Gramscian one – is how the national British, French, American cultures maintained hegemony over the peripheries (Said, *Culture*, 59). According to Said's theory of culture in relation to imperialism, Chinese – Americans suffer double oppression in the American context: " America as Western entity imposes double imperialism upon its residents specifically of coloured people" (Said 346).

Adjusting to life is a must in order to cope with life's barriers and difficulties. It is not easy to conform to the rules of the American Dream. One of the Americans of Dutch descent demonstrated this fact. As Gro Svendsen put it, "Life here is very different from life in our mountain valley. One must readjust oneself and learn everything all over again, even to the preparation of food" ( Gro Svendson qtd. in Oyangen, 346). Asian Americans need "balance in duality" to adjust to American society (Wang 120) and to "adjust to the situation of being a Chinese American" (122). Adjusting to life through assimilation is a must for

Chinese – Americans: "Assimilation is itself a commodity that one desires in order to rid oneself of difference and identity" (Ty and Goellnicht 10). Sanders defines assimilation in terms of contact : "Assimilation theory is framed as a multigenerational process, early stages of which include completion and conflict as groups comes into contact" (Sanders 337). In the light of Sanders' argument on assimilation, conflict characterizes Asian American family members, especially father/son relationships, which "embody the tensions between inclusion and exclusion, "what has come to be a common trope in Asian American literature...the disruption of Asian American families...[G]enerational and gendered conflicts within the family success and failure, and between citizen and foreigner..." (Casho 378). It is noteworthy for its references to Chinese – Americans' skill and ability to adapt to life whatever the living conditions are. Pearl talks about Amy Tan's moving into a new place out of the danger of the Japanese invasion of the mainland China " We didn't complain too much. Chinese people know how to adapt to almost anything...You're lucky you were born in this country" (225).

Cultural differences characterize the present age that "is indeed the age of the refugee, the dislocated person, mass immigration" (Said, *Reflections*, 174). Sallach refers to Gramsci's use of the concept of hegemony as follows: "Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to refer to the way in which 'a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestation' (Williams qtd. in Sallach, 41).

The "Modern era is fascinated by the experience of distance and estrangement" (Kaplan 1) due to oppression, persecution, wars, poverty, and lack of security that cause great masses of people including Asian Americans to immigrate to "the promised land". The second generation Chinese - American protagonists in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are torn between the cultures of the first and second generation Asian Americans, which renders them alienated protagonists. Homi Bhabha, in his *The Location of Culture*, highlights the effect of "cultural alienation" on colored people's estimation": "A display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic. Its discriminatory effects are visible in those split subjects of the racist stereotypes – the Simian Negro, the effeminate Asiatic male – which ambivalently fix identity as the fantasy of difference "(108). As Bhabha argues, second generation Chinese- Americans are

indeed "split subjects" whose identity has no fixed borders or consistent cultural entities. They undergo cultural shifts as a result of cultural border crossings in order to explore their true identity, feel peace of mind and survive.

Asian American literature "shares with most other literature thematic concerns such as love, desire for personal freedom and acceptance, and struggles against oppression and injustice" (Elaine Kim qtd. in Huntley, 48). The issue of assimilation of the Chinese Americans is explored in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* with regard to concepts of race, class, gender, culture and religion. In this regard, Bhabha quotes Renee Green in *The Location of Culture* to clarify the role of cultural differences in the search for self-definition: "Multiculturalism doesn't reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily ... It requires a person to step outside of him/her self to actually see what he/she is doing (3).

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* has received criticism for its theme of controversial of belonging to a certain location and culture among mothers and daughters in the host country of America. Ruth Young, the second generation Chinese American in the novel, is culturally and psychologically torn. The multiple voices in the novel move between the past and the present to highlight the indispensable values and principles adopted from the ancestors missing in America.

The inner conflict of second generation Chinese Americans in Amy Tan's fiction is the outcome of the figurative and literal exile for both the first generation Chinese immigrants and their American-born offspring when they are separated from their inherited morals and values. The protagonist then is led astray, unable to realize the true meaning of happiness in America. Cultural disharmonies and clashes undermine the sense of place for the Chinese - American protagonists. Such exile can be attributed to "a rift fixed between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said, *Reflections*, 173).

This inner conflict overwhelms the second generation Chinese Americans' lives who have to cope with what Werner Sollors terms "consent and descent" (6). In other words, they have to confront the cultural differences they encounter in the host country with its dominant and hegemonic attitude towards the Other. On the one hand, the immigrants are isolated in American society, being doubly oppressed in their native land and in America. Moreover, they warn their

offspring against adopting the bad manners or the sexual freedom of the society, as they see it. The immigrant parents in the selected fiction fear that their cultural identity could be shattered or uprooted by assimilating into the American mainstream that does not recognize them as naturalized Americans.

The main Chinese characters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* who represent the second generation of Chinese – Americans, believe in getting involved in the materialistic American society that can help them survive "racism and hardship" in the U.S. (Chantharothi 165). Chinese – Americans are viewed as successful on the material level according to the following quotation "Chinese and other Asian Americans are viewed as "model minorities" who have managed to overcome discrimination through hard work and patience achieving in the process a degree of socioeconomic success" (Schlund – Vials 182). Polster quotes Anthony Ramirez's "America's Super Minority...succeeded through great measure to hard work, dedication, and a willingness to adapt to a predominantly white culture..." (129). The second generation Chinese-Americans have nothing to do except to "make themselves more acceptable to the dominant race, sometimes at the expense of abandoning their Chinese heritage" (Yin 118).

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* is a novel about sacrifice and the ideals of love appreciated by Chinese culture. Ruth, LuLing's daughter, discovers these ideals, which constitute a turning point in the Americanized daughter. This novel focuses on the mother/daughter relation in the protagonists LuLing and Ruth whose development in behavior, orientation and life dramatically change from Americanness to Chineseness. The mother/daughter relationship reveals the intergenerational gap between the immigrant mother and the American-born daughter. Ruth is characterized as a Westernized woman who has lived her American life in San Francisco separately from her old and sick mother, on the metaphorical level. Ruth leads a life of lacking recognition. Amy Tan explains in an interview with Dana Gioia that Ruth's success in her career as an editor is due to her being fluent in English (48). Ruth uses words to earn her living. The city life proves promising for the machine-like figures like Ruth who has gained a position as an editor for agents whose books she helps in editing and revising without leaving her home. Ruth achieves such progress through her appreciation of the value of words, both spoken and written, particularly when she is temporarily mute in her childhood. However, Ruth lives aimlessly, like many other Americans, suffering from unexplained bad moods.

As a child, Ruth had no sense of real love, considering the materialistic aspects of the American life more rewarding than living simply. Ruth has a sense of bitterness in her childhood as a Chinese-American girl due to poverty, unable to buy flowers except on special occasions:

Ruth had not grown up with flowers in the house. She could not remember LuLing ever buying them. She had not thought this a deprivation until the day she went grocery shopping with Auntie Gal and her cousins. At the supermarket in Saratoga, ten-year-old Ruth had watched as they dumped into the cart whatever struck their fancy at the moment, all kinds of good things Ruth was never allowed to eat: chocolate milk, TV dinners, ice cream sandwiches, Hostess Twinkies. Later they stopped at a little stand where Auntie Gal cut flowers, pink baby roses, even though nobody had died or was having a birthday (*BD 37*).

When Art, the American born boy friend, tries to approach Ruth when she is asleep, she was not in the mood "She wanted to explain what was wrong – but she realized she did not know. There was nothing specific beyond her bad mood" (*BD 11*). In order to seek her own happiness and privacy away from LuLing's continuous worry about her, Ruth pays no attention to her old and sick mother. Ruth tries to please and responds to her mother's extreme, unjustified worry over her: worry based on illusions not facts. LuLing's worry over Ruth is perceived by Ruth as a form of interference. The little Ruth is forced to obey her mother regarding what she has to eat to recover "You want me to cook you rice? Eat. That will help get you well" (*BD 71*). The extreme cultural differences between the mother and the daughter cause misunderstanding between the mother and the daughter Ruth, so Ruth feels lonely:

Ruth felt sick to her stomach. Her mother saw danger where there wasn't. And now that something was truly really awful, she was blind. If Ruth told her the actual truth, she would probably go crazy. She'd say she didn't want to live anymore. so what difference did it make? She was alone. No one could save her (*BD 132*).

Ruth's meaningless and unbearable life for Ruth leads her to keep a diary to prove that she is still there, not annihilated by her mother or Art later on. Ruth needs to keep her privacy by keeping a diary as a tool through which she can keep her secrets safe: "The diary would be proof of her existence, that she

mattered, and more important, that someone somewhere would one day understand her, even if it was not in her lifetime" (*BD* 138). The Chinese-American Ruth frankly wishes death on her mother in her memories. Ruth expresses her hatred for her mother in the diary, fantasizing LuLing is going to read it "The week before Ruth wrote those fateful words, she and LuLing had been escalating in their moment of each other. They were two people caught in a sandstorm, blasted by pain and each blaming the other as the origin of the wind (*BD* 140). LuLing disapproves of her daughter's lack of obedience for the mother's instructions "Why I have daughter like you? Why I live? Why I don't die long time' go?" LuLing was huffing and snorting. Ruth thought she looked like a mad dog. "You want I die?" Ruth was shaking but shrugged as nonchalantly as she could. "I really don't care" (140 – 1).

Ruth's materialistic way of living justifies her keeping some money as savings from her mother for special purposes: "She rationalized that she deserved the money – for mowing the lawn, washing the dishes, being yelled at for no good reason" ( 137). Ruth's American culture makes her misunderstand her mother's worry about her as intrusion in her life. Ruth feels angry with LuLing to complain about her mother in her diary: "I hate her! She's the worst mother a person could have. She doesn't love me. She doesn't listen to me. She doesn't understand anything about me. All she does is pick on me, get mad, and make me feel worse" (141).

Due to the mainstream culture of the whites otherizing nonwhites, Ruth separates herself from her mother, denying her as her mother to her friends in the park. Ruth hates LuLing because of her accented English and ambiguous language used with Ruth in the presence of Ruth's playmates: " "She's not my mother!" Ruth shouted back. "I don't know who she is!" Her mother's eyes locked on hers. Although she was clear across the playground, she heard everything, saw everything" (*BD* 69).

The values of kindness and love are missing in Ruth's life with the selfish Art. Tan's use of LuLing's memoir in Chinese is meant to reflect how crucial it is to handle and treat parents in their old age. In this case, Ruth and Art plan to send the eighty-three-year-old LuLing to a nursing home when the narrator describes what Ruth was thinking of: Was this really the best solution for her mother's safety and health? Or was she abandoning her mother for convenience's sake sake?" (*BD* 330). Ruth discovers LuLing's ungratefulness towards Precious

Auntie as the cause of Auntie's suicide, which makes Ruth worry about her mother lest the same should be repeated in LuLing. Ruth is influenced by the great love shown by Auntie for LuLing in her old age:

Ruth remembers how her mother used to talk of dying, by curse or her own hand. She never stopped feeling the urge, not until she began to lose her mind, the memory web that held her woes in place. And though her mother still remembers the past, she has begun to change it. She doesn't recount the sad parts. She only recalls being loved very, very much. She remembers that to Bao Bomu she was the reason for life itself (*BD* 351).

Ruth is extremely involved in her work as an editor, which prevents her from visiting her old lonely mother, the Chinese woman who wrote memoirs of lacking love in America. Ruth's disciplined way of life does not work out when she is unable to remember the missing task in her agenda to perform at the beginning of the novel. It is the boring city life full of routine calculations for Ruth. Ruth's daily life draws on what most white Americans suffer, namely boredom and routine. Ruth is inflicted with this sense as a book editor "What was she doing ten years ago? The same thing. What would she be doing ten years from now? The same thing. Even the subjects of the books she helped write were not that different, only the buzzwords had changed" (38).

Ruth is typically Americanized in feeling confused. She suffers from boring city life because she lives a materialistic life free of emotions; therefore, LuLing complains about Ruth's not paying a visit to her mother "So busy, so success," her mother had said recently when Ruth told her she didn't have any free time to see her. "Not free," LuLing added, "because every minute must charge money. What I should pay you, five dollar, ten dollar, then you come see me?" (41). When LuLing keeps talking with her mother unconsciously in an ungrateful way, Precious Auntie decides to commit suicide as written down in LuLing's memoir:

These were my very thoughts as my aunts, GaoLing, and I followed mother to the ink-making studio to begin our work. As we entered the dim room, we all saw the mess. Stains on the walls. Stains on the bench. Long spills along the floor. Had a wild animal broken in? And what was that rotten sweet smell? Then Mother began to wail, "She's dead! She's dead" (212).

Ruth's discovery of her grandmother's suffering relieves her sense of emptiness with Art. Tan details this fact when she comments on the miserable

life of Precious Auntie "who became a widow and an orphan in the same day" (174).

Ruth's worried nature may be attributed to the lacking filial relationship with her mother and grandmother despite her assimilated position in the American society. She takes on the racial, gender and class differences in the American community around her; therefore, she felt she is an outsider, which leads to her temporary separation from Art, to care for her old mother "Ruth knew what it meant to feel like an outsider, because she had often been one as a child. Moving to a new home eight times made her aware of how she didn't fit in" (59). Ruth, cannot identify her real self when, as an adult, sleeps in her old (girlhood) bed "She was the same person and yet she was not. Or perhaps she was two versions of herself, Ruth 1969 and Ruth 1999, one more innocent and the other more perceptive, one needier, the other more self-sufficient, both of them fearful (303). Familial consideration may work out for Ruth unlike her relation with Art. She discusses with him what she has to do concerning her ill mother and Art with his two daughters.

Ruth's living with Art does not work out without the recognition of Art's love for her in order to cope with life. Ruth utters the words missing in her life while talking with Art about the best words in life: " *'peace, love, happiness,'* the favorite words for her that she lacks in reality when asked about the most important words in her life on the part of Art" (28). Ruth's lacking of recognition dates back to her early childhood when Ruth once lied regarding the fall in the park and being mute to keep enjoying the care and love of people around her in school and at home. Ruth enjoys being silent, as people around her are being more careful for her after her accident in the park:

For two days after the fall, Ruth was helpless; her mother had to feed, dress, and bathe her. LuLing would tell her what to do: 'open your mouth. Eat a little more. Put your arm in here. Try to keep your head still while I brush your hair.' It was comforting to be a baby again, well loved, blameless.

When she returned to school, Ruth found a big streamer of butcher paper hanging at the front of the classroom. 'Welcome Back, Ruth!' it said. Miss Sondegard, the teacher, announced that every single boy and girl had helped make it. She led the classroom in clapping for Ruth's bravery. Ruth smiled shyly. Her heart was about to burst. She had never been as proud and happy. She wished she had broken her arm a long time before (72).

Ruth's accident worked out. She knew that "someone was angry for her. Someone knew what to do" (123). American individualism versus Chinese communal culture is manipulated by Tan in the novel. Ruth's family reunion helps her realize how love and care matter among family members and in life, in general. Ruth keeps on visiting her family members to keep their traditions alive "Reunions were important, a ritual to preserve what was left of the family. She did not want her cousins and her to drift apart, but she feared that once the older generation was gone, that would be the end of the family ties" (90).

Ruth's family reunion fills the filial gap in her life, in contrast with living meaninglessly with Art. Such familial gatherings give Ruth "her feeling of family" (83). Ruth's realization of the value of having a family after her sense of emptiness in her life with Art. Familial gathering matters as part of Chinese culture with reference to Ruth's family party at the restaurant: "At last Ruth was somewhat becalmed. It was a good idea to host this dinner after all. In spite of the uneasy moments, reunions were important, a ritual to preserve what was left of the family" (90).

Ruth is not welcomed by Art's parents due to racial differences and the resultant hatred and underestimation for her when Ruth receives Art's parents at the family reunion :

Miriam (Art's ex-wife) loved Art's parents, and they adored her, Whereas, Ruth felt, the Kamens (Art's parents) had never warmed to her. Even though she had met Art after the divorce was nearly final, Marty and Arlene probably saw her as the interloper, the reason Miriam and Art did not reconcile. Ruth had sensed that the Kamens hoped she was only a brief interlude in Art's life. They never knew how to introduce her (83-4).

Art's parents add to the burden on Ruth. She has no recognition or appreciation on the part of all the Kamens. Ruth feels, for the first time, recognized for doing something worthy and appreciated by the family reunion she holds, unlike the emptiness she feels in the company of Art:

It was their Chinese thanksgiving, the reunion that she was hosting for the first time. She had given much thought to setting it up, what it should mean, what family meant, not just blood relatives but also those who were united by the past and would remain together over the years, people she was grateful to have in her life (83).

Art does not pay attention to Ruth, his partner, out of his white superiority. On the other hand, Ruth is in bad need of love, which was displayed by Precious Auntie for LuLing. Precious Auntie keeps advising LuLing to place the bones of the ancestors in their original place to evade their curses in their lifetimes as LuLing writes in her memoir:

While we rested, Precious Auntie talked with her inky hands. Stay away from that side of the monkey's teeth. Once they chomped down on an ancestor, and he was ground up and gobbled with stone. My father found his skull over there, We put it back right away. Bad luck to separate a man's head from his body (164).

Art's lack of interest in Ruth may be one of the reasons behind her temporary muteness. Art's need for Ruth as a partner, then for marriage, satisfies Ruth's need for feeling worthy. The sociable part of Art is aroused when Ruth leaves him in order to care about her ill mother. Art spares no money when he plans to pay for taking care of LuLing "Right, and a very expensive orchid! I can't let you pay that, not for three months". "It's worth it," he told her again ... "Not in so many words. I didn't really think about it until these past few months you've been gone" (322-23).

LuLing discusses the problem with Ruth: "Why doesn't he have more concern for you? No wonder he never married you" (68). Ruth's differences in culture and facial features make Ruth accept to live with Art without marriage. LuLing is stressing generous and respectable life with racial and cultural differences regarding Ruth's living miserably with Art. Luling further explains Ruth's not being loved by Art or his daughters: "Long time' go, you first meet him, I tell you, why you live together first? You do this, he never marry you. You remember? Oh, now you thinking, Ah Mother right. Live together, now I just leftover, easy throw away. Don't be embarrassed. You be honest (304).

Love and kindness in LuLing are juxtaposed with Ruth's selfishness when Ruth translated LuLing's story in Chinese. Ruth was once selfish, but she incredibly believes how much her mother loved her. Ruth's sense of kindness and love of motherhood are satisfied in her position as a partner for Art when exploring her mother's sacrifice, to keep all her savings for her. Gaoling, LuLing's spiritual sister, once said to Ruth "she ( LuLing) has been saving it all for you ... (334). Care is raised in Ruth for Precious Auntie. Girls and daughters want to repay their mothers and grandmother. Ruth wanted to thank her grandmother for her sacrifice and love for people who dehumanized her: "She

wished she could tell this woman from the past, her grandmother, that her granddaughter cared, that she, like her mother, wanted to know where her bones were" ( 335).

For this purpose, Ruth plans to write her own story, where mutual happiness matters in the individual including herself, her mother and her grandmother "They write about what could have been, what still might be. They write of a past that can be changed" (353). Ruth has managed to speak the unspoken for her through the written word. She then takes over her occasional muteness when she is fortified by her grandmother's story of patience and sacrifice. She plans to honor Auntie and LuLing with her proposed story at the end of the work. Then Ruth becomes more worried about losing LuLing in a stroke, for example:

She (Ruth) wanted to embrace her mother, shield her, and at the same time wanted her mother to cradle her, to assure her that she was okay, that she had not had a stroke or worse. That was how her mother had always been, difficult, oppressive, and odd. And in exactly what way, LuLing had loved her. Ruth knew that, felt it. No one could have loved her more. Better perhaps, but not more (58).

Place plays a very significant role in fiction as it has an impressive impact on the characters' behavior and orientation. According to Leonard Lutwack in his *The Role of Place in Literature*, place can strongly influence the protagonist's emotions:

Spaciousness may elate or terrify; small enclosures may be sought after refuges, wombs where the spirit may be reborn, or they may be prisons, the place of despair and death; a forest may be a sheltering grove or a dark wood to get lost in, a place of freedom, or of horror; and a garden may harbor earth's delights or earth's positions (35-6).

Displacement is a major issue in modern literature and critical theory, as Liisa H. Malkki notes: "What Esward Said ... calls a 'generalized condition of homelessness' is seen to characterize contemporary life everywhere" (Malkki 53). In her study of displacement, Caren Kaplan notes the effect of the sense of displacement to:

The World Wars, and other military projects [that] moved large groups of working-class and middle-class men (and some women) away from their home locales. The twentieth century has also

produced unprecedented numbers of refugees as people have fled their homes to avoid famine, genocide, or incarceration (5).

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* examines the dilemmas faced by the second-generation Chinese immigrants in their attempt to feel at home in a place other than their homeland in the modern age, "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (Said, *Reflections*, 174). Displacement in humans is mainly due to the unbridgeable gap between self and place as exemplified in the rooted exile of man from "the garden of Eden" (Hoffman 39). Hoffman also notes the inevitability of displacement: "We feel ejected from our first homes and landscapes from childhood, from our first family romance, from our authentic self. We feel there is an ideal sense of belonging, of community, of attunement with others and at-homeness with ourselves, that keeps eluding us" (39). America, with its abundant forests and land, has been desired through the ages as the homeland for those persecuted poor countries. In this study, China does not provide safety for the Chinese protagonists because of floods, poverty, war and famine, causing them to head to the U.S., where they aspire to lead a better life during and after the Second World War. Begona Simal Gonzalez notes, quoting from Werner Sollors "Much has been written of the cultural alternatives of continuity, rupture, or invention in recent years ... the history of immigration is the history of America (225).

Amy Tan highlights the significance of place to the second generation Chinese – Americans, particularly in catastrophic times of war, oppression and poverty urging them to seek better living conditions through immigration to the U.S. which represents freedom, happiness and plentitude. At the same time, they have to cope with the racism and patriarchy of the New World. The characters in the novel suffer in their homeland before emigrating to America in order to lead a better life. But they are obliged to work in kitchens and laundries, jobs usually allotted to minorities who strive to support themselves in American society. Misery continues in America for the second-generation Chinese –Americans, chasing in their dreams in racist America where they are "schizophrenically torn" (Jin 94). Jin stresses the cultural contradiction between Asia, in general, and America, due to their dream of a better life in America, the fact, to Jin, that justifies the use of the hyphenated "Asian-American". On the one hand, China is

described in the selected novel as torn by war, corruption and famine, as "many Asian immigrants have come to America to escape political, social, economic and/or personal calamities" (Li 60). On the other hand, America turns out to be a land of unfulfilled dreams for the first generation Chinese-American protagonists.

LuLing, the Chinese bastard daughter of Precious Auntie in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, suffers the lack of peace of mind because of the Chinese superstition of the chasing ghosts including her mother's ghost. LuLing knows America is not totally "a land of Honey and Milk" because of the religious obligations stated by Sister Yu in the orphanage when she warns the orphanage girls against adopting the Chinese gods. Freedom is not perfect in America as observed by LuLing in advance before she emigrates to America. Misery enforces LuLing to forge her official papers to seem five years younger in order to be sponsored. The Chinese were among the races that participated in building not only Europe but also America. In this regard, Said refers to Fanon " Fanon argues that not only were 'the well-being and the progress of Europe – built up with the sweat and dead bodies of negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races' but 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World (Said, *Culture*, 237).

In order to settle in America, Chinese-Americans intended to be part of the American society through participating in life by assimilation into the American society. However, the second-generation Chinese-Americans had to cope with the new way of life for survival. Bhabha asserts the inevitability of change of immigrants' way of life "Nations could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways which they had unconsciously adopted ( 11). Lack of stability is permanent according to Said, as a result of living in exile ( *Reflection* 173). When they have the new house with the lawn, they feel satisfied according to the argument of Said, "There is ... a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be" (186).

GaoLing, LuLing's spiritual sister, stresses the universality of suffering when she describes the illusion of the easy and comfortable life in the U.S. due to the inaccessible American Dream in her letter to LuLiing while the latter is waiting

in Hong Kong for the sponsorship papers to come through to join GaoLing in San Francisco (*BD* 281):

Life here is not so easy. And making money is not like we imagined. All those stories of instant riches, don't believe them. As for dancing, that is only in the movies. Most of the day, I clean houses. I am paid twenty-five cents. That may sound like a lot, but it costs that much to eat dinner. So it is hard to save money (285).

LuLing and GaoLing's view of America regarding a land of prosperity and happiness comes to an end. GaoLing and LuLing think of "dancing in America" when they reunite in the States. The same view of America as a place of perfect happiness is highlighted in the orphanage where the orphanage girls act in plays in which China is saved by girls playing the role of doctors representing a new destiny for China through American cultural values of survival, compassion and aid. LuLing dreams of America to relieve her sense of lacking safety in China. She views America as the only place where she may get rid of her curse of ancestors and misfortunes that pursue her, her sense of displacement after Auntie's suicide. The shattered sense of belonging is problematic for LuLing not only in China but also in America where she marries an American citizen as a sponsor: "It is not only the displaced who experience a displacement. For even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken" (Gupta and Ferguson 38).

The Chinese immigrants' sense of place is undermined because of war and oppression in homeland China that make LuLing, the daughter of her nursemaid Precious Auntie, not feel at home in her birthplace. LuLing is forced to live in an orphanage after her mother Auntie commits suicide in a time when China is invaded by Japan that targeted the Chinese Communists. LuLing's first husband Kai Jing and two scientists in the quarry were killed by Japanese soldiers after refusing to tell them where the Communist troops were located (266). War and political turmoil cause a gap between humans and place as stated by Said (*Reflection*, Introduction xxxi). Despite LuLing's wish to stay in China to be close to where her mother and her husband are buried, she flees in fear of the Japanese soldiers who show no mercy to the Chinese especially women, leaving the body of her loving mother unburied properly, a mother whose pure love makes Auntie worried about LuLing in Peking, the city she believes to be full of

"bandits". Out of lacking recognition on the part of LuLing, Precious Auntie commits suicide after LuLing defies her, pointing out that LuLing cannot interfere with her projected marriage to one of the Changs, the coffin makers. After Auntie's suicide, LuLing's marriage plans fail, to threats from Mother to sell her as a "slave girl" (215) believing that Auntie's suicide will bring bad luck for the whole family including LuLing: "I did not know where I belonged in that family any more, and sometimes when Mother was displeased with me, she threatened to sell me as a slave to the tubercular old shepherd (215).

Bad luck targets LuLing's family because Precious Auntie's husband is killed by the Japanese on the wedding day, and years later Auntie commits suicide when LuLing treats her badly without knowing she is her mother. Later on, LuLing realizes how cruel she was to Precious Auntie. LuLing feels displaced when she discovers she no longer belongs to the Liu family (294) of Father and Mother but is regarded as Precious Auntie's "bastard daughter" as LuLing later describes herself in her memoir in Chinese during her stay in the orphanage (215). Mother sends her to an American missionary where she becomes more and more eager to emigrate to America, hoping to bring an end to her misfortunes. When she works in the orphanage, she regards America as "the new country" (281) to which she could escape from the old curse and enjoy a happy life as narrated by LuLing in her memoirs with reference to how LuLing and GaoLing will receive people of the orphanage, including Sister Yu and Teacher Pan when they all gaily engage in wishful thinking the night before GaoLing and LuLing leave for Hong Kong:

GaoLing and I would come to the harbor in San Francisco and wait for them in our new automobile, a shiny black one with many comfortable seats and an American driver. Before we drove them to our mansion on top of a hill, we would stop at a ballroom. And to celebrate our reunion, we all agreed, we would dance and dance and dance (282).

LuLing has to move to the orphanage where she is reduced to working as a tutor for young students. In such place, her belonging to China is fading as long as she no longer feels safe, the fact that makes her eager to immigrate to the U.S., her Christian paradise. Then, LuLing goes to Kowloon Walled City, in the Chinese side of Hong Kong, where she waits with other Chinese citizens to travel to America. When GaoLing writes to tell her that she cannot yet sponsor her in

America, LuLing feels trapped in misfortune. GaoLing surprises LuLing regarding the high costs of living and hardships in America when LuLing strives to keep living: "in this crowded city among desperate people with stories sadder than mine. I knew no one and I was lonely for my friends. There was no America for me. I had lost my chance (286).

Thus the paper has tackled the close relationship between place and the sense of adjustment of the second generation Chinese-Americans who settled down in the United States unwillingly as in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* to realize the unattainable American Dream. The political deterioration and the Communist takeover of China in 1950 lead LuLing in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* to emigrate to the States during Chino-Japanese war (1937 – 1945) to lead a better life there compared to that in the "Old World" of China. Displacement is the outcome of the Chinese immigrant protagonists' cultural shock when their idealized image of America is shattered due to cultural differences in addition to their misconceptions about America at a time of American cultural hegemony abroad. They find Chinese values of familial solidarity, love and respect for the elders are lacking in the American scene with a place of plenty in addition to being "the Land of Milk and Honey" for the immigrant who left such values behind in his or her home country of China.

The past is vivid through nostalgia that can be defined as "Diaspora that signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile..." (Anderson and Lee 9). The sense of nostalgia is the catalyst for life for immigrants. The Chinese immigrants, particularly males, are in pursuit of subjectivity through memory to remove their being objectified versus being the centre of the family in China. Thus Asian Americans "experience transformation of their own subjectivity into objectification as aliens. They leave China as a subject, but in the process of entering the U.S., they are violently objectified and deprived of the right to preserving their subjectivity by the US Immigration Laws and the white society" (Kim 88).

In this regard, the Chinese-Americans think of their families and homeland due to their experience of displacement and "the loss of home" (Li 59), so they are more and more eager to remember their homeland China. The sense of nostalgia in Asians is predominant in most Chinese immigrant families who live in a semi-exilic status in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Chinese are eager to restore their Chinese identity of subjectivity in an objectifying harsh life in America out

of "nostalgia for homeland and Chineseness " (Ma, "Immigrant Subjectivities", 129) through remembering their past because of emasculating America for Asian males. Asian American misery in the States was expected. Because of the exilic status of the first generation Chinese-American immigrants in the United States, they experienced exile as "emblematic of human estrangement and longing as well as specifically inhuman and intolerable" (Kaplan 117). Therefore, the new country alienated them, as they are more and more eager to go back to their homeland China. Gupta and Ferguson relate memory to the sense of loss for Asian Americans as a result of "the association of place with memory, loss, and nostalgia" (Gupta and Ferguson 41).

Amy Tan highlights the sense of the past with its experiences of miseries encountered by women in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* through the use of flashbacks and memories written by LuLing in Chinese. Tan's use of memories is an attempt to identify with her Asian American protagonists and all oppressed female figures in her fiction who were forgotten via the unnamed Precious Auntie for the lack of recognition that Auntie had in her life. Amy Tan's contribution is embodied in drawing the attention to the mysteries and myths of the Chinese culture that focuses on cherished morals, traditions and beliefs adopted by the whole family members through the use of flashbacks:

Tan's fiction is ethnic in the sense that it is the product of the imagination of an author who is a second-generation Chinese American, a writer who is interested in and well-informed about the cultural, geographical, and historical borders of her life and that of her immigrant parents. In giving a voice to the immigrant community, Tan speaks for and to that community, reflecting its traditions and cultural structures, and articulating its values and its concerns (Huntley, *Amy Tan*, 39).

The past is one of the key aspects in memory. The past experiences of LuLing in China reflect her Chinese roots including the entity of her mother Precious Auntie. Amy Tan sheds light on the past incidents in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* to reflect on the Chinese ethnicity of LuLing, Young, Father, Mother and Gaoling in addition to Precious Auntie to juxtapose the Chinese heredity with the American culture represented by Ruth, the American-born Chinese daughter. Memories keep the cultural identity of LuLing's ethnic background to which she refers "These are the things I must not forget" (*BD* 153). What keeps LuLing's Chinese identity lively is the use of storytelling technique by the author in the

form of the memoirs device, a technique of "keeping the past alive" (Huntley, *Amy Tan*, 14). In other words, the past forms a plot device in the novel. In the light of Wagner's argument, LuLing, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, discovers who is she through the past represented in her memoirs "Research into the past becomes a popular plot-device as well as a metaphor for the search for selfhood" (Wagner 25). The past memories help the mother and the daughters recognize their real identity in relation to Tan's general identity doing "the ancestral-seeking journeys" (Kong 3).

The language used in LuLing's memoirs is Chinese, her family's language, in order to keep in touch with her Chinese ancestors including her mother, Precious Auntie. This helps LuLing survive these living difficulties in the new homeland of the United States, where she knows well that her American-born daughter Ruth will not use Chinese because of the American culture where she has grown up. Instead, LuLing uses the sand tray reading language to communicate with the dead mother Precious Auntie during the occasional muteness of Ruth. Part of LuLing's identity as a Chinese woman is missing, a woman who must search for the place of her mother's bones in order to give her a suitable burial. Identity can be fulfilled in case of LuLing's recognition of her mother's role in LuLing's life till she emigrates to America by means of showing honest love and kindness for Ruth. Living in the States cannot help LuLing forget such a role towards her dead mother. In this sense, the novel focuses on gratitude to the oppressed mothers as Precious Auntie. The act of writing these memoirs may fulfill her objective in life through writing about Precious Auntie's struggle. Not only love among people, but also the homeland are celebrated in LuLing's memoirs that focus on her extreme sadness due to life's miseries: "We had been desperate enough to leave behind our motherland and families" (*BD* 283).

When reading the translated diary of LuLing, Ruth reshapes her identity as the daughter of a sacrificing mother surviving life's misfortunes in multiple places including the Chinese Immortal Heart Village, Hong Kong and finally San Francisco to assert the complexity of the human nature itself exceeding life's barriers and meaningless racism, sexism and patriarchy in the American society particularly to people of color, as Meiling Wu quotes Shirley Geok-lim's "Immigration in Diaspora" published in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* "Tan's novels exhibit many of the marks of affiliation that symbolically reknit American sociopolitical hegemony" (13).

This paper has attempted to investigate memory, in the form of place, in an endeavor to adjustment and assimilation, a predominant theme in Asian American novelists to manifest the universal theme of suffering and miseries encountered by humans in general and nonwhites in particular in "the Land of Milk and Honey", particularly in the selected novel by Tan. The Diaspora of Asian immigrants is dramatized in the *Bonesetter's Daughter* when they live the American Dream with its illusion of the possibility of leading a perfect life and justice for all including nonwhites. In this case. Immigrants, as Bhabha argues in his theory of culture, had to reconcile with the authentic Chinese self that has been annihilated and suppressed as a result of American racism and cultural contradictions.

Past events, dramatized by Tan, are full of misery and oppression as related to both the old China and in the United States. The sense of nostalgia in the protagonists may relieve the bitterness of life for the protagonists in the selected work. The Chinese protagonists are eager to reunite with family members in the homeland China to survive their infliction at present. Keeping true to the individual's ethnicity is unattainable without adhering to the past. In this case, Chinese characters no longer hate their Chinese self as they have a glorious history and past experiences where Chinese women and men prove innocent and pure. LuLing Young keeps this past in her diary in order not to lose it due to Alzheimer and life's miseries.

Later, Ruth experiences transformation from editing others' books or from being "a writer of other people's stories" (Keaton 207) to write her own story of recognition and self seeking, a story allocating the self to a missing Chinese self handling the ways with words" that align a speaker or writer with one social group rather than another" ( Ivanic 6). Writing is manipulated by the author to set the self boundaries for Ruth with whom the writer identifies in the semi-autobiographical novel of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* according to the role of the writing for the writer "...writing always conveys a representation of the self of the writer" (3). A revised self definition or "a revisioning of the self through a reinterpretation of the past" is considered the underlining theme in this context (Heung 607). Ruth has rebelled against the suppression of using "the power of words over silence" (*Economist* 88).

The intergenerational gap between the Chinese mother and the American-born daughter is the major issue of the novel. To put it in other words, cultural differences between mothers and daughters underlie the conflict not only in the novel but also in the fiction of Amy Tan "She (Amy Tan) writes with compassion about the tension between immigrant parents and American-born children caused by differences in language and cultural upbringing (Stuhr 126). Ruth's translation of LuLing's Chinese diary helps her in exploring her ancestors to identify her Chinese self, a major theme in Tan. It is "the ancestral-seeking journeys in Amy Tan's novels" (Kong 3).

Ruth becomes the spokesperson of her ancestors' traditions and values. In this study, we have dealt with Asian American fiction as portrayed in the issue of quest for assimilation and adjustment in relation to the most problematic matters of multiculturalism and the resultant intergenerational gaps. Amy Tan, as an Asian American writer, is preoccupied with the dramatization of the dilemma of the coming-of-age colored protagonist who encounters the crisis of awareness of unjustified oppression in the free American land that designates her as "the Other". In the final analysis employing the theories of culture in the works of *The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha; *Culture and Imperialism and Reflections on Exile*, by Edward Said, the study has found out the protagonists realization of the myth of the American Dream and perfect life.

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* reveals a bicultural world for the protagonists by focusing on their inner life and search for a safe haven. The cultural contradictions in the novel alienate the protagonist from belonging to the States as a place to live in. Both the immigrants and their offspring feel the same displacement in the host country of America. Then, it is ambiguous who they are really. In this respect, their self-redefinition helps them cross cultural borders safely. The second generation Chinese-Americans can keep their loyalty to their home country of China. They either hate China or are divorced from it. They further know nothing about what it means to be Chinese, particularly for Ruth in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, in which they are shocked by its cultural oddities and ambiguities, so they show resistance to their parents' China and seek to adopt American culture represented by freedom for all. Using the language of the host country is another means of assimilation; therefore, Ruth feels embarrassed when LuLing, her mother, can not speak English well during shopping.

Duality of nationality with biculturalism constitute a paralyzing crisis for the Chinese figures with whom the author identifies. The writer has successfully dismantled the Self/Other duality through mirroring the misery and conflict of the second-generation characters in addition to the protagonist's striving to define new borders unexplored yet. Living with difference explored in the research on the cultural level to denote the importance of accepting the other who is part Chinese and part American. Ruth decides to reconcile with her once rejected Chinese self. LuLing had to show submissiveness to the whites, otherwise they had no place for shelter. Life's hardships and racism in China and the States obliged LuLing to be eager to what she left behind not existing anywhere else; namely love and recognition through writing memoirs in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. This influences the protagonists' quest for identity and mapping the self. There must be some midway between the American and Chinese cultures; however, the protagonist is torn between her American way of living and responsibilities towards her Chinese family whose leaders sometimes have difficulty in assimilating into the American way of living such as speaking the language of the host country, exemplifying the lack of cultural harmony. The past of the protagonist, using flashbacks, focuses on the ethnic past highlighting Said's theory of exile and nostalgia for purity and simplicity.

Displacement and adjustment are the focus of this paper, using flashbacks in order to show whether the protagonist is Chinese or American. Time passage in the novel helps the Asian protagonist to see how vital it is to adhere to an ambiguous culture as Chinese to evade the materialistic American ideology. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, appearance cannot resolve the adjustment issue in second generation Chinese-Americans.

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