

**Empowering Women in Patriarchal Societies: A Feminist Study of  
Amy Tan's Novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife***

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Patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and comes from a Greek word meaning "father of a race" or "chief of a race, patriarch" (Ferguson 1048). The word is now generally defined as the rule of men over women and children (Biaggi 13). A patriarchal society is usually thought of as one in which males hold primary power and have political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. In patriarchal societies men are often portrayed as rational, dominating, independent and fearless and they rule and control the other members of society. In sharp contrast, women are described as being passive, obedient, and submissive and they have duties towards husbands and family members. Thus, patriarchy affirms men's superiority and women's inferiority and implies male domination and female subordination.

According to feminists, patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women such as religion, economy, and culture. Sarah Gamble – the leading feminist - defines patriarchy as "a system ruled over by men, whose authority is enforced through social, political, economic and religious institutions" (271). Similarly, Sylvia Walby describes patriarchy as "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (20). Lise Fortier asserts that virtually every society has been patriarchal and that "throughout history patriarchy has enjoyed the solid support of religion, the political system and culture" (278). All these definitions and views imply that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power but do not indicate that women are totally powerless or completely deprived of their rights.

Ara Wilson observes that the feminist concept of patriarchy as a widespread social system of gender dominance was developed in the context of North American and European women's liberation movements and the intellectual and political climate of the late 1960s and 1970s and she attributes the spread of the term in particular to Marxism with its compelling explanation of inequality and strong desire to change society (1493). Bell Hooks notes that prior to the widespread use of "patriarchy",

feminism used the terms "male chauvinism" and "sexism" to refer roughly to the same phenomenon (20).

Most feminist thinkers consider patriarchy as one of the main obstacles facing women in society. Judith M. Bennet, for example, considers it the "central problem" of women's history, and even "one of the greatest general problems of all history" (393). This led feminists to use this term as "a strategic and political struggle concept," as Maria Mies explains, "because the movement needed a term by which the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect women could be expressed as well as their systemic character" (37).

Sara Gamble argues that all feminists oppose patriarchy, although they differ in their conceptualization of it: radical feminists regard patriarchy as all-pervasive and ahistorical system, Marxist and socialist feminists locate patriarchy within materialistic relations, and postmodern feminist theorists regard patriarchy as an ideology that permeates every area of culture (271). Recently, controversies surrounding the term patriarchy have diminished, Ferguson remarks, as all new feminists tend to take patriarchy as a general descriptor of male dominance (*Women's Studies Encyclopedia*). There is agreement now that patriarchy is oppressive and frustrating to society, and therefore should be fought.

Simone de Beauvoir opened Book II of *La Deuxieme Sexe* (English: *The Second Sex*) with her most famous statement: "One is not born a woman but becomes one"(330). Her statement supports the feminist argument that femininity does not stem from biological, psychological or intellectual differences. Feminism is rather the creation of culture. It is a reflection not of the essential differences between men and women but of differences in their situation. To her, situation determines character not the other way round. Thus, gender is not the same as biological sex. Gender only underlines the socially constructed roles given in society to males and females. Simone de Beauvoir argues that patriarchy has no basis and therefore it is wrong to think a woman is imperfect because of everything peculiar to her body (23). Because man wrongly thinks he is perfect, argues de Beauvoir, he views women as a lesser being to him, and ultimately he considers her existence dependent on him (26). De Beauvoir maintains that as the man defines a woman in his own terms, the woman becomes to him as:

Sex – so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (26)

With all these views prevailing in society, de Beauvoir believes that gender conflict is inevitable.

In 1963 Betty Freidan published *The Feminine Mystique* which is often seen as the beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement in the United States. The title refers to the idealized image to which women tried to conform to despite their lack of fulfillment. In this book Freidan described the problem of modern American women:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Each suburban [house] wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries ... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — 'Is this all?' (15)

Freidan thinks that the problem of the modern woman is to be content with her role as a housewife and mother. She argues that women should develop themselves and their mental abilities rather than choosing to be restricted to these roles. She notes that no woman can ignore the voice within herself that says "I want more than my husband and my children and my home" (16). Freidan also believes that the luxurious suburban houses where suburban American women lived in did not nourish their creativity (246).

Freidan addresses white American housewives who suffer from the limited role of housewifery and motherhood. To her, this role is less real, less useful and less functional than men's work. Therefore, society treated women as not "complete human beings" (239). Freidan wanted women to take an active role in public sphere. Freidan's strategy of liberating women was to encourage them to work outside home: "to resist the time-filling busy work of suburban house and community, and find or make, the same kind of serious commitment outside the home that she would have made in the city" (244-5). In brief, Freidan calls for women's empowerment:

[W]e may now begin to glimpse the new human possibilities when women and men are finally free to be

themselves, know each other for who they really are, and define the terms and measures of success, failure, joy, triumph, power, and common good, together. (xxxiv)

De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* attack patriarchy as it represents a big hindrance to women's advancement in society and call for women empowerment. More recently, feminists changed their outlook aiming at fighting for gender equality in society. They strive to achieve equality and dignity for women and call upon women to control their lives whether at home or outside. This forms the essence of woman empowerment.

Empowerment is a word that has been used often and widely in recent years. The word traces in history in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century with the legislative meaning "to invest with authority" (Tripathi 1). Then it began to be used with an infinitive in a more general way meaning "to enable or permit." Currently, the dictionary meaning of empowerment is that "the empowerment of a person or a group of people is the process of giving them power and status in a particular situation" (*Collins Dictionary*). The word is often used with marginalized people such as women, the handicapped and the poor. For women, it means gaining control of their lives in the family, community, and society. The present study adopts Robert Adams' definition of the term: empowerment is "the capacity of individuals, groups, and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives" (xvi). Carr asserts that the ultimate goal of empowerment is the "sociopolitical liberation of marginalized communities" (9). Empowerment is both a goal in itself and a process that leads to other achievements and outcomes.

Lee observes that empowerment has become an essential part of feminist theory and, as such, seeks to increase the personal, interpersonal and political power of oppressed and marginalized populations for individual and collective transformation (23). It enables women to develop self-respect and acquire a positive outlook in society, playing an important role in restoring unequal access to power and resources. Empowerment of women in particular involves changing the way of thinking of the whole society. Patriarchal oppression is one form of injustices found in society. Another one is racial oppression found at its best in multi-ethnic countries such as the United States. Empowerment strategies devised by feminists

can help overcome the former whereas Critical Race Theory may assist in curbing the former.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed in the United States in the 1980s. It aimed at dealing with the most insidious forms of racism and exposing the various sources of racial inequality by examining laws, social practices and institutions. Although the movement began with law professors and students, it has drawn scholars from other disciplines. Influential scholars in the Critical Race Theory include Derrick Bell, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Alan Freeman, Mari Matsuda, Jean Stefancic and Patricia Williams. Many critical race theorists believe that "racism is engrained in the fabric system of American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture." ("What is Critical Race Theory?"). Scholars were disappointed with the slow rate of racial reform in the United States. They argue that traditional approaches of fighting racism are not effective enough.

Delgado and Stefancic outline some characteristic themes as in Critical Race Theory. Salient among these are:

- a) Interest Convergence: thesis that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so (110).
- b) Revisionist History: view of history or an event that challenges the accepted one (113).
- c) Critique of Liberalism: critical race scholars are discontented with liberalism as a framework for addressing racial problems. They favor a more aggressive approach to social transformation as opposed to liberalism's more cautious approach (114).
- d) Structural Determinism: the idea that our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary, is ill-equipped to redress certain types of wrong. It is a mode of thought or a widely shared practice that determines social outcomes, usually without our conscious knowledge (114).
- e) Legal Storytelling and Narrative: using stories, parables, and first-person accounts to understand and analyze racial issues (111-2).

Amy Tan (born 1952) is a famous Chinese-American novelist known for her versatile genius. As a leading contemporary novelist, she has produced various short stories and novels. Though descending from a

Chinese family, Tan resists being labeled an ethnic writer, preferring to recognize her novels as “American” rather than representative of Chinese culture. In her essay entitled, "Required Reading and Other Dangerous Subjects," she addresses this issue:

If I had to give myself any sort of label, I would have to say I am an American writer. I am Chinese by racial heritage. I am Chinese-American by family and social upbringing. But I believe that what I write is American fiction by virtue of the fact that I live in this country and my emotional sensibilities, assumptions, and obsessions are largely American. (7)

She always emphasizes that she writes first and foremost as an artist and argues that her bicultural upbringing is not the primary subject of her work but an important source of inspiration.

According to Becnel, much of Tan's work draws on the lives of her family and her work is often considered to be to some extent autobiographical (98). Yet, she approaches issues which can be valid for all nationalities. Her characters' issues are the ones of all men and women, not only of those who are born Chinese. What characterizes her works is that female stories dominate the scene. In all her novels she is concerned with depicting the relationships between women and women and women and men and the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies. In addition to patriarchal oppression, women characters in Amy Tan's novels suffer from another kind of plight. As women, they experience patriarchal oppression in China and later in the United States; and as non-whites, they undergo racist beliefs and practices in their new home.

The present study aims to analyze how Amy Tan depicts the image of Chinese-American women who are crushed under the forces of the patriarchal system and racial oppression and how these women react against this dual (or double) oppression. The study explores Tan's first two novels - *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) - to define the empowerment strategies which these women use to cope with this dual oppression. Most of the studies on Amy Tan trace daughter/mother relations and/or racial encounters between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters but no study to my knowledge attempts to discuss female empowerment in her novels. The current study attempts to explore this neglected area referring to the work of feminists Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Freidan who support and call

for total liberation and empowerment of women along with critical race theorists who address the insidious forms of racism. More specifically, feminism and Critical Race Theory are used to achieve two aims: to analyze how women characters in the two novels become aware of patriarchal control and racial oppression prevalent in the family, at the workplace and in society in general and to identify the various empowerment strategies used by these women to transform the present situation to the better.

Amy Tan's first novel *The Joy Luck Club* appeared in 1989. It is divided into four sections and each section contains four stories which are in turn linked thematically. These sixteen stories are personal narratives about four Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters in China and the US. Dividing the lives of these female characters into separate personal narratives allows each of these characters to confront a similar difficulty, but to make a different choice. These female characters are Suyuan Woo and Jing-mei (June) Woo, An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan, Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair.

Each of the mothers tells two stories which mostly concern their past in pre-1949 China, when every one of them has had a painful experience either as a child or as a young woman. Each daughter in turn narrates two stories, one about her maturity days and the other about her present life. All these stories take the form of monologues and this clearly shows the absence of communication between the mothers and their daughters. The novel ends with the reunion of Jing-mei and her half sisters in China, and the mutual understanding of the other three pairs of mothers and daughters.

Chinese women are often stereotyped as weak, oppressed and silent mothers, daughters, victims and slaves in a patriarchal society. Amy Tan challenges these fixed images by portraying strong Chinese mothers in her novels. In *The Joy Luck Club*, for example, Chinese women are not weak, silent victims and slaves anymore; instead, they are strong and decisive both in their daily life and in their emotional world. They fight for their rights, life and happiness. Meanwhile, they are also the protectors of their families and daughters. These mothers who had suffered patriarchal dominance in China in the past did their best to make new lives for themselves in a new country. Currently, they want their American-born daughters to lead a happy life without suffering and pain in their new

home. Thus, they become aware of their true plight – the duality of gender and racial oppression. Gender oppression is the patriarchal ideas prevalent whether in China or in their new home in the United States. Racial oppression is the one they suffer in the United States because they are not-whites.

In *The Joy Luck Club* all four mothers fight for their own lives with courage, wisdom and determination. Suyuan tried her best to let her babies stay alive at war, and looked for them all her life. An-mei learned to fight and strive for her own life. Lindo obtained her freedom from her patriarchal family. Ying-ying did not yield to her unhappy fate and could build a new happy life. To sum up, these mothers had miserable lives but they fought for a better life and succeeded.

Mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* use various strategies to empower themselves and their children. One of these strategies is female friendship and bonding. These women come to one another because they share the same tragic destiny in China and the challenge of survival in America. According to Jing-mei, "the women of these families also had inseparable tragedies"(JLC 6). They bond together to show sympathy with one another.

The Joy Luck Club is an embodiment of the empowerment strategy of spiritual defense. Suyuan Woo, mother of Jing-mei started the first Joy Luck Club in Kweilin, China when they witnessed Japanese troops advance towards China. In order to survive, the club members tried to "celebrate [their] good fortune and play with seriousness and think of nothing else but adding to [their] happiness through winning" (JLC 11). Suyuan Woo expresses this attitude:

It's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable. (JLC 11-12)

In this way the Club helped Suyuan and her friends survive the hardship of war in China.

In San Francisco Suyuan revived the Club with her other Chinese immigrant friends. Feeling alien and alone in a new country, they choose to meet occasionally to raise their spirits. As it was the case with the first club, the second one was a means of survival and solidarity for these women. All the members of the new club had "unspeakable tragedies that



they had left behind in China and hopes they couldn't begin to express in their fragile English" (*JLC* 6). The time they spend in playing mah jongg was the only time they can "hope to be lucky...that hope was our only joy" (*JLC* 12). Jing-mei remarks that when the mothers play mah jongg and chat together in the Joy Luck Club, they become "young girls again, dreaming of good times in the past and good times yet to come" (*JLC* 32). The women in San Francisco club reset the rules of the game so that it becomes a game with no losers:

We got smart. Now we can all win and lose equally. We can have stock market luck. And we can play mah jongg for fun, just a few dollars, winner take all. Losers take home leftovers! (*JLC* 18)

In this way, female friendship and bonding in this Club give mothers hope and help them overcome alienation and loneliness in the new country.

Another strategy used in *The Joy Luck Club* is the matrilineal line (connection between daughters and mothers) as a source of power. At the beginning, there is communication gap between the mothers and their daughters; they are more like antagonists than friends. The daughters ignore the mothers' attempts to infuse Chinese tradition into their minds. They have become so thoroughly Americanized that they maintain only fragments of the Chinese culture. In sharp contrast, the mothers have sense of generational continuity; they feel connected with mothers and their mothers' mothers, and they feel equally linked with their daughters. The novel is replete with examples of these feelings. For example; when Jing-mei Woo admits that she knows little about her dead mother, An-mei Hsu tells her: "Your mother is in your bones"(*JLC* 40). Later, when An-mei Hsu talks with her daughter Rose about her own mother, she remarks: "I was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way" (*JLC* 215). At the end of the novel, the four daughters' gradual understanding of their mothers' and grandmothers' life stories enables them to establish a matrilineal bond which in turn enables them to find their roots and true selves.

The four mothers in the novel love and care for their families particularly their daughters. The mothers not only fight for their own lives, but also for their daughters. They empower their daughters by teaching them to take positive steps. Ying-ying, for example, tries to prevent her daughter Lena from being hurt by her marriage. She teaches her daughter

to ask for her own rights and to be positive. She wants her to do something before her marriage collapses. Ying-ying is not the stereotypical Chinese silent woman here; instead, she encourages her daughter to have her voice in handling her marriage to prevent tragic things from happening. She has courage and determination unlike her American-born Chinese daughter.

Another caring mother in *The Joy Luck Club* is An-mei. This Chinese immigrant mother discovers that her American-born daughter Rose's marriage is falling apart. Her daughter Rose has always allowed her husband Ted to make all the decisions, but when Ted asks her to take some of the responsibility, Rose's relationship with him falls apart. The mother does not want her daughter to have the same fate like hers. She wants her daughter to discuss the whole thing with her husband to save the small family. She warns her daughter against the dangers of passivity and teaches her the necessity of speaking up for herself. She asks Rose:

"Why do you not speak up for yourself?" she finally said in her pained voice. "Why can you not talk to your husband?" ... "I am not telling you to save your marriage," she protested. "I only say you should speak up." (*JLC* 216)

The mother wants Rose to "listen and watch, to wake up and try to understand what has already happened" (*JLC* 272) to save her small family.

Amy Tan made it clear that the forces of patriarchy and capitalism which the female ancestors suffered back in China were not absent in the so-called "liberal" American society when the mothers immigrated to America after WWII. She believes that patriarchal dominance is found in both countries but with different degrees. To support this view, Tan depicts some daughters who encounter patriarchal dominance as they grow up in the American society. For instance, Waverly faces hostility when she wants to play chess with some older men: the men refuse telling her they do not play with females whom they believe have limited mentalities. At the same time those men are shocked to see her excellent skills in the game. Another example is Rose's passivity with Ted which is based on the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in society of positive and heroic males and of submissive and victimized females. A third example is Lena's agreement to serve as a minor assistant in the architecture firm that she helps her husband to found. This agreement is based on patriarchal rules she has to accept. To Amy Tan, surrender to patriarchal thought and

behavior is unacceptable whatever the place as it entails the devastation of female autonomy.

In her second novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* Amy Tan continues her exploration of women's reactions to patriarchal dominance and racial oppression and the empowerment strategies they use. She depicts the relationships and conflicts between a Chinese immigrant mother (Winnie) and her American-born daughter (Pearl). The focus of the novel is on the story of the mother who endures a degrading marriage and after the death of her three children immigrates to the US where she successfully creates a happy life. Left by her mother at an early age, Winnie (originally Weili) married Wen Fu, a cowardly wartime pilot and sadistic liar who took hold of Winnie's wealth. During the course of their marriage, Wen Fu repeatedly rapes and abuses his wife and mistreats his three children, all of whom die in their first years. Winnie eventually escapes to America with a man named Jimmy Louie. As the novel concludes, the mother and her American-born daughter Pearl reconcile, and Winnie gives her daughter a Chinese idol as a gesture—once the abused and downtrodden Kitchen God's wife, she is now Lady Sorrowfree, a symbol of new beginnings for the two women.

*The Kitchen God's Wife* illustrates some faces of the humble status of women in Chinese society in the early 20th century. Salient among these is the tradition of arranged marriages which demonstrates women's lack of control over their own lives.

According to this tradition, marriages were arranged to make a good match for the families: men sought to marry rich girls or ones from powerful families. There was no consideration of women's desires or emotions and little attention was given to whether the two partners are suitable to each other. Girls could neither choose nor refuse any of their marriage suitors. Winnie's father approves her marriage to Wen Fu without consulting her. He explains to his daughter that her opinions are of no value to him and that she is only expected to obey her husband all the time. Consequently, Winnie submits to Wen Fu's cruel and sadistic desires. His family rapidly uses up her dowry, and she is powerless to object. She ultimately escapes by fleeing China and going to America. Huntley in *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* believes that these injustices are the product of Confucian culture which "raises women to be passive and silent in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers" (100).

As for education, Chinese women were kept illiterate or denied full educational opportunities. They were not considered suitable for education

because they were not expected to state opinions or take part in intellectual discussions. They were considered more like objects than human beings. Winnie remembers that her grandfather did not want to send her mother away to school because:

That was the modern thought - educate sons, educate daughters a little to prove you were not too feudal-thinking. But Gung-gung did not want to send her to France, or England, or America, the way some families did just to prove how rich they were. All those girls came home with short hair and dark faces from playing tennis outside in the sun. Why should he educate a daughter only to turn her into a girl he did not like? (KGW 120-121)

Men believed that education would corrupt girls' ideas and teach them to defy men. Thus, girls were not allowed to complete their education. An important means of women empowerment is to establish gender equality in education so that women can work and become autonomous and participate effectively in the social and economic affairs of the society like their male counterparts. .

Delgado and Stefancic consider storytelling/ counterstorytelling (or narratives) one major theme in Critical Race Theory. They believe that these stories if well-written "may begin a correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity"(44). It is obvious that Amy Tan employs the stories of mothers and daughters in *The Kitchen God's Wife* as an empowerment strategy for these women. She examines the position of women in prewar China and in present-day California. Tan explores through the story of Winnie what it meant to be a woman in Chinese society before and during World War II. Jiang Weili (later becomes Winnie Louie) is depicted as the product of a patriarchal culture raising women to be passive and silent in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. Weili's story exposes the suffering of a woman whose rough husband abuses her privately and publicly while the couple's friends and relatives pretend that nothing is wrong (KGW 101). Winnie was born in China where women were supposed to be submissive and obedient and strong women were punished for their opinions and determination. Her father's only advice to her was to put her husband's opinions and desires before her own. Winnie discovers that these ideals have only brought her suffering. She expresses deep regret for not knowing that she had the choice to say "no" to Wen Fu, and to be more positive about her own life and her own destiny. After meeting women who have escaped their

husbands, she was able to do the same. To justify her elopement, Winnie narrates instances of the cruel treatment of her Chinese husband to her daughter Pearl:

"It is too late," he said, "I will not give you back the marriage. You are still divorced." And then he threw the paper on top of my head. "Get up!" he shouted. "Get in the bed." "Kill me if you want," I begged. "Of course I will kill you," he said. "You and everyone else in this house if you do not obey. Get in the bed." That night, with a gun to my head, he raped me, telling me I had lost the privileges of a wife and now had only the duties of a whore. He made me do one terrible thing after another. He made me murmur thanks to him. He made me beg for more of his punishment. I did all these things until I was senseless, laughing and crying, all feeling in my body gone. (KGW 395)

Not until Weili meets the American, Jimmy Louie, is she able to break away from this cruel life. As Jimmy's wife, she begins to understand that marriage can be the genuine union of two hearts and minds, and not simply a legal bonding aiming to produce male heirs for her husband. More importantly, Weili learns that marital intercourse is not always rape and does not have to be painful or degrading. Through Jimmy, she is introduced to passionate love and tender affection; with him she finds the happiness that has evaded her for most of her life. As Jimmy's wife, she could change her life and become the strong woman we meet. At the end, Winnie changes her ideas about women. This symbolically appears when she transformed the statue of the Kitchen God's Wife that Auntie Du has left behind from a victim into a goddess, an empowered figure.

One effective empowerment strategy used in *The Kitchen God's Wife* is bonding with female friends. The mutual support of Winnie and Helen, for example, transforms their lives from misery to fulfillment. Helen is Winnie's best friend and Winnie talks about her almost as much as she talks about herself. Helen wanted to see her friend unite with her daughter and did not want to keep anymore secrets between the mother and her daughter. Finally, she could bring the mother and her daughter together and made them happy.

Amy Tan uses storytelling to empower her female characters. Huntley remarks that one reading of *The Kitchen God's Wife* would be to examine the novel as the record of a woman's journey from silence to full

voice through the vehicle of storytelling (105). To her, this novel can be seen as a story about women's silences, and about the ways through which women can empower themselves to break those silences (106). At the beginning Winnie tells Pearl that she intentionally chose silence and inaction: "I made myself blind [and]...deaf" (*KGW* 260). She was silenced not only by her brutish husband but also by the friends who were passive and allowed her husband to continue his brutal and dehumanizing treatment of her. When Winnie narrates her life story, she breaks the long silence that has engulfed her life long time ago. Her Stories help her to build her own identity and gain self-independence.

This study has attempted to prove that most men in Amy Tan's novels are highly immersed in patriarchy. They are completely biased against women and allow limited freedom for women. They practice violence on females in various forms and degrees to satisfy their sadism and egoism. The study also confirms that both Chinese and American societies were not totally ready to give women equal share in real life. It also shows that minorities such as Chinese-Americans living in the United States still suffer from racial oppression. Women characters in Tan's novels respond to this dual oppression according to the tools available to them. They are eager to assert their own voices and empower themselves using a variety of strategies. In the two novels studied here, Chinese women characters use the strategies of matrilineal bonding, storytelling, and female friendship to empower themselves and their daughters. These strategies help them to control their environment, develop self-respect, and adopt positive outlooks and behaviors. Amy Tan considers patriarchy as oppressive and frustrating to women and society, and therefore it should be discontinued. It is clear that Amy Tan is supportive of women's empowerment and autonomy and that she dreams of a society where women are able to function as equal to men. She calls upon women to use all available strategies to empower themselves socially, politically and economically.

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## ملخص

تمكين النساء في المجتمعات الذكورية: دراسة نسوية لروايتي ايمي تان

(نادي جوي لك) و (زوجة اله المطبخ)

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تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل صورة المرأة عندما تعاني من الاضطهاد الذكوري و الاضطهاد العرقي و كيف تصرفت المرأة تجاه هذا الاضطهاد المزدوج و ما هي استراتيجيات التمكين التي استخدمتها و ذلك في روايتي الكاتبة الأمريكية-الصينية ايمي تان (نادي جوي لك) و (زوجة اله المطبخ). كل هذا يتم من منظور الدراسات النسوية feminist studies خصوصاً كتابات سيمون دي بوفوار و بيتي فريدان اللتين تدعان و تدعوان إلى حرية المرأة و تمكينها في المجتمع. و بالاستعانة بالنظرية النقدية العرقية Critical Race Theory.

و قد خلصت الدراسة إلى إن معظم الشخصيات الرجالية في روايتي ايمي تان هي شخصيات ذكورية تقف معظم الوقت ضد مساواة المرأة بالرجل و ضد تمكين المرأة في المجتمع و أن معظم هذه الشخصيات تمارس العنف البدني و المعنوي ضد المرأة و أن الأقليات في أمريكا لا تزال تعاني من الاضطهاد العرقي. كما بينت الدراسة إن المرأة في هاتين المسرحيتين تستخدم استراتيجيات عديدة لتمكين نفسها في المجتمع و منها التلاحم بين الأم و بناتها، و سرد القصص المؤثرة، و الصداقات القوية بين النساء.

**Empowering Women in Patriarchal Societies: A Feminist Study of  
Amy Tan's Novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife***

**By Dr Ehab Salah Mohammed Fayek**

**Abstract**

Amy Tan (born 1952) is a famous Chinese-American novelist known for her versatile genius. The aim of the present study is to analyze how Amy Tan depicts the image of Chinese-American women who are crushed under the forces of patriarchal systems and racial oppression and how these women react against this dual oppression. Specifically, the study explores her first two novels - *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) - to see how women are victimized and analyzes empowerment strategies which women use to overcome this dual oppression. The current study attempts to explore this neglected area referring to the work of feminists Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Freidan who support and call for total liberation and empowerment of women along with critical race theorists who address the insidious forms of racism in American society. The study proves that most men in Amy Tan's novels are highly immersed in patriarchy and practice violence on females in various forms and degrees to satisfy their sadism and egoism. The study also confirms that both Chinese and American societies are not totally ready to give women equal share in real life. It also shows that minorities such as Chinese-Americans living in the United States still suffer from racial oppression. Women characters in Tan's novels respond to this dual oppression according to the tools available to them. They are eager to assert their own voices and empower using a variety of strategies. These characters use the strategies of matrilineal bonding, storytelling, and female friendship to empower themselves and their daughters.