

JING-MEI WOO'S HYBRID IDENTITY IN AMY TAN'S *THE JOY LUCK CLUB* NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Migration is considered as a massive impact of colonization. It causes a huge number of people from a certain country (a colonized ones) move to another country due to colonization. Starting from this, usually a new society consists of mixed culture, norms, values adjusted to the altering citizens (migrants and non-migrants) that has been created. Yet, an issue of one's identity appear for those who come from the two cultures as it appeared in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Jing-Mei Woo, a Chinese-born American had issue of defining her identity due to the hybridity circumstance she achieved as the daughter of immigrant parents. This research aimed to examine the portrayal of Jing-Mei Woo's hybridity identity and the way she developed her hybrid identity. This research was a qualitative research for the data were in the form of words from *The Joy Luck Club* novel. Barry's theory about hybrid identity was used to answer the research questions towards Jing-Mei Woo character. The result showed that Jing-Mei Woo experienced hybridity as she was unable to define herself whether it was her past-self (Chinese) or present-self (American), felt out of place not knowing exactly her identity form of the two cultures, and having the hybrid identity between Chinese and American cultures. While during the process, Jing-Mei Woo developed her hybrid identity by getting through the four stages: she ignored her origin's identity as a Chinese woman, denying her Chinese identity by telling her mother most of times that she was not a Chinese and that was the reason she could not understand a bit about her mother's culture, maintaining the American's way of thinking as she thought that was her identity despite the fact that she was also a Chinese, and finally realising that in order to define herself, she accepted her Chinese blood and admitted her hybrid identity as a Chinese-American woman.

Keywords: *migration, hybrid identity*

ABSTRAK

Migrasi merupakan dampak luar biasa dari kolonisasi. Peristiwa ini (migrasi) menyebabkan perpindahan sekelompok orang dengan jumlah yang banyak dari suatu negara (yang dikuasai atau dikolonisasi) ke negara lain. Biasanya sebagai akibat dari migrasi ini terbentuklah suatu masyarakat baru yang sistem-sistemnya mengandung percampuran budaya, norma-norma, serta nilai-nilai yang telah menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan yang terjadi pada masyarakatnya yang terdiri dari para migran dan non-migran. Akan tetapi, ada satu masalah yang muncul berkenaan dengan masyarakat baru yang terbentuk ini: permasalahan mengenai identitas diri seseorang yang berasal dari dua budaya berbeda seperti yang ada pada novel Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*. Jing-Mei Woo, seorang anak perempuan dari orang

tua imigran Cina dan memiliki darah Cina tetapi menetap di Amerika, memiliki permasalahan dalam menentukan identitas dirinya yang sebenarnya karena ia hidup di lingkungan hibriditas. Studi ini merupakan studi kualitatif karena menganalisa data yang berupa kata-kata dari novel The Joy Luck Club. Teori dari Barry mengenai identitas hibrida digunakan untuk menjawab pokok-pokok permasalahan pada karakter Jing-Mei Woo. Hasil studi ini memperlihatkan bahwa Jing-Mei Woo mengalami hibriditas karena ia tidak mampu menentukan identitas dirinya, apakah identitas itu adalah dirinya yang dimasa lalu sebagai seorang Cina ataukah dirinya yang sekarang sebagai seorang Amerika, merasa tidak memiliki tempat yang cocok dengan dirinya, dan memiliki identitas hibrida antara budaya Cina dan Amerika. Selama proses Jing-Mei Woo mengembangkan identitas hibridanya, ia melewati empat tahapan yaitu: Jing-Mei Woo mengabaikan identitas aslinya sebagai wanita Cina, menolak identitasnya sebagai seorang Cina dengan selalu mengatakan pada ibunya bahwa ia bukanlah seorang Cina maka wajar jika ia tidak bisa mengerti sedikit pun soal budaya ibunya, menganggap bahwa identitas sebenarnya yaitu dengan mengikuti pola pikir seorang Amerika terlepas dari fakta bahwa ia juga memiliki darah seorang Cina dalam tubuhnya, dan akhirnya Jing-Mei Woo menerima darah Cina dalam tubuhnya dan mengakui identitas hibridanya sebagai seorang keturunan Cina-Amerika, yang membuatnya mampu menentukan identitas dirinya yang sebenarnya.

Kata Kunci: migrasi, identitas hibrida

A. INTRODUCTION

As one of a massive impact of colonization is the migration of people around the world. Due to several changing conditions of post-colonization that appear to a certain colonized country such as in the economic state, government policy, ethnics, religions, etc. somehow make the local people migrate to another country. This event of migration gives changing to the destination country for both the migrants and the non-migrants. The changing happens to some aspects of social, cultural, economic, institutions for both sides (migrants and non-migrants) so it creates a new whole society (Magobunje in Kurekova 10-11). This new society consists of combining values, norms, even beliefs and traditions from both sides that become their society system.

There are many literary works about migration issue these days. Be it about the stories focusing on the migrants people, their condition before or after the migration, reasons why migrating, the adjusting culture between the migrants and non-migrants, etc. Yet, one that is considered as the most outstanding work about migration and culture is a novel by Amy Tan, entitled *The Joy Luck Club*. It was a story of a Chinese minority group that experienced different values from American majority group.

The researcher analyzed about the hybrid identities of Jing-Mei Woo (main character) as the focus of this research. She was confused of her real identity. She was born in China and grew up in America, but she did not understand about Chinese culture where her family was born. It made her to question her own identity as a person. The researcher used hybridity theory by Peter Barry to analyze about the portrayal of hybridity in Jing-Mei Woo's identity and the way she developed her hybrid identity in *The Joy Luck Club* novel by Amy Tan.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Barry, in post-colonial study, hybridity in literature and culture theory is described about the construction of culture and identity (16). Hybridity is related with cross-over of ideas and identities where there is a cross between the colonizer's and the

colonized's cultures in the situations when individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (Barry 131). Hybridity can be experienced from different culture, where the individual is able to create double identities or well known as hybrid identity.

a) The past and the present

According to Barry, the term of "the past and the present" refers to the individuals who leave their country (origin culture) and they have to accept their new country (new culture) that resulting them as the colonized people, have the responsibility to get back to the past to find a voice and identity (127). This means that even though their present culture is where they live at the moment yet the past (the origin culture) also takes part of shaping their culture even after arriving in the present country. The past is very crucial for the search of identity. The different cultures might be that of the colonizer's and that of the colonized's, as produced by colonization. Wherever, as long as the individuals do migration, they will achieve the host's culture and the origin's culture.

b) Displacement

Displacement happens to people who experience colonization or migration. The sense of displacement makes the colonized people or the immigrants to feel alienated and have crisis in self-image. This happens when one person or event is represented by another which in some way linked or associated with it, perhaps because of a similar-sounding word, or by some form of symbolic substitution (Barry 71). It means that displacement makes someone to feel different from other people in a place such as the way they thinking, their skin and also have crisis in self-image. They are different from the people from their origin culture, but they are not the same as the people in the new place or the people with the superior culture. In the case of immigrants, the sense of displacement makes them to feel homeless or 'out of place' (Barry 20). They feel different with other people and isolated for not having other people who experience the displacement as they do.

c) Hybrid Identity

Barry explains that double identity or hybrid concerns with the identity issues (128). Hybrid identity is an identity which crossed or mixtured of more than one identity. It is related to the relationship between the past and present and also the sense of displacement, in which an individual might develop a new identity. However, the individuals will get the difficulties of accepting the new culture (129). Although hybrid identity is caused by colonization, but it also depicts the immigrant people who gain double identity or hybrid identity. At the end, the people with hybrid identity still have to choose between their origin culture or they have to leave and try to accept and learn the new culture where they live in at the moment to be their real identity. Furthermore, there are four stages of an individual to develop their hybrid identity:

a. Ignoring Origin's Identity

In defining one's identity, an individual mostly expresses anxiety toward the inability to reconcile an origin culture with another new culture that a person surrounds in. That is why people sometimes ignore their origin's value because they are confused whether to follow their origin or their new identity (165).

b. Denying Origin's Identity

According to Barry, identity is an important issue in hybridity. It is also a key in racial and ethnic conflict especially with cross-culture parents, where the children disagree with their parents about who is in control of their lives which resulting

about how they would present themselves to the outside world (166). That is why as children who are born and raised in cross-culture parent, facing the disagreement with their parents especially about how their mother takes fully control of their life and how the children should listen to every word they have been given. However, when a conflict of identity occurs, it can be difficult to resolve. It happens because the opponent can be seen as a bad person and their views and feeling are not worthy of attention. It is seen as a threat to one's own identity.

c. Maintaining New Identity's Way of Thinking

It shows that the individuals are able to maintain their new culture's way of thinking where they become more open minded. But then on the other side, the individuals also obtaining the former culture's values from their parents (167).

d. Accepting Origin's identity

In this stage, the individuals start to accept their origin identity through a long process. After being told of what kind their origin identity is, they start to question their true identity (168). Hybrid identity occurs when a person has two culturally identities as the cause of colonization. When a person has finally accepted his or her origin's identity without any denial along with the new identity they receive at the new place is actually a moment that person develops the hybrid identity. In other words, hybrid identity is not about which one of the two identities of culture (the origin and the new cultures) will be taken as the only identity by the migrants people, yet this is about when two different cultures exist and shape a person's identity.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative method because this reseach did not use numbers as its data and formula during the analysis. The data of this research were words and taken from conversations and sentences from *The Joy Luck Club* novel written by Amy Tan. As the research instrument, the researcher used herself to analyze hybrid identity towards Jing-Mei Woo character. There were several steps implemented in this research to get all the data needed: the researcher read the novel to get the data, while reading the novel, the researcher focused at the plot of the novel to understand the whole story.

The data presented based on two research questions about Jing-Mei Woo's hybrid identity that had been portrayed and the way she developed her hybrid identity in *The Joy Luck Club* novel by Amy Tan by using Barry's hybridity theory. After the data had been presented and collected, the researcher answered the research questions and made the conclusion of this research based on the explanation of the data. This research used the data triangulation (qtd. in Hales 13) as its triangulation method due to the use of valid data source which was a published novel by Amy Tan entitled *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989 officially published from a publisher (Sandra Di jkstra, New York). Aside from its officially published matter, the used of data triangulation in this research was also because of the novel issue's concerned on spesific time (in 1989), person (Chinese migrants, Chinese-American born daughters), and space which took place in China and America.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Hybridity Portrayed within Jing-Mei Woo's Identity

Hybridity portrayed in Jing-Mei Woo's identity was identified into three characteristics: the past and the present, displacement, and hybrid identity.

a. The past and the present

Jing-Mei Woo, in order to find her hybrid identity, she tried to trace back her family history before she could define her identity. At first, Jing-Mei Woo who did not understand Chinese language still tried to learn it, yet because she did not understand the language in the first place, it was very difficult for her. The fact that she could not understand Chinese language got her to be stuck in between her past self (when she was a child who understood even just a bit of Chinese words) and her present self (when she could not understand the Chinese words at all).

It was one of those Chinese expressions that means the better half of mixed intentions. I can never remember things I did not understand in the first place (Tan 6).

At the moment when Jing-Mei Woo had been told that she had twin sisters in China, she decided to visit China for the first time to find her mother's twin daughters and her families in China. By tracing back her family's history, Jing-Mei Woo thought she would be able to find her self-identity by letting go of her past and embraced her identity in the present. This was what Barry calls as the past and the present. Before she defined her identity, Jing Mei Woo traced her family's history by promising to herself that she would be able to tell them about their mother's story.

b. Displacement

In this novel, there were cultural barriers between Jing-Mei Woo as a daughter who grew up in America and her mother as an immigrant. Moreover, she did not know about the Chinese culture, particularly about Chinese mahjong (a traditional game) because she did not know her mother's story. She could not see her good fortune because she did not know her mother well. Therefore, she felt out of place not knowing the meaning of Chinese mahjong as part of Chinese culture. She failed to recognise Chinese customs and traditions especially the difference between Chinese mahjong and Jewish mahjong.

“What’s the different between Jewish and Chinese mahjong?” I once ask my mother. I couldn’t tell by her answer if the game were different or just her attitude towards Chinese and Jewish people.

“Entirely different kind of playing,” She said in her English explanation voice “Jewish mahjong, they watch only for their own tile, play only with their eyes.”

Then she switched to Chinese: “Chinese mahjong, you must play using your head, very tricky. You must watch what everybody else throws away and keep that in your head as well. And if nobody play well, then the game becomes like Jewish mahjong. Why play? There is no strategy. You’re just watching people make mistakes.”

This kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different language, which we did. I talked to her in English, she answered back in Chinese” (Tan 23).

During her conversation with her mother about Chinese and Jewish mahjong, Jing-Mei Woo felt a massive barrier between them: she spoke in English while her mother replied in Chinese. Hearing her mother's Chinese language made Jing-Mei Woo out of place by knowing the fact she was born as a Chinese yet she did not understand her origin culture as well as her mother. She failed to grasp her origin's identity which made her to feel out of place neither as a Chinese nor as the native American.

Another moment when Jing-Mei Woo felt out of place when she read a letter from her twin sisters in China. They wrote the letter in Chinese words. Regarding that Jing-Mei Woo could not read the Chinese words, at that moment when she read the letter, Jing-Mei Woo once again experienced the gap between herself and her mother's culture.

My sister, I repeat to myself, saying these two words together for the first time.

Auntie An-mei is holding a sheet of paper as thin as wrapping tissue. In perfectly straight vertical rows I see Chinese characters written in blue fountain-pen ink. A word is smudged. A tear? I take the letter with shaking hands, marveling at how smart my sisters must be able to read and write in Chinese (Tan 30).

Jing-Mei Woo felt that she was also her mother's daughter as well as her twin sisters, yet she was the only one who could not understand the Chinese culture. She felt jealous towards her twin sisters for being able to understand her mother's culture even though they lived apart from her. It broke Jing-Mei Woo's heart to see the reality that she was the closest to her mother yet she was in fact the farthest for not being able to understand anything about her. This situation made her to feel alienated from her origin's culture as a Chinese. On the other hand, Jing-Mei Woo also could not find her place in her present culture as an American. Every time she tried to think and acted as an American, her mother and her surroundings kept pulling her back to the Chinese culture which she could not understand. Her feeling of displacement was related to a cultural gap between the original culture of the immigrants and their new place's culture.

c. Hybrid Identity

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-Mei Woo was described of having two identities as what Barry describes as hybrid identity. She was born and raised in America and both of her parents were immigrants who migrated from China to America. She was confused to define her identity whether it was as a Chinese or an American. On the other hand, she felt that she was American, but her Chinese identity flowed within her blood.

“Mama. Mama,” We all murmur, as if she is among us. My sister look at me, proudly. “Meimei jandale,” says one sister proudly to the other. “Little sister has grown up.” I look at their faces again and I see no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family it is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go (Tan 305).

When Jing-Mei Woo finally met her twin sisters, out of sudden, she felt that part of her was Chinese. She remembered what her mother said about once she was born Chinese, she was Chinese. After she stepped her feet in China for the first time, she could not deny her mother's word and agreed with her mother after she arrived in China. The moment Jing-Mei Woo realised and admitted that she was a Chinese was when she looked at her twin sisters' faces. She saw that they looked nothing alike her, but the blood flowed inside them were the same. It was from her mother as a Chinese. Jing-Mei Woo acknowledged she was Chinese and also admitted that she had experienced hybrid identity as a Chinese-American.

2. The Process of Developing Jing-Mei Woo's Hybrid Identity

There were four steps Jing-Mei Woo got through in developing her hybrid identity: ignoring origin's identity, denying origin's identity, maintaining new identity's way of thinking, and accepting the origin's identity.

a. Ignoring origin's identity

Everytime Jing-Mei Woo's mother spoke in Chinese, she always answered her mother using English. It occurred because Jing-Mei Woo did not understand Chinese, and chose to ignore her origin's identity by refusing to learn more about Chinese.

"But with me, when we were alone, my mother would speak in Chinese. I could understand the words but not the meanings"
(Tan 109).

Even though her mother gave birth and raised Jing-Mei Woo in America, but she hoped that her daughter would learn about Chinese, however, Jing-Mei Woo still ignored it and refused to learn how to speak Chinese. It was clear that Jing-Mei Woo ignored her origin language because as an American she had to speak English and followed the American customs.

b. Denying origin's identity

At one time, Jing-Mei Woo's mother forced her to learn playing piano, because she also wanted her daughter to be the child prodigy just like other Chinese daughters would be. Yet, Jing-Mei Woo refused it and said that she could not make her to do things she did not want to.

I didn't budge. And then I decided. I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before and look what happened, she was the stupid one.

"I'm not your slave. This isn't China. You can't make me."

"You want me to be someone I'm not! I'll never be the kind of daughter that you want me to be!"

"There two kinds of daughter; obedient or follow own mind. Only one kind of daughter could live in this house, obedient kind."

"Then I wish I wasn't your daughter! I wish you weren't my mom!"

“Too late to change this” (Tan 152).

The quarrel Jing-Mei Woo had with her mother happened because her mother kept imposing her to learn piano like any Chinese children would which in truth she could not. Jing-Mei Woo rebelled towards her mother words because at the moment she still denied herself as a Chinese. She did not feel that she was a part of Chinese and therefore had no obligation to follow the Chinese customs as her mother told her to be. It was because at the present she lived in America then she had to live as the way an America would and not following her origin's culture way of life.

Jing-Mei Woo also denied her Chinese origin when her mother told that her appearance looked exactly like a Chinese woman, but she denied it and told her mother that her Chinese identity was only limited to her external features.

”Cannot be helped,” my mother said when I denied that I had any Chinese whatsoever below my skin. So there was no doubt in her mind, whether I agree or not: once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese.

“And someday you will see.” Said my mother “It’s in your blood, waiting to be let go” (Tan 153).

The reason why Jing-Mei Woo kept denying her Chinese identity was because she could not understand any part of being a Chinese. Jing-Mei Woo felt anxious towards the inability to reconcile her Chinese heritage as her origin's identity with her American surrounding. She thought the blood of a Chinese within her only existed because her mother was a Chinese. Excluding that fact, she could only feel that her identity was as an American for the rest of her life she was only familiar with being an American, hence she only acknowledged her identity as an American.

c. Maintaining new identity's way of thinking

Jing-Mei Woo had obtained the Chinese norms which acquired from her parents, her extended family and her ethnic community who were mostly had their Chinese point of views or perspectives as their origin identity, but she also tried to maintain her new identity as an American.

I used to dismiss her criticism as just more of her Chinese superstitions, beliefs that conveniently fit the circumstances. In my twenties, while taking Introduction of Psychology, I tried to tell my mom why she shouldn't criticize so much, that it didn't lead to a healthy learning environment (Tan 298).

She started to criticize the way her mother as a Chinese who still believed in superstitions. It showed that Jing-Mei Woo started to think fully open-minded which based on American way of thinking. She followed the perspective of American which was more rational and more open-minded, especially towards the issue such as Chinese superstitions.

Besides the matter of Chinese superstitions, Jing-Mei Woo also criticized about the differences of the way women were treated between in America and China.

Eating is not a gracious event here. It's a though everybody had been starving. They push large forkfuls into their mouths, jab at more pieces of pork, one right after the other. They are not like the ladies of Kwelin, who I always imagined. Savored their food with a certain detached delicacy. And then, almost as quickly as they started, the men get up and leave the table. As if on cue, the woman packs at last morsels and then carry plates and bowls to the kitchen and dump them in the sink. The woman take turns washing their hands, scrubbing them vigorously. Who started this ritual? (Tan 300-301)

In America, she saw herself and understood the equality rights between women and men. That women were treated fairly as a human being and not as an object just like in China. It was shown towards her when one day she and her mother's friends (the aunties) were having dinner. Right at the moment after finishing dinner, the men then got up and just left the table without helping to clean it while the women were meant to do the cleaning. She saw that there was something wrong with the custom and therefore tried to maintain her American way of thinking before she could accept her Chinese origin.

d. Accepting the origin's identity

Jing-Mei Woo experienced a mixed identity rather than one particular identity. As an immigrant, she was born and raised in America even though both of her parents were Chinese. So there was a mix-identity between Chinese and American within Jing-Mei Woo's identity.

The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese. And then we are caught in a stream of people rushing, shoving, pushing us along, until we find ourselves in one of a dozen lines waiting to go through customs. I feel as if I were getting on the number 30 Stockton bus in San Francisco. I am in China, I remind myself. And somehow the crowds don't bother me. It feels right (Tan 312).

In the end, Jing-Mei Woo finally accepted her origin identity as a Chinese. She was sure that she and her sisters had the same identities. She realised that no matter how hard she tried to ignore and denied her origin identity, it was clearly that she was Chinese. After maintaining her new identity's way of thinking, she was able to accept her origin's identity and not only that, but by accepting her origin's identity, she also could define her mix-identity or her hybrid identity. Jing-Mei Woo was not only a Chinese, but she was also an American which created her hybrid identity as a Chinese-American.

Jing-Mei Woo as the main character showed all characteristics of hybridity: first about the past and the present, Jing-Mei Woo tried to trace back her family history before she could define her identity. After she had been told that she had twin sisters in China, she

decided to visit China for the first time to find her mother's twin daughters and her families in China. Second about displacement, Jing-Mei Woo experienced the displacement because she felt like the only person who did not know anything about her mother's story. She also acknowledged the difference of identity between herself and her twin sisters, Chwun Yu and Chwun Hwa. It showed that she failed to connect her mother's culture within herself. Third about hybrid identity, Jing-Mei Woo finally acknowledged that she was a Chinese and admitted she had experienced hybrid identity as a Chinese-American.

This experience had several process of developing Jing-Mei Woo's hybrid identity that were ignoring origin's identity, denying origin's identity, maintaining new identity's way of thinking, and accepting the origin's identity. As the result, Jing-Mei Woo realised that no matter how hard she tried to ignore and denied her origin identity, it was clearly that she was a Chinese. She was also able to define her mix-identity or her hybrid identity. It meant that she was also an American which created her hybrid identity as a Chinese-American.

E. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research questions, there were two conclusions about Jing-Mei Woo character as follow:

1. Hybridity portrayed within Jing-Mei Woo's identity

There were three characteristics of hybridity in Jing-Mei Woo character. First, she was unable to define herself from the past and the present. Second, she felt out of place not knowing what exactly her identity was. Third, she experienced hybrid identity where she had two identities: Jing-Mei Woo experienced hybridity between Chinese and American identity.

2. The Process of Developing Jing-Mei Woo's Hybrid Identity

The finding showed that Jing-Mei Woo went through the four stages in order to define her hybrid identity. Before she finally accepted her origin identity, there were four stages as Barry explains: ignoring the origin's identity, denying the origin's identity, maintaining new identity's way of thinking, and accepting origin's identity in order to define an individual's hybrid identity.

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