



ISSN 2455-393X

**Journal of the English Literator Society**

Volume 11 Issue 6 November 2025 | www.jels.in



Research Article

## **Memory, Translation, and Mobility: Hybrid Identity Practices in Amy Tan's Postcolonial Narratives**

**B. Mannisha**

*Research Scholar, Department of English, Thanthai Periyar Arts and Science College (A),  
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli - 620023, Tamil Nadu, India;*

*mannishababu1911@gmail.com*

**Dr. K. Radah**

*Associate Professor, Department of English, Thanthai Periyar Arts and Science College (A),  
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli - 620023, Tamil Nadu, India;*

*dradaheng@gmail.com*

Published online: 5 November 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17528542>

### **ABSTRACT**

Amy Tan theorises, dramatises, and complicates hybridity and cultural negotiation as lived practices of identity formation across generations, languages, geographies, and political regimes in her six major novels: *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013). This paper makes the case, drawing on postcolonial and transnational frameworks, that Amy Tan's work positions diasporic subjects in intersubjective spaces mother/daughter, sister/sister, tourist/local, where translation, superstition, trauma, and storytelling serve as mediating technologies of hybrid identity. Amy Tan's work stages "being" and "becoming" as dynamic negotiations between ancestral memory and modern adaptation. The reading generates three claims: first, that Amy Tan's distinctive mother-daughter architecture exemplifies an ethics of hybridity based on intergenerational discourse; second, that Amy Tan's subsequent transnational turn expands hybrid negotiation from domestic ethnic relations to cross-border, geopolitical encounters; and third, that Amy Tan's narrative poetics frame tales, spectral narration, and polyphonic structure perform hybridity both thematically and formally. In addition to providing careful



---

readings of significant passages in each book, the study synthesises critical knowledge on Chinese American literature, diaspora, hybridity, and transnationalism. Amy Tan is reframed in the end as a cultural negotiation theorist and novelist whose works shed light on the ways in which memory, mediation, and movement are used to re-author identities.

**KEYWORDS:** Hybridity, Cultural Negotiation, Diaspora, Chinese American Literature, Transnationalism.

## **FULL PAPER**

It is best to view Amy Tan's writing as a thorough examination of hybridity as a lived, negotiated practice in which cultural identities are iterative reconciliations across family histories, migrations, and international crossings rather than stable inheritances or straightforward assimilations. Amy Tan's stories are organised around mother-daughter and sisterly dyads, which offer private spaces for cultural translation. Later works broaden these spaces to include international travel and misinterpretations of other cultures. Alongside diaspora studies and Asian American transnational criticism, which emphasise fluid identities created both within and across borders, postcolonial concepts of hybridity, the "contact zone," in-betweenness, and the interanimation of past and present serve as a framework for this interpretation.

First, the theoretical framework for hybridity and cultural negotiation is established. Next, each novel is examined, with recurrent mediating mechanisms such as superstition, translation, trauma testimony, archives, ghost/spirit narrative, storytelling, and cross-cultural travel traced. The development and scope of Amy Tan's hybrid poetics are demonstrated by a final synthesis that unifies Amy Tan's early and late stages into a unified arc, from transnational ethical negotiation (tourists/locals, courtesan economics, colonial modernities) to domestic diasporic negotiation (mothers/daughters, sisters).

### **Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Hybridity, Diaspora, and Transnationalism**

By highlighting the inseparability of the colonial past and neocolonial present as well as the continuous "in-betweenness" of diasporic life, postcolonial approaches to hybridity go beyond biological mixing to refer to "new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation." According to this perspective, identity is created through dialogue with the past but cannot be unmediatedly returned to its

---

origins; individuals must choose between "being" (ancestral continuities) and "becoming" (adaptive rearticulations), a dyad that cultural theorists and diaspora scholars place at the centre of the formation of hybrid identities. The vectors of dispersion, memory, and ambivalence are added by diaspora studies, which highlight how people preserve cultural continuity while adjusting to host societies, creating hybrid socialites and aesthetics. By exploring the way writings traverse languages, genres, and geographical boundaries to create internationally infused identities and criticisms, Asian American transnational literary studies expands this discipline. Themes of gender, assimilation, generational struggle, and multilingual reoccur as fundamental coordinates for identity work in Chinese American literary history.

Amy Tan's works perform hybridity as process rather than stance across this critical environment. Through narrative devices that also function as identity technologies, her characters navigate cultural scripts such as American individualism, Chinese and English language worlds, superstition and rationalism, and Confucian filiality. These include storytelling as a pedagogy and archive, superstition as symbolic grammar, translation as an ethical relationship, trauma and testimony as a generational memory, and ghostly/spectral mediation as an aesthetic of "in-between" seeing.

### **I. *The Joy Luck Club*: Mythology, Narrative, and the Mother-Daughter Hybrid Identity Lab**

*The Joy Luck Club* presents hybridity as an intergenerational negotiation, as evidenced by its polyphonic structure and interleaving of San Francisco and China. According to studies, second-generation girls negotiate identity development as cultural hybridisation by striking a balance between lived American modernity and inherited Chinese standards; the result is a hybrid identity expressed through re-established connections to the maternal archive. As places where translation and conflict paradoxically allow for identification and reattachment, the story dramatises "cultural clashes, language discrepancies, and generational gaps." Rather than rejection or simple assimilation, hybridity is modelled as interpretive continuity in recent work, which emphasises superstition as a cultural anchor and a negotiation site. Mothers' cosmologies luck, fate, and taboo become symbolic grammars that daughters initially resist but later reinterpret as connective tissues for belonging and meaning.

The main source of tension, according to critical accounts of Sino-American cultural conflict, is the mother's desire for bicultural success to be Chinese while succeeding in the United States which leads to communication breakdowns that the novel fixes through storytelling, returning to China, and ritual acts that transform memory into present identity. An early indication of Amy Tan's hybrid ethics, the overall image from scholarship and textual analysis depicts a domestic diaspora where

---

identity is co-authored through intergenerational discourse and narrative remembrance.

## **II. *The Kitchen God's Wife*: Postcolonial Memory, Diasporic Dislocation, and Gender Negotiation**

The mother-daughter laboratory is expanded into a postcolonial and feminist register in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The work is interpreted by critics as a diasporic account of cultural memory that illustrates how identity is reconstructed across borders and generations and maps the "triple disruption" of migration place, language, and social codes onto the protagonist's life story. Identity negotiation is mediated by storytelling as an ethical act of revelation and reconciliation; scholarship highlights Winnie's painful history in China and the mother-daughter tensions that occur in the United States as they struggle over culture, language, and self-definition. As a means of re-gendering cultural symbols and an allegorical critique of patriarchal valuation, the mythic subtext the Kitchen God and his wife aligns with postcolonial feminist concerns regarding "double colonisation" and the re-authorization of women's subjectivity both within and against tradition.

According to the novel's theme, cultural negotiation is a transition from silence to communication: the act of narrating makes cultural inheritance flexible and talkable, allowing the mother to accept her daughter's American life as a valid present and the daughter to accept her mother's China as a useful past. Instead of assimilation, the outcome is a deliberately hybrid identity that is shared but challenged and addressed via narrative labour.

## **III. *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Sisterhood, Spirits, and Hybrid Perception's Yin/Yang**

Amy Tan's third book examines the spiritual and perceptual aspects of hybridity by shifting the focus from mother-daughter relationships to sisterly ties. The layered contexts (San Francisco and Changmian; Taiping Rebellion in 19th-century China) and recurring contrasts two sisters, two civilisations, two centuries, and two epistemologies (rational/empirical versus spiritual/yin) are noted by critics. For Olivia, whose half-Chinese, half-Caucasian identity is orientated towards American secular modernity, Kwan's "yin eyes," her assertions that she speaks with "yin people," and her outspoken Chineseness serve as both annoyances and mentors. According to scholarship, haunting and disappearance serve as narrative elements that perform the "in-between" of hybrid identity and as metaphors for buried cultural memory.

This perspective is supported by research on diaspora and identity negotiation: Chinese American subjects "choose or combine competing values" to negotiate their identities, with history, sociocultural background, and belonging creating a hybrid formation, particularly in intergenerational or mixed-heritage households. By placing Olivia in an ancestral terrain and requiring interpretive openness to Kwan's alternative

---

ontology, the trip to China in *The Hundred Secret Senses* literalises this negotiation. The end outcome is a temporary reconciliation wherein the hybrid identity encompasses not just sociological accretions but also emotive, narrative, and spiritual ways of knowing.

#### **IV. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*: Translation, Archives, and Hybrid Memory Ethics**

Identity negotiation in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is centred on translation across languages and generations as well as archive recovery. Research focusses on LuLing's "being and becoming," her vicissitudes between her Chinese heritage and American society, creating equivocal identifications and hybrid behaviours that are never truly settled. The orphanage in the novel, which is administered by Christian missionaries in a Buddhist/folk religious setting, represents institutional hybridity, while Ruth's translation and LuLing's written narrative carry out the intergenerational task of making the past understandable in the present. According to scholarship, this is a classic example of hybrid identity formation: the mother's textualized memory expands the daughter's American subjectivity, and the ethics of attentive reading, translation, and retelling realise cultural negotiation.

Diaspora critique emphasises how a new, integrative identity that recognises pain and re-establishes cultural ties without erasing diversity is contingent upon mother-daughter reconciliation. In other words, Amy Tan views hybridity as a technique that reauthorises both persons' identities through memory-work, language mediation, and reciprocal recognition rather than as a compromise.

#### **V. *Saving Fish from Drowning*: Cultural blindness, transnational travel, and ethical hybridity**

A global change occurs in *Saving Fish from Drowning*, when the story shifts from the home realm to an itinerary of Americans travelling around China and Burma under the guidance and narration of Bibi Chen's ghost. With less personal mother-daughter plotting, more politics, cultural satire, and ethical investigation into Western conceptions of the "other," critics position this book as a departure from Amy Tan's previous works. The story's humorous abductions and miscommunications tourists unaware that they are being abducted by a Karen group, the prophetic overlay, and misidentification showcase the boundaries of touristic cosmopolitanism and portray cultural blindness as a moral failing. Amy Tan here "reflects on the West's blindness in its perception of other cultures," according to publishing and paratextual assessments, raising the stakes of hybrid negotiation from intercultural ethics to personal identity.

Analysing the journey episodes closely reveals how Amy Tan's poetics of misrecognition extends the project of hybridity: ethical hybridity necessitates both responsible cross-border seeing and attachment to one's ancestral archive. These episodes include market scenes, bureaucratic obstacles, and the group's naïveté about

---

local suffering. In this register, hybridity turns into a cosmopolitan disposition that is put to the test against political instability, unequal power, and colonial history's aftereffects.

## **VI. *The Valley of Amazement*: Colonial Shanghai, Courtesan Modernities, and Generational Transitions**

Within a complex transnational history, *The Valley of Amazement* revisits mother-daughter themes, including the birth of the Republic, the fall of the Qing, Shanghai's prostitute culture, foreign concessions, and wartime displacements. Identity development in a setting of colonial modernities is highlighted by both critics and summaries. For example, American Lulu transforms into a Shanghai madam, and Violet, who is half Chinese and half American, is brought up in courtesan institutions and must negotiate racialised desire and gendered economy. According to scholarly analysis, the novel's dual narrative serves as a lengthy reflection on intergenerational storytelling, inherited pain, and the morality of forgiveness and atonement as means of mending one's identity. Amy Tan's research on courtesan culture and the global positioning of "Shanghailanders," which places personal histories within geopolitical crosscurrents, is highlighted in reviews and author profiles.

The scale of cultural negotiation increases in this final work: hybridity is influenced by colonial spatial hierarchies, global capital, and racial-sexual economies just as much as by family. However, the book stays true to Tan's identity technologies: narrative confession, mother-daughter reunion, and archives (photographs, house "rules") all serve to piece together identity from pieces. As a mature articulation of Amy Tan's lengthy argument that hybrid identity is not a deficiency but a resource, when rooted in true recollection and mutual acknowledgment Violet's acceptance of her Chinese heritage serves as both a survival strategy and an ethical awareness.

## **The Poetics of Hybridity: Using Storytelling to Negotiate Culture**

Amy Tan's formal changes artistically express hybridity; they are not incidental. In *The Joy Luck Club*, segmented frameworks and polyphony create a dialogic arena where opposing cultural grammars collide. Archival mediation is enacted through the use of framing stories and memoirs in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The ethereal narration and sisterly counterpoint in *Saving Fish from Drowning* and *The Hundred Secret Senses* represent in-betweenness as voice. Intimate existence is embedded in geopolitical change in *The Valley of Amazement's* international historical sweep. The emphasis on "hybrid poetics with two-pronged geopolitical critiques" in transnational Asian American literary research, which transcends languages and genres to undermine distinct national frames, is in line with these forms. In *The Joy Luck Club*, superstition serves as a recurrent fulcrum for negotiation and reinterpretation,



---

serving as a symbolic and narrative framework that both divides and unites generational realms.

### **Translation, Memory, and Hybridity: Identity Technologies**

Three identity technologies appear frequently throughout the oeuvre: Storytelling as Pedagogy and Repair: Amy Tan's characters discover their identities through hearing previously untold tales, narrative brings continuity back without preventing change, a premise supported by critiques of identity creation in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*.

Translation as Ethics: Ruth's labour over LuLing's text in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* serves as a literal example of this, but translation is more comprehensive and involves deciphering spiritual claims, decoding alien locales, accessing archives, and navigating superstition into secular vernacular. The "Other" is recreated as an interlocutor rather than a spectacle through translation.

Yin/Yang of Knowing and Spectral Mediation: Ghostly narrators and spirit-viewing are used as metaphors for hybrid vision in *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *Saving Fish from Drowning*. These metaphors include seeing across life/death, past/present, and here/there. This spiritual excess insists that a hybrid identity encompasses several epistemologies and opposes empiricist reduction.

### **Power, Gender, and Postcolonial Analysis:**

Amy Tan's work is replete with postcolonial feminist themes: women negotiate patriarchal systems in China (courtesan economies, arranged marriages, and domestic abuse) and in the United States (racialisation, gendered expectations), echoing research on "double colonisation" and the rewriting of subjectivity through narrative. *The Valley of Amazement* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* are clear: courtesan histories and mythological revisionism reveal gendered inequalities while reclaiming women's autonomy via community, craft, and speech. Mother-daughter disputes in the diaspora, which are frequently interpreted as cultural clashes, also serve as criticisms of gendered silences that can only be broken via narrative. Reception studies document the empowering effects of Amy Tan's popular narratives as well as discussions on cultural correctness and audience. The critical discipline also includes criticisms of Amy Tan's portrayals, such as accusations of Orientalist inscription. Amy Tan's work resides in a transnational dialectic between aesthetic liberty and representational responsibility in a global marketplace, which includes these debates.

### **From Diaspora at Home to International Ethics:**

A trajectory appears. The mother-daughter bond serves as both a source of tension and a remedy in early works, which portray the domestic diaspora as the dominant site of hybrid negotiation. Subsequent works look outward to colonial

---

histories and transnational itineraries, asking what ethical hybridity looks like when Western subjects encounter non-Western locations and when imperial modernities frame racialised desire and gendered labour. *The Valley of Amazement* re-situates identity in multi-imperial Shanghai, rendering hybridity inextricably linked to political economics and spatial organisation; *Saving Fish from Drowning* parodies shallow cosmopolitanism and calls for reflexive seeing. The response is the same in both stages: hybridity involves work of remembering, translating, listening, rewriting myth, and mending relationships.

### **Spectral Mediations and Semantic Bridges: Cultural Hybridity Throughout Amy Tan's Literary Works**

Superstition as a Semantic Bridge in *The Joy Luck Club*: In sequences when daughters dismiss omens or taboos as unreasonable, narrative arcs later return to those signs as keys to comprehending maternal choices and sacrifices. Critics contend that superstition serves as a language of ethics rather than as exotic colour, with luck and fate representing obligation and relationality. By acknowledging this grammar, daughters are able to incorporate Chinese symbolic worlds into American selfhood, creating a hybrid identity that is safe enough to respect both.

Voice and Myth Revision in *The Kitchen God's Wife*: Winnie's life story is reframed by the legendary irony that the Kitchen God becomes divine through shame but his mistreated wife is left uncanonized. The book shifts moral authority to women's testimony through storytelling and confession, turning myth into counter-myth and serving as an example of postcolonial feminist reappropriation. Here, re-narrated dignity and narratively mediated shame are the sources of identity construction.

Epistemic Hybridity in *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Olivia is sceptical about Kwan's "yin eyes" until crises and travel create a place for interpretation. Empirist certainty is called into question by the novel's alternating past-life narratives and present-day plot, which implies that hybridity involves epistemic hospitality accepting story as a mode of truth suitable to the palimpsest of diasporic memory.

Intergenerational Repair and Translation in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*: Through Ruth's translation of LuLing's narrative, self-awareness and forgiveness are made possible by transforming an ambiguous maternal past into a common archive. The orphanage is criticised for being an institutional hybrid; LuLing's subjectivity varies among geocultural sites, highlighting the fluid "becoming" of identity. Reading is a perfect example of hybrid identity work, where the daughter's "becoming" (American life) and the mother's "being" (ancestral links) collide.

Parody of superficial cosmopolitanism in *Saving Fish from Drowning*: A trip that turns into a story of Western misinterpretation is framed by Bibi Chen's ethereal narration. An ethics of attention is highlighted by the group's ignorance of their kidnapping, their



---

consumption of cultural "difference," and Burma's political context. Therefore, Amy Tan extends hybridity beyond minority-majority negotiation to global responsibility: intercultural interaction necessitates humility and reflexivity in addition to curiosity.

Shanghai's Colonial Hybrid Orders in *The Valley of Amazement*: The novel examines identity within colonial spatialities treaty-port Shanghai, courtesan homes as locations of gendered labour, and the milieu of "Shanghailanders" through Lulu and Violet. While the scope and stakes are transnational and historical, the dual narrative implicates hybridity in the unequal exchanges of modernity by assembling transgenerational trauma into a reconciled story, mirroring Amy Tan's constants. Here, forgiveness and redemption are political-ethical tools for overcoming division rather than merely sentimental acts.

### **Placing Amy Tan in the Diasporic, Transnational, and Chinese American Canons:**

Amy Tan is regularly positioned among changing issues in surveys of Chinese American literature, including gender, assimilation, generational conflict, multilingual, and, more and more, transnational flows that transcend national contexts. Reading Asian American literature "without borders" and paying attention to hybrid poetics and geopolitical critique is encouraged by scholarship, Amy Tan's later novels respond to this demand in both form and content. Amy Tan's identity laboratories are grounded in the grammar of diaspora theory, which emphasises memory, ambivalence, and changing belonging. Postcolonial hybridity's emphasis on past/present entanglements also roots the frequent return to China arcs and the rejection of nostalgia as mere recuperation.

### **Arguments, Disputes, and the Morality of Representation**

The reception has not all been joyous. Some critics have pointed out linguistic or cultural errors, while others have criticised some depictions as being orientalist or catering to Western standards. However, reception studies also show how Amy Tan's stories empower readers who identify with their own mixed heritages and suppressed family history, as well as how her approachable polyphony may be used as a teaching tool to promote cultural diversity. Instead of resolving the arguments, this study interprets them as a part of the very transnational negotiation Amy Tan thematises: writing hybrid identities will inevitably be challenged both inside and outside of communities; representation is an ethical practice carried out under uneven global literatures.

### **Conclusion:**

Together, Amy Tan's books present hybridity as a moral behaviour as opposed to a fixed identity. Memory work (stories, archives, myth), mediation work (translation, reinterpretation of superstition, spirit narration), and mobility experience (diaspora

---

return, transnational travel, colonial modernities) all combine to create identities that are dialogic and long-lasting. Later novels embrace a transnational posture that tests hybrid ethics against the frictions of global crossings and unequal histories, whereas early books deepen an intra-familial model of cultural negotiation based on mother-daughter reattachment. Formally, hybridity is performed at the level of narrative structure by Amy Tan's polyphony, frame stories, spectral voices, and historical expansiveness. Hybridity is a set of behaviours that make multiple inheritances bearable rather than a loss or compromise. Amy Tan views cultural negotiation as a pedagogy of attention, translation, and mutual recognition that is learnt in kitchens, courtyards, markets, monasteries, courtesan houses, and border crossings. Amy Tan's work reads as a comprehensive introduction to becoming more than one thing in a globalised world where identities must be negotiated through memory and mobility while remaining open to the other.

### Works cited

- Bhandari, Nagendra Bahadur. *Reinventing the Self: Cultural Negotiation of LuLing in Amy Tan's The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Prithvi Academic Journal, 2020.
- Cheung, King-Kok. *Chinese American Literature without Borders*. UCLA English, 2018.
- Critical Analysis of Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*. Literariness.org, 2020.
- Critical Analysis of Amy Tan's The Hundred Secret Senses*. Literariness.org, 2020.
- Golchin, Simin. *The Process of Identity Formation in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*. University of Gavle, 2011.
- Jing - Mei Woo's Hybrid Identity in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. JBSSB, 2018.
- Johnson, Divya. *Dislocation and Identity in Amy Tan's The Kitchen God's Wife*. Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, 2013.
- Nindyasmara, Ken Ruri. *Negotiation of Identity in Diasporic Literature: The Hundred Secret Senses and Ceremony*. Rubikon, 2019.
- NPR. *Saving Fish From Drowning : A New Direction for Tan*. 2005.
- The Dijkstra Agency. *The Valley of Amazement*. 2013.