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Social Status and Gender Roles in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen*
God's Wife

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Dedication

Dedicated to all the women, who got their wings broken and their dreams crushed under the weight of culture.

Dedicated to my mother

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Abstract

Females are exposed to social rules and restrictions since the day they are born. These cultural limitations force them to restrict themselves within the box that has been designed for them by the power hierarchies; neither males nor females are born dominant or submissive, respectively, they are taught to be “men” and “women” according to their culture’s standards. In this research, sociological criticism is applied for the sake of depicting the social and cultural elements in Amy Tan’s novel *The Kitchen God’s Wife* (1991), and then psychological criticism is devoted to study the effects of culture on the female characters’s attitudes and psyche.

Introduction

Since the beginning of humanity, the art of storytelling has been widely used to transmit cultures and different social experiences from one generation to another. This led to the acknowledgement of literature as the “mirror” of the society’s values, costumes, politics, beliefs, arts, superstitions, norms, and culture in general, as well as its members’ thoughts and actions. Asian-American Literature is no exception. It also functions as a demonstration of its society’s lifestyle and struggles as it is seen in the works of Amy Tan and other such writers.

Amy Tan ,who is one of the most successful and well-respected writers of her generation, was born in Oakland, California, on February 19, 1952, to immigrant Chinese parents. Throughout her childhood, the aspiring writer was torn between her parents’ desire to hold onto their mother culture and her own desire to become more of an American. This friction between cultures, in addition to the loss of her father and brother, led her to rebel against her mother. In her memoir, “Where the Past Begins: A Writer’s Memoir”, Tan reveals that her works are mainly inspired by her mother’s past stories and family secrets. Since her memoir and novels deal with topics of rape and sexism, Tan faced accusations of representing the Asian men incorrectly. In an interview with Nichol Chung, Tan responded to such accusations by saying “I’m not writing sociology, it just so happens this is what happened in my own family.” (par. 23)

The Kitchen God’s Wife is one of Amy Tan’s bestselling books. The novel is her second piece of writing, which was originally published in 1991. With its release, the book earned positive criticism by reviewers, and it has even been described by Wendy Law-Yone of *The Washington Post* as a “bigger, bolder, and, I have to say, better” version of her first novel (par.1).

The Kitchen God's Wife may be telling the story of an imaginary character, Winnie Louis, but her suffering, abuse and misery are a real reflection of the life of Daisy Tan (The writer's mother).

A main theme in the novel is the troublesome relationship between the Chinese immigrant mother, Winnie, and her American born daughter, Pearl. Throughout the story, the two felt the need to hide secrets from each other; such as Winnie's past life and Pearl's illness. However, things took a different turn when Winnie is forced to reveal her hidden reality. Other topics that are strongly present in the novel are physical, emotional and sexual abuse, discrimination based on sex, and forced marriage. The novel also depicts the influence of superstitions on the protagonist's life and how she finally took control over her own destiny.

The present study focuses on the role culture plays in shaping individuals' personality and ways of thinking. A culture that feeds its women the principles of submission and blind obedience since a very young age, produces generations of females who are unable to defend and speak up for themselves. Vice versa, a culture that plants the illusions of superiority in its males' minds produces generations of abusive and power hungry men. In *The Kitchen God's Wife* when Winnie's mother chose her freedom and run away, a funeral was held to bury her shame. "Her education was the cause" (Tan 122) is how Old Aunt justified the reason behind her decision. "The girl's eyes should never be used for reading, only for sewing. The girl's ears should never be used for listening to ideas, only to orders. The girl's lips should be small, rarely used, except to express appreciation and ask for approval..." (Tan 121), are the behaviors that are expected from women. Men in the Chinese culture, as depicted in the novel, have the right to have many wives in order to use their prettiness to add to their prestige. Strength and stubbornness during that era were considered as traits that should only belong to men.

The Kitchen God's Wife has been studied from different angles. According to Sihem Arfaoui in her article, "Reading Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* with and against the Grain of 'A Sex Which Is Not One.'" (2016), Winnie's self-hatred and sense of inferiority are planted in her mind by the gender codes which are composed by the religious and political patterns of the background she grew up in. The poor conditions and the low status of the female characters as second class citizens are believed to be the result of the way they have been raised. As a young mind, Winnie has been taught not to question men and their ruling and to "consider what your husband's opinions are. Yours do not matter so much anymore" (Tan 178). Despite being physically, mentally, and sexually abused by Wen Fu, Winnie's patriarchal society did not give her justice and viewed her husband as the victim instead, just like the myth the novel is built upon. Arfaoui in her piece of writing justifies Winnie's decision to break silence as a result of her penis-envy. Penis-envy, as it has been postulated by Freud, can come in the form of the females' desire to get access to cultural values that are supposed to be only "exclusive" to males. (148-150)

The novel has also been perceived from the view of trauma in relation to memory. Naeimeh Tabatabaei Lotfi in his article "Scrutinizing the Discursive Nature of 'Memory' in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* & Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*" (2014), points out the role of memory and mind in dealing with traumatic events. It is believed that "the impact of trauma makes the process of remembering and forgetting more complex than other situations and survivors are therefore particularly likely to express themselves in stories containing elements which are imaginary, disjointed and loaded with symbolism" (qtd. in Lotfi 142). In other words, the minds of individuals with traumatic past tend to polish and reshape the upsetting images into more satisfying ones in order to be able to cope with the present and future realities. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Winnie keeps remembering her mother's disappearing incident differently, "over the years, I tried to remember her face, the words she

said, the things we did together. I remember her ten thousands different ways” (Tan 89), (142-145)

Another issue that has been widely discussed in relation to the novel is the topic of identity, duality, and immigration. Vidhyavathi and Anbazhagan in their article entitled, “Unveiling the True Identity in Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*” (2012), discuss the duality’s problem Winnie faces in the novel. The protagonist who encounters misery and suffering in her homeland China, and happiness and comfort in her new home America feels stuck in between. The article also points out the similarity between Goa and Winnie whose right to be a “God” has been taken away from them by their husband. (1-5)

Divya Johnson in her article, “A Search for Space: Dislocation and Identity in Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*” (2013), discusses the feelings of diaspora and exile that hunt the characters. Johnson argues that the nostalgia the protagonists suffer from mirrors the experience of the immigrants and their continuous suffering to build a personal identity in the new land. The rising tension between the Chinese and American culture and between individual desires and family connection are what create the intergenerational conflicts and misunderstandings. Amy Tan herself faced such challenges of duality during her lifetime, which eventually found their way to light through her novels.

As for Kem Sungai Besi in her article “Food, Family and Desire: Women as Hungry Ghost Figures and Kitchen God in Selected Amy Tan’s Novels” (2011), she explains how the female protagonists in *The Kitchen God’s Wife* and other Amy Tan’s novels are compared to a Hungry Ghost; which is a mythic creature from the Buddhist mythology with a large appetite and a narrow throat that prevents it from getting full. The “yin” in the Chinese culture represents the females’ spirit, and since it has a lower rank than the “yang”; which represents the males’ spirit; the females during the process of incarnation are reborn to the lower rungs of hierarchy which are animals, hungry ghost and hell creatures. In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*,

Winnie and Pearl suffer from “insatiable hunger” due to the secrets that weigh down their hearts. After revealing them, the questions are answered, however, the “haunger” remains. Besi also discusses how women are facing challenges during the process of communicating with each other due to the lack of a special language between females (304-6).

On the other hand, Harold Bloom’s book *Bloom’s Modern Critical view* (2009), specifically, in the section entitled “Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*” discusses the connection between Patriarchy and imperialism. Weili, who would change her name later on to Winnie, is given as a sacrificial lamb to marry to an “acceptable” family instead of her cousin Peanut, despite being a daughter of a height class man. As the story goes on, her husband, Wen Fu, proves to be a sadist who enjoys humiliating Weili, a liar who stole his dead brother’s diploma to join to the National Air force as an officer, and a betrayer who abandoned his fellow soldiers whenever they faced Japanese aircraft. However, because of his social position, the society decides to turn blind on his crimes. This parallel between the Chinese patriarchy and the Japanese invasion is further demonstrated by Weili’s father betraying his country the same way he betrayed his own daughter. Furthermore, the effect of imperialism can be explained in the fact that Weili’s victimization wouldn’t have lasted that long if the USA did not supply the Japanese invasion with oil and scrap metal. (37-41)

This research applies two major literary approaches which are sociological criticism and psychological criticism. According to X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, the use of the sociological approach involves examining “literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received.” (qtd. in Oladokun 5). Since this approach includes Marxism and feminism, it also allows the analysis of the group’s associations that affect individuals’ status in society, and the role of gender in the piece of writing (Oladokun 5). In the present study, such approach is going to be used on the case study *The Kitchen God’s Wife*

in order to depict the status of females and males, the relationship between them, and how both are expected to behave within their society.

As for the second approach, it uses psychological theories in the process of text's interpretation with the aim of understanding the psychological aspects of it. The latter is going to be used for the sake of exploring the characters' mental state, personality, and feelings. One of the advantages of this approach is that it helps in understanding the motives behind the characters' actions in the literary text.

The sex schema theory is one of the concepts that would be discussed in the present study. Sandra L. Bem (1981) is among the first who discussed this theory which states that children since birth are exposed to information by their society to make them recognize the gender they belong to. This phenomenon is known as sex typing. During the process of learning their culture's gender schema, children become aware of the traits that are associated with their gender, for example, males' strength and females' weakness. With time children become selective and choose only the attributes that are appropriate to their gender. (Bem 354-56)

The present study includes an introduction that contains a general overview of the author, Amy Tan, the novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, short literature review and the methodologies that would be used. It is divided into three chapters. The first chapter would be a theoretical one, and it would discuss the background of sociological and psychological criticism and the theories that would be used. As for the second one, it is entitled Chinese Culture as Depicted in Amy Tan's "*The Kitchen God's Wife*". This chapter discusses the Chinese culture and its etiquettes and norms. It also aims to depict the principles and the values the Chinese live by and the status of both the females and males in their society. Just like its name says, the third chapter, which is entitled Effects of Culture on Gender Roles in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, is

concerned with the effect of culture on the psychology of the novel's individuals and how it formed their attitudes and responses.

The significance of this research mainly lies in depicting how the Chinese culture treats women, and how females are raised differently from males. Women, being fed ideas of submissions and inferiority since a very young age, were raised to be passive and easily controlled as adults. Culture, which determines the individuals' status based on gender, plays a significant role in the shaping process of the females and males attitudes toward themselves and others, and thus shaping their behaviors and responses.

Chapter One: Theoretical Background

Literature has been described by the American showman, politician, and businessman P. T. Barnum as "One of the most interesting and significant expressions of humanity". Its importance lies in the fact that it functions as a reflection of the past, present and even a prediction of the future. It also reflects the social, economic, and political condition of the society it takes place in. Thus, history and literature go hand in hand, and without literature, it is nearly impossible to figure out the lives of the people who lived before us.

By reading and discussing literature, individuals are able to expand their imagination, enrich their sense of possibility, and enhance their critical thinking. This is what is known as literary criticism. It is the judgment of a literary work on the basis of thought, reflection and analysis. According to Dr. Ambreen Kharbe in his book, *English Language and Literary Criticism* (2009):

Literary criticism has been a social institution for many centuries. Different ages take different approaches, but the activity is constant. Authors are aware of criticism so it is probably not entirely fair to say that literary critic reads meanings into the texts that

were never intended by the author. Literary criticism is not "reading between the lines" it is reading the lines very carefully, in a disciplined and informed matter (160).

Thus, literary criticism is a scientific tool that has been used by different critics, from different eras, with the intent of understanding and interpreting the intentions of the authors.

Despite the fact that the majority of the critical literary works belong to the twentieth century's era, the earliest known forms of literary criticism originate from the productions of Aristotle and Plato; such as Plato's book *Republic* (381 BC). One striking difference between the ancient and modern forms of criticism can be seen in the involvement of science. The blooming of the sociology of Marx, and the psychology of Sigmund Freud, in addition to the contribution of other influential figures, led to significant changes in literary analysis and criticism (Crews par.10-28).

Literature's analysis has always been part of liberal education. In earlier times, literary studies were handled in relation to the three humanistic disciplines of literature, history and philosophy. By the twentieth century, social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology have been used to develop new approaches to criticism. Psychology helped to explore the motivation and the attitudes of the characters and the authors, sociology made it possible to expose the relationship between the author, the literary work and the society that surrounds them. As for anthropology, it helped in shading the light on the position of ancient myths and rituals in society (Kharbe 160).

Literary criticism and literary theory have always been the center of debate among scholars. There are some who use the two terms for the same concept, while others view literary criticism as the application of literary theory; the first is the interpretation of a literary piece, whereas the latter is the different frameworks used for the sake of interpreting the piece

(Hasa par.1). Literary criticism comes in many forms including sociological criticism and psychological criticism, which are the focus of this chapter.

I.1 Sociological Criticism

Sociological criticism is a literary approach that takes into consideration the author's social and cultural background in the process of analyzing and interpreting the literary creation.

Studying the social surroundings of the author, as well as that of the literary piece, allows the reader to view the work from a whole new perspective. According to this approach, both the writers and their creations are a direct result of the social factors of the historical period they existed in. On the light of these assumptions, sociological critics believe that the sociological circumstances of Elizabethan England created Shakespeare and Shakespearean drama. The writers in this approach are considered as restricted agents, and their ideas are believed to be molded by sociological forces. In other words, their only source of inspiration is the sociological factors of the era they live in (Kharbe 205-6).

Sociological criticism has a long history. Its father is believed to be John Baptista who developed this approach in his book *Principle of a New Criticism*. Furthermore, H.A.Taine, who is a French critic and historian, is the one who first provided theoretical basis for this approach. According to him, race, milieu and moment are the three controlling factors which determine the character of literature. The first factor refers to the national and racial characteristics, as for the second, it refers to the motion of social event, while the latter refers to the motivation and necessity of the moment. On these bases, sociological criticism tries to find, not only the relationship between the authors and their society, but also the relation between the literary work and the part of the society it addresses (Kharbe206-8).

Another important feature of sociological criticism is that it functions as a commentary tool on history. It allows the exploration of the society the literary piece consumes by revealing

sociological documents and data about it. For instance, Chaucer, who is the 14th century representative poet, masterpiece *Canterbury Tales* (1387) exposes the social, political and economic circumstances of that era. *The Dickens World* (1941) by Humphry house is one of the most recognizable works of sociological criticism. In this piece of writing, the author addresses the historical events of the Victorian society, while taking illustrations from Dickens' novels. As an example, Dickens' *Oliver Twister* (1839) clearly discusses the issues of child labor, society's gangsters, and other morally wrong social phenomena. Despite its ability to deal with both fiction and poetry, this approach is more practical to fiction than to poetry. Simply due to the fact that fiction, specifically novels, largely handle social issues, while poetry is more about personal perspectives of life (Kharbe 207-10).

Sociological criticism includes two main sub-classifications, which are Marxism and socialist feminism. Even though sociological criticism has been known for a very long time, it was not until the spread of the ideas of Karl Marx that this approach became a scientific tool for literature's analysis. The significant contributions of Marxist critic, such as Louis Althusser, helped in the development of this approach (Kharbe 112).

Karl Marx, who is a German philosopher, economist, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and social revolutionary, was born in Trier, Germany on the 5th of May 1818. Marx, with the help of Friedrich Engels, developed a body of doctrine known as Marxism. Marx's works, which are basically critics, were mainly directed towards the idealist system of G.W.F. Hegel. However, his works were not produced for the sake of rejection only, but also out of the belief that a one should not interpret the world solely; a one should also be concerned with changing it. What separated Karl Marx from other philosophers, who handled an entire group of problems from one perspective, is the way he analyzed and linked each problem to the others. In addition to that, he also made attempts to relate them to the real world from a historical, social, political, and economic perspective (Chambre and McLellan par. 1-2).

Despite Marxism being found in the nineteenth century, and despite Karl Marx himself being very concerned with art and literature, it was not until the twentieth century that Marxism started getting involved with literary criticism. Even so, Marxist critics relied on more than just the statements provided by the original founders; due to the fact that Marx and Engels gave no more than just basic and fragmented comments on literature rather than a developed theory about it, because their interests were sharply oriented towards political and economic issues (Eagleton 1).

The views of Marxism, in relation to literature, revolve around the idea that literary productions are the result of the historical and social forces, and that they can be analyzed through studying the conditions in which they have been created. The main focus of this theory is on the tension between the dominant and the repressive classes of a certain era. In other words and as believed by Marx, literature is not an isolated field, but it is largely associated to the social and economic realities of its time. According to K.M. Newton in his book entitled *Twentieth Century Literary Theory: A reader* (1997), Marxism consists of the base and the superstructure; while the base includes the economic system, the superstructure is made of cultural activities such as art, literature, and philosophy. As it has been theorized by Marx, the base is a crucial element to the determination of the superstructure, which in its return embraces the ideologies of the base. Since the base introduces the dominant class's ideas as the beliefs of the whole society, this enables the individuals from experiencing the real function of society (Hamdi 155-6).

George Lukács, who is the first major Marxist critic, is the one who came out with what is known as reflectionism. Basically speaking, reflectionism assumes that a literary piece of writing functions as a reflection to the society in which it has been produced in. The aim of this theory is to discover the socioeconomic system, the class conflicts and the politics of that place and era through the analysis of the characters and their relationship with each other.

Another major figure, who has contributed in the Marxism's evolution, is the Algerian-born French philosopher Louis Althusser, who unlike Lukács, believes that art and literature are able to place their touch on a society and even change it in a revolutionary way. His theory, which is referred to as the production theory, is built upon Antonio Gramsci's idea that the dominant class manipulates the working class to accept their ideology through the use of different means including art, in a process that he named interpellation. However, since art and literature are not exclusive to the dominant class only, they can also be used by the working class to construct their own culture and possibly to start a revolution that may lead to the creation of a new power balance (Dobie 84-6).

In much simpler words, one of the essential features of Marxism is that when associated with literature, it mainly relies on Marx and Engels theory of class struggles. The main idea of this theory focuses on how the upper class manipulates the lower classes to submission through the use of ideology. The purpose behind such act is to provide the society with a fake consciousness and an invalid, reshaped perspective of reality (Reynolds).

Another form, or more appropriately sub-classification, of sociological criticism is socialist feminism. Just like in the Marxist approach, socialist feminism derives its attention towards social injustices and oppression. This approach is very critical of society and is concerned with those who are marginalized and tyrannized by the dominant culture/class (Kharbe 213).

The beginning of socialist feminism started by the end of 1960's when a group of Marxist feminist thinkers decided to speak up their minds. Juliet Mitchell's article, "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), which is inspired by Louis Althusser's ideology theory, marked the turning point of social feminism towards psychoanalysis as a tool of demonstrating and explaining the unfair circumstances women endure on a daily basis. In her piece of writing,

Mitchell put emphasis on the role ideology plays in controlling and turning women into sex objects in a patriarchal community. In the world of literature and culture's criticism, such theories led to the creation of socialist feminist critical praxis with distinctive methods of reading, writing, and interpreting literature (Kowaleski-Wallace 535).

What makes socialist feminism different from other types of feminism is the way it links women's oppression to other types of social subjections. Social feminists try to avoid isolating feminism from the rest of society by associating the struggles of women against oppression with their struggle against other types of social injustices, on the basis of race, class, and economic status. Besides acknowledging the effect of economic dependency on women's liberation, social feminism also takes into consideration the role psychology and personality play in this process of enslaving or freeing women (Napikoski "Socialist Feminism Definition and Comparisons" par. 1-8).

Despite the similarities between the two approaches, Marxism and social feminism differ in a number of points. When it comes to literary analysis, Marxists pay attention to the material conditions of the literary outputs, while socialist feminists focus more on the details of women's lives and value. Another point of disagreement between the two approaches is on the way women are defined. According to Marxism, women are defined by their works (what they do and do not do); the works that enable them to build and change their materials and worlds. As for socialist feminism, it believes that women are defined by the sexuality they execute or the sexuality they are oppressed by; social experiences are formed through sexuality (Humm 74-5).

Putting the differences aside, Marxism is very helpful to feminist critics because it offers them methods of analyzing literature in relation to the social and historical contexts in which the literary piece has been produced. Such methods serve the purpose of feminist critics who aim to detect evidences of the oppressive circumstances women lived in through history from

literature. Another reason for why Marxism is so important to social feminists is the fact that Marxists reject the idea of literature as a separated form. From a Marxist perspective, literary writings are a reflection of the social patterns and behaviors, thus the maltreatments the characters go through in the literary production, is a reflection of the abuse women endured in the representative society (Humm 75).

A major theme and a central focus of socialist feminists is on the way gender and institutions' representations connect. As an example, Zoe Fairbairns, who is a British socialist feminist writer, discusses in her novel, *Benefits* (1979), the link between women's oppression, reproduction and the state. In her novel, Fairbairns creates a world in which women are paid to stay home to reproduce and look after their families; restricting their roles to mere baby produces and house keepers. According to socialist feminist's critics, family is not something natural, but it is more of an institution that has been socially constructed (Humm 89).

The approach of Sociological criticism strongly emphasizes on the relationship between a literary piece and the society it surrounds. The focus of this approach is mostly on the special bond the society and the author share, and even on the social elements within the literary piece itself. Marxism, which is one of the main forms of sociological criticism, has remarkably contributed in the development and the expansion of this approach. Marxist criticism considers literary productions as a reflection to the society it represents. The direct aim of this approach's critics is on the analysis of the social, economic, and cultural intuitions of a given society. Louis Althusser, who is one of the most influential Marxist philosophers, relied on the works of Antonio Gramsci and other scholars to come up with his groundbreaking theory of ideology. Ideology, from the perspective of Althusser, functions for the sake of keeping the dominant class in power through the use of non-violent methods. In this concept it plays a key role in shaping individuals' minds and manipulating them in favor of the dominant culture/class. Socialist feminism, which is another form of sociological

criticism, has been built by feminist thinkers on the basis of Marxism. Socialist feminists argue that economic dependency is the roots of women's oppression. Furthermore, they strongly believe that women's oppression and other forms of prejudice on the basis of class, race, and economic status go hand in hand.

The power of social influence has always been a topic that fueled the interests of psychologists. The role society and culture play is very powerful and crucial in shaping and constructing people's attitudes and beliefs towards themselves and others.

I.2 Psychological Criticism

What makes humans do what they do? What are the motives behind their behaviors and attitudes? What triggers their actions and reactions? Are some of the questions psychology and psychologists sought to find answers to. The complexity of human beings as living creatures led to the creation of a field that allows scientists, scholars, and researchers to explore the mind, and study the personality's traits of individuals.

The term psychology first appeared in 1693, but it was not until the mid-1800s that the word became used and understood. The word has Greek origins and is a combination of "Psych" and "logos". The first means breath; which denotes that the soul did not yet leave the body; however it later started directly referring to soul as well. As for the latter it indicates the study of. During the seventieth century the word "Psyche" and "logos" expanded to include mind, and discourse respectively. Even so, many contemporary psychologists rejected this definition under the reason that psychology is not only concerned with the (internal) mental process, but also with the (external) physical behaviors. These statements led to a change in the definition to the study of or the science of behaviors. Despite the changes, the renewed definition has also been refused in fears that it may cause misunderstandings; it is wrong to refer to it as the study of behaviors only, since it is also interested in the mental processes that

result in these behaviors. The outcome of these disagreements is that psychology cannot be restricted in a single definition. Yet, the most accurate one would be “psychology is the science of the nature, functions, and phenomena of behavior and mental experience” (Colman 1-4).

Psychology, just like literature, is a branch of science that is concerned with humans and their souls and thoughts. While psychology studies humans’ behaviors and the motives behind them, literature embodies and demonstrates these behaviors through fiction. The relationship between the two disciplines is mutually beneficial for both psychologists and literary critics. The meeting ground of the two fields would be the literary work; in which the literary production depicts the characters’ psychological behaviors and circumstances, while psychology provides resources that can be used to analyze the characters’ mental processes. According to the American literary critic Meyer Howard Abrams, the author, the reader, the text, and the theme are the four major elements of literature. In order for a research to be a psychology-based one, it should focus on, not only the author and the reader, but also on the other two elements, specifically, the world that has been created within the literary piece. The study of literature on the basis of psychology, mainly aims at analyzing the influence the social surroundings have on the character’s behaviors and thoughts in the novel (Badegül 49-51).

It is believed that the first novel on the basis of psychology is *The Tale of Genji* (11 BC) by Murasaki Shikibu (which is also the world’s first full-length novel). In her literary masterpiece, Shikibu focuses on Genji’s emotional state and explores that era’s Japan. Even though the association of literature and psychology dates back to the times of ancient Greek; in the works of Aristotle and Plato; it was not until the arrival of Sigmund Freud in the 20th century that this approach became more prominent (Badegül 51).

Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, is considered to be the most influential intellectual of his time. Freud's creation of psychoanalysis, which is a theory of the humans' psyche, left a permanent mark on culture and psychology (Jay par. 1-2). Basically speaking, Psychoanalysis is a field of study that consists of a set of psychological theories and therapeutic methods based on the works of Sigmund Freud. The central focus of this discipline is on the mental processes of the unconscious and the different mechanisms individuals rely on to repress them. The most well-known example in this case would be that of the Oedipus complex, in which it is claimed that boys develop the already mentioned complex due to their repressed sexual desires for their mothers (Colman 5).

Psychoanalytic methods and techniques are believed to be suitable for the analysis of all forms of humans' activities starting from religion, and society, and ending with art and literature. The possibility of linking psychoanalysis to literature started with Freud's assumption that literary writings are the result of the unconsciousness, and thus can be used to study and analyze the psychical forces' mechanism. In this case, a literary critic can make use of psychoanalysis to diagnose either the writer or the characters' psychological health while referring to the symptoms available in the literary production (Waugh 200-1). Ernest Jones's *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), is one of the most recognizable psychoanalytic readings of a fictional character. Ernest in his work relies on Freud's claims in *the interpretation of dreams* (1900), to explain the reason behind Hamlet constant hesitation to avenge his father's assassination. Despite the son's hatred towards his uncle, he finds himself unable to kill him because he unconsciously identifies with him; for achieving Hamlet's childhood desires of killing his father and marrying his mother (Ellmann 3).

One of the revolutionary theories introduced by Freud would be that of the human's mind. According to the founder of this approach, the human mind is divided into the conscious and the unconscious mind. While the conscious mind includes all the elements that can be brought

into awareness, the unconscious mind consists of the memories, desires, and wishes that humans are unaware of, but still affect their behavior. For further demonstration, Freud compared the human mind to an iceberg; with the tip being what the individuals are aware of, and the large hidden part being the unconsciousness. In addition to that, Freud also divided the personality into three main parts, the id, the ego, and the super ego. The id, which is considered as the primitive component, functions unconsciously and is the source of the libidinal energy. On the other hand, the ego, which is despite being unconscious, is responsible for dealing with reality and satisfying the id's demands in socially accepted ways. As for the super ego, it is the part that is composed of the internalized ideals and morals that are acquired at an early age from family and social life (Lapsley and Stey 6-7).

The Freudian's theories of the mind are mainly biological, and even when they recall the social factors in the form of the super ego, they still connect it to the id, which is believed to be biological by nature. Such beliefs led the ties between the society and the individual to be cut. From the Freudian's theorists' perspective, an infant is born with an identity, and is later corrupted along the way of the developmental process by external factors. However, these external factors are biological (breast, penis...) rather than sociological ones. These claims have been rejected by Orthodox Foulkes (a Freudian psychoanalyst), who used Freud's idea of the unconscious, to come up with his own theory "the social unconscious" (Dalal 541-3).

Dr. Earl Hopper in his book entitled *The Social Unconscious: Selected Papers* (2002) explains that:

The concept of the social unconscious refers to the existence and constraints of social, cultural and communicational arrangements of which people are unaware; unaware, in so far as these arrangements are not perceived (not known), and if perceived not acknowledged (denied), and if acknowledged, not taken as problematic ("given"), and

if taken as problematic, not considered with an optimal degree of detachment and objectivity. Although social constraints are sometimes understood in terms of myth, ritual and custom, such constraints are in the realm of the “unknown” to the same extent as the constraints of instincts and fantasies, especially in societies with high status rigidity. However, constraint is not meant to imply only restraining, inhibition, or limitation, but also facilitation, development and even the transformation of sensations into feelings. (qtd. in Brok par. 5)

The latter suggests that the social and cultural forces “constraint” the different shapes humans can take. In this sense, the term “constraint”, does not only denotes “to limit”, but also “to facilitate” the process of development.

The Social unconscious is believed to be located inside the individual’s unconscious, as well as being part of the society itself. The psychologist and group analyst Dr. Haim Weinberg puts emphasis on the importance of considering the fantasies, myths, and anxieties before attempting to study and expose the social unconscious of a certain society.

Furthermore, it is argued that the social unconscious also includes what is known as the mental black hole. Basically speaking, it refers to the patterns that are socially rejected and denied. A mental black hole is not something that can be directly seen, however it can be learned through the ways the society’s members treat each other; the kind of relationship they share (Doron par.4-7).

Lynne Layton, who is the assistant clinical professor of psychology in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, argues in her paper, “What Psychoanalysis, Culture And Society Mean To Me” (2007), that the social hierarchies that are imposed on individuals by their societies enforces them to act in a certain manner that is appropriate to their gender, class, race...etc. Such external forces, lead individuals to build their own identity in

consideration to the other identities that exist within their culture. These social hierarchies are kept alive via the “normative unconscious processes”, which is a concept that has been developed by Layton herself. The normative unconscious processes aim to support the dominant ideologies for the sake of gaining the approval and the acceptance of the social surroundings. For better understanding, the scholar gave a personal example of the era she grew up in; the 50s and 60s. During that time white females from the middle class were expected to take care of their families only, otherwise they would be considered unfeminine. Layton recalls that whenever she held a book or started preparing a class assignment, she would receive disapproval glances and gossips from others. According to her, these glances and mean words when repeated affect the psyche, and lead the individual to submit to the social demands (par.7-11).

In *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics: Encounters in the Clinical Setting* (2006), Layton states that the normative unconscious processes are the result of the sexist, racist (and other forms of inequalities) that are forced by the power hierarchies for the purpose of making one group inferior to another. The motive behind them is purely narcissistic and creates a conflict with other conscious and unconscious process that function to free the psyche from the imposed chains (Layton “The Unconscious Pull” 107).

How children identify to their gender is a question that has been widely discussed by different psychologists who provided different answers. However, the first researcher who handled such mystery would be Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic theory believes that children identify with the parent from the same sex as them in a mechanism that allows them to be sex typed. This leads the child to discover the sex’ organs differences which in return leads to the penis envy, in females, and the castration anxiety, in males. Among the other theories that dealt with the gender identification issue are the social learning and the cognitive development theory. While the first links sex typing to the observation of the social sex-

differentiated practices and the reactions the child receives for the sex-appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, the latter associates it to the internal processes and credit the self solely for the child's ability to recognize his/her gender. Aside from all the previously mentioned speculations, the gender schema's theory by Sanra L. Bem is by far one of the most impactful contributions that linked culture and society to gender's identification (Bem, 599-603).

The American psychologist Sandra L. Bem in her article, "Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing", (1981), defines sex typing as the process in which society alters males and females into masculinity and femininity according to that society's standards. Children as they grow learn specific content information about the behaviors that are expected from them in relation to their sex. Once their society's gender schema is learnt, children start to adapt to the attitudes and behaviors that are expected from them as males and females. A young girl who is remarkably strong and a young boy who is caring and affectionate won't be noticed nor praised for these qualities because these attributes don't belong to the "appropriate sex". As a result, kids learn to make use of their society's gender schema in the process of selecting among the humans' traits the ones that are appropriate to their gender. In other words, the social factors are internalized to make individuals shape themselves into their society's definitions of maleness and femaleness (354-55).

As an example, a female that has been raised in a traditional culture and a conservative society would think that marriage is her only choice in life, unlike a female that grew up in a developed society would attempt to build a career and even reject the idea of getting married and raising kids. Vice versa, a male from a conservative culture would strongly believe that women's place is in the kitchen and men's place is in work. From these viewing, children learn women's and men's roles in their representative societies and what they are able and unable of doing (Cherry par. 5-6).

To conclude, humans are an integral part of society, and they are affected and shaped by it in a large extent. Human beings as sociable creatures are surrounded by people since the day they are born. As a result they are expected to act in a certain way that is suitable and appropriate to the society they live in. Each society has its own social norms and values that are imposed on its members. The complexity of the human's society and socialization led sociologists and psychologists to come up with various theories in an attempt to explain and understand the relationship between the two variables.

Chapter Two: The Chinese Culture as Depicted in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*

After the release of the megahit novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan's mother, Daizy Tan, asked for a literary work that tells her story. However, making her wish come true was a difficult task to achieve, due to some personal and political reasons. By failing to convince her mother to forget the past, Amy Tan complied by creating the fictional character Winnie, whose life mirrors that of Daizy Tan. The massive majority of the twenty-two chapters, deal with the protagonist's struggle against her rapist husband during the pre-communist China's era. In addition to that, the novel also exposes the oppressive circumstances Chinese women from history and mythology had to endure (Adams 72-4).

Just like in her debut novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife* clearly demonstrates the way Chinese women were treated and expected to behave in the mid-twentieth century China. The novel explores gender roles in the Chinese culture through conversations and storytelling (Becnel 98). In an interview with NBC Today Show, Amy Tan stated that she didn't expect the complicated story that hid behind a simple question about her mother's life in China:

I was actually asking her about the war because I knew she lived in China at that time. And I said, 'What was it like during that time?' And she said, 'Oh, I wasn't

affected.' And I thought what she meant by that was that she had been safely tucked away somewhere in free China. But then later on she was telling me more about that time and how she had to run away three times a week from the bombs and how people who came to dinner one week were dead the next. And I said, 'Wait a minute, you said you weren't affected by the war.' And she said, 'I wasn't, I wasn't killed.' And it made me realize how different our perspective on life was, based on what she had lived and what I lived. (*Tan: The Kitchen God's Wife*)

Tan's sudden knowledge about her mother's past made her realize that the miserable life Daizy had, made her think that not being killed meant that she was not affected by the war. This wide gap between hers and her mother's life was one of the reasons that encouraged her to tell Daizy's story to the world.

The novel opens up with a conversation between the mother and her daughter about an engagement ceremony that Pearl, Winnie's daughter, finds herself forced to attend. As the event takes place, Helen Kwong, Winnie's lifelong friend who pretends to be her sister-in-law, threatens both Pearl and Winnie, separately, to reveal their disease and past, respectively, to each other. "How can I fly to heaven when this is weighing me down?" (Tan 36). Helen, through the use of her suspicion that she is dying from a brain tumor, pressures the mother and her daughter to confess their secrets.

II.1 The Chinese Cultural Limitation of Women

As the story progresses, Winnie makes the decision of sharing her horrendous past with her daughter. The tell-all session starts by the fifth chapter entitled "Ten Thousand Things". This chapter discusses the pain and disgrace the disappearance of Winnie's mother brought to herself and her daughter.

Winnie describes her mother, whose name was never mentioned in the novel, as an honest and open woman, “my mother was not like my father’s other wives” says Winnie, “the ones who used the same kind of fake manner, acting more pleasant than someone else, as if they were in a contest to win something big” (Tan 108). The mother’s attitudes and behaviors were foreign to the Chinese culture, where women were expected to obey, submit, and have no opinions.

After her disappearance, a funeral was held to bury her shame, and different family members began jumping to conclusions about the reason behind her act. Old Aunt believed that “her education was the cause” (Tan 122). From her perspective telling girls that they can be teachers (can work) and have the choice to decline marriage will only cause them trouble. According to Wong Yin Lee in his article, “Women’s Education in Traditional and Modern China” (1995), females were commonly restricted to learning how to cook, clean, and be obedient wives from their parents. When they require the necessary skills, they get married and dedicate the rest of their lives to serve their husbands and parents-in-law (346). Most of the females during that era were raised by the principle that “The girl's eyes should never be used for reading, only for sewing. The girl's ears should never be used for listening to ideas, only to orders. The girl's lips should be small, rarely used, except to express appreciation or ask for approval” (Tan 121). Since a very young age, women are taught to listen, obey and follow the rules that are given to them blindly.

Besides the educational restrictions, women were also physically restricted. Such kind of limitations can be seen in the act of foot-binding. Since the feet of Winnie’s mother were already unbound by the age of eight, some people speculated that this is the reason behind her acts, “that’s why she ran wild” (Tan 119). Foot-binding started during the Tang dynasty and spread throughout the Chinese society during the Qing dynasty. (Ling 18-19) Girls would usually get their "foot-binding" at the ages between 4 and 6 years old. The process would

involve tucking and pulling the three smaller toes towards the heel and wrapping them with bandages. The practice is usually done through an older female relative (sister, mother, grandmother...) with the goal of making the feet at least 3 inches long or 7.62 cm. (Smith par.2). The reason behind such social practice was to provide control over women in a male dominated society, as it has been stated in the Nu Er Jung (Doctrine for Women); “Feet are bound, not to make them beautiful as a curved bow, but to restrain women when they go outside doors” (qtd. in Ling 19).

In addition to being discriminated on the basis of gender, Chinese women were also discriminated on the basis of social status and appearance. Unlike Winnie, who was guaranteed to marry to a well off family; because she comes from a wealthy background herself; Hulan was skeptical about her future because she was born to a poor family. Marriage in the Chinese culture was more about matching families with each other than about matching a woman with a suitable groom. To give a daughter to a family with lower status was considered a shameful act that can only be done when the daughter suffers from a disability (Ebrey 62-3). In the case of Winnie, her mother’s disgrace led her father and Aunts to give little thoughts about the family of the man Winnie was going to marry. Despite Wen Fu (Winnie’s husband) being not that poor himself, he still was an inappropriate match to Winnie according to their society’s standards.

In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Hulan tells the story of the girls who are neither blessed with beauty nor with money. These kinds of girls are “destined to marry an old farmer or the one-eyed potmender down the road, a life guaranteed with hard work, no hope for any kind of happiness” (Tan 228). Women who belong to the lower classes are rejected and get little to no chance at all to be daughters-in-law to respectful families, unless “their beauty had been exceptional” (Tan 215). According to Wen Hua in her book, *Buying Beauty: Cosmetic Surgery in China* (2013), this unhealthy obsession with women’s appearance is traditionally

rooted within the Chinese culture by the stereotypical roles that were given to females. While men are encouraged to seek success outside of the household, women are asked to take care of their appearance and 'nurture' their beauty. Some Chinese sayings such as "a virtuous woman is one without talent" and "a talented man matches with a beautiful woman", clearly state the roles each gender should stick to (93).

The reason Wen Fu asked Winnie's hand for marriage; after pretending to be in love with her cousin; is because he found out Winnie's family is wealthier than that of Peanut (Winnie's cousin). As it has been mentioned in the stories *The Kitchen God's Wife* carries, women are discriminated and marginalized multiple times; for being females, for being part of the lower classes, and for not meeting their societies beauty standards. In a report by the United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, it is explained that due to gender discrimination, a woman who is poor faces harsher times than a poor man. Their rights tend to be unprotected and their voices unheard. Usually, these women engage in sexual activities as a part of a survival mechanism ("Women and Poverty" par. 2-4). Both Hulan's sister and Wen Fu mistress, Min, gave themselves and their bodies to men for a chance to save themselves from hunger and misery through marriage or at least concubinage. After Winnie questioned the reason to why Min would stay with Wen Fu, who is a man that neither possesses handsomeness nor a tender character, she came out with the conclusion that "the reason she stayed with him was not love, couldn't be that. It was something else: perhaps a way to give up her life slowly rather than all at once. Here she would have a place to sleep, food to eat. Everything else did not matter so much" (Tan 345).

Socialist feminism believes that women's oppression is not related to gender only, but also to other social injustices such as economic dependency; one of the ways women can be liberated is through economic equality (Napikoski par. 6). In the studied novel, Winnie was able to take care of herself through the use of her dowry's money. Because she had a rich

father, she also had a considerable amount of dowry. This type of money is given to the bride by her father in order not to be “too much of a burden” on the new family. Women’s dowry would be the only money women would have for themselves for their entire lives (Tan 175). Otherwise, they would have to be economically dependent on their husbands. Basically speaking, women with little to no dowry at all would be left without any type of income.

Betty, who is a friend of Winnie, is a perfect example of a character that rolled her sleeves and worked in order to feed herself and the baby inside of her after her husband’s death. When Betty did not bow down to her parents-in-law and decided to get a job in a post office to be financially independent. This act from her behalf granted her some freedom to make her own choices. When the parents of her husband demanded that she give them the baby and go her own way, her answer was “why should I go there and let them treat me so bad? Do they think I’m a duck—laying eggs so they can eat them?” (Tan 262). According to researches, women who are economically deprived become more dependent on men, which will eventually limit their choices and even enable them to leave an abusive relationship (BBVAMF par. 5).

In ancient China, women had to follow what is known as *sancong* or the three followings. This social norm obliged females to blindly obey their fathers, husbands, and then their sons in the case of widowhood (Cartwright par. 1). Such obligation left them with no choice and no opinion. When Winnie’s father asked for her opinion about a painting, all she was thinking about is an answer that would please him. After giving her thoughts, which he interrupted, he said “from now on... you must consider what your husband’s opinions are. Yours do not matter so much anymore.” (Tan 178). Hearing this order from her father, Winnie was grateful that he gave her such a valuable piece of advice. Children since a very young age watch the adults around them practice gender hierarchy on a daily basis which made them think that it is a normal and natural thing (Gates 801).

Despite the claims of the Chinese mythology that the position of women is high, reality has another saying. From this perspective, it is also believed that females are inferior to males and thus they should submit to them. Such ideology was provided by the traditional Chinese philosophy which assumed that the universe is formed by the yin and the yang. The yin elements are a representation of earth, moon, darkness, females and weakness. As for the yang, it is a representation of heaven, sun, light, males and strength. Even though the yin and the yang elements complete each other, females and males were not viewed as equals. Throughout time, these beliefs led to the creation of codes and norms that were used to regulate and control women's behaviors. They mainly aimed at making females dedicate their whole life at serving men and complying with their demands (Ling 18).

When Winnie was young and getting ready to marry, Peanut told her about the man whose parents refused a woman he chose, because she was "too fierce, too strong" (Tan 196). After he married the girl, he died, and the woman was accused of killing him because she had too much yin that it drew her husband's entire yang. After his death, her parents-in-law treated her badly and wished for her death in order to bury her next to their son for the hopes of giving him his yang back. During that time, it was believed that women should not have too much yin; should not be too strong. If they had too much yin they would draw the life out of the men.

The title of the novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, in itself is a reference to a Chinese myth that ignored the wife and gave undeserved credit to the husband. According to Anita Ganeri in her book *Chinese Myths and Legends* (2013), the kitchen God is a man who used to live on earth by the name of Zhang. He had a beautiful wife, Ghuoding, who was kind and hard working. Thanks to the dedication she had for her work and her husband, Zhang became rich and important. However, he cheated and played with another woman, and eventually abandoned his wife. As time passed, he lost all his money and became a beggar. One day after

the woman he kicked out saw the situation he was in, she pitied and welcomed him in her house and gave him food. When he realized the woman who helped him is the same wife he abandoned, he threw himself in the Kitchen's fireplace out of guilt and shame. As a reward for his scarification and epiphany, the Gods made him immortal and appointed him as the kitchen God (38).

In her work, Amy Tan questions the myth and uses it to demonstrate the low-status women are given. Just like the wife of the Kitchen God, women in the Chinese culture are expected to submit and remain faithful to their husbands no matter what. Even after working hard and giving their everything, women get no recognition and appreciation and are still connected to their husbands' name. In Chinese mythology, she is constantly referred to as the Kitchen God's wife; she does not have a name of her own. This loss of identity symbolizes the only role women are allowed to identify with; wives. Even the kitchen, which is a place that was traditionally controlled by women, is under the authority of the Kitchen God (Rajani par 8-9). Winnie feels a close connection to the Kitchen God's wife because just like her, she suffered from domestic violence and lack of appreciation:

When Jesus was born, he was already the son of God. I was the daughter of someone who ran away, a big disgrace. And when Jesus suffered, everyone worshipped him. Nobody worshipped me for living with Wen Fu. I was like that wife of Kitchen God. Nobody worshipped her either. He got all the excuses. He got all the credit. She was forgotten. (Tan 323)

Women are hated on and discriminated for being females from the moment they are born. In traditional Chinese literature, female characters tend to state that they were males in their previous lives but have been cursed into females for their bad deeds. In some cases, they are even introduced with humiliating lines such as unfortunately she was born a woman. Ancient Chinese families prefer a son because he would provide them with financial support when he

grows up, whereas a daughter is unable to gain money. Baby girls are usually abandoned at birth, as for those who survive, they are named after flowers and precious objects, such as pearl, in hopes that the girl would take after her name and receive good marriage proposals (Cartwright par. 3).

The death of Winnie's first stillborn child had a strong impact on her. On the other hand, it did not affect Wen Fu the slightest bit because the infant was a daughter. When the mother was devastated that her child left her too early, Wen Fu was only grateful that "at least it was not a boy." (Tan 305). Favoring sons over daughters can also be seen in the difference between Wen Fu's reaction over the death of his second daughter Yiku, and the death of his third child, who happened to be a boy, Danru. When Yiku got sick, her father did not even bother to answer her mother's pleas to get a doctor for her. However, the death of his son led him to accuse and sue the mother for carelessness and negligence.

Despite Wen Fu's sadistic and unbearable character, Winnie found herself unable to break free from his grip, simply because she did not have a choice. Asking for a divorce was a right that can only be granted to the husband. After Wen Fu brought a mistress to their household, Winnie seized the opportunity and filled a divorce paper and handed it to him. He responded by tearing the paper into pieces, not for the sake of love, but as a way of showing dominance:

And I knew he did not do this to say that he loved me, that he was so sorry for what he had done. He did this to show me who was the boss. Because after he tore up my chance, he pointed his finger at me and said in a hoarse voice, "When I want to divorce you, I will tell you. You don't tell me what to do." (Tan 354)

Women in ancient Chinese culture suffered from educational, physical, and economic limitations. They were viewed as incomplete creatures that are inferior to men from a historical and mythological point of view. Furthermore, their roles were restricted to mere wives and housekeepers, who were expected to serve and submit to different men in their

lives; fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. From the early years of their lives, females are taught that their opinions are of no importance and that they should follow that of their husbands. Being born a female in a patriarchal society means your life is owned by everyone but you.

II.2 Male Privilege in the Chinese Culture

Throughout the Chinese history, men have been valued and viewed as the core of both family and society. As for women, they were treated as mere objects that shall be used for men's pleasure (Bloom *Asian* 63). Sexist societies that are based on gender hierarchy grant social and economic advantages that are granted only to males on the basis of sex (Rohrer and Keig 71). Such acts are known as male privilege; basically speaking, it is giving males rights that females are deprived from.

For centuries, son's preference has been a widespread phenomenon in Chinese culture. Baby boys are valued for many reasons such as their ability to carry on the family line, for taking care (with their wives) of their parents when they become old, and for being the one who receive inheritance (Zhou and Wang 459). Those thoughts led to negative attitudes towards daughters and preferential treatments of boys.

When they were running from the war, Hulan shared with Winnie the story of her painful past. Being a village girl from a very poor family meant that food and clean water are not that common within the household. The mother being responsible for food was the one who divided it among her children. "My mother was the one who divided everything up, gave a little to the boys, then half that to the girls" said Hulan (Tan 362). Despite all the kids equally suffering from hunger and lack of nutrition, the division of food was far from equal. China's favorable treatment of boys has always been viewed as the normal thing to do. Sons are the

ones who get better access to food and health on the expense of daughters (“China's Great Gender Crisis” par. 4).

Generally speaking, Women are sexually objectified, judged by their appearance, and used for men’s services and pleasure. They are not viewed as humans, but rather as physical objects for the sexual desires of males (Szymanski, et al 8-9). Such phenomenon largely exists in many cultures, specifically, in cultures where males are privileged. In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Winnie’s father had up to five wives, who competed against each other for his affection and approval. The more powerful and rich the man is, the more wives and concubines he had. Jiang Sao-Yan (the father) “was an important man. He could have had all kinds of wives—which he did. Back then there was no other reason to marry a second, third, or fourth wife, except to use a woman's prettiness to add to a man's prestige” (Tan 120). The reason Sao-Yan fancied Winnie’s mother was her black long hair. Her hair was “very, very black, as black and shiny as water at the very bottom of a deep well” (Tan 113). Such physical trait made women more desirable and valued in the Chinese culture.

In addition to having the right to choose as many wives and mistresses as they want, males were also prioritized when it comes to education and knowledge. During their childhood both males and females receive education, but in different ways; in accordance to their social roles. Later on in life, only males are allowed by society to receive formal education that can be used for career’s opportunities (Wei 1-2).

While Winnie was still living under the roof of her Uncle, she has noticed that her New Aunt only called for her daughter Peanut in the morning to do house chores:

That morning, Peanut was pulling her quilt over her head to find where her sleep had gone. But then we heard New Aunt calling, "Peanut, you lazy girl, where are you?"

You see how she called for only Peanut, not me? Her mother was not being nice to me, letting me sleep. She wanted her daughter to get up and learn how to put a house in order, so that one day Peanut would know how to be a proper wife. (Tan 137)

Teaching girls how to cook, clean, and take care of a house was considered as the most necessary, and only, skill every female should require. As for males they are constantly encouraged to seek success in various academic and non-academic domains; they have the choice. As the Chinese saying warns “men should fear entering the wrong profession; women should fear marrying the wrong man” (Q. Herzberg and L. Herzberg 88). Such sayings, which are based on Confucian teachings, clearly draw the line between what men and women can do.

What is more, besides women being physically trained to use their bodies and strength to serve men, they are also psychologically tutored to submit and obey:

When Old Aunt thought I was not acting fearful enough—when I didn't bow down fast enough and beg for forgiveness—she would slap the side of my head. "So willful, that rebellious! What kind of family would want you for their son's wife? Maybe I should marry you off to Old Shoe Stink!". (Tan 164)

Even assertive personality's traits that are necessary for success and gaining respect are monopolized by males due to gender roles. Winnie's Uncle used to blame Winnie's mother's personality for her disappearance. “All the will and stubbornness that should have been given to a boy went into her. Worse, her parents let her stay at home and grow stronger and stronger” (Tan 122). Males are the ones who are supposed to be ambitious, aggressive and strong-willed, while females are expected to be polite, kind and passive.

Since Chinese families are built upon patriarchal ideologies, husbands are given more importance and consideration. Thus, man's superiority and dominance over women are culturally justified and accepted (Jackson 209). This kind of attitude led to the normalization

of domestic abuse by not only males, but also females. In the eighth chapter untitled “Too Much Yin”, a mother heard her son and his wife viciously fighting. After the wife began screaming and crying, the mother-in-law initial thought was “Good, now he is teaching her to be more obedient” (Tan 197). Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter “American Dance”, when Winnie complained to Hulan and Auntie Du about her abusive husband, Hulan responded by “Every woman's husband has a bad temper... Your situation is no different.” (Tan 395). Men’s abusive nature is justified by culture, and accepted by women.

According to Lee E. Ross in his book, *The War against Domestic Violence* (2010), there is no phrase equivalent to “domestic violence” in the Chinese language. Such act is named Da Lao Po (wife beating), which is considered as a private matter between the spouses. Even law and society do not enforce any codes that protect the wife from her husband. The proverb “Qing Guan Nan Duan Jia Wu Shi”, which means even the wisest judge cannot rule on family matters, further stretches men’s power and leave women unprotected (31). When Wen Fu got injured and lost one of his eyes, Winnie threw a dinner table on his honor. While her husband was resting in his room, everyone, including Winnie, Hulan, and the guests, started remembering the old times, chatting, and singing. Suddenly, Wen Fu got awoken by his own insecurities and began verbally and physically harassing Winnie “How can you sing that” he screamed. “I am a sick man, you are a healthy woman! I am a hero, you are a whore! Your two eyes see other men!” (Tan 318). He even went as far as asking her to kneel down and ask for forgiveness in front of everyone. Out of fear that he may hit her with the stick he was holding, Hulan pushed Winnie on her knees and asked her to comply. As the situation took place, none of the guests did anything to help Winnie out:

They watched and did nothing as I lay with my head touching the floor. They said nothing when my husband ordered me to say, "Sorry, I am wrong, you are right.

Please forgive me." They did not protest and tell Wen Fu, "This is enough," when he

told me to beg for forgiveness, again and again. And as I bowed and begged, cried and knocked my head on the floor, I was thinking, why doesn't anyone help me? Why do they stand there, as if I were truly wrong?. (Tan 319)

The guests' fear of Wen Fu overcame their sympathy towards Winnie. Such fear of interfering in family's matters kept the cycle of domestic violence going.

Cultural beliefs that are influenced by patriarchy systems such as Confucianism, place women as the "weaker sex" in vulnerable situations and give men power over them. Thus, men as the superior sex have the right to take control over their wives by any means including violence. Furthermore, the Chinese, as members of a society with a sense of collectivism, put emphasis on the act of face-saving; they try to avoid embarrassment even on the expense of their own comfort and safety. This kind of mentality prevents victims of abuse from publicly acknowledging their suffering and asking for help (Do, Weiss, and Pollack par. 2-3). The first sign of abuse Wen Fu showed was in the ninth chapter "Best Time of Year", in which he asked Winnie to perform some sexual favors, when she refused he took off her nightgown and locked her outside of the room naked. Out of fear that someone would see her, Winnie accepted to do what he asked:

He pulled me back up, dragged me toward the door like a bag of rice. He opened the door, then pushed me outside into the corridor of the monastery, where anyone passing by could have seen me, naked like that. What could I do? I could not shout. Someone would awaken, look out, and see me. So I was whispering to him through the door, pleading, "Open the door! Open!" And he said nothing, did nothing, until several minutes had passed and I finally said, "I will say them". (Tan 209)

Wen Fu tried to humiliate and publically embarrass Winnie in order to make her comply with his demands. Vis versa, Winnie gave up and accepted what she initially refused out of fear of public shame.

Ideology plays a massive role in setting social roles and status. According to the Marxist thinker, Louis Althusser, the ruling class maintains power and order through ideology. It is the use of different social and cultural institutions such as the educational system, the religious entity, and even family to impose the upper class' dominance in what is known as Ideological state apparatuses (Felluga par.1). Winnie and the other females of *The Kitchen God's Wife* have been taught by their parents to obey or else they would be married to the Old Shoe Stink:

I think all the mothers in our village threatened to marry their daughters to Old Shoe Stink. And those daughters must have obeyed... Giving threats to children was the custom in old families like ours. Old Aunt's mother probably did this to her when she was a child, handing out warnings about another kind of life, too terrible to imagine—also giving examples of obedient children too good to be true. This was how you made children behave. This was how you drove selfish thoughts out of their foolish heads.

(Tan 163)

When daughters were misbehaving, their mothers would threaten them with a bad life that would be granted to them if they do not comply.

Even though Ideological state apparatuses mainly work with ideology, it can also include punishment as a secondary mean of achieving power. After the constant physical, sexual, and mental abuse Winnie faced, she decided to stand up against her husband and speak up her mind. When she did so, she stood tall and brave, and did not allow herself to get scared by his screams, threats, and fists. Wen Fu witnessing such a change in his wife's attitude, decided to use her baby, Yiku, against her to make her submit again:

He looked toward Yiku standing behind me in her crib. She was crying hard. He put his hand down. He walked over to the crib very fast. And I thought he was sorry that he had made her cry. I thought he was going to pick her up and say he was sorry. And

then, before I could even think to stop him, he slapped her—kwah!—hit her hard on the face, so hard half of her face turned red...Wen Fu hit her again—kwah!— again and again...And I was crying and begging Wen Fu, Forgive me! I was, wrong!

Forgive me!. (Tan 331-2)

When Wen Fu noticed that his threats no longer scared Winnie, he turned to the one thing he can use against her, their child. As a mother, Winnie could not just stand and watch her kid getting hurt. So she did what she knew would stop her husband, she submitted and complied.

Culture plays a major role in setting unrealistic and unfair limits to women and giving unjustified and undeserved power to men. The Chinese society during that era did not only restrict women on the educational level, but also on the economic, and the physical level. Such limitations made women dependent on men, which in return made men abusive and controlling towards women. By devaluing females, males became privileged and overestimated.

Chapter Three: Effects of Culture on Gender Roles

Some theorists believe that individuals learn, from their society and culture, to behave in certain ways that are appropriate to their gender. For instance, men learn to be aggressive and dominant, and women learn to be nurturing and passive. According to the social learning theory, kids are rewarded or punished for following or declining their parents' rules, respectively. Moreover, according to the law of effects, behaviors that are rewarded are more likely to be repeated (Wentworth and Chell 117). Basically speaking, individuals follow the behaviors they have been rewarded on, and avoid the behaviors that cause them punishments.

Gender schema's theory, by Sandra Bem, suggests that children build their gender identity in relation to their culture. Their society's beliefs, about what makes males and females, heavily influence the development of their gender schema. Individuals as they grow learn from their society and people around them how to behave in accordance to their gender. This

learning process includes the social roles each gender should commit to, what is expected from them, and how they are supposed to be treated. Gender schema has a strong impact on peoples' beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and their understanding of their social surroundings (Mupepi et al. 291). In addition to serving as a guide for the social surrounding's interpretation, gender schemas also function as a guide for self-worth's evaluation. "Our self-worth can be strongly affected by the ways in which we evaluate how we meet the expectations of our gender schema" (Kahn 134). The genders' information that are provided to society's members affects the way they view themselves and others.

As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the Chinese males and females have been raised and treated differently according to the gender they belong to. Winnie has been taught to take care of a house; to be a housewife, nothing less and nothing more. When she did not bow fast enough, she had been punished for her rebellion, stating that no family would want a daughter-law like her. As for Wen Fu, he has been prioritized and treated like royalty by his mother and everyone around him. After her husband mistreated the hospital' staff, Winnie blamed his mother for his behavior:

I blamed his mother!—for having given birth to him, for tending to all his desires as if she were his servant, for always feeding husband and son first, for allowing me to eat only after I had picked off bits of food stuck to my father-in-law's beard, for letting the meanness in her son grow like a strange appetite, so that he would always feel hungry to feed his own power. (Tan 325)

The treatment of the mother toward her son fed his ego and corrupted his character. After he got married to Winnie, the mother passed her job as her son's servant to his wife.

The mother-in-law taught Winnie to fear her husband under the name of respect. She also encouraged her to touch the soup with her bare hands in order to make sure it is proper,

temperature wise. Whenever Winnie screamed, because of the pain the hot soup caused, her mother-in-law would say ““That kind of sacrifice for a husband never hurts.” (Tan 106).

Such treatments each gender received had a strong impact of their psychology and caused them to form a set of beliefs and attitudes towards themselves and others.

III.1 Society Reinforces Women’s Silence

Women throughout their lives have been programmed to believe that they cannot decide for themselves; simply, that they do not have a choice. Their life’s decisions are first made by their fathers, and then by their husbands, once they get married. And since they are economically dependent on the males that exist in their lives, their choices are sharply limited and controlled. When Winnie got a marriage proposal from Wen Fu’s family, her father, Old Aunt and New Aunt made the decision for her. “I did not say yes. I did not say no. Nobody asked for my answer because it was not my choice to make.” (Tan 166). Her family members did not even think about asking for her opinion. Even Winnie herself did not believe it was her choice to make.

According to Marilyn Frye, who is a radical feminist philosopher, oppression is something women have no choice in. The oppression of women is created and forced by institutional and ideological forces, which pressure females to serve males. Frye describes being oppressed as living in a cage where the barriers, which are systematically linked to each other, restrict the one’s own motion (Frye 11-3). While she was struggling against her abusive husband, Winnie explained that she felt as a “chicken in a cage, mindless, never dreaming of freedom, but never worrying when your neck might be chopped off.” (Tan 398). She did not accept her marriage, but she did not have the power to fight back.

Even when she was being sexually abused by Wen Fu, Winnie neither had the courage nor the awareness to speak up against her abuser:

That bad man was using my body. Every night he used it, as if I were—what?—a machine! Today you teach your daughters to say to a stranger, “My body is my body. Don't touch me.” A little child can say this. I was a grown woman, and I could not say this. (Tan 398)

Winnie's inability to protect herself from her own husband led to her many pregnancies. Since she could not stop Wen Fu, she decided to stop the babies from coming by killing them before they are born to save them from the miserable life that is waiting for them. “I could only stop those babies from coming. I cried to myself, this is a sin—to give a baby such a bad life! ... So I let those other babies die. In my heart, I was being kind.” (Tan 398). The helplessness she felt, and the powerless position she was in, left her with no choice other than killing her unborn children.

When Winnie complained to Hulan about her husband's unusual sexual desires, and how unhappy she was, Hulan looked at her weirdly, and answered that “this is not a problem. You should be glad. That's how you got your baby, isn't it?” said Hulan mockingly “Why shouldn't you do this for your husband? You should be grateful he still wants you” (Tan 233). Marital rape has been normalized by the different traditional and patriarchal views that have enforced on the society's members.

The word rape comes from the Latin word *raptus*, which refers to an act in which a man damages the property of another man. Since wives have always been viewed as their husbands' property, rapes that are committed by spouses are never criminalized and punished for (Schmidt 122). In cultures where women are objectified, marital rape is justified, the rapist is excused, and the victim is blamed. This rape culture has negatively impacted women and reinforced their silence. Furthermore, the phenomenon of victim blaming created an environment where women who have been raped cannot step forward, and the men who committed the crime cannot be blamed (Brown 85). Since The Chinese culture values the

collective interests' principle, which puts emphasis on individuals' obligations at the expense of their rights, women's are obliged to respond to their husbands' sexual demands under the name of women's obligations. Such cultural forces deprived women from their right to say no (Yuan 94).

Due to these cultural limitations women believed that freedom is something that cannot be reached. Winnie and the other female characters thought that death was the only way out of their misery. After Wen Fu raped and got a fourteen years old servant pregnant, she killed herself because there is nothing else to do; no one would listen to a female, and no one would punish a man for the sake of a mere servant. Even Winnie herself thought of death. "There were many, many times when I almost killed myself" (Tan 398) said Winnie, who stated later on that she would have ended her life if she did not find a way to free herself. In the chapter entitled "Little Yu's Mother", Winnie tells the story of Little Yu, who committed suicide because she was unable to escape her marriage. Little Yu's mother set her daughter up with a man, who had a height position due to his father noodles' business. However, he had a developmental disability:

People had to keep reminding him which direction to walk in, what to say. He giggled and laughed out loud at all the wrong times, making Little Yu's mother think that he was drunk. He wasn't drunk. He had the mind of a little child! He still wet the bed. He cried when the wind blew too hard. He thought Little Yu was his big sister. (Tan 451)

When Little Yu asked for her mother's help to end the marriage, her mother refused, saying that things could have been worse, and her daughter should be grateful "at least the family was good to her, gave her plenty to eat" (Tan 451). After the rejection she received from her mother, Little Yu, who lost hope, went back home, climbed a tree, and hanged herself.

According to researches, people attempt suicide out of despair and hopelessness. When individuals start feeling that the situation they are in has no way out, and that things are not going to get any better, they consider taking their own lives (Ghose and Writer par. 1-3).

Hyeon Jung Lee in his article “Fearless Love, Death for Dignity: Female Suicide and Gendered Subjectivity in Rural North China” (2014), links females suicidal behaviors with their yearning desire for freedom. Such behavior from their behalf does not denote their ability to resist, but rather shows the powerless position they occupy within the society (29).

After Winnie’s mother heard that she had to marry one of her father’s friends, she run off to her first lover, Lu, asking for his advice. When they met, he started telling her the story of a revolutionary village girl, whose family tried to force her to marry an old man she neither knew nor wanted. When the girl stood up against her family and refused the marriage, stating that she wants to choose her own husband, her father got really angry and locked her up in a pig shed. The girl shouted every day, everyone heard but no one listened. At the day of her wedding, her mother and aunts dressed her up ,and put her in a locked-up wedding sedan, which was carried out by six men. When they arrived to the wedding party, they opened the sedan just to find out that the bride had killed herself using her own hair (she strangled herself with her hair) (Tan 127). Lu asked Winnie’s mother to reject the marriage, not only for the sake of their love, but also for the sake of their country; in hopes of changing the traditions by fighting this forced marriage phenomenon.

After hearing the story, Winnie’s mother considered it, but was not brave enough to adopt it. Later on, after getting married to Jiang Sao-Yan, the mother decided to run away from her unhappy marriage leaving behind everything precious to her, her jewelries, her money, her hair, and even her daughter. “And that’s why she cut off her hair”, said Winnie “to show she was just like that girl who hung herself in her sedan chair, free at last.” (Tan 129).

According to the Chinese beauty standards, long hair is a necessary element of womanhood. Such ideology pressured women to maintain the length of their hair (Baranovitch 157). Hong Fan in his book, *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (1997), stated that Women's bodies have been one of the sources of their humiliation and oppression. Through the use of their bodies, the Chinese society succeeded in controlling women both physically and psychologically (289). Furthermore, he considered long hair as one of the symbols of oppression. Since the Chinese associated hair with revolution, when women cut their hair, it meant that they are loudly declaring they are claiming back their freedom (198). Winnie's mother was admired by her husband and the women around her for her long black shiny hair. So when she decided to break free, she left the hair to them.

When Winnie was frustrated of her husband's behaviors, she blamed his mother for the way he turned out. And when Wen Fu brought a mistress to the household, Auntie Du advised Winnie to deal with the mistress since she cannot confront her husband. "If you cannot stop your husband, you can stop that girl" said Auntie Du (Tan 353). Sexist cultures that gave men all the power and kept women silent and passive, led females to turn against each other, and release their frustration and anger on those who are as weak or even weaker than them:

And perhaps this was wrong of me, to blame another woman for my own miseries. But that was how I was raised—never to criticize men or the society they ruled, or Confucius, that awful man who made that society. I could blame only other women who were more afraid than I. (Tan 325)

This kind of attitude leads to what is known as horizontal hostility. Horizontal hostility takes place when members of an oppressed group act in a way that reinforces the dominance of their oppressor (Debella par.2). According to Paula J. Caplan, women, just like men, learn to poorly judge and devalue the opinions and the existence of other females. When

individuals sense that they are not worthy enough, they apply this feeling to the people who belong to the same group as they are (51).

When Wen Fu raped a fourteen years old servant, everyone got blamed except for the rapist himself. Even the young girl blamed herself for his actions:

I listened from a faraway place as the servant girl begged me to forgive her, slapped her own face twice, and confessed she was the one who was wrong. She said she was the one who was weak for letting him touch her. She cried and prayed for me to not say anything to my husband. (Tan 327)

After listening to the victim, Winnie was determined to confront him with his actions. However, after giving it a thought, hesitations driven by fears that people may start criticizing her for taking the servant' side against her husband, started possessing her. She also feared that the others would blame her for Wen Fu's deed:

And then I thought, what will people think when they find out? What will they think of me—if I take sides against my husband and defend a servant girl instead? I imagined Hulan scolding me, accusing me of seeing only the worst in everything and everybody. I saw others criticizing me for not managing my house better. I could imagine people laughing—a husband who chases after a servant girl because his own wife is not enough—the classic old story!. (Tan 328)

In addition to being influenced by the opinions of others, Winnie also justified Wen Fu's crime by saying that many men do the same thing, "what he did was wrong, maybe it was a crime, but not a big one. Many men did those kinds of things with servants" Thought Winnie (Tan 329). The low status females, especially poor ones, occupied during that era made society's members think that the violation of their bodies and forcing them to be engaged in sexual activities against their will was "not a big crime", simply because the act was done by

the majority of men. This devaluation of women as living creatures, and the objectification of their body made not only men but also women think that such acts are justifiable and trivial.

In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Intergroup Processes* (2001), the author sheds light on the impact of objectification on women's psychology. The way women are looked at turned them into mere bodies. Because of this intense concentration on females' appearance, women learned to objectify themselves and devote a lot of time and energy on thinking about their physical features; which distracted them from seeing the other important issues surrounding them. In an experiment conducted by Fredrickson, men and women were asked to wear a swimsuit and view themselves in the mirror. When the participants did so, it has been noted that women were more critical and disgusted by their appearance than men were. After that, each group has been assigned a task to perform. After analyzing the results, it has been discovered that women who were under the effect of self-objectification performed worse than the other participants (Brown and Gaertner 251).

When Winnie was remembering her mother's appearance, she described her as a person who is proud of her beauty:

In any case, my mother did not look in a pond, she looked in a mirror. Every night she did this. So if I am honest, I would have to say my mother was proud of her looks, maybe even vain, just a little. Of course, she had reason to be proud. Her skin was the color of white jade. Or maybe it was the color of a summer peach. Or maybe I am only remembering my mother as another classical tale, all those phrases about ladies with voices as pretty-sounding as lutes, skin as white as jade, their gracefulness flowing like calm rivers. Why did stories always describe women that way, making us believe we had to be that way too? (Tan 119-20)

The stories women heard about females with exceptional beauty, made them set height expectations that they pressured themselves to meet. When Winnie and Peanut were heading

to a festival, Peanut took extra time and made extra efforts to look prettier. She applied different beauty products to achieve the desired white as jade appearance. Under the guidance of a foreign beauty magazine, she exaggeratedly powdered her face, darkened her eyes, and painted her lips (Tan 145). While they were in the marketplace, Peanut met Wen Fu and instantly fell in love with him. However, the day after the meeting, Peanut refused to see Wen Fu, because she feared he may not see the beauty in her without make-up (Tan 157). Society's obsession with women's appearance, created a belief that females who lack beauty are worthless.

The influence of culture did not only touch females, but also males. This impact can be seen in the phenomenon of toxic muscularity. Toxic muscularity can be defined as the harmful behaviors and attitudes that men execute under the illusion of showing dominance. Such behaviors usually end up with violence, and cause harm to the doer and those around him. Individuals who possess this type of masculinity believe that manhood is "defined by violence, sex, status and aggression" (qtd. in Barr par. 7). Toxic masculinity is built upon a set of beliefs that degrade and devalue anyone who is not a straight male. Furthermore, it is considered as a threat to women and an obstacle that prevents them from reaching powerful positions and denies them from their basic human rights (Barr par. 4-11).

Men have always been given excuses to their actions no matter how bad or offensive they are. These justifications to their behaviors allowed them to practice their male power and dominance without facing the consequences of it (Ford). After a bad fight between Winnie and Wen Fu, in which he humiliated and raped her, Hulan, after hearing the fight, stated that "Every woman's husband has a bad temper... Your situation is no different." (Tan 395). Women in misogyny's cultures are expected to be patient and handle their husband's mistreatments. As the Chinese proverb says, "if a woman marries a chicken, she should stick with the chicken; if she marries a dog, she should stick with the dog" (qtd. in Fan 213):

meaning that a wife is supposed to stay by her husband's side for life. After Winnie asked Hulan and Auntie Du to be her divorce's witnesses, they freaked out and strongly refused "How can I do this!" said Hulan "She is right, syau ning," said Auntie Du, "How can you ask a friend to be witness to your tragedy? Reconsider. Think of your little son" (Tan 395). Winnie's salvation has been viewed by her friends as a "tragedy." Even when she ran away and hid from Wen Fu, Hulan told her husband about her location thinking that she is helping her.

According to Jingjing Chen and Xiaoling Shu, divorced women face harsher criticism and are more shamed by society than divorced men. They are referred to as worn-out shoes, and they are less likely to get remarried since they are viewed as damaged products. Such cultural stigma forces women to stay in their failed marriage than to get their freedom (par.4). After Wen Fu signed the divorce paper, he said to Winnie "You see, you are divorced... Worth nothing. You have no husband. You have no home. You have no son." (Tan 193). With the mention of her son, Winnie started panicking. Wen Fu, realizing that her son is her weakness, asked her to beg for his forgiveness. Patriarchal cultures feed men egos and give them unconditional power over women. When Winnie dared to challenge Wen Fu and the sexist norms society imposed on her, he used her son to maintain his dominance over her.

III.2 The Internalization of Oppression

Unlike Freud, the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Foulkes, believes that social forces have the ability to access and to affect the id. He further argues that the ego and the superego, besides the id, evolve together within the context of the family. "The individual is pre-conditioned to the core by his community...and his personality and character are imprinted vitally by the group in which he is raised" (qtd. in Dalal 115) states Foulkes. Basically speaking, the character of the individual is largely built and shaped by her/his social surrounding. While Orthodox Foulkes asserts that the society has an impact on the

development of the individuals, radical Foulks believes that the individuals are entirely made by the society they live in (Dalal 115-6).

Ravit Raufman and Haim Weinberg in their book, *Fairy Tales and the Social Unconscious: The Hidden Language* (2017), argues that social unconsciousness is created by the different beliefs and assumptions that are shared by the members of the same society. Despite some of these beliefs are conscious, people are still unaware of the impact they have on their behaviors (134). In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Peanut explains to Winnie the common belief that “if a woman has too much yin, she draws a lot more yang from her husband” (Tan 199). In other words, if a woman is too strong, she draws the life out of her husband's body. When Turtle Uncle told the story of the man who died while he was having an intimate time with his wife, the mother-in-law, Turtle Uncle and Peanut (who retold the story), all accused the wife of killing him because she had too much yin. Such beliefs led the society's members to resent and reject strength in women, making them believe that a strong woman is a threat and danger to the family system. Vice versa they also tricked women into thinking that being passive and submissive is the natural thing to do.

Social unconscious consists of social relationships, which the individuals are unaware of. In the opinions of Foulks, this phenomenon can only be revealed or investigated through group situation, “each individual's feelings and reactions will reflect the influences exerted on him by other individuals in the group and by the group as a whole, however little he is aware of this” states Foulks (qtd. in Nitzgen 5). That is to say, People's actions and emotions are unconsciously driven by the influence the society and its members has on them.

Winnie's mother, who has been educated against Confucius thinking, learned to use her mind and make her own choices, and according to Winnie's Uncle “That's what got her into trouble, thinking for herself.” (Tan 123). After many years have passed, Winnie and her Aunts went to meet her father to ask for his approval to marry Wen Fu. While they were in her

father's house, he asked Winnie about her opinions on a painting he owned. Hearing her father's question, Winnie panicked and started mentally searching for the answer that would satisfy her father. "My mind ran fast, trying to think of the answer, one that would please him..." (Tan 178). Due to the ideas that have been planted in the minds of females, they grew up fearing to think for themselves.

Winnie, since her mother's disappearance, has been hearing other family members negatively talking about her mother's disgrace. Even a funeral has been held to bury her shame. Such memories strongly affected Winnie, and made her think that her mother's stubbornness, strong will, and strength are what gave her an unhappy life, according to what the other family members said:

I used to think they were like my mother's own life, as sad as a story. At that moment, and not until then, did I consider that all these stories were false—only stories. Like Peanut and everyone else, I had imagined an unhappy ending to my mother's life. Like Peanut, I had allowed myself to be scared by those sad tales. And look what happened.

It did not prevent disaster from coming into my life. Just the opposite. (Tan 434)

As a young child, Winnie believed the stories that have been told about her mother; how she brought disgrace to her and her family's life by setting herself free, how her escape was as bad as her death, and how her education and thinking for herself brought her trouble and shame. Such stories led Winnie to avoid her mother's mistakes in hopes of achieving happiness. She confused love with pain, and believed that women, as wives, are supposed to suffer and bear pain for the sake of being a good wife:

... this kind of pain for a husband was true love, the kind that grew between husband and wife. I had also learned this in the movies, both Chinese and American. A woman always had to feel pain, suffer and cry, before she could feel love. And now that I was living with Wen Fu in a little monastery room in Hangchow, I suffered a lot. I thought

my love was growing bigger and bigger. I thought I was becoming a better wife. (Tan 207)

Winnie, like all the other female characters, learned how to be an obedient wife from the other females around her, who in return learned how to adhere to their social role from other females' figures in their lives. Thus, it is appropriate to say that women in *The Kitchen God's Wife* inherited their oppression and learned how to consciously and unconsciously accept it through the internalization of the oppressive social norms.

Lynne Layton suggests that norms are not internalized easily; usually, individuals tend to fight back those oppressive norms that are enforced on them by the dominant group. The power hierarchies, as Layton refers to them, seek to maintain power and inequality through shaming and rejecting normal humans' features, such as aggression and confidence in females. Those who challenge society and do not follow the norms are punished by withdrawing love and respect from them and given criticism and humiliation instead (Layton "Beyond Sameness and Difference" 174-5). The most suitable example of such a case in the studied novel would be the situation of Winnie's mother. The way she fought the oppressive circumstances she lived in, and the way she rejected her social role, earned her a great deal of criticism and gossip from her society's members. Another example would be that of Peanut, whose father declared that she was dead for him after she escaped her marriage. Peanut's father used to strongly love his daughter, however, after she committed such "crime", his love for her was withdrawn. Furthermore, her husband, whose Peanut ran away from because she discovered he was homosexual, declared in all the newspapers that he is divorcing her for the sake of bringing her humiliation:

"he put an announcement in all the big and little newspapers in Shanghai. It said I am divorcing from Jiang Huazheng, deserter wife. Your poor uncle, he read this while eating his midday meal—almost choked to death on a piece of radish." (Tan 430)

The power hierarchies uphold their dominance through splitting human's characteristics and abilities. In other words, they categorize the appropriate human's traits according to the appropriate group or class. Then the members of society are expected to limit themselves within the box that has been designed for them. As it has been mentioned, those who do follow the social rules gain social approval, while the others who do not get deprived from love and acceptance. However, even the members who maintain the split that has been assigned for them face psychological pain due to neglecting some natural humanistic parts in them. Such individuals engage in psychological conflicts between the normative unconscious processes, that seek to maintain the dominant class ideologies, and the other unconscious processes that refuse them (Layton "Beyond Sameness and Difference" 175).

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, when Winnie decided to confront her husband or made a step towards freedom, certain thoughts that had been planted in her mind or gained through experience resurfaced. For instance, after she heard of the rape Wen Fu committed against the fourteen years old servant, the bravery she collected to face him with, crushed once she remembered the reactions she would receive from Hulan and Auntie Du. Furthermore, When she finally made Wen Fu sign the divorce paper, once he mentioned her son she immediately thought of the pain her mother's disappearance brought to her:

I had not thought what would happen to Danru. How foolish I was! To think my life was my own, something to protect or lose only for myself. I could never leave him. I could never do what my mother did to me. (Tan 393)

Since women have been taught that their only role in life is to nurture and to take care of the people around them (parents, parents-in-law, husbands, sons), Winnie considered her desire for freedom as selfishness. In addition to limiting their roles, women's emotions have also been restricted. When Wen Fu kept comparing Winnie to all the women he knew, Winnie did not feel angry, simply because she was denied the right to "I was not angry. I did not know I

was supposed to be angry. This was China. A woman had no right to be angry. But I was unhappy...” (Tan 210).

The different kinds of limitation society imposed on women psychologically affected them and deceived them into thinking that their social status is lower than that of men. Such beliefs have been imposed on females since birth via various social, cultural, and familial institutions. These social assumptions and norms led to the creation of what is known as social unconsciousness. Simply, the latter refers to the different social constructions that exist within society without the members’ awareness. Social unconsciousness affects people’s behaviors and makes them act in accordance to the other individuals around them. Just like Winnie learned how to be submissive, so did the other women. The process of oppressions’ internalization females went through, led them to unconsciously accept and normalize their abuse. However, usually humans do not accept these ideologies without a fight. Throughout this conflict, there are unconscious processes that reject the imposed oppression, and there are also normative unconscious processes that function for the sake of maintaining the dominance of the power hierarchies.

Conclusion

Since literature is considered as a mirror of society, it allows us to study the lives of those who existed before us and to consider their cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances. For the sake of analyzing a literary piece, critics use various tools and methods under the name of what is known as literary criticism.

The history of literary criticism dates back to the times of Plato and Aristotle; however, it did not explode until the twentieth century's era due to the involvement of science. The sociology of Marx and the psychology of Freud largely contributed in the update of literary criticism as a mechanism for analysis. With its development, literary criticism evolved to include different forms, for different purposes, such as, sociological criticism for analyzing the social surroundings, and psychological criticism for analyzing the characters' mental side.

According to sociological criticism, the writers and their works are shaped under the influence of the social forces. From this perspective, literary works are viewed as windows to the represented era and its circumstances. This approach does not only deal with the relationship between the creator and her/his creation, but also with the relationship between the literary piece and the society it consumes.

Due to the belief of Karl Marx that literature cannot stand alone, but should be connected to the social forces of its era, the approach of sociological criticism developed to be a more prominent scientific tool of analysis. However, since Karl Marx's interests were more oriented towards politics and economy, Marxist critics relied on more than just what has been provided by Marx himself. Louis Althusser, who is a French Marxist philosopher, asserts that the dominant class is able to maintain its power through the use of ideology to manipulate the lower classes into submission.

Besides Marxist criticism, socialist feminism is another form of sociological criticism that is concerned with social injustices. This approach links women's oppression to other kinds of social subjections such as economic inequality and racial discrimination. Socialist feminists believe that women's psychology plays a key role in their oppression. Juliet Mitchell in her article, "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), which is inspired by Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, assumes that women have been brainwashed into submission through the use of ideologies. Marxism is a valuable approach to socialist feminists since it provides them with various methods of analyzing literature in relation to the society it took place in.

Another major approach to literary criticism is psychological criticism, which has been mainly popularized by Sigmund Freud in the twenties century. Literary critics rely on psychological criticism to analyze the characters' attitude, motives and feeling. Freud's in his theory divided the mind into the conscious and the unconscious. Furthermore, he also divided the personality into the id the ego and the super ego. The Freudian theory of the mind is mainly a biological one that neglects the social forces. The latter has been partially rejected by the Freudian psychoanalyst Orthodox Foulkes, who theorizes the existence of what is known as "the social unconscious". Simply put, the social unconscious contains social restrictions and rules that exist within the society and its members without their awareness.

According to Lynne Layton, society creates and forces its members to follow certain oppressive rules that have been created in relation to their gender. These rules are applied and kept alive via "the normative unconscious processes". When individuals attempt to challenge the role that has been assigned to them, the love and respect that have been given to them get taken away, and replaced with rejection and humiliation. Furthermore, the American psychologist, Sandra L. Bem suggests that children learn how to behave according to their gender from society and people around them. Once they learn their culture's gender schema, they start to behave in accordance to it.

Amy Tan in her bestselling novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which has been published on 1991, retells her mother's story and painful past in the form of the protagonist Winnie. After Winnie has been forced by her longtime friend Hulan to unfold the secrets, she reveals her miserable past to her daughter, Pearl. Throughout the storytelling, Winnie implicitly and explicitly exposes the discriminations women faced in the Chinese culture on the basis of gender, and the low status they were given.

Women were viewed as mere sex objects and house keepers and were denied the basic human rights, including education. After Winnie's mother escaped her unhappy marriage, she faced harsh criticism from her family and society's members and was considered dead. Some accused her education for her disgrace, while others put the blame on her free will, "That's what got her into trouble, thinking for herself." (Tan 123) Said Winnie's uncle. Besides facing educational limitations, women are also restricted on the economic level. Winnie in the novel has no stable income except for her dowry. Betty, who is one of her old friends, relied on herself and worked in order to feed herself and her baby. Her economic independency allowed her to reject her parents-in-laws act of degradation.

In addition to being treated badly because of their gender, women are also looked down upon due to their appearance and family's wealth. Wen Fu at first pretended to be in love with Peanut because he wanted to marry into her family. But once he found out that Winnie's family is wealthier, he sent his parents to ask for her hand. Hulan in the novel envied Winnie for not having to worry about marriage, because she comes from a rich family. As for poor women, they are destined for misery except if they are blessed with exceptional beauty.

Women are not only denied basic human rights, but also basic human emotions such as anger. Winnie in the novel admitted that whenever her husband compared her to other women, she did not feel angry, because women back then were not supposed to be angry.

Strength in females is also rejected, and fierce women are believed to be danger on their husbands. Peanut shares with Winnie a story; she heard her Turtle Uncle share with his friends; about a woman who had too much yin that she took her husband's life. The woman has been accused of killing her husband because she was too strong.

Females are given a low status since the day they are born. Daughters are less preferred than boys, and are only used for house chores. Women in the Chinese culture are expected to serve their fathers, husbands, then their sons respectively. Peanut and Winnie have been taught to be proper wives since a very young age. They have been trained to be submissive and obedient to their husbands from the other individuals around them.

As for males, they have been given unconditional power, and were allowed to practice their dominance on females without any consequences. The male's privilege of the Chinese culture can be seen when Winnie stated that Wen Fu's mother acted as her son's servant, and once he got married she trained his wife to do the same thing.

The Chinese cultural limitation applied on females psychologically affected them and made them believe that freedom is a sin that cannot be thought of. The way their minds have been programmed, turned them into mere bodies with no opinions made only to serve others. Their fear of freedom and independency led even Hulan to refuse to sign on Winnie's tragedy's paper (divorce paper), despite her knowledge of Winnie's struggle. Some female characters, such as Little Yu, even attempted suicide when they were not able to escape their marriage.

Both social status and gender roles are socially constructed element that have been forced on females and males by their society and culture. The power hierarchies assign each group different human characteristics that they have to follow; for instance, weakness for females, and strength males for males. If they follow the rules, they get social support, but if they do not, they earn humiliation and criticism. Such limitation, which individuals face since birth,

brainwashed women into submission, and gave men the illusion of power. The process of oppression's internalization women went through, made them consciously and unconsciously accept their abuse and inherit it to their daughters, thinking that it is the right thing to do.

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ملخص

تتعرض الإناث لقواعد وقيود اجتماعية منذ ولادتهن. هذه القيود الثقافية تجبرهم على تقييد أنفسهم داخل الصندوق الذي تم تصميمه لهم من خلال التسلسلات الهرمية للسلطة ؛ الذكور و الإناث لا يولدون مهيمنين أو خاضعين ، على التوالي ، يتم تعليمهم كيف يصبحون "رجال" و "نساء" وفقاً لمعايير ثقافتهم. في هذا البحث ، يتم تطبيق النقد الاجتماعي بهدف تجسيد العناصر الاجتماعية والثقافية في رواية أمي نان زوجة *اله المطبخ* (1991) ، بينما يتم توظيف النقد النفسي لدراسة اثر الثقافة على سلوكيات الشخصيات الأنثوية و نفسياتها.

Résumé

Les femmes sont exposées aux règles et restrictions sociales depuis le jour de leur naissance. Ces limitations culturelles les obligent à se limiter à la boîte conçue pour eux par les hiérarchies de pouvoir; ni les hommes ni les femmes ne sont nés dominants ou soumis, on leur apprend à être des «hommes» et des «femmes» selon les normes de leur culture. Dans cette recherche, la critique sociologique est appliquée afin de décrire les éléments sociaux et culturels du roman d'Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), puis une critique psychologique est consacrée à l'étude des effets de la culture sur les attitudes et le psychisme des personnages féminins.