




RS Global
Journals

Scholarly Publisher
RS Global Sp. z O.O.
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

Dolna 17, Warsaw, Poland 00-773
Tel: +48 226 0 227 03
Email: editorial_office@rsglobal.pl

JOURNAL	International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science
p-ISSN	2544-9338
e-ISSN	2544-9435
PUBLISHER	RS Global Sp. z O.O., Poland
ARTICLE TITLE	THE DECONSTRUCTION OF MYTH LIKE THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY (Based on Amy Tan's Novel "The Kitchen God's Wife")
AUTHOR(S)	Nigar Rauf Asgarova.
ARTICLE INFO	Nigar Rauf Asgarova. (2022) The Deconstruction of Myth Like the Search for Identity (Based on Amy Tan's Novel "The Kitchen God's Wife"). <i>International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science</i> . 4(36). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122022/7893
DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122022/7893
RECEIVED	19 October 2022
ACCEPTED	20 December 2022
PUBLISHED	28 December 2022
LICENSE	 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License .

© The author(s) 2022. This publication is an open access article.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF MYTH LIKE THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

(Based on Amy Tan's Novel "The Kitchen God's Wife")

Nigar Rauf Asgarova

Ph.D. student at Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku Slavic University, Baku, Azerbaijan

DOI: https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122022/7893

ARTICLE INFO

Received 19 October 2022

Accepted 20 December 2022

Published 28 December 2022

KEYWORDS

Amy Tan, "The Kitchen God's Wife", Novel, Myth, Identity.

ABSTRACT

The article examines the identity of a Chinese-American woman in the novel "The Kitchen God's Wife" by modern American writer A.Tan in parallel with the "Kitchen God", one of the ancient Chinese myths. It turns out that A.Tan deconstructs the plot line from Chinese mythology against the background of the life story of modern man and presents this image as a woman of the new world. This woman behaves and lives like a man of the modern world, along with her roots, customs, and traditions. A.Tan deconstructs the image of a woman belonging to the mythical world and, unlike Chinese myths, describes her not as submissive and obedient, but as a real-world woman who fights for her rights and understands her national identity.

The writer brings the mythical thought to the level of problems of the modern world and evokes ideas about the Chinese-American's national identity, its past, and its essence. E.Tan refers to images and motifs taken from Chinese mythological and folklore sources, preferring Chinese cultural symbols. Highlighting the ethnic past, E.Tan warns that every Chinese is bound to lose as well as gain in the contact of cultures. For this reason, he deconstructs the myth of the "Kitchen God" to reconsider the national moral bonds in the novel "The Kitchen God's Wife".

Citation: Nigar Rauf Asgarova. (2022) The Deconstruction of Myth Like the Search for Identity (Based on Amy Tan's Novel "The Kitchen God's Wife"). *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(36). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122022/7893

Copyright: © 2022 Nigar Rauf Asgarova. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY)**. The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Introduction.

Myth is one of the important elements involved in the creation of moral and ethical problems, motives, and symbols in A. Tan's creativity. A.J.Grainas writes that myths are "a figurative form of thinking inherent in mankind, which solves the main ideological and philosophical problems" (Grainas, 1983: 81). Apparently, for this reason, through myth, the writer makes the issues of national identity important and significant. The use of myth reinforces the importance of national history in the description of national traditions, a certain stage of development of an ethnic community. According to Kurt Huebner, "various forms of mythical thinking continue to live in our modern spiritual world" (Huebner, 1996: 6). For this reason, Chinese history and mythology appear as a subtext in A. Tan's novel. Myth themes and motives play a connecting role in the relationship between women in A. Tan's novels. If these myths are past and memory for the mother, for the girl it is perceived as culture, and national identity.

Experiment.

The mythical plot line used by A. Tan in her works is completed in the unity of modern social, cultural, philosophical, and ethical essence and becomes an important tool embodying the hero's search for identity. Such an approach is a characteristic feature of A. Tan's novels. As a rule, mythical plots and motives act as a spiritual and aesthetic category in the writer's novels. We can see it in the novels

“The Joy Luck Club”, “The Hundred Secret Senses”, “The Bonesetter’s Daughter” and “The Kitchen God’s Wife”. In the novel “The Kitchen God’s Wife” the Chinese mythological plot line changes its original meaning and at the end of the work falls into the circle of modern man and appears in a new way. A.Tan changes familiar myth in the attitude of the American Chinese to life and people and gives it a new meaning. According to K.Levi-Strauss, “the main thing in myth is neither style nor form of narration, the main thing in myth is the story told” (Levi-Strauss, 2001: 187). In the context of the American way of life and cultural values, Chinese myth loses its original meaning. The concept of the kitchen god from Chinese mythology is re-understood after the Chinese have lost touch with their homeland, and as a result, it belongs more to modern America than to traditional Chinese society. America, its way of life, its American conception is a self-assertive discourse of the Chinese placed in a new cultural context. For this reason, Chinese traditions and mythical motifs become a semiotic space and express the national identity of the American Chinese. It is in this case that anything related to China acts as a cultural code in various discourses. Although the Chinese mother and the American girl remain faithful to different cultures, at the end, the myth “The Kitchen God’s Wife” (Kitchen God or Stove God named Zao Jun) brings them together, but urges to continue life in a different interpretation and in a new way: “She will use her stick to chase away everything bad. See her name: Lady Sorrowfree, happiness winning over bitterness, no regrets in this world. Now help me light three sticks of incense. The smoke will take our wishes to heaven. Of course, it's only superstition, just for fun. But see how fast the smoke rises – oh, even faster when we laugh, lifting our hopes, higher and higher...” (Tan, 1991: 102). Myths that have a social, ethical and aesthetic function appear in A. Tan’s novel as an “element of the narrative structure”, as Y.M.Meletinsky said (Meletinsky, 2001: 83).

Discussion and Results.

In A.Tan’s novels, mothers and daughters re-evaluate Chinese myths placed in different cultural contexts. If China and its mythological thinking are a memory and a tradition for the mother, it becomes a search for national identity for children who have never been to China. In other words, Chinese culture’s mythology becomes a semiotic code, expressing culture and national identity.

In the novel “The Kitchen God’s Wife”, Chinese myth also becomes a metaphor, and the memory of the myth told by the mother to her grandchildren revives national identity and national customs. “Here I can forget my tragedy; I can hide behind the door all my secrets that I could never reveal to anyone”, says Winnie, who lives in a foreign country but is also attached to his roots. For this reason, in the plot of the myth, he tells his grandchildren, pain, and suffering are the main motives of the whole work. The myth that Winnie tells his grandchildren carries a memory and a national tradition, but it also speaks of the problems that tradition brings.

Using the ethnic past, Chinese customs, and traditions, the writer’s heroes can find themselves in a new cultural reality. Literary critics estimate this feature of the work as “a brilliant artistic embodiment of the modern world” (Stanley, 1998: 176).

It is interesting that the writer leads mythical thinking to the plane of problems of the modern world, and in this way awakens ideas about national identity, its past, and its essence. It refers to images and motifs taken from Chinese mythological and folklore sources. For this reason, the important role of the work is given to the symbols of Chinese culture. Promoting his ethnic past, A. Tan points out that while every Chinese gains in contact with cultures, losses are inevitable. For this reason, in the above-mentioned novel, he proposes to reconsider the relationship with tradition and deconstruct the myth of the “kitchen god”.

A.Tan’s creativity is rooted in Chinese mythology, and each sample of folklore is accompanied by a typical event experienced by many American Chinese. Under the influence of the society in which they live, the heroes of A. Tan are more or less connected with the cultural heritage of China. On the other hand, all the events reflected in A. Tan’s work show that American girls of Chinese descent, along with their cultural values, also accept American culture and are able to overcome the resulting conflicts. It is known that fiction refers to mythology, which reflects the traditions, national and cultural values, and through it opens the way to artistic samples that express the national identity, the genetic code. This feature is more prominent in the works of writers living in different cultural spaces. On the other hand, mythology has a special role in solving the problems of national identity. Mythical thinking, which refers to gods and supernatural phenomena, not only expresses cultural ideology, but also reflects national-cultural identity and national values. A. Tan’s work also includes such a mythological thought,

but at the same time brings it to the level of the problems of the modern world. That is why her works have become a personal mythology that embodies the life stories of Chinese women. The myths in A. Tan's novels stand out in the characters' life stories and views on life, and become the writer's interpreter to express a certain idea. In their personal life stories, mothers try to share folklore motifs, folk wisdom, and instructive advice with their daughters. Girls, in turn, create their own myths from the plots of legends, tales and myths told by mothers.

Although A. Tan conveys Chinese cultural values with a mythical plot, he also reworks them with two separate, often contradictory ideas. In his novels, real-life situations are resolved around a mythical plot line based on the family conflicts of the characters. In the novel "The Kitchen God's Wife", the writer uses Chinese mythology, which has an exceptional role in the history, national and cultural values of his people, and voices it in the language of the Chinese mother.

Winnie tells her grandchildren Tess and Cleo a Chinese myth about how rich farmer Zhang became a kitchen god: "In China long time ago, there was a rich farmer named Zhang, such a lucky man... He was not satisfied with his happy life. He wanted to play with a pretty girl and chased his wife away. Later, he became poor, he wore patches than whole cloth on his pants. He crawled from the gate of one household to another, crying, give me your moldy grain. At last he got to his wife house, but he was shame to meet his wife and began leaping about the kitchen looking for some place to hide, then jumped in the kitchen fireplace just as his wife walked in the room" (Tan, 1991: 205).

Embarrassed by his mistreatment of his wife, Zhang throws himself into the kitchen stove to avoid confrontation. Zhang's ashes, which are burning in the stove, are blown into the sky through the chimney. In the heavens, Jade Emperor (the supreme ruler of the heavens in Chinese mythology, the ruler of human destiny) decides that Zhang draws conclusions from his evil deeds and is ashamed, which is why he is rewarded with deification. Zhang becomes kitchen god and is responsible for people's actions. He conveys to the supreme ruler the names of people who should be rewarded with wealth for their exemplary life every New Year. But it also provides information about those who deserve to be punished for their bad behavior.

A. Tan translates this plot line from Chinese mythology into the novel "The Kitchen God's Wife" and thus recreates the abused woman in the image of Winnie. The kitchen god's wife, Winnie, lives the life of an unnamed woman in the myth with the problems of the modern world. In Chinese mythology, when Zhang ascends to heaven and becomes a deity, nothing is said about his wife. However, in A. Tan's novel, Winnie, who suffered a lot and was constantly physically and mentally tortured by her husband, gets a chance to live happily due to her patience and endurance. She escapes from the tyrant and cruel Wen Fu, marries a happy American-Chinese Jimmy Louie and becomes the mother of a talented girl and the grandmother of two beautiful children.

M. Eliade writes that "understanding the structure and functions of myths in traditional societies means not only clarifying a certain stage in the history of human thought, but also a better understanding of the most important events of modern life ... myth becomes a model for any human activity" (Eliade, 1996: 25).

In A. Tan's novel, the kitchen god's wife symbolizes the fate of female ancestors. That's why when Winnie tells her grandchildren the plot of this myth, she tells it in a unique way, and that's why the fate of Chinese women sounds like "chicken in a cage, brainless, never dreaming of freedom, but never when your neck might be cut off" (Tan, 1991: 230). Throughout history, Chinese women have encountered the way of life of all eastern women. As her husband's personal property, she can become an object of sale in any case. For this reason, as seen in the plot of the myth, Zhang, who found a new lover, kicked his wife out of the house. One of the greatest troubles of a Chinese woman was her inability to give birth to a boy. That is why she became the second and sometimes the third woman in the house.

Winnie is a Chinese immigrant and has lived in China for most of her life, but moved to the United States whenever possible. Winnie runs a flower shop in the United States and runs it with another Chinese woman who lives as an immigrant. Until her husband's death, she was a pastor in a Chinese church, and her daughter, Pearl, is a speech therapist. Pearl lives with her husband, Phil Brandt, and their two daughters.

The novel, which begins with a description of the life story of a mother and daughter in the background of an ordinary event of everyday life - the engagement ceremony, continues around the idea of a mythical plot, and only at the end of the work, the reader understands the myth deconstructed by the writer. Pearl's mother learns that Winnie was Weili Jiang while living in China, and that she was the daughter of

Wen Fu, not Jimmy Louie. His real father, Wen Fu, was a tyrant and cruel man, and he was one of the hypocrites and forgers who used the documents of his dead brother to become an Air Force officer.

A. Tan deconstructs the mythical plot line in the image of a Chinese woman living an immigrant life and restores the forgotten kitchen god's wife, in other words, the myth in a new way. Already in this novel, "the kitchen god's wife" restores her identity. This, in turn, is a new myth for girls stuck between the past, traditions, and modern American traditions. The character of the ancient Chinese myth has no place in the new myth because he lives by patriarchal rules. The woman of the new world creates her own myth and sees herself in the place of the kitchen god like Winnie. She acts as a woman who can decide her own destiny, takes responsibility for her own life, and restore her identity. Apparently, for this reason, at the end of the work, the mother and daughter take a figure that does not attract anyone's attention, not the figure of the kitchen god, and call it "Lady Sorrowfree". Lady Sorrowfree has become a symbol of hope for hundreds of disenfranchised, silent women, and has gained the status of a goddess in Pearle's kitchen. Analyzing A. Tan's novel "The Kitchen God's Wife", Guiyou Huang writes that "while depicting an assiduous quest for a female divinity", the author's calling her Lady Sorrowfree is out of coincidence (Huang, 2005: 127).

In A. Tan's novel, women claim to replace the kitchen god. Both Winnie and Pearl clearly see the harmful patriarchal influence of custom and tradition in ancient Chinese culture and realize that this problem is stored in the memory of myth. For this reason, Winnie was abused by her husband while living in China and was forced to remain silent and obey like Chinese women. The work revolves around this problem, and A. Tan wants to convey to the reader that women like Winnie will live the life of the kitchen god's wife, as long as patriarchal customs and traditions don't lose their force. If they remain silent as they did in the past, their daughters will repeat the life of their mothers. In other words, the daughters of the new generation, along with Chinese cultural values, must accept American culture, define their identities from the union of the two, and write their own destinies and destinies. With the myth of the "kitchen god" spoken by the mother, the writer challenges both Eastern culture and traditional Chinese cultural ideology. In her novel, she describes a strong woman who does not represent the dominant culture. In other words, the author's image of a woman in the mythical world is not a dragon, a double-headed snake, or a geisha. A. Tan deconstructs the image of a Chinese woman, depicting her as a real-world woman, unlike Chinese myths.

Conclusions.

Apparently, the myths are interpreted in "The Kitchen God's Wife", as in many of A. Tan's novels are explained from the views of a Chinese-American woman. That's why Winnie conveys the myth to her grandchildren in a unique way. The myth she is talking about already identifies a Chinese woman living in America. That's why it should be noted that the deconstructed myth is a tool used by A. Tan to create the American Chinese myth. In other words, the fact that a Chinese woman lived in America and recounted her life in China is an attempt by a Chinese American to share her experiences. It is the desire of a Chinese woman to pass on to a new generation a new myth in the form of a theme that once resonated with an ancient myth. A. Tan believes that such an approach should be kept in mind as an important condition for the study of national identity. In other words, it means being American without damaging China's heritage.

In Amy Tan's novel, the mother's life in search of identity and identity follows a mythological model. By accepting her national identity, her daughter also accepts her mother's wisdom and commitment to her ancestry. In other words, he finds a balance with his personality by mastering the culture of his mother and modern American culture. The text of the myth allows him to understand not only the Chinese, but himself - the Chinese-American. It is no coincidence that Susan Muaddi Darraj wrote with reference to the American writer Mary Ellen Snodgrass that the novel "Kitchen God's Wife" is "Chinese Gone with the Wind" (Darraj, 2007: 37).

REFERENCES

1. Bloom H. Asian-American Writers. – Yale University. Chelsea House Publications, 2009. – 219 p.
2. Darraj S.M. Amy Tan. – Infobase Publishing, 2007. – 112 p.
3. Dong L. Reading Amy Tan. – Dublin: Libraries Unlimited, 2009. – 138 p.
4. Dissanayake W., Bradbury S. Literary History, Narrative, and Culture. // Selected conference papers. College of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature. – University of Hawaii, 1989. – 142 p.
5. Eliade M. Aspects of myth / Translated from French V.Bolshakova. – M.: Invest-PPP, 1996. – 240 p.
6. Graimas A.J., Kurte J. Semiotics. Explanatory dictionary of language theories // Semiotics / comp., introductory article and ed. Y.S.Stepanova. – M.: Raduqa, 1983. – 340 p.
7. Huebner K. The truth of the myth. – M.: Respublica, 1996. – 448 p.
8. Huang G. Asian American Literary Studies. – Edinburgh University Press, 2005. – 258 p.
9. Huntley E.D. Amy Tan: A Critical Companion. – Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998. – 165 p.
10. Levi-Strauss K. Structural anthropology / Translated from French. – M.: Publishing House EXMO-Press, 2001. – 512 p.
11. Ling A. Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry. – New York: Pergamon Press, 1990, – 214p.
12. Meletinsky Y.M. From the myth to literature. – M.: RGGU, 2001. – 168 p.
13. Stanley S.K. Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color. – Chicago: University of Illinois Press. – 1998. – 180 p.
14. Tan A. The Kitchen God's Wife. – London: Penguin Books, 1991. – 415 p.
15. Zia H. Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People. – Pub: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. – 368 p.
16. Willard N. Talking to Ghosts: In Amy Tan's New Novel, a Chinese-American woman searches for her roots.<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books-01/02/18/reviews/010218.18williat.html?0216bk>