

Characters Analysis in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*: Psychological Approach

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Abstrak

Artikel ini berjudul "Characters Analysis of Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club: Psychological Approach" yang bertujuan untuk menemukan konflik dari karakter melalui Bahasa kiasan dan menganalisis bagaimana konflik tersebut mempengaruhi karakter di dalam novel Amy Tan yang berjudul "The Joy Luck Club" yang dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan psikologi. Data penelitian ini diambil dari novel Amy Tan yang berjudul "The Joy Luck Club" yang di publikasikan oleh G. P. Putnam's Son pada tahun 1994. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dan metode yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data adalah metode dokumentasi dengan menggunakan teknik mencatat. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penulis menggunakan beberapa bahasa kiasan untuk menyampaikan konflik yang dialami oleh karakter di dalam novel. Konflik psikologis dan fisik terjadi dalam hidup semua karakter yang dimulai sejak mereka masih anak-anak dan kemudian menyebabkan konflik lain yang terjadi ketika mereka sudah dewasa. Konflik tersebut mempengaruhi keadaan psikologis karakter dan juga memberikan pengaruh pada kehidupan karakter dan hubungan mereka dengan orang-orang disekitarnya.

Kata kunci: karakter, konflik, psikologis.

1. Background of the Study

Literature such as novel, drama, and poetry in this modern period are full of psychological elements as manifestation; a mood of the author, the characters in the fictional narrative, and

the reader. Psychological fiction is a term used to describe a novel struggling with spirituality and emotion with more than reviewing the characters rather than the plot or the events. In other words, literary works can be explored

through the psychological approach to show the characteristics of the characters; although imagination can display a variety of imaginative problem. Psychology explains underlying reasons for the character's behavior or elaborates the relationship between conflict and psychological condition of characters and evaluates their behavior and motive in doing something.

Analyzing literature using psychological approach, in order not to leave the nature of the analysis of a literary work, it is a reflection of a variety of psychological concept that exist in the literature that can be submitted through the characters and conflict of the characters which can be done by analyzing figurative languages used in the story. Through this, we could find out what the author chooses to reveal a character's personality, virtues, and fault in fewer words and what the author really wants to convey through the characters' point of view.

2. Problems of the Study

- a. What are conflicts of the characters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* based on figurative language?

- b. How do the conflicts influence the characters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*?

3. Aims of the Study

- a. To figure out the conflicts of the characters through figurative language used in the novel Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.
- b. To analyze how the conflicts influence the characters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

4. Research Method

The data were taken from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, which is published by *G. P. Putnam's Sons* in 1994. This data were chosen because the characters in the novel have strong personality and the conflict between the characters are really interesting to analyze. The data in this study were collected and selected using the library and documentation method including several steps. First, the data were taken by reading and understanding the content of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and doing the selection based on and related to the topic. In this case, the elements of the fiction, especially, those about the characters' experience in life were selected by quoting, and note

taking. Then, the data found were collected and used in presenting and supporting the analysis of the study. The data which were collected from the data source were analyzed using the qualitative descriptive method where all the collected data were classified according to the appropriate categories. This study used intrinsic element theories proposed by several experts, such as: the theory of character and plot by Kenney (1966) and the theory of figurative language and conflict proposed by Perrine (1983). The other theory used was the psychoanalytic theory proposed by Erik Erikson. Those theories were used to discover the conflicts of the characters through figurative language and how the conflicts influence the characters in the novel.

5. Findings and Discussions

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* reflects the psychological and physical conflict of the characters which is delivered by the author using figurative language: simile, metaphor, personification, and symbol. The psychological conflict occurs when a character experiences inner unrest and discord, essentially struggling within

their own self. However, the physical conflict that happens to one character can occur because of the other character or the environment around her/him. Those conflicts occur because humans have to choose everything and because of conflicting desire. Freud considered powerful desire to be always in conflict, and how these conflicts give rise to unintentional expression forming the character (personality and behavior) of the character (Albertine, 2016). Erikson (1963) stated that adolescent and young adulthood periods were a crucial stage for a development of a person's identity. Therefore, the conflicts that happen to the eight characters' life occurred in those stages which give impacts on their psychological state.

5.1 Suyuan Woo

The conflict in Suyuan's life could be seen from the figurative languages used by the author to describe her situation. In Suyuan's case, the conflict mainly in the form of physical conflict, where the conflict aroused resulting from the environment around her. Those conflicts started when she was in China where she experienced a war which led to a crisis (a time when the personality would go one way or the

other) in her life. The crisis that happened in her life occurred at **young adulthood stage**.

In Suyuan's case, she experienced conflicts in her life starting when she lived in Kweilin on Chinese war. The conflict resulting from the war also gave big impacts on Suyuan's psychological state, because psychosocial development is considered culturally relative, where each generation of individuals is impacted by the events during their era, such as industrialization, urbanization, immigration, the depression, and the civil right movement or the war (Miller, 2010).

For example, the first simile that was found in the first chapter of *The Joy Luck Club* when the main character, June or Jing-mei, recalled the story that her mother (Suyuan) told her of a time when she lived in Kweilin on Chinese war.

Data 1: ***"...When the sirens cried out to warm us of bombers, my neighborhood and I jumped to our feet and scurried to the deep caves to hide like wild animals."***
(The Joy Luck Club, 1989:22)

Simile in the *Data 1* represented Suyuan's fears and her determination to survive when her life was in struggle. Simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another. This is usually achieved by the use of the word *like* or *as*. Suyuan described herself as a *wild animal*, which represented a *wilder* part of human's nature, the part of human's personality that usually liked to be kept, caged, tame, or domesticated, but also could be unpredictable.

According to Aureli (2005), animal and human experience many similar emotions in daily life. Though animals cannot express their feeling linguistically, they can express their emotions through actions. Animals respond to the environment as much as human do, reacting emotionally to others and even becoming stressed and anxious in times of danger. Just like human do, animal also try to keep themselves in favorable conditions, such as: moving to somewhere warmer if they are too cold, moving towards food if they are hungry and moving away from danger to protect themselves.

Therefore, when Japanese eventually reached Kweilin and Jing-mei's mother was forced to flee, the sound of bombings was everywhere and the scream of victims filled her ears. Suyuan said that she just liked a *wild animal*; she was full of fear as she tried to find a safe place for her hiding place to protect herself.

As a young woman, she had been married to an army officer and had twin daughters. She had the responsibility for running the household while her husband was away fighting on the battlefield. While Suyuan's husband was away fighting, the Japanese invaded her native city of Kweilin, forced her to flee from her home with her twin daughters. She walked for days, tried to find a safe shelter for her babies. However, because she was getting sick and felt like dying, along the way, she ended up left everything that she had on the road; including her twin daughters. From that experience, Suyuan had a hard time adjusting to the situation that she never expected to happen in her life, which made her think to herself, "*...can you imagine how it is, to want to be neither inside or outside, to want to be nowhere and*

disappear." (*The Joy Luck Club*, 1989:22)

At that time, Suyuan could feel overwhelmed with everything that was going on in her life. Everything became so hectic that she could feel like trapped in a whirlpool of hardships, decisions, relationships, activities, etc. No matter where she went, she felt like she simply could not free herself from the stressful demands of life; each day presented one with new obstacles to overcome which later gave her a disappointment. She made decision to leave her twin babies on the road, which became the hardest thing that she could do in her life. This overwhelmed feeling caused her to have a desire to simply disappear and leave everything behind.

5.2 Jing-mei Woo

The psychological and physical conflicts were found in the character of Jing-mei. The psychological conflict happened when she tried really hard to find her true self despite the lack of confidence. Her problem with her mother who had so much expectation for her also caused physical conflict. As a young little girl, Jing-mei grew up with so many expectations from her mother; Jing-mei did her best to fulfill

her mother's wish. However, each time Jing-mei could not fulfill her mother's wish, she would see the disappointment on her mother's face. All those conflicts occurred in the **adolescence** and **young adulthood stages**.

An adolescent is beginning to think abstractly and can conceptualize his or her self-identity and personality. The adolescent begins to consider questions of identity, such as: *Who should I be? What should I value? And what interest should I have?* The adolescent must answer these to develop a good sense of self-identity. Exploration of various roles and personalities is common on this stage.

In this stage, Jing-mei also started to face conflicts which later shaped her true character or identity. Conflict that happened to Jing-mei in this stage occurred when Jing-mei started to feel that her mother mold her character and forced her to become someone that was not her true self.

Data 5: *"And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted to see it spill over. And that's when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about. **"Then I wish I'd never been***

***born!"** I shouted. **"I wish I were dead! Like them."**(The Joy Luck Club, 1994:142)*

The simile above could represent Jing-mei's feeling when she was forced to become somebody that she was not. It was becoming one of the most important stages in the development of Jing-mei's character. Here, Jing-Mei told her mother that she wished she was dead like her twin sisters, who Suyuan had to abandon when she left China.

She said that *she wishes that she was dead*, which could express her desire to simply disappear after all the stress that she had as a result of inability to achieve her mother's expectations. Here, the word *Dead* did not mean *no longer alive*, but it means that she just wanted to disappear from her situation. She hoped that she did not exist between all the problems that she had with her mother. It could be related to her twin sister story, because when she said that she wanted to die just like her twin sister, in the reality she actually did not know whether her twin sisters were dead or not. She knew that she had twin sister, but they were just not around which made her feel like they were already dead.

This conflict brought negative and positive impacts for Jing-mei. The negative one; Jing-mei became stressed and lack of confidence. She believed that she always brought disappointment which also decreases her own value. Jing-mei actually had a difficult time finding the good things about her own self because she had little confidence. She did not only had problems with her mother, but also with her inner self, as she was always wandering who she was, who she was supposed to become and what she really wanted for her life.

This conflict later led to increasing her insecurity as an adult. Therefore, her childhood had been one of the struggle stages to find her identity. It could be seen from quotes: *“It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her many times, each time asserting my will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight As. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college. Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be, I could only be me”* (*The Joy Luck Club*, 1994:142)

However, after all the problems that she faced with her mother, Jing Mei finally spoke up for herself, accepted the failures and stopped her mother to get involved too much in her life and mold her character. One of the important lessons that Jing Mei had to learn from her problems was to accept herself for who she was rather than the other version of her that her mother wanted to create. She took the first step in becoming the person she had always been and accepting her limitations, focusing on what she was rather than what she was not.

6. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the formulated problems in the previous chapter, it could be concluded that the author used figurative language to deliver the conflict of the characters in the novel. There were eight characters in the novel and each of the characters had struggle with their own psychological and physical conflicts. Those conflicts happened to the characters in their adolescent and young adulthood stage, where all the characters experienced conflicts in their young age which later aroused another conflict in their adult life. There were

four figurative languages found in the novel, namely simile, personification, metaphor, and symbol.

From all the characters who experienced conflicts, it can be seen that conflicts were part of human life caused by many different reasons and conflicting desire. Those conflicts influenced the character's development and the characters' psychological state which affected their life and their relationships with people around them. Some negative and positive impacts of the conflicts were found in the behavior and personality of the characters in the novel. Those positive and negative impacts occurred depending on how the characters and people around them faced the conflicts.

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