‘The Trunk of Best Things’:
Inheriting Identity in Amy Tan’s The Bonesetter’s Daughter

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Abstract

Amy Tan’s The Bonesetter’s Daughter is a story that revolves around bits of memory aboutthree
women characters from different generations: Precious Auntie, LuLing, and Ruth. Structure-wise,
the series of plot presented in the novel is of several layers of narration; the opening part (LuLing’s
narration), the next part—Section I—(Ruth’s narration), the part following this—Section II—(LuLing’s
narration), and the last part—Section III—(Ruth’s narration). The novel ends with an epilogue that
generally tells about Ruth’s current activities after the journey of tracing back her heritage has
taken place.

In narratological sense, analysing such a complex mode of narration requires a closer look at the
significant use of series of analepses and prolepses. The act of tracing back and moving forward is a
classic representation of trying to make sense of multicultural identity. In terms of identity
construction for migratory subjects, this essay argues that for second generation Chinese American
women authors, the specific pivotal point of ethnic self-reflection occurs partly with the act of
immigration—that is, the physical, ideological and emotional act of bodily re-placement (Singh and
Schmidt, 2000). As far as this essay is concerned, the final postulation of the analysis shows that the
‘foreign self’ of the central characters in the novel is hybrid in quality, as they are observed on a
different and more complex level. At the end of the day, such an intricate process offers a way of
inheriting identity amidst the complex world of second generation Chinese Americans.

Keywords: inheriting identity, analepses, prolepses, multicultural identity, migratory subject.

Introduction

The Bonesetter’s Daughter is a story that revolves around bits of memory about three women characters from
different generations: Precious Auntie, LuLing, and Ruth. Structurally speaking, the series of plot presented in the
novel is of several layers of narration. The story opens with a glance on LuLing’s narration which is taken from the
opening part of her journal. Following this, there is a section (Section I) that provides a narration that has its
centre on Ruth’s activities (Ruth is LuLing’s daughter). The next section (Section II) is a series of story told by
LuLing—also taken from her journal—which is the continuation of the brief narration provided at the beginning of the
novel. The last one (Section III) is again, a narration with Ruth as its central character. On the very last part of the
novel is provided an epilogue that generally tells about Ruth’s current activities after the journey of tracing back her heritage has taken place.

In narratological sense, analysing such a complex mode of narration requires a closer look at the significant
use of series of analepses and prolepses. This essay is framed within the idea puts forth by a specific term used in the
story, ‘the trunk of best thing,’ which basically has similar connotation with treasure chest. In it lies the
answer Ruth has been seeking for with regard to her quest of identity. The act of tracing back and moving forward
(as shown in the series of analepses and prolepses) is a classic representation of trying to make sense of
multicultural identity. In terms of identity construction for migratory subjects, this essay argues that for second
generation Chinese American women authors, the specific pivotal point of ethnic self-reflection occurs partly with the
act of immigration—that is, the physical, ideological and emotional act of bodily re-placement (Singh and
Schmidt, 2000). As far as this essay is concerned, the final postulation of the analysis shows that the ‘foreign self’ of the central characters in the novel is hybrid in quality, as they are observed on a different and more complex level. At the end of the day, such an intricate process offers a way of inheriting identity amidst the complex world of second generation Chinese Americans.

Contrapuntal Reading in Postcolonial Context

Said proposed what he calls “contrapuntal reading” in terms of ‘reading the canon as a polyphonic accompaniment
to the expansion of Europe’ (1994: 71). To Said’s argumentation, this is the case since in nineteenth century
Europe, the empire functions as a codified presence in fiction.1 Contrapuntal reading, thus gives way to a reading
of texts by focusing on what seems to be of secondary importance as significant references to the story’s main
frame. In other words, it is to read the background sounds as contributory factors to the harmonisation of the
composition of voices presented in the text. In correspondence to this, in relation with narrative theory, a
resounding argumentation that fits this mould is that of Genette’s. In his version of narratology, on narrative level,
contrapuntal aspect can be present in alteration or change of focalisation in the plot. The theory is that change of focalisation

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can also be analyzed as a momentary infraction of the code which governs that context without thereby calling into question the existence of the code—the same way that in a classical musical composition a momentary change in tonality, or even a recurrent dissonance, may be defined as a modulation or alteration without contesting the tonality of the whole (1980: 195).

In other words, the modulation present due to the existence of minor voices repeatedly occurred in classical music composition is the very factor that constructs the relevance among the different chords and notations which eventually creates harmony. As an attempt of what Bakhtin calls "[transposing] a symphonic (orchestrated) theme on to the piano keyboard" (1982: 263), narrative analysis in this essay is applied to provide dialogic space between major and minor voices in the novels. In The Bonesetter’s Daughter, such a harmony is represented by what can be called compromising closure. For descendants of migratory subjects such as Amy Tan, the steps taken to reach compromising closure in each novel is by presenting dialogic process between the cultural identity of China and America. The modulation in the novels is represented—to name a few—by changes in point of view, shifts in time and place, shifts on the presentation of the selves, inarticulateness in “translating between,” and inability to distinguish between dream and reality.

The negotiating process in Tan’s novel takes place between what Grice (2002) observed as a series of boundary crossings. In the process of identity construction, negotiating seems to be the recurring act for the characters in Tan’s novel. As will be shown on the analysis, the final point of negotiation, the agreement is reached through a series of compromises.

Postcolonial theory provides a powerful approach to ethnic literatures of the United States. An attempt to show how it is applied is in Beyond the Borders (2003), where a series of essays deal with the issues of ethnic literatures in the United States and of those political regions significantly influenced by U.S. political or cultural imperialism, namely: Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, Southeast Asia, and areas of Central America such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Since post-colonial theory ‘is the tool that enables the cultural study of a reformulated identity’ (Madsen: 2003), and that to tackle the issues of identity construction in the multiethnic nature of the U.S. there is a need to explore “border” regions, then it is important to note that in the context of cultural history in the U.S., the emergence of postcolonial studies in American literature has its start in what is called “border studies.” Since the accompanying key concepts used in this research are drawn from postcolonial theory, and since the key concepts of feminism also take part in the analytic process, this research thus applies the combination of the two, termed as postcolonial feminism. The intersection of postcolonial criticism and feminism, Moore-Gilbert argues, ‘entails new perspectives on the body, on language, on the relationship between theory and practice, and on the complex interaction between the personal and the political’ (1998: 43).

In terms of narratology, this essay focuses on, in Genetian sense, the way the narrative is presented. Order refers to the set of relations between the order in which events (are said to) occur and the order in which they are counted (Genette, 1980), where analepsis and prolepsis take place. Analepsis is an anachrony going back to the past with respect to the “present” moment; a RETROSPECTION; a FLASHBACK, while prolepsis is an anachrony going forward to the future with respect to the “present” moment; an ANTICIPATION; a PROSPECTION; a FLASHFORWARD (Genette, 1980). Anachrony is a discordance between the order in which events (are said to) occur and the order in which they are recounted. A typical example of anachrony is constituted by a beginning in medias res followed by a return to earlier events.

**Inheriting Identity**

Entitled ‘Truth,’ the prologue of the novel—which is in medias res—draws the reader’s attention to LuLing’s personal domain. Having LuLing’s journal as its source, this part is narrated using fixed internal focalisation which shifts from the present-tense introductory bit about LuLing Liu Young, to the past-tense memories about Precious Auntie, LuLing’s mother. Toward the end of the narration, it is clear that the main issue pointed out here is LuLing’s (almost) desperate attempt to remember Precious Auntie’s family name. LuLing traces back the memories she has with Precious Auntie up to when she is six years old. Even when she remembers Precious Auntie writes down her family name on a scrap of paper and puts it in front of her face, she still cannot remember it. This is very troubling not only to LuLing but also to the reader, because the series of events that leads to the point when Precious Auntie writes the name down is there, yet LuLing’s memory fails to capture it when it comes to the point of visualising the Chinese character of the family name.

Being able to remember Precious Auntie’s family name means LuLing will be able to claim and use it as her own. It will mark the heritage of her family, where she comes from. Her main concern is that it will be too late for her to come to terms with her troubled past with Precious Auntie. She is described as not wanting this to happen because from the series of parallelism provided in the novel, this is one way she can mend her troubled relationship with her daughter, Ruth. LuLing has a way of hiding everything she loves with a special ache in what she calls her ‘trunk of best things.’ Precious Auntie’s family name, in this case, is one of the objects stored in it. The problem is that LuLing keeps it for too long that she forgets she has it. So when she opens her trunk, she only finds crumpled objects that are no longer recognisable. It is clear from this point that this attempt of trying to gain back the memory of Precious Auntie’s family name is what triggers the entire story plot to flow into series of other bits of memories from LuLing and Ruth, in search of their family heritage.

As mentioned earlier, the time sequence presented in this part is of present and past, which indicates that as it enters the narration of LuLing’s memory of Precious Auntie, the reader is provided with a story within a story. The story within leads the narrative to an expository return to an earlier period of time. To the novel, this mode of narrative is basically what makes the plot unfolds itself through layers after layers of narration. In this first part, for instance, the narrator’s analepsis is evoked after realising that she remembers the names of her husbands and in what Chinese year she and her daughter was born, yet she cannot dig out the memory of Precious Auntie.
Auntie’s family name. Next, on Section I, as the story seems to really take its start, told using external focalisation, series of analepses are evoked whenever Ruth is described as doing or remembering anything related to her relationship with her mother, LuLing. Section II, being the continuation of LuLing’s journal which is presented at the beginning of the novel, is basically a series of analepses related to Precious Auntie’s life. On Section III, there seems to be zero analepses, as the story of Precious Auntie, LuLing and Ruth begins to merge in harmony. On this section, Ruth is mostly described as interacting with LuLing, not bringing back memories that concern LuLing. The epilogue, told in the present time using external focalisation, provides a closure which in fact can be seen as a prolepsis that generates the entire story of the three generations.

In narrative theory, the analepses presented on the first and second sections of the novel can be categorised as internal analepses, which Genette proposes to call as heterodiegetic (analepses dealing with a story line—with a diegetic content—which is different from the content of the first narrative). As Genette puts it: ‘Such analepses deal, classically, either with a character recently introduced whose “antecedents” the narrator wants to shed light on, ...; or they deal with a character who has been out of sight for some time and whose recent past we must catch up with’ (Genette: 50). The memories of Precious Auntie through LuLing and the memories of LuLing through Ruth are analepses that provide information about the retrospective sections preceding them, which are seemingly presented as having minor importance to the contribution of the entire construct of the story. It is in fact these retrospective sections that hold the key issue of what the story tries to unravel. The following paragraphs will provide an analytical view on how this takes place.

The idea of constantly referring the set of actions done by the characters to memory and memory loss is crucial in this novel. On the following, I will supply series of successions that construct the plot that are triggered by attempts to remember things which are well kept yet in some ways slips from mind when trying to be retrieved. Further, I will highlight the critical points that are being surfaced from each series to later show how this is relevant to the analysis of the entire novel. Also on the following, some phrases and clauses that show the point when a memory of LuLing emerges will be typed in bold to make it easier to be referred back as the analysis continues to take its course.

On the first fragment of Section I, the narrative structure opens at that time of year when Ruth loses her voice. The narrator retells some information on when this loss of voice initially occurs. It is the ninth year from the first time it happened that Ruth is described as voluntarily retreating into verbal silence before the actual date of her voice-loss approaches. The night before she decides to regain her voice, as she turns to her desk, Ruth realises that she cannot recall something she is not supposed to forget. As she tries to remember what it is, she sorts the clutters on her desk, and then organises the stacks of paper in the bottom right-hand drawer of her desk, where she accidentally finds pages written in Chinese, her mother’s writing, which have been given to Ruth five or six years earlier. This triggers a memory about LuLing when she gives the papers to Ruth, and further about Ruth’s unsuccessful attempt to translate them in English, which finally brings Ruth to hire someone fluent in Chinese to translate them for her. Ruth then places the pages at the top of the heap, not the bottom, which indicates that the pages are now a priority above any other stacks of paper she keeps in her drawers.

On the next morning, these are the following succession of events that lead Ruth to finally remember what she forgets: While getting ready to take Dory and Fia (Art’s children) to the ice rink, Wendy—Ruth’s friend—calls. Once Ruth hangs up, she mentally lists down the tasks she needs to do that day. Ruth forgets list number nine, which is usually something important, because, as her mother tells her, it is a significant number. Ruth drops the children at the ice rink. Ruth then arrives at the dry cleaner, and phones Wendy who is telling her about her mother marrying her personal trainer. Wendy’s remark about her mother (‘Do I have to watch over her now, nine, which is usually something important, because,’ which causes her to remember what has been eluding her; her mother was supposed to see the doctor at four that afternoon.

As highlighted on the previous paragraphs, it is told that Ruth remembers bits of memories about her mother three times in this narration. Even though the first two do not trigger her to remember what she needs to remember, they are presented there to provide a glimpse on various degrees of relationship between Ruth and her mother. When Ruth remembers the time LuLing gives her the paper, it sores old wounds on how Ruth detests LuLing persistence to make Ruth learn to write and understand Chinese. She tells her mother that she is going to find the time to translate them, but she never does manage to do so. When Ruth points out that number nine is a significant number in LuLing’s book of life, and when at this point Ruth is described applying the same method her mother uses in terms of putting a series of tasks in a list, it is then illustrated that Ruth does not altogether rejects the things her mother teaches her. Ruth compromises to use this number nine system and to count fingers as a memory device because this method corresponds to how to put things in order. And this enables American-style Ruth to have more organised routine tasks. Wendy’s statement on her mother leads the narrative to supply information on how Ruth has all that time been acting like LuLing’s mother, making sure that LuLing does not get herself into trouble.

To reveal the thing Ruth is not supposed to forget and to remember list number nine—which is an important number in Chinese—the plot in this narration is presented in series of prolepsis and analepsis, which, in my view, parallel to the idea of writing Chinese characters. As narrated by Ruth when her childhood memories lead her to the time when LuLing tries to guide her how to write a Chinese character, LuLing instructs her, ‘The way you drew it—it, well, look, the whole thing is falling down. Do it like this ... light first, then temple. See? Together, it means “news from the gods.” See how knowledge always comes from above? See how Chinese words make sense?’ (Tan: 49). In Chinese character, LuLing tells Ruth, ‘Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one’ (Tan: 48; my emphasis). The whole thing is falling down, light first, then temple, the whole thing is a mix of thought, feeling, meanings, memory, and history. In relevance to this, the series of prolepsis and analepsis are relevant to provide an illustration on how knowledge can be gained, on how things make sense. The
entire plot of this novel, in this case, is a search of Ruth’s family heritage, by “letting things fall down” through reflecting back to Ruth’s, LuLing’s and Precious Auntie’s pasts.

Several times in the plot, there are indications that memory fails to cooperate each time something of significance is tried to be remembered. One example, as I stated earlier, is there is a point in the narration where LuLing tries to remember Precious Auntie’s family name, but LuLing’s memory fails to capture it when it comes to the point of visualising its Chinese character. Even when she remembers Precious Auntie writes down the name on a scrap of paper and puts it in front of her face, she still cannot remember it. In my view, attempts taken to remember what this Chinese character is, is like trying to find a lost object. And the process, which is the most common, is by retracing the things done before the object is lost. Throughout the retracing process, there are times when there is a need to pause to remember whether at that time, the object is still in possession. In this novel, this manifests into a series of plot that constantly present a break, a point where anything associated to Precious Auntie’s history is perceived through Ruth’s and LuLing’s focalisations.

To LuLing, this is one of the things she must not forget: Gesturing with her hands to LuLing, Precious Auntie says “A person should consider how things begin. A particular beginning results in a particular end” (Tan: 135). This is what bases LuLing to devote pages to the story of Precious Auntie, and these pages then come to Ruth as a legacy of her family heritage. The legacy is preserved in print because human memory is unreliable. In Ruth’s case, her writing down her family history is similar to being what Auntie Gal calls a “ghostwriter,” a person who writes down the stories people tell her, word for word, exactly as told. The slight difference is, Ruth is writing the story for herself, not for others. In an odd way, what LuLing does best branches into what Ruth does for a living, being a “book doctor.” LuLing taught Ruth to make life better by revising it. Making life better has been the family’s habit for as long as memory goes back. That is their family’s Chinese tradition. For practicality, Ruth manages her American life by always putting things in order based on priority levels. LuLing’s Chinese influence which seems to have been internalised by Ruth, causes Ruth to not put the most prior on list number one, but nine. Another relevant example: In terms of spending money for tertiary needs, Ruth’s habit seems to also develop from her mother’s influence. She is not accustomed to buy flowers to decorate her house, but when she feels like she would like to buy some, the middle ground she takes is buying the ones with lasting value. Having gotten used to deprivation while living with her mother, Ruth decides to buy orchids because they ‘look delicate but thrived on neglect. You didn’t have to water them but once every ten days. And while they were somewhat pricey, they bloomed for six months or more, then went dormant before surprising you with new blooms all over again’ (Tan: 35).

Ruth’s intention to translate her mother’s journal to English is basically an attempt to preserve her family legacy. She notices that LuLing’s memory is deteriorating. As resistant as she is to her mother’s Chinese influence, there still comes a point where Ruth reaches the need to be with LuLing, ‘as her mother told her about her life, taking her through all the detours of the past, explaining the multiple meanings of Chinese words, how to translate her heart’ (Tan: 131). In living her daily life with LuLing, Ruth constantly gets lost in translation because she mostly has to deal with mother’s choppy English, just like LuLing mostly has to deal with Precious Auntie’s kind of talk, which is only represented by hand gestures. LuLing cannot name specifically, what she does is making classification, just like cloth in her vocabulary is classified as ‘cost too much,’ ‘too slippery,’ ‘scratchy skin,’ and ‘last long time.’ She cannot name specific trees. To her, oak, maple, gingko, or pine either falls into the category of ‘shady’ trees or ‘drop leaf all the time’ trees.

LuLing’s inarticulateness is made clear in the narration about Ruth in Section I and III of the novel. LuLing’s choppy English is exposed by the narrator each time the dialogue taking place is externally focalised. LuLing’s articulate voice is presented in the prologue and Section II of the novel, which has its source from LuLing’s journal. In Section I and III, LuLing’s voice is focalised by the narrator, within the story about Ruth. In her journal, LuLing’s voice is supposedly focalised by herself. The Chinese character written above the English title of each fragment in LuLing’s journal emphasises that these narrations are of different domain from what is narrated in Section I and III. From this, it can be drawn that LuLing’s narration, her journal, is outside the main plot, which is the narration about Ruth. It is outside, but relates to the main plot. It fills the gaps in the story of the search of Ruth’s family name.

In terms of voice, there is a time when Ruth silences her voice to ironically make herself heard more by LuLing. When she is six, Ruth has an accident; she throws herself down the slide, head first, and crashes. Ruth continues to stay silent, and all the time she does so, she receives extra care from LuLing; ‘The less Ruth said, the more her mother tried to guess what she might want’ (Tan: 64). Ruth takes advantage of the situation, provides Ruth with a tray of wet sand and a chopstick to write down what she wants to say. Until there comes a time when LuLing misinterprets what Ruth writes on the sand. She has always wanted to have a dog, so Ruth writes the word Doggie on the sand. LuLing thinks that is Precious Auntie speaking through Ruth, calling LuLing in her name of endearment. Ruth panics, and, not knowing what to write, she draws several lines and a square after her mother asks if her luck has changed, whether or not the curse over and she is safe. LuLing interprets it as Chinese character for ‘mouth.’ Ruth panics as her mother insists her to ask Precious Auntie to come every day, and
this consequently causes her to shout. Ruth regains her voice, and mother interprets this as having to do with Precious Auntie’s interference to bring Ruth’s voice back. Following this, every year on August twelfth, Ruth always loses her voice. The first time it happens, Ruth can only hiss like an untended teakettle. Her husband jokes that her laryngitis must be psychosomatic.

The time setting of fragment One in Section I starts in August twelfth, the eighth year Ruth annually suffers from voice loss. Knowing that it is that time of year she usually loses her voice, Ruth anticipates it by refraining herself from talking for the entire week. Near midnight, in a few hours before she will be able to talk again, Ruth comes across LuLing’s journal written in Chinese, stacked in the bottom drawer. This is the point of departure that leads the plot to stories relating to LuLing’s past, which, involuntarily also leads to Precious Auntie’s. On the Epilogue, also set on the twelfth of August, unlike the former twelfth of August of the last eight years, Ruth still has her voice. At this point, she knows for certain that ‘Her ability to speak is not governed by curses or shooting stars or illness. … But she does not need to talk. She can write. Before, she never had a reason to write for herself, only for others. Now she has that reason’ (Tan: 307). Ruth’s voice loss ends after she finally finds out Precious Auntie’s family name, as narrated at the end of Section III. This means that the question put forward at the beginning of the novel reaches an answer. The case is closed. It seems that after this, all curses are vanished. All problems find their solutions; LuLing is able to be persuaded to live at Mira Mar Manor, home for the elderly people, so that she can have better nurture, and Ruth finds out Precious Auntie’s family name.

‘Family name Gu,’ exclaims LuLing. “Gu,” to Ruth’s knowledge means “bone,” which makes sense since the family has been bone setters for generations. But Ruth does not altogether accepts the idea that Precious Auntie’s family name is “Gu” because there is a possibility that LuLing remembers that name because it is the Chinese word for bone. Again, Ruth cannot rely on LuLing’s memory. But later, Aunt GaoLing reveals that the name is “Gu.” She finds out from her relative in Beijing who, in the search, comes across an old woman whose grandfather was a travelling photographer. She still keeps an old photo of Precious Auntie. On the photographic plate is written the last and the first name of Precious Auntie: “Gu” and “Liu Xin.” “Gu” can also mean “gorge,” it has the same sound as the bone “gu” but is written in a different way. GaoLing explains that ‘the way “bone” is written can also stand for “character.” That’s why we use that expression “It’s in your bones.” It means, “That’s your character’” (Tan: 304). “Liu Xin” means “remain true,” but it has similar sound with “liu xing” which means “shooting star,” which to Chinese belief, has a bad meaning. LuLing knows Precious Auntie’s name only from the way it is pronounced, not the way it is written in Chinese character. This explains why all those years she thinks that Precious Auntie’s life is like that of a comet; it ‘burns up quick, one day here, one day gone’ (Tan: 305). Up to this point, the meaning of Precious Auntie’s full name is mended. The fate, somehow, altered. The spell is broken. With joy, Ruth celebrates the fact that she has a family because being able to remember Precious Auntie’s family name means the possibility to claim and use it as her own. It will mark the heritage of her family, where she comes from.

Her grandmother had a name. Gu Liu Xin. She had existed. She still existed. Precious Auntie belonged to a family. LuLing belonged to that same family, and Ruth belonged to them both. The family name had been there all along, like a bone stuck in the crevices of a gorge. LuLing had divined it while looking at an oracle in the museum. And the given name had flashed before her as well for the briefest of moments, a shooting star that entered the earth’s atmosphere, etching itself indelibly in Ruth’s mind’ (Tan: 305).

At this point, the problem is resolved; Ruth knowing Precious Auntie’s full name means she has a heritage she can claim, and this branches to LuLing as well. And also, this shows that the name binds the three generation together. The secret has been there all along, ‘in the crevices of a gorge,’ inside the trunk of best things.

Conclusion

Throughout the retracing process, there are times when there is a need to pause to remember whether at that time, the object is still in possession. In this novel, this manifests into a series of plot that constantly present a break, a point where anything associated to Precious Auntie’s history is perceived through Ruth’s and LuLing’s focalisations. Being able to remember Precious Auntie’s family name means LuLing will be able to claim and use it as her own. It will mark the heritage of her family, where she comes from. Her main concern is that it will be too late for her to come to terms with her troubled past with Precious Auntie. She is described as not wanting this to happen because from the series of parallelism provided in the novel, this is one way she can mend her troubled relationship with her daughter, Ruth. Ruth’s intention to translate her mother’s journal to English is basically an attempt to preserve her family legacy. The epilogue, told in the present time using external focalisation, provides a closure which in fact can be seen as a prolepsis that generates the entire story of the three generations.

References


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1 To Said, it is like the significant references on Antigua in *Mansfield Park*, Australia in *David Copperfield*, and plantation in the West Indies in *Jane Eyre*.

2 Cultural identity here refers to an identity constructed and is influenced by memories of the past which are associated with any forms of historical and traditional references from which the author is originated (Hall, 1994). In my view, cultural identity best represents the problematic term used to articulate what it means to say an identity which is associated to a certain country. For instance, it is problematic to articulate what young Kingston means to say in *The Woman Warrior* by mentioning that she strives to be American-feminine, that is, having feminine quality according to American standards.

3 Hall’s term (Stuart Hall’s interview with Julie Drew, [in Olson and Worsham, 1999: 213]).

4 In *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women’s Writing* Helena Grice (2002) provides a survey of the state of the field of Asian American women’s studies both within the United States and beyond the geographical boundaries of Asian America. In this book she also tackles with the questions of what exactly Asian American women’s writing is and its origin.

5 The hyphenated term (post-colonial) is used here by Madsen to emphasize the historical significance in its first two primary meanings; that the term ‘refers to writings produced in a previously colonized nation after its independence from colonial control’ and the ‘four (often overlapping) phases: the pre-colonial, colonial, independence, and de-colonized periods of a nation’s development’ (2003: 2).

6 Ruth’s voice loss is also a significant matter in the story. It gives Ruth authority, especially to LuLing. This is illustrated in the middle of Section III, when an analepsis of the first time Ruth loses her voice when she is six years old is provided.

7 The scheme of prioritising here is a continuation of an idea borrowed from analytical view on an indication that the stack of papers at the bottom is the least prioritised, taken from *Tradition and Modernity in the Construction of Identity of the Main Character in Amy Tan’s The Bonesetter’s Daughter* (A translation for the Indonesian *Tradisi dan Modernitas dalam Konstruksi Identitas Tokoh Utama Novel The Bonesetter’s Daughter Karya Amy Tan*). Unpublished thesis (2009) by Rhasus Budhyono, p. 52.