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The Primal Pain of Mothers in *Joy Luck Club* and *Saving Face*

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Han, Jihee. "The Primal Pain of Mothers in *Joy Luck Club and Saving Face*." *Modern Studies in English Language & Literature* 53.3 (2009): 175-193. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976) has made a huge influence on the feminist studies of motherhood for the past thirty years. Due to Rich's insight, they could separate motherhood as an ideology from mothering as an experience and examine the oppressive aspects of a mother's existence in a patriarchal society. Especially, Rich's conception of the primal pain of mothers allowed them to look into mothers' depression and feeling of alienation from a fresh point of view. Therefore, this essay takes up Rich's theoretical position as a main discursive frame and tries to analyze Chinese mothers' pain represented in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* and Alice Wu''s Sa*ving Face*. By looking into various representations of mothers, this essay ultimately suggests the persistent relevance of Rich's discursive insight on the issue of motherhood and mothering. **(Gyeongsang National University)**

Key words: Primal Pain, Motherhood, Asian Mothers, Alien Others, Specular logic

1. Introduction

Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976) has made a huge influence on the feminist studies of motherhood for the past thirty years. According to Andrea O'Reilly, Rich provided "key theoretical insights" for feminist scholars "to fully study and report upon the meaning and experience of motherhood" and thus "influenced the way feminist scholarship 'thinks and talks' motherhood" (1-2). To name several works

that show Rich's discursive imprints, there are Ann Dally's *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* (1982) and Elizabeth Badinter's *Mother Love: Myth and Reality* (1984) to Shari Thurner's *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (1994) and Sharon Hayes's *The Cultural Constructions of Motherhood* (1996), Jess Wells' *Lesbians Raising Sons* (1997) and Elaine T. Hansen's *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood* (1997) to Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey's *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment, Transformation* (2000).

The great debt today′s feminist scholars owe to Rich is, probably, her critical perspective that separated motherhood as an ideology from mothering as an experience. According to Rich, "the physical and psychic weight of responsibility on the woman with children is by far the heaviest" and yet "the mother's very character" and "her status as a woman" are in question "if she has 'failed' her children" (52). In other words, mothers would live under the patriarchal ideology of motherhood that madates them to bring up their children to have socially right gender identity and politically correct values. Thus even though their actual mothering experiences suggest different senses about their children, they often ignore them and distress themselves as well as their children to meet the social standards. Due to such ideological pressure of the 'right' mothering, they often abase their actual mothering experiences. They even demean their personal status as a woman when they think they failed the images of the 'good' mother. Rich calls such psychological burden under which many mothers suffer "the primal pain of woman" (52).

Developing Rich's assertion that motherhood is not a natural capacity of women but a patriarchal ideology and institution, many following feminists could examine that there had been various images of the 'good' mother, depending not only on such individual variables as race

and class but also on such societal variables as historical periods, places, and cultures. For instance, O'Reilly describes that thanks to Rich she could note that the image of "the full-time, stay-at-home mother" is a product of Industrialization, that the "pure, pious and chaste" mother is another of Victorian period that followed Industrialization, and that the "happy homemaker" baking apple-pies and decorating the house is constructed after the WW II(5). Analyzing the shifting images of the 'good' mother and the oppressive ideological aspects of becoming a mother in patriarchal society, she concludes that women do not have to be kept down by one universal image of the 'good.' Rather, she suggests that women can not only create alternative images of the 'good' mother but also empower their actual mothering experiences. Along with O'Reilly's insights, such new concepts as "Other-Mothering/ Community Mothering," "feminist, gynocentric mothering," "Motherhood as Social Activism," and "Nurturance as Resistance" (O' Reilly 11-12) are all positive outcomes that aim to redress the "primal pain of woman" that Rich identified first in 1976 and still exists in the twenty-first century.

Yet it seems that Rich's perspective on motherhood and mothering is not sufficient enough to analyze "the primal pain" that Asian immigrant mothers go through in rearing their America-born children. The main reason is that Asian immigrant mothers, due to their Asian origin, do not speak out their 'private matters' public, given their Confucius social training. Further, their poor English does not help them to express their pain so that they can find a way to heal their pain and empower their mothering experiences. Thirdly, since their stories are often represented by their America-born daughters, who are also caught up with their own psychological issues, their race-/culture-specific pain and suffering have often been romanticized. Therefore this essay, complementing Rich's discussion of motherhood and mothering with a psychoanalytical

perspective, illuminates 'the primal pain' of Chinese immigrant mothers represented in Amy Tan's novel *Joy Luck Club* and Alice Wu's film *Saving Face*. By looking into the representations of Chinese immigrant mothers, this essay illustrates how women of twenty-first century are still enthralled by the ideology of motherhood and how Rich's perspective still provides a relevant insight in examining the works dealing with the issue of motherhood and mothering.

2. Masking the Mother's Face

Since there is virtually no literature or film created by Chinese immigrant mothers except for those representations rendered by Chinese-American daughters, it is impossible to examine 'the primal pain of woman' from the mother's position. Therefore, this essay indirectly speculates it by way of investigating Chinese American daughter's reactions to their Asian mothers. In *Of Woman Born* Rich indicates that Black and Jewish mothers have been represented as strong, exotic matriarchs who manipulate their children and induce guilty feelings from them by emphasizing their self-sacrificing motherhood. Things are not different in the case of Chinese-immigrant mothers. Taking *Joy Luck Club* (1990) for an instance, Amy Tan represents Chinese immigrant mothers as those who do not speak English well and yet are very loud and meddlesome matriarchs who rule over their family and stick to their cultural values obstinately. Maxine Hong Kingston in *Woman Warrior* also presents an intrusive mother who has not been assimilated to American culture and thus calls Americans "white ghosts" and "black ghosts" and keeps telling a striking story of a sister who died young in China. By representing a strong, exotic Chinese mother, however, Tan and Kingston reproduce

the stereotypical image of 'Exotic Asian Woman,' which reflects the specular logic of white-centered patriarchal society. Even though such scholars as Patricia Chu, King-kok Cheung, Risa Lowe, and Elaine Kim have already indicated the incorrectness of such an image, it is still worthy of examining why they use such a stereotypical image. Inasmuch as Tan represents the psychological cost Chinese-American daughters had to pay in order to overcome the Oedipal complex in white-centered society and become an 'All American Girl,' she also intimates how much the daughters have also been enthralled by the ideology of motherhood and how great the psychological pain their mothers might have suffered because of their daughters' responses.

From a psychoanalytical perspective it can be said that unlike white girls who form their gender identity under the gaze of the Father, Asian-American girls grow up under two different racial gazes of the Father: the gaze of the Asian Phallic Mother and that of the White Father.[1] Considering the fact that in most Asian-immigrant societies, as Cheung suggests, women take the role of a main breadwinner and rule over the family, Asian immigrant mothers take the symbolic position of the Father while immigrant fathers get effeminized in the household as well as white-centered American society. Then, the way America-born Asian girls go through the symbolic stage cannot but be different from the way white girls undergo. In other words, they struggle with the power of the Asian Mother who wields the Name/Law of the Father, which is called 'Phallus,' and at the same time, have to face the patriarchal gaze of the White Father, which functions as another 'Phallus,' who governs the symbolic system but also the relations between the Whites and the Asians. Despite struggling hard between

1) The following discussion depends on Julia Kristeva's notion of the Phallic Mother and Jacque Lacan's conception of the Name/Law of the Father.

the double gazes of the White Father and the Asian Phallic Mother, they realize the reality they live in and cannot but choose to obey the Law of the White Father in order to become a fully functioning subject, 'all-American girl' in the white-centered society. Yet the transaction to become an 'all-American' subject costs them a steep price because they have to suppress the racial part of their subjectivity and consciously dismiss the power of their Asian mothers. While masquerading as what they wish to be, namely, an 'all-American white' girl, they then go on developing split subjectivity, lopsidedly structuring their subjectivity to prioritize the White signifier over the Asian one.

Given this race-specific cost they had to pay while growing up, it is imaginable how much pain both Chinese immigrant mothers and Chinese-American daughters afflicted one another. In a way, Chinese-American daughters might have needed the stereotypical image of a strong, exotic matriarch in their narrative as a trigger to ignite their so-long suppressed Oedipal angst. For instance, in *Joy Luck Club* Tan represents June's mother Suyuan as a cold, austere enforcer who is willing to bend her daughter's independent spirit in order to make her "obedient" enough:

> "You want me to be someone I am not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!" "Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" "Then I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother," I shouted…. "Too late change this," said my mother shrilly. And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point….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." (153)

Here Suyuan's emphasis on the "obedient daughter" triggers June to

re-visit her traumatic experience of repressing the Asian Mother and choosing the White Father. For a child who had a serious identity crisis between the 'Asian' daughter her mother wanted and the 'All-American girl' she wished to be, making a choice that she would "never be the kind of daughter" her mother wanted her to be would have cost a tremendous price. Now after all those years she became an adult and still feels the ramifications of her choice: she is guilty about repressing the essential part of herself(Chinese Mother) and confused as if being punished by the choice(White Father) that she could not but have made. Thus, in this episode June repeats her childhood wish, "You were not my mother" and expresses an immature death-wish in order to get out of the unstable in-between feelings of who she is.

The ultimate purpose of Tan's representation of such a strong, exotic Chinese matriarch is to make an outlet for Chinese-American daughters to re-visit their painful childhood memories and face what they had most feared and finally make peace with the Other half, that is, their Asian cultural identity. For instance, June, who once had serious anxiety about being transformed into a cultural "mutant," takes a trip to China only after her mother died to meet with the lost babies of her mother:

> And I know it's not my mother, yet it is the same look she had when I was five and had disappeared all afternoon, for such a long time, that she was convinced I was dead. . . . And now I see her again, two of her, waving. . . . As soon as I get beyond the gate, we run toward each other, all three of us embracing, all hesitations and expectations forgotten. . . .I look at their faces and I see no trace of my other in them. Yet they still look familiar. *And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go. . . . Together we look like our mother.* Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish. (133-34)

Although June had to muster all of her courage in order to face her

long-held fear, she finds the process not to be as distressing as she imagined. Seeing herself blended more easily in Chinese people who have similar eyes and mouths to hers, she realizes that her anger towards her mother was rooted in her anxiety about not being able to fit-in the mainstream white society. Then she just lets go of herself and finds herself to be embraced as "the same" with the Chinese. Finally, she sees that she, too, is Chinese after all and come to terms with her mother's "long-held wish" to have an Asian daughter. At the moment she overcomes her matrophobia[2] of becoming like her Chinese mother and finds peace within her mind.

Given the point that Chinese-American daughters needed strong, exotic matriarchs in order to overcome their matrophobia, it should also be noted that even if they want to make peace with their immigrant mothers and thus try to share their mothers' hidden pain, they ironically end up masking the real faces of their mothers. In other words, to the extent that they needed the typical image of a strong matriarch to dissolve their Oedipal angst, they still need another typical image of 'exotic Asian Woman' to relate to their mothers who still remain culturally different Others in their Americanized mind. Then, although they seem to speak for their mothers who cannot speak English well and re-tell their past stories in Asia, their stories reflect the specular logic of the White Father[3] that defines Asian women as poor 'Asian' women who believe superstitions, have submissive attitudes towards their overbearing husbands, and suffer from cruel, inhumane social customs and practices of their under-civilized native country.

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2) The fear of living just like one's mother.

3) Luce Irigaray's feminist analysis of the binarism of Western metaphysics is applied here. According to Irigaray, subjectivity is denied to women in the specular logic of Western philosophical thought because it defines woman as silent Other. Likewise, in the specular logic of White Father, Asian women is defined as silent Alien(foreign) Other.

Thus replicating the specular logic of the main stream white society and masking their mothers' faces with the culturally acceptable image of 'exotic Asian Woman,' they transform their immigrant mothers' pain as women as well as mothers as something mysteriously Oriental and something wildly romantic toward which Asian-American daughters as well as American readers can show some humanistic compassion and pathos.

Let's take a look at four mothers in *Joy Luck Club*. Despite different circumstances of their emigration, they are strikingly exotic to stir the reader's imagination due to their shocking stories as wronged women. June's mother Suyuan had to leave China with guilty feelings for having lost her twin daughters and yet until she died, she has never given up the hope for finding them. Waverly's mother Lindo, who married through a traditional matchmaking process, met her husband for the first time on the wedding day and had to go through injustice and harsh treatments from her husband and her mother-in-law until she finally stood up for herself, using wit and intelligence. Rose's mother An-mei grew up traumatized by witnessing her mother's life-long hardship and the ensuing suicide and feared about following her mother's footsteps when she was abused and harassed by her indifferent father and his second wife. Ying-ying, as is revealed little by little, drowned her baby to revenge her husband's continuous abuse and cruelty. Yet as her inner voice says "he took from me my youth," her act is presented as an act of survival of an abused woman instead of something of a crazy, cold-hearted psychopath.

In this way, Chinese-American daughters' retelling of their immigrant mothers' painful past stories evoke exotic interest and humanistic pathos. Yet those representations do not fully suggest that they have understood their mothers' primal fear and pain of living as 'Alien Others'[4] and raising America-born daughters in white-centered society

while viewed as incorrigible 'Asians.' Unintentionally, they end up transforming their immigrant mothers' unusual stories into what Patricia Chu calls "immigration myth," in which poor Asian immigrants overcome various hardships of life with their strong will to survive and achieve their American dream through patience, diligence, hard work, and faith. In the end, the stories of Chinese immigrant mothers' race-/culture-specific pain, despite told sympathetically, are unwittingly sublimated as romanticized vignettes of exotic Asian Woman's tragic and painful lives.

3. Saving the Mother's Face

In this respect it can be said that Alice Wu's film *Saving Face* (2004) makes a really significant progress because Wu tries to represent the primal pain of a Chinese immigrant mother by dismissing the specular logic of the White Father and then trying to look into the immigrant mother's real face as it is. In other words, while still examining the typical relationship between a meddlesome, persistent, and controlling Chinese immigrant mother and a successful Chinese-American daughter with matrophobia, Wu represents not only the daughter's matrophobia to "be free from the mother's control and become an independent individual"(Rich 293) but also represents the psychological pain of the mother who wishes to get out of the status of 'the Alien Other' and achieve her own individuality. Further, Wu takes out mothering experience that both the mother and the daughter have inside and in so doing provides a new mode of mother-daughter relationship freed from

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4) In America the foreigners who hold permanent residentship are legally categorized as "Aliens." Here in this essay, their status as "Aliens" and the Other is combined.

the ideology of motherhood.

Particularly, it is interesting to note that Wu's representation of a mother-daughter relationship, whether she was conscious or not, carries out Rich' vision of an ideal mothering experience that empowers both the mother and the daughter. In 1976 Rich in *Of Woman Born* indicated that the ideology of motherhood separated mothers from daughters by polarizing their relations and manipulating each other to "project guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto the 'other' woman" (253). Yet, Rich suggested a positive outlook, saying that "the quality of the mother's life" would be "her primary bequest to her daughter" in the fact that "a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist" (247). Thus Rich suggested that women should learn "to accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in [them]selves" (253) so that women can experience mothering as subjective and empowering one as it has always been. And in 2004 Wu adopts Rich's discussion of motherhood and mothering and represents a new mother-daughter relationship without transforming the mother's story into an immigration myth.

Now let's take a look at how Wu restores mothering experience from the oppressive ideological discourse of motherhood. In this film Gao is presented as a stereotypical middle-class Chinese immigrant mother who has lived alone, raising the only daughter Wilhelmina after her husband's death. Brought up by a conservative Chinese father who is a retired professor and leader of Chinese immigrants' society, she lives in China town Flushing and does not feel it necessary to learn to speak English at all. Like typical Chinese mothers in *Joy Luck Club*, she always finds fault with her daughter's clothes, despises her daughter's black neighbor, brags at the hair salon about her daughter's being the top of her class and now a promising doctor. In addition, like other

Chinese mothers she keeps trying to teach her daughter "why Chinese thinking is best" (*Joy Luck Club* 289) and forces her to meet a successful Chinese-American man after another. Wilhelmina, the daughter, is also presented as a typical Chinese-American daughter, who is smart, independent, and represses her anger towards her mother. Like many Chinese-American daughters, Wil also feels split apart between her individualistic American spirit and her Chinese cultural heritage: when her mother suddenly comes to her place and announces that she will live with her from then on, she feels invaded but calms herself, reasoning herself with the notion of "the Chinese Karma" that she might bring onto herself when she drives her visiting mother out of the house.

In Wu's narrative, however, the conflict between Chinese immigrant mother and Chinese-American daughter is pushed a little further. By constructing the core of the conflict in terms of the daughter's lesbian sexuality rather than racial/cultural issue, Wu prepares a platform to delve into the fear that both Asian mother and Asian-American daughter have to face without focusing on the daughter's cultural/psychological battle over the mother or romanticizing the mother's mourning over or nostalgia for the past lives in China. For instance, Wu presents Gao's meddling with her daughter's life not as enforcing the Chinese cultural way on the daughter but as coming from the fear of being a bad mother. Thus, after having visited Wil's apartment without a call and witnessed her daughter being with other woman, she denies what she saw and from then on she acts as if nothing had happened. She still treats Wil as a 'normal' daughter and keeps looking for a match for her. Even when Wil, after having parted with another lover Vivian, confesses her mother that she is a lesbian, Gao keeps saying, "I am not a bad mother" and "You are not a gay," refusing to accept her daughter's sexual identity.

Thus, Wu shows that at the core of Gao's denial lies the ideology of motherhood. Gao fears Chinese immigrant society's contempt as well as her failure to become a good mother. Given the mainstream White society's prejudices of lesbians and the Chinese immigrant community's conservative Confucian values, having an 'abnormal' lesbian child, be she a promising doctor or not, is as good as wearing the red badge of dishonor that stigmatizes Gao as a 'bad' mother. At the same time, accepting her daughter's 'abnormal' sexuality might turn all the sacrifice, time and energy Gao devoted to raising a good, healthy daughter as a single mother into nothing and further erases the *raison d'etre* of Gao as a woman. Therefore, even when she notices the lesbian relationship between Wil and her lover Vivian, she turns her face away from that uncomfortable truth and simply reduces Vivian's existence to 'just a friend' and treats her accordingly.

In this respect the episode of unexpected living together functions as a necessary vignette, in which Chinese immigrant mother's psychological angst is calmly illuminated. First, unlike Amy Tan who romanticizes Chinese immigrant mother's painful stories, Wu focuses on realistically presenting the process of how a controlling immigrant mother gets out of the ideological pressure of the 'good' mother. Initially Gao moves into Wil's place due to her pregnancy outside the wedlock. Gao's father humiliates Gao for being an ungrateful child who wastes his sacrifice of having given up his own social status in China in order to bring her to a better country. He also rebukes her for bringing "an indelible disgrace upon the family" and for making him lose face in the community. He even threatens her that he would disown her unless she confesses who the baby's father is. Yet Gao refuses to divulge the father's name and gets driven out by her father. As a forty-eight year old pregnant woman with no job, no English skills, no experience of dating, Gao finds herself in the place of Wil. Like her daughter she once blamed,

she became an ungrateful daughter and feels lonely, confused and helpless. Although Wil persuades her to go on a date and enjoy a new life, she is unsure about whether such an American woman's lifestyle is fit for her. After going through several failed dates, Gao keeps saying "I will become a bad mother" and begins to worry about the reality of becoming a bad mother again for the new baby. Her depression gets worse when she gets completely ostracized by the Chinese community and even by her mah-jong friends.

At this stage, Wu provides a new interesting twist, through which Rich's notion of an empowering mode of mothering is explored. In other words, turning a stereotypical Chinese matriarch into a helpless woman, Wu lets the Chinese immigrant mother and the Chinese-American daughter change each other's role. Wil, now playing the mother's role, practices mothering for Gao. Just as Gao once did for her, she looks for a perfect match for Gao, interviews many candidates, and even encourages her depressed mother to enjoy a new life. Wil also makes motherly intervention between her grandfather and her mother when Gao, in order to reconcile with her angry father, decides to marry a widow her father selected for her. When Gao decides to marry a widow arranged by her father, Wil, who is unsure about her mother's decision, accidentally finds out the man her mother really loves and hurries up to the wedding hall. Then she reveals all the truth and gives a motherly advice to her mother to think about whether she made a choice for herself or for others. Encouraged by her daughter's motherly support, Gao directly faces her father who angrily shouts "are you going to defile my name I cherished all my life?" and speaks out her mind. She finally learns to prioritize her own individual happiness as a woman over other people's happiness and not to mind the gaze of others as a mother. In front of all the shocked wedding guests she reveals who the baby's father is and goes outside the hall courageously with her

motherly daughter.

Riding in a bus, Wil, a bit excited by her mother's courage, asks her the question that reflects Asian-American daughters' anger towards their Asian immigrant mothers: why has she not spoken the truth and achieve her individual happiness from the start but waited so long and endured all the humiliation? Smiling at her daughter's frank question, Gao opens her heart for the first time without fear of being viewed as a bad mother: she says that she has long lived a limited life as a dutiful daughter and thus wanted to give herself a chance to have new experiences; that she also wanted her lover Little Yu to announce his love in front of everyone. With this confession, Gao wears an awkward smile on her face and for the first time Wil looks her mother in the face and finds not a stereotypical submissive exotic Asian Woman but just an ordinary individual woman who tries to experience life as fully as she can. She knowingly nods her head and smiles back at her mother.

Further, Wu presents a new image of a truly supportive mother who Asian-American daughters aspire to have and in doing so, explores a new phase in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, while Wil brings out the mother inside and plays a supportive mother's role for helpless Gao, Gao also brings out the woman inside and lives a life of a free, autonomous being. Living together, Gao restores the woman inside and experiences a life of a free, subjective woman. After having such a new experience, Gao comes to see her daughter just as another woman and accept Wil's black neighbor as he is regardless of his skin color. Meeting new people and dancing for the first time, she learns that her daughter's life as a single American woman is not as easy as she imagined. Thus, appreciating Wil's support which made her overcome the fear of becoming a failed mother, she finally decides to accept Wil's lesbian identity. She makes up her mind to give what is

mostly needed for her daughter, that is, a mother's unconditional love and support. Gao talks to Vivian's mother in secret and makes a plan to let their daughters meet and love again.

The last scene where Wil and Vivian meet each other is in this respect very symbolic. When other Chinese people express their disgust and contempt toward Wil and Vivian, Gao proudly smiles at her daughter and wishes her real happiness. At this moment Gao, having regained the autonomy as a woman, now restores her authority as a mother. In other words, she finally overcomes the fear of social criticism and truly achieves her individuality because without minding the gaze of other mothers, she made a choice based upon her own experiences of mothering her daughter. Wil also completes her individuality by openly admitting her sexual identity in front of everyone. And putting on a warm smile, she does not hesitate to show her unconditional support and love toward her daughter. Gao made a choice to support Wil on the basis of her own mothering experiences and finally goes beyond the patriarchal ideology of motherhood and truly achieves her maternal authority and authenticity.

V. Conclusion

The image of a mother who supports her daughter and achieves her own individuality as a woman is strong enough to provide Asian immigrant mothers with a new perspective of mothering. It is because Gao demonstrates the true meaning of mother's love and courage: she is the positive character who believes in herself and fights for the possibilities in order to create livable spaces around her and her daughter. For Chinese-American daughters like June, Tan, Wil and Wu, growing up torn between White mothers who speak up their minds and

Chinese immigrant mothers who repress their voices, Gao's face with assuring smile is sufficient enough to suggest a new Asian mother's face that has long been hidden under the romanticized mask of poor, exotic Asian Woman constructed by white society.

Clearly, in Wu's representation Gao is not a poor, submissive typical Asian immigrant mother who practices the patriarchal discourse of motherhood. Instead of sacrificing all her life for her children and yet provoking matrophobia to the daughters with a staunch Asian attitudes, she restores her individuality as a woman and gets reborn as an authentic mother. She overcomes the primal pain of not only being alienated from her own mothering experiences but also of being isolated from her daughter as a culturally heterogeneous and racially peripheral 'Alien Other.' Although Tan also shows sympathy towards the pain of Chinese immigrant mothers, it is Wu who, without turning the exotic life stories of Chinese mothers into immigration myths, suggests a very empowering vision, in which both the mother and the daughter mutually recognize each other's mode of existence.

In the end, Wu embodiment of Rich's conception of a new mode of mothering seems satisfactory. The new mode of mothering, in which both the mother and the daughter share the experience of mothering, at least suggests a way-out from the psychological damage of the ideology of motherhood which so far made the mother and the daughter project guilt, anger, shame onto each other. Of course, it is "no easy matter," as Rich suggests, to "accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in ourselves" (253). Yet Wu successfully rescues woman's mothering experiences from the oppressive ideology of motherhood and the patriarchal images of the 'good' mother. She truly saves the faces of 'mothers en masse,' who have long lived stripped of the authority and authenticity as mothers.

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