

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Bc. Petra Paulusová

Assimilation in Selected Works of Gish Jen and Amy Tan

Diplomová práce

Vedoucí práce: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

Olomouc 2017

Podklad pro zadání DIPLOMOVÉ práce studenta

PŘEDKLÁDÁ:	ADRESA	OSOBNÍ ČÍSLO
Bc. PAULUSOVÁ Petra	Chvalovická 368, Ronov nad Doubravou	F140056

TÉMA ČESKY:

Asimilace ve vybraných dílech Gish Jen a Amy Tan

TÉMA ANGLICKY:

Assimilation in selected works of Gish Jen and Amy Tan

VEDOUcí PRÁCE:

prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc. - KAA

ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the concept of assimilation in selected novels by Chinese-American authors (Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* and *Typical American* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*) with regard to immigration, cultural and ethnic identity and most importantly the clash between the first and second generation of immigrants. The aim of the thesis is also to compare these concepts as depicted in the analyzed novels written by two different Chinese-American authors.

SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:

- Bloom, Harold. *Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009.
- Furman, Andrew. "Immigrant Dreams and Civic Promises: (Con-)Testing Identity in Early Jewish American Literature and Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land*." *Melus*. 25/1 (2000): 209-226. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468158>.
- González, Begona Simal. "The (Re)Birth of *Mona Changowitz*: Rituals and Ceremonies of Cultural Conversion and Self-Making in *Mona in the Promised Land*." *Melus*. 26/2 (2001): 225-242. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185526>.
- Hamilton, Patricia L. "Feng Shui, Astrology, and the Five Elements: Traditional Chinese Belief in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Melus*. 24/2 (1999): 125-145. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467703>.
- Hyung-chan Kim. *Dictionary of Asian American history*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Jen, Gish. *Mona in the Promised Land*. New York : Random House, 1997.
- Maharpol, Ora-uan. "Cultural conflicts and dual identity of Chinese living in the USA: an analysis of the *Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan." (2005) Accessed January 25, 2015. <http://digi.library.tu.ac.th/thesis/lg/0129/01TITLE.pdf>.
- Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. London: Random House UK Ltd, 1996.
- Xu, Ben. "Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Melus*. 19/1 (1994): 13-18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467784>.
- Zeng, Li. "Diasporic Self, Cultural Other: Negotiating Ethnicity through Transformation in the Fiction of Tan and Kingston." *Language & Literature*. Vol. 28 (2003): 1-15.

Podpis studenta: Jan

Datum: 19.4.2017

Podpis vedoucího práce:

Datum:

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma „Assimilation in Selected Works of Gish Jen and Amy Tan” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc. for his helpful advice, guidance and valuable comments during the whole process of writing the thesis. Further, I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and support.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	7
2	Amy Tan and Gish Jen	9
3	Chinese Immigration to America	11
4	Assimilation.....	15
4.1	Cultural Assimilation	19
4.2	Language Assimilation.....	33
4.3	Economic Assimilation	38
4.4	Residential Assimilation	47
4.5	Intermarriage	51
5	Conclusion.....	55
6	Resumé	59
	Bibliography	62

1 Introduction

America has always been considered to be the nation of immigrants. Throughout its history, various incoming ethnic groups were expected to fully assimilate into the mainstream of American society. Theodore Roosevelt said in his 1918 speech: “There can be no fifty–fifty Americanism in this country. There is room here only for 100 percent Americanism, only for those who are American and nothing else”¹ Roosevelt, as well as many of his contemporaries were very strict in their approach toward immigrant groups. Nevertheless, this trend has been on the decline and immigrants have been accepted more easily and graciously with their own unique identities, bringing new elements into American culture. With the recent emphasis on the individual identity, many people have become proud of their origins and refuse to entirely give up their original culture and adopt the American one. Therefore, ethnic literatures have been on the rise.

Both writers Gish Jen and Amy Tan are second generation Chinese Americans. In their novels *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, and *The Joy Luck Club* they follow two generations of Chinese living in the USA, the first generation including immigrants and the latter being American–born. While Jen focuses predominantly on the lives of one family in the new country, Tan follows her protagonists and their lives in America but also adds description of the first generation’s childhood and youth in China. Each of them presents a slightly different image of the lives of immigrant families in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in America. Their protagonists approach immigration and subsequent assimilation diversely.

The aim of this thesis is both to analyze different types of assimilation as depicted in Gish Jen’s *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land* and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* and to compare the authors’ conception of this notion in the selected novels. The analysis is supported by theoretical notes on the specific concepts. The thesis is divided into five main chapters.

Firstly both novelists are introduced with the emphasis on those events in their lives and the lives of their families, in which they found inspiration for writing their novels. After that, the immigrant stories of the protagonists from the novels are presented against the background of the history of Chinese immigrants in America. In

¹ Theodore Roosevelt in “Quote of the Day,” Last modified June 30, 2010. http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/publications/id.6604/pub_detail.asp

the fourth chapter, assimilation in general is defined and the five following subchapters describe cultural assimilation, language assimilation, economic assimilation, residential assimilation and intermarriage and the depiction of these concepts in the novels. The chapter focusing on cultural assimilation is significantly longer than the ones following it as the topic is considerably wider and the content is more complex. Language, economic, residential and marital assimilation are very specific and narrower in their meaning. As language assimilation is closely related to and sometimes considered to be embedded in cultural assimilation, the chapter dealing with this topic is purposely placed to immediately follow the analysis of acculturation in the novels.

2 Amy Tan and Gish Jen

Both authors are second generation Chinese American and several resemblances of their lives with the lives of their protagonists can be found. Gish Jen was born Lillian Jen in 1955 in New York to Chinese immigrants who came separately from Shanghai in the 1940s. Her mother came to study and her father, a hydraulics engineer, came for work. Similarly to Jen's protagonists, her parents never intended to stay permanently in America, however, when the Communists took over, they were not allowed to return home.

Jen grew up in the predominantly Jewish suburb of Scarsdale, which later became an inspiration for her writing. In high school she changed her name to Gish after Lillian Gish, an actress with whom she shared her first name. She was the second of five children and all of her siblings attended Ivy League Universities. Jen's parents had high expectations about her education and career. She attended Harvard University as a premed and prelaw student, but she graduated majoring in English. Later Jen dropped out of Stanford, disappointing her parents and enrolling in the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, pursuing her writing career.

Her first novel, *Typical American*, became very successful, followed by its sequel *Mona in the Promised Land* and other works, such as *The Love Wife*, *Who's Irish?*, *World and Town*, and *Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self*.² Earlier this year Gish Jen published a nonfiction work titled *The Girl at the Baggage Claim*.³

Amy Tan was born An–mei Ruth Tan in 1952 in Oakland, California to Chinese immigrants as the second of three children. An–mei means “blessing from America” in Chinese. The story of her parents inspired her for her first novel, the *Joy Luck Club*. Her mother Daisy Du Ching had been married with three children before she met John Yuehan Tan. When her husband learned she had fallen in love with John Tan, Daisy was sent to prison. John immigrated to America, trying to free Daisy from prison and her marriage. After two years Daisy finally arrived in America, leaving her daughters from the first marriage in China, and married John immediately. Unfortunately, she never forgot her hardships from China, remaining fearful and worried in her new life.

² Don Lee, “About Gish Jen,” *Ploughshares* 26/ 2–3 (2000), 217–222, accessed November 19, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40352824>.

³ Gish Jen, *The Girl at the Baggage Claim*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

The motif of constant fear later appeared in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* through the character of Ying-ying, while the difficult decision of a mother to leave her children behind occurred in the novel through Suyuan. Daisy's fear of ghosts led to the family moving frequently from one place to another. She regularly met with her friends to play mah-jongg, a Chinese game. Similarly to Gish Jen's parents, she had high expectations from her daughter, imagining her becoming a doctor and a concert pianist, while Amy enjoyed drawing and wanted to be an artist. Due to her parents' demands, emphasis on excellent results at school and strict rules, she always felt separated from her classmates. Because of her mother's limited English, Amy often took care of business and official matters,⁴ similarly to her protagonist Lena St.Clair. During Amy's teenage years, her older brother and father died and Daisy moved the family to Europe, finally settling in Switzerland. Later on, during her university studies, Tan met her future husband, a white American.

Amy Tan refused to acknowledge her Chinese heritage until one day she travelled to China with her mother. This trip opened her eyes and experiences from it as well as her half-sisters' stories would later serve as an inspiration for her writing. So did the above described experience from her childhood years.⁵ Another unusual resemblance can be found between the novel and the life of Amy Tan's grandmother, Jing-mei, who, similarly to An-mei's mother from the novel, was forced to become a concubine to a rich man after becoming a widow. Both Amy's grandmother and her protagonist's mother gave a male heir to the rich man and ended their lives tragically by committing suicide in the same way.⁶

The Joy Luck Club was published on March 22, 1989 and became a best seller. Tan's other works also became successful, including *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, *Saving Fish from Drowning* or *The Valley of Amazement* and also children's writing.

⁴ Natalie M. Rosinsky, *Amy Tan: Author and Storyteller* (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2007), 15–28.

⁵ Mark Mussari, *Amy Tan* (Malaysia: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 14–25.

⁶ Lan Dong, *Reading Amy Tan* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LCC, 2009), 2.

3 Chinese Immigration to America

Immigration is a term which will occur and be touched several times in the thesis, therefore it is important to briefly introduce the process. It is common for people to move to another country or region, or in other words *to immigrate*. There are many reasons why immigrants leave their home country, these are the so called “push factors” and “pull factors”. The first is connected with negative conditions in the immigrants’ country of origin, which push them away, such as poverty, political oppression or religious persecution. In case of the latter, people are pulled into the new country by positive conditions, seeking new opportunities. These factors often work together when one decides to leave one’s home country. Immigrants usually settle in places where they find jobs or where other immigrants had settled before them. They bring their own languages, religion and traditions, contributing uniquely to the multicultural society of America.⁷

In the history, both difficult conditions in China and seeking a better life brought Chinese immigrants to the USA. There have been three major waves of Chinese immigration. The first took place in early 1850s, when they began migrating in thousands, running away from difficult conditions in China including natural disasters as drought, flooding or earthquakes, but also diseases and wars. They were lured to America by the California Gold Rush, many of them later worked on the transcontinental railroad or in agriculture. Very often Chinese men came to America to make money and intended to return back home to their wives or families. At first they were seen as cheap labor, however, competition with white workers, growing racial prejudice and fear led to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which greatly limited Chinese immigration and denied citizenship to those already in America. It was not until World War II that another act was passed permitting Chinese to become American citizens and also to immigrate to America again, allowing them to flee from the Communist party, which took over the power in China in 1949. The second wave of Chinese immigration followed. The third wave of Chinese immigrants came in the 1980s and 1990s, many of them being students and professionals seeking better opportunities.⁸

⁷ Michael Teitelbaum, Robert Asher, *Immigration to the United States: Chinese Immigrants* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), 5–7.

⁸ Teitelbaum, Asher, *Immigration to the United States*, 11–14.

All of those protagonists of the novels *The Joy Luck Club*, *Typical American*, and *Mona in the Promised Land* who came to America as first generation of immigrants, arrived in the late 1940s at the time when immigration from China was possible again. The reasons for their leaving China varied. Against his father's wishes, Ralph Chang, the protagonist of Jen's *Typical American*, went to America to gain a university degree in engineering. At the time his name was Yifeng, which the Foreign Student Affairs Secretary at the university, Cammy, found difficult to repeat and since he did not have any English name, she named him Ralph. Ever since, everyone called him Ralph, which was the first significant step in his assimilation process.

Ralph never intended to stay in America after finishing his degree, however, after the Communist Party took over power in China, American government would not let Ralph and other Chinese students return home. His family begged him to come back but unfortunately he had to reply that the Americans would not let him from fear of him helping the communists with the knowledge gained in the US. Ralph still did not want to officially become an American citizen, as he felt that China was his home. Consequently, he forgot to renew his visa and was forced to go into hiding for several months. After he discovered that there was not any chance of him returning to the university to finish his PhD, he relinquished all hope in his life and gave up pursuing his American Dream. Fortunately, one day he met his sister Theresa who had been looking for him ever since she had come to America.

Theresa's motif for immigrating to America was not only finding her brother, but also her personal life predominantly due to her unusual appearance. She was taller than other Chinese girls and had large feet, which men in traditional China considered unattractive. Before she emigrated, she had been engaged to the son of a banker, who should have made a suitable spouse for her and her whole family. Unexpectedly, the fiancé asked to see her before the wedding, which had not been a common practice in China at the time when couples normally saw each other for the first time at their own wedding. After he saw her at a park, the engagement was suddenly canceled by the young man's family, which broke Theresa's heart. Her extraordinary height posed an insuperable obstacle in finding a husband for her.

Theresa arrived to America with her friend, Hailan, whom she named Helen. Helen came from a wealthy family and was not used to working, however, in America, she had to learn to cook and take care of a household. She was very careful with her

clothes, as she was still hoping that she would not have to buy anything until she came back home. Like Ralph, she never intended to stay permanently.

Characters from *The Joy Luck Club* came to America under quite different circumstances. Unlike Jen's protagonists, they immigrated to the new country with the intention to stay. Suyuan and Canning Woo arrived in 1949 on a boat with just "one stiff leather trunk filled only with fancy silk dresses."⁹ They started their life in America with no capital and had to wear the same clothes until they received some from the charity by the First Chinese Baptist Church. Before that back in China, Suyuan's first husband had been an officer and a father to their twin daughters. When the Japanese came, she rushed to join him in the city of Kweilin. Unfortunately, she had to walk many miles and while carrying all that she had packed and the two babies, she became exhausted and thought she would die. When she begged other people to take them and nobody helped, she was forced to leave her two babies by the path, their pockets stuffed with all the money and family jewelry she had. She also wrote a note for anyone who would find them with the address where they should be returned. After many more miles she fell unconscious and woke up in a hospital, where she met Canning. After the news of her husband's death and years of vain search for her children, she finally gave up and left for America with Canning, her second husband. Unlike the protagonists from Gish Jen's *Typical American*, Suyuan and Canning came to the USA with the intention to stay, as there was nothing to return to back in China, their reasons for departure being so tragic. Tan seems to have inspired herself with the story of her own parents, as her own mother had been married in China before she came to America, also leaving her children behind.

A similar pattern appeared in the story of Lindo Jong, who had also been married before she left for America. However, the circumstances of her marriage were different, as it had been arranged when she was two. Unlike Suyuan, she was unhappy in the union. Her mother-in-law wished to have a grandson but Lindo's husband Tyan-yu refused to consummate their marriage. When Lindo heard about a servant pregnant with an illegitimate child, she claimed that she had a dream about the spirits who had planted Tyan-yu's seeds into a servant. After the family had found the girl, they believed it was a miracle and were happy that they would finally have a grandson and an heir. Lindo got her clothes, a ticket to Peking and enough money to go to America,

⁹ Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (London: Vintage, 2013), 8.

where she met her second husband. Lindo's circumstances of arrival to America were much better than those of Suyuan, as she had enough money to live a decent life there. But again, unlike Gish Jen's protagonists, Lindo intended to stay in America permanently.

Similarly to Ralph and Helen, Ying-ying came from a wealthy family. A nursemaid took care of her and her father had concubines. Unfortunately, the circumstances of her leaving China were as unhappy as those of Suyuan. Again, her life was affected by a disastrous marriage. From vain reasons, she got married very young to a wealthy man whom she believed was her destiny, even though she knew he would be a bad husband. Despite this, she fell in love with him. Unfortunately, soon after he impregnated her, he left with an opera singer. Desperate Ying-ying had killed the baby before it could be born. After ten years of living without a husband and a job, she became a shop girl. In the shop, she met Clifford St. Clair, an American trader with cheap clothes. While he courted her for four years, she knew she would eventually marry him. After receiving the news of her husband's death, Ying-ying finally left for America with Clifford. From a picture taken right after she was released from the Immigration Station, her daughter Lena recognized her mother was scared and looked displaced. Ying-ying was the only one from the first generation female immigrants in *The Joy Luck Club* who entered into a mixed marriage with a white man.

Circumstances of An-mei Hsu's immigration are not revealed in the novel. However, it is clear that her life in China was as tragic as Suyuan's, Lindo's and Ying-ying's. After growing up with her grandparents, An-mei came to live with her mother, who was a concubine. On the treacherous advice of the Second wife (first concubine), An-mei's mother tried to do a pretend-suicide to make her husband keep his promise about a house for her but unfortunately poisoned herself. Her husband, afraid of her spirits, promised to raise An-mei as his own child. After that, An-mei grew up in a wealthy family and immigrated to America with enough resources to start a new life there. She believed she could do anything she hoped and wished for in her new country.

4 Assimilation

Assimilation has been a part of American identity since the colonial times. It is a complex process involving several components. In the history, immigrants were expected to assimilate sooner or later, while contemporary views significantly differ. Sociologists Richard Alba and Victor Nee explicitly state that they avoided such a generalization in their work. They also refuse the earlier perception of the Anglo–American culture as the superior one and the conviction of the classical theorists that the majority culture would remain unaffected by minority groups, who would fully accept it and completely give up their own. Alba and Nee propose that there are other ways to enter society than to fully assimilate to the mainstream consisting predominantly of white Protestant people of Anglo–Saxon origins. They define assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.”¹⁰

Alba and Nee further declare that in the process of assimilation “[i]ndividuals’ ethnic origins become less and less relevant in relation to the members of another ethnic group (typically, but not necessarily, the ethnic majority group), and individuals on both sides of the boundary see themselves more and more as alike.”¹¹ Their view of the concept does not assume the disappearance of individual ethnic features, but quite the opposite. Moreover, they believe that the assimilating minority groups can contribute to and shape the majority, with the example of the East–Asian cuisine, which has found its way into the lives of the majority and some habits which were originally not a part of the “American” way of life. Alba and Nee acknowledge the importance of intermarriage in this respect. Assimilation is also closely linked to social mobility in which not only various ethnic groups but also individuals within a group differ.¹²

Alba and Nee describe what they call the “mechanisms of assimilation,”¹³ which influence immigrant families and their adaptation to an environment different from the one they come from. Taking into account self–interest, the authors propose that immigrants and their descendants assimilate individually, to a different extent. Completion of the assimilation process may not necessarily be their goal; for many the

¹⁰ Richard Alba, Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream* (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2003), 11.

¹¹ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 11.

¹² Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 12–15.

¹³ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 38.

outcome is unintentional, as they often aim for mere adaptation into the new environment. They often do not realize they have changed and assimilated until one eye-opening moment.¹⁴ For Lindo, the first generation Chinese from Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, this moment occurred when after almost forty years she travelled back to China, even though only for a vacation. To her surprise, she was treated as a foreigner, even though she did her best to blend in: "I had taken off my fancy jewelry. I did not wear loud colors. I spoke their language. I used their local money. But still, they knew. They knew my face was not one hundred percent Chinese. They still charged me high foreign prices."¹⁵ It was not until then that she was able to realize how much she had changed and how much she had been influenced by the country in which she now lived. Like Lindo, the Changs from Jen's novels did not wish to be assimilated after their arrival to the USA. The reason was their intention to return to China. However, the longer they remained in the new country, the more they were assimilated without realizing it. As Alba and Nee explain:

Individuals striving for success in American society often do not see themselves as assimilating. Yet the unintended consequences of practical strategies and actions undertaken in pursuit of familiar goals—a good education, a good job, a nice place to live, interesting friends and acquaintances, economic security—often result in specific forms of assimilation.¹⁶

The Changs wished to succeed in the new country as soon as they realized they would not return to their country of origin. As described above, Ralph, Helen and Theresa wanted to receive the best education they could, moved to a nice neighborhood in the suburbs, found new friends there and did their best to provide for their family.

Further Alba and Nee point out that not only informal norms but also formal laws and rules play an important role in immigrants' lives, calling these collectively "institutional mechanisms."¹⁷ In American history, there were many discriminatory local and regional laws aimed against certain ethnic groups. Alba and Nee argue that formal constraints need to be removed and minorities need to be given fundamental rights first and only after that the process of assimilation is possible. The negative mindset in America has changed and authorities have fought against discrimination by

¹⁴ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 38.

¹⁵ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 324.

¹⁶ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 41.

¹⁷ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 53.

means of various rules and laws. After WWII, several enormous institutional changes were implemented helping members of minorities become a part of the majority and enabling social mobility. The vision of punishment has eliminated discriminatory behavior, which has unfortunately not entirely disappeared. Racism and discrimination have most significantly decreased for Asian Americans when compared to other minority groups in the US.¹⁸

There are three processes associated with assimilation: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting. It should be pointed out that these are ideal states, in practice they occur only to a certain extent. When one crosses a boundary, one basically moves from one group to another without changing the boundary. This process can be “exemplified by the members of racial and immigrant minorities who pass as members of the majority by changing their names and taking on its habits of speech, dress, and behavior.”¹⁹ They share appearance with the majority. These are often descendants of racially mixed parents.²⁰ Lena St. Clair from *The Joy Luck Club* reached a certain level of boundary crossing, as she was of a mixed origin. Her mother was Chinese and her father English–Irish. Lena inherited most of her appearance from her father, therefore she was able to pass for white. Lena described herself as follows:

Most people didn’t know I was half Chinese, maybe because my last name was St. Clair. When people first saw me, they thought I looked like my father, English–Irish, big–boned and delicate at the same time. But if they looked really close, if they knew they were there, they could see the Chinese parts.²¹

It can be declared that Lena shared more features with the majority than with her predecessors from her mother’s side. Moreover, she was raised in America, spoke English, dressed and behaved like an ordinary American citizen.

To continue with, if a boundary blurs, it becomes less distinct as a possible consequence of race mixing. This can happen for example due to intermarriage. The symbolic boundary between two ethnically different groups gradually vanishes and becomes less and less relevant. Consequently members of both groups adopt or accept some features or patterns of the other group while at the same time retaining their own. The authors exemplify this with religion; sometimes when there are two religions

¹⁸ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 53–54.

¹⁹ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 61.

²⁰ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 60–61.

²¹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 114.

among members of one family involved, both can be recognized by the family. Interaction among people of various ethnic identities plays an important role in boundary blurring. The last process involves a shift of the boundary so that those who were originally considered outsiders are now seen as insiders. While throughout the history all three processes were important for assimilation of immigrants, recently the first two have become prominent.²²

Alba and Nee call post-1965 immigrants “new” immigrants. They review assimilation of these new immigrants in America in relation to the following key areas: language assimilation, socioeconomic position, residential change, and intermarriage.²³ Even though Jen’s and Tan’s protagonists immigrated to the USA earlier than that, I would like to follow primarily their terminology in analyzing the novels. However, in the first subchapter, cultural assimilation will be examined in compliance with Gordon M. Milton’ view of this term as a subprocess of assimilation. The following chapters will describe acculturation and language assimilation, economic assimilation, residential assimilation, intermarriage and the depiction of these concepts in the novels. Sociologists and anthropologists sometimes use the terms assimilation and acculturation interchangeably or consider them to be overlapping. In this thesis the terms will be distinguished and treated as two different concepts.

²² Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 60–63.

²³ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 216.

4.1 Cultural Assimilation

Even though sometimes cultural assimilation and acculturation are distinguished, the terms will be used interchangeably in this thesis. From the point of view of psychology, acculturation can be defined as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members.”²⁴ The change is neither sudden nor rapid, but rather gradual, sometimes taking whole generations, while both the majority and the minority mutually accommodate them and adapt themselves. This change can occur easily through the processes which the professor of psychology John W. Berry calls “culture shedding and culture learning.”²⁵ In such a case an immigrant intentionally or unintentionally loses his or her original cultural patterns of behavior, explores and accepts those of the majority culture in contact. In case the change does not take place as easily as described above, mutual interactions between the members of minority and majority culture can cause acculturative stress.²⁶ Berry described acculturative stress as “the psychological, social and physical health consequences of acculturation.”²⁷ This phenomenon can be exemplified by Ying–ying’s incident during shopping, when she opened jars in a grocery store to smell the inside like she used to do in China. She did not understand why the shop owner yelled at her, which led to her confusion and acculturative stress. Berry further proposed that not only is the rate of acculturation different among members of the same ethnic group, but also within families.²⁸ This can be exemplified by the different acculturation rate of Gish Jen’s protagonists Helen and Ralph Chang on the one side, and Theresa Chang on the other. Reasons for the difference shall be described later in this chapter in detail.

In Milton M. Gordon’s view, the process of cultural assimilation usually starts with taking on the English language and American behavioral patterns. However, as Gordon argued, not even complete cultural assimilation can guarantee the “entry of each

²⁴ John W. Berry, “Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005), 698. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic551691.files/Berry.pdf>.

²⁵ Berry, “Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures,” 700.

²⁶ Berry, “Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures,” 700.

²⁷ John W. Berry, “Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society,” *International Migration* 30/1 (1992), 71, accessed March 11, 2017, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.1992.tb00776.x.

²⁸ Berry, “Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures,” 700.

minority into the primary groups and institutions [...] of the white Protestant group.”²⁹ Gordon distinguished two types of cultural patterns which may characterize an ethnic group: intrinsic and extrinsic cultural traits. To the first, which is essential in a group’s cultural heritage, belong for example “religious beliefs and practices, [...] ethical values, [...] musical tastes, folk recreational patterns, literature, historical language, sense of common past [...].”³⁰ The latter constitute for example “dress, manner, patterns of emotional expression [...].”³¹ Gordon was convinced that differences between core society and minority in extrinsic traits lead to discrimination and prejudice.³² Alba and Nee, on the other hand, believe that in the process of cultural assimilation not only does the minority change toward the majority, but also the core culture can accept influence from the immigrant group, sometimes leading to a kind of *fusion* of more cultures.

After their arrival to America, the Changs from Jen’s novels never thought that this land would become their home. Especially Helen was waiting for the right moment to return to China, resisting any type of assimilation. However, starting with learning the English language, acculturation eventually followed. The first major impulse came with mass media, as Helen started reading American newspapers and magazines and enjoyed listening to the radio. For her and Ralph’s wedding she rented a western-style wedding dress. Ralph liked to reminisce about his life back home. When in doubts about his marriage, he wished he still lived in China, where his marriage problems could be easily solved by taking a concubine. However, while he considered the system in China better, he was faithful to his wife.

After nine years in America, Ralph, Theresa and Helen became citizens. They learned to live an American life. Apart from Chinese New Year, they also celebrated Christmas, regularly visited the Radio City Music Hall and loved watching baseball. Ralph decided to call his family The Chinese Yankees, in short “Chang-kees”. After embracing America as their home, they also accepted its culture and many local habits. They believed that they looked like a typical American family, which in their idealized view included a house, a car, a dog and having friends in their white suburban neighborhood. Helen’s reaction to Ralph buying a dog and taking training classes with

²⁹ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: the Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, Oxford University Press: 1964), 78.

³⁰ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 79.

³¹ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 79.

³² Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 81.

him spoke for itself: “A dog? [...] Now we really are Americanized.”³³ Helen and Ralph perceived themselves as Americans and refused the “label” Asian Americans or immigrants. While their American-born daughter Mona was proud to call herself Chinese American and claimed that her parents came as immigrants, she realized that “her parents would never use that word on themselves. They think it means people who try to bring live chickens on buses and don’t own real suitcases.”³⁴ Considering the refusal of anything American upon their arrival to the country which they later called their home, it can be concluded that they underwent a profound transformation.

Theresa was not able to resist a remarkable change of her personality either. While in China she would have never dreamed of even thinking of a married man, in America she started having an affair with a family friend’s husband, which Ralph and Helen found unacceptable. Despite Helen condemning Theresa’s relationship, she herself flirted with Ralph’s business partner Grover, however, nobody discovered their secret. One day Ralph humiliated Theresa in front of other people, saying she had two boyfriends, which was untrue. Consequently, his sister found her own flat and left the family. After some time and their reconciliation Theresa moved back to their house, predominantly because she felt the need to help Ralph and Helen who found themselves in a serious financial situation.

It was her duty, she told herself. She was in many ways Americanized, but in this respect she was Chinese still—when family marched, she fell in step. And wasn’t this what she’d longed for? Reunification, that Chinese ideal, she could not eat an orange without reciting to herself, as she did at New Year’s, *quan jia tuan yuan*—the whole family together.”³⁵

In many ways, Theresa was a changed woman, but her family remained a vital part of her life. She forgave her brother for his cruel behavior and in exchange Ralph had to accept her relationship with Henry Chao, who decided to divorce his wife for Theresa.

Theresa’s personality underwent another major transformation when several years later she moved to California with Henry. At the time of Mona and Callie being teenagers, she came for a visit, “wearing an Oakland A’s baseball cap, and carrying a large straw backpack full of surprises. *Look!* A Hawaiian florist neighbor has made

³³ Gish Jen, *Typical American* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2008), 251.

³⁴ Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (New York: Random House, 1997), 27.

³⁵ Jen, *Typical American*, 265.

these herself, leis for everyone.”³⁶ Theresa’s generosity did not change at all. From her new home in California she brought many gifts including fruits and vegetables, some of them from her own garden. On the other hand, her behavior and appearance drastically changed. Now she wore her hair loose instead of having a bun like she used to. As for her clothes, she was very much influenced by the trends in California in the 1970s .

[S]he is wearing blue jeans like a hippie, only new-looking and fresh-pressed, with a crease down the front of each leg. The jeans go with a lightly starched work shirt, on which has been embroidered chain after chain of daisies and—in a little half-moon around the shirt tag in the back—her name, only without the h: Teresa.”³⁷

When compared to her brother with his wife and more importantly to the woman Theresa used to be, one must admit the vast difference. In her youth in China she was pressured by her family into engagement because her younger sister, who had already found the perfect match for her, was not allowed to marry him while her older sister was still unmarried. As mentioned earlier, it was not easy to find a husband for Theresa because of her height and large feet, not to mention her manly behavior. She was fully dependent on her family and it was because of her them that Theresa had to pretend to be someone she was not. On the other hand, in America she was free to do whatever she wished, working and making her own money. She finally became independent, which is closely related to her economic assimilation.

On the contrary, Helen remained dependent on her relatives for many years. Firstly she relied on her family’s help during her life in China and later when she married Ralph, she became dependent on him and his sister. It was not until many years later when she started working in the restaurant, contributing to the family budget.

Alba and Nee consider attainment of the host country language as the crucial part of cultural assimilation. In this respect, Ying-ying from *The Joy Luck Club* can be considered as the least assimilated from all of the first generation characters from the novels. As mentioned earlier, she learned only basic English vocabulary and with her daughter she communicated exclusively in Chinese. This considerably limited the circle of people she socialized with. According to Alba and Nee, “communication in a mother tongue marks a largely impenetrable social boundary which includes all who share the

³⁶ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 241.

³⁷ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 242.

same ethnic origin and can speak its language and excludes everyone else.”³⁸ Due to her language limitation, Ying–ying only befriended other Chinese, her best friends being Suyuan, Lindo and An–mei from the Joy Luck Club. Even though she was very close with her daughter, at the same time there was a gap between them as Ying–ying never embraced the American culture, while Lena’s beliefs were built on it. Ying–ying did not consider herself to be American, while addressing Lena as “you Americans”, expressing distance between them.

As mentioned earlier, one’s acculturation is not always intentional and immigrants often do not realize how much they have changed since their arrival to the new country. Returning to the land of their origin might be an eye–opening experience, as was for Lindo Jong, who travelled to China after almost forty years in America. Even though she tried to do her best to blend in, local people still treated her as a foreigner, as if they recognized the American influence on her, while she herself did not. However, Americans considered her a foreigner as well, therefore it can be stated that she fully belonged to neither of the groups. While the Chinese could not be convinced about Lindo being Chinese, the Americans could be easily fooled. According to the situation and whenever it suited her, she changed her behavior. When she found herself in an uncomfortable situation with her daughter at the hairdresser’s, she thought: “I smile. I use my American face. That’s the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand.”³⁹ Over years, she learned how to behave toward Americans, never considering herself to be one. According to Ogbu and Matute–Bianchi, “[i]t is possible and acceptable to participate in two different cultures or to use two different languages, perhaps for different purposes, by alternating one’s behavior according to the situation.”⁴⁰ Lindo changed her behavior mostly according to people she spent time with. She spoke Chinese in the company of her friends from the Joy Luck club, while she used English in communication with her husband and children.

Like her friends from the Joy Luck club, Suyuan honored Chinese culture and she never changed many of the habits which she had learned in her country of origin. She celebrated Chinese New Year by having dinner with her family and friends. During one of the celebrations Suyuan refused to eat a crab with a missing leg believing it was

³⁸ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 72.

³⁹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 310.

⁴⁰ John Ogbu and Maria E. Matute–Bianchi, “Understanding Sociocultural Factors: Knowledge, Identity, and Social Adjustment,” in *Beyond Language: Social and Cultural Factors in Schooling*, ed. California State Department of Education, Bilingual Education Office (Sacramento: California State University at Los Angeles, 1986), 89.

a bad sign on a New Year. Suyuan's acculturation was largely influenced by American mass media. In an attempt to find out in which way her daughter was special and to a great extent to prove to Lindo that Jing-mei possessed some hidden talents which Waverly lacked, Suyuan watched American television and read American magazines. In this respect her behavior was not too different from that of Helen Chang from Jen's novels, as described earlier in this chapter. Rubén G. Rumbaut claims that American mass media have had a profound impact on immigrant individuals, using such strong expressions as cultural propaganda as one of the influences of mass media, calling them collectively "context of perception."⁴¹ It was predominantly through mass media that Suyuan learned about American culture. Without even realizing it, she passively accepted various cultural influences which shaped her identity.

When analyzing the selected novels by Jen and Tan, it is apparent that the influence of mass media was not rare; on the contrary. Despite having a different impact on the characters' lives, the power of mass media can be traced in the stories of Helen Chang, Lindo Jong, Suyuan Woo and finally also An-mei Hsu. Once An-mei and her family went on a trip to a beach about which her husband had read in the *Sunset* magazine. Remembering the experience, her daughter Rose admitted:

Thinking back, I remember that this beach cove was a terrible place, full of wet shadows that chilled us and invisible specks that flew into our eyes and made it hard for us to see the dangers. We were all blind with the newness of this experience: a Chinese family trying to act like a typical American family at the beach.⁴²

Rose felt the awkwardness of the situation, realizing that under the influence of American mass media, they were imitating a perfect American family on the perfect family trip. Nothing about this trip, however, was perfect. After falling from a cliff into the ocean, Rose's brother Bing tragically died together with An-mei's hopes for her family becoming typically American. Except for An-mei's single attempt to experience a trip many Americans recommended, neither of Tan's first generation protagonists deliberately tried to assimilate. And as far as it concerns cultural assimilation of the protagonists from all the analyzed novels, it can be concluded that Jen's characters were more advanced in the process. There was a vast difference between the Changs and

⁴¹ Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Ironies and Paradoxes," in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, ed. Charles Hirschman et al. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 26.

⁴² Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 139.

families from Tan's novel. While the Joy Luck Club members regularly gathered to play mah-jongg, Helen Chang found pleasure in playing bridge with other women from her white middle-class neighborhood.

Despite being born and raised in America, Jen's and Tan's second generation characters from the selected novels were assimilated to different degrees. Mona and Callie Chang, Ralph and Helen's children, grew up in an environment where hardly any Asians lived. Because of their parents being Americanized to a great extent, they did not have many opportunities to learn about Chinese culture, habits, or the language. In their childhood, Mona and Callie were very much influenced by American popular culture, an example being Theresa's cats, which the girls named Barbie and Ken.

Even though Helen did not have a job and stayed home, the girls attended kindergarten like any other child in America. For Callie's first day, "Helen bought her a navy blue jumper with a duck for a pocket, a light blue blouse with a Peter Pan collar, matching light blue stretch ankle socks with lace trim, and a pair of marine blue tie-up Buster Browns [...]." ⁴³ The girls grew up with no special emphasis on Chinese culture or traditions. In their teenage years, each of them perceived their Chinese background differently. While Mona was joking in front of her schoolmates about her doing karate and knowing a way how to become pregnant with tea, Callie was ashamed of helping in the restaurant of her parents and perceived it as a humiliating stereotype. Mona observed that her sister "says she doesn't see why they should be working in the family restaurant when everybody else is out going to concerts to begin with. She says it isn't normal, and that she's sick of being Chinese." ⁴⁴ Callie was happy to finally leave home and start college. When Helen and Ralph learned that their daughter would live in a dorm with a girl named Naomi, they stereotypically assumed she would be African American. They wished Callie would live with a "nice Chinese girl," ⁴⁵ a daughter of someone they knew. They imagined the girls would study together. Naomi really was African American, however, after meeting her in person, Ralph and Helen liked her, putting prejudice aside. It was Naomi who initiated Callie's transformation. While before college she refused her Chinese heritage, after Naomi told her about Chinese traditions, Callie decided to follow them. However, she did not show any interest in learning about Chinese culture from her parents, but surprisingly from Naomi. Callie

⁴³ Jen, *Typical American*, 161.

⁴⁴ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 29.

⁴⁵ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 36.

also decided to drop French and start learning Chinese instead. When she came home during a break and wanted to practice her Mandarin after one semester, she complained Helen and Ralph spoke with an accent and too fast on purpose. They did not understand the reason for Callie's learning this language and were convinced it was useless. She continued practicing her language skills with Naomi who believed that in a way, Callie had the opportunity to be linked to her ancestors, paradoxically omitting her parents.

One day Mona visited her sister in a beach resort, where she worked during the summer. She was surprised to find Callie on the beach in the morning, doing what she called "Chinese exercises," Tai qi. Mona was astonished by her sister's attempts to become Chinese, as Callie had hated being Chinese before. Callie explained that there was a vast difference between what their parents taught them and what she learned from Naomi, the latter being more interesting and appealing. This can be accounted for by Chinese culture gradually becoming fashionable at the time even for people of different ethnicities. Then it was possible for a Chinese American to learn about Chinese culture from an African American. Callie claimed that "she didn't understand what it meant to be Chinese until she met Naomi."⁴⁶ Acculturation is usually considered a two-way process, not only immigrants and their children gradually adopting the majority culture, but also the majority accepting some features of the minority. Ethnically distinct people then adopt each other's clothing, languages, some features of behavior, religion or cuisine.⁴⁷ In *Mona in the Promised Land* one can see that the Chinese inspired many people in America. As apparent from the analyzed novels by both authors, Chinese culture became very popular in the 1960s. Not only people of various ethnicities, such as Naomi, partly adopted it, but also fully assimilated descendants of Chinese immigrants were turning to it, such as Callie and also some of Tan's protagonists, who shall be mentioned later.

Completion of Callie's new life direction came with her idea to write a book about China, despite her never having been there. An editor from New York actually supported her idea, which encouraged her in her lifestyle. She started wearing Chinese dresses, which she maintained even several years later, when she became a pediatrician and got married. She seemed to be more Chinese than her parents, wearing Chinese clothes and cloth shoes which were not common even in China anymore. Moreover, she named herself Kailan, calling it her original name, even though her parents gave her the

⁴⁶ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 168.

⁴⁷ Berry, "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures," 700.

name Callie. Kailan was its Chinese equivalent. She assured everyone that she was proud of being Asian American, which was an expression Ralph and Helen despised. If one compares Callie's attitude toward her ethnicity before and after she started attending college, one can recognize that her personality underwent a fundamental transformation.

Mona, on the other hand, was a complete opposite of her sister. When she and her family moved to Scarshill, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, she started attending a local high school. During that time, she came into contact with many Jewish people and befriended many of them, including her best friend Barbara. Mona decided to convert to Judaism with the help of Rabbi Horowitz. Her mother was strictly against this idea, objecting to Mona: "How can you be Jewish? Chinese people don't do such things."⁴⁸ On the one hand, Helen raised her daughters to become Americans, on the other hand she expected them to behave in compliance with Chinese conventions. Even though Helen considered herself to be "very westernized"⁴⁹ and tolerant, there were many situations in which she found Mona's behavior unacceptable. Mona preferred not to tell her mother about using tampons, which Helen would not allow, and later going to a new clinic to have contraception pills prescribed. Helen would have never approved if she had known.

Mona supported one of Ralph's restaurant employees, African American Alfred. She and Barbara let him live at Barbara's house while her family left for a summer vacation. Unfortunately, Alfred started organizing parties in the house, was not very reliable at work and was consequently fired. Nevertheless, Mona defended him in front of her parents, who were very unhappy to discover that their daughter attended Alfred's parties in Barbara's house. Helen, disappointed with her, called her an American girl: "You know what you are? [...] You are an American girl. Only an American girl can do something like that and hide it from her mother. Every day you lied to me."⁵⁰ Despite considering herself American in many ways, Helen distanced herself from this identity, remembering her Chinese upbringing and learned beliefs. The conflict between Mona and her parents regarding Alfred culminated in Helen and Ralph discovering that Mona called them racist and told everyone they would not promote Alfred because of him being African American. In Mona's opinion, she lived in a free country and had the

⁴⁸ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 45.

⁴⁹ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 48.

⁵⁰ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 221.

right to say whatever she wanted, however, Helen felt betrayed, as Mona openly opposed her own parents. Ralph and his wife realized that they were not too strict in raising their children and despite Mona already being a teenager, they decided to change their approach in this respect. “No more typical American parents, [...] No more let the kids run wild. From now on we are Chinese parents.”⁵¹ They decided to give Mona almost no freedom regarding her hobbies and leisure time activities. Not long after that, Mona fled from their house and eventually decided to attend a college tour at Harvard. Subconsciously Mona desired to make her parents happy, as they considered the college tour a must. In a way, she tried to be the daughter they wished her to become.

Another major conflict in Mona and her mother’s relationship was caused by Mona dating a white Jewish boy Seth. When Mona separated from him, her mother expressed her joy and stated that Mona was “still a good girl. [...] Sometimes she likes to have a big mouth, but then she looks in her heart and realizes she is still our nice Chinese daughter.”⁵² Paradoxically, Helen and Ralph raised their daughters American but in Mona and Callie’s teenage years they insisted on them behaving Chinese. After Mona had entered into a relationship with Seth again, she had a big fight with her mother after which she moved out of their family house. Helen insisted on Mona giving up being Jewish and starting to behave like a nice Chinese girl again, which Mona refused and left home permanently.

After many years, Ralph and Helen finally accepted their daughter’s conversion. In their view, “[b]etter to turn Jewish than Asian American, that’s their opinion these days.”⁵³ They did not like the expression *Asian American*, which their other daughter Callie used while defining her identity. They did not wish to be associated with the Vietnamese, Koreans, Indians and others who fell under the term Asian American.

While the Changs decided to raise their daughters to be typical Americans, most of the parents in *The Joy Luck Club* endeavored to do their best in teaching their children Chinese ways. Despite their wishes, Lena, Waverly, Rose and Jing–mei grew up very much Americanized. Looking at her adult daughter’s life, Ying–ying believed it was foolish. She was convinced that all Lena, who was married to a wealthy husband, cared about was her fancy house, material comfort and listening to a Sony Walkman. Ying–ying believed that Lena would never resemble her in any way: “I raised a

⁵¹ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 246.

⁵² Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 244.

⁵³ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 302.

daughter, watching her from another shore. I accepted her American ways.”⁵⁴ Ying–ying did not seem to realize the profound influence she had on her daughter. In her childhood, Lena always bore in mind Ying–ying’s terrifying stories: “I began to see terrible things. I saw these things with my Chinese eyes, the part I got from my mother. [...] And when I became older, I could see things Caucasian girls at school did not.”⁵⁵ Lena was convinced that due to her being half–Chinese, she was different from her schoolmates, having special skills inherited from her mother. At the same time, however, she was influenced by current American trends. In her teenage years she stopped eating because having an anorexic figure was fashionable at the time.

While Lena realized some of the resemblances to her mother and differences from her white friends, she still felt American. However, there were several characteristics of her behavior which she unconsciously learned and accepted from her mother’s teaching, as for example her subordination to her husband. She tolerated his higher position in a company which they in fact established together. They were not equals, as he made seven times more than her. It troubled Lena that despite her working very hard and producing many major designs as an architect, she was not really appreciated by her husband. However, she never complained to him about it. At the time when they met, Lena believed that he was too good for her and that she did not deserve him. It was not until several years later that she finally understood that he was not as perfect as she had seen him. One day Lena realized that she had “this feeling of surrendering everything to him, with abandon, without caring what [she] got in return.”⁵⁶ In this respect, without even realizing it, she resembled her mother Ying–ying, who also surrendered everything to her first husband, even though their marriage eventually ended tragically. However, Lena decided that it was time to change her attitude and living in America allowed her to do so, while her mother did not have a choice in China in the past.

Rose found herself in a similar situation. Like Lena, she was afraid that she would not be good enough for her husband Ted. Over the years, she let him decide everything for her. “At first [she] thought it was because [she] was raised with all this Chinese humility, [...]. Or that maybe because you’re Chinese you’re supposed to

⁵⁴ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 305.

⁵⁵ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 114.

⁵⁶ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 187.

accept everything, flow with the Tao and not make waves.”⁵⁷ She was reminded, however, that she did not live in China and that her ethnicity should not be entirely blamed for her nature. While Rose feared telling her mother about her and Ted’s divorce, An–mei’s reaction surprised her. She encouraged Rose to fight back, to be more active and fierce. An–mei complained about Rose’s character and predominantly about her passivity:

If she doesn’t speak, she is making a choice. If she doesn’t try, she can lose her chance forever. I know this, because I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people’s misery, to eat my own bitterness. And even though I thought I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way!⁵⁸

Rose, amazed by her mother’s encouragement, realized that it was time to fight her submissiveness. While Ted sent her divorce papers and expected her to sign them as he asked her to, Rose surprised him with her new attitude. She decided that she would not let Ted and his mistress live in their house because she wished to stay there herself. She told him that new divorce papers would be prepared by her lawyer, astonishing not only Ted and all their friends, but also herself.

In their youth, the second generation characters tried to dissociate themselves from the Chinese in many ways. As mentioned earlier, the first generation protagonist Lindo Jong did everything in her power to appear like local people when travelling to China. On the other hand, her daughter Waverly was afraid that during her honeymoon in her parents’ homeland, Chinese people would consider her one of them. Waverly was disappointed when she was assured by her mother that everyone would immediately recognize that she did not belong there. Lindo explained to her the details from which the Chinese would know why and then she realized:

My daughter did not look pleased when I told her this, that she didn’t look Chinese. She had a sour American look on her face. Oh, maybe ten years ago, she would have clapped her hands–hurray!–as if this were good news. But now it is so fashionable. And I know it is too late. All those years I tried to teach her! She followed my Chinese ways only until she learned how to walk out the door by herself and go to school. [...] How can she think she can blend in? Only her skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside–she is all American–made.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 182.

⁵⁸ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 257.

⁵⁹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 307–308.

Donghui Zhang explains that it is common for foreign-born parents to attempt to transfer the culture they brought from their land of origin to their children. However, these children often accept American culture as a major influence after they start attending an American school, which is an important milestone not only in their lives, but also their assimilation process. Cultural differences lead to conflicts and misunderstandings between the two generations.⁶⁰ Even though Lindo did her best to pass her knowledge, beliefs and ways of thinking on Waverly, her daughter embraced American culture as her own and was influenced by the environment in which she grew up, predominantly by the schools she attended from elementary school to the university. It was only later in her life when being Chinese and Chinese culture in general became fashionable that she wished to learn more about her parents' cultural heritage. In this approach a resemblance can be found with Gish Jen's character of Callie Chang, the only difference being in the devotion to becoming Chinese, Callie being much more passionate about it and to a certain extent also more extreme, as mentioned earlier. However, it should be noted that Jen used a lighter tone while describing the stories of her characters.

Even more similarities between characters from Jen and Tan's novels can be found in relation to the trend described above. While the mothers from *The Joy Luck Club* believed their daughters preferred being called by their American names, Jing-meí wished quite the opposite. She admitted that it was "becoming fashionable for American-born Chinese to use their Chinese names."⁶¹ Because Callie Chang from Jen's novel originally did not have a Chinese name, she changed the one the parents gave her to Kailan in her adult years, as it was considered a Chinese equivalent to Callie. Growing up American, all of the above mentioned second generation women were suddenly becoming proud of their Chinese origins, each of them adopting a different attitude.

On the one hand, the second generation women from the novels considered America their home and American culture as their own, on the other hand they felt that they were not entirely American. They felt the sense of common past, their connection

⁶⁰ Donghui Zhang, *Between Two Generations: Language Maintenance and Acculturation Among Chinese Immigrant Families* (El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2008), 2.

⁶¹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 30.

to their predecessors. This was shown predominantly through the story of Jing–mei Woo.

In her teenage years, Jing–mei denied any Chinese heritage and felt wholly American. Her mother assured her that being Chinese ran in her blood and one day she would recognize it. Jing–mei finally understood her deceased mother’s meaning when she travelled to China to meet her half–sisters: “The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, My mother was right. I am becoming Chinese.”⁶² Even though Jing–mei grew up assimilated to a great extent, due to being in the land of her ancestors she could feel that this was where her roots were and finally learned to appreciate her bi–cultural identity. Jing–mei was able to identify and accept the Chinese part of her life and self: “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.”⁶³ She felt relieved after this revelation, as now all the stories she had heard from her mother made sense. It was not until her journey to China that she learned more about her own mother and developed a deep connection to her. Jing–mei’s Chinese–born half–sisters helped her understand an important part of Suyuan’s life, which had been unknown to her before.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that Callie Chang’s attempt to learn about the original culture of her parents can be seen more as a fashionable trend than an actual connection. Lena St.Clair’s connection can be seen both as real and as vivid imagination.

It can be declared that due to the vast difference between the two generations many conflicts and confusion arose, examples being Helen’s refusal of her daughter’s conversion to Judaism and interracial marriage, Lindo’s feeling that her daughter was ashamed of her, or Ying–ying belief that her daughter’s life was shallow and foolish. All these led to the earlier described acculturative stress.

⁶² Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 325.

⁶³ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 352.

4.2 Language Assimilation

The process of language assimilation, or language acculturation, usually begins upon an immigrant's arrival. Sometimes it is considered a part of acculturation, therefore its analysis follows and is closely connected to the previous chapter. Alba and Nee mention several factors which influence language assimilation including "age at arrival, education, and length of residence in the United States."⁶⁴

Immigrants who come to the United States with the intention to stay permanently usually learn English faster than those who plan to stay only for a limited period of time. Immigrants coming with their families are also more likely to learn English early to be able to assist their children in schooling. Those who come at a young age learn the new language quickly while going to an American school. Social context also plays an important role, as immigrants surrounded by people speaking the same language do not feel the need to learn English in comparison to those who live among English-speaking inhabitants. Fluency in English, however, seems to be crucial for any chance of success in America.⁶⁵

The Changs experienced difficulties with learning English after their arrival to America. Ralph, despite spending most of his days at the university during that time, surrounded by the English language, still did not speak very well, as he mostly sought the company of other Chinese immigrants and more importantly, he intended to leave America after graduating. With more time in the American environment and learning that there was no possibility for him to return back to China, his English improved significantly. His wife Helen came to the USA on a student visa. She was in contact predominantly with Ralph's sister Theresa, who lived with them in their apartment, therefore she did not feel pressured to learn English. Both women attended an English language school; however, Helen was not really devoted to the studies.

Helen walked as little and as lightly as she could, sparing her shoes, that they might last until the Nationalists saved the country and she could go home again. She studied the way she walked too, lightly – why should she struggle with English? She wrote her parents during class, hoping for an answer that never came.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 220.

⁶⁵ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 220–221.

⁶⁶ Jen, *Typical American*, 62.

Like Ralph, Helen was convinced that she would return to China sooner or later. As time passed by and it became clear that the Changs would stay in America permanently, their language skills improved. “Helen knows most of the words to most of the songs in *The King and I*, and *South Pacific*.”⁶⁷ Apparently, American culture played an important role in the learning process. Sometimes they still had difficulties expressing themselves, but they were gradually getting more proficient.

Ralph invented his grammar on the fly; even Theresa struggled to put her Chinese thoughts into English. But now she had English thoughts too – that was true also. They all did. [...] The language of outside the house had seeped well inside – Cadillac, Pyrex, subway, Coney Island, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Transistor radio. Theresa and Helen and Ralph slipped from tongue to tongue like turtles taking to land, taking to sea; though one remained their more natural element, both had become essential.⁶⁸

Being away from China for a longer period of time, sometimes they were not able to express some words in Chinese. Their places of residence played its role in their language assimilation. They never lived in a Chinese neighborhood, eventually settling in suburbs surrounded by white Americans, whom Helen even met on a regular basis, joining the local bridge club. Social context influenced both Ralph and Helen significantly with regard to their language skills.

Unlike the Changs, most of the first generation characters from *The Joy Luck Club* did not speak English very well. Suyuan’s daughter Jing–mei aptly described their language skills as “fractured English”. She also observed that they spoke “in their special language, half in broken English, half in their own Chinese dialect.”⁶⁹ While the Changs lived among white Americans, the Joy Luck Club members regularly met each other and other Chinese people, making themselves considerably less exposed to English. Suyuan and her family first lived in Sacramento’s Chinatown. Surrounded by people of the same ethnicity, Suyuan did not have too many opportunities to socialize with someone other than Chinese. However, trying to discover in which way her daughter was special, she looked for inspiration in American magazines, watched American television and admired Shirley Temple. Language assimilation is often closely connected and sometimes considered as embedded in cultural assimilation. In

⁶⁷ Jen, *Typical American*, 123.

⁶⁸ Jen, *Typical American*, 123–124.

⁶⁹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 27.

Suyuan's case, it was primarily American culture that helped her with learning English. Nevertheless, her daughter Jing–mei believed that her language skills were the worst when compared to others from the Joy Luck circle. Whenever Jing–mei asked her mother a question in English, Suyuan answered in Chinese.

Lindo Jong and her family lived in San Francisco's Chinatown above a Chinese bakery. Her English, however, was influenced by something other than the environment in which she lived. When she met her future husband in America, they were not able to understand each other. Both originally came from China but from different regions, therefore each of them spoke a different dialect. To cross this language gap between them, they took English lessons and spoke English with each other. Nevertheless, their daughter's white American fiancé thought Lindo's English was very bad.

Ying–ying St.Clair's language skills were even worse. One would naturally think that being married to an American husband, her English would be fluent. However, she spoke predominantly Mandarin and knew only a little of English. Her marriage to Clifford was a peculiar one, as his Chinese was also very poor. In their daughter Lena's words, Ying–ying "spoke Mandarin and a little bit of English. My father, who spoke only a few canned Chinese expressions, insisted my mother learn English. So with him, she spoke in moods and gestures, looks and silences, and sometimes a combination of English punctuated by hesitations and Chinese frustration."⁷⁰ Despite their differences and the language gap, their marriage lasted until Clifford's death. With Lena, Ying–ying spoke only Chinese.

It was predominantly due to the place of residence and social context that the first generation characters from Jen's novels learned English faster and became more proficient in it than Tan's protagonists. The neighborhood in which they lived and people they socialized with were a major influence on their English language skills. As described earlier, raising children speaking English with them also contributes to the language assimilation, which is accurately depicted through the characters of the Changs but partly also Lindo Jong and her husband. However, the language assimilation of the Changs went even further, as they occasionally began forgetting Chinese equivalents to their English vocabulary.

Gordon M. Milton argues that it is taking on the English language and American behavioral patterns that the process of cultural assimilation usually starts with, however

⁷⁰ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 117.

this is hardly ever completely achieved by the immigrants themselves, rather by the second and succeeding generations attending American schools and speaking English as their mother tongue.⁷¹ The second and following generations are usually fluent in English. For them, on the other hand, a problem might arise with keeping the language of their parents and other ancestors. Some are bilingual and thus fluent in two languages.⁷²

Regarding the Chang children, when Callie and Mona were born, Ralph and Helen agreed that the girls would be American, learning English first and Chinese only after that in order not to have an accent. They were inspired by their Chinese friend's example and also by Callie's confusion from hearing a different language at home and outside. As Alba and Nee explain, many children of foreign-born Asian Americans speak English as their first language and often it is also the language spoken at home. Many parents believe that their children, by being fluent in English without any accent, will have a greater opportunity for a better education which then opens door to an interesting, well-paid job.⁷³ This is precisely what Helen and Ralph intended. As a result, neither Callie nor Mona learned Chinese in their childhood but spoke perfectly English. It can be concluded that in case of the Chang family, the process of language assimilation was completed by the second generation. Similarly, Waverly from *The Joy Luck Club* did not speak Chinese at all except for a few childish expressions which she had learned in her childhood. This was a consequence of her parents speaking English with each other.

On the other hand, children of those parents who chose to speak Chinese with them were bilingual in the novels. Suyuan's daughter Jing-mei became fluent in both English and Chinese. While her mother spoke Chinese to her, Jing-mei liked to answer in English, and when Jing-mei spoke English to her mother, Suyuan responded in Chinese. Similarly, Ying-ying St. Clair spoke only Chinese with Lena who used her mother's lack of the English language knowledge to her advantage. When Ying-ying asked her daughter to translate forms, instructions or notices from school for her, Lena translated what suited her best, saying for example that due to the danger of polio germs, it was obligatory for all students to bring their lunch to school only in metal boxes. Rose Hsu also spoke both Chinese and English, the first being the language

⁷¹ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 78.

⁷² Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 221.

⁷³ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 41.

predominantly spoken at home in her childhood and the latter being spoken outside of home, most importantly at school.

All of the second generation daughters from the three novels were proficient in English predominantly due to attending American schools. Despite some of them growing up in a Chinese neighborhood, all of them spoke English as their first language and Lena, Rose and Jing–mei from *The Joy Luck Club* were bilingual.

4.3 Economic Assimilation

The socioeconomic background of immigrants greatly varies. The position of foreign-born Americans in the new country can depend on and reflect their position in the country of origin.⁷⁴ In the field of economy, George J. Borjas defines economic assimilation as “the rate of convergence in economic outcomes between immigrants and natives in the post-migration period.”⁷⁵ The more the immigrants resemble members of the majority in their professional lives, the more economically assimilated they are.

Alba and Nee divide immigrants primarily into two groups: *labor immigrants* looking for manual, lower-paid jobs and *human-capital immigrants*, who are usually educated professionals. The latter group often assimilates faster and Alba and Nee observe that members of this group often come from Asia. First generation immigrants are at a disadvantage when trying to find a job in the mainstream economy. Even though ethnic economy might not offer as many job opportunities as the mainstream economy, newcomers often do not have a choice due to their limited knowledge of the language, their education and ethnic identity. It might even be the case that educated immigrants are forced to take a job which does not match their level of education due to their limited knowledge of English. After some time spent in the new country, immigrants seek and are able to find jobs in the mainstream economy.⁷⁶

Alba and Nee describe what they call “network mechanisms”⁷⁷, meaning social norms and informal rules that play a role in a relationship between two people or even whole groups. Breaking or violating such rules by a member of the group leads to disapproval of other members. On the other hand, its members encourage one another to seek success, putting emphasis on cooperation, welfare, helping those who are new in the country, maintaining ties on an economic level.⁷⁸

Another part of assimilation mechanisms constitutes “forms of capital”⁷⁹ the immigrants are endowed with upon their arrival to America consisting of financial, human and social capital. These include university degrees, high technical or professional skills with a substantial financial reserve on the one hand, and basic education with no capital on the other hand. The situation differs for those coming from

⁷⁴ George J. Borjas, *Immigration Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 26.

⁷⁵ Borjas, *Immigration Economics*, 38.

⁷⁶ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 230–232, 234–235.

⁷⁷ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 42.

⁷⁸ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 42–46.

⁷⁹ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 46.

middle- and upper-middle-class background and those who immigrate in search of a job, so called human-capital immigrants and labor immigrants. Labor immigrants often help each other with the process of settling in a new place within an ethnic community, or with finding the first job, which is usually not well paid. To a great extent, that makes newcomers dependent on the ethnic community and thus creates social barriers. All these factors can reduce the opportunity for social mobility of the second generation when compared to children of those skilled professionals who have stood on their own feet since their arrival to the USA. The rate of their assimilation also greatly varies among them.⁸⁰

The socioeconomic background of the immigrant characters from the analyzed novels differed. Some came from wealthy families and had enough resources for a decent life in America, some found themselves in a more serious and complicated situation. To start with, the Chang siblings and Helen from *Typical American* grew up in wealthy families. Ralph came to study at university and were it not for the communists' takeover in China and his forgetting to prolong his visa, he would have finished his studies and returned home. After all these unfortunate events Ralph's life dramatically changed. Without his family's support, he had to find a job and due to his expired visa he hid from the authorities. Naturally, he began his job search in Chinese restaurants, seeking support from people of the same ethnicity: "Being Chinese, he had thought the safest place to work would be in the Chinese restaurants scattered like toys in around the legs of the el on 125th Street. Weren't people needed to wash dishes, wait table, make noodles?"⁸¹ Being a scholar, he began searching for a job far below his qualification. When nobody from the Chinese hired him, he finally started working in a meat store. From an intellectual, a human-capital immigrant, he became a low-paid unskilled laborer.

After his last hope of returning to the university was dashed, Ralph Chang gave up on his life. At that time he met Theresa, who had been looking for him for quite some time. With Theresa on his side and her friend Helen with her, he gained a new impetus for his life. Not long after their reunion, Ralph started courting Helen. After he found a job, he proposed to her. From the economic point of view, their lives turned toward better. Then suddenly all foreign students became illegitimate. Ralph went to the immigration department, as now all Chinese immigrants had no status like him. He was

⁸⁰ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 46–50.

⁸¹ Jen, *Typical American*, 34.

given a chance to finish his PhD and was one step closer to becoming an assistant professor. He and his family were gradually moving from the lower class to the middle class.

After some time Ralph met Grover, an American-born Chinese entrepreneur who became his role model. Ralph wished to become a self-made man like his new friend. Even after he successfully finished his studies and became an assistant professor, he still was not contented with his life and he dreamed about opening his own business. However, because of their new house and a loan, he had to hope for a promotion at the university and remain there. By the time he finally got promoted, he decided he did not wish to become a professor after all. He was convinced that “[a]nything is possible. A man is what he makes up his mind to be.”⁸² Unfortunately, he was not able to pursue his dreams until six or seven years later, when he met Grover again. Being too credulous, Ralph naively wrote him a check, convinced that the man would help him with starting his own business. Grover persuaded Ralph that he bought a successful business for him. Ralph felt lucky and all he could think about was the idea of the self-made man he used to dream about. When he finally told his family about his plans with Grover, Theresa said right away: “That man [...] is a liar and a cheat.” She accurately assessed Grover’s character, however, Ralph was blinded by his dream and could not be stopped. He became the owner of a highly successful fried chicken restaurant, being immensely enthusiastic but also obsessed with money and success.

Ralph’s cooperation with Grover changed him. Suddenly he became dishonest, as he and his partner did not declare all their earnings from store to the tax office in order to pay a lower tax. After some time, Ralph decided to invest more money and expand his business. He pitied those who were not as successful as he was. When the restaurant reopened after the reconstruction, Grover went to prison for tax evasion. Not long after that, cracks appeared on the wall which had been built during the reconstruction. From the former owner of the property Ralph learned that the building had been built on an unstable soil, which Grover had known about. The restaurant had to be closed after a couple of months. With his dream destroyed, Ralph once again gave up on his life, his financial situation being serious, owing a lot of money to Grover due to loans. Helen tried to convince her husband to return to the university but Ralph stubbornly refused that. When they became broke, he finally became a professor again.

⁸² Jen, *Typical American*, 186.

Unfortunately, Theresa's accident, which left her in coma, was the last straw for the family's financial situation. With hospital bills and Grover demanding money from them, the Changs were forced to sell their house and move once again into a small apartment.

It was not until several years later that Ralph's dream about his own restaurant came finally true when they established the "pancake house". They were also able to move to a prominent New York neighborhood of Scarshill. With the new restaurant more responsibilities came and the whole family, except for Theresa, worked there. Helen did not have time for taking care of the household anymore, as she spent all day behind the counter at the restaurant and came home every day too tired. Ralph preferred hiring Chinese staff; Cedric, who came to America with the intention to make money for his family back in China, was his favorite cook. Moreover, he thought "who else was going to hire Cedric? And is Ralph such a bad guy for wanting to keep some China around him, for wanting to *make sure*?"⁸³ As mentioned earlier, immigrants often help each other with the process of settling in a new place within an ethnic community, or with finding the first job. Even though none of the Chinese restaurant owners whom Ralph visited regarding his first job in the USA helped him, he was determined to help labor immigrants of the same ethnicity. Unfortunately, it negatively influenced the number of customers in the restaurant, for it seemed that after white American workers left and new Chinese staff members were hired, fewer customers were coming.

Like Ralph, Helen and Theresa, Ying-ying from Tan's novel also came from a rich family. She married a wealthy man, imagining she would be secured for the rest of her life. Unfortunately, after her husband left her, she went to live with her second cousin's family in the country. With three families living there, their house was overcrowded. Moreover, they all lived in dirt and very poor conditions in overall. After ten years, she became a shopgirl, due to which she was able to support herself. It was not very common at the time in China for a woman to work. When she immigrated to America with Clifford St.Clair, she was never as rich as the family she had been born into. In her own words she explained: "Saint took me to America, where we lived in houses smaller than the one in the country. I wore large American clothes. I did servant's tasks. I learned the Western ways."⁸⁴ From the tone of her narration it is apparent that she felt her new life was below her level. Inside her the feeling of

⁸³ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 139.

⁸⁴ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 305.

melancholy mixed with bitterness. However, it is also clear that she eventually reconciled with her life in America.

Lindo Jong arrived to America alone. She had enough money to settle there, nevertheless, she had to find a job. Her major disadvantage, like many other immigrants', was her lack of knowledge of the English language. She wished to become a salesgirl, but her language skills stood in her way, forcing her to search for a job among the Chinese community. Ethnic economy did not offer as many jobs as she wished for and Lindo considered many of them unacceptable. Eventually she started working in a fortune cookie factory and hated her job. There she met An–mei, who already spoke English a little and translated sayings from the cookies for Lindo. If one compares An–mei's position in America to that in China, where she was raised in a wealthy family after her mother's death, it is clear that she experienced downward social mobility similar to Ying–ying. Unfortunately, uneducated women did not have many job opportunities after their arrival to America. An–mei's husband, who had been a doctor by profession in China, was forced to change his profession due to a language barrier and predominantly different practices. In America, he worked as a pharmacist's assistant, lowering considerably his social position.

While Ying–ying, Lindo and An–mei arrived to America with a financial capital, Suyuan and her husband came with no money or belongings and had to rely on charity. Suyuan cleaned people's houses for a living. All four women were forced to find a low–paid job, becoming labor immigrants. The first generation women from *Typical American*, on the other hand, did not go to work after their arrival. With respect to the Chinese tradition, Helen became a housewife. She took care of the household by herself though without hiring any servants. Financially, she was fully dependent on her husband.

Both Ralph and later also Theresa attended a university. Only after finishing her studies, Theresa started working at a hospital. Taking into consideration Borjas' definition stated at the beginning of this chapter, it can be concluded that Theresa reached or was close to reaching full economic assimilation, as her position in America equaled that of native–born inhabitants with the same education. As well as Ralph, she accomplished this only a few years after her arrival to the USA. While in China Theresa relied on her family in accordance with tradition, in America she became economically independent, taking care of herself financially. On the other hand, Helen stayed home

and took care of the household until many years after their arrival to the USA Ralph finally established his own restaurant where Helen worked very hard.

Sooner or later, all the Chinese women from the novels found jobs, even though under different circumstances. The first generation characters from Tan's novel became labor immigrants, while Ralph and Theresa Chang from Jen's novel came to America as human-capital immigrants. Being educated professionals, they eventually found high-paying jobs. In Portes' and Rumbaut's words, "educated immigrants are in a much better competitive position and are more likely to succeed occupationally and economically in their new environment."⁸⁵ Tan's uneducated protagonists had to accept jobs which were available to them, as they did not have a choice. These were not very well paid. According to Morrison G. Wong, in the period between 1945 and 1990, foreign-born Chinese in America "exhibited a bipolar or bimodal occupational structure, or the clustering of workers in both high-paying professional occupations and low-paying dead-end service jobs, with relatively few in between."⁸⁶ Gish Jen and Amy Tan depict exactly the two opposing ends of this spectrum. Jen's first generation protagonists represent the first end including high-paying professions, such as a professor or a doctor, while Tan's characters constitute the other end consisting of low-paying jobs, such as a housekeeper or factory workers.

Generally, the second generation of immigrants who were raised in America and can speak English fluently have considerably more opportunities to find employment in the mainstream economy. In his research based on censuses from 1940s to 1970s, G. J. Borjas proposes that second generation Americans earn more in their professional lives than their immigrant parents. Borjas gives several possible explanations for intergenerational mobility of American-born children of immigrants, such as their attending American schools preferred by employers in the USA, ability to speak English more proficiently than their parents, better knowledge of the local labor market opportunities and considerably less influence of ethnic communities.⁸⁷

Alba and Nee argue that even if the parents only achieve basic education, they encourage and support their children in pursuing their studies, often very strictly.⁸⁸ This

⁸⁵ A. Portes and R. G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 46.

⁸⁶ Morrison G. Wong, "Chinese Americans" in *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*, ed. P. G. Min (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005): 126, accessed March 7, 2017, https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/6035_Chapter_6_Min_I_Proof_2.pdf.

⁸⁷ Borjas, *Immigration Economics*, 125.

⁸⁸ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 234–235.

was precisely the case of all families in the selected novels. All parents laid strong emphasis on their children's education, believing it would later considerably impact their lives from the economic point of view.

For the Chang sisters from *Mona in the Promised Land* it felt only natural to apply to college after finishing high school and it was even expected from them while they were growing up. When the time came for Callie to decide about her future career, Helen and Ralph persuaded her that Medical School was the right choice, even though originally she was not interested in medicine at all and had no intention of listening to her parents' wish. Eventually she agreed that they needed someone to care for them in their old age and family was best to rely on. Later, in the course of her studies, Callie discovered that her dream was to write about her Chinese experience despite never having been to China, as Mona promptly reminded her. As stated in the novel's epilogue, Callie eventually became a successful pediatrician, loving her job.

When the time came for Mona to decide to which college to apply, her parents were already decided:

They knew what colleges Mona should apply to already – it was so obvious. Mona should apply to the same colleges as Callie. *Go to Harvard if you get in, Yale second choice, Princeton also nice.* Harvard was better than Yale because it was so close to MIT – how much more likely she was to find a husband there! They saw it as a kind of twofer. As for other schools – if they are all Mona can get into, say her parents, that is one hundred percent all right, nobody has to know.⁸⁹

It was clear that the Changs were very ambitious for their daughters, aiming only for the best universities in the Ivy League. At the same time, their children's education was a topic they could discuss with pride with their friends, especially if the girls were accepted to Harvard. Unfortunately it is not stated in the novel which college Mona eventually attended. Before she became pregnant, she held a freelance job at a company called B'nai B'rith. Concerning education, both Mona and Callie followed in their parents' footsteps. In contrast, the second generation in *The Joy Luck Club* differed from the first generation in this respect.

Jing–mei Woo's mother was very disappointed when her daughter dropped out of university and to her friends Suyuan said Jing–mei was returning to her studies after almost ten years. This was Suyuan's deepest wish but it was not true. All her life, Jing–

⁸⁹ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 260.

mei saw her mother desperately trying to discover Jing–mei’s secret talent. After her daughter left the university, she was pushing her to return, always comparing her to the daughters of her Joy Luck Club friends, whom she believed to be more successful in their professional lives. Jing–mei worked as a copywriter for a small agency, contended in her job, and never intended to return to studies.

Jing–mei’s friend from childhood and also the main rival at the same time, Waverly, became very successful in her profession. In her youth everyone admired her for her achievements in playing chess. After graduating from university, she worked as a tax attorney for a large company, Price Waterhouse. Her mother, Lindo, was enormously proud of her, as her daughter achieved success which she herself could not due to many obstacles, above all the language barrier and education. Waverly was aware of her own success and showed it to everyone around her, especially Jing–mei.

Lena St. Clair also attended university, majoring in Asian American studies. Despite the focus of her education, she later became an accomplished interior architect, working with her husband together in a company which they established together. Unfortunately, despite her preparing many new designs and bringing several original and innovative ideas into the company, her husband never appreciated her work as she would deserve.

Rose Hsu grew up in a poor family. In her childhood, she and her sisters slept in one double bed. Her parents did everything in their power to provide their children with the best education they could afford. Rose graduated from UC Berkeley where she studied arts. After she married and settled down with Ted, she started working as a freelance production assistant for graphic artists in a studio which she ran on the ground floor of their house.

Douglas S. Massey claims that “[t]he process of immigrant assimilation is fundamentally one of social mobility.”⁹⁰ He declares that Asian immigrants have been very successful in terms of upwards mobility in the new country, their social status often equaling or even exceeding that of white Americans. They usually show educational and occupational advancement.⁹¹ Massey’s theory aptly characterizes the second generation characters from Amy Tan’s novel in this respect. Unlike their parents, the daughters from *The Joy Luck Club* had access to education, which then

⁹⁰ Douglas S. Massey, “Dimensions of the New Immigration to the United States and the Prospects for Assimilation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 7 (1981): 72, accessed July 5, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946022>.

⁹¹ Massey, “Dimensions,” 72.

opened door for them to considerably more job opportunities in America and helped them to improve their social status. Considering Tan's novel, knowledge of English can be seen as the crucial aspect in an immigrant's professional life, the first generation being seriously disadvantaged in this respect.

4.4 Residential Assimilation

Immigrants coming to America frequently settle in urban or suburban areas of large metropolitan cities. Newcomers often seek help and support of those who had come before them and thus settle in a district or a neighborhood with a great concentration of people of the same ethnicity. Unfortunately in such areas the immigrants are not in almost any contact with the majority, do not learn English and as mentioned in the chapter on economic assimilation, deprive themselves of any chance for social mobility. However, as Alba and Nee observe, moving into these areas can be caused by the fear from prejudice and tension.

Currently in American cities there are many mixed neighborhoods where one can find people of various ethnicities as well as members of the majority. Even though adult immigrants might prefer meeting others of the same ethnic identity in such neighborhoods, their children are brought together with other ethnics and whites in playgrounds and predominantly schools.

Alba and Nee claim that for earlier immigrants, moving from central urban areas into suburbs meant completion of the residential assimilation process, or at least an important milestone in it. Residence in a suburban area increases contact of immigrants with the majority and thus encourages acculturation.⁹²

All immigrant characters from *Typical American* and *The Joy Luck Club* settled in large cities after their arrival. As a student, Ralph first lived at the campus and then moved very often, while Helen and Theresa were accommodated in a women's residence. After that the Changs lived in a small flat on the 125th Street in New York. As this was a part of Harlem, there were many African Americans living in the neighborhood, by which the Changs were disconcerted. An interesting point is that even though Helen visited Chinatown several times a week, the family never lived there during their life in America.

Ying-ying and her family from *The Joy Luck Club* lived in a small house in Oakland's Chinatown, after that moving to an apartment in an Italian neighborhood of San Francisco. Similarly, An-mei and her family first lived in San Francisco's Chinatown. However, when their children were still little, they moved to the Sunset District, in which there was still a high concentration of Asians. Other first generation

⁹² Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 248–257.

characters from Tan's novel also never moved away from Chinese quarters of large cities. Lindo Jong's children grew up in San Francisco's Chinatown. They all lived in a small two-bedroom flat above a Chinese bakery. Suyuan, Lindo's best friend and main rival at the same time, also lived in a modest flat only a few blocks from Lindo.

Compared to Tan's protagonists, the Changs changed their places of residence considerably more often in their lives. From a small and poor flat in Harlem where they lived after Ralph and Helen got married they moved to a larger one in Washington Heights. Not long after that came a ground-breaking moment in their life as well as their residential assimilation. After visiting Connecticut and seeing houses there they wished they owned one with a backyard where their daughters Mona and Callie could play. Helen, being the most enthusiastic supporter of moving into a suburban area, found the perfect house for them as well as a special loan intended for encouraging people moving to suburbs. Not long after that, they all moved into an enormous house. Now they looked like a typical American family, trying to grow grass in their garden, taking advice from their neighbors. The whole family, but especially Helen, felt much better in the suburb. She believed that

in the city, she hadn't wanted to take in the fumes and gases, everyone else's exhaust; that air was like garbage air. Compared to this. She loved the aromas of the dirt, the grass, the flowers; the rain. Who would have thought the rain would smell? The seasons had their smells too; and indoors, she smelled clean house, soapy children, a medicinal sister-in-law, a sex-strong husband.⁹³

The family quickly settled in their new place of residence, quarreling about such things as cutting the lawn too much. They were gradually becoming more and more similar to their white middle-class neighbors. The Changs now felt very lucky that they lived in America. When they compared it to their lives in China, they spoke only in superlatives. "Whereas this New World – now this was a continent. A paradise, they agreed. An ocean liner compared to a rowboat with leaks. A Cadillac compared to an aisle seat on the bus. Every dream come dreamily true."⁹⁴ For several years The Changs dreamed their American dream until their financial situation worsened due to Ralph's failed business and Theresa's accident. It was not until Mona and Callie became teenagers

⁹³ Jen, *Typical American*, 160.

⁹⁴ Jen, *Typical American*, 158.

when the family, except for Theresa, moved to Scarshill, a fictional Jewish suburb in New York modelled upon Scarsdale.

Alba and Nee propose that a place of residence is of great importance to immigrant professionals who are often moving to suburbs. Consequently, immigrant families encounter and maintain contact with other residents from their neighborhood, which inevitably leads to acculturation not only of the parents, but especially of their second generation children. That is what the authors call the “purposive action”⁹⁵: immigrants trying to achieve their individual goals, often prioritizing their children.⁹⁶ Therefore, choosing the right location for their residence again several years later was a difficult decision for the Changs, considering predominantly education of the girls. “Where should they live next? The parents slide the question back and forth like a cup of ginseng neither one wants to drink. Until finally it comes to them: what they really want is a milkshake (chocolate), and to go with it a house in Scarshill.”⁹⁷ Once again, they moved into a neighborhood where no Chinese lived and Mona and Callie were the only Chinese Americans in their school.

Many of the first generation protagonists in Jen’s and Tan’s novels had the following in common: once they earned enough money, they either left Chinatown or if not living there, they moved to a better neighborhood. The Changs completed their residential assimilation process by settling in a suburb, participating in the social life of their neighborhood. Ying–ying lived in an Italian neighborhood because of her husband being of Irish descent.

Allen and Turner claim that an immigrant’s place of residence indicates his or her level of cultural and economic assimilation. The more culturally and economically assimilated an immigrant is, the higher chance there is of his or her living outside centers of ethnic concentration. Based on their study they confirm that members of ethnic groups living farther from these centers receive higher income.⁹⁸ Moreover, they add that “[i]mmigrants residing in ethnic concentrations show less English language ability, a lower educational attainment, a lower rate of naturalization, and a lower income level than do those living outside such concentrations.”⁹⁹ Their summary shows

⁹⁵ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 41.

⁹⁶ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 41.

⁹⁷ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 3.

⁹⁸ James P. Allen, Eugene Turner, “Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Assimilation,” *The Professional Geographer* 48/2 (1996): 141–142, accessed March 31, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1996.00140.x>.

⁹⁹ Allen, Turner, “Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Assimilation,” 153.

the interconnection of all the assimilation types analyzed prior to this subchapter. Considering the lives of all characters it can be concluded that residential assimilation is closely related to economic assimilation but also language assimilation. Those characters who became more proficient in English found well-paying jobs and thus were able to afford moving out of Chinatown.

As the process of residential assimilation had often been completed by the first generation characters in the novels, their children were naturally fully assimilated in this respect. The Chang sisters from Jen's novels were mostly described in their youth while still living with their parents. It was only in the epilogue of *Mona in the Promised Land* that this topic was touched by the description of Callie's life and her residence in a "single-family house with double-dug flower beds."¹⁰⁰ However, the residential assimilation had already been completed by Mona and Callie's parents after they had moved to the suburbs. In Tan's novel, it is not explicitly stated in which neighborhood the second generation protagonists lived. However, based on their economic mobility in relation to their parents and the attitude toward their Chinese heritage at the time of their early adulthood, it can be deduced that these protagonists' places of residence were not in Chinatown. Waverly lived in an apartment with her daughter and partner Rich, while Lena and Rose resided in houses with their husbands. Jing-mei's housing situation is not mentioned in the novel.

¹⁰⁰ Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, 302.

4.5 Intermarriage

Intermarriage together with residential assimilation constitute social assimilation. In Milton M. Gordon's view of the assimilation model, intermarriage is regarded as the final part in the process of assimilation of a minority group. In Qian and Lichter's words, "[i]ntermarriage with whites provides a clear signal that minority group members have adopted cultural patterns of the host or majority population, such as its language and customs, and that they have been absorbed, both economically and politically, into mainstream society."¹⁰¹ In the history, spouses of two different races were prohibited by law. In 1948, the so called anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional in California, the rest of the United States followed many years later, in 1967. While in the late 1960s and in the 1970s the acceptability of interracial marriages was questioned, in 1980s they were already quite common and accepted by society.¹⁰² The number of Chinese intermarriages being slightly lower than those of other minority groups (African Americans, Hispanic population and Native Americans), the percentage still rose from zero, meaning almost exclusively endogamous marriages in the 1930s, to over 30% of Chinese marriages being interracial in the late 1980s.¹⁰³

In Douglas S. Massey's view, intermarriage serves as an "objective indicator of the degree of assimilation of the minority."¹⁰⁴ According to him, studies from late 1970s and early 1980s showed that the number of marriages to the non-Chinese increases with the number of generations of a family in the USA, even though often these people marry a person culturally or racially similar, mostly other Asians.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, almost twenty years later Alba and Nee declare that Asian American intermarriages are mostly with white Americans. They are convinced that this can be accounted for by education and a higher socio-economic status of the Chinese Americans.¹⁰⁶

Morrison G. Wong, the professor of sociology focusing on Asian Americans, states several reasons for intermarriages and also explains why many Asian Americans only marry others of the same race. One of them is the concentration of the Chinese in

¹⁰¹ Zhenchao Qian, Daniel T. Lichter, "Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage", *American Sociological Review* 72 (2007): 70, accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472448>.

¹⁰² Morrison G. Wong, "A look at Intermarriage among the Chinese in the United States in 1980", *Sociological Perspectives* 32/1 (1989): 87–88, accessed December 5, 2016a doi: 10.2307/1389009.

¹⁰³ Wong, "A look at Intermarriage," 102.

¹⁰⁴ Massey, "Dimensions," 70.

¹⁰⁵ Massey, "Dimensions," 72.

¹⁰⁶ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 265.

urban areas of large cities, where they inhabit whole neighborhoods, such as Chinatown in San Francisco. In such a case, people meet almost exclusively other members from the community and therefore their chance of meeting and marrying someone of a different race is low. On the other hand, Chinese Americans of a higher socioeconomic status often move out of these communities to suburbs or other areas where they find better career opportunities. With a lower concentration of Chinese there is a high probability of intermarriage. Another reason Wong provides is acculturation. The more the Chinese become socially integrated, the higher chance of intermarriage they have. In the recent decades, racial tolerance may have also contributed to a higher number of intermarriages. The Chinese are accepted more easily by the dominant group. The attitude of the Chinese has also changed; the process of acculturation has eliminated prejudice and altered their customs and beliefs making it acceptable and easier for them to marry someone of a different race, especially native-born Chinese who might have more in common with the dominant society than their foreign-born parents.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, as Alba and Nee argue, occurrence of “pan-Asian intermarriages”¹⁰⁸ has not been unusual. Pan-Asian intermarriages are marriages among the native-born Chinese often caused by social or cultural boundaries.

Majority of the first generation characters from the selected novels married or intended to marry a partner of the same ethnicity mostly due to customs and the cultural tradition. Suyuan had already been married in China and came to America with her husband. Before Lindo Jong was even introduced to Tin Jong by a friend, she refused to consider marrying him. He came from a different region in China than she did and it was unacceptable for Lindo to marry a Cantonese man. An-mei explained to Lindo that they were not in China anymore and in America it did not matter which part of China they came from, as now they all lived in the same country. Only after that Lindo finally agreed to meet Tin, realizing that she did not have many choices. As she had been advised before she left China, she needed to find a husband who was an American citizen and if he was not, they had to have a child as soon as possible, ensuring themselves a citizenship.

From the first generation of immigrants in the novels there was only one character who married a white American. However, her marriage was not really a part

¹⁰⁷ Wong, “A look at Intermarriage,” 88–90.

¹⁰⁸ Alba, Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 263.

of her assimilation but more aptly the start of her assimilation process. Ying–ying, as mentioned earlier, met her future husband Clifford St. Clair in China, thinking:

I neither liked him nor disliked him. I thought him neither attractive nor unattractive. But this I knew. I knew he was the sign that the black side of me would soon go away. [...] He was clean and pleasant. But he smelled like a foreigner, a lamb–smell stink that can never be washed away.¹⁰⁹

It took her several years before she married him and immigrated to the USA. Enthusiastic about her arrival to his homeland, Clifford “proudly named her in her immigration papers: Betty St. Clair, crossing out her given name of Gu Ying–ying. And then he put down the wrong birthyear, 1916 instead of 1914. So, with the sweep of a pen, [she] lost her name and became a Dragon instead of a Tiger.”¹¹⁰ He did not have bad intentions but changed her identity completely. And she never complained. Ying–ying never really fell in love with him but knew he would take care of her and love her. In fact she became passive or even apathetic after her arrival to the USA and in her marriage. Very often she was fearful and saw danger in everything around her, even other Chinese. Her fear can be attributed to the earlier mentioned acculturative stress.

Similarly to Lindo, Suyuan and An–mei, Helen from Jen’s novels never thought of marrying anyone of a different ethnic identity. When she met Ralph, her friend’s brother, it only seemed natural for her to marry him. Therefore, she expected the same from her daughters and was not happy when Mona was in a relationship with a white Jewish boy. She also expressed her strong disapproval of the possibility of Mona having a mixed baby. At the beginning of her relationship with Seth Mona had in mind her mother’s upbringing and she remembered to behave properly. When the couple finally parted, Helen was happy and satisfied at the same time. Later, as Mona returned to Seth, Helen refused to speak to her daughter. Several years later, Mona and Seth conceived a mixed baby, which Helen did not accept. Mona was sad and disappointed when Helen did not come to see her granddaughter Io after she had been born. On the other hand, she was happy that her father Ralph accepted and in a way admired Seth and he loved Io. Eventually, after a very long time, Mona and her mother reconciled at Mona and Seth’s wedding, the clash of the two generation being finally overcome.

Rose Hsu from *The Joy Luck Club* found herself in a similar situation when she met her future husband, a white American, at the university where she studied. Before

¹⁰⁹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 303.

¹¹⁰ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 115.

that she dated only Chinese boys and so did her sisters. Her mother An–mei did not like her dating a white boy, pointing out Ted was American, a “*waigoren*.”¹¹¹ However, in comparison to Helen Chang, she was more tolerant of her daughter’s relationship as eventually she accepted Rose’s boyfriend.

Like Helen Chang, Lindo Jong refused to acknowledge her daughter’s fiancé Rich. He was younger than Waverly, had red curly hair and pale skin with freckles. Whenever Waverly mentioned Rich’s name, Lindo changed the subject. One day Waverly brought her mother to the apartment where she lived with Rich and her daughter from the first marriage, Shoshana. She was hoping Lindo would notice the couple was living together but her mother pretended she did not. Finally Waverly convinced her mother to invite them for a family dinner. She was afraid her mother would ruin the way in which she saw Rich because she felt that she was not able to stand up to her. After the dinner she knew that Rich failed in Lindo’s eyes but her mother surprised her when they told her they were planning a wedding: “Hate? Why do you think I hate your future husband?”¹¹² Lindo was sad that her daughter thought she hated Rich. She explained that she did not have a problem with Waverly marrying a white man; there were simply other important topics to discuss while Waverly tried to tell her mother about Rich and Shoshana’s visit of the Exploratorium or a coat which Rich bought her. It can be deduced that even though initially Lindo was not happy about her daughter dating a man of a different ethnicity, as soon as she understood that Waverly’s relationship was serious, she became supportive and positive, unlike Helen Chang from Jen’s novels.

¹¹¹ Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 133.

¹¹² Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 215.

5 Conclusion

Both Gish Jen and Amy Tan inspired themselves in their own or their immigrant families' experience while writing their novels. *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land* and *The Joy Luck Club* discuss similar topics in many ways, however, each of the authors used their unique style of narration. Assimilation is one of the central themes of these novels, despite each of the authors approaching the concept slightly differently.

All of the analyzed types of assimilation were interconnected and often one would not have taken place without the other ones. The basic assumption is that assimilation is a long and complex process and is hardly ever completed by the first generation of immigrants, rather by the second and succeeding generations. It can be concluded that neither of Jen's and Tan's immigrant characters entirely completed the process. By the end of the novels, each of them was assimilated to a different extent. However, it can be proposed that assimilation of Gish Jen's protagonists reached further and they resembled the American majority more than Tan's immigrant characters. There were several reasons for that.

The Changs socialized with people of different ethnicities, predominantly white Americans. Not only did this contribute to their acculturation, but also to the learning of English, since often people in their surroundings did not understand Chinese. On the other hand, most of Tan's first generation protagonists preferred meeting other Chinese and for a long time, if not their whole lives, they remained a part of Chinese community in America. All of the second generation women in the novels were proficient in English, which significantly helped them with their education and careers. In this respect, the university-educated daughters in Tan's novel substantially differed from their mothers, who had to keep low-paid jobs to take care of their families. Only one out of the four daughters in question did not graduate from a university, though she was accepted and studied for a while. On the other hand, the Chang daughters only followed in their parents', especially their father's and aunt's footsteps. In Jen's novels, two members of the first generation of immigrants attended a university in America. All daughters from the three analyzed novels were encouraged in applying to universities, as their parents from the immigrant generation realized how important a university degree and education was in the new country for both men and women. In return, all

second generation women from the novels were trying to do their best to live up to their parents' expectations.

Generally, it can be concluded that the better language skills and education, the more opportunities for success in the USA the immigrants and their families had. Moreover, learning English seems to be the key factor for all types of assimilation. Without it, immigrants have difficulties with finding a job corresponding to their education or socializing with members of the majority and thus acculturating themselves. As proposed earlier, language assimilation is closely related to and can be considered a part of acculturation. In the analyzed novels by both writers, mass media proved to be one of the first and most significant inputs and initiatives for both learning English and embracing American culture.

Initially, the lack of knowledge of the English language was a major obstacle also in economic assimilation. While Tan's protagonists were encouraged to seek help within the Chinese community, Ralph Chang from Jen's novels gained a negative experience in this respect and learned to rely only on himself after his visa expired. After initial troubles, the protagonists of *Typical American* pursued studies, which helped them to become skilled professionals. That way they were able to follow their dreams related to their careers, Theresa becoming a doctor and Ralph establishing his own restaurant. However, while Theresa remained humble and family-oriented, Ralph's personality underwent a profound transformation. In the chasing of his American dream, he put his business first and did not care about anything else for a while. On the other hand, Amy Tan's protagonists arrived to America as unskilled laborers forced to find low-paying jobs and had to remain in them. Most of them experienced downward mobility after their arrival to the USA. However, despite never having been especially wealthy during their lives in America, *The Joy Luck Club* parents saved money, predominantly for children and their studies. While Tan's first generation belonged to the lower or lower-middle class, their daughters experienced upward mobility and found their places in the middle class or higher, their standard of living being comparable to or even exceeding that of white Americans. Amy Tan depicted rising toward a higher social position by moving from the lower class to the middle class within two generations of immigrants, marking a vast difference between the parents and their children. On the other hand, Gish Jen's first generation already arrived to the new country as members of the middle class, their children remaining in the same social position.

Place of residence is of great importance in the assimilative process. Living in a suburban area or generally among white American people significantly contributes to it. It can be concluded that the Changs from Gish Jen's novels were more assimilated in this respect than Tan's protagonists. What is more, it can be proposed that residential assimilation was completed already by the first generation characters from *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land*, being the only type analyzed in this thesis which was completed by the first generation of immigrants in the selected novels. Not too long after their arrival to America, the Changs lived in the suburbs and then in a Jewish neighborhood in New York and hardly ever met other Chinese. On the other hand, Tan's first generation protagonists resided in areas with a high concentration of Asian people with the exception of Ying-ying, who lived in an Italian neighborhood. However, that was in all probability caused by her husband being of Irish descent, not Chinese.

In all three novels the clash of two generations can be traced. The clash was predominantly caused by both generations growing up in a different environment and culture. Being raised in America and attending American schools, all second generation characters from the novels became Americans in their hearts. However, all of them except Mona from *Mona in the Promised Land* could feel a Chinese part of their identity within them. Predominantly by converting to Judaism and marrying a white American man, Mona clearly distanced herself from the culture of her ancestors, having to accept the consequences. Other second generation protagonists approached their bicultural identity differently and individually. While some took their cultural heritage seriously and were able to understand it after travelling to China, others were fully assimilated and showed interest in learning about the Chinese culture only after it became fashionable in the United States. The latter pattern appeared in both authors through the stories of Callie from *Mona in the Promised Land* and Waverly from *The Joy Luck Club*. However, if one omits physical appearance, it can be generally proposed that the second generation protagonists from all three novels were more similar to the white majority in America than to their Chinese parents.

Intermarriage was the last theme discussed in the thesis and it was included due to its significance in the assimilative process. Usually when someone marries a person from the ethnically different majority, it is a sign that assimilation of that individual is either completed or at the latter stages. However, the story of Ying-ying from Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is a peculiar case. While it can be concluded that she was one of the

least assimilated from the first generation characters of both authors, she was the only one to marry a white man. The authors Gish Jen and Amy Tan, both second generation Chinese, also married white men and intermarriage of the second generation can be found in their novels with the example of Jen's Mona and Tan's Waverly and Rose. In Mona's and Waverly's case the intermarriage marked the completion of their assimilation process. Despite Mona's parents being assimilated more than the parents in *The Joy Luck Club*, their approach to their daughter's relationship with a white man was certainly more disapproving. On the other hand, Lindo and An-meï eventually accepted their daughters' choice.

6 Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na problematiku asimilace a její zobrazení v románech *Typický Američan* a *Mona v zemi zaslíbené* autorky Gish Jen a *Klub radosti a štěstí* autorky Amy Tan. Obě spisovatelky se narodily v Americe rodičům, kteří emigrovali z Číny. Při psaní svých románů se zčásti inspirovaly jak svým vlastním životem, tak příběhem a zkušenostmi svých předků. Druhá kapitola této práce pojednává právě o životě autorek a naráží na některé podobnosti mezi romány a jejich osobními příběhy.

Ve třetí kapitole je v krátkosti popsána historie imigrace Číňanů do Spojených států amerických a zároveň jsou představeny příběhy imigrantů z románů obou autorek. Všechny postavy přistály v nové zemi na přelomu čtyřicátých a padesátých let dvacátého století, avšak každá za poněkud jiných okolností. Zatímco protagonisté Gish Jen přijeli studovat a nikdy neplánovali v zemi zůstat, postavy Amy Tan emigrovali právě za účelem hledání nového domova a neměli v úmyslu vracet se do Číny. Z důvodu nástupu komunistického režimu k moci v Číně v roce 1949 se možnost návratu domů všem imigrantům zkomplikovala a tak nakonec i rodina Changova z románu *Typický Američan* v Americe zůstala.

Čtvrtá kapitola obsahuje nejprve obecnější pojednání o asimilaci. Teoretické vymezení pojmů se z velké části opírá o odborný výzkum amerických sociologů Richarda Alby a Victora Nee, jejichž poznatky byly použity i v dalších kapitolách této práce. Protože asimilace je složitý proces, ke kterému se může přistupovat několika různými způsoby, v této diplomové práci jsem se zaměřila na vybrané typy asimilace, a to kulturní, jazykovou, ekonomickou, prostorovou a manželskou. Všechny tyto typy jsou vzájemně provázané a žádný neprobíhá odděleně. Kulturní asimilací se rozumí kontakt menšiny s většinou a přijímání některých rysů většiny, jako například jazyka, náboženství, zvyků, oblékání, nebo vyjadřování. Přestože první generace protagonistů autorky Gish Jen nejprve neplánovala v Americe setrvat, jakmile bylo zřejmé, že se tato země stane jejich domovem natrvalo, poměrně rychle se jejich osobnosti začaly měnit. Ke kulturní asimilaci postavy Helen značně přispěly americké hromadné sdělovací prostředky, díky nimž se učila nový jazyk a poznávala místní kulturu. Zde se nachází podobnost s postavami autorky Amy Tan, které byly rovněž ovlivněny americkou televizí či rádiem. Zatímco rodina Changova se ale naučila mluvit anglicky velmi dobře,

první generace imigrantů v románech Amy Tan neovládala tento jazyk na příliš vysoké úrovni. Od toho se pak odvíjely další typy asimilace, v nichž se rodina Changova rovněž dostala hlouběji.

Druhá generace obou autorek již byla plně asimilována jak kulturně, tak jazykově. Některé hrdinky byly bilingvní, některé dokonce vůbec nemluvily jazykem svých rodičů, ale pouze anglicky. Všechny se v nitru duše považovaly za Američanky. Teprve když se čínská kultura dostala v America do popředí zájmu, začaly se některé hrdinky z druhé generace hrdě hlásit k dědictví svých předků. Tento fenomén se objevil v románech obou autorek, jedna z hrdinek knihy *Mona v zemi zaslíbené* však zacházela až do extrému. O kultuře svých předků se navíc neučila od svých rodičů, nýbrž od své afroamerické spolužačky a z různých dalších prostředků.

Ze socioekonomického hlediska se imigranti obvykle dělí na dělnické imigranty a imigranty disponující lidským kapitálem. Přestože hrdinové autorky Amy Tan mnohdy vyrůstali v Číně v rodinách z vyšších společenských tříd, v Americe si ve společenském postavení kvůli neznalosti angličtiny a chybějícímu vzdělání výrazně pohoršili. Naproti tomu Changovi, pocházející z podobného prostředí jako postavy z románu *Klub radosti a štěstí*, přijeli do Ameriky studovat. Díky tomu neměli problémy získat dobře placené zaměstnání a jejich společenská pozice, až na některé finanční problémy, byla srovnatelná s ostatními Američany střední vrstvy, či dokonce vyšší. Jejich dcery je následovaly a za velké podpory rodičů se nakonec přihlásily na univerzitu. Také druhá generace postav z románu Amy Tan studovala na prestižních univerzitách. Jejich rodiče si ani nedovedli představit, že by tomu bylo jinak, přestože většina z nich samotných vysokoškolské vzdělání postrádala. Zde si tedy druhá generace oproti té první značně vylepšila postavení ve společnosti.

Je patrné, že ke kulturní asimilaci Changových značně přispělo místo bydliště. Na rozdíl od postav z románu *Klub radosti a štěstí*, které se usadily ve velkoměstských čtvrtích s vysokou koncentrací Asiatů, či dokonce žily v čínské čtvrti po celý svůj život, Changovi v Americe vždy bydleli obklopeni buď jinými minoritami, nebo bělochy. Vrcholem prostorové asimilace Changových byla koupě domu na předměstí New Yorku, kde se pravidelně setkávali s Američany střední vrstvy. Jak zmiňují Alba a Nee ve své knize *Remaking the American Mainstream*, imigranti, kteří bydlí obklopeni a stýkají se pouze s obyvateli stejné rasové příslušnosti a hovoří převážně svým rodným jazykem, nemají šanci na asimilaci do takové míry jako imigranti žijící mezi většinovým obyvatelstvem. Asimilace Changových se tedy do značné míry odvíjela od

místa bydliště, respektive společnosti, se kterou se stýkali. Hrdinky z druhé generace obou autorek již byly v tomto ohledu plně asimilované, jelikož ani jedna z nich nežila v místech s vyšší koncentrací Asiatů.

Poslední podkapitola pojednává o smíšených manželstvích, tedy v případě této diplomové práce o svazcích uzavíraných mezi příslušníky odlišných etnických skupin. Ze všech tří zkoumaných románů se v první generaci tento druh sňatku objevil pouze u jedné postavy, a to z románu *Klub radosti a štěstí*. Byla jí Ying–ying, která svého budoucího manžela, původem Ira, potkala v Číně a nakonec se s ním odstěhovala do Ameriky. Přestože by se dalo předpokládat, že díky tomuto svazku bude nejvíce asimilovaná ze všech hrdinek první generace, nebylo tomu tak a se svým manželem se mnohdy dorozumívala pouze gesty. Mezi druhou generací jsou smíšená manželství poměrně obvyklá a objevila se i v románech obou autorek. Zatímco však rodiče v románu *Klub radosti a štěstí* tyto sňatky přijali, Helen Chang se v knize *Mona v zemi zaslíbené* přestala se svou dcerou kvůli zeti odlišné etnické a náboženské příslušnosti stýkat.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Jen, Gish. *Mona in the Promised Land*. New York: Random House, 1997.

Jen, Gish. *Typical American*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2008.

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. London: Vintage, 2013.

Secondary Sources

Alba, Richard and Victor Nee. *Remaking the American Mainstream*. Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2003.

Allen, James P. and Eugene Turner. "Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Assimilation." *The Professional Geographer*, 48/2 (1996), 140-155. Accessed March 31, 2017. doi: 10.1111/j.0033-0124.1996.00140.x.

Berry, John W. "Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society." *International Migration* 30/1 (1992): 69–85. Accessed March 11, 2017. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.1992.tb00776.x.

Berry, John W. "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005): 697–712. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic551691.files/Berry.pdf>.

Borjas, George J. *Immigration Economics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Dong, Lan. *Reading Amy Tan*. Santa Barbara: ABC–CLIO, LCC, 2009.

Gordon, Milton M. *Assimilation in American Life: the Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Gish Jen. *The Girl at the Baggage Claim*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

- Lee, Don. "About Gish Jen." *Ploughshares* 26/ 2 (2000): 217–222. Accessed November 19, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40352824>.
- Massey, Douglas S. "Dimensions of the New Immigration to the United States and the Prospects for Assimilation," *Annual Review of Sociology* 7 (1981): 57–85. Accessed July 5, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946022>.
- Mussari, Mark. *Amy Tan*. Malaysia: Marshall Cavendish, 2010.
- Ogbu, John and Maria E. Matute–Bianchi. "Understanding Sociocultural Factors: Knowledge, Identity, and Social Adjustment." In *Beyond Language: Social and Cultural Factors in Schooling*. Edited by California State Department of Education, Bilingual Education Office, 73-142. Sacramento: California State University at Los Angeles, 1986.
- Portes, A. and R. G. Rumbaut. *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Qian, Zhenchao and Daniel T. Lichter. "Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage." *American Sociological Review* 72/1 (2007): 68–94. Accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472448>.
- Roosevelt, Theodore in "Quote of the Day." Last modified June 30, 2010. http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/publications/id.6604/pub_detail.asp
- Rosinsky, Natalie M. *Amy Tan: Author and Storyteller*. Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2007.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Ironies and Paradoxes." In *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, edited by Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, Josh DeWind, 172–195. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999.
- Teitelbaum, Michael and Robert Asher. *Immigration to the United States: Chinese Immigrants*. New York: Facts on File, 2005.

- Wong, Morrison G. "A look at Intermarriage among the Chinese in the United States in 1980." *Sociological Perspectives* 32/1 (1989): 87–107. Accessed December 5, 2016. doi: 10.2307/1389009.
- Wong, Morrison G. "Chinese Americans." In *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*, edited by P. G. Min, 110–146. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005. Accessed March 7, 2017. https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/6035_Chapter_6_Min_I_Proof_2.pdf.
- Zhang, Donghui. *Between Two Generations : Language Maintenance and Acculturation Among Chinese Immigrant Families*. El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2008.

ANOTATION

Name: Petra Paulusová

Faculty: Faculty of Arts

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of the Thesis: Assimilation in Selected Works of Gish Jen and Amy Tan

Supervisor: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

Number of pages of the thesis: 66

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the concept of assimilation in selected novels by two female Chinese American authors, namely Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* and *Typical American* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and also to compare the authors' conception of this notion in the selected novels. Firstly both writers are introduced with the emphasis on those events in their lives, which inspired them for writing their novels. After that, the immigrant stories of the protagonists from the novels are presented against the background of the history of Chinese immigrants in America. After introducing the concept of assimilation, selected types of this process are analyzed, namely cultural assimilation, language assimilation, economic assimilation, residential assimilation and intermarriage.

Key Words: Assimilation, immigration, first generation, second generation, clash between generations, Chinese Americans

ANOTACE

Jméno: Petra Paulusová

Fakulta: Filozofická fakulta

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Asimilace ve vybraných dílech autorek Gish Jen a Amy Tan

Vedoucí práce: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

Počet stran: 66

Cílem této práce je analyzovat pojetí asimilace ve vybraných románech dvou čínsko–amerických autorek, konkrétně *Mona in the Promised Land* a *Typical American* od Gish Jen a *The Joy Luck Club* od Amy Tan. Dále jsou porovnána pojetí asimilace obou autorek ve vybraných dílech. Nejprve jsou obě představeny s důrazem na události v jejich životech, které jim byly inspirací pro jejich romány. Dále práce popisuje příběhy postav imigrantů na pozadí čínsko–americké imigrace ve Spojených státech. Po vymezení pojmu asimilace jsou analyzovány jednotlivé vybrané typy tohoto procesu, a to jmenovitě asimilace kulturní, jazyková, ekonomická, prostorová a manželská.

Klíčová slova: Asimilace, imigrace, první generace, druhá generace, mezigenerační konflikt, Američané čínského původu