

Concubine Mother-Daughter Attachment in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*

Meihua Li ^a

limh5757@gmail.com

Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Rohimmi Noor ^b

rohimmi@upm.edu.my

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The mother-daughter relationship is one of the most primary bonds. It is also an embodiment of women alliance. The mother-daughter interaction is manifested intensively in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*. This study compares two pairs of mothers and daughters by looking at their lives. According to John Bowlby's attachment theory(1982), a mother's past personal, cultural and economic experiences would significantly impact her caregiving style. The intersection of the personal, the cultural and the economic catches every mother. Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality (1989) is introduced to study the concubine mothers' pasts. A mother's maternal care directly impacts a child's attachment pattern. As a result of various attachment patterns, children's later personality exhibits different dynamics(Bowlby, 1982). This study identifies the concubine mothers' respective intersectional life, namely one in the patriarchal and traditionally feudal system, and the other in feudal and colonial system. And that determines their parenting ways towards their daughters, which facilitates the formation of the daughters' attachment patterns: the secure and the anxious-resistant. Later, the daughters' personalities demonstrate a contrasting development. An-mei becomes strong-minded, composed and highly resilient, whereas Annelies develops into a mentally vulnerable, impulsive and less resilient person. By focusing on the experiences of the female characters, this study acknowledges women's intersectionality and female subjectivity. By locating them in Asian background, it helps with the understanding of Asian women's life and Asia's diverse culture.

Keywords: Pramoedya Ananta Toer; Concubine Mother-daughter Attachment Patterns; Intersectionality; The Joy Luck Club; This Earth of Mankind

^a Main author

^b Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Women study is an important branch in Asian literature. Due to Asia's cultural and historical background, women have always been regarded as second-class humans, which have received a lot of criticism. In feudal Asian community, concubines different from common women play a significant role, but their presences in literary works gain limited attention from scholars. They often push through the confines of their roles and wield power to negotiate their positions in social system. Those figures and actions arguably serve to demonstrate the complex entity of human relationships and social structures. The rich portrayal of concubinage in terms of autonomy, agency and emotional dynamics reflects the cultural norms and the social anxieties in specific places and periods.

The term concubine contains different meanings according to one's time. In Chinese feudal society, concubine indicates one's identity as a man's ordinal wife. Though that is lawfully recognized, the concubine's status is conventionally inferior to the man's previous wives. While in feudal society associating with colonizers, concubine refers to a colonizer's possessive woman, which holds no legal validity. Despite the sharing lower status than common women, the distinction among concubines in separate backgrounds is noticeable. And that results in each concubine's exclusively individual life. Considering the rich diversity of Asian literature, it is fallacious to generalize Asian women experience. To truly restore Asian women's real living experiences, the group of concubines must be constantly included in discussion. Centering concubines is a valid channel to expand and advance the development of Asian women literature.

This study selects two texts, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* (1990). The common setting, around the turn of the twentieth century in Asian society (old China and colonized Indonesia), makes them comparable. Further, these novels not only portray concubines' experience at great length and with a lot of details but also contain considerable narratives about their offspring. Concubines and their female children are a special group of women. They undergo a particular experience different from their ordinary counterparts. Looking into the lives of the concubine mothers and their daughters, this study examines in parallel various types of mother-daughter attachment. Concubine literature provides a comprehensive understanding of social complexity and cultural identity. This study aims to demonstrate the intersectional living reality of the concubines and reflect on its resulting forces and consequent impacts on themselves and their children. It contributes to the understanding of Asian women life in Asian literature, as well as Asia's cultural variety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A typical subject in Asian narrative is mother-daughter relationship. Criticism about that is a common practice in Asian literary studies. For example, Yusoff & Raihanah examine the motherhood set in 1970s Oman and Bangladesh (2022), and Oreiq et al. investigate the life of mother and daughter who experiencing migration (2024 & 2025). However, there are few researches addressing the element of concubine in mother-daughter relationship. The role of concubine carries great significance in better understanding Asian literature. Therefore, this paper includes the element of concubine in studying mother-daughter relationship, adding to the richness of Asian literary criticism. In the following, some reviews about the authors and the two selected texts are provided.

Amy Tan (19 February 1952 - present) is a Chinese American author who is widely known for the portrayal of the Chinese landscape, and the expression of Chinese Americans' reality. Her debut novel, *The Joy Luck Club* has been studied by countless literary scholars. Being a piece of Chinese American literature, the common topics discussed are ethnic identity in America (Wang, 2025; Xu, 1994; Schueller, 1992), revised culture shaped by Chinese and American forces (Puskás, 2025; Fickle, 2014), as well as the challenging mother-daughter relationship between the immigrant and the American-born (Wei, 2022; Pattana, 2020; Chintescu, 2020). However, this article is of full Chineseness, looking at the people's living experience long before the immigration. It centers two minor characters in old feudal China, a concubine and her young daughter. It investigates their mother-daughter attachment, and demonstrates how the concubine's past experiences have unavoidable impact on herself and her daughter. It recognizes the legacy of the past living experience and the sustainable capacity of the history acting on the present. Amy Tan shares that the true stories regarding the family's past told by her mother are gifts for her writing (PBS, 2017). She is a native-born American, and the writing itself is a legacy of Chinese experience. Her manifold narratives of China are vivid manifestation of her mother's past. It echoes the finding of this study, that is, the past experiences play a crucial role in shaping one's life and passing down their effects to future generations.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer (6 February 1925 – 30 April 2006) was an Indonesian writer who, during his time, represented the voice of the people. He was constantly subjected to persecutions and imprisonments in his life. The distribution ban of his books is still discussed by people (Febriani et al., 2025). Due to rigid censorship, Pramoedya's literary works had limited publicity, even though he was frequently mentioned as Indonesia's and Southeast Asia's best candidate for a Nobel Prize in Literature. Toer was a marginalized writer in his age, and reading his works provides a particular angle to understand the life and culture in some historical points, as those fictions vividly reflect the social structure and societal dynamics. *This Earth of Mankind* is the first book of his historical fiction series, the *Buru Quartet* (the other three books are *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps* and *House of Glass*). The previous literary studies on the book explore themes such as modernity (Niekerk, 2011), nationalism (Teeuw, 1997), class conflicts (Miranda, 2021), culture (Sulaeman & Hun, 2023) and women's treatment (Bahari, 2007; Marwan et al., 2019). There are also studies focusing on the portrayal of Nyai (Santari, 2023; Ramli & Aziz, 2014) and Annelies (Christy, 2023). But those failed to emphasize the relationship between concubine Nyai and Annelies. This study, encompassing their mother-daughter attachment, shows how Nyai's past experience acts on their present life.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & METHODOLOGY

To better understand the relationships between the concubine mothers and their daughters, this study primarily adopts Bowlby's attachment theory. A child's attachment to his or her mother can generally be regarded as inborn, but the degree of intimacy between a mother and her child could be impacted by the subjects' behaviors. The attachment intimacy exerts considerable influence on the child, and keeps shaping his or her personality and mental health in whole life (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby's Attachment Theory was originally formulated in 1969, and further developed in the year 1982. It interprets a mother's parenting way in a developmentally historical perspective. It places emphasis on how the mother has experienced in the past while understanding her present maternal style. According to the theory, there are four factors that contribute to the quality of a mother-child relationship. These factors are a child's bonding behaviour to attachment, a child's antithetic

behaviour to attachment, a mother's caring behaviour to attachment and a mother's antithetic behaviour to attachment. Importantly, an individual's personal, cultural and economic experiences significantly affect his or her parenting techniques (Bowlby, 1982). Thus, the intersection of the personal, the cultural and the economic catches every mother. Intersectionality is invented by legal scholar Crenshaw in her essays (1989 & 1990). It reflects on the naturally intersectional identities that one exhibits in life. It points out that each life experience is unique. By considering one's experiences in multiple systems, the living reality could gain nuanced and comprehensive understanding. The term is commonly used to dissect one's complex encounters under different kinds of circumstances, particularly in terms of oppression. Intersectionality highlights the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities. The analysis of this study starts with examining the intersectional life experiences of the concubine mothers, that is, Anmei's mother's life in feudal Chinese society, and Nyai Ontosoroh's life caught between feudal society and colonial systems. To be followed, it will explore how the concubine mothers' parenting styles are impacted by their pasts to present separate. Anmei's mother interacts with her daughter in a lovingly and close manner, while Nyai tends to be calm and self-contained.

There are three types of attachment patterns, namely secure attachment, anxious-resistant attachment and anxious-avoidant attachment (Bowlby, 1982). Secure attachment is consistent with the healthy development of a child, in which he or she is confident that whenever an adverse or a fearful situation is encountered, his or her attachment figure will be able to respond appropriately. Securely attached children are willing to boldly explore the world, and competent in dealing with life's challenges. Anxious-resistant attachment means that a child alternates between either seeking proximity or contact with his or her attachment figure, and resisting interaction with the attachment figure. This type of children are uncertain whether or not the attachment figure will have the capability to assist them, when a need arises. Because of the children's insecurity, they are always prone to separation anxiety. The third pattern Resistant-avoidant attachment takes place when the children avoid the attachment figure during reunion. In this attachment pattern, the child lacks confidence that he or she will receive care, comfort or help from the attachment figure and the child expects to be rebuffed. Many anxious-avoidant children treat strangers in a more friendly manner than their own attachment figures. These individuals attempt to lead a life without the love and support of others. Each attachment pattern plays a key role in a child's eventual personality development (good or bad). This can be assessed through the dimensions of ego-control and ego-resilience (Bowlby, 1982). This paper investigates two concubines' daughters, adopting the concepts of secure attachment and anxious-resistant attachment. It identifies the daughters' different attachment patterns, and demonstrates how the daughters perform under the influence of respective attachment pattern, in terms of their personality development and daily lives.

ANALYSIS

The analysis is organized in a longitudinal order. The concubine mothers in both texts behave distinctly when engaging with their daughters in despite of their same social status as concubine. Each person's present behaviors are shaped by their previous history. Therefore, the analysis starts with tracking the concubine mothers' past intersectional experiences. Then it examines the concubine mothers' adoption of parenting styles. Since a mother's care-giving ways greatly impact a child's life, the study in latter part deals with the daughters' attachment pattern and personality development.

THE CONCUBINE MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES OF INTERSECTIONALITY

“Most mothers experience a strong pull to be close to their babies and young children” (Bowlby, 1982, p.241). It is a predictable outcome mediated by their behavioural systems (p.240). However, whether the mother’s aptness of being attached to or detached from her child depends on her “personal, cultural, and economic” experiences (p.241). In *The Joy Luck Club* and *This Earth of Mankind*, the concubine-mothers are individuals who lead uniquely different lives. The specificity and complexity of their distinctive lifestyles should be acknowledged. Intersectionality informs the necessity to apprehend one’s lived experiences from different perspectives. It particularly highlights one’s exposure to various forms of discrimination and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989 & 1990).

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the concubine mother lives in a patriarchal and traditionally feudal society. In patriarchal societies, men are the owners of women and have absolute authority over them. Anmei’s concubine mother experiences misery of life from a few aspects.. Personally, she is set up to be raped, which leaves her no choice but become one’s concubine. In the context of feudal and patriarchal culture, if any woman sleeps with a man other than her legal husband, she should preferably kill herself to keep her honor. Thus, An-mei’s mother’s choice of continuing her life brings her no sympathy but hatred from others including her own family, as shown in this “her brother kicked her, and her own mother banned her from the family house forever” (Tan, 1989, p.207). Adding to that, the concubine’s deprivation of two sons also results from traditional Chinese cultural beliefs, that is, “A son can never go to somebody else’s house to live” (p.190), and the later-coming concubine has less right than the earlier-coming concubine despite the fact that she is the biological mother of the child. An-mei’s mother’s powerlessness to change her condition makes her realize the importance of teaching Anmei to read truth.

Every person is inevitably shaped by the culture in which he or she grows. Filial piety plays a noticeable part in Chinese culture. The strong belief of family bond has been deeply implanted in An-mei’s mother’s mind since childhood, which is demonstrated through the mother’s act of cutting off her own flesh for her mother’s cure. Inheriting and practising the tradition of filial piety, the concubine-mother always prioritizes her family first. Therefore, she cares more about her daughter’s lifetime welfare than her own interests. She develops a character that she would protect her daughter from suffering the same fate by whatever she can do.

In *This Earth of Mankind*, the concubine-mother Nyai lives in a sectional society of the patriarchal and the colonial. Her struggles to make a life in the waves of patriarchy and colonialism force her to develop useful survival skills. Nyai’s initial encounter with patriarchal oppression is being exploited as a commercial object by her own father, as she is sold to the colonizer Mellema for “twenty-five guilders” (Toer, 1990, p.84). She concludes that “I must be strong”, because “No one is going to help you!” (p.84). She chooses her own way of dealing with people, without exception for her family. For example, “giving up all respect and esteem for [her] father” (p.84), which serves as a way of protesting against his misdeed of selling her. This harsh experience stimulates Nyai to establish a sense of self-autonomy and self-independence, which she earnestly intends to pass down to her daughter Annelies.

Another life lesson Nyai learns is from her master Mellema’s mental breakdown. In Dutch colonization, Indonesian natives are inferior humans. After Mellema’s accident, Nyai comes to realize that as Mellema’s concubine she “would have no right over anything, because the law would not acknowledge [her] motherhood” (p.77). Being aware of the persistent threat of being deprived of everything, including her children and the family’s wealth, she adjusts her attitudes and actions. She manages all the business affairs, and tackles the household matters such as

keeping Mellema's problem in secret. In this way, she earns a comfortable life and maintain the house and her family. The successful experience of effort and reward gives rise to her strong motive to equip her daughter with the ability of making a good living.

THE CONCUBINE MOTHERS' PARENTING BEHAVIOURS

There are four contributing factors to the bond between a mother and her child. These factors include a child's bonding or antithetic behaviour to attachment, and, a mother's caring or antithetic behaviour to attachment. In any pair of mother and child, more than one pattern of behaviour is exhibited, whilst some are for the maintenance of proximity, some are irrelevant to the issue of proximity, and some serve as the impediment of proximity (Bowlby, 1982).

Deep family bond is one of the strongest characteristics in Chinese culture, especially for women. A Chinese woman always put her family above herself. Her love for her children is not only instinctively planted, but also culturally built-in. The concubine mother in *The Joy Luck Club* always expresses affection for her daughter upon their reunion. This strengthens the attachment between them. When the mother returns home for the sake of An-mei's grandmother, she proactively seeks intimacy with her daughter via body touch and language communication, as shown below:

She took my hand and led me to the settee . . . began to loosen my braids and brush my hair with long sweeping strokes. "An-mei, you have been a good daughter?" she asked, smiling a secret look . . . I could feel her long smooth fingers rubbing and searching under my chin, finding the spot that was my smooth-neck scar.

(Tan, 1989, p. 40)

Through these attachment behaviours An-mei "[comes] to love [her] mother" (p.42) again after five years of separation.

Two sons being taken away from the concubine makes Anmei become the only child who she could physically and emotionally attach to. After her mother's funeral, the concubine intends to take An-mei with her, which showing her positive attitude to stay connected. On their way to Tientsin, she pays circumspect attention to her daughter. She calms An-mei's fears about the unknown future, and dresses her up properly. When they disembark the ship, the mother "grabbed [An-mei's] hand tight" (p.193). The kind acts cheer An-mei up and well prepare her for the new living environment. All of these behaviours present the mother's loving care, which promotes An-mei's attachment to her. An-mei's mother continues to maintain the closeness with her daughter in Tientsin During the period, An-mei has "no worries, fears or desires" (p.197).

Being a concubine, the mother has no independent wealth or property. Apart from building an intimate relationship with An-mei, the mother also defends her daughter on critical matters. She teaches Anmei wisdom, decisively revealing the Second Wife's vicious attempt, and expresses affection by passing down a ring of true value. Furthermore, knowing that this kind of life leads to no good end for her daughter, she takes action. Taking advantage of Wu's fear of ghost, she kills herself to secure Anmei's future. These interaction and sacrifice firmly consolidates the attachment between them.

By contrast, Nyai adopts a differently ambivalent way to interact with her daughter. She increases or reduces the attachment to Annelies in separate occasions. As part of her parental duties, Nyai provides her daughter with good food, clothing and shelter. Besides fulfilling her maternal responsibilities, the mother herself teaches Annelies to manage their family company. All of the

above-mentioned behaviours are inherently compatible with a mother's maternal care, performing the function of enhancing their attachment. Another important factor facilitating mother-daughter relationship is effective communication. Unlike Anmei's mother who frequently spends quality time with her daughter, Nyai seldom does so. Instead, she focuses more on developing Annelies's pragmatic abilities (business management). Timely proper communication is often absent in major situations, such as taking out Annelie from school, accepting Minke as an intimate friend.

A mother's maternal care could be counter balanced by other kinds of behaviours which are the very opposite of care-giving (Bowlby, 1982, p.242). Nyai develops a life view from her own experience. She is a concubine, having no legal claim, but her living conditions are much better than others, and she becomes the head of the household. Therefore, she believes that a woman could secure a good life as long as she masters skills and works hard. She keenly trains her daughter based on this life philosophy. So, she has been "deliberately harsh with [Annelies] so that [Annelies] would develop the ability to work" (Toer, 1990, p.76) and gain independence. The distribution of roles inside the family business is made clear by Nyai. The mother handles the "office work", while her daughter is in charge of "everything except the office work" (p.36). The clear division of work forces Annelies to spend most of her time alone. These circumstances cause the mother and daughter to grow apart from each other.

The experience of being sold by her father destroys Nyai's faith in family members. A family unit provides the basis for a child to develop his or her psychological state. In the growth of attachment behaviour, "the greater the number of attachment figures to whom a child was attached, the more intense was the child's attachment to the mother as his or her principal attachment figure likely to be" (Bowlby, 1982 p.202). After Herman's mental instability, Nyai takes extremely autocratic actions, as shown in Annelies's reminiscence of these events:

Mama refused to look for him or look after him. Mama forbade me too to look for him. We were even forbidden to talk about him. Papa's portraits were taken down from the walls by Darsam, and Mama ordered that they be burned in the yard in front of the whole household and all the workers.
(Toer, 1990, pp.102-103)

Nyai's attitude and actions towards Herman infuriate Robert (Annelies's brother) and lead to Robert's subsequent long-term enmity. Annelies's secondary attachment figure never comes into being. Nyai is Anmei's only attachment figure, meanwhile she also performs a latent threat. The seemingly indifferent statement "If you like, you may follow your brother's example" (p.102) adversely affects Annelies's mentality and alienates her from Robert. Thus, Nyai becomes Annelies's one and only host in her physical and psychological world. The detached distance between the governing party (the mother) and governed party (the daughter) is innate. Despite there being a moderate level of intimacy between them, Annelies feels distant and estranged from her mother.

THE DAUGHTERS' ATTACHMENT PATTERNS

A mother's behaviours exert enormous influence on the relationship with her child (Bowlby, 1982). The mother in *The Joy Luck Club* always lovingly cares for her daughter, while the mother in *This Earth of Mankind* initiates not a few actions harmful to the attachment with her daughter. As a result, the daughters develop different attachment patterns.

An-mei, being through her mother's sensitive and loving behaviours, forms a secure attachment pattern. Securely attached children will get upset if separated from their attachment figures, and are active in "seeking contact when distressed . . . [and] they are readily comforted" (Bowlby, 1982, p.338). Anmei experiences distress, knowing her mother's departure, shown as that "the night before she was to leave . . . [An-mei] was crying to bring her back before she was even gone" (Tan, 1989, p.188). Anmei keenly looks for a way to maintain proximity with her mother. Anmei's feeling sad about being away from her mother is one of the typical characteristics of the secure attachment pattern.

Children with a secure attachment pattern are very sure that their parenting figures will be always present, helpful and responsive, whenever they are in need of protection. With this assurance, these children would be able to boldly explore the external world. "When exploring and playing in his or her surrounding environment, a group B[the securely attached] infant was likely to use the mother as a secure base. Content to move away from her[the mother], he [or she] would nonetheless keep track of her movements" (Bowlby, 1982, p.271). An-mei, though living in a strange environment, could freely probe into the new world. With knowledge of the mother's whereabouts during her absence, An-mei displays the stable balance between her exploration of the world and deep attachment to her mother, which is demonstrated as follows:

My mother . . . went downstairs to discuss with the tailor how such a dress could be made using the material available . . . Yan Chang and I roasted chestnuts on top of the little coal stove. And burning our fingers while eating these sweet nuggets, we naturally started to giggle and gossip . . . we both laughed out loud.

(Tan, 1989, p.204)

In *This Earth of Mankind*, Annelies is mediated by her mother's "being available and helpful on some occasions, but not on others" (Bowlby, 1982, p.124). She manifests signs of an anxious-resistant attachment pattern. An anxious-resistant individual lacks confidence in whether his or her parenting figure would be available, responsive or helpful when he or she seeks contact and protection. With this uncertainty, the child experiences more conflicts inside himself or herself, and tends to "oscillate between seeking proximity and contact with [the attachment figure], and resisting contact and interaction with [the attachment figure]" (Bowlby, 1982, p.338). When Annelies is tragically raped by her brother, she should have turned to Nyai for comfort and protection. However, she gives up the idea of opening up to her mother, because she is not confident that Nyai would or could protect her. The anxious-resistant attachment prevents her from positively predicting the mother's actions. Therefore, she painfully represses and keeps the whole occurrence to herself, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

Didn't you say anything to Mama?
What good would that do? The situation would have got worse. If Mama found out, Robert would have been eliminated by Darsam, and then everyone would have been destroyed. Mama. Me. No one would come to our business anymore. Our house would have become a house of the Devil.

(Toer, 1990, pp. 244-245)

Annelies's silence about the rape expresses her doubt over Nyai, which reflects her insecure attachment pattern.

Someone with an insecure-resistant attachment pattern "is always prone to separation anxiety, tends to be clinging . . . This pattern, in which conflict is evident, is promoted . . . by threats of abandonment" (Bowlby, 1982, p.124). Nyai's hostile attitude towards Annelies's father

has negatively affected Annelies. As Nyai excludes Mellema from their world, she becomes the single parental figure to whom Annelies can develop attachment. Thus, Nyai becomes the daughter's only source of emotional and spiritual support. Nevertheless, she also turns out to be the source of Annelies's anxiety. Annelies constantly lives with a fear of being abandoned by Nyai, who has done that to Herman and Robert. So she would automatically adjust her behaviour to accommodate her mother and put her mother's interests above hers, if she senses any potentially coming conflicts between them, shown in a conversation below:

"Let me, Mama. Let me look after Papa."
"He doesn't know you."
"But he's my papa, Mama."
"Shhh! Pity is only for those who are conscious of their condition . . . He is no longer a human being . . .
It's over, don't ask about him again."
I put to sleep my desire to know more. Whenever Mama was serious like that, it wasn't wise to press her further.

(Toer, 1990, p. 78)

The dialogue presents an internal conflict for Annelies. Annelies's choice of surrender is an embodiment of her separation anxiety. No matter how much she wants her mother to take her thought into consideration, she would submit to her mother's will. Another noteworthy example of Annelies's anxious-resistant attachment pattern is that she has "been saving up all her feelings" regarding her family for a long time till the arrival of Minke, who becomes "the receptacle into which they[Annelies's burdensome feelings] overflowed" (p.68). It indicates that Annelies does not consider Nyai as an approachable candidate to talk with. Annelies's attachment to her mother is seemingly solid, but in fact weak and uncertain.

THE DAUGHTERS' PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

One's attachment pattern correlates with the social patterns of other people apart from his or her mother. The stability of attachment patterns becomes the children's property, which means that their attachment "patterns of behaviour have become a function of [themselves]" (Bowlby, 1982, p.361). Attachment patterns persist throughout a person's life, thus constantly affect his or her personality traits. At this point, in order to assess a child's attachment pattern's resultant influence on his or her personality development, the terms ego-control and ego-resilience are adopted. "Ego-control varies from over-control, through moderate-control to under-control, with the optimum in the middle. Ego-resilience varies from high to low, or brittle, with the optimum at the high end" (p.362). An-mei and Annelies appear to have different attachment patterns. In the case, they tend to develop their personalities separately.

An-mei exhibits a secure attachment pattern towards her mother and has developed a positive personality. She displays the characteristics of a self-controlled and highly resilient person. Well-disciplined individuals cultivate a positive outlook that inspires them to stay motivated and persevere in the face of adversity (Bowlby, 1982). For example, An-mei keeps her composure while watching her mother dying. Instead of panicking, An-mei behaves calmly and is able to maintain her mental stability, as shown in the following passage:

I wanted to shout to the clock and make its meaningless noise be silent, but I did not. I watched my mother march in her bed. I wanted to say the words that would quiet her body and spirit. But I stood there like others, waiting and saying nothing.

(Tan, 1989, pp. 208-209)

Her mother's miserable death does not make her sink into grief. In reality, she resolves to cope productively with the tragedy. On the day of An-mei's mother's funeral, An-mei reassures herself that "[she] can see the truth, too. I [She] am[is] strong, too" (p. 210).

An-mei is a well-disciplined person with a strong disposition. "Among the characteristics of a highly resilient person are the resourcefulness in adapting to changing situations, a flexible use of his or her behavioural repertoire, and the ability to process information" (Bowlby, 1982, p.363). After her mother's demise, An-mei immediately stands on her own feet. Since she knows that "on the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. . . all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow" (Tan, 1989, p.210), she plots to carry out her revenge against Second Wife, who previously destroyed her mother's hopes of having her own house and a happy life. Taking advantage of Chinese superstitions, An-mei takes revenge on Second Wife and earns justice for her mother. An-mei grows to be a truly strong person. That is also shown in her later life, as she manages to lead a comfort life in America.

However, Annelies clearly manifests the anxious-resistant attachment pattern towards her mother, and thereafter develops a negative personality. She presents personality features such as lacking a sense of control over the events in her life and low resilience. "Among the characteristics of an over-controlled person are constrained and inhibited responses, reduced expressions of emotions, and narrow restrictions of the information processed" (Bowlby, 1982, p.363). Since Minke's first visit to her house, Annelies becomes very fond of him, whom she desires to please by dressing up in beautiful clothes. However, since Annelies is so used to strictly concealing her true feelings in front of others, she merely appears "embarrassed" and "startled" anytime Minke pays her a compliment (Toer, 1990, p.42). The limited expression of her real emotions is a typical trait of an over-controlled person. Meanwhile, in some other situations Annelies is under-controlled. During Minke's long absence, her health fails seriously. She loses her mental stability. She becomes extremely ill and has to receive specialised practice of "drugging" (p.201).

In terms of ego-resilience, Annelies possesses feeble resilience. "A brittle person shows little flexibility, and responds to changing and stressful situations either by persevering rigidly in his original response, or else by becoming disorganised. Competing and conflicting information make the person unduly anxious" (Bowlby, 1982, p.363). During the lawsuit regarding Annelies's guardianship, she quickly loses her appetite and has to "be drugged once again" (Toer, 1990, p.334). Annelies's spirit rapidly fades, and she exhibits hopelessness, therefore she performs "no movement, no expression whatsoever" (p.349). After the court declares Mr. Maurits as her guardian, her faith in life is completely lost. Annelies's farewell words "Once in my life, let me feed my husband" (p.354), and "Mama, I too will never return home" (p.357) mirror her disillusionment with life. Annelies's poor ego-resilience could not help with her psychological turmoil. Just as her prediction, Annelies never gets a chance to see her loved ones again, for she soon dies in the Netherlands.

CONCLUSION

The study, in light of Bowlby's attachment theory, compares two pairs of concubine mothers and daughters. It contends the concubine mothers' different intersectional experiences, An-mei's mother living in a feudal and patriarchal society while Nyai in a patriarchal and colonial world. By displaying how Asian women try to lead their lives, it recognizes the reality of Asian women's lives and pays tribute to Asian female subjectivity. The concubine mothers' separate experiences

lead to their contrasting methods of raising children. Anmei's concubine mother frequently provides attentive care, which validly contributes to the formation of An-mei's secure attachment pattern. However, Nyai demonstrates limited protection, resulting in Annelies's anxious-resistant attachment pattern. In the process of the daughters developing individual personalities, their attachment patterns function as a vehicle to empower or dis-empower them. An-mei develops a positive personality with an excellent ego-control and a flexible ego-resilience, which greatly benefits her future life. On the contrary, Annelies's negative personality is characterized by unpredictable actions and low resilience, which causes her tragic death. By investigating how the mothers' experiences and behaviours cause effect on the daughters' attachments and personalities, it reveals that history profoundly leaves its mark on more than one generation through parent-child relationship. The good ending of Anmei displays the women's power of changing life, while the sorrowful fate of Nyai losing her daughter and the family property informs one's powerlessness in the contemporary current.

The concubines represent a certain type of role in the female community. Inclusion of concubines in Asian literary studies broadens the scope of literary inquiry. By exploring the presentation of concubines in Asian texts, the understanding of the intersection of power, identity, and culture could be improved. The richness of Asian women's stories is worthy more academic attention. By selecting Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*, this study evidently acknowledges their contributions to Asian literature and Asian women's narrative.

REFERENCES

- Bahari, R. (2007). Between a Rock and a Hard Place? Interstitial Female Subjectivity in between Colonialism and Patriarchy: Women in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Tetralogy. *Indonesia*, 83, 41-77.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and Loss* (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Chintescu, M. C. (2020). Mothers and Daughters in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Joy Luck Club*. *Philologia*, 18(1), 41-50.
- Christy, A. S. (2023). The Futile Self-conflict of Annelies Mellema in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (1980). Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Katolik Soegijapranata Semarang).
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. *Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1, 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Febriani, I. D. A., Yudana, I. M., & Kertih, I. W. (2025). Human Rights Violations During Orde Baru: A Case Study of the Distribution Ban On *Bumi Manusia* Books By Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *J-CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, 4(2), 2668-2674.
- Fickle, T. (2014). American Rules and Chinese Faces: The Games of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 39(3), 68-88.
- How Amy Tan's family stories made her a storyteller*. Interview with PBS. 2017. <https://www.pbs.org/video/newshour-bookshelf-1510706441/>

- Marwan, R., Nuryatin, A., & Doyin, M. (2019). Women's Psychic Violence in the Buru Island Tetralogy by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Seloka: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 8(3), 30-36.
- Miranda, H. (2021). Social Stratification on This Earth of Mankind by Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Novel. *Acitya: Journal of Teaching and Education*, 3(2), 310-323.
- Niekerk, C. (2011). Modernity, Sexuality, and Gender in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's This Earth of Mankind (1980). In *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* (Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 77-98). Taylor & Francis Online.
- Oreiq, A., Vengadasamy, R. & Hashim, R. S. (2024). Catharsis of Migrant Mother and Daughter in Preethi Nair's Gypsy Masala. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 30(1), 65-78.
- Oreiq, A., Vengadasamy, R. & Pillai, S. (2025). The Flavours of Migration: Mother-Daughter Culinary Experiences in Preethi Nair's 100 Shades of White. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)*, 15(5), 1453-1461.
- Pattana, N. (2020). A Reflection of Parenting Styles and Impacts on Behaviours of Children in The Joy Luck Club. *Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Burapha University, 28(3), 44-66.
- Puskás, A. (2025). Encounters of Generations and Low/High cultures: Intercultural Communication in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 18(1), 12-20
- Ramli, A. J., & Aziz, S. A. (2014). Nyai in patriarchal and colonial society: A subaltern study of Nyai Ontosoroh in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Bumi Manusia. *Malay Literature*, 26(2), 182-204.
- Santari, R. D. (2023). The Portrayal of Nyai Ontosoroh Struggle in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Bumi Manusia: A Study on Socialist Feminism. *Elite Journal*, 5(1), 233-242.
- Schueller, M. J. (1992). Theorizing Ethnicity and Subjectivity: Maxine Hong Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey and Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. *Genders*, 15, 72-85.
- Sulaeman, A., & Hun, K. Y. (2023). Value Social and Moral Message Novel Bumi Manusia by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Sch Int J Linguistic Lit*, 6(3), 182-190.
- Tan, A. (1989). *The Joy Luck Club*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Teeuw, A. (1997). The Ideology of Nationalism in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Fiction. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 25(73), 252-269.
- Toer, P. (1990). *This Earth of Mankind* (M. Lane, Trans.). Penguin Books Ltd. (Original work published 1980).
- Wang, Y. (2025). The identity evolution and causes in The Joy Luck Club and Everything I Never Told You. In *Addressing Global Challenges-Exploring Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Sustainable Solutions in a Changing World* (pp. 727-736). Routledge.
- Wei, J. (2022). The Impact of the Characters' Traumatic Memories on Their Family Patterns in The Joy Luck Club. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(2), 388-394.
- Xu, B. (1994). Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 19(1), 3-18.
- Yusoff, R. A., & Raihanah, MM. (2022). Moulding Lives, Shaping Destinies: Motherhood and Nation in Celestial Bodies by Jokha Alharthi and A Golden Age by Tahmima Anam. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 22(3), 196-212.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Meihua Li completed her Master of World Literature course at University Putra Malaysia in March 2023, and is currently pursuing her PhD in Postcolonial Literature in English Language at University Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research interests are science fiction and postcolonial studies.

Rohimmi Noor is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, University Putra Malaysia. His research interests include Malaysian literature in English, contemporary English literature and literary criticism.