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## The Biography and Creative Work of Amy Tan

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese American literature originated in the 1850's when the first Chinese immigrants reached America and wanted to share their experience with other people. The early Chinese works depict American history from a point of view of immigrants to the United States, using their Chinese background for comparison with the American reality.

Keywords:

Odd jobs, novels, awards and books.

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California. She is the second of three children born to Chinese immigrants John and Daisy Tan. Her father was an electrical engineer and Baptist minister who traveled to the United States in order to escape the chaos of the Chinese Civil War. Amy Tan attended Marian A. Peterson High School in Sunnyvale for one year. When she was fifteen years old, her father and older brother Peter both died of brain tumors within six months of each other. Daisy subsequently moved Amy and her younger brother, John Jr., to Switzerland, where Amy finished high school at the Institution Monte Rosa, Montreux. During this period, Amy learned about her mother's previous marriage to another man in China, of their four children (a son who died as a toddler and three daughters), and how her mother left these children behind in Shanghai. This incident was the basis for Tan's first novel *The Joy Luck Club*. In 1987, Amy traveled with Daisy to China. There, Amy met her three half-sisters. Tan had a difficult relationship with her mother. At one point, Daisy held a knife to her throat and

threatened to kill her while the two were arguing over Amy's new boyfriend. Her mother wanted Tan to be independent, stressing that Tan needed to make sure she was self-sufficient. Tan later found out that her mother had three abortions while in China. Daisy often threatened to kill herself, saying that she wanted to join her mother (Tan's grandmother, who also committed suicide). She attempted suicide but never succeeded. Daisy died in 1999.

Tan and her mother did not speak for six months after Tan dropped out of the Baptist college her mother had selected for her, Linfield College in Oregon, to follow her boyfriend to San Jose City College in California. Tan met him on a blind date and married him in 1974. Tan later received bachelor's and master's degrees in English and linguistics from San Jose State University. She also participated in doctoral studies in linguistics at UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley, but abandoned her doctoral studies in 1976.

While in school, Tan worked odd jobs—serving as a switchboard operator, carhop,

bartender, and pizza maker—before starting a writing career. As a freelance business writer, she worked on projects for AT&T, IBM, Bank of America, and Pacific Bell, writing under non-Chinese-sounding pseudonyms.

While Tan was studying at Berkeley, her roommate was murdered, and Tan had to identify the body. The incident left her temporarily mute. She claimed that every year for ten years, on the day she identified the body, she lost her voice.

In 1998, Tan contracted Lyme disease, which went misdiagnosed for a few years. As a result, she suffers complications like epileptic seizures. Tan co-founded Lyme Aid 4 Kids, which helps uninsured children pay for treatment. She wrote about her life with Lyme disease in *The New York Times*.

Tan also suffers from depression, for which she takes antidepressants. Part of the reason that Tan chose not to have children was a fear that she would pass on a genetic legacy of mental instability - her maternal grandmother committed suicide, her mother threatened suicide often, and she herself has struggled with suicidal ideation.

Tan resides in San Francisco, California, with her husband in a house they designed "to feel open and airy, like a tree house, but also to be a place where we could live comfortably into old age" with accessibility features. Tan has recently taken up drawing and has shared her art on social media.

Tan's first novel, *"The Joy Luck Club"*, consists of sixteen related stories about the experiences of four Chinese American mother-daughter pairs. Tan's second novel, *"The Kitchen God's Wife"*, also focuses on the relationship between an immigrant Chinese mother and her American-born daughter. Tan's third novel, *"The Hundred Secret Senses"*, was a departure from the first two novels, in focusing on the relationships between sisters. Tan's fourth novel, *"The Bonesetter's Daughter"*, returns to the theme of an immigrant Chinese woman and her American-born daughter.

Tan's work has been adapted into several different forms of media. *"The Joy Luck Club"* was adapted into a play in 1993; that same year, director Wayne Wang adapted the book into a

film. *"The Bonesetter's Daughter"* was adapted into an opera in 2008. Tan's children's book *"Sagwa"*, *"The Chinese Siamese Cat"* was adapted into a PBS animated television show.

#### **Short stories:**

*"Fish Cheeks"* (1987)

#### **Novels:**

*"The Joy Luck Club"* (1989)

*"The Kitchen God's Wife"* (1991)

*"The Hundred Secret Senses"* (1995)

*"The Bonesetter's Daughter"* (2001)

*"Saving Fish from Drowning"* (2005)

*"The Valley of Amazement"* (2013)

#### **Children's books:**

*"The Moon Lady"*, illustrated by Gretchen Schields (1992)

*"Sagwa"*, *"The Chinese Siamese Cat"*, illustrated by Gretchen Schields (1994)

#### **Non-fiction:**

Mid-Life Confidential: *"The Rock Bottom Reminders"* Tour America With Three Chords and an Attitude (with Dave Barry, Stephen King, Tabitha King, Barbara Kingsolver) (1994)

*"Mother"* (with Maya Angelou, Mary Higgins Clark) (1996)

*"The Best American Short Stories"* 1999 (Editor, with Katrina Kenison) (1999)

*"The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings"* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2003, ISBN 9780399150746)

*"Hard Listening"*, co-authored in July 2013, an interactive eBook about her participation in a writer/musician band, *"The Rock Bottom Reminders"*. Published by Colloquy, LLC.[27]

Where the Past Begins: *"A Writer's Memoir"*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 2017, ISBN 9780062319296 )

#### **Awards:**

1989, Finalist National Book Award for *"The Joy Luck Club"*

1989, Finalist National Book Critics Circle Award for *"The Joy Luck Club"*

Finalist Los Angeles Times Fiction Prize

Bay Area Book Reviewers Award

Commonwealth Gold Award

American Library Association's Notable Books

American Library Association's Best Book for Young Adults

2005-2006,

Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature  
 Honorable Mention for Saving Fish From  
 Drowning  
 "The Joy Luck Club" selected for the National  
 Endowment for the Arts' Big Read  
 New York Times Notable Book  
 Booklist Editors Choice  
 Finalist for the Orange Prize  
 Nominated for the Orange Prize  
 Nominated for the International Dublin Literary  
 Award  
 Audie Award: Best Non-fiction, Abridged  
 Parents' Choice Award, Best Television Program  
 for Children  
 Shortlisted British Academy of Film and  
 Television Arts award, best screenplay  
 adaptation  
 Shortlisted WGA Award, best screenplay  
 adaptation  
 1996, Academy of Achievement, Golden Plate  
 Award

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