

## The Joy Luck Club (1993)

**Directed by** Wayne Wang **Writing credits** Amy Tan (novel) Amy Tan (screenplay)  
**Genre:** Drama **Runtime:** 139 min **Country:** USA **Language:** English / Mandarin / Cantonese

**Plot Outline:** Based on Amy Tan's 1989 best-selling novel of the same name, the movie explores eight women, four born in China and their four American-born daughters. The Joy Luck Club is the older women's weekly mah jong gathering. Despite their astonishing histories in pre-revolutionary China, the conversations focus on their comfortable lives and families in San Francisco. Though unspoken, events from earlier days affect the ability of the mothers to relate to their daughters. The Asian-American children think they are very different from their parents but in fact are deeply affected by their experiences and their common culture. This story is not only about Asian-American families but the way in which any parent's hopes can become both a restraint and an inspiration to their children.

### Discussion:

1. Which of the main female characters (the "aunties" and their daughters) do you find most interesting and why?
2. Which of the male characters is most memorable?
3. Which scene in the film did you find most interesting?
4. In part, the film is about the "generation gap". Can you see any similarities between the daughters' relationships with their mothers and your own family relationships?
5. Do you think that the film **stereotypes** Chinese people in any way? If so, how?
6. Does the film show immigrant life in an optimistic or pessimistic light, overall?
8. Read out the quotations below and discuss your reactions to them.
7. Suggest a different title for the film.
9. In your group, agree on a rating for the film (0 stars minimum - 10 stars maximum).

### Quotations from the film :

*June (Age 9)* You want me to be someone I'm not. I'll never be the kind of daughter that you want me to be.

*Suyuan* . Only two kinds of daughter: obedient or follow-own-mind. Only one kind of daughter could live in this house: obedient kind.

*June (Age 9)* Then I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mom.

*Suyuan* Too late to change this.

*Lindo (age 15) before seeing her husband for the first time.* I have prayed to the gods many days for you, so that you were not too ugly or too old. *(She sees her husband and realizes he is a boy.)* I must have prayed too hard.

*Waverly (Age 6-9)* I've decided to play chess again.

*Lindo* You think it is so easy. One day quit, next day play. Everything for you is this way: so smart, so easy, so fast. Not so easy anymore.

*Waverly* What she said, it was like a curse. This power I had, this belief in myself, I could actually feel it draining away. I could feel myself becoming ordinary. All the secrets I once saw, I couldn't see them anymore. All I could see was my mistakes,

my weaknesses. The best part of me just disappeared. But I can't put it all on my mother. I did it to myself. I never played chess again.

*Waverly* Mom, why don't you like Rich?

*Lindo* Is Rich you afraid I not like? If I don't like your Rich, I act polite, say nothing, let him have big cancer, let my daughter be a widow. I like Rich, of course I do. To allow him to marry such a daughter!

*Waverly* You don't know, you don't know the power you have over me. One word from you, one look, and I'm four years old again, crying myself to sleep, because nothing I do can ever, ever please you.

*Ying Ying* All around this house I see the signs. My daughter looks but she does not see. This is a house that will break into pieces. It's not too late. All my pains, my regrets, I will gather them together. My daughter will hear me calling, even though I've said no words. She will climb the stairs to find me. She will be scared because at first her eyes will see nothing. She will feel in her heart this place where she hides her fears. She will know I am waiting like a tiger in the trees, now ready to leap out and cut her spirit loose.



Amy Tan

Amy Tan was born on February 19, 1952 in California. She grew up surrounded by influences from both Chinese and American cultures. She has written about trying to assimilate into the mainstream, American world as a child, often at the expense of her Chinese heritage. Tan's father and brother died of brain tumors when she was fourteen years old. At this time, she also learned that her mother had been married to a different man in China and had three daughters from this marriage, a situation not unlike June's in **The Joy Luck Club**, her first novel.

Tan attended high school in Switzerland and went to eight different colleges, ultimately receiving a master's degree in Linguistics from San Jose State University. **The Joy Luck Club** (for which she won the L.A. Book Award and The National Book Award) was published in 1989 and became a best-seller. Tan's popularity helped expose an entire genre of literature to a broad cross section of society.

Tan has said that her intention in writing is not to provide historical information, but rather to create a work of art. Her work is generally received in this manner. Critics have said that her works are not necessarily "Chinese" in nature, but are instead stories with universal themes (generational conflicts, war of the sexes, etc.) that have an added dimension of being told through narrators that are constantly searching for a balance between their Chinese heritage and American lifestyles.