

lactational states affect the normalization of maternal behaviour, she undermines biological determinism by exploring the meanings that are socially imputed to such factors. In so doing, she casts considerable light on “why mothers experience significant stress in entering a role considered to be ‘natural’ for them.”

But although this book begins with the wholehearted conviction that the sociological influences on parenting are generally “underrated,” it ends with the halfhearted notion that men and women “*can* try to make fair choices within a less than fair social context.” Included in the final chapter is advice on how individuals can protect their relationships from the negative effects of stereotyping. I appreciated the soundness of these suggestions; however, I expected greater discussion on what might be done collectively, rather than interpersonally, to combat the increased gender differentiation that concurs with sexual reproduction.

Nonetheless, this accessible study will be an eye-opener for many new mothers and fathers who unknowingly attempt to meet both the current demands of family life—such as the need for a dual income—and the neo-Victorian expectations of parenthood. As Walzer’s analysis clearly shows, it is common for partners to profess that gender roles have changed and, at the same time, evaluate their own and their mate’s parental conduct in terms of conservative cultural ideals. Thus, the model of the ever-present mother, who indefatigably devotes her physical, emotional, and mental energy to the well-being of her children, prevails even when both partners are required to provide financially for the family. Such insights prompted me to recollect my own experiences as a new mother only to discover (to my chagrin) that I had internalized some of the same gendered cultural imagery as Walzer’s interviewees. Readers will undoubtedly find *Thinking About the Baby* not only engrossing but also illuminating.

## **In Her Mother’s House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing**

Wendy Ho  
Oxford: Altamira Press, 1999

### **Reviewed by Andrea Riesch Toepell**

*In Her Mother’s House*, by Wendy Ho, is part of the Critical Perspectives on Asian Pacific Americans Series, published by AltaMira Press. There are five other titles in this series.

*In Her Mother’s House* is subtitled *The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. This is a good description of the fairly narrow field covered

by the book. The blurb on the back cover of the book says: "*In Her Mother's House* brings Asian American women's experiences and standpoints, as mothers and daughters, to the forefront of racial-ethnic and gender debates," and this is certainly the case.

The book begins with an apparently autobiographical chapter, describing the author, her mother, and grandmother in their private environment in Honolulu, Hawaii. Having set the stage for multigenerational mother-daughter discourse, the author proceeds to an exhaustive academic analysis of three authors, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Fae Myenne Ng, although numerous others are mentioned.

The book presumes at least some familiarity with the history of China and of Chinese immigration into the U.S.A., with general feminist knowledge, and with the peculiar dynamics of immigrant families in North America, specifically the relationships between first- and second-generation immigrants. *In Her Mother's House* provides some pointers on these issues, but mainly in the context of literary criticism. A reader must know that this is a book covering mother-daughter relationships, mostly in Chinese-American families, mostly as depicted by Kingston, Tan, and Ng, while engaging in polemics with other authors about Kingston's, Tan's, and Ng's writings. Considerable attention is also given to father-daughter relationships, in the same contexts. An interesting and exhaustive discussion is devoted to the concept of "talk-story", its use and interpretation by different authors and critics.

*In Her Mother's House* confines itself to the analysis of certain literary works about mother-daughter relationships, among Americans of Chinese descent, who experience various conflicts and generational differences, and who use specific methods of communication (e.g. talk-story). However, it will be obvious to most readers that such difficulties are not unique to Chinese or Asian families. Geographical and social mobility and intergenerational differences are common experiences for many, if not most, people on this continent

*In Her Mother's House* suffers from drawbacks not uncommon to other academic texts, namely logorrhea, thesaurus abuse, and excessive neologisms. Words often are used in their second or third meanings. A good example is consistent use of the word "engage" in the sense of to "engage the enemy's forces." Ho's writing style is uneven. Her book begins with a personal, almost poetic, well-written (if not to everyone's literary taste) autobiographical section, but the style soon writing becomes ponderous, jargon- and neologism-laden.

Despite her book's difficult style, Wendy Ho obviously is an expert in her field. The author shows her erudition by frequently quoting from her extensive list of references. This book will give a persevering reader the pleasure of having come to understand a complex, if somewhat narrow, field.