Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Forming and Identity through Silence

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Spring 2006

By *David Cheuk*

Thesis Reader
Professor Dee James

Thesis Advisor
Professor Blake Hobl

David Cheuk Lit

491

Professor James 8

May 2006

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Forming an Identity through Silence

Written in 1975, Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts,* invites readers into the life of one Asian American writer. In this autobiographical work, Kingston uses the stories of five unique individual women to illustrate how the effects of race, class and gender create boundaries to victimize women. No-Name Woman, Kingston's long forgotten aunt becomes a target for violence when the village turns on her for committing adultery. Moon Orchid, Kingston's living aunt, tries to resume her marriage with her husband only to be rejected; Brave Orchid, Kingston's mother, abandons her professional career as doctor in order to assist her husband in need of financial support. Similarly, Fa Mu Lan, the mythic woman warrior, gives up national fame as a heroic figure to become a better housewife. Lastly, Kingston, herself as child struggles to find coherence in her life by re-imagining her past to construct a present identity.

Throughout *The Woman Warrior,* Kingston gradually finds her own personality by examining heavily weighted "talk-stories", stories containing the mores and values of society throughout many generations. In an article, Lok Chua Chen points out how

Kingston's ancestors first come to America in pursuit of the "American dream," referring to the state of California as "Gold Mountain" (63). Then by comparing and contrasting the stories of the four women in the story, No Name Woman, Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid, he shows how the ancestors' initial impression of America evolves with the new generation, represented through Kingston herself as a process of identity formation. These stories are relayed to Kingston through her mother, Brave Orchid. Initially convinced by the stories, Kingston grew up believing, "we [girls] failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves" *(Woman Warrior* 18). As Kingston matures, however, she recognizes a pattern of silenced women who have lived under male doctrines. Chen states, "In these four women, heroic and humiliated, imagined and empirical, Kingston has mapped out her paradigm of female identity" (65). After witnessing their silences and how it has continued to deprive these women of living complete lives, Kingston goes against her mother's stories and creates her own identity by validating the need to voice one's own opinions freely. Chen suggests by the end of the novel, Kingston, an "American Writer astride two cultures," becomes like the poetess, Tsai yen, who's marries into a foreign culture, yet remains Chinese.

Over the last decade, literary scholars of both genders, different age groups, and various ethnicities accept the works of Maxine Hong Kingston and the author herself, as an "authentic" American writer. Scholars of the past were not always as readily accepting towards some of Kingston's works. Earlier scholars, writing during the mid 1970's when the book was first published, have accused Kingston of inaccurately portraying traditional Chinese culture in addition to willfully distorting parts of history with low regard toward her Chinese-American heritage. Most notably, writer Frank Chin, as quoted by Wenxin

Li, is said to have described Kingston's novel as "pandering to white tastes". More recent scholars who have wrote on *The Woman Warrior* within the last ten years, such as Anne Anlin Cheng, and LeiLani Nishime, however, argue that Kingston's rewriting of history in her novels serves not to change history, but simply to illustrate the absurdity of race and gender roles defined for men and women throughout history.

Since *The Woman Warrior* became published, the work has generated copious amounts of some heated/some pleasant scholarly responses within the last thirty years of its publication. The majority of the criticism circulating around Kingston's works does not fit neatly into any of the defined schools of criticism. Most of Kingston's critics however, tend to analyze the author's books from a race and gender critical standpoint. Writers of this stance usually try to illustrate how race and gender are both arbitrarily construed by the dominant group in order to maintain control over those dubbed inferior. In her article, 'The Melancholy of Race," Anne Anlin Cheng refers to the notion of race and gender as somewhat of a synthetic disease that subjects people to multiple forms of unwarranted biases, what Cheng refers to as "Multisubjectivity". The whole concept of race and gender is fabricated by so called "superior beings" (i.e. whites and males) in order to suppress those who fall short of being Caucasian or male (Cheng 54). Cheng shows the devastating effects of trying to "fit in," by using Kingston's character of herself in *The Woman Warrior* as an example. In the book, as pointed out by Cheng, Kingston suffers from a lack of identity through denial of her own cultural heritage, and the yearning to assimilate to a heritage belonging to "the Other" (53). A clear example of this alienation through wanting to assimilate occurs when the child Kingston tries to replace her innate "strong and bossy," Chinese women's voice with one that is

"American-feminine," which ends her up in speech therapy *(WW*172). As Kingston continues to change her identity in order to blend in with the predominant social class, she further distances herself from society, as she becomes disenfranchised by those she chose to reject, her own, and by those who refuse her, the ones she yearns to be a part of.

In her article, "The Poetics of Liminality and Misidentification: Winnifred Eaton's *Me* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior,"* Katherine Hyunmi Lee, also writing from a race and gender viewpoint, comments on the detrimental effects of having to lead one's life through predefined race and gender roles. Kingston, who is marginalized by both the Chinese for being a woman and also by Americans for being Chinese, becomes increasingly dislocated both inside and out the realm of her works (Lee 27). For example, as child, Kingston was taught by her mother, the difference between them and the "ghosts". These ghosts consisted of anyone whose origin was different from the family's native village in China. As a result, Kingston grew up believing there was a possibility of getting "sent back to China," if she revealed the family's immigration secrets to the wrong person, particularly her sixth grade American teacher *(WW* 183). Simultaneously, Kingston battled off anti-female resentment from her second cousins' great grandfather, who often shouted obscenities at the girls calling them "Maggots!" while they all joined at the dinner table *(WW9).* All in all, however, Kingston manages to overcome the hatred geared towards Chinese women. Lee asserts, by representing a Chinese woman as a role model of strength and appropriating a Chinese story as a source for identifying race and gender, Kingston undermines the dominant portrayal of men often times found in Western narratives (25). Lee contrasts Kingston's real-life battle of trying to unite both North America and Asia similar with the author's retelling of the Fa

Mu Lan myth in "White Tigers". The former, like trying to win a constant battle with no clear enemy, becomes stark in comparison to the latter, in which the villains are easily identifiable and receive their just rewards in the end (Lee 27). In Kingston's case, when dealing with issues pertaining to race and gender, there is no clear enemy. For example, after learning one thing from school and hearing another through her mother's stories, Kingston admits it is difficult to differentiate "what's real and what you make up" *(WW* 202). In addition, this confusion becomes apparent when Kingston believes her mother had cut her frenum in order to keep her silent, as opposed to her mother's intention, which was to help her speak freely *(WW2Q2).*

On similar note, adding to the heated debate on issues of race and gender within Kingston's novel, Linda Hunt, in, '"I Could Not Figure Out What Was My Village': Gender Vs. Ethnicity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior"* proposes that women of societies from which we have written literature tend to be at odds with themselves while living under male dominance. This can be seen in *The Woman Warrior,* as the protagonist, neither part of the dominant race nor class, struggles to resolve the war within (Hunt 6). With Kingston, this internal conflict exacerbates as the Chinese culture praises social cohesion, while simultaneously labeling the female sex as "maggots," or "slaves" (Hunt 6). As a result, Hunt explains how the young Kingston becomes silenced throughout most of the text unsure how to use the right words to support her own point of view, caught between two dissimilar perspectives (11).

Further commenting on the double-bind minority women writers must face once a work is published and obtains scholarly attention, Hsiao-Hung Chang, writing from a feminist stance examines the methods of manipulating power to perpetuate male

dominance in order to achieve female subordination. In his article, "Gender Crossing in Maxine Hong Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey" Chang discusses how these women become the central target of ethnic and gender oppressions, having to wrestle with notions of masculinity and femininity from both Asian and Western cultures. For Kingston, this oppression came in the form of having to battle severe attacks from male writers within her ethnic group. Men who accused her of "catering to white tastes" exoticizing the Chinese culture invoking racial stereotypes; men who blame Kingston for inaccurately portraying traditional Chinese culture while willfully distorting parts of history out of ignorance (Chang 19). One male critic, Frank Chin, is identified not only by Chang but numerous other writers, as Kingston's foremost adversary.

Despite the majority of the recent critical conversation surrounding *The Woman Warrior* in light of race and gender issues, writers such as Hsiao-Hung Chang, writing from a feminist stance, talks about the double bind minority women writers must face, once a work is published and obtains scholarly attention. In Elliot Shapiro's article, Shapiro refutes the old notion set in place by Frank Chin, who claims Kingston taints with Chinese history in her works. Shapiro adds, Kingston writes not from the viewpoint of a Chinese-American, but on her own terms, "authentically American" Shapiro uses a historical approach to answer some of the very same questions previous critics were labeling as race and gender related issues. A more recent scholar who's disapproving of Kingston's work, Yuan Shu, writing from historical/post-colonial school of criticism, argues that Kingston's representation of the villagers in the story, "No Name Woman" as "mischievous, inhuman, and irrational" fuels Orientalist discourses with a confirmation of white stereotypes (203). Rufus Cook writes from a structuralist stance in his article on

how Kingston usually tells a story from two different cultural perspectives in order to show the pros and cons of both cultures. Writer, Ya Jie Zhang writes in a personal response paper on how Kingston's novel sort of grows on a reader. At first, Zhang describes she was taken aback by the author's revolting portrayal of the Chinese villagers in "No Name Woman". She then, realizes like many of the scholars who have come before her, such as Shapiro that Kingston writes not for an audience, but through personal experience. However, the scholar I found, whose article and thesis most resonated with my own was Lok Chua Chen's article, '"Two Chinese Versions of the American Dream: The Golden Mountain in Lin Yutang and Maxine Hong Kingston". In this article, Chen discusses how Kingston develops her own identity through personal experience. In a comparative analysis between Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* King Kok Cheung's article further runs parallel to my own, in which she states how both protagonists in the stories develop articulation skills through many years of remaining silent.

Kingston's telling of No Name Woman's story after "fifty years of neglect," signifies the absurdity of it all and how the villager's beliefs have continued to plague the aunt long after her death. The story takes place long ago in a village back in Kingston's native land of China and talks about the persecution of one of Kingston's aunt, who supposedly commits adultery. Kingston presents two strong arguments on behalf of her aunt: one, her aunt lived a predestined life, and two, if her aunt acted out of lust, she should not be held accountable for her actions considering the husband first breaches the marriage contract. In a time when women's subservience to men seems natural, Kingston believes the villagers wrongfully convict her aunt of adultery; the author suggests

because the two men, "gave orders: she followed" *(WW7).* In addition, Kingston adds, "[her aunt] had almost forgotten what he [her husband] looked like," a result of sharing a diminutive amount of time with her husband before he departs for America *(WW7).* This critical piece of information shows the brevity of their relationship, if it even qualifies as being called a relationship. Kingston questions the validity of the whole ordeal and whether No Name Woman's moving on with her life, should have even been considered as infidelity.

The vivid account of No Name Woman's tale and the injustice arbitrarily brought on to her has clearly instilled her the haunting memory within Kingston. The haunting opening lines alone, as Brave Orchid tells the child Kingston, "You must not tell anyone, what I'm about to tell you," creates a serious tone and mood that immediately the lines to follow do not seem to be appropriate for a child to be hearing *(WW3)* This sentence serves two purposes: one, it shows Kingston's contemporary beliefs on woman's free speech, and two, it demonstrates the tacit role society continues to delegate to women throughout history. The aunt's unspoken nature speaks most clearly throughout the pregnancy process, as she conceives a child for a second man in "silent birth," trying to keep the man's identity concealed. Her devotion towards protecting this man's life, trying to keep her pregnancy a secret from all else, astonishes Kingston, who asserts it was he who helped "organized the [village] raid against her" *(WW7).* Furthermore, Kingston believes the death relates to her aunt's loyalty to her family as well. By taking her own life, stifles any shame brought onto her family. In return, the family repays the daughter by disregarding her existence after her death; hence, nobody knows her real name. Kingston does believe, however, that her aunt committed a "spiteful death," by plugging

up the family well *(WW* 11). If this were the case, the aunt would not be the obedient woman as she's portrayed to be. Kingston expresses the harshness and absurdity of the reaction of the both the villagers and of No Name Woman's family towards the whole ordeal. As a result, the family's willingness to accept the villager's subjective views of marital life, enough to turn against their own daughter, illustrates the dangerous and overbearing influence of the patriarchal system and its grasp over the entire group of people.

In an article titled, "Cultural Politics and Chinese American Female Subjectivity: Rethinking Kingston's Women Warrior, Yuan Shu offers a different explanation for the grounds of No Name Woman's tragedy which could be directly related to Chinese feudalism as asserted by Kinston, or it could also be in correlation to Western colonialism and US institutional racism (203). From this historical/post-colonial school of criticism, writers have a tendency to look at cultural behavior and expression in relation to the colonized. Shu argues that Kingston's representation of the villagers in the story, "No Name Woman" as "mischievous, inhuman, and irrational" fuels Orientalist discourses with a confirmation of white stereotypes (203). In so doing, Kingston ignores the broader historical aspect of the situation, in which Chinese laborers and their family members were separated in relation to the US history of exclusion (Shu 203). Shu also points out how not only did these exclusion acts prevent laborers from leaving and entering the US freely, but also forbade women from joining their husbands. Shu argues, when uniformed readers take in Kingston's works as an authentic representation of Chinese patriarchal culture and society, China is view as misogynistic and irrational, while issues that need to be addressed, such as US institutional racism is overlooked.

Sharing a similar fate, Moon Orchid, who should be glad to be alive and not stoned to death by the villagers, as put by her husband, lives a life deprived of a voice *(WW* 153). In this story, Brave Orchid, summons her younger sister, Moon Orchid, all the way from China to America to reclaim her bigamously remarried husband. Brave Orchid's persistence in trying to force her younger sister back into her husband's life represents ignorance, a fixation with attempting to use methods from the old country and applying them in America. While Brave Orchid's logic may seem outdated, her sister's personality in general, appears old-fashioned. Immediately after arriving in America, Moon Orchid becomes a nuisance to the child Kingston and her and her older brother, probing into their lives trying to "figure them out" *(WW* 140). This "fascination," Moon Orchid exhibits towards the children's lives add to the vibrant nature and eagerness of her character's passion to attain knowledge. However, we see this curiosity for life disposition slowly begin to deteriorate shortly after her confrontation with her husband. Instead of offering his wife a warm welcome into this new country, the husband tells her she reminds him of, "people in a book," he had once read about long ago *(WW* 154). From that day forward, Moon Orchid, who could not "endure the heat," *(WW* 142) in the laundry when put to work, nor connect with Brave Orchid's "antisocial and secretive," *(WW* 128) children, nor "have the hardness," *(WW154)* for America as told by her husband, keeps to herself not long before crumbling under the pressure of fitting in. The identical parallels between Moon Orchid's tale and No Name Woman's account suggest if No Name Woman lived life according to societal standards, she then would encounter a similar inequitable fate.

It is important to note, however, that Moon Orchid's mental instability reflects not just that one major occurrence between her and her husband, which probably put her over the edge, but also many years of keeping silent. Kingston describes the routine she and her husband engaged in for many years, which helps sustain their long distance relationship:

Moon Orchid did not say anything. For thirty years she had been receiving money from him from America. But she never told him that she wanted to come to the United States. She waited for him to suggest it, but he never did *(WW* 124). This passage describing Moon Orchid's passive personality mirrors almost identically that of No Name Woman's. Moon Orchid, a woman who yearns to come to America, yet, in fear, refuses to speak up for what she desires. Her husband's act of sending money home to China operates to justify his absence from the household. In contrast to No Name Woman's story, this story, involves a man, who leaves his wife in China and finds a new wife in America. The inconsistency between the two stories occurs when we find the villagers do not condemn him for his unsuitable actions nor does his exploit bring disgrace upon his family living back home. Therefore, by juxtaposing the two stories, Kingston comments on the biased nature of societal values.

From the experiences of these two different women, Moon Orchid and No Name Woman, a pattern of silence develops early on in Kingston's own childhood. In "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," schooling becomes a process of identity formation or exclusion, an experience of fighting for individual identity and facing the pressure to assimilate. At the American school, Kingston and other Chinese-Americans play silent roles, trying desperately to not be called out for their lack of English skills. As Kingston

says, "When I first went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent" *(WW*165). Since then, Kingston still feels "a dumbness - a shame," that haunts her even till this day, causing her voice to crack "in front of the check-out counter," or when asking directions of a bus driver *(WW* 165). As Kingston matures in the story, the author begins to notice the detrimental effect and its pattern of keeping silent as illustrated when she tries to help a girl in her school find her own voice. In an intense scene, Kingston tries to get the silent girl to open up:

> You're going to pay for this. I want to know why. And you're going to tell me why. You don't see I'm trying to help you out, do you? Do you want to be like this, dumb (do you know what dumb means?) your whole life? Don't you ever want to be cheerleader? Or a pompon girl? What are you going to do for a living? Yeah, you're going to have to work because you can't be a housewife. And you, you are a plant. Do you know that? That's all you are if you don't talk. If you don't talk, you can't have a personality. You'll have no personality no hair. You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain. You think somebody is going to take care of you all your stupid life? You think you'll always have your big sister? You think somebody's going to marry you, is that it? Well, you're not the type that gets dates, let alone gets married. Nobody's going to notice you. And you have to talk for interviews, speak right up in front of the boss. Don't you know that? You're so dumb. Why do I waste my time on you? (0W180)

From this life changing moment, Kingston exhibits an urgency to reach out and help this girl who's reserved demeanor reminds the author so much of her two late aunts. The

sheer length of the dialogue represents the prolonged time Kingston remained to herself, suppressing and bottling up all this anguish and torment inside. As a result of many years being deprived of a voice, when Kingston does find her own voice, loud and clear, it pours out from within. Kingston's repetitive use of the word, "you," seems as if the author directly tries to communicate with or in a sense help the reader overcome his/her fears of learning to speak out in public. When Kingston asks the young girl, "You think you'll always have your big sister?" she is reminded of the close sibling relationship shared between her own mother and her aunt, and how even their strong familial bond in the end could not withstand the forces of female suppression. Shortly after this confrontation, Kingston develops a "mysterious illness," which leaves her bedridden for eighteen months (flW 182). After Kingston's recovery, we see a new Kingston who learns how to speak up for herself and do away with silent roles altogether.

After finding her parents are undisturbed by the Chinese boy who frequents the Laundromat with his stack of pornography magazines, Kingston summons the courage to speak out to her parents (1W201). Kingston believes her parents' acceptance of the boy indicates their grand plan to wed him with their daughter. At this moment, Kingston decides she can no longer remain silent, questioning every bit of knowledge she has acquired from her parents. In this second outburst of suppressed emotional feelings, Kingston tells her mother:

> I know what you're up to.. .If I see him here one more time, I'm going away. I'm going away anyway. I am. Do you hear me? I may be ugly and clumsy, but one thing I'm not, I'm not retarded.. .They tell me I'm smart, I can win scholarships. I can get into colleges. I've already applied. I'm smart. I can do all kinds of things.

I know how to get A's, and they say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself. (HW201) In this passage, the overuse of the word, "I" suggests Kingston's coming to terms or accepting of the individual self, the individual she once was incapable of speaking about. As Kingston's first grade experience would explain, Kingston did not always find speaking to be done so easily. For the longest time, Kingston wrestled with the fact that the English "I" is made up of three strokes, as opposed to the Chinese "I" composed of seven "intricate" strokes *(WW*166). The "I" in its singular form becomes seldom used in a Chinese society that values community; therefore, it becomes comprehensible that a first grader, who was brought up on Chinese values, would become silent and intimidated when encountered with the letter *(WW* 166). Once again, the writing style of this passage reads like an essay or argument a motivational speaker may present to win a group of people over to his/her own side. In this case, Kingston speaks to encourage the victims of race, class or gender oppression, leading the group to the light at the end of the tunnel. In contrast to her fictitious character of the woman warrior in "White Tigers," what Kingston lacks in strength she makes up for in poetic verse. King Kok Cheung, asserts in, "Don't Tell: Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior, "* that we see in both main characters, Alice Walker's Celie and Kingston a development in articulation skills. Cheung shows many of the parallels between the stories, such as the protagonists both having silence imposed on them in the beginning of the text. The stepfather threatens Celie telling her, "You better not never tell anyone but God. It'd kill your mammy." With Kingston, the mother tells her, "You must not tell anyone..." (Cheung 162). Although, the characters initially keep silent, they communicate through

writing. It is not long before both writers gain confidence through their writing, "transforming from victims to victors," enabling them to articulate their thoughts through speech (Cheung 7). By the end of the stories, the two women take charge of their lives, yet maintain their individual identity by retaining their own unique "distinctive voices" (Cheung 11).

This newly discovered self speaks most boldly nearing the end of the autobiographical novel. In "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," after recovering from a mysterious illness, Kingston finds an overwhelming need to inform her mother of the disgust she has had to live with because of being a woman. With a list of over two hundred secrets contained within since a child, Kingston finds courage to confront her mother to reveal all hoping this would, "stop the pain in my throat" *(WW* 197). This specific targeting of her mother signifies the toughest obstacle of her life. It becomes no surprise that Kingston's mother, the most influential and at the same time feared figure, who managed to manifest every aspect of Kingston's life becomes the "unidentifiable enemy" who has kept Kingston from finding her identity. Kingston's early identity is comprised from one of two sources: A) the American education system, and B) her mother through Chinese talk-stories.

One such talk-story, Kingston's retelling of the mythic tale, Fa Mu Lan, the woman warrior who rescues the Han people by reclaiming harvests taken from thieves and bandits, represents what all women should aspire to become. The story, as told through a first person perspective, re-imagines the ancient tale as Kingston re-writes herself as the woman warrior. Throughout this journey of self-discovery, the woman warrior must learn a series of virtues. Interesting enough, the first thing the old woman,

who trains Fa Mu Lan, tells her to learn, "is how to be quiet" *(WW* 23). Considering Brave Orchid passes this tale onto Kingston, the prime virtue being the code of silence coheres with what is expected of a woman. Consequently, the outcome by the end of the tale when Fa Mu Lan tells the parents-in-law, "Now my public duties are finished.. .1 will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons," does not come as a shock *(WW* 45). This portrayal of the woman warrior returning to obedience to her husband only reinforces what values Brave Orchid would like Kingston to take from the story.

In a sense, Brave Orchid's life journey could be looked upon as a talk story to educate Kingston. In this description of her mother, Kingston describes her mother's process of attaining a medical degree, "She had gone away ordinary and come back miraculously like the ancient magicians who came down from the mountains" *(WW16).* The notion of going away ordinary and returning with magical powers resembles the journey the woman warrior makes in order to rescue her country. The author's comparison between her mother and the woman warrior, illustrates the high regard, in which she holds her mother and her achievements in life. After coming to America to help her husband raise their family, for many years picking tomatoes, and washing clothes in a Laundromat, Brave Orchid tells Kingston, "You have no idea how much I have fallen coming to America" *(WWII}.* Once again, this notion of putting a much desired life behind for the sake of traditional marriage runs parallel to the woman warrior's tale as she gives up the fame, glory, and heroic title of a nation's heroine, in order to fulfill her role as housewife. In addition, Brave Orchid's tale represents the

paradigmatic faithful woman, who should always be ready, both hands and feet to serve her man.

As the story closes, we're presented with a self-assured Kingston, who after many years being silenced, afraid of never getting the opportunity to "get off the ground.. .never get to fly," begins to lift off (Kinston 96). Kingston tells readers, "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (WW 206). In saying this, Kingston no longer fears her mother's talk stories; stories that have once silenced her as a child, now serve as an instrument for self expression. Like the poetess Tsai Yen, who is silenced among her family members, yet able to move on, Kingston becomes the literary woman warrior as she adapts her mother's talk stories. In his article entitled, "Authentic Watermelon: Maxine Hong Kingston's American Novel" Shapiro reexamines some of Kingston's earlier critiques on America's historical exclusion of women and minorities from narratives of "high culture," and the imperialist appropriations and violence against non-white "Others" (8). For these reasons, Kingston is said to have formed a "coalition of many voices" against the repeated repression of minorities throughout history (Shapiro 14).

In a Reader Response article, "A Chinese Woman's Response To Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior, "* Chinese writer, Ya Jie Zhang, comments on how the novel sort of grows on you. Zhang's initial response to the book was:

> It did not appeal to me when I read it for the first time, because the stories in it seemed somewhat twisted, Chinese perhaps in origin but not really Chinese anymore, full of American imagination. Furthermore, some of Kingston's remarks

> offended my sense of national pride as well as my idea of personal discretion. (Zhang 103).

Sharing similar views with Kingston's chief opposed critic, Frank Chin, Zhang agrees in that both writers find the Chinese American's novel sort of betray their Chinese race. Also, the last line presented in the preceding argument shows some commonality between Zhang and Shu's views on how Kingston's inhumane portrayal of the Chinese community could be misread by uniformed readers. Zhang admits that after first reading the novel, she became upset with the author's misrepresentation of many aspects pertaining to the Chinese culture, such as Kingston making the claim, "the Chinese are too loud" (103). It is not until a reread and a reevaluation of the book that enables Zhang to realize the author's implied intention. After seeing how Kingston integrates, "the old culture as well as the new," to form her own identity, Zhang, like many other critics who have come across Kingston's novel, is able to overlook cultural blocks in the novel finding, "it is, after all, an American story, not a Chinese one" (104).

Part of finding her own identity in *The Woman Warrior* had a lot to do with reconciling her differences between her Chinese and American heritage and finding a middle ground where the two could intertwine peacefully. This theme of merging the East and West, however, is not new to the American literary tradition. Many Asian-American female writers who have come before Kingston have illustrated this theme within their works. One well-known writer, Amy Tan uses the subject liberally in her novel, *The Joy Luck Club* as the work seems to revolve around the idea of assimilating the two cultures. A common aspect in both novels is how Chinese children spend their most of their childhood wanting to escape their Chinese identities. For example, like

Kingston who compromises her Chinese voice by speaking softly trying to mimic the way the America kids speak, in *Joy Luck Club*, Lena walks around the house, purposefully widening her eyes to make herself look more like the American kids at school. In the end, however, the girls both understand that they will always be part of their Chinese heritage. Lena grows up wanting to learn more about the other half of her identity in order to feel a sense of completeness. And Kingston starts to tell the very same Chinese talk-stories, she once hated with a passion. Instead of telling the stories in a manner that reinforced the coercion of women in inferior roles, Kingston, adding an American twist instead uses the stories to empower women.

Works Cited

Chang, Hsiao-Hung. "Gender Crossing in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey."* MELUS 22.1(1997): 15-34. Chen, Lok Chua. "Two Chinese Versions of the American Dream: The Golden Mountain in Lin Yutang and Maxine Hong Kingston." MELUS 8.4 (1981): 61-70.

Cheng, Anne Anlin. "The Melancholy of Race." The Kenyon Review. Gambier 19.1 (1997): 49-13. Cheung, King Kok. "Don't Tell: Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior. "* PMLA 103.2 (1988): 162-174. Cook, Rufus. "Cross-Cultural Wordplay in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior."* MELUS 22.4 (1997): 133-146. Hunt, Linda. "I Could Not Figure Out What Was My Village": Gender Vs. Ethnicity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior. "* MELUS 12.3 (1985): 5-12.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*. New York: Random House, 1989.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers." Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston. New York: G. K. Hall & Co.. 1998. 95-103. Li, Wenxin. "Review on Cynthia Wong, ed. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: A Casebook:'* RMMLA. 28 Oct. 2004. 5 May 2006. < http://rmmla.wsu.edu/old/54. l/reviews/li.html> Lee, Katherine Hyunmi. "The Poetics of Liminality and Misidentification: Winnifred Eaton's *Me* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior"* Studies in the Literary Imagination. (Atlanta) 37.1 (2004) 17-34.

Shapiro, Elliott H. "Authentic Watermelon: Maxine Hong Kingston's American Novel." MELUSCLos Angeles) 26:1 (2001): 5-28. Yuan, Shu. "Cultural Politics and Chinese American Female Subjectivity: Rethinking Kingston's *Woman Warrior."* MELUS (Univ. of Southern California, Los Angeles) 26.2 (2001): 199-223. Zhang, Ya Jie. "A Chinese Woman's Response to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior. "* Melus 13.3 (1986): 103-107.