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The Narrator's Revolting Sprit in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*

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This thesis entitled "The Narrator's Revolting Spirit in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Renuka Shah has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The Woman Warrior by Hong Kingston tends to display the fragile condition of the Chinese immigrants, especially that of the women in America. Through the help of mythical characters like Fa Mu Lan, Kingston seems to have drawn a picture of the Chinese superstitions and unfair prejudices practiced in the Chinese culture. In the meantime she has equally emphasized the behaviors shown to the first generation Chinese immigrants in America. Her endless efforts in presenting the cultural clashes and gender discriminations seem to have been much remarkable in the text, *The Woman Warrior*. Furthermore, the contrastive nature of women grown in two different cultures, i.e. Chinese and American, seems to be equally significant in this concern. Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid are contrastive in nature. Brave is bold and revolting whereas Moon is submissive and fragile. The very situation may vary due to the cultures' distinct structures, norms and values. Her way of presenting typical and exemplary characters such as Fa Mu Lan, No Name Woman, Brave Orchid, Moon Orchid and others discloses her own intrinsic character that she has been revolting against both Chinese social superstitions that is of knotting the tongue of female children and American white people's biased behaviors in terms of race, culture and gender. This thesis is totally directed to justify the fact how the narrator has expressed her revolutionary spirit throughout the text.

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I. Introduction

Kingston and her Works

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in Stockton, California, in 1940. She is the eldest of six surviving children of Tom Hong and Ying Lan Chew. She earned a B. A. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1962 and a teaching certificate in 1965. She has lived and worked both in California and in Honolulu, Hawaii. As the author of three award-winning books, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), and *Trip Master Monkey* (1989), Kingston is undoubtedly one of the most recognized Asian American writers today. Her works attract attention from many areas: Chinese American, feminist scholars, literary critics, and the media. In 1977, Kingston won the Mademoiselle Magazine Award, and in 1978 the Anisfield Wolf Race Relation Award. In 1980 she was proclaimed living Treasure of Hawaii. *The Woman Warrior* received the National Book Critics Award for the best book of nonfiction in 1976, and Time Magazine proclaimed it one of the top ten nonfiction works of the decade. It is however, a collage of fiction and fact, memory and imagination: a hybrid genre of Kingston's own devising. Through the Chinese legends and family stories that marked her childhood and the mysterious old customs, Kingston enriches her texts. With Kingston's own experiences and her imaginative and poetic flights, *The Woman Warrior* details the complexities and difficulties in Kingston's development as a woman and as a Chinese American. It focuses on a difficult but finally reconciled mother/daughter relationship.

Kingston's second book, *China Men*, focuses on men and is shaped by a rather uncommunicative father/daughter relationship. It depends heavily on family history, American laws, and imaginative projections based loosely on historical facts. Its purpose, Kingston has stated, is to 'claim America' for Chinese Americans by

showing how indebted American is to the labor of Chinese men. Her great grandfather and grandfathers, who cleared jungle for the sugar plantations in Hawaii, split rock and hammered steel to build railroads in the United States, created fertile farmland out of swamp and desert, yet faced fierce discrimination and persecution.

In *Trip Master Monkey*, her first novel, Kingston again blends Chinese myth with American reality. She combines allusions to a Chinese classic *Monkey or Journey to the West*, the story of a magical, mischievous monkey who accompanies a monk to India for the sacred books of Buddhism, with the life of the 1960s Berkeley Beatnik playwright.

Maxine Hong Kingston is a highly acclaimed writer of both fiction and nonfiction and was one of the first Asian Americans to make it to the top of the literary world in America. Her first book, *A Memoir* published in 1976 called *The Woman Warrior: Members of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, won the National Book Critics Award and made her a literary celebrity at the age of 36. Kingston has since written two other critically hailed books. *China Men*, a sequel to *The Woman Warrior*, was published in 1980 and also received the National Book Critics Circle Award; and in 1989 she published her first novel, *Trip Master Monkey: His Fake*.

One way to look at Kingston's major works is to regard them as different stories of growth. In *The Woman Warrior* the first person narrator explores her identity formation in relation to her mother and female relatives. Kingston's major project in *The Woman Warrior* is to avenge oppression by reporting stories about women in her family. The book opens with "No Name Woman", a story of a nameless aunt in China. This aunt, who had become a family outcast for getting pregnant out of wedlock, finally drowned herself. Brave Orchid, Kingston's mother reveals this family secret to the young Maxine on the onset of her daughter's menstruation to

caution her against sexual indiscretion. At the same time, the mother attempts to suppress this story by forbidding the daughter to repeat it. Kingston, however, reports the story as a tool of political resistance to Chinese patriarchy and repression in general. Furthermore she contrives different reasons for her aunt's pregnancy: the aunt could have been a victim of rape and patriarchy, she could also have been a passionate seductress and individualist. Through active imagination Kingston gives this aunt life and immortality in her own way.

The second section of *The Woman Warrior*, "White Tigers", is an often anthologized and discussed part of the book because of its fantastic portrayal of a female avenger. This story of the swordswoman is derived from the tale of the legendary Chinese heroine Fa Mu Lan, who substitutes for her aging father in a military conscription. In Kingston's version, the swordswoman studies martial arts from a pair of mysterious old couple and leads a peasant uprising against the tyrannous emperor. After she decapitates the misogynist baron who has exploited her village and ruined her childhood, the swordswoman renounces her masculine power and returns to the traditional roles of daughter-in-law, wife and mother. By adopting the story of an exemplary woman who has successfully balanced her roles in the public sphere, which is almost always dominated by men, and in the private sphere of home, Kingston is imagining victory over the andocentric Chinese and American traditions. Further, in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston writes of the conflicting cultural messages she received as a daughter of Chinese immigrants grown up in America in the 1950s. The book also tells the story of the generations of Chinese woman that preceded her and the weight she felt as an American trying to emerge from their stifling presence. The subtitle of the book *Memoirs of Girlhood among Ghosts*, suggests the almost fantastic tone of the text, while referring specifically to the ghosts

of Kingston's relatives and tragedy of their lives, as lived in the extremely male dominated society of China.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's concern for ethnicity and gender is evident in the way the narrative is built- up. In the text, the Chinese mythic 'talk-stories' are brought in with modern American reasoned objectivity allowing Kingston to mix fact and fiction, and comment on both the Chinese and American cultures and bring about a final reconciliation. By placing herself in the 'liminal position' she writes in the cross cultural context and manages to dovetail in both gender and cultural categories. By maintaining her psychic connection to her Chinese heritage, Kingston, in *The Woman Warrior* has made a critique of prevalent racism and sexism and attempted to reconcile two for the constitution of a harmonious multicultural society.

Kingston's next book, *China Men*, was in many ways a companion to her first. In it she explores the Chinese American experience, this time as it was felt by the men in her family.

Kingston is a highly acclaimed memoirist who integrates autobiographical elements with Asian legend and fictionalized history to delineate cultural conflicts faced by American of Chinese descent. As an American born daughter of eastern Chinese immigrant parents Kingston relates the anxiety that often results from clashes between radically different cultural sensibilities. Kingston blends her melodic and poetic story telling ability with her rich Chinese ancestry and her own cultural struggles. The result is partly autobiographical, partly fictional; masterpieces of literature that have helped recent generations discover the fullness of their own spirit.

One of Kingston's greatest strengths is her ability to weave in all sorts of other stories into the narratives, facts, essays, fables, legends, ghost-stories, scenes and reporting that all add up to a complete picture of the lives of the China men who came

to the United States. Kingston's work is difficult to place either biography or historical novel. In many places she identifies facts that she has projected from her own life into that of her ancestor's stories. In either case the text functions as a postmodern commentary on the state of Chinese Americans. Kingston shows how myths were functional parts of the lives of her ancestors, and that the myths served a purpose they helped her ancestors adapt or cope with their situation. Tony Hume states: "One of Kingston's greatest strength is her ability to weave in all sorts of other stories into the narratives, facts, essays, fables, legends, ghost-stories, scenes and reporting that all add up to a complete picture of the lives of the China men who came to the United States" (45). Hence it gets pretty clear that Kingston is a versatile writer whose focus has always been on the Chinese issues. Kingston's work is difficult to place either biography or historical novel. In many places she identifies facts that she has projected from her own life into that of her ancestor's stories.

In 1989, published her third book, *Trip Master Monkey: His Fake Book*, her first novel. The story is about a playful and highly young man who is out of college. After being fired from his job at a toy store, the irreverent Wittman turns his enormous energies to writing a contemporary epic based on an old Chinese novel. The book was a startling departure for Kingston and confused many readers.

Her book *China Men* appeared as a prose piece in *The New Yorker* in February 1980. Kingston acknowledges her debt to Gertrude Stein's *Making of Americans* in the title. In reference to Stein, Kingston grounds her work in the American tradition. Of her "artful combination of Chinese rhythms and American slang" (Brownmiller148), she says, "I am trying to write an American language that has Chinese accents...I was creating something new, but at the same time, it's still the American language, pushed further"(Rabinowitz 182).

An Indian critic, Ram Pal Sinha asserts: “*China Men* tells the stories of Kingston’s male ancestors, with the father as the central figure. Composed of eighteen chapters of varying length, it resembles *The Woman Warrior* in its collage of family stories, Chinese and Western legends and myths, Chinese and Chinese American history, fantasy, and memoirs” (43). Kingston claims that *Tripmaster Monkey*, unlike the first two books, is completely fiction. The narrative, set in San Francisco in the 1960s, focuses on the character of a Chinese American would be playwright, Wittman Ah Sing, and on his attempts to produce a Chinese American epic drama. Using the classical Chinese mythical trickster figure of Monkey, the novel introduces a number of finely imagined Chinese American characters, ranging from showgirls of the 1940s to eccentric elders. John Mary states: *Tripmaster Monkey* portrays the hip, psychedelic 1960s culture centered in Berkeley of the Free Speech Movement” (64). Modeling itself on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the novel uses strategies of realism, following a few days in the life of its hero to offer, self-consciously, an epic body of materials on Chinese American history and culture.

Kingston’s first autobiographical novel *The Woman Warrior* is structured in the service of the theme: how Kingston developed into an artist with experience and ideas she wants to share to foster social change. Structure reveals the author’s epistemology and aesthetic theory, just as content does, as she confronts memories or experiences that imply the nature of embittered reality. The narrator’s effort to explain everything so minutely shows the fact that she speaks on the behalf of the author and expresses the bitter truth regarding the behavior of the Chinese immigrants with the females in America. Furthermore, Kingston reflects the reality that is to say the feeble position of Chinese American females in comparison to the Chinese American males. She also advocates that gender is the social construct which is not biological.

Presenting the deep-rooted reality she makes the narrator a revolutionary figure. The book has been divided into five chapters: i) *No Name Woman* in which Kingston reveals her childhood, fear of Chinese violence and sexism. The very opening statement of the first chapter: “You must not tell anyone” (1), closes the mouths of the Chinese girls and inaugurates the “as it is” reality faced and tolerated by the females and we happen to observe it with our inner eyes and aching minds. A female depicts the story of another female like herself with an absolute fearful state of mind, which utterly proves the submissive nature of Chinese females. The entirely hush-hush story was told to Maxine by her own mother twenty years ago not for past-time or pleasure but as a warning. In China, a paternal aunt was rebuked by the entire community including her own family for a protruding melon of a womb though she may be a victim of rape or seduction as Kingston conjectures suicide “drowning herself in the drinking water” (19) against the response of hatred towards her. Kingston’s matured refusal to enter into the Chinese unpardonable conspiracy of silence, as a final punishment of her aunt is evident in her insistence on publishing tradition in order to protest against inhumanity.

Kingston, thus, recalls her childhood imaginatively becoming *The Woman Warrior*. Taught by archetypal male and female figures of immortal wisdom to fight for justice, *Fa Mu Lan* is made by her parents to be a fighter who instead of swords uses words, not just physical force, and skill with any weapons but magic of words to avenge family grievances. To take “revenge” in Chinese ideographs is to “report a crime” and “report to five families” (63) Kingston has unearned nostalgia and as an adult, she has chosen to batter for truth, beauty and justice through sharp verbal weapons. Actually, *The Woman Warrior* seems to be one but Kingston herself preserving the myth in her heart. To get mentally armed is necessary in order to revolt

against the counter part. Hence the Chinese American society is the counter part to the narrator along with other females.

The Woman Warrior has been criticized that it is not the authentic account of Chinese culture. *The Woman Warrior* originates in and addresses not the high culture of China but its low culture, more specifically a transplanted oral culture, of Say Yup (Cantonese) immigrants in California. In the same way, David Leiwei Li's essay "...Naming of the Chinese-American" locates *The Woman Warrior* in its cross-cultural context. Focusing on the primacy of names and pronouns in the book Li provides the Chinese Cultural information necessary to balance reading of this Chinese-American text.

Similarly, Leslie Rabine's essay in *Signs* explores Kingston's double ambivalence to her parents' Chinese culture and examines the "proliferation of gender arrangement" in *The Woman Warrior* to show how gender systems change across cultures as well as how symbolic gender and social gender change between cultures. Roberta Rubenstein's *Bridging Two Cultures* and Elaine Kim's *Visions and Fierce Dreams* analyze *The Woman Warrior* as reconciling the immigrant and American born Chinese, Kingston and her parents. As an American-born daughter of immigrants, the narrator has no direct access to Chinese realities. She must have drawn her unexplained cultural practices.

Some critics have accused Kingston of promoting a "fake" Chinese-American culture by mutilating traditional material beyond recognition.

After all *The Woman Warrior* tells the story of the protagonist's mother and is as much a story of her relationship to her mother as it is "about" the protagonist herself. Kingston, by emphasizing the social aspect of an individual identity, broadens the scope of autobiography to include the constant negotiations with different social

structures that make up the shifting ground of ethnicity. As Michael Fischer states: “Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned, it is something dynamic” (159). Ethnicity in *The Woman Warrior* can’t be understood as an individualist experience but has meaning only within a social context. It resides within a social dynamic. The book’s protagonist says “we have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhood fits into solid America” (6), ethnicity and by extension Kingston’s identity, is constantly being created through the competing discourses of the emigrant’s invisible world and solid America.

As a fact matter of fact the above numerous studies done on *The Woman Warrior* vary from the issue I proposed. Stating concretely the very sort of issue has not been explored yet. I have endeavored to analyze the text in relation to the heroic and revolting spirit prevailing in the protagonist who indeed undergoes different ups and downs psychologically, culturally, socially as well as geographically. The issue which I have raised is researchable but challenging. However, my inquisitive temperament will help deal with the issue tactfully and wisely.

II: Socio-Political Perspective

Feminism

The present stands on the ideological foundation of the past. The economic, social, religious, and philosophical perspectives of the past pave a distinct avenue for the formation of social concepts, manners, and expectations in the present. Maithreyi Krishnaraj declares: “Rejecting all tradition is neither possible nor advisable because one has to seek validation within one’s own culture and history” (27). Accordingly, women in the West and in the East tend to derive the psychological effect from the past while resisting the male-domination. Myriad culture, historical and mythological figures, various movements, and social factors account for the difference in the women’s voice against male-oppression on women.

The West has a culture of disintegration, marked by the colonial search for power and material gain. Its root has been set on the always-flowing forces, which are unable to assimilate and reconcile with one another. It was always motivated by self-benefit and self-thinking with sufficient self-confidence to obtain its destination. Consequently, it has created the type of human morality confined within the pragmatic utility and mechanistic life-style where people compete and acquire the acme of success. In the following words, S. R. Bakshi and Lipi Mahajan present a right thinking European Muslim who analyses the disintegrated western scenario:

The unfavorable result of this craving after power and pleasure is the creation of hostile armed to the teeth and determined to destroy each other whenever and whatever their respective interests come to clash. And on the cultural side the result is the creation of human type whose morality is confined to the question of practical utility alone,

and whose highest criterion of good and evil is material success.

(136)

The origin of women's voice against male-domination is a kind of political consciousness of the inferiority of women in comparison to men. Women in the West are economically and academically advanced. They have realized the undervalued position of women imprisoned within the narrow domestic world of mothering and house managing, and the biasness in the field of education and employment. As a result, they are demanding for proper place of women in the society. Nancy F. Cott examines the origin of women's movement: "Such consciousness of [...] inferiority was the first group-consciousness likely to produce a feminist movement, because it acknowledged cultural and social determinants of women's capabilities as well as divine and natural ones, and thus allowed for the possibility of change" (*The Bonds* 202). The revolutionary origin has given an impetus to the development of historical feminist figures.

Historical feminist personalities have raised a strong voice for women's liberation from the biased male-tyranny on women. Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century attempted to liberate women from male-dominating motives hidden in the emphasis of feminine features like meekness, humility, and childishness. Unraveling the bases of women socialization whereby they are taught to be feminine, Wollstonecraft indicates the fault in the process of the socialization. She detests the then false education system that inspired women to love at the expense of reason, and encouraged women to study medicine, business, and mathematics. Rosemarie Tong examines Wollstonecraft's views about women's education that they should "be provided with a real education, one that sharpens and focuses her mind and gives her a chance to develop her national and moral capacities, her full human potential" (15).

Similarly Virginia Woolf advocates for the radical change in the conception of family and social life. She refutes the traditional view about women that they are submissive, and cried for a separate space for women in literature and society because they are also independent human beings like men. Hazard Adams presents Woolf's view about women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation[...];it is narrow-mindedness in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (822)

Another historical figure, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, directs women towards useful works created by modern industry and profession. Highlighting women's capability to work in the public world, she focuses on economically beneficial occupation for women. She refutes the childcare and housework, which deprive them of opportunity and the development of their genuine potentiality. Cott speaks of Gilman: "She proposed [...] the socialization of remaining home employments such as cooking and laundry and argued that housecleaning and childcare would be better performed by specialized paid employees than by housewives and mothers not necessarily suited and not paid for the tasks" (*The Grounding 41*).

Simone de Beauvoir has brought a widespread consciousness on the part of women, pointing to the socio-historical construction of women. She contends the socialization that persuades women to be sexy and to be flesh for the mere entertainment of male ego. Rather, she creates a mentality for women to be self-

assertive and determinate to tackle with impediments, and to liberate them from the social construction of femininity. Jane Freedman says that her “distinction between biological sex and the social creation of the ‘eternal feminine’ is a precursor of the distinction between sex and gender that is common in much feminist theory” (14).

Kate Millett has further led the women’s revolution making a connection between the personal and the private world. Maggie Humm presents her remarks: “The personal is political” (195). It is by scrutinizing the personal level internally at home that we can comprehend suppression on women at broader level, and it is by addressing the collective issues related with men’s power and upper position that we can reconstruct and reform the structure, which ultimately influences women’s life at personal level. She doesn’t find any difference between the personal and the public level. The decisions made by the public sector regarding women, childcare, and family planning ultimately affect the private life of women.

Shulamith Firestone proposes a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of offspring. And males are the owners of the labor market; females are no more than the workers to the reproductive system. Oppression upon women due to the productive function is a historical act, and the emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denies the emotional attachment of parents with their children, and spoke for undoing family unit. Freedman further displays her: “Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family unit, with children being brought up by ‘households’ made up of about 10 adults, and set up to bring up children over a period of time. Children would develop no special bonds with their ‘parents’ but would instead form love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex” (70). Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on

the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity. Fundamentally, feminist theory analyzes the gender-relation of the society where patriarchal ideologies are largely prevalent. The study of gender-relation includes feminist issues as well. The feminists' pride lies in their femaleness and they have made it a vital tool to secure their existence. Evaluating the discrimination and domination upon women by patriarchal culture and society, Toril Moi writes, "Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of old political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism not simply concern for gender in literature"(204).

The radical feminists insist that the root of women's oppression and violence deep-rooted in patriarchy is sex\gender hierarchy. Cate Millett in her "*Sexual Politics*" (1970) has clarified that sex is politically motivated because the male-female relationship is determined by it. Defining 'politics' as the operation of power relation in society, Millett argues that western institutions have manipulated power to establish the domination and subordination along with subjugation of women in society. She further attacks on Freudian psychoanalytical theory for its male biasness and analyzes the fiction of D.H.Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet opining how they upgrade their aggressive 'phallic' selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects in their works.

The patriarchal society considers women's existence in relation to man, therefore men occupy the position of subject and absolute whereas women are regarded an incidental and inessential being .Rosemarie Tong quotes Mill's "*Sexual Politics*" in *Feminist Thought* regarding the male superiority in patriarchal society as:

Patriarchal ideology, according to Millett, exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always

have the dominant, or “masculine”, roles and that woman always has the subordinate, or “feminine”, ones. This ideology is particularly powerful because through conditioning, men usually secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress. They do this through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women’s subordination to men with the result that most women internalize the sense of inferiority to men. (96)

So, feminism as a political movement has harshly begun questioning the longstanding dominant, male phallo-centric ideologies in order to establish common ground on which both male and female are measured in terms of virtue not in terms of biological variations.

Elaine Showalter has entitled women’s writing and women’s culture in which she claims that women have their own sort of culture and language. They have their own types of body, the speaking style, the language, the capacity of thinking and behaving, the psyche and the males have their own. Showalter’s *A Literature of their Own: British Woman Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) describes the female literary tradition in the English novels from Bronte and onward as a development of a subculture by arguing that since women, in general, constitute a kind of subculture within the framework of a larger society, their works definitely demonstrate a unity of values, conventions, experiences and behaviors encroaching on each individual. Showalter in her analysis of historical development of feminism presents three important stages of a female literary tradition: feminine, feminist and female. The collaboration of the two contemporary feminists, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is important both for understanding present world of feminism and its historical roots. They began an extensive study of women writers and set up a feminist literary

tradition. Their influential work, *The Mad Women in the Attic* (1974), explores pressure of psychology under which females are writing. It describes several key developments in the history of women's writing. Through close biographical and textual reading of the works of female novelists-ranging from Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, and Mary Shelley to George Eliot and Emily Dickinson-this work traces the evaluation of a distinctly feminine narrative style that has come as a reaction to male dominated literary discourse prevailed in the time when these authors wrote. Gubar and Gilbert have argued that women writers grew both afraid of that they lacked the ability to express themselves artistically and angry that the patriarchal attitudes toward women trapped them in such a position. Briefly, *The Mad Women in the Attic*(1974) demonstrates that by channeling those emotions and experiences into language, the nineteenth century women writers have developed not only a uniquely feminine style, but also a language that subverts patriarchal ideology. According to M.H.Abrams, Gilbert and Gubar declare:

Purpose that the 'anxiety of authorship that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is a exclusively male prerogative, effective in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to the heroine[...]; such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (236)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that artistic creativity of the nineteenth century tradition was perceived basically as a male quality that is in fact patriarchal superimposition upon the women writers who are imprisoned within it. The verity of theoretical emergences have presently influenced feminism that brought broad concept about it which covers a wide scope and includes different aspects of humanity

despite its focus on the entire issue of women. It, now, no more remains a unitary theory. It manifests great variety of critical vantage points and procedure, including adaptations of psychoanalytic, Marxist and diverse post-structuralist theories.

Fundamentally, feminist theory analyzes the gender-relation of the society where patriarchal ideologies are largely prevalent. The study of gender-relation includes feminist issues as well. The feminists' pride lies in their femaleness and they have made it a vital tool to secure their existence. Evaluating the discrimination and domination upon women by patriarchal culture and society, Toril Moi writes, "Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of old political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism not simply concern for gender in literature" (204).

Diaspora

From the Greek meaning 'to disperse', Diaspora historically refers to the exclusively dispersion of Jewish almost 4000 years ago. Diaspora, the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into a new region, is a central historical fact of colonization. Although the concept of Diaspora has been epistemologically and semantically derived from that of dispersal experiences of those ancient Jewish people of that distant past, in the present context it has come to merge into the issues raised in postcolonial theory. Colonialism itself was a radically Diaspora movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world. Due to the wide spread effects of these migrations, continued on a global scale, many such 'settled' regions were developed historically as plantations or agricultural colonies to grow food stuffs for the metropolitan populations. A large number of slaves were shipped to the plantation colonies to supply the labor where the local population could not supply the need.

After the slave trade, and when slavery was outlawed by the European powers in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the demand for cheap agricultural labor in colonial plantation economics was met by the development of a system of indentured labor. This involved transporting, under indenture agreements, large population of poor agricultural laborer from population rich areas, such as China and India, to the areas where they were needed to service plantations. The practices of slavery and indenture thus resulted in world-wide colonial Diaspora. Analyzing the history of colonial Diaspora Ascroft writes:

Indian population formed (and form) substantial minorities or majorities in colonies as diverse as the West Indies, Malaya, Fiji, Mauritius and colonies of Eastern and Southern Africa. Chinese minorities found their way under similar circumstances to all these regions too, as well as to areas across most of South east Asia and the Spanish and later American dominated Philippines. (256)

Even during the Second World War, because of heavy casualties and disturbances in the normal lives of people, many of them fled helplessly as war victims and refugees to foreign countries; later most of them chose to settle down in foreign lands permanently-even as second class citizens- after the wars were over.

After the Second World War, formerly colonized nations such as India, Ghana, Kenya and others became politically independent from the colonial power and regime. In many countries, the national movement began with the strategies of reforming their countries after the political independence. As the nationalist movement failed in their mission, people began to get disillusioned, and the rapid succession of capitalism and the globalization pushed them westwards. Searching for a better life and higher income, people began to migrate westward, which is

increasing day by day even in the present time. Consequently, Diaspora has been as indispensable issue of the present global scenario. The most recent and most socially significant Diaspora movements have been those of colonized people back to the metropolitan centers of Europe, and western countries like Britain and France. The descendents of the Diaspora movements generated by colonialism have developed their own distinctive cultures which both preserve and often extend and develop their original cultures. The development of Diaspora cultures necessarily questions essentialist model to interrogate the ideology of unified 'natural' cultural norm; an approach that underpins the centre/decenter model of colonialist discourse.

Both of the modes of migration, either migration led by the imperial European or British in terms of cheap laborers and slaves, or migration that occurred in the periods of late capitalism and the globalization in the post colonial phases, have created a significant number of Diaspora. All these migrants are displaced from their homelands. The displacement from homelands not only refers to the spatial dislocation but also signifies the displacement from their origin, their root and their culture, as well. Therefore in this Diaspora state their sense of exile, their nostalgia for homelands, their sense of humiliation over the identity crisis that they face with and sometimes even their feeling of 'in-between-ness', especially sensed by the descendents of Diaspora become extremely intense and irrepressible. Some Diaspora writers have recreated their very dispersal sensibilities in their fabulous literary writing. Regarding Diaspora sensitivities, an Indian critic Sudhir Kumar asserts:

The Diaspora consciousness as some critics aver presupposes the predominance of such feelings as alienation, dispersal, longing for the ancestral homeland, a double identification with the original homeland and the adopted countries, identity crisis, remembering myths related

to the homeland, protest against discrimination of all sorts in a new land etc, the metaphor of imaginary Homelands does not cum up the conditions of the Diaspora communities well. (70)

Diaspora writing basically focuses on the experiences of migrant people. The migrant people as they resettle in the foreign countries have to face a lot of different problems in terms of all aspects like culture, language, food and others. They are always considered as outsiders through eyes of native people. Diaspora writings capture both the problems and experiences of the migrants. The writers in such texts try to recollect their past through the help of memories, nostalgia and familial myth. The writers not only re-vitalize their history of origin, offer the reader all exotics and fantasies of their homelands, and but also compel us to re-vitalize about its authenticity. They also reaffirm their own distinct identity as subjects constructed by Diaspora. Therefore, on the account of immigrant people both as recreating their history and making an appeal for their marginalized identity, the Diaspora writings hold a significant position in the literary genre.

Despite the immense popularity in Diaspora writing the theory of Diaspora is not free from controversies. The Diaspora writers and theorists have been assailed for being unauthentic and misrepresenting the reality. They are also critiqued for using more fantasy and exaggerating the reality of their far away homeland in order to create an aesthetic effect on the reader or to engage large audiences. Despite the adverse criticism, fantasy is still an inevitable part of the Diaspora writing. It is the only source that makes it possible for the immigrant characteristic to be connected between their past and present. Despite the fact that there are numerous perspectives in regard to the Diaspora writers' position and capability to capture the far away places into their imaginative writings, the very controversy is redundant in the sense

that the writers do not need to be at the place they are writing about. Furthermore they have very strong intuition that helps them to draw the picture in theoretical forms which are indeed close to the reality. The Diasporas from Indian continent are mostly in the United States and United Kingdom who have proven to produce wonderful and quite realistic works. No doubt there has been immense impact of their aesthetic taste in the writings, it should not be taken in other ways.

Brij V. Lal an Indian diaspora writer explores the social background of the immigrants, the conditions of their journey from India, and the myriad difficulties with which life and work on the plantations confronted men and women. Largely unable or unwilling to return, they dealt with disruption, preserved some continuity of cultural patterns, and constructed a post-indenture, overseas Indian society out of the fragments of religion and texts they had brought with them, while elaborating new forms of cooperation and regulative behavior. Lal indeed talks of the problems of the immigrants in diaspora especially in the countries out of the Indian continents since they have got different language and food habit.

Similarly Vijay Mishra states in this regard: “The old Indian diaspora of indentured labor: the origins of its new social forms in the crucial spaces of the ship and the plantation barracks, and the conditions in which women and men of many castes created a new life while clinging to highly mediated fragments of an old one”(I). He traces out the similar issue that is of the people who are in the unknown zone where many of the social and cultural practices vary from their original ones. Due to which they feel uncomfortable enough over there. Mishra’s extended exploration of this diaspora is also prologue: a further, essential part of his argument is that “the experience of indenture is given artistic form in Naipaul’s works [...] and the artistic documentation of the effects of indenture history is part of their internal structure” (5).

In fact Mishra argues while reformulating Jamesson's much-criticized statement on Third World texts as national allegories- that Naipaul's "East Indian fictions are to be read as diasporic allegories," (7) and demonstrates the results of such a reading.

In this way Lever-Tracy and IP take as their context the explosive recent development of China and the emergence onto the world economic stage of diaspora Chinese business which, they argue, has produced a significant, identifiably Chinese current within global capitalism. They explore how far and in what manner a growing density of transnational linkages between smaller diasporan Chinese businesses may have been encouraged by the magnet of an accessible China. Their article is based on open-ended interviews with thirty-six ethnic Chinese Australians trading with or investing in China and looks at why and how such Diaspora businesses are entering and operating in China, and with what impact.

There is a close relationship between feminism and Diaspora since both of them advocate for the rights of the minorities. It is a fact that women writers struggle a lot to create some literary works being away from their motherlands. Distinct hindrances are there basically in terms of opportunities, and other national rights. Kingston as a writer should have faced a lot to develop her career because of her firm promises. Hence *The Woman Warrior* could be revealed at four situations.

Hong Kingston is a Diaspora woman writer who seems to have attempted to capture both the female and Diaspora issues in *The Woman Warrior*. The vitality of the writer lies in her power to deal with both issues simultaneously. In fact *The Woman Warrior* is the dilemma of the Chinese- American woman as she struggles for selfhood in a chaotic and hostile environment. Straddling two cultures, Maxine has to confront the reality or fiction of her Chinese heritage that reaches culmination mainly through her mother's mythological yet authoritative "talk stories" and the equally

puzzling realities of her American birth, education and experience. Both heritages impose external limitations and demand prescribed behaviors even though she is constantly aware of the remoteness of ancestral China and her essential separation from it as well as her marginal status of exclusion and alienation in the American society. As a Chinese-American hyphenated woman, Maxine must come to terms with her past and present with China and America, with woman as slave and woman as warrior and thus find her identity and voice, one that is not externally imposed but self-expressive, born painfully out of the experience of alienation and suffering.

In *The Woman Warrior*, No Name Woman, the first chapter has even a limited or no place at all as a woman in Chinese culture. Her country becomes alien to her; at length, she dies committing suicide in the family well. Temma Kaplan explains about the same: "It is impossible to speak of women's culture without understanding its variation by class and ethnic group, women's culture, like popular or working class culture, must appear in the context of dominant cultures" (87). The essence of Kaplan's statement is borne out by reading fiction and autobiography written by women from different backgrounds. Such books not only show the great cultural diversity of women experience but also evoke the incompatible definitions of femininity and the irreconcilable demands a woman is likely to encounter as she attempts to live in more than one cultural world at the same time. Such duality of cultures is deep-rooted in Maxine's mind as an American-born Chinese daughter.

Even in the modern free and unbiased society, women's worlds may differ widely due to ethnic background and social class but in the societies from which Maxine composes literature, male dominance is a common denominator. Her autobiographical book, *The Woman Warrior* suggests that we need to pay attention to the contradictions, male dominance that is created for women who are at one and the

same time subordinated by a culture and yet embroiled in its intersect. Such women may be painfully at odds with themselves. A woman like Kingston, who is doubly marginalized, is likely to feel this conflict with particular acuteness because an affiliation with a minority culture tends to be particularly strong.

Clarifying one of the major contradictions which shape the legacy of her Chinese-American girlhood, Kingston comments bitterly: “Even now China wraps double binds around my feet” (9). The most difficult double bind has been the need to reconcile her loyalty to her Chinese-American heritage, a background, which devalues and even insults women, with her own sense of dignity as a female. This effort is about Kingston’s attempt to resolve the war within her, a struggle that is exacerbated by the tremendous emphasis given by Chinese culture on social cohesion. She has been raised to experience and require a powerful identification with family and community and yet, as a woman she can’t simply accept a place in a culture which calls people of her sex “maggots”, “broom and dustpan,” “slave” etc.

Kingston begins her critique with an aunt back in China whom the family tried to ignore, telling her story in such a way that she artfully shifts point of view and sympathy in order to convey her divided loyalties. The aunt became pregnant while her husband was in America. The enraged villagers, terrified by her behavior compelled her to commit suicide: any lust not socially-sanctioned was seen as disruptive of the social order.

Kingston identifies herself with the rebellious aunt whom she calls “my forerunner”, and using her imagination to create various detailed scenarios, first of all, rape and then of romantic attraction, alternative version of what might have happened. It is narrated in the omniscient third person. She expands her theme, beginning to

imagine in sensuous detail, the pull that an attractive man might have had on this aunt “caught up in a slow life”.

Kingston retells the story, casting herself as the swordswoman who through magic and self-discipline is trained to bring about social justice while at the same time fulfilling her domestic obligations. Significantly, a good part of her training involves exercises, which teach her body the ideographs for various words in Kingston’s universe. It is through mastery of language that a warrior is created. Language is again important in that before *Fa Mu Lan* sets out dressed as a man, to lead her male army against the enemies of her people, the family carves on her back the words, which suggest their endless list of grievances.

As the narrator, Kingston’s fantasy of herself as *Fu Mu Lan* returns home, the villagers “make a legend about her perfect finality. This myth combining heroism and social duty is explored to see if winning the approval and admiration of the Chinese or Chinese-American community can provide so much gratification that Kingston will be persuaded to repress her injuries at the hands of the community. However, she subverts her own attempt by embedding her tales of the females, with certain elements which bring forth once again the theme of the injustices women suffer as sex and the issue of female anger:

Hunting down the baron who had drafted her brother, she presents herself as defender of the village as a whole: “I want your life in payment for your crimes against the villagers,”. But the baron tries to appeal to her “man to man” lightly acknowledging his crimes against woman in a misguided attempt at male-bonding. Oh, come now.

Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to get rid of them. Girls are maggot in the rice. It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters. He quoted to me the sayings I hated.” (51)

Kingston as a conscious lady goes back to bring about the cultural issue so that she can expose the genuine countenance of the Chinese who have treated the females inhumanly in the name of custom and fake social norms. To justify the following extract could be great evidence:

Brave Orchid’s story of *No Name Woman* provides one valuable inroad into Kingston’s discovering her cultural history. Brave Orchid relates how on the night when Kingston’s aunt gave birth to an illegitimate child, the people of the village in which the aunt and her family lived ransacked the family’s house, killed all of their livestock, and destroyed their crops. (17)

Brave Orchid’s story about Kingston’s aunt is a cautionary tale meant to discourage the young Kingston from engaging in premarital sex. Hopefully, the fear of humiliation, ostracism, and death will serve sufficiently as a deterrent for sexual promiscuity. Brave Orchid explains to her daughter about the aunt: “Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us [...] The villagers are watchful” (15). Here, Brave Orchid’s phrase “The villagers are watchful” transcends time and geography. *No Name Woman* severely crippled her family’s social standing in the Chinese village; similarly, Brave Orchid warns her daughter not to embarrass her family, which was among many others that emigrated from their village in China and settled in Stockton, California. Kingston notes of her mother: “Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories

that ran like this one, a story to grow up on” (16). Brave Orchid uses the “talk-story” of No Name Woman to pass on codes of proper conduct and values to her daughter.

The young Kingston has difficulty making sense of her mother’s story and fails to receive direct, unambiguous responses to her questions and concerns. Her struggle to understand how knowing the history of her aunt who committed suicide will help her conduct herself properly- according to her mother’s traditional Chinese code of beliefs- is reflected in the questions she asks directly to Chinese Americans:

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what are the movies?” (19)

The larger issue, then, becomes how Kingston will integrate such talk-stories into her own personal life as she grows from childhood to womanhood, and just how relevant these tales of life in China are to a first-generation Chinese American with Chinese-born parents. To her American sensibilities, the stories are confusing because they are based on a Chinese context. Thus Kingston learns to talk-story by having listened to her mother. In this way, continuity is established between her mother, who represents the cultural traditions of China, and herself as a first-generation Chinese American. Kingston will finally acknowledge this succession of generations when, at the end of “Shaman,” she compares herself favorably to her mother and proudly recognizes their similarities: “I am really a Dragon, as she is a Dragon, both of us born in dragon years. I am practically a first daughter of a first daughter” (12).

The similar situation regarding the narrator’s boldness and her inner heroic qualities can be observed in another chapter of *The Woman Warrior* that is “White

Tigers". The scarcity of detail in the many versions of Mu-lan's story is markedly different than in Kingston's revision of the tale. For example, one version of "The Ballad of Mu-lan" begins with the folk heroine volunteering to fight in place of her father, whereas Kingston details Fa Mu Lan's education as a woman warrior. Fa Mu Lan has an older brother who replaces his father in the first round of army conscription, but Mu-lan has no older brother so she must go in place of her father when the first drafts her; and Kingston's woman warrior fights against the emperor, but Mu-lan fights for him. The greatest similarity between Mu-lan and Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is that each heroine returns home after fighting and assumes her traditionally female duties. In one version of "The Ballad of Mu-lan," when the folk heroine, who is weaving at the beginning of the poem, comes home from fighting, the first thing she does is remove her "wartime gown" and put her "old-time clothes" back on, an act that symbolizes that she will resume her duties as a daughter in the household. In Kingston's talk-story, in which Fa Mu Lan marries and has a son, the woman warrior conforms to Chinese custom by going to live with her husband in his family's home. Kneeling at her parents-in-law's feet, she tells them that she will stay with them, doing farm work and housework, and giving them more sons. All the above situations prove that the narrator as the woman warrior directly and indirectly revolts the long established customs and the mind-sets of the Chinese. In fact she does not long to live as a slave in the hands of males. This is why the narrator transitions from her remembering hearing the talk-story as a child to the actual tale itself, which is told from the first-person: "I" perspective of Fa Mu Lan.

III. Cultural Boundaries and the Narrator's Protest

Marine Hong Kingston has incorporated her experiences in her first autobiographical novel, *The Woman Warrior*. She seems to have attempted to share her ideas to foster social change. The entire novel is divided into five different chapters with distinct life experiences of the author. In the first chapter, *No Name Woman* Kingston reveals her childhood, fear of Chinese violence and sexism. In fact Kingston begins her search for a personal identity with the story of an aunt, to whom this first chapter's title refers. Ironically, the first thing is Kingston's mother to warning Kingston: "You must not tell anyone [...] what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born" (1). Hence the cruelty of the Chinese culture is exposed especially in terms of gender discrimination. Women had to remain silent before males and their dominating actions. But the writer is no more of the kind of being silent Of course; keeping silent is exactly what Kingston is not doing. Because she is most concerned with exploring how her Chinese cultural history can be reconciled with her emerging sense of herself as an American. Kingston must uncover just what this Chinese cultural history is, and one way of doing so is by listening to, and then altering, her mother's stories about the family's Chinese past.

Throughout *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston refers to her mother's historical tales as "talk-stories," culturally based, primarily oral stories whose general purpose is didactic. For example, here in "*No Name Woman*," Kingston says of her mother, who is named Brave Orchid:

Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one [about No Name Woman], a story to grow up on. She

tested our strength to establish realities. Those in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home. Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America. (5)

The above extract from the original text clarifies the fact that the writer represents the Chinese women of the contemporary time and her mind-set up refers to theirs. The women had culturally been made in such a way that they felt good and necessary to hand down the Chinese cultural practices to the new generations who were even in the immigrated situation. The direct way of telling someone something of great importance was not so commendable. Therefore Kingston's mother attempted to convince her daughter through stories. Similar to a folktale, a talk-story often involves the fantastic and fuses realistic events with magical qualities. Because of this realistic magical aspect, a talk-story can be as confusing to its audience-Kingston and her readers- as it can be inspiring. In the same vein Kingston states:

To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder whether he masked himself when he joined the raid on her family. (6)

The concrete nature of the male-dominated society that men used women as puppets who could play on their commands is displayed in the above excerpt. No doubt women are equal to men in terms of human feelings and temperament. Their unalienable rights seem to have been abused in the name of culture and tradition that have often favored the male status in the society. Sex is not the matter of one-sided

will. Rather it is the act performed on the common desire of two opposite partners. Similarly, another vital point is here that does show how Chinese women suffered incompatibility of marriage partners:

She was lucky that he was her age and she would be the first wife, an Advantage secure now. The night she first saw him, he had sex with her. Then he left for America. She had almost forgotten what he looked like. When she tried to envision him, she only saw the black and white face in. The group photograph the men had had taken before leaving. (7)

Women were considered fortunate enough in case they got to marry a person of their age. In addition to this they felt delighted when they were the first wives to their husbands. Hence it gets pretty clear that the males in China were endowed with some special rights regarding the choice of marriage partners. They could marry as many times as they wished. Indeed they enjoyed full-fledged democracy in terms of marriage.

Brave Orchid's story of *No Name Woman* provides one valuable inroad into Kingston's discovering her cultural history. Brave Orchid relates how on the night when Kingston's aunt gave birth to an illegitimate child, the people of the Chinese village in which the aunt and her family ransacked the family's house, killed all of their livestock, and destroyed their crops. Shunned by her family, the aunt gave in a pigsty, alone. The next morning, Brave Orchid went to gather water from the family's well, where she discovered that No Name Woman had committed suicide by throwing herself and her child down into the well. Indirectly Kingston attacks on the brutality deep-rooted in the Chinese culture of the past.

Explaining that the aunt had become pregnant by a man whose identity the aunt never disclosed, Brave Orchid also relates that at the time-1924- the aunt's husband was working in America. Due to failing crops and poor domestic economy, many of the men from the ancestral village in China were forced to leave their farms to seek work, traveling as far as America, which the Chinese nicknamed "Gold Mountain" because the original Chinese immigrants initially perceived it as a bountiful land where a good living could be made working in the gold-mining industry.

Brave Orchid's story about Kingston's aunt is a cautionary tale meant to discourage the young Kingston from engaging in premarital sex; hopefully the fear of humiliation, ostracism, and death will serve sufficiently as a deterrent for sexual promiscuity. Brave Orchid explains to her daughter about the aunt:

Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful. (5)

Here, Brave Orchid's phrase "The villagers are watchful" transcends time and geography: No Name Woman severely crippled her family's social standing in the Chinese village; similarly, Brave Orchid warns her daughter not to embarrass her family, which was among many others that emigrated from their village in China and settled in Stockton, California. Kingston notes of her mother whenever she had to warn us about life, her mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. Brave Orchid uses the "talk-story" of No Name Woman to pass on codes of proper conduct and values to her daughter.

Kingston, however, does not fully understand the story's importance when she first hears it. Because she is confused by its many details, she rewrites Brave Orchid's original tale, creating the impetus for why No Name Woman acts as she does in Brave Orchids version. Kingston knows that her mother is concerned that she has not premarital sex because her mother directly states that that is the reason for telling the story. But what Kingston does not know, at least not until the memoir's final chapter, is that her mother hopes to strengthen her daughter emotionally and psychologically by giving her a sense of whom she is and where she came from. In "No Name Woman," Kingston writes: "Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhood fits into solid America" (5). China is "invisible", an intangible place that Kingston only hears about; America is "solid," not only because she physically lives in it, but because she interacts daily with other Americans and necessarily wants to fit in. How to reconcile this conflict between these two disparate cultures becomes her thesis, the problem she attempts and ultimately succeeds to solve.

The young Kingston has difficulty making sense of her mother's story and fails to receive direct, unambiguous responses to her questions and concerns. Her struggle to understand how knowing the history of her aunt who committed suicide will help her conduct herself properly according to her mother's traditional Chinese code of beliefs that is reflected in the questions she asks directly to Chinese Americans:

"Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing

with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what are the movies? (5)

Cultural variations are of the minute care. The Chinese and American cultures have got a gap between them. Due to this cultural conflict the narrator has been to feel difficult in her life in America.

How, Kingston asks, can she decipher what is real and what is fiction in her mother's stories when her mother herself will not tell her? The larger issue, then, becomes how Kingston will integrate such talk-stories into her own personal life as she grows from childhood to womanhood, and just how relevant these tales of life in China are to a first-generation Chinese American with Chinese-born parents. To her American sensibilities, the stories are confusing because they are based on a Chinese context.

Because her mother's messages are difficult to adopt or apply to her immediate American reality, Kingston, after relating Brave Orchid's telling of *No Name Woman's* story, rewrites the tale from her own American perspective. She uses her own style of "talk-story" to guess the reasons for her aunt's actions. Ironically, although at the time she probably would not have recognized it, nor perhaps have wanted to, Kingston's rewriting her mother's talk-story as her own indicates an important element in reconciling her Chinese past and her American present. She learns to talk-story by having listened to her mother. In this way, continuity is established between her mother, who represents the cultural traditions of China, and herself as a first-generation Chinese American. Kingston finally acknowledges this succession of generation when, at the end of "Shaman," she compares herself favorably to her mother and proudly recognizes their many similarities. Having reclaimed the discarded memory of her aunt by telling her story in "No Name

Woman”, Kingston continues her search for a Chinese-American identity in a more assertive and positive tone in “White Tigers,” which relates the heroic struggle of Fa Mu Lan, one of the women warriors from whom the memoir gets its title.

“White Tigers” confidently proclaims that many successes are possible for women and, more specifically, for “Chinese girls.” Prominent among the many talk-stories Kingston heard while growing up is one involving a woman warrior accomplished in martial arts, a story that Kingston narrates in the chapter’s first paragraph as a segue between *No Name Woman*’s history and the tale of Fa Mu Lan. The description of this woman’s “combing her hair one morning” recalls how Kingston wanted to believe that *No Name Woman* “combed individuality into her bob.” Also, the comment:

Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound. It was a woman who invented white crane boxing only two hundred years ago. She was already an expert pole fighter, daughter of a trained at the Shao-lin temple, where there lived an order of fighting monks. She was combing her hair one morning when a white crane alighted outside her window. (19)

It evokes the implied threat in Kingston’s mother’s telling her daughters that they should be glad that they were not forced to have their feet bound when they were seven years old, and foreshadows the later incident in bandages used to wrap their feet, became fierce women warriors themselves.

For most of this chapter, Kingston relates the talk-story of Fa Mu Lan, the woman-warrior heroine about whom she learned as a child. She blends aspects of the Chinese legend of Fa Mu Lan with other myths stemming from Eastern philosophy and religion. Some of the talk-story’s images that appear most extraordinary or

fanciful, such as people and swords flying through the air are based on Chinese popular culture and folklore; Kingston saw these images depicted in Chinese movies while she was growing up in Stockton, California. Kingston's mother was very much suggestive at every step of her life. She enabled the narrator psychologically to grow bold and a woman warrior like Fa Mu Lan. It shows that it was a great need to the narrator to turn into radically new personality so that she could get capable of fighting all sorts of dominations. Thus Kingston asserts in this reference:

After I grew up, I heard the chant of Fa Mu Lan, the girl who took her father's place in battle. Instantly I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother, who may not have known its power to remind. She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up warrior woman. (20)

Furthermore it has here been stated so clearly that the allusion of Fa Mu Lan could bring about a drastic change in the narrator in order to do her level best to cope with the male figures and their biased cultural mores and other superstitious practices.

There is indirect revolt from the narrator against the Chinese culture.

Kingston's talk story about Fa Mu Lan is derived from a classical Chinese folk story and a woman named Mu-lan. Anonymously written in the fifth or sixth century by a Chinese poet, "The Ballad of Mu-lan" sketchily details how Mu-lan, about whose deeds many different versions have since been composed, fights in place of her father when he is drafted into the emperor's army. After the war ends, Mu-lan returns home to her family and resumes her normal life. The Ballad of Mu-lan begins with the folk

heroine volunteering to fight in place of her father, whereas Kingston details Fa Mu Lan's education as a woman warrior; Fa Mu Lan has an older brother who replaces his father in the first round of army conscription, but Mu-lan has no older brother so must go in place of her father when the army first drafts him; and Kingston's woman warrior fights against the emperor, but Mu-lan fights for him.

The greatest similarity between Mu-lan and Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is that each heroine returns home after fighting and assumes her traditionally female duties. In one version of "The Ballad of Mu-lan," when the folk heroine, who is weaving at the beginning of the poem, comes home from fighting, the first thing she does is remove her "wartime gown" and put her "old-time clothes" back on, an act that symbolizes that she will resume her duties as a daughter in the household. In Kingston's talk-story, in which Fa Mu Lan marries and has a son, the woman warrior conforms to Chinese custom by going to live with her husband in his family's home. Kneeling at her parents-in-law's feet, she tells them: "I will stay with you, doing farm work and housework, and giving you more sons" (23). There is the obligatory situation before women that they are compelled to step ahead on the command and will of the male figures. The woman surrenders herself before men not because they are naturally inferior to men but because they have been culturally made so. Despite women's physical and mental capacities, they are excluded from different aspects of life such as school and army department. It shows the biased nature of the society. In regard to this, Kingston states: "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (39).

Adding to the confusion surrounding just how much Kingston personally identifies with Fa Mu Lan is Kingston's use of the subjunctive mood which is told

from the first-person “I” perspective of Fa Mu Lan. The narrative technique of using the subjunctive mood begins with Kingston’s recalling how her mother told the young Kingston that she would grow up to be a wife and slave, but she rejects these roles and instead promises that she will have to grow up a warrior woman.

The legendary Fa Mu Lan remembers being led by a bird through brambles and over rocks. Fa Mu Lan reaches the summit of a mountain, on top of which stands a thatched hut. There, an old man and an old woman, who represent ultimate wisdom and enlightenment, greet her. They offer to teach her to be a warrior if she will stay with them for fifteen years, but the choice is hers: “Either she can return home to pull sweet potatoes in the field with the rest of her family, or she can become a young woman warrior who will “avenge [her] village” and recapture the harvests that the thieves have taken” (38). The old woman assures her that she can be remembered by the Han people for her dutifulness. Fa Mu Lan gladly agrees to stay with the old couple and so spends the next fifteen years undergoing intensive martial arts training in mental and physical activities and disciplines.

As the middle chapter in Kingston’s memoir about growing up listening to her mother’s talk-stories, “Shaman” contains Brave Orchid’s personal history, how she earned a medical degree of midwifery in China, then moved to America to be with her husband, and raised their American-born children.

The chapter’s title, “A Tribute to Brave Orchid,” refers to a person who acts as a medium between the physical and spiritual worlds, and who usually has healing powers. Brave Orchid is shaman who exorcises ghosts, both in the Chinese women’s school of midwifery and in Stockton, California. Brave Orchid’s photographs fascinate Kingston, who notices how differently her mother looks in the camera:

She has spacy eyes, as all people recently from Asia have. Her eyes do not

focus on the camera. My mother is not smiling; Chinese do not smile for photographs. Their faces command relatives in foreign lands-“Send money”-and posterity forever- “Put food in front of this picture.” My mother does not understand Chinese-American snapshots.(58)

Brave Orchid’s “spacy” look underscores the intense fear and hesitancy that many Chinese emigrants felt leaving their homeland for America. However, Kingston points out that after these emigrants reside in America for a few years, they learn the barbarians’ directness- how to gather them and stare rudely into talking faces as if trying to catch lies. For example, photographs of Kingston’s laughing father, who looks directly into camera and wears a straw hat that show how westernized he has become since moving to America. Emphasizing the transitional nature of ‘Shaman’, Kingston writes that her mother, who, has lived in America for many years, now has eyes as strong as boulders. Orchid’s style of dress has dramatically changed as well. In the medical school class photograph, she wears a dress that suppresses any hint of sexuality:

My mother put hers, a chrysanthemum, below her left breast. Chinese dresses at that time were dartless, cut as if women did not have breasts; these young doctors, unaccustomed to decorations, may have seen their chests as black expanses with no reference points for flowers. Perhaps they couldn’t shorten that far gaze that lasts only a few years after a Chinese emigrates. (59)

At school, Brave Orchid feels pressure to appear smarter than her fellow classmates. Because she is older than they, traditionally she is expected to be wiser. She seeks out hiding places in which to study secretly so that she will appear more knowledgeable than her peers. These hiding places also symbolize the importance that the female

students place on personal space. For example, in her section of the room that she shares with other female students, Brave Orchid “placed precisely” each of her personal items. Her cataloging these items emphasizes the pleasure she gets from organizing her own belongings rather than someone else’s. The locks on her suitcase opened with two satisfying clicks; she enjoyed again how neatly her belongings fitted together, clean against the green lining. Although the “daydream of women- to have a room, even a section of a room, that only gets messed up when she messes it up herself” -seems limited at best, most likely the majority of the female students came from homes headed by either a father or a husband, and the women would have been treated by the male figures as second-class citizens in their own homes. Kingston writes:

Free from families, my mother would live for two years without servitude. she would not have to run errands for my father’s tyrant mother with the bound feet or thread needles for old ladies. Ironically, however, neither would there be slaves and nieces to wait on her. (62)

Kingston’s reminiscence of her mother’s life and deeds, she is very much conscious and critical in the sense that she seems to have attacked the Chinese culture and its tradition so fiercely.

Kingston begins “Shaman” with the word “Maybe,” which signals that she is reinterpreting her mother’s talk-story to understand better how the tale affects her own American life. The narrative strategy is similar to Kingston’s inventing a personal history for No Name Woman and introducing Fa Mu Lan’s talk-story using the subjective “would.” By creating one possible scenario of Brave Orchid’s bravery, Kingston emphasizes how her mother is herself a woman warrior, who is fearless to sleep overnight in a haunted room. Brave Orchid exerts her independent spirit not

only when she accepts the other students' challenge to meet whatever ghost awaits her, but intellectually when she daringly questions the traditional belief of life after death: "How do we know that ghosts are the countenance of dead people? [...] Perhaps human beings just die, and that's the end. I don't think I'd mind that too much" (65).

Another, more important example of Brave Orchid's independent, warrior like spirit is her decision to retain her own name rather than take her husband's after they married. The power to name oneself, to have an individual identity, is further emphasized when Brave Orchid, after arriving in America, keeps her own name rather than westernize it. Kingston writes: "Even when she emigrated, my mother kept Brave Orchid, adding no American name nor holding one in reserve for American emergencies" (64). That Orchid retained her own name, that she had a name at all, contrasts with Kingston's aunt's namelessness. Kingston suggests throughout the novel that people who control the power of language can survive any ordeal because they cannot lose their personal identities. A person like No Name Woman, whose identity is figuratively buried along with any memory of her, has no power to stand up for herself and combat the violence inflicted against her. She is a lost soul because her family refuses to call out the list of their ancestors' names in order to guide No Name Woman's spirit back home.

"At the Western Palace" opens at the San Francisco airport. Brave Orchid contrasts her children's behavior with her niece's. She is highly critical of her children's importance, which she characterizes as a distinctly American trait; however, her niece's sitting with her impresses Brave Orchid as proper, respectful, Chinese deportment. Brave muses to herself:

Her American children could not sit for very long. They did not

understand sitting; they had wandering feet. She hoped they would get back from the pay t. v.'s or the pay toilets or wherever they were spending their money before the plane arrived. If they did not come back soon, she would go back for them. If her son thought he could hide in the men's room, he was wrong. (113)

Hence Kingston shows disparity in the American culture in the sense that the American children do not know the manner of sitting. Rather they are mechanized in such a way that they are away from homely virtues.

She thinks of them as a bad boy and bad girl, but her niece's opinion of her cousins is very different. For example, when Brave Orchid complains that her son in Vietnam is careless and "not normal," her niece defends him and his siblings. Speaking to her aunt, she says: "Your son can take care of himself. All your children can take care of themselves" (114).

Brave Orchid and her children's personal interactions during Moon Orchid's gift-giving are strained at best. The cultural gap between them is immense, in large part because Brave Orchid judges her children based on traditional Chinese manners. For instance, when Moon Orchid passes out the paper dolls, the children immediately begin to play with them. However, Brave Orchid, raised by Chinese parents who taught her "correct" Chinese behavior, privately thinks of her children as lazy, and when they talk at eating the luck-ceremony candy that symbolizes good beginnings, she thinks of them as stupid. Brave Orchid does not consider English to be a "language," the children may speak it without getting into trouble. Unfortunately, this language barrier dramatically increases the cultural gap between Brave Orchid and her children: "Brave Orchid will not master English because it symbolizes the

barbarous American culture, and the children resist speaking Chinese because they want to be “American-normal” (124).

In “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”, Kingston discusses the difficulties she experienced growing up as a Chinese-American female. Greatest among these challenges, was learning to speak English to non-Chinese people, while struggling to confront traditional Chinese culture, represented by her mother, which inhibited her efforts to integrate fully into American culture. She searched to locate a middle ground in which she can live within each of these two respective cultures. While doing so, she created a new, hybrid identity between them. Kingston drew on a talk-story about the legendary Chinese female poet Ts’ai Yen to demonstrate her own achievement of a delicate harmony between two competing cultures. Throughout her identity-forming process, she also found that she must assert herself by breaking away emotionally from her mother, who had been the center of her life. Once free, she became able to develop an identity of her own.

“A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” begins with Kingston admitting that she heard about Moon Orchid’s disastrous confrontation with her husband, which Kingston related in “At the Western Palace,” from her brother. In fact, it was her brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of her sisters told her what he’d told her. This passing on of stories demonstrates the always-changing nature of talk-stories, whose telling is dependent on the teller. For instance, Kingston recognized that her brother narrated Moon Orchid’s story differently than she. She wrote that his version of the story may have been better than hers because of its bareness, not twisted into designs. However, she relished her talk-stories’ with complicated designs because they emphasized the complexity of both the talk-stories and, more important, their narrator-Kingston herself. Likening herself to a knot-maker who, long ago in China,

would have continued to create a special, intricate knot even after the emperor banned its being made, Kingston tested the boundaries that her mother, Chinese culture, and American culture erected to manipulate her every thought and action.

Kingston follows the brief talk-story of the outlawed knot with a discussion between her mother and herself concerning Brave Orchid's supposedly cutting Kingston's frenum, the membrane under the tongue that restricts the tongue's movement. Although Kingston is unsure whether or not Brave Orchid truly sliced her frenum, she wants to believe that her mother did so as an act of empowerment: "Sometimes I felt very proud that my mother committed such a powerful act upon me" (164). When Kingston again asks her recalls the word "tied" from the talk-story about the Chinese knot-makers:

I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything. Your frenum looked too tight to do those things, so I cut it. (164)

Brave Orchid understands all too well the necessity of her daughter having the power of language and the relationship between language and personal identity.

Symbolically, Brave Orchid tells Kingston that she cut her frenum so that her tongue would be able to move in any language. She'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. Brave Orchid, a powerful Chinese woman in her right, is concerned that Kingston succeed not only as a woman of Chinese descent, but as a woman of Chinese descent living in America.

Kingston is confronted with her first challenge to speak English while attending kindergarten, but the fear and intimidation of publicly speaking English last well into her adulthood. Although she claims that she is making daily progress

speaking English to strangers, she cannot forget her first three years of school, when her silence was thickest. During these three years, she completely covered her school paintings with black paint, layers of black over houses and flowers and suns.

Concerned by these paintings, Kingston's teacher called her parents to the school, but they did not understand English and so could not discuss their daughter's behavior, other than Kingston's father cryptically telling Kingston that in China: "The parents and teachers of criminals were executed" (165). To Kingston, however, these paintings represented the happy possibilities of curtains about to reveal sunlight underneath, mighty operas.

The major obstacle to Kingston's learning to speak English is cultural that is based on the individual's relationship to society. Traditionally, Chinese custom frowns on a person, especially a female, who boldly and assertively speaks. Such behavior implies the individual's raised status over others. American Culture, however, is theoretically based on the rights of individuals, not on the collective whole of society, and the English, language, in which a subject-often refers to the first-person, singular "I"- which generally begins each sentence, reflects this cultural emphasis on individualism. When Kingston raised by parents who speak only Chinese, reads aloud in English, she stumbles constantly while saying "I". She writes:

I could not understand 'I'. The Chinese 'I' has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American 'I' assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness; "I" is a capital and "you" is lower case.(166)

In contrast to spoken English, Chinese pronunciation appears hard and loud, or “chingchong ugly,” as Kingston later characterizes it after she becomes more consciously attuned to American speech and values. This critical statement suggests her embarrassment at how she believes spoken Chinese sounds to American ears. However, cultural inhibition is not the only reason preventing the Chinese girls from speaking aloud. Rather, they want to be accepted as soft-spoken, American, and feminine. Ironically, although they think that they are being feminine, they are, in fact, being too soft to be heard. It is a cultural boundary created to the Chinese-American women in America. The need that the Chinese American women should speak English softly in order to show their feminine qualities is a great challenge to the women gender especially to those women who are in the Diaspora situation. Kingston faces difficulties in America first because of being a daughter of Chinese emigrants and secondly because of being a woman. This is why the narrator seems to have protested ironically against both Chinese culture and male notion of the American life style.

IV. Conclusion

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* depicts a dire conflict between cultures and an ultimate resolution of that conflict in Kingston's life with the help of the Chinese mythical characters Fa Mu Lan and Tsai Yen. Kingston's attempt has not been to make the Chinese culture more American nor the American culture more Chinese. She has made efforts to give equal vitality to both cultures through her tactful and skilful articulation. The special details Kingston relates in her accounts of her schooling experience and other experiences of learning to read and write are chosen to highlight the difference of cultures and her observation of one from the perspective of one another. Along with this she has attempted to display the genuine situation of the women in the Diaspora especially in America and how they are and were exploited in the name of Chinese norms and American cultural practices. Her basic focus seems to have been on the gender issue.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the writer's personal narrative is told through family tales, legends and talk-story. It is in relation to the female figures in these stories that the process of self definition takes place. By interweaving stories and experiences distant both in time and space, Kingston produces the effect of diffusion, which is heightened by the juxtaposition of real life referent and traditional wisdom. This technique may serve to capture the experience of an individual who feels fragmented, the plight of bicultural person.

In *The Woman Warrior*, cultural identity is being negotiated in the mother-daughter relationship, as the writer juxtaposes and seeks to reconcile two divergent sets of norms and values and of female models and expectations. The emphasis in this text, therefore, is on the Chinese-American dichotomy and on the search for a hyphenated Chinese-American identity.

Brave Orchid, the emigrant Chinese mother, is struggling to raise a good “Chinese” daughter in America telling the stories. These stories are powerful influences in shaping cultural identity. As Kingston phrases it “those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhood fits in solid America” (13). Kingston talks about the real situation of the first generation Chinese immigrants in America. She has been so much critical while dealing with each bit of experience in both Chinese and American cultures. She is able to describe alienness through this statement. One of the central problems faced by the second generation Chinese-Americans is how to distinguish whether the statements made and the stories told are true or false. The Chinese do not give their proper names, they conceal their occupations, and rather than paying compliments they “like to say the opposite.” It is the girl’s incapability to distinguish fact from fantasy which underlines many of the mother-daughter confrontations in this text: operating with different cultural codes, they often fail to understand one another.

The central dichotomy between Chinese and American culture seems, for the writer, at least, to resolve around the issue of gender. There is no equality of the “males-females” in the Chinese family and many proverbs are included in the text, which express the negative Chinese attitude to daughter. The dominant images of Chinese women are, according to Kingston, those of wives and slaves, and of heroines and swordswomen. Only by performing superhuman feats is it possible for a Chinese girl to demonstrate “perfect filiality” Brave Orchid’s own stories of her life-experiences in China emphasize the respect and status she achieved as doctor, and her bravery and power is revealed in her confrontations with ghosts. To reconcile these Chinese models of femaleness with those of the dominant American culture is no easy

task for a young girl. Kingston is the daughter of Chinese immigrants who grew up experiencing the often-painful results of the radical clashes between American and Chinese cultures. Her mother, who was a strong influence on Kingston, wanted her to remain essentially Chinese and instilled in her the superstitions, traditions, and customs of her native country but Kingston does not seem to take all of them for granted. One very good example is found in *At the Western Palace* about the cultural differences that are Moon Orchid who is Kingston's another aunt and a Chinese submissive wife. Her husband was in California who had married another junior wife but had been supporting his first wife as well. When she came to America and was told to claim her right as the first wife by Brave Orchid but Moon Orchid could not and went insane because of her submissiveness. The cultural tension indeed made Moon insane. Brave Orchid has been brave as her name suggests but Moon remained fragile in her nature like Moon. It is American culture that made Brave Orchid bold and it is Chinese culture that has Moon Orchid coward, dependent and submissive.

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