**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

# Affirmation of Cross-Cultural Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*

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**By**

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## Approval Letter

This thesis entitled **"Affirmation of Cross-Cultural Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*"** submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Kamal Prasad Bhattarai has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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**Abstract**

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is a recounting of past for the reshaping of future. The narrative persona retells her experiences of growing up as a second generation Chinese American daughter challenging the cultural discourses that tend to exclude, silence and marginalize her. Dispelling the illusion of cultural opposition and hierarchy that sustains authoritative and essentialist moral and cultural worldviews, the narrator brings both the worlds-Chinese and American-together that shape her cross-cultural Chinese American identity.

## Contents

# I. Introduction

## Elaboration of Hypothesis

In Maxine Hong Kingston's seminal work *The Woman Warrior*, the author (or the narrator) brings both the Chinese and American worlds together affirming the hybrid subject position in the broader sense of multiculturalism. In other words, the narrator recounts the past in such a way that challenges the cultural discourses that tended to silence and marginalize her.

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* consists of five chapters that blend life stories of the narrator's Chinese kinswomen with her own lived experiences in America. As the subtitle *Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* suggests, it is a reflection of the narrator's past experiences of growing up as an American born daughter of Chinese immigrants. The book abounds with the narrator's painful experiences of growing up among conflicting sets of cultural discourses, of imposed silence and marginalization by Chinese misogynism and American racism; and finally of defining her Chinese American selfhood when history, tradition and family have formulated China and America as reciprocally alien territories.

Such a precarious situation of the narrator is related with cultural discourses in one way or the other. As a member of immigrant community she is obliged to maintain the Chinese social norms and values and at the same time to be aware of its inadequacy in her day to day American life. In addition, the narrator is marginalized both as a female in misogynist culture of immigrants and as an ethnic in the racist culture of the white Americans. Yet, there are no options available on her part except to redefine and further strengthen her Chinese American selfhood which is possible only by questioning the legitimacy of dominant cultural discourses. This act of questioning, challenging and subverting the very authority of dominant cultural

discourses is carried out through her textuality in *The Woman Warrior.* In other words, the narrator's recounting of the past emphasizes that any moral, political or cultural worldview is inadequate to represent human experience.

Thus the main focus of this research work is to prove that the narrator in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* brings two distinct worlds- Chinese and American - together affirming the cross - cultural identity of in-betweenness. Cultural Studies will be employed as theoretical framework in order to prove the hypothesis proposed.

**Maxine Hong Kingston and Her Works**

Maxine Hong Kingston is one of the highly acclaimed Asian American authors. She was born in 1940 in Stockton, California, where her parents Tom and Ying Lan Hong operated a laundry. Maxine graduated from Berkeley University in 1962 and married with an actor Earl Kingston the same year. After becoming involved in the anti-war protests of the late sixties, the Kingstons moved to Hawaii where Maxine taught English and began composing her two memoirs *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980). She published her first novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His fake Book* (1989) after returning to California.

*The Woman Warrior* is Kingston's first book which was published in 1976. It is the first book by Chinese American author to receive astounding acclaim. Subtitled as *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts,* it was published initially under the label of 'autobiography'. The book won The National Book Critics Circle Award for non fiction in the same year of its publication.

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is composed of five different chapters with separate titles. The chapters integrate Kingston's living experience with a series of 'talk stories' that combine Chinese history, myths and beliefs. The life stories of

Kingston's real or mythical female predecessors are focused in order to reconstruct her own Chinese American selfhood. Rather than a chronicle of Chinese culture or traditions, the book is simply a reflection of the experience of one Chinese American girl far removed from the culture and traditions about which she is writing.

Maxine Hong Kingston's second book *China Men* was published in 1980 as a companion volume of *The Woman Warrior.* It includes the stories of Kingston's male ancestors, with the father as the central figure. Composed of eighteen chapters with 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. The chapters range from the legendary past of 'very great grandfather' in China to the brother who returns safely from Vietnam. Regarding her decision to publish the two books *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* separately Brownmiller quotes Kingston:

> At first I thought I could do it all in one volume, the men and the women, but the men's stories didn't fit in with the women's stories. The mythology is so different - the men's stories were in conflict with the women's stories. So, I decided that the men's book would be a companion volume. (214)

In *China Men* Kingston gives voice to her male ancestors who had been silenced throughout history by the mainstream American society. Several chapters in *China Men* expose how Chinese Americans were behaved as outsiders and inferiors despite their great contribution for the development of the United States. As a modern day successor of Chinese Americans, the narrator wages a linguistic battle to claim American for four generations of China men. Through the reconstruction of her own family history, the narrator questions the official national history of America.

Although the non-fictional status of Kingston's first two books is under doubt, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) is often taken as her first fully fictional work. Set in San Francisco in the 1960s, it focuses on the character of a Chinese American would be playwright Wittman Ah Singh, and on his attempt to produce a Chinese American epic drama.

In this heteroglossic novel, Kingston continues her project of claiming America and further explores the mentality of Chinese American males. Like Kingston's earlier books, *Tripmaster Monkey* is constructed around a web of Chinese intertexts to which she skillfully translates into Chinese American idioms with many allusions to western literature, movies and bohemian culture. Wittman Ah Singh, the protagonist in the novel declares himself as "really the present day incarnation of the king of the monkeys" (33). Experiencing drug – induced 'trips', he imitates the mythical Chinese monkey king who is rebellious and mischievous trickster figure capable of seventy two transformations. Kingston models her hero Wittman Ah Singh after monkey king in which she finds a source of empowerment to battle bigotry, discrimination, injustice and violence.

This general survey of Kingston's works shows that her literary project is directed towards making the United States a secure place for the Chinese Americans deauthorising further all the forms of prevalent dominating cultural discourses.

**Historical Background of *The Woman Warrior***

Chinese Americans occupy a significant space in the ethnic mosaic of the United States of America. They trace a long history in this country dating back to the first major influx after the Gold Rush of 1848 and the massive importation of laborers to build the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s.

Since the beginning, the Chinese immigrants in the United States were the strict followers of their own Chinese customs and traditions. Accustomed to Chinese social norms and values, the lifestyles of the immigrants reflected their 'old homeland' in many ways. Each and every activities of the immigrants were guided or influenced by Chinese cultural beliefs and attitudes. The social conduct was conditioned in large part by Confucianism and the cult of ancestor worship which kept them attached to kin and native village. They revered the past, respected their elders and obeyed their parents, for filial piety was particularly valued.

Due to the distinct socio-cultural practices of Chinese immigrants, the mainstream American people merely treated them as foreigners and undesirable additions to American society. Stereotyped as inassimilable, exotic and asexual, Chinese were segregated in schools and theaters, refused services in shops, hotels, restaurants and other public places and even barred entirely to some towns. They were blamed for displacing the Caucasian laborers and small farmers and also accused to be responsible for causing depressed wages, unemployment and other economic and social ills. Chinese Exclusion Act passed by the U.S parliament institutionalized further all the activities of prejudices and discrimination against Chinese people in the United States.

The prevalent institutional racism reinforced the immigrants' reluctance to abandon traditional ways and attitudes. The discrimination of various sorts further strengthened the Chinese Americans' intrinsic cohesiveness and also induced their withdrawal and isolation from the mainstream of American life. This growing distance between the Chinese Americans and the mainstream American society is observed by Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong in this way: "Because of American political rejection, no less than Chinese cultural imperatives, even those immigrants who had

managed to put down roots on American soil tended to think of themselves as *huaqiao*, 'overseas Chinese'" (39). The sense of 'outsiderness' encouraged the immigrants to maintain their own native ways. Moreover, they did not like their offspring, though born and brought up in America, forsake tradition. Thus the new American born generation was also enforced to follow the norms and values of their parents' homeland.

However, the bond of the new generation to China was far weaker than of their predecessors. Born and brought up in the United States, they would already be more progressive and egalitarian in outlook than their elders. Unlike their immigrant parents, the new generation had no more real world than the United States. While China was the world only to be heard in their parents' stories, the United States was the world to cope with for their day to day existence.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* recounts the past childhood days of such a new generation Chinese American girl. The extreme allegiances of both Chinese immigrants and white Americans with their own moral, political and cultural worldviews have endangered the life of the narrator who is acceptable fully neither to immigrants nor to the white Americans. Her Americanness is more visible to the Chinese immigrants and her Chineseness is more visible to the white Americans. In both cases she is on the other sides of dominant discourses. Neither the male dominated Chinese immigrant society nor the racist mainstream American society assures her a respectful and secured future. Similarly, as an American born member of Chinese descent, she can admit her consent neither to the separatism of immigrants nor to the white American chauvinism.

In this context, the narrator looks for a third space that is in agreement neither with the deracinating imperatives of Americanization nor with narrow minded

orthodoxy of immigrants. She recounts the past performatively that undermines any kind of historical or ideological hierarchy and authority. It is the space of 'rupture' that denounces the politics of polarity in order to search for the common ground of interaction and negotiation. The narrator interrogates the strict cultural adherences of both Chinese immigrants and white Americans gesturing textually that any cultural, moral and political worldviews are merely a construct or artifact rather than some objective reality. She raises her voices against imposed silence revealing the fact that extremist and essentialist worldviews of both immigrants and white Americans are subject to revision and reappropriation. Through her artistic strategy, Kingston uncovers the structure of oppressive cultural worldviews which, in turn, pulls down the dominant cultural discourses in parallel lines. Rather than preferring one at the expense of the other, Kingston affirms the identity of in-betweenness that empowers her unsettling Chinese American sexism and American racism.

**Critics on *The Woman Warrior***

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has contributed immensely to establish her as a well known Chinese American writer in literary arena. Right from its publication in 1976, the book has been analyzed, studied, and interpreted from different perspectives. It has received great critical acclaim and wide ranging responses from numerous critics and commentators. Many critics have poured their critical sensibilities from different perspectives.

Though it is difficult to label and categorize the multifaceted work like Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the subtitle of the book *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* provides it both fictional and non-fictional touch. Its initial publication under the label 'autobiography' and its subsequent selection as winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for non-fiction in the same year of its

publication emphasizes its non-fictional status. However, the later readings of the book stresses that Kingston's working with memory and childhood experiences has provided greater spaces to the imagination. In addition to drawing on family history, most of which the narrator invents from bare bones given by her mother, Kingston also makes extensive use of Chinese myths and legends, which she revises for her own purpose of self fashioning. Arguing against the inappropriate classification of the book Donald Goellnicht says:

> The only apparent reason for Knopf's decision to classify this text as autobiography seems to have been the previous success of Chinese American autobiographies, notably Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant*, published in 1943, and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, originally published in 1945 and in a revised version in 1950. ( 343)

Kingston's mingling of several genres in her writings have perplexed almost all critics and readers alike. It is not an autobiography as a specific genre but in an 'autobiographical form' that combines both fiction and non-fiction. We can neglect neither factual aspects of the text nor the fictional ones. Showing her consent to the peculiar generic nature in *The Woman Warrior,* Shirely Geok-Lin Lim puts her view in this way: "*The Woman Warriors* is a complex, highly inventive, historically embedded work. It is part biography, part autobiography, part history, part fantasy, part fiction, part myth, and wholly multi-layered, multi-vocal and organic" (Preface x). The collage-like nature of the book reflects Kingston's own colorful childhood memory which was beyond her own understanding. It is difficult to claim each of the events in *The Woman Warrior* as authentic and real. Not only the issue of genre was

pulled into controversy but Kingston's use of Chinese materials also ensued a notorious pen- war between the critics. Regarding the issue King- Kok Cheung writes:

> Yet *The Woman Warrior* was severely attacked by Frank Chin, who accused Kingston of falsifying Chinese myths and catering to a racist white audience in the name of feminism. The ensuing pen war that raged between the defenders of Kingston one the one side and Chin and his supporters on the other became the most protracted and notorious in the field. (10)

The above controversy about the authenticity of the materials rather proved meaningless in comparison to Kingston's strategic textuality. It is clear in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* that the Chinese world presented is merely a reflection of a child's mental picture. As a second generation Chinese American it is difficult for her to understand the invisible worlds. Her immigrant mother's message or stories about China and Chinese immigrants complicate her life in America. R. Radhakrisnan's observation about the position of Kingston also refers to the same fact:

> As Maxine Hong Kingston demonstrates painfully in *The Woman Warrior*, both the home country and the country of residence could become mere 'ghostly locations' and the result can only be a double depoliticization. For example, the anguish in her book is relational; it is not exclusively about China or the United States. The home country is not real in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede America-nization, and the 'present home' is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic. (207)

It shows that Kingston doesn't have ample bases upon which she can claim her belongingness to each of the worlds. She is obliged to occupy the position determined

by the cultural forces around her. Her reality as a second generation Chinese American has trapped her between two cultural worlds. But Kingston does not want to reside in alien culture. She transcends the boundaries of both cultures by rewriting the Chinese stories once authored by her mother and rejecting the displaced China experience in American society. It is only by questioning the extremity of two worlds, she can recreate her own selfhood. Therefore she raises her protesting voices against the accepted cultural norms, values and institutions. Pointing out the strength of subversion in *The Woman Warrior,* Malini Johar Schueller writes:

> Few American contemporary writers are as aware of the need to question and subvert accepted cultural definitions as Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior* is a sustained subversion of cultural, racial and gender definitions and an affirmation of a radical intersubjectivity as the basis of articulation. (53)

Kingston emphasizes upon the diversity and heterogeneity of voices in her works. She is against the singular definitions about any issue as if it is only one among hundred of other such versions. Any socio-cultural norms and values are merely the construction of society so that any claim to their authenticity and transcendence is illogical and meaningless. Her upbringing among unreal or ghostly worlds have taught her to doubt the singularity and supremacy of anything. Moreover her advocacy to multiplicities and indeterminacies strengthens her voices against the Chinese and American domination. In order to assert her position and reshape her future, she must question the existence of so called transcendent truths and realities. Hence Kingston's writing is full of doubt and mistrust about absolute truths and conventions. Explaining about the postmodern features in Kingston's art, Marilyn Yalom writes:

> There a blow against chronological time and the illusion of causality! There a thrust against the dual pretense of objectivity and universality! There a parry to deflate the lofty seriousness of high culture and its clichéd fabrications! There a lunge against masculine hegemony! Much that disturbs, disorders, and debunks finds its way into Kingston's art. (113)

The narrative art of Kingston is self-reflexive. Like her subject position which is divided between multiple legacies, her writing is also unconventional that denies the totality. She emphasizes on the contingent and provisional nature of truth. As a victim of ethnocentrism, she protests against the assumption of objectivity and universality. Her writing leads us across the boundaries of cultural discourses that merely pretend itself as superior and others inferior. This rupture between cultural boundaries is the most effective means of self assertion whose life is entangled with uncertainties and multiplicities. Kingston's writing tries to subvert all forms of hierarchies that help to surpass the blind adherence to each cultural, national and racial belonging and so on. Rather than the existence of full subjectivity, the emphasis is upon the subjectivities that are multiple, performative, and in flux. Pointing out the hybrid subject position in *The Woman Warrior* Donald C. Goellnicht remarks:

> Rather than thinking in binary terms of inside and outside, we should perhaps think of hybrid positions as a web of multiple intersecting and shifting strands in which the precise location of the subject is extremely difficult to map. Maxine Hong Kingston brilliantly articulates the shifting positionality of the self as subject in the making. [. . .] There is then no pure/essential/authentic Chinese American self,

> no "biological inside" against which she can be measured and found wanting. ( 357 )

It shows that people like Kingston who are brought up in uncertainties and indeterminacies affirm the performative subject position that is subject in process rather than objectified by past. From this vantage point any claim to binary opposition or hierarchy can be called into questions. It is the space from where the legitimacy of any singular cultural, racial or gender definition can be questioned.

## II. Cross-Cultural Encounter

### Culture

The word 'culture' in English language is derived from the Latin 'cultura' which means the act of cultivation of the soil. Subsequently, the idea of cultivation was broadened to encompass the human mind or 'spirit' giving rise to the idea of the cultivated or cultured person. Later the term is applied to any custom, art, social institution, literature, music, and so on, that is cultivated in society.

The idea of culture as people's 'whole way of life' first arose in the late eighteenth century. Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* quotes Mathew Arnold's view on culture as "the best that has been known and thought in the world" (xiii). Along Arnoldian line of thought, English anthropologist E.B. Tylor defines culture as the "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (qtd. in Mitchell 45).

By the mid nineteenth century such ethnographic view about culture underwent massive change. Raymond Williams contrasts this anthropological meaning of culture, denoting the whole way of living of people with the normative meaning of culture. In normative usage, culture still claims to represent the organic voice of people. Out of this conflict between culture in the anthropological sense and culture in the normative sense, there emerges a third way of using the term that refers to, as Graff and Robbins writes: "a battle ground of social conflicts and contradictions" (421). Thus culture refers to the ideas, attitudes, and experiences in various forms of social structure.

Despite the multiplicity of referents it can be said that culture denotes to historically transmitted pattern of meaning in codified symbols. This system of

inherited conceptions is expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions. Discussing about culture semiotically Clifford Geertz opines: “That man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (5). It clarifies that culture is a network of frames of reference by which conceptual world is constituted. Comprehension of a particular event, ritual, custom or idea is often based on the conceptual world one has developed. Describing about the close relationship between intelligibility and culture, Geertz adds: “As interworked systems of construable signs . . . culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviour, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly described" (14). This semiotic approach to culture stresses on the internalization of structures of signification made up of signs and symbols.

With the emergence and dissemination of postcolonial criticism and postcolonial theory, the new terminologies like 'power', 'discourse' and 'hegemony' are introduced into the cultural field. Edward W. Said, one of the prominent intellectual figures of Postcolonial Studies, also points out the general relationship between culture and empire. For him, the power of culture is representing as well as functioning as a form of hegemony. He is of the opinion that: “Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds

among different cultures" (*Culture* 261-62). So, culture is powerful means of differentiation, appropriation and domination.

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. The critics have formulated their critical revisions around the issues of cultural differences, social authority, and political discrimination, in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalization' of modernity. According to Homi K. Bhabha culture is "an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value" which "reaches out to create a symbolic textuality, to give the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure" (172). Observing about culture in this regard, he further writes:

> Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement [. . .]. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies – make the questions of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture a rather complex issue. (172)

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. This hybrid cultural space of transnational as translational provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity.

**Identity**

Identity has become the central area of concern in Cultural Studies. Identity is the process how we describe ourselves to each other. Cultural Studies explores how

we come to be the kinds of people we are, how we are produced as subjects and how we identify with descriptions of ourselves as male or female, black or white, Asians or Americans. Identities are not concrete things with universal qualities; rather they are discursive constructions, the product of discourse or regulated ways of speaking about the world.

As Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" argues, there are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. Firstly, it can be defined in terms of one shared culture, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition Hall writes: “Our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (111). People from same geography, history and culture have sense of belongingness to one another. They find several common attributes among them because their worldviews are shaped under common frames of references.

However, the notion of cultural identity is not only limited to 'what we really are' but also to 'what we have become'. One can't speak for very long, with any exactness about one's identity. Such is the second notion of cultural identity as Hall argues:

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (112)

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, identities are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Rather than merely grounded in a 'recovery' of the past, which is to be found, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.

Immigration and globalization have accelerated the movement of people from one place to another resulting into the confrontation and interaction among people with diverse cultural backgrounds. The identity of these people is plural and partial at the same time. This is the situation of having no stable identity and a fully integrated subjectivity.

Thus identity is neither once-and-for-all nor is a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity has been merely a fantasy. Rather than an essence, identity is a positioning which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin.'

**Diaspora**

Diaspora was originally applied to the condition of the Jewish people living outside Palestine. With the development of postcolonial theory, it has been extended to cover a range of different cultural and ethnic groups held together by shared cultural commitments and having some sense of exile from a place or state of origin and belonging. The term within Cultural Studies is used to describe a dynamic network of communities without the stabilizing allusion to an original homeland or essential identity. To live in Diaspora is to experience the trauma of exile, migration, displacement, rootlessness and the life of minority group. In this regard, Rushdie argues, "It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are

haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). The writers in Diaspora create imaginary homeland in order to affirm each part of the world as home and not home.

People in Diaspora have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths. Their identities are at once plural and partial. According to R. Radhakrishnan, "The diaspora has created rich possibilities of understanding different histories. And these histories have taught us that identities, selves, tradition and natures do change with travels" (210). So, identities, perspectives and definitions change when people move. Though people in Diaspora feel torn apart between two cultures and the ground to be based is ambiguous and shifting, it is not an infertile space to occupy. As Hall argues: “The diasporic experience [. . .] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity” (119). It clarifies that people in Diaspora have liberal view regarding their culture and identity. They don't have essentialist worldviews that exclude each other. They affirm the in-between position so as to bridge their lost home with their present location.

**Hybridity**

Generally, the term 'hybridity' refers to the creation of something new. It is used in horticulture to refer to the third species produced by mixing or grafting plants of different species. In the domain of postcolonial discourse hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization or mass immigration. It has several forms such as linguistic, cultural and political.

Hybridity occurs as an aftermath of contact or interaction between people from different parts of the world. The history of colonization, slavery, mass

immigration and the recent trend of globalization are responsible in one way or other in the creation of such hybrid societies. Regarding the occurrence of hybridity, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write:

> Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, or when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when settler – invader dispossesses indigenous people and force them to 'assimilate' to new social pattern. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence (e.g. indentured labourers from India and China) continue to produce complex cultural palimpsests with the postcolonized world. (*Postcolonial Studies* 183)

When people with different history, culture and identity come together, they inevitably affect each other. It is impossible for each group to continue with their own way of living with no influence from outside. Colonialism, immigration and globalization cause hybridity which weakens the purity of each culture and identity. The people who are in such cross-cultural situation affirm the state of in-betweeness rather than their essential position. In other words, these people who occupy the space of in-betweenness have taken identity as a learned or constructed allegiance rather than an innate condition.

Both the colonized and the colonizers as well as subordinated and dominant cultural groups are obliged to rethink and reconstitute their earlier positions. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. Hybridity, thus, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant

cultures. It challenges not only the centrality of colonial culture and marginalization of the colonized, but the very idea of 'center' and 'margin'.

**Ethnicity**

The term 'ethnic' as an adjectival form is derived from the Greek word 'ethnikos', which refers to people or nation. In its contemporary form, ethnic still retains the basic meaning in the sense that it describes a group of people possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity who are, at least, aware of having common origins and interests. So, an ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people or a sector of population, but a self-conscious collection of people united, or closely related by shared experiences.

Generally, an ethnic group has come into existence as a consequence of either of these two phenomena. Firstly, people from one country have left their homeland to seek improvements elsewhere or have been forcibly taken from their lands as in the case of Africans. Secondly, the natural inhabitants or native people have been invaded by foreign conquerors or colonizers. Their experiences are usually of deprivation like that of immigrants and their descendants. They are materially deprived, culturally denuded and politically neutered. Thus, the term 'ethnic' conveys its meaning as something that is other than majority.

Ethnicity owes its base on historical and cultural similarities among its members. It has distinct sets of values, belief and norms which differentiates it from other groups. Regarding ethnicity Steve Fenton remarks:

> Ethnic group refers to descent and cultural communities with three specific additions.
>
> 1. That the group is a kind of sub-set within a nation state.
> 2. That the point of reference of difference is typically cultural and,

3. That the group referred is 'other' (foreign, exotic, minority) to some majority, who are presumed not to be ethnic. (23)

Here, Fenton manifests the role of culture while shaping ethnicity. It encourages a sense of belonging based on a common mythological ancestry. Ethnic groups are marginal from the perspective of those people who are in power, or in majority.

Each ethnic group constructs a unique self image that reflects its response to the dominant culture. The reactions of its members may vary according to their different positions, to the social environments, and to the dominant value systems. The self that emerges can be defensive, aiming to preserve the original cultural values and keeping its alienation and marginality. Or the self can be extensive, losing marginality mediating between cultures. Thus multicultural environments force each ethnic group to balance a duality and negotiate the distance. Elaborating the nature of ethnic constituency R. Radhakrishnan writes: “The constituency of ’the ethnic’ occupies quite literally a '-pre-post'-erous space where it has to actualize, enfranchise and empower its own 'identity' and coextensively engage in the deconstruction of the very logic of identity and its binary and exclusionary politics" (62).

Thus, ethnicity is concerned with identity but it does not look back to the one unaffected through time and space. It advocates the belief that culture and identity gain, rather than lose, when opened up to new standards. To state more clearly, ethnicity is the very space of cultural extra-territory that paves the ground for cross cultural interaction, negotiation and understanding.

**Gender**

Gender is often brought into discussion together with the notion of 'sex'. Sex is a biological need, so it is natural. The naturalness of sex is based on the belief in the

discrete differences of the human bodies which are taken to be irreducible. These differences are assumed to be the hallmarks of two different categories of sex – male and female.

On the basis of different physiological features human beings are categorized into two different genders, male and female, and are accordingly assigned different social roles to be performed by them. To put in simple words, if the proper terms for sex are male and female, the corresponding terms for gender are masculine and feminine. Sex is dependent on biology but gender has psychological and cultural connotation. In this sense, sex is unalterable, permanent and biological in origin which refers to the physical differences of the body whereas gender is socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to males and females based on the perceived differences of the sexes themselves. In other words, the term 'sex' refers to the physical nature of human bodies, while gender refers to what different cultures make of sex. Thus we can say that it is 'given' socio-cultural roles, rather than nature, that determines the distinct life experiences among males and females. Thus, unlike sex, gender is socio-cultural construction as claimed by Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . which is described as feminine" (89).

It shows that the concept of gender is largely a cultural construct that is generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. It is culture that has identified masculine as active, dominating, adventurous, and creative, and the feminine as passive, emotional and conventional. The socio-cultural worldview is constituted on the basis of patriarchal discourse that consigns women to a negative and marginal status. It believes on the existence of essential factors that define woman as a woman and man as a man.

Deconstructing this previous worldviews based on the representation of the essential differences between genders, recent theories stress to the performativity of gender. It proposes the view that masculine or feminine is not something that one is, but a pre-established condition that one repeatedly enacts. Forwarding this view in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judtih Butler argues: “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity, or a locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (179). This view of Butler denies the stability and universality of gender. Gender is merely a constructed mechanism of exploitation and sub-ordination by those who are in power so it can easily be questioned and deconstructed.

**Racism**

Racism is the idea that there is a direct correspondence between a groups' values, behaviour and attitudes, and its physical features. It is defined as a way of thinking that attempts to link a group's physical characteristics to its mental and moral characteristics. The origin of the idea of racism can be traced back to the European colonization of much of the world; the rise and development of European capitalism, and the development of the European and American slave trade. As mentioned in The Cambridge Encyclopedia, "Racism is an ideology that claims to explain an alleged inferiority of certain racial and ethnic groups in terms of their biological and physical characteristics." It clarifies that racism is a way of domination and exploitation. Racial prejudice is based upon the belief that certain race is naturally inferior to other race.

Racism dehumanizes people on the basis of their physical attributes ignoring their internal differences and complexity. Defining racism as a way of thinking Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* explain:

“Racism can be defined as a way of thinking that considers a groups’ unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics and which on this basis distinguishes between 'superior' and 'inferior' racial groups” (199). It shows that racism is, in fact, a prejudice conditioned by perceptions. People belonging to certain race have been categorized as inferiors and often dominated and subordinated by other people belonging to so-called superior race.

These racial categories like 'superior' and 'inferior' are merely socio-cultural construction. Thus, racism is merely a discursive formation and can easily be denied and questioned.

The above discussed issues related with cultural studies provide a firm ground to analyze Maxine Hong Kingston's seminal work *The Woman Warrior* from cultural perspective.

Cultural Studies emphasizes that culture, identity, gender and race are discursive formation represented in each society. In other words, it refuses the universality of culture and challenges the belief that group particularism like blackness, femaleness, or Chineseness are essential unchanging qualities.

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the second generation Chinese American narrator opposes the old cultural worldview that tends to silence and marginalize her. Similarly, she raises her voice against the racist mainstream America for its age old exclusion and discrimination upon Chinese American people. The narrator who is both Chinese and American does not want to perpetuate the tradition of reciprocal exclusion and hostility. Instead, she negotiates between the two worlds affirming the identity of in-betweeenness.

## III. Affirmation of Cross-Cultural Identity

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* brings both Chinese and American worlds together affirming the cross-cultural identity of in-betweenness. The narrator recounts the past challenging the authoritative cultural discourses that tend to silence and marginalize her. It is an attempt of a Chinese American daughter to recreate her own space of existence in between both legacies that reshape her identity. For this purpose what follows is the explanation of all five chapters that make up the composite voice of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

The first chapter "No Name Woman" begins with a family story about a dead Chinese aunt. The emigrant mother tells the story to her daughter (narrator) on the condition that she does not speak about it. "'You must not tell anyone'", says the mother "'what I am about to tell you'. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well" (3). The villagers used to organize 'hurry-up weddings' to insure that all the youths gone abroad would responsibly return home. The aunt's husband had sailed for America on the following day of her marriage leaving her back at home. Later, the narrator's paternal aunt gets pregnant out of wedlock and on the day the baby is to be born, the villagers raid and ravage her household. The aunt gives birth to her child in the pigsty and commits suicide along with new-born baby jumping into the family well.

The aunt's act of having illegitimate sexual relationship was against the norms and values of their society. The aunt's state of pregnancy after the long separation with her husband was really a terrible thing in the society. Nobody in the village could even think of such a situation. Even the mother had not noticed before that the aunt had such a "protruding melon of a stomach" (3). It was a stain of disgrace to the aunt's whole family so they decided to forget her forever as a punishment for her betrayal.

"We say that your father has all brothers", says the mother, "because it is as if she had never been born" (3). It was the only option left to the family as a punishment to her.

The mother vividly describes about the situation at the time of raid to her daughter. All the villagers-both familiar and unfamiliar-were involved in the raid. They were so angry with the aunt that "they ripped up her clothes and shoes and broke her combs, grinding them underfoot" (4). Their neighbours cursed the family loosing the 'spirits of-the-broom' over them.

The dominance of patriarchy in the aunt's rural Chinese village is evident in the towering rage of the villagers as depicted in her mother's narration:

> At first they threw mud and rocks at the house. Then they threw eggs and began slaughtering our stock. We could hear the animals scream their deaths-the roosters, the pigs, a last great roar from the ox. Familiar wild heads flared in our night windows; the villagers encircled us. Some of the faces stopped to peer at us, their eyes rushing like search lights. The hands flattened against the panes, framed heads, and left red prints. (4)

It is known later that the mother revealed this tragic family secret to her daughter as a warning because it was the time of her first menstruation. "Now that you have started to menstruate," the mother warns, "what happened to her could happen to you" (5). She bewares her newly menstruated daughter in America not to 'humiliate' them again because the "villagers are watchful" (5).

Even from the way of storytelling to her daughter we can measure the degree of her mother's fear. She says, "Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her" (5). Though the narrator, as an American born daughter, wants to know more about her Chinese aunt, her mother tells nothing more "unless powered by Necessity,

a riverbank that guides her life" (6). She has told her daughter "once and for all the useful parts" and further enquiry is not entertained (6).

On the basis of her mother's story, the narrator creatively invents her own version about the situation that precedes the raid. She interprets the aunt's act of adultery merely an extravagance and compares it with her own act of flying kites and watching movies in America. She says, "Whenever we did frivolous things, we used up energy; we flew high kites" (6). The aunt's extravagance was turned into crime due to the rampant poverty of the village. She questions, "Could people who hatch their own chicks and eat the embryos and the heads for delicacies and boil the feet in vinegar for party food . . . engender a prodigal aunt ?" (6). It points out how any cultural norms and values are prone to influence of outer circumstances. The narrator is dissatisfied with the rural Chinese culture that is repressive towards female. She writes, "To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was waste enough" (6). She describes about several situations where her aunt could have been victim of sex. She writes, "Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountains where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. [. . .] His demand must have surprised, then terrified her. She obeyed him; she always did as she was told" (6). The narrator thinks that females in rural Chinese society did not have their choices. They had to be sexual partner despite their reluctance. They had to be afraid both of the society and the individual. She thinks that for her aunt there would have no difference between her husband and her inseminator. Her husband had spent only a single night with her before he left for the 'Gold Mountain'. It was only in group photograph she could detect "What he looked like" (7). She was submissive to their orders: "They both gave orders. She followed" (7).

Just after the scenario that depicts her aunt as a submissive woman, the narrator portrays her as a seductive woman, harboring her blossoming passion in her attempt to attract a man's attention. She thinks that her aunt must have decided not to maintain the past repressing her youthful feelings and desires. Her aunt have "often worked at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination" (9). The aunt could have been a seductress or a lover as well as a victim of rape or incest. The inseminator could have been her beloved or her villager or even her kinsman.

Basically, in the chapter, "No Name Woman" the narrator tries out first one version of events and then another, first from one cultural point of view and then another. She is at first adamant that her aunt could not possibly have been "the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex" (6). Even if she committed adultery, it could have been out of blind, unreflective obedience, because as a traditional Chinese woman she had been conditioned all her life always to do exactly as she was told. Suddenly, a page or two later, we find her considering precisely the possibility that she has just dismissed. Her aunt might indeed have done what she did out of love because "she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hips" (8).

The aunt was not likely to have been "a wild woman" of course, or "free with sex", the narrator concedes, "I don't know any women like that or men either" (8). But even if some possibilities might have to be dismissed because they are inconsistent with common sense, there is still no limit to the number of possible versions. Of course, there are no a priori limits to the aunt's behaviour or motivation. It is unacceptable to think that certain feelings or behaviour would have been impossible for the aunt, just because she was Chinese or a woman. As a human being, it is always

conceivable that the aunt could have "crossed boundaries not delineated in space" (8). In the same way the aunt, could not have let her feelings pass like 'cherry blossoms' but "let dream grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted" (8). In this way, the narrator opens up a distinct perspectives than that of narrow patriarchal feudal community to see her dead aunt.

Human feelings and emotions are not often under the control of socio-cultural norms and values. She opines, "Attraction eludes control so stubbornly that whole societies designed to organize relationships among people cannot keep order, not even when they bind people to one another from childhood and raise them together" (12). It also points out the inadequacy of any socio-cultural norms and values to represent the complexity of human experience. Describing about the nature of her aunt's village culture, she points out more possibility of incestuous relationship. While there are kinsmen all over the village or community, incest is often inevitable. She writes, "Everybody has eight million relatives. How useless then sexual mannerisms, how dangerous" (12). It is clear hereby that it is such socio-cultural norms and values that make the existence of crime and criminal activities possible.

Similarly, the narrator also concedes that the vastness of cultural norms and values could be the reason of her aunt's adultery. It was not possible for the aunt to have access to 'one roundness into another' with which the community was made up of. She was too shortsighted to see that her infidelity had already harmed the village. She writes, "This roundness had to be made coin-sized so that she could see its circumference . . ." (13). The narrator expresses her sympathy over her aunt trying to prove her innocence.

At the end of the chapter, the narrator picturizes her aunt as a lonely wandering ghost begging for scraps from the gifts given to other ghosts by their

relatives. As a punishment for her betrayal, her family had not given "paper suits and dresses, spirit money, paper houses" to the aunt that could help her "act like gods" (16). The narrator transgresses the imposed silence of family and proves her aunt's innocence. She writes: "My aunt haunts me-her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes" (16). Translating the mother's talk-story from her own perspective, narrator exposes the limitation of any singular moral and cultural point of view. She transforms her dead Chinese aunt, a symbol of disgrace among emigrant family and community into an exemplary 'forerunner' capable enough for 'ancestral help' (8). In the narrator's account, the No Name Woman is transposed from negative into a positive role model for herself to transgress the stifling presence of traditional attitudes and beliefs of Chinese emigrants in America. Yet she is still not without fear as she says, "I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide [. . .]." The narrator's profound confusion about where her loyalty lies regarding the aunt is clearly depicted here. If she identifies with the community, she must accept and even endorse her own humiliation at their hands; if she allows herself to fully experience the depths of her alienation, she is in danger of being cut of from her community. Thus, in the second chapter "White Tigers", she juxtaposes an exploration of the legend of Fa Mu Lan, a tale her mother used to chant, as a compensation to the story of her outlaw aunt. The mythical heroine of her community provides a way for her to transcend the degrading female social role, and yet be loyal to the community.

As a Chinese American girl, she finds a source of strength in the mythical woman warrior to fight against the tyranny and injustice prevalent in her society. It has the potentiality of defying the traditional Chinese image of woman as worthless.

The daughter realizes that her mother's talk-stories themselves have swordswoman's strength. Listening to her mother's stories, the narrator finds herself endowed with the power of the swordswoman. She says, "At last I saw I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story" (19-20).

As a grown up girl, the narrator remembers her mother and herself "singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village" (20). She thinks that her mother may not have known the story's 'power to remind'. "She said I would grow up a wife and a slave", says the narrator, "but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (20). The narrator seems careful in her remarks while referring to her mother's chant. She says, "I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother . . ." (20). It shows that her fantasy won't be limited only to mythical Fa Mu Lan but goes beyond it.

The doubt over the myth's originality is even more evident when the narrator's mother says, "Night after night my mother would talk story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice, the voice of the heroines in my sleep" (19). In course of transmission from one generation to another, there might be changes in the tale's versions. In the same vein, it is obvious that the mother's and the narrator's tales vary greatly; but the fascinating aspect of the tale is the narrator's ability to tell her own tale both in opposition to, and in harmony with her mother's tale.

The narrator retells the story, identifying herself as the swordswoman who is ready to sacrifice her childhood to take the training of the old couple. She is committed to fulfill her duties to her family and all the Chinese people, which is clear from their conversation:

> "You can avenge your village", said the old woman.
>
> "You can recapture the harvests the thieves have taken. You can be remembered by the Han people for your dutifulness"
>
> "I'll stay with you", I said. (23)

Beginning to make sense of the old couple's world the narrator says, "I thought nature certainly works differently on mountains than in valleys" (23). The world of mountains is different from her own. ". . . though they were older than I," says the narrator "but I poured for them" (21). It refers to cultural differences between the two worlds. Inside the hut of the old couple, her mentors, there are table, benches and bed but made of natural things like rocks and fallen trees. It clearly indicates the differences in symbolic structures from one cultural system to another. Significantly, a good part of her training involves exercises, which teach to move her body to make ideographs for various words. She remarks, "I walked putting heel down first, toes pointing outward thirty to forty degrees, making the ideograph 'eight', making the ideograph 'human'" (23). It is through mastery of language that her journey to warriorship begins.

The old couple takes her to the forest of white tigers from where her real training begins. This training for the narrator is how to get free from one's own world so as to be able to unite with other's. It is the state of enlightenment in which seeming dualism unites. It informs Kingston's own vision that delineates differences of gender, race, class and culture. The narrator gestures such unity in her remarks: "I heard high Javanese bells deepen in midring to Indian bells, Hindu Indian, American Indian" (27). In the same way, the seeming differences between gender unite as the narrator says, "The man and the woman grow bigger and bigger, so bright . [. . .] I cannot bear their brightness and cover my eyes, . . ." (27).

At the end of the first phase of training, the old couple takes the survival test asking her to tell her experience in the forest of white tigers. The narrator replies, "I had met a rabbit who taught me about self immolation and how to speed up transmigration . . ." (28). It also points out that the main focus of the training is to equip the narrator to view anything from the perspective of others as well.

After this survival test, the narrator starts her dragon lesson which is more advanced than the earlier one. Quoting the old people the narrator says, "You have to infer the whole dragon from the parts you can see and touch. . ." (28). Here the dragon stands for any cultural system with which the narrator must be aware of to maintain her double legacies in perfect balance. It is clarified further when the narrator metaphorically remarks to the vast world of any cultural system: ". . ., I could understand that I was a bug riding on a dragon's forehead as it roams through space, its speed so different from my speed that I feel the dragon solid and immobile" (29). After this dragon lesson, she learns to make enlightenment a permanent quality of mind: "I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (29). Enlightenment involves widening the field to accommodate contradictory cultural and gender codes. Equipped with the mind to view beyond a singular cultural world, the narrator becomes able to identify her enemies whom she has to execute. She says, "By looking into the water gourd I was able to follow the men I would have to execute. [. . .] I watched powerful men count their money, and starving men count theirs" (30).

The narrator's ability to maintain her dual legacies is implied in the old man's remarks: "you'll never be trapped like that poor amateur. You can see behind like a bat" (30). The narrator's skill of warriorship refers to her skill of living in multicultural world balancing each legacy to the other. Similarly, other gender

definitions divided into male and female also do not exist in her world. It is clear in her remarks: "Menstrual days did not interrupt my training; I was as strong as on any other day" (30).

Kingston seems to attempt to move beyond gender difference to a higher unity beyond gender. The couple in the fantasy often appear like young lovers. Referring to the old couple, the narrator says, ". . . he appeared as a handsome young man, tall with long black hair, and she, a beautiful young woman who ran bare-legged through the trees. In the spring she dressed like a bride. [. . .] By this time I had guessed from the manner that the old woman was to the old man a sister or a friend rather than a wife" (28). It indicates that in the couple's world there is not any form of patriarchy and gender discrimination.

Having problematized traditional gender roles, Kingston presents the complex figure of the swordswoman ready for battle. As the swordswoman leaves her village she is at once the knight in shining armour who rides on her talismanic white horse and the departing bride who receives gifts like wedding presents: "Then the villagers relinquished their real gifts to me – their sons" (36). She wears man's clothes and ties her hair back in manly fashion and is complimented on her beauty: "How beautiful she looks" (36). Her husband appears before her during battle not as titular head of the family, but as the lost part of the swordswoman. He appears in her tent and says, "General, may I visit you in your tent, please?" (39). When she finds her childhood friend as her husband, she gets happy and says, ". . . the childhood friend found at last . . ." (39). With her pregnancy the swordswoman's gender seems most complicated. She describes herself: "I wore my armor altered so that I looked like a powerful big man. [. . .] Now when I was naked, I was a strange human being indeed-words carved on my back and the baby large in front" (39-40).

Through her retelling of Fa Mu Lan's story, Kingston questions the cultural, racial, gender, and class hierarchies and oppositions. In addition to it, she also recreates the role of avenger for her purpose. The swordswoman needs to be the female avenger and the avenger of the family. Thus the woman warrior out in battle avenges not only the wrongs to her village but the discrimination she has been imposed to. Her warriorship extends even to historical distances moving back to the Chinese history but not alone. The swordswoman says, "We would always win, Kuan Kung, the god of war and literature riding before me" (38).

In a scene of confrontation with baron, the swordswoman announces herself as a 'female avenger'. Misunderstanding the word, the baron tries to have alliance with her as if she is a man. He says, "Oh come now. Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them. 'Girls are maggots in the rice'. 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughter'" (43). Only when she rips up her shirt to show her back with words of revenge, he knows her as a woman. It suggests that the attributes of so-called masculine and feminine are merely socio-cultural endowment. The swordswoman's final return as a house woman further reproves the height of her filiality "Three feet three from the sky" (24).

Thus, the legend of swordswoman becomes the personal story of the Chinese American girl enraged at the sexist abuse and racial bigotry of her day to day life. In her real life, her academic progress cannot please her parents. In contrary, she listens to the litany about girls from her senior emigrants. On the one hand, she has to be American feminine scoring good grade in school and on the other the emigrants say, "There is an outward tendency in females" (47). Similarly, she becomes the victim of racial bigotry as the racist bosses dismiss her for not following their footsteps.

The narrator cannot assure herself whether the legacy of bravery that the Han people have helps her or not. She says, "Surely, the eighty pole fighters, though unseen, would follow me and lead me and protect me, as is the wont of ancestor. Or, it may well be that they're resting happily in China, their spirits dispersed among the real Chinese and not nudging me at all with their poles" (49). She admits that she is not able to fight the oppression and subjugation pervasive in her community. She has not been able to convince her neighbours that she is not "one more girl who couldn't be sold" (5). But she realizes that, she must adapt Fa Mu Lan's behaviour to her particular situation, and she discovers how to do so through the example of her mother, Brave Orchid.

Brave Orchid, to whom the third chapter 'Shaman' is devoted, is a student, midwife, mother, laundry worker, farm labourer and indefatigable emigrant. She is nothing if not a contradiction of her own pronouncements on the unworthiness of females. The chapter stresses the mother's heroism, scholarship and power as a role-model for her daughter, the narrator. In the beginning of the chapter, her academic certificates are described in detail which focus her warrior-like personality while education for women in China was still a taboo at her time. The certificate shows her proficiency in "Midwifery, Pediatries, Gynecology, Medicine, Surgary, Therpeutics, Opthalomology, Bacteriology, Dermatology, Nursing and Bandage" (57). In the same way, the narrator describes about her mother's photograph that shows her outstanding personality.

Away from her emigrant husband, Brave Orchid decides to spend her money on study after the death of her two children. A woman of incredible power and intelligence, Brave Orchid escapes her traditional role as housewife. "Free from families," the narrator says, "my mother would live for two years without servitude"

(62). Away from the New Society Village, she is responsible for no one but herself. She finds independence and success at the To Keung School of Midwifery quickly making herself one of the more brilliant students in her class. Unlike the "contented women sitting on her bunk sewing," she aspires for "a job and room of [her] own" (62). She also impresses her classmates fighting and destroying the malicious Sitting Ghost. Her victory over the ghost symbolizes her success in study overcoming the sense of fear, loneliness, insecurity and past traditions. Through her strong will and rigorous self-discipline, Brave Orchid manages to renew her self confidence. Taking up a struggle against ghost in a medical school established by European doctors can also be interpreted as an act of resistance to the hegemonic discourse of Europeanization. Her struggle with the ghost in medical school also prefigures her struggle with ghosts in America later.

Back to her village after the completion of her study, the villagers welcome her with 'garlands and cymbals'. Not unlike the swordswoman, "She had gone away ordinary and come back miraculous, like the magician who came down from the mountains" (76). In the village, she quickly establishes herself as a successful doctor with an amazing skill to heal the sickness and scare away ghosts.

Even in America, Brave Orchid teaches her children to call all people except Chinese and Japanese as ghosts and often warns her children to beware of them. The strong willed woman gives birth to six children in her later years running her laundry fifteen hours each day.

Though Brave Orchid proves a real-life role model for the narrator, she was not free from traditional norms and values as a Chinese woman. For instance, she tells with pride that she bought slave girl in China. She also denies to treat the dying or rescue a madwoman from communal murder when she has to transgress the

community's norms and values. It shows her psyche engraved with such traditional Chinese values.

Many of Brave Orchid's stories are upsetting to the child narrator. It is not easy to figure out how all the things and events fit together meaningfully. The stories about 'slave nurse' and 'holeless boy' frequently recur into her dream. The magical and supernatural figures of the stories haunt her life in America. Observing her childhood days she comments, "Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear" (87).

In the same way, Brave Orchid is often nostalgic for her Chinese homeland. She tells to her children about China as if that is the reality to which her family members eventually have to adjust. "Not when we were afraid" the narrator recalls, "but when we were wide awake and lucid, my mother funneled China into our ears: Kwantung Province, New Society Village, River Kwo which runs past the village" (76). She adds, "Whenever my parents said home, they suspended America" (99). It shows the longingness of her mother for China which is inadequate for the lives of her American born children. Finally, as an author, the narrator elaborates to her mother her need for distance and independence from the tensions and suffocation of ghostly life. Convincing her mother she asks, "Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land we belong to the planet?" (107). It stresses the fact that for the people who are uprooted from their original homeland, identity is often a learned entity rather than a transcendent one. It is their home wherever they are. Finally the mother lets the narrator leave her house which shows their adaptability that they have learned from experiences.

As a Chinese American girl, the narrator must come to terms with herself in relation to the legacy she inherits from her mother and her own present subject

position. She must gain strength from her mother without being harmed by her. For this purpose, she has to recreate her own space of existence in accordance with her present situation.

The futile and fatal attempt of imposing one's own will upon other is depicted in the fourth chapter "At the Western Palace." Brave Orchid invites her sister Moon Orchid from Hong Kong to the United States and urges her to reclaim her wayward husband after thirty years of separation.

Due to Brave Orchid's misconception that her sister will aggressively reclaim her husband and the Americanized couple will also accept Moon Orchid as "Big Wife', her well-intentioned plan comes out disastrous with the ultimate death of her sister in America. At the same time, Brave Orchid's attempt to transplant oriental myth with little obvious relevance to the actual situation also fails.

"You are the Empress of the East", Brave Orchid tells her sister, "and the Empress of the West has imprisoned the earth's Emperor in the Western Palace. And you, the good Empress of the East came out of the dawn to invade her land and free the Emperor" (143). The inadequacy of Brave Orchid's assumption increasingly becomes obvious as the story unfolds. "Those are your children" she advises her sister at one point, referring to the offspring of her husband's second marriage: "The children will go to their true mother you . . ." (125). She urges her sister to march boldly into her husband's house in sub-urban Los Angeles and demand what in traditional Chinese society would have been her rightful place.

Brave Orchid does not allow for the gradual clash between American values and her sister's ability to adjust to the strange new land. Just before her confrontation with her husband, Moon Orchid reacts, "Oh I can't move. My knees are shaking so much I won't be able to walk. He must have servants and workers in there, and they'll

stare at me. I can't bear it" (146). In this regard, Moon Orchid's natural right and freedom for gradual adaptation is questioned. After the rejection by her husband, she goes paranoid and dies in a mental asylum in America.

From this chapter, Kingston attempts to prove how Moon Orchid faced cultural tension and was defeated by it. Similarly, it shows how inadequate old myths are in new situation. It suggests that all myths and legends are contingent upon certain cultural necessity. Whenever they are transplanted, certain changes are always necessary.

Just after the end of chapter, the narrator reveals how little she really does know about what went on in Los Angeles. In the beginning of the last chapter "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," she remarks, "In fact it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her. His version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs" (163). It indicates the possibility of different perspectives from one individual to another to see and observe the events and situations. Moreover, it pokes fun of tendency to generalize human nature and behaviour ignoring its diversities and complexities.

In the same vein, the last chapter stresses on diversity in every aspect of Chinese culture and Chinese emigrant life in America. Like the differences between Brave Orchid, who becomes a doctor in China and fights for her rights in America and Moon Orchid who accepts the role of abandoned wife, emigrant Chinese life varies largely in the United States. When the narrator puts her childish inquiry about the flags of first Chinese emigrants in San Francisco bay to her mother, she replies, "Maybe the San Francisco villagers do that; our villagers don't do that" (183). In a different context, the narrator says, "No other Chinese, neither the ones in

Sacramento, nor the ones in San Francisco, nor Hawaii speak like us" (186). It points out narrator's resistance to stereotype by which she has been victimized for long as a female and ethnic member. Stressing on such diversity even in China, the narrator remarks, "I'd like to go to New Society Village someday and find out exactly how far I can walk before people stop talking like me. I continue to sort out what is just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (205). It implies how impossible it is to generalize their living in certain fix category. It is such variety and constant change that has been shaping the world of culture and identity.

Regarding the silent behaviour of older generation of Chinese emigrants, at one point, the narrator exclaims, "I don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. May be they didn't; may be everyone makes it up as they go along" (185). She is skeptic over the continuity and coherence of any authentic cultural tradition and values.

The last chapter "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" is mainly focused on the narrator's childhood and adolescent life where she has to live through bifurcated realities of two different cultural worlds. As a child, she cannot make sense of her mother's remark that her tongue is cut up. As a student in both Chinese and American school, she begins to be conscious about the difference between languages. She exclaims, "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?" (166). It creates confusion in her immature mind to which she is not able to solve. She has to confront embarrassing situation when her emigrant mother insists her to demand candy from the drugstore. Due to her emigrant mother's insistence, she

cannot avoid doing even the nonsense thing though she is well aware of it. It depicts the difficulties of her growing up among two different cultural worlds.

Her suspicion over her mother's act of tongue cutting makes her so tense about her speech that she can hardly produce any natural and coherent speech. Her own obsession to speech lets her torment a little silent girl, who seems to be like her in many respects.

Due to the narrator's introversion, she has built in her mind a list of bad thoughts or sins that she yearns to tell to her mother. She says, "If only I could let my mother know the list she – and the world – would become more like me, and I would never be alone again" (198). When her first attempt to confess the sins fails, she angrily screams out her list the next time. Surprisingly, this time she cries out her numerous grievances rather than her disloyalty to family. It is significant that the narrator conceptualized the items first as an insider of her mother's cultural world and then as an outsider. This outburst is an important breakthrough in that she is impelled to make a choice, and choosing to identify as injured outsider frees her to speak. At this moment, what she articulates with that new found voice is the need to get away from her home: "I won't let you turn me into a slave or a wife. I am getting out of here. I can't stand living here anymore" (201).

Reacting to her daughter's grievances, the mother admits, 'That is what we're supposed to say. That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite" (203). At this state, the narrator realizes her misconception about her mother. She gains such an insight that she is not only teller but also the listener: "No higher listener. No listener but myself" (204). This is the state of in-betweeness from where the narrator can work as a bridge to bring the two worlds together. Affirming this position, the narrator says,

"I had to leave home to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. [. . .] Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts" (204).

Rather than the sources of ghosts, her mother's stories prove to be a source of enlightenment to her. So, she proudly combines her mother's story about a Chinese grandmother with her own story about Ts'ai Yen as a gesture of reconciliation. The narrator writes: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (206). In both stories, lovers of art have been able to avoid the possible calamities in their life. The grandmother can save her household from the robbery and Ts'ai Yen can return to her family after a long exile in barbarian's land. Through her song, she can transgress the gap between her and the barbarians: "Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger" (209). It refers to Kingston's own success of transferring her feelings from one world to the another.

Thus, the narrator's act of leaving the home is not much different than of Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid and Ts'ai Yen. It is rewarding in the sense that it empowers the self with greater capacity for life and knowledge of human connectedness. From this vantage point, she has been able to reshape the future bringing the two worlds together.

In this regard, Maxine Hong Kingston has proved her warriorship in literary arena as her own declaration: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. [. . .] What we have in common are the words at our backs" (53). With the help of her words she has been able to raise her voice against the tradition of age-old discrimination, injustice, reciprocal hostility and exclusion.

## IV. Conclusion

Cultural issues have often been dominant in the literatures of emigrants and their succeeding generations. The existence of these diasporic and ethnic people or community is determined by its response to the impact of the dominant culture. Their reactions vary according to their different positions, to the social environments and to the dominant value systems. On the theoretical base of Cultural Studies, these different textual responses can be examined and analyzed. Most of these responses are directed to the need of negotiation and mediation between and among the worlds one has to live due to several socio-historical and political circumstances.

As projected on the hypothesis proposed, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been proved as a voice for mediation. Analyzed and interpreted on the basis of several threads related with the issues of culture and identity, detailed discussion of the all five chapters have their orientation towards the limitation and inadequacy of singular moral and cultural point of view. The first chapter has been analyzed to show the punishing beliefs of feudal Chinese community where the victimization of female is almost predestined. The second chapter focuses on the modern day incarnation of legendary Fa Mu Lan who is capable enough to subvert the cultural oppositions, and gender and racial hierarchies. The third chapter presents the real-life role-model of Fa Mu Lan who is able to transgress to a large extent the socio-cultural barriers imposed upon female. The fourth and fifth chapter strengthens the theme of Kingston's necessity to recreate her own space of existence reconfiguring bicultural discourses.

As regards Kingston's own past account of growing up among conflicting norms and values and the discrimination of both sides she had to face, it is her necessity to rebuild a new future. She refuses to remain a victim of reciprocal

exclusion and hostility as well as to be a victim of discrimination from both legacies. She manages to go beyond her mother's talk-stories translating it to suit her own present situation. In between the two worlds, she positions herself across languages and across cultures. She challenges the delimiting elements and embraces the empowering elements of both cultural worlds. Instead of dangling as a double-alienated outsider, she succeeds in bridging the two cultures and merging the duality. Kingston acknowledges the influence of both cultures that exist not as an antithesis that excludes each other but as an integration that combines both. She does not want to build a wall that divides but to create a bridge that connects.

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