

**Seeking Identity between Worlds:
A Study of Selected Chinese American
Fiction**

MA Mini-Thesis

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Keywords

- Diaspora
- Chinese American Literature
- Identity
- Postcoloniality
- Autobiography
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Amy Tan
- Jade Snow Wong

Abstract

“Seeking Identity between Worlds: A Study of Selected Chinese American Fiction”

The literature of the Chinese diaspora in America is marked by a tension between ancestral Chinese traditional culture and the modernity of Western culture. This thesis explores diaspora theory, as elaborated by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Gabriel Sheffer and others to establish a framework for the analysis of key Chinese American literary works. Maxine Hong Kingston’s seminal novel, *The Woman Warrior* (1975), will be analysed as an exemplary instance of diasporic identity, where the Chinese cultural heritage is reinterpreted and re-imagined from the point of view of an emancipated woman living in the West. A comparative analysis will be undertaken of Jade Snow Wong’s *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) to identify links between the writers who have grappled with various forms of diasporic identity in their works. An important part of this analysis is the representation and adaptation of Chinese folklore and traditional tales in Chinese American literary works.

Declaration

I declare that “SEEKING IDENTITY BETWEEN WORLDS: A STUDY OF SELECTED CHINESE AMERICAN FICTION” is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have utilized or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

LIU CHUNJING

November 2011

Signed: _____



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I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have offered me help and encouragement throughout the undertaking of the study.

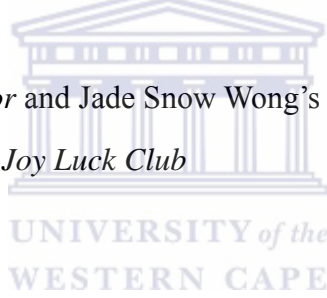
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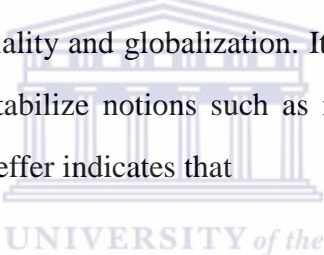
Chapter one

Introduction

This thesis will examine Maxine Hong Kingston's seminal American novel, *The Woman Warrior – Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) within a framework of diaspora theory. Diasporic writers have double national and cultural identities that allow them to understand and reflect on cultural shifts in their foreign context. This is of great significance for us if we are to understand Kingston's works. According to Salman Rushdie "a full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behavior and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to his own" (1992:277-278). Kingston's book however shows how the originally alienated situation of the migrant has undergone change: in her stories the narrator has in a sense moved beyond the condition of "disruption" and has embraced a diasporic identity that relates itself to both the former "lost place" as well as to the new country. As a result, this thesis intends to examine Maxine Hong Kingston's diasporic cultural identity as represented in *The Woman Warrior*. Supported by insights from some diasporic theories, notably Homi Bhabha's "third space" theory, I will look at the new cultural identity which comes about in this in-between space, showing that it belongs neither to China nor to America; it is a so-called "third culture" (Shaffer, 1998:1). Diasporic identity is the result of negotiation between Western and Eastern culture, forming a new hybrid subjectivity which is still closely connected with each.

John Thieme indicates that "historically, [diaspora] continued to be mainly used to refer to the large number of Jews living outside Israel, but in recent times it has been applied to the overseas migrant populations of numerous other communities and peoples, e.g. the African or Black diaspora, the American diaspora, the South Asian diaspora and the Irish diaspora" (2003:77). In literary studies, postcolonialism has

specifically looked at the way in which the global effects of empire and colonialism during the 19th century and before, have affected cultural politics and representations of self in the 20th century. In the 1960s, a growing public interest in globalization and its cultural effects began to emerge, and, in this process, the contradictions and paradoxes of diasporic communities also began to receive interest. With the development of globalization, international communications strengthened, and different countries and regions became more connected than ever before. This resulted in the emergence of a significant phenomenon – a world-wide wave of immigrants. Diaspora – an unavoidably significant development – is now becoming more and more common in the global context. According to Zhang Longhai, “with this rise in number of immigrants internationally, what has come to be known as Diaspora literature began to develop” (2004:56). All in all, diaspora is an increasingly important aspect of postcoloniality and globalization. It is always connected with the shifts and mutations that destabilize notions such as nation, ethnicity, culture, and especially identity. Gabriel Sheffer indicates that



[b]ased on aggregate decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. (2003:10)

Chinese Americans, as an ethnic diasporic group, are simultaneously both alienated from and attracted to the American dominant community, and thus their culture emerges as a hybrid expression of otherness. This thesis will look at the way select Chinese Americans construct new identities that mediate between traditional Chinese and Western ideas.

According to Zhang, “the flowering of the black consciousness movement in the 1960s brought about a growing awareness of the freedom associated with human rights. In this context, the Chinese American diaspora followed suit, taking up the struggle for their rights as well” (2004:120). As a result, the period following the

1960s is marked by the appearance of some key Chinese American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, Amy Tan and Gus Lee. Among these, Maxine Hong Kingston and her first book, *The Woman Warrior – Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, hold a position of indisputable importance in the long history of Chinese American literature. Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin, the authors of a collection of interviews with Maxine Hong Kingston, in their introduction, summarize the impact of Kingston's first book, *The Woman Warrior*:

It is estimated that [Kingston's] work is the most anthologized of any living American writer, and that she is read by more American college students than any other living author. Students, particularly Asian American women, look to her as a model, find themselves in her tales; seek her out with sycophantic regularity. (1998: vii)

Therefore, Kingston can be seen as a representative Chinese American writer whose work has to be engaged with in the study of the Chinese American diaspora. As a result, this thesis will, in the light of diaporic theory, explore questions regarding narrative and identity in Chinese American writers by focusing on Kingston's work, notably her first book.

Besides Kingston, Jade Snow Wong is “a pioneering figure in Asian American literary history and one of the most noted Asian American autobiographers” (Huang, 2001:79). Kingston has claimed on many occasions (in conversations and interviews) that Jade Snow Wong has had a considerable influence on her writing; she praises her as “the Mother of Chinese American Literature” (Ling, 1990:20). Therefore, Jade Snow Wong's work forms an indispensable part of the analysis of this thesis. The aim is to explore how Kingston has followed in her senior's footsteps in articulating the special hybrid identities of the Chinese American diaspora.

Another Chinese American woman writer who addresses the important theme of identity as experienced by Chinese American women is Amy Tan. Her first novel, *The*

Joy Luck Club, was published in 1989, and “held a place on *The New York Times* best seller list for nine months” (Rosinsky, 2007:11). As a Chinese American woman writer, Amy Tan portrays the complexity and resilience of Chinese cultural consciousness. As a result, her works mirror sensitive feelings which emphasize family relationships and the importance of blood ties. As the mother-daughter relationship is also a key theme in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, this thesis will also focus on a comparison between Kingston and Amy Tan as two significant Chinese American diasporic writers.

Maxine Hong Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*

Maxine Hong Kingston was born on 27th October, 1940 in California, America. Her father, Tom Hong, and her mother, Ying Lan Chew, were both Chinese immigrants. While Kingston was their third child, she is the first of their American-born children. E.D. Huntley argues that “much of the available published information about Kingston’s parents and her own childhood is embedded in her first two books, *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980)” (2001:1). Maxine’s father, Tom Hong, a professional scholar, well-educated in China, could only work as a window washer because of the discriminatory early American immigrant policy when he emigrated to the United States in 1925. Huntley indicates that “Maxine’s mother, Chew Yinglan (the character Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior* is modeled on her), had married Tom Hong in China and the couple had two children who died very young” (2001:2). Like many other Chinese immigrants, Tom and Chew were separated for fifteen years and the father sent money back to China to support the family. Chew was well-trained in medicine and midwifery, as well as in Western-style medicine.

Huntley refers to Kingston’s revelation that “she is the descendant of several sojourners”, explaining that “in her father’s family, men traditionally sojourned in North America three or four times before returning permanently to China” adding that “the men in her mother’s family were also sojourners” (2001:2). Her ancestors’

sojourner experience forms a significant background for Kingston's creation of the experience of straddling Chinese and Western culture: "growing up on Hazleton Avenue in Stockton and surrounded by Chinese immigrants who had made their homes there, Maxine spoke Chinese at home and around her parents' friends" (Huntley, 2001:4). However, when she was five, her parents sent her to school, where she had to speak English. Kingston was living in Chinatown which provided her with Chinese surroundings "punctuated by traditional Chinese theatre [which was] alive and well in California, in contrast to what was happening in the old country" (Huntley, 2001:5). The outcome of this as it appears in her novels, is that, on the one hand, in Kingston's novel there are a large number of vivid traditional Chinese stories; on the other hand, all her information about China is second-hand, presented from the point of view of a diasporic community embedded within Western culture. The consequence of this is a hybrid form of story-telling where Western perspectives are interwoven with traditional Chinese stories.

As a result, Maxine Hong Kingston's novels set up a new trajectory in Chinese American literature that forms an interface between Chinese American culture and American mainstream society, between Chinese folk tales and American popular culture. They open a way for her ancestral experience to have meaning for her own generation.

The Woman Warrior not only made a reputation for Kingston, but also heralded a new era in Chinese American literature. According to Huntley, "with the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1976, writing produced by Asian Americans entered the mainstream of twentieth-century American literature, achieving ... both popular acclaim and a solid position in the canon of American literature" (2001:39). The novel may also be regarded as "the first Asian American text to both enter the arena of national culture and arrest the American public imagination" and can be regarded as "a book that changed forever the face and status of contemporary Asian American literature" (Li, 1999:44).

The Woman Warrior won her the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 and the Anisfield Wolf Race Relations Book Award in 1978. In 1997, when Maxine Hong Kingston was awarded the Presidential Humanities Medal, President Clinton addressed the reception ceremony with the following comment: “In her ground-breaking book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*; she brought the Asian-American experience to life for millions of readers” (1997:1265).

Although conventionally viewed as a kind of autobiographical text, *The Woman Warrior* contains more than facts about the author. It is a combination of fact and fiction, as it weaves together her family stories, traditional Chinese tales and reminiscences within the imaginative texture of the book. *The Woman Warrior* is about a Chinese American girl growing up between two worlds: one is represented by an image of China created by the narrator’s immigrant family and their neighbors in San Francisco; the other is America, a world filled with “ghosts”, which refers to both non-Chinese persons and things, and the things that the narrator does not understand. Kingston’s book consists of five stories: “No Name Woman”, “White Tigers”, “At the Western Palace”, “Shaman” and “Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”. These stories are told in a strong, vivid narrative style that presents the conflict, and the possibilities for amalgamation, between Chinese and American culture, as well as offering an insight into the hybrid inheritance of the Chinese American diaspora.

Responses to *The Woman Warrior* have by no means been unambiguously positive. On the one hand, *The Woman Warrior* is generally acclaimed as a great feminist work; on the other hand, many Chinese and Chinese American scholars (such as David Toming, Leiwei Li and Wenshu Zhao) complain that *The Woman Warrior* constitutes a rebellion against patriarchy and sexism in old China rather than one against sexism and racism in the white mainstream. To them, *The Woman Warrior* confirms, consciously or unconsciously, Edward Said’s critique of the juxtaposition of “civilization and democracy” of modern America versus the “barbarism and

despotism” of old China (1978:172), and so, to some extent, reinforces notions of Orientalism and white supremacy. For example, Kingston’s creative use of Chinese traditional myths and her criticism of the Chinese patriarchal tradition in the culture, was provocative to several Chinese American male writers and critics who accused her of pandering to the Orientalist idea of effeminized Chinese American males. Frank Chin, one of the chief critics of Kingston, and himself a creative writer, wrote in his anthology of Chinese American literature, *The Big Aiieeeee*:

The China and Chinese Americans portrayed in these works (including the works of Kingston and other authors) are the products of white racist imagination, not Chinese culture, and not Chinese or Chinese American literature. (Chin,1991:xii)

In response to such critique, this thesis will consider these two perspectives and argue how Kingston represents diasporic identity through her work, *The Woman Warrior*.



A Brief Introduction to Chinese American Literature History

In order to understand Chinese American writing more fully, especially *The Woman Warrior*, it is necessary to consider the historical background of immigration from China to the United States during the mid-nineteenth century.

Xiao-huang Yin in his book, *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, indicates that there are scarcity of reliable sources which can provide proof of exactly when and where the Chinese first came to North America. However, he also indicates that “although some individuals arrived in the New World as early as the eighteenth century, it was not until the Gold Rush years that Chinese immigration became large enough to have a significant impact on American society” (2000:12). As a result, the history of Chinese Americans goes back to the eighteenth century when the first group of Chinese immigrants left their home country to seek their fortune in the United States, a country that the Chinese referred to as “the Gold Mountain” (Yin, 2000:12). According to Yin’s introduction to his book, early Chinese American

writing appeared soon after the large-scale immigration around the time of the gold rush when numerous Chinese laborers were recruited from villages in Southern China to build the transcontinental railroad, and work in the mines on the west coast of the United States. The earliest Chinese American work in English can be traced back to 1887. It is the autobiography *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) written by an overseas student, Lee Yanphou, who was sponsored by a missionary. In his book, Lee talked about his life in China before the age of thirteen, and referred to all kinds of Chinese customs. Court official Yung Wing's *My Life in China and America* (1909) and diplomat Wu Ting Fang's *America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (1914), also occupy an important position in early Chinese American literature. These elitist works, owing to their dissociation from the common people, ignored the life and death struggles of the large numbers of labourers under American domination. But Edith Eaton, whose pen name was Sui Sin Far, reflected a different view of Chinese immigrants. Though Eaton herself was only half Chinese (and half English), she was devoted to the cause of counteracting the hatred and prejudice against Chinese Americans. She enriched Chinese American literature through her short-story collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912).

Once the discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act was finally abolished in 1943, the number of Chinese American writers gradually began to increase. For example, this period saw the appearance of Jade Snow Wong's *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) and Diana Chang's *The Frontiers of Love* (1956). Cheng indicates that "it was not until 1960 that Chinese American literature attracted significant attention from American society" (2003:23). In 1976, with the publishing of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Chinese American literature was ushered into its period of growth and creativity. According to Harold Bloom, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, "made the first significant impact of Chinese American literature on the mainstream American literature and paved the way for young writers of the next decades" (2009:50).

According to Cheng's *Studies on Chinese American literature* (2003), the Obie Award for the Best New Play went to David Henry Hwang's *F. O. B* (1990), and his *Butterfly* (1988) won the Tony Award for Best New Dramatic Play on Broadway in 1988. Frank Chin's collection of stories, *The Chinaman Pacifica and Frisco Railroad Co.* won the American Book Awards from the Before Columbus Foundation. In this period, the most successful writer was Amy Tan. Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) soon gained critical praise, and remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for many months. The 1990s saw an abundant harvest of Chinese American literature. Many books were published which attracted American readers' attention. These include Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), Gus Lee's *China Boy* (1991), David Wong Louie's *Pangs of Love: Stories* (1991), Gish Jen's *Typical American* (1991), Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993), etc.

This brief overview of Chinese American literary history suggests that Chinese American women writers began to occupy a significant position in this new and expanding field. They felt the need to speak out in a loud voice, given the opportunity, and their contribution has therefore been quite significant in relation to their male counterparts. One reason for this development may be because Chinese American women suffered a form of double oppression – from American racism on one hand, and from their own patriarchal system on the other. As Yvonne Walter says:

Until now, Chinese American literature has largely been dominated by women writers. Authors like Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan or Gish Jen are not only familiar to a literary audience inside Asian America, but have gained fame within a wider American society. Certainly, there is also a growing number of male authors in Chinese American communities, but with a few exceptions, such as David Henry Hwang or Lawson Inada, hardly any of them has exceeded local recognition. Frank Chin, one of the better known writers, has not so much been recognized for his literary accomplishment as for his attacks on female authors since the early 1990s. (quoted in Guan Hefeng, 2007:7)

As a result, to understand the significance of the emergence of these texts, it is important to acknowledge that it was Maxine Hong Kingston's novels which set up a

new trajectory in Chinese American literature, one that came to form an interface between Chinese American history and American mainstream society, and between Chinese folk tales and American popular culture. Her work marks a moment when Chinese American literature is no longer suffering from Rushdie's "triple disruption" (1992:277) but begins to embrace a diasporic identity.

Overview of Chapters

In my opening chapter, I will provide a general introduction to diasporic theories, looking at the meaning of diaspora and its impact on postcolonial studies. Here I refer to Homi Bhabha's hybridity and "the third space" theory as well as Stuart Hall's notions of cultural identity. These theoretical positions will assist in the process of analyzing Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the themes which emanate from it, which together form the central focus of this thesis.

In the second chapter, Kingston's work, *The Woman Warrior*, will be analyzed in detail, against the backdrop of Chinese history and Chinese American literature, as well as the characteristic features of diasporic literature. *The Woman Warrior* deals with identity, which is a frequent theme in diaspora literature. As already apparent in the subtitle of Kingston's novel, "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts", the term "Ghost" is a central concept. Therefore, the meaning of "Ghost" in the context of traditional Chinese interpretation will be discussed in this chapter, with the aim of further discussing and analyzing the conflict between the mother and daughter – which stands as a microcosm for the larger conflict between Chinese culture and American culture. In this chapter, the character Mulan is selected as a central focus for discussion. Kingston creates an altered image of this traditional Chinese folk heroine, thus creating a hybrid character with a distinctively modern, feminist consciousness. In Kingston's version, Mulan's name is scratched on her back by her parents. It becomes a transplantation of the story of Yue Fei, a patriotic hero in Chinese history, whose mother scratched on his back the words: "Faithful to

Motherland Forever” before he joined the army. Kingston combines these two stories and creatively rewrites the traditional folk tales to suit her own emancipatory agenda.

In Chapter 3, the manner in which Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* is crucial to the creation of a new writing tradition that aims to rewrite Chinese tales is analyzed. It becomes clear that what she adapts from Jade Snow Wong’s works and the means whereby Kingston reflects on her novels are intrinsic to this process. Apart from this aspect, Kingston’s influence on followers such as Amy Tan is analyzed, notably the way in which Amy Tan develops the complex mother-daughter relationships that Kingston explored.

In this thesis three women writers have therefore been selected as representatives of Chinese American diasporic literature. They are Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. The focus of this thesis is on Kingston’s work as the key example that illustrates the diasporic characteristics of Chinese American literature. Jade Snow Wong’s and Amy Tan’s works are referred to with the aim of bringing to light points of difference and points that illustrate development, as well as a space in which comparative insights may be reflected upon.

In my conclusion, I will summarize the main ideas of this thesis and argue that a study of Chinese American diasporic literature can serve a study of the diasporic literatures and cultures more generally. In this regard, the conclusion will briefly look at two South African Chinese diasporic texts, Ufrieda Ho and Darryl Accone's works. Each of these texts may be read as a good example of Chinese diasporic literature and offer a reflection on Kingston’s works.

Chapter 2

Diaspora Theory and Chinese American Literature

In this chapter, Chinese American literature will be looked at within a postcolonial framework, with a particular focus on the concept of diaspora. Diaspora is an important concept because it is the basic theory for understanding Chinese American literary works. This chapter will provide a general introduction to diaspora theories and it will focus on two points: the meaning of diaspora and the postcolonial approaches to diaspora. In postcolonial studies on diaspora, there are two key theorists, namely Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall. This chapter will focus on introducing both Homi Bhabha's theory of Hybridity and "the third space", and Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity" theory. The introduction of these theories is an important background to the whole thesis.

2.1 Diaspora's Original Meaning and the Postcolonial Meaning

Both Peter Brooker and John Thieme indicate that traditionally, the word diaspora was applied to the dispersal of the Jews during the period of their Babylonian captivity. Thus, from its origin, the word diaspora was closely related to dislocated experience. According to Sudesh Mishra, "in the first instance, diaspora was... a neologism whose origin can be dated back to ancient Greece meaning scattering or disseminating and was originally employed to explain the botanical phenomenon of seed or pollen dispersal" (2006:13). The metaphor of scattering seeds can help us form a clear impression of the term's meaning. Since its first appearance as a cultural phenomenon in *the Old Testament*, Zhang Longhai indicates that "diaspora as a concept was associated with the dispersive experiences of the Jewish people who were scattered all over the world for quite long time" (2004:113).

Menahem Ben-Sasson points out that the modern use of “diaspora is first linked by historians with the migration of Palestinian Jews, which occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem” (1997:3). Afterwards, it is extended to refer to the dispersion of various originally homogeneous peoples, such as Chinese diaspora, Caribbean diaspora, South Asian diaspora, etc. J.D. Cohen Shaye and Ernst S. Frerichs underscore the nature of diaspora in the ancient works and signal its continued pertinence to the present:

The contemporary common usage of the word “diaspora”, which links the word to the experience of the Jewish people in their exile to Babylon and their dispersion throughout the Mediterranean world, is too exclusive an application. Viewed as a mass migration of movement or flight from one location or locations, diaspora could be viewed as an event in the history of several peoples of antiquity. Clearly the fact of dispersion and its many consequences have been an experience of many people, ancient and modern. (1993: 1)

Thus the meaning of the word “diaspora” has now been extended to refer to more than only the movement of Jewish people. Diaspora, as Martin Baumann in an article titled “Diaspora: Genealogies of Semantics and Transcultural Comparison” (2000) suggests, signifies at least three different inherent things: “when we say ‘diaspora’, we have to clarify its notion, that is, whether we refer to the process of becoming scattered, or the community living in foreign parts, or the place or geographic space in which the dispersed group live” (2000: 313).

Mishra argues that diaspora criticism is “an interdisciplinary genre of theoretical writing devoted to issues relating to identity politics, migratory subjectivity, identifications, group taxonomy as well as double consciousness” (2006:13). The concepts “migratory subjectivity” and “double consciousness” are particularly useful perspectives on diasporic identity. For example, in the novel the narrator, as a second generation Chinese American, born in America to Chinese parents, grows up between the two cultures and consequently has a “double consciousness”. On the other hand, she is different from other white-skinned, blue-eyed Americans and on the other, she

is living in America, so to her China is a far-off and mysterious place. The following chapter will give a more detailed exploration of these perspectives of diaspora.

Although as discussed above, the term diaspora is derived from the Greek verb “dispeiro” (to sow, scatter) and the prefix ‘dia’ (apart or across), the meaning of diaspora was not initially used to refer to people dispersed from their homeland. Stephane Dufoix holds that in the so-called Septuagint Bible, “diaspora” always means “the threat of dispersion facing the Hebrews if they failed to obey God’s will” (2008:4). It was only in later Jewish tradition that the meaning of “diaspora” changed to designate both “the scattered people and the locale of their dispersion” (Dufoix, 2008:4). Then Waltraud Kokot notes the expansion of its reference as follows:

Nowadays the label has been stretched to cover almost any ethnic or religious minority that dispersed physically from its original homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to the dispersion, and regardless of whether, and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the community and the home country. (2004:9)

According to Mishra, there are three distinct historical moments corresponding to the emergence of Diaspora social formations, that is, “the classic or pre-modern, the (early) modern as well as the late (post) modern” (2006:13). The Jewish people, as the pre-modern diaspora, represent “the classic diaspora phenomenon by reason of their capacity to preserve their integrity as an ethno-religious community despite more than two thousand years of existence without political power over their own country of origin” (Dufoix, 2008:8). As modern societies are characterized by a belief in reason, universality and stability, correspondingly a modern definition of diaspora highlights cultural integrity and fixed identity. Dufoix defines modern diaspora, such as Chinese American diaspora, as follows: “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands” (2008:9). Gabriel Sheffer gives a further explanation:

Essential aspects of the phenomenon are the unending cultural-social-economic struggles and especially the political struggles of these dispersed ethnic groups, permanently residing in host countries away their homelands, to maintain their distinctive identities and connections with their homelands and other dispersed groups from the same nations. (1986: iii)

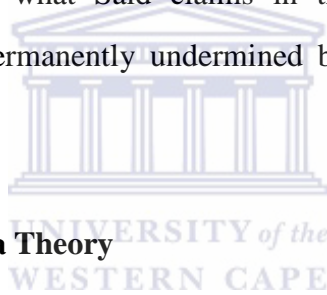
In postcolonial theory, diaspora is defined as “the movement from own homeland to other places under compulsion or of own accord, which was a central historic event during the process of colonization” (Ashcroft, 2007:224). Zhang Jinyuan also defined the term diaspora as “the dispersive experience of a nation all over the world due to external force or according to one’s own will” (1999: 1, my own translation). Most immigrant laborers, due to the expansion of the capitalist market, are from the continents of Africa and Asia, and consequently, as discussed in the introduction, Thieme argues that “recently, besides the historically Jewish diaspora, we now see an emergence of the African or Black diaspora, the American Diaspora, the South Asian diaspora and the Irish Diaspora” (2003:77). Hence, in the period after the 1980s, the word ‘diaspora’ began to appear uncapitalized and was widely used to refer to other origins or ethnicities. Most of the works by Chinese American writers show that many Chinese people went to America for money and a better lifestyle. In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator says, “We will meet in California next year... all of them sent money home” (Kingston, 1976: 1). However, most Chinese American diasporic people have arguably a poorer lifestyle than they had in China. For example, in the chapter, *Shaman of The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid was respected doctor in China; however, in the chapters that follow, when she arrives in America, she has to work in a laundry.

As to the life in exile, Edward W. Said writes at the beginning of his essay “Reflections on Exile” (2000):

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self

and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (2000:173)

Born into displacement without choice, Said, representing those who share the same fate, asks: "What is like to be born in a place, to stay and live there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever?" (Said, 2000:181) In order to reflect the feelings and life of those exiled Chinese Americans, Kingston employs and adapts the story of an exiled Chinese poet in *The Woman Warrior*. The story of the Chinese poet Ts' ai Yen manifests that the idea of exile is a universal archetype in various cultures, for it recalls a shared spiritual state of human collective unconsciousness to that of being banished. This ties in with what Said claims in the above passage, that "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever".



2.2 Stuart Hall and Diaspora Theory

Diaspora as a key word frequently appears in the works of postcolonial cultural critics, for instance, in Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2006). Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), Robin Cohen's *Global Diaspora* (2008) and *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) by Paul Gilroy are further theoretical texts that explore diasporic identity.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2006), Hall points out that there are two different ways of thinking about identity: one is connected with uniformity, similarity and continuity while the other regards differences and discontinuities. Hall cautions that identities are not eternally fixed on some essential past (for instance, "Africanness" or "Chineseness"). Instead, they are "subject to the continuous 'replay' of history, culture,

and power” (2006:345). Identity is an ongoing process and a production constructed within representations. He claims that “it is a matter of becoming rather than being” (2006:345). That is to say, identity does not exist as something held from birth, but must go through complex processes to cross two or more cultural gaps; it is achieved in the process of development and integration. The latter sense of an unfixed, non-essential identity is clearly central to Kingston’s project. In one of her interviews, Kingston explains that the reason she prefers the unhyphenated title (“Chinese American”) is that the hyphen (as in “Chinese-American”) separates the two worlds as well as the two cultures, leaving her feeling excluded from both. Without a hyphen, Chinese is only an adjective to modify American. Asked to explain, she answered: “I also call myself a Stocktonian, the daughter of the San Joaquin Valley and the Central Valley. I am a Cantonese, and to be exact, a Sun Woi villager” (Skenazy & Tera, 1998:88). Her identity is thus multiple and not reducible to either America or China. When Kingston claims America and emphasizes her subject position, she does not forget her Chinese descent. She is straddling the two cultures. Therefore, to some extent, Kingston’s dislocated Chineseness also manifests what Hall calls “uniformity, similarity and continuity”.

If the diasporic community wants to live within mainstream society, they must learn how to adapt to the new culture, which involves a rupture or break with the past. That is what Hall refers to as “differences and discontinuities” (2006:21). These “differences and discontinuities” have to be adopted for the diaspora to adapt to the new cultural context. Throughout the text Kingston questions the definition of identity, from both a gender point of view, and from a cultural point of view. Kingston reveals the cultural conflicts that have affected her and how, ultimately, she was able to fight back and establish her new un-hyphenated Chinese American identity.

For example, *The Woman Warrior* is Kingston’s exploration of the dilemma of the Chinese American woman as she struggles for selfhood in a hostile environment. Straddling two cultures, the narrator has to confront her Chinese heritage that reaches

her mainly through her mother's mythical 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 American society. As a Chinese American woman, the narrator 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 Chinese American identity and voice, one that is not externally imposed but self-expressive, born painfully out of the experience of alienation and suffering. As a result, Chinese American identity is intrinsic to the fact of diaspora, and is achieved through life rather than inherited at birth.

In the wake of the increasingly transnational world brought about by globalization, the idea of diaspora challenges essentialist conceptions of identity and culture. Hall writes that "cultural identity is constituted not as an essence but as a positioning" (2006:26). Hall's use of the term "positioning" refers not only to the idea that cultural identity can be viewed as rooted in a history, but also as something positioned or placed both from within the culture and from outside of the culture, where the term positioning refers to the geographical position in which cultural identity is rooted. Hall suggests that within the places where cultural identity is positioned, it is not rooted, but keeps changing within people wherever they become newly positioned, since it is constantly being transformed or is becoming something new or different. Therefore, cultural identity, while rooted in places and histories, cannot be static, since views of history are constantly changing according to where people are positioned. So, cultural identity, while neither a static or homogeneous entity, is constantly being redefined from within and outside of the culture.

Hall's theory provides a good theoretical background for explaining Kingston's rewriting of Chinese tales. For example, in the subtitle of the book, "Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts", the word 'Ghost' carries an immediate negative duality of

meaning: apart from its superstitious meaning, in Chinese, “ghost” refers to the people who belong to a culture other than that of the Chinese people. Its connotation is one that suggests something alien and disagreeable. As a result, the subtitle of this book indicates that it contains stories about a Chinese migrant suffering. Kingston’s narrator is “positioned” in America instead of in China.

Hall concludes that “diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (2006:235). Owing to their dislocated diasporic life, the diasporic communities no longer belong to their native countries. In order to survive living in their host countries, they have had to allow their customs and other particularities to be influenced by those of the host countries. As a result, when they meet their native people, these diasporic individuals are treated as familiar strangers – the same skin color and looks, but different customs. However, since diasporic people cannot completely deny their native ways, they cannot be accepted so easily by, or assimilated into the host countries. As a result, the diasporic identities of these people will be in a state of what Hall describes as “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew” (2006:5), which is a special state. Hall connects this with the condition and experience of hybridity.

2.3 Hybridity and “The Third Space”

In *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha provides postcolonial critical discourse with original theoretical tools. Most of Bhabha’s thoughts and thought-provoking concepts, such as the “third space”, “hybridity”, “cultural translation”, “mimicry”, have become influential in the field of cultural studies. These theories are also utilized in the study of diaspora and ethnic minority writings. In the following section, I will explore how Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* reflects Bhabha’s notions of “Third Space” and “Hybridity”.

“The third space” is a term coined by Homi Bhabha in his study of cultural difference.

He does not clearly define this term, but we can get an inductive concept from his overall accounts. Generally speaking, “third” in English refers to a position that transcends the traditional binary opposition and cannot be definitely categorized as this or that. For example, recently gender studies have witnessed the emergence of a new term – the third sex. People who are classified into the third sex are gay, bisexuals and transgendered individuals who cannot be contained in the conventional male-female binary. They form a special third sex community. In cultural studies, the idea of third culture can refer to those growing up in multicultural or immigrant contexts, and find it hard to identify with a conventional, binary notion of nation or country.

Apart from the general meaning of vagueness and obscurity, Bhabha’s notion of “third space” attaches significance to the construction of a new culture and identity. For him the third space is an “interstitial space” (Bhabha, 1994:34) which is intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity; it is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” (Bhabha, 1994: 13) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production that blurs the limitations of existing boundaries, and calls into question established categorizations of cultural meaning and identity. Thus, the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective space that engenders new possibilities. The third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no “primordial unity or fixity” (Bhabha, 1994:30).

For Bhabha, the “third space” is inevitably related to “hybridity”. The term “hybrid” or “hybridity” originally stems from biology, meaning a sense of intermingling or cross-breeding, which has now come to be widely used in both science and the humanities. According to Bhabha, “hybridity or the hybrid state is where two cultures meet” (1994:12). It is a space interwoven from different national backgrounds, social cultures, as well as life experiences. The space is not merely where binary opposition exists but a place where different races, classes, genders and cultural traditions

converge to form a hybrid state. Bhabha says in his introduction to *The Location of Culture* (1994):

The move away from the singularities of “class” or “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical location, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of original and initial subjectivity and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1994: 1-2)

Bhabha illustrates in detail the process of cultural discourse when two seemingly opposing groups clash and articulate their differences. As the above-mentioned citation says, “new signs of identity” form in the ‘in-between spaces’ and emerge when and where the two groups clash or converge. As a result, Bhabha defines this space as an intersectional position where cultural interplay, hybridity and convergence take place. For example, there are many cultural clashes between Chinese culture and American culture in *The Woman Warrior*, especially the conflict between the mother (who represents Chinese culture) and the daughter (who represents American culture). However, through this conflict, they achieve a space which is Bhabha’s “in-between” space, productive of new identities. It is neither an American identity nor a Chinese identity; it is called a Chinese American identity. This perspective will be explored in the following chapters.

Bhabha also raises his idea about culture in a postcolonial context. Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity claims that the national character is shaped by the co-existence of different cultures. Therefore, the basis of national culture is founded in difference. The three terms, namely hybridity, liminal space and exile, as proposed by Homi Bhabha within a discussion of a postcolonial context, all embody a kind of uncertain

middle state that leads to a fluidity of cultural identity:

Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relations of Self to Other. [...] The reason a cultural text or system's meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the difference of writing... It is this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent. (1994: 36)

Bhabha presents a postcolonial theory of cultural hybridity which characterizes those who live in between the more or less fixed identities – as they encounter each other. The hybrid subject negotiates a new space that “is neither one culture nor the other but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both in a dialogic process through which emerges something altogether new”(1994:41). This in-between or new space emerges as Bhabha's third space.

For Bhabha it is the “indeterminate spaces in-between subject positions that are lauded as the locale of disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices” (1994:121). Bhabha posits hybridity as such a form of liminal or in-between space, where the “cutting edge of translation and negotiation” (1994:120) occurs and which he terms the third space. Therefore, the term “the third space” involves the concept of place, a position between the self and the other, which harbors difference and negotiation. For Kingston, as we will see, the third space means the hybrid cultural identity both American and Chinese, both Oriental and Western.

2.3 Other Diasporic Theorists

Following Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy has focused his critical energies on addressing the question of race in diaspora studies. Gilroy redirects the “class-dominated” (1993:3) emphasis that was prevalent in earlier forms of British Cultural Studies, to highlight the African diaspora, as this finds expression in Britain. In his investigation, he reveals a

“hybrid culture” (1993:6) that serves to enhance the concept of the word “diaspora”. Paul Gilroy refers to “the use of the term diaspora in cultural theory as well as in post-colonial studies and studies of race and ethnicity, to describe the connection between host and other peoples who have been dispersed or who have migrated across national boundaries” (1993:3). The notion of diasporic identity, according to Gilroy, “offers possibilities for visualizing a future where new bases for social solidarity are offered and joined” (1993:304).

Similarly, *The Woman Warrior* is written as a memoir of the writer’s experience of growing up as a second-generation Chinese American. In telling her own stories, the narrative is inserted into the stories of several other women to reveal the struggles and issues that have affected her own view about the identity of Chinese American women. Kingston reveals the interface between her mother’s Chinese myths and her American dreams, and poignantly articulates the ambiguous identity of Chinese Americans. The use of myth helps Kingston find a way to write Chinese Americans into American history and to search for her own Chinese American identity. In other words, Kingston creates a new version of a classic Chinese myth to reflect her difficult situation as a woman in traditionally patriarchal Chinese society, and to help construct her female Chinese American identity by making the protagonist perform the traditionally patriarchal role of a male hero, while not neglecting her maternal role.

Robin Cohen’s *Global Diaspora* (2008) is a good introduction to the study of diaspora. In this book, he shows how the ancient Greek concept of diaspora could be renewed to understand many aspects of ethnic diversity and international migration. He points to the impact of globalization on cultural debate, calling attention to the complexities entailed in this international phenomenon. In this way, he extends the range of the field beyond his own interest in its “historical, sociological and political” dimensions, to include those aspects relating to “social identities and postcoloniality” (2008:374). A particularly striking outcome of Cohen’s engagement with this public debate was the

emergence of an awareness of the tension in narratives that captured “hybridity” together with “diasporic consciousness.”

2.4 Conclusion

Clearly, what the analysis of these theorists suggests is that identity is a complex and contested terrain of culture, especially in the case of diasporic people who have to negotiate between two different cultures. Leslie Bow summarises this debate by arguing that identity is not static but “fluid, shifting, continually negotiated and contextualized” (2011: 25), therefore it seems impossible to talk about *the* identity of an individual or of a group. But this does not mean that a description of identity is out of reach. Of all the possible identifications mentioned by Amy Ling, the first three listed, namely race, nationality and gender are most fundamental. It is the focus of this thesis to discuss Maxine Hong Kingston, who was born to Chinese immigrants, reared in America, and who, while receiving an American education, lived in a family who held the strong belief that China was the real home.

To further complicate the question of identity, not only are biological and geographical factors significant, but social factors impinge as well. It is not surprising that a new immigrant feels estranged and alienated, but the situation becomes more complex when considered from the point of view of a “fifth-generation native Californian”, whose “Great-Great-Grandfather came on the Nootka, as ancestral as the Mayflower” (Kingston, 1997:41), and who is accosted with such patronizing questions as “Where do you learn such good English” (Kingston, 1997:41). There is clearly also the need for a discussion concerning identity in relation to Americans in general, as well as Americans with non-European ancestry.

Thus identity crisis, the uncertainty of who one really is, the feeling of belonging nowhere, often haunts Chinese Americans. As stated earlier, the issue becomes even more complicated if the Chinese American happens to be a female, as Maxine Hong

Kingston is. As Bow puts it, identity is also embodied: “Important events occur in the landscape of identity, when race and gender compete for and combine in a single body” (2011:25). Historically, the Chinese have assigned their women to an inferior and even expendable status as the Chinese proverb tells: “A woman without talent is a woman of virtue” (Confucius, 1973:7). In American society, Chinese American women are often sacrificed for the sake of rediscovering a “masculine” Chinese American identity, as is evident in the work of Chinese American writers such as Frank Chin. For Chinese American women as for other women of color, the first step in the constitution of identity is to choose between feminism and cultural nationalism with the former being considered as a whitewashed notion, and the latter often characterized by misogyny. This “either-or” choice that one’s primary identity must be based either upon nationhood or sisterhood constitutes a clashing opposition.

The hybrid identities of a Chinese American woman are not only a combination of racial, cultural and gender factors, but also a result of their reciprocities. How can I identify myself? Perhaps it is at this point that Maxine Hong Kingston, as well as her fellow female Chinese American writers, sets off on her odyssey to reconstruct her identity. The following is an extract from Bow’s *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion* which in many ways mirrors Kingston’s own experience:

Since the self, like the work you produce, is not so much a core as a process, one finds oneself, in the context of cultural hybridity, always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not. When am I Vietnamese? When am I American? When am I Asian and when am I Asian American or Asian European? Which language should I speak, which is closest to myself, and when is that language more adequate than another? By working on one’s limits, one has the potential to modify them. Fragmentation is therefore a way of living at the borders. (2011:25)

All in all, this chapter provides an overview of some key concepts associated with diaspora, focusing on Stuart Hall’s notion of identity and Homi Bhabha’s ideas of “hybridity” and “third space”. Through the above explorations, the chapter provides a

theoretical backdrop for the following two chapters in which there is an analysis of Chinese American diasporic works.

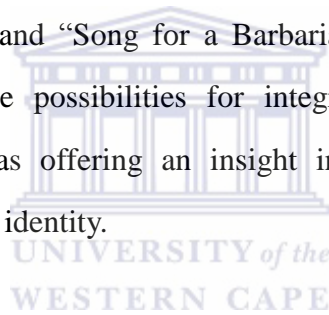


Chapter Three

Diasporic Identity in *The Woman Warrior*

3.1. The Content and the Theme of *The Woman Warrior*

The Woman Warrior is about a Chinese American girl growing up between two worlds: one is represented by an image of China created by the narrator's immigrant family and their neighbours in San Francisco; the other is America, a world filled with "ghosts", a word which invokes the non-Chinese in the book. Kingston's book consists of five different stories: "No Name Woman", "White Tigers", "At the Western Palace", "Shaman" and "Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe". These stories explore the conflict and the possibilities for integration between Chinese and American culture, as well as offering an insight into the diaspora of Chinese Americans and their quest for identity.



The five relatively distinctive short stories each have a female protagonist. Each of the five stories has a somewhat independent plot. They are diverse but are intertwined and linked together in a subtle way. Firstly, the book tells stories of women in one family: a mother, an aunt on the mother's side, an aunt on the father's side and "I", as well as an imaginary story of a traditional Chinese heroine, Fa Mulan. Secondly, all the stories have a Chinese American background. The act of story-telling happens in a contemporary American setting.

The first chapter "No Name Woman" is about an unnamed ancestral aunt in China, who was an outcast from her family because of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. This woman proceeds to drown herself and her newborn baby in the family well the day after the villagers' raid. The narrator's mother tells her the story of the unnamed aunt after her first menstruation, warning the American-born girl against any sexual

indiscretion. The second chapter, “White Tigers”, involves transformations and changes. It primarily recalls a well-known traditional Chinese folk story, “Fa Mulan”, in which a girl, risking a death sentence, joins the army in the disguise of a man to take her aging father’s place, and fights valiantly and successfully in the wars. But all this takes place only in the narrator’s imagination. The story is told to present sharp contrasts between its context and her real life experience in America. The next chapter “Shaman” is her mother’s story, set in China, and involves the manner in which she achieves self-confidence and fame there; it also deals with the unpredictable nature of her life in America. “At the Western Palace” depicts pictures of the life of the narrator’s other aunt, Moon Orchid, who was a traditional Chinese woman and who regarded her husband as her only salvation, only to be discarded by him. Finally, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” records and articulates her once silent childhood life in America.



3.2 Literature Review

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston portrays Chinese American women’s life journey and spiritual growth, which has drawn much positive critical attention and has promoted the growth of Chinese American literature. Scholars responded enthusiastically to *The Woman Warrior*. Their different thoughts about the book resulted in numerous critical articles.

Published in 1976, the book was an immediate success. It won several American national book awards, including Book Critics Circle Award in the category of nonfiction, and the American Book Award. In 1979, this book was rated as one of the top ten nonfiction books of the decade. Barbara Isenberg indicates that “it went on to become the book by a living writer that was most often taught in U.S. colleges and universities” (2005: 262). Moreover, regarded as a milestone in the development of Chinese American literature inside America, this book was acclaimed as “a book that changed forever the face and status of contemporary Asian American literature” (Li,

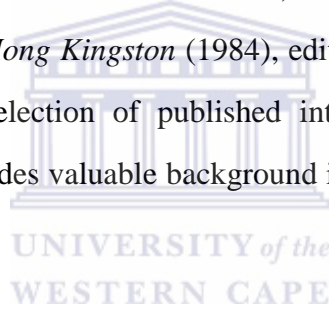
1999: 44). As a result of this book, Maxine Hong Kingston gained a reputation for herself as a Chinese American writer and “opened the way to a whole generation of Asian American writers who have found a national audience for the first time” (Skenazy & Martin, 1998: 7).

In *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, Elaine H. Kim concludes that it “is a book of exploration of identity” (1984:182). Huntley indicates that “it is a mosaic of memoir, history, and fiction – artistic storytelling in the service of one woman’s (re)creation of her own identity” (2001:77). Huntley also analyses *The Woman Warrior* from the perspective of writing style. He states that “*The Woman Warrior* breaks with the Western autobiographical style of writing when focusing on the community in her writing, rather than the individual themselves, but most importantly Maxine Hong Kingston writes her memoir in a circular manner rather than chronologically” (2001:148).

Feminist criticism certainly occupies a large portion of the critical terrain. King-Kok Cheung, in her *Articulate Silence: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston; Joy Kogawa* (1993), aims to research the provocative silence in both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, pointing out that in both books, “the narrator ultimately fractures Chinese and white American orthodoxies to make room for renewed gender and ethnic identities and for sexual, racial, and international politics grounded in reciprocity rather than in domination” (1993:78). I wholeheartedly agree with this point. For example, the position of Ts’ai Yen in *The Woman Warrior*, as Patricia Lin Blinde comments is illustrative: “Ts’ai Yen’s experience in exile serving as a catalyst for her artistic activity is a situation which is analogous to Kingston’s own literary pursuits as an ‘exile’ writer” (1979: 53). As a result, Ts’ai Yen’s “Hu jia shibapai” (Kingston, 1976:176) becomes Kingston’s own song, the song for her identity as a female Chinese American. In this sense, the story of Ts’ai Yen represents Kingston’s finding a foothold in the new land, as well as her achievement of a hybrid identity as a Chinese American writer.

Wendy Ho argues that “the psychic bonding between mother and daughter through gender, socialization as women, and talk-story traditions is used to work through and express the new psychic landscape of the Chinese American daughter-writer in American (1999:232). The mother and daughter influence each other, and as such an interrelationship defines Chinese American women’s experience in Kingston’s work.

Deborah L. Madsen’s *Maxine Hong Kingston* (2000), one of the literary master series, introduces Kingston’s life experience and analyzes the social factors that affect her writing and the acceptance of her work. It also discusses the thematic topics of Kingston’s works, and divides approaches to Kingston studies into several kinds: autobiographical writing, Asian American literature, race, gender and postmodernism. *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston* (1984), edited by Paul Skenazy and Tena Martin, brings together a selection of published interviews with Kingston. The collection of interviews provides valuable background information about the creation of Kingston’s works.



However, the reception of this canonized book is rather controversial. With regard to the ‘pure Chinese tradition’, some critics, especially some within the ethnic group, have debated the authenticity of the representation of traditional Chinese culture in *The Woman Warrior*. As alluded to earlier already, the harshest commentary comes from Frank Chin, a Chinese American male writer. He fiercely attacks Kingston and blames her for misrepresenting traditional Chinese literature and culture, arguing that Kingston tries to ingratiate herself into the American mainstream society. He sees Kingston as somehow despising, hating and even excluding traditional Chinese culture, and regards her and some other Chinese American writers as writers of Christian tradition. David Leiwei Li noted that Frank Chin “regardless of his admiration of its style, thought of *The Woman Warrior* as another in a long line of Chinkie autobiographies by Pochahontas, yellow-blowing the same old mixed up East/West soul Struggle” (1998:45). Views of this kind are extreme, and the fact that

Kingston represents a Chinese American point of view and not one of China, needs to be taken into account.

But Chin's charges of Orientalising China do have merit if we look at the book's initial reception. Jane Kramer described *The Woman Warrior* as "the mystery of a stubbornly, utterly foreign sensibility" in *The New York Review of Books* (7 November, 1976). And the title of the review, "On Being Chinese in China and America: *The Woman Warrior*", clearly shows the reviewer stubbornly considers Kingston a "Chinese" in America rather than a Chinese American, let alone American. Margaret Manning similarly wrote a review titled "Music and Dragons, Violence and Blood" for *The Boston Globe*: "Mythic forces flood the book. Echoes of the *Old Testament*, fairy tales, the Golden Bough are here, but they have their own strange and brooding atmosphere inscrutably foreign, oriental" (both reviews quoted in Skandera-Trombley 1998:29). These critics reveal that Orientalism and racism are very much prevalent in American mainstream society. Kingston herself had to stand up to protest by publishing a well-documented critical essay "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" (1982), in which she reports that about two-thirds of the reviews had measured her book with the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental. Such a damaging reception is firstly and partly ascribed to the categorization of the book as being a Chinese rather than an American text.

Many Asian American critics and some mainland critics are not hesitant to condemn what they assume to be Kingston's Orientalist description of Chinese culture in the book. Professor Zhao Wenshu, for instance, has pointed out that as

a Chinese American book, the spearhead of its criticism is pointed neither at the racist discrimination against Chinese America nor at the sexist oppression from the mainstream society against Chinese American women; rather, it narrates China and the residual influence of Chinese culture in the Chinese American community as the site and force that victimize and silence women. (2004:114)

Zhao can find his voice echoed in that of his comrade Frank Chin, who claims himself to "be the Chinatown cowboy, challenging all the effeminate images of

Chinese males in the ingrained Orientalist discourse of American society” (2004:3). On the one hand he attacks white racist prejudice and their distorted images of Chinese, especially the image of effeminate Chinese males like Charlie Chan, created by the English writer Earl Derr Biggers in 1925. On the other hand, he lashes out at those Chinese American writers who, in Chin’s eyes, betray the Chinese American society and Chinese culture by pandering to the white audience. Maxine Hong Kingston is among these writers, and she may be the one who incurs the highest degree of wrath from Frank Chin whose unremitting criticism broadly runs along two lines in his essay, “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake” (1988). In this essay he blames Kingston for “faking the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history” (quoted in Cheng, 2003:3) As shown in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, there is a whole slew of Chinese cultural elements, including the story of Hua Mulan, of Yue Fei, of Ts’ai Yen and so on. These Chinese legends and tales are not a little different from the original ones when transplanted into the American literary soil, which Kingston admits openly and explains clearly in many interviews. In one talk with Timothy Pfaff in 1980, Kingston defends herself as follows:

We have to do more than record myth. That’s just mere ancestor worship. The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way...It’s harder to look into the present and come to terms with what it means to be alive today. (Pfaff, 1980:18)

Obviously, what Kingston desires to fulfill in her work by using the Chinese mythologies like that of Hua Mulan is to serve her practical needs to establish a strong foothold in America and to construct for herself a cultural identity that does not deny its Chinese heritage. As we have seen earlier, Kingston’s conduct is in accordance with her self-identification as a Chinese American: “I am not a Chinese woman, never having travelled east of Hawaii” (quote in Huntley, 2001:204). It is important not to forget that Kingston has no direct living experience of Chinese culture; her knowledge of Chinese culture is derived from her mother.

The Woman Warrior also aroused interest from Chinese critics. Shen Fugen, for instance, applying the discourse of feminism, interprets the work. He analyses of the female protagonists, pointing out that the tragic fate of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid represents a furious protest against patriarchal society. The narrator asserts equality with men or even the superiority of women over men, by projecting herself onto Hua Mulan and Ts'ai Yen. In all these critics, *The Woman Warrior* is a work that lends itself easily to a feminist reading. And this is also evidenced by Kingston's own pronouncement: "politically and socially, however, I look at myself as being very much a feminist. Growing up as I did as a kid, I don't see how I could not have been a feminist. In Chinese culture, people always talk about how girls are bad. When you hear that, right away it makes you radical like anything" (Skenazy & Martin, 1998:3).

3.3 The "Other": Living Among American "Ghosts"

In Kingston's novel, the idea of the ghost is of central importance. Kingston's use of the word ghost is polysemic and in this section, some of these meanings are explored. The common perception of ghosts is that they are usually daunting and frightening supernatural beings. According to the *New Chinese Dictionary* (1992), the Chinese equivalent of the English word "ghost" (gui) has at least two meanings: one is similar to the Western idea of ghost as we understand it – a supernatural one. However, the other meaning is one that engenders distaste in someone, coupled with unease, loathing and a sense of cultural alienation (1992: 162, my own translation). As a result, this second meaning of the word "ghost" is also commonly used by Chinese people to refer to people of other nationalities, who are regarded as cultural aliens. As a person of different ethnicity in America, the biological appearance that distinguishes him/her from the mainstream Americans/Westerners is the most immediate impression that other people preserve about him/her, and therefore the most difficult image to change in their minds. The feeling of "otherness" is a shared experience that most Chinese Americans have experienced. Consequently, as a Chinese American writer, Kingston inevitably feels that "otherness", and that feeling

is reflected in her works. The subtitle of this book is “Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts”. “Ghost” is thus the key to understanding the narrative.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator uses “ghost” to describe the situation of her childhood environment in the Chinatown of America. It shows the repressive atmosphere which was created by the dual oppressions of traditional patriarchal norms and a racial stereotyping by mainstream society. Kingston herself has defined the word “ghost”: “The ‘ghost’ in the subtitle is not simply white people but ‘shadowy figures from the past’ or unanswered questions about unexplained actions of Chinese [and] whites” (Kim, 1984:200). In *The Woman Warrior*, there are at least three kinds of ghost: the ghost of the past (like the No Name Woman); the ghost as a supernatural figure (like the Sitting Ghost) and cultural or ethnic aliens (people who are not quite accepted as humans). In the sections that follow, the thesis will provide detailed analysis concerning each of these three forms of ghost.

3.3.1 The Ghost in “No Name Woman”

The “No Name Woman” story begins with mother’s talk-story as an admonitory story to warn the narrator against transgressing traditional morals when she becomes an adolescent. The aunt was kept like a ghost-like skeleton in the closet, as if she had never existed because the patriarchal family considered her as a blot on the family’s name. The story is written against “the family’s deliberately forgetting her” (Kingston, 1976:18). However, through retelling the story in an imaginary way, against her mother’s warning – “you must not tell anyone” (Kingston, 1976:1), the narrator imaginatively resurrects the aunt and breaks the silence for her, and wives of Chinese laborers in America at large.

The narrator retells her mother’s story about the No Name Woman. She lived in a village of old China and had been married to a young man on the eve of his departure for America. Left behind, lonely and with no hope of reuniting with her husband, the

aunt became pregnant by a stranger, and thus having disgraced herself and her family she has also violated the community taboo against adultery. When she is about to give birth to an illegitimate child, the villagers raided the house. The narrator describes the raid of the villagers with white masks, impressing readers with a ghostly, haunting environment: “as the villagers closed in, we could see that some of them, probably men and women we knew well, wore white masks. The people with long hair hung it over their faces” (1976:4). From the narrator’s description, the villagers appear as ghost-like, avenging figures. Their “white masks” and “long hair” disguise their individual human identity and make them appear like a mass of wrathful, spectral figures bent upon eradicating the aunt’s deviant individuality. Those ghost-like villagers cursed No Name Aunt as ghost: “‘pig’, ‘ghost’, ‘pig’, they sobbed and scolded while they ruined our house” (1976:5). By cursing the No Name Aunt as a ghost, those villagers turn her into a socially dead person while she is still physically alive. Similarly, her family members ostracize her from the community of the living: “Aiaa, we’re going to die. Death is coming. Death is coming. Look what you’ve done. You’ve killed us. Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You’ve never been born” (Kingston, 1976:15). The last phrase, “you have never been born” indicates that her social and familial identity is being symbolically erased, and although she is still a living body, her life has been wiped out, she who has “never been born” cannot even have a name any longer, hence she is the ‘No Name Woman’ who cannot be spoken about any more. Her subsequent suicide is merely the logical conclusion and final confirmation of what the villagers and then her family have already achieved: they have symbolically killed her. The narrator excavated the aunt from the dust-sealed past in order to give her a voice and a justified name:

My aunt haunts me – her ghost has drawn towards me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute. (1976:16)

Here, the narrator states that her aunt “is a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water”. In Chinese culture there is a major importance attached to “the water that literally and symbolically promises the continuance of matrilineal decent and the symbolic order it nourishes” (Smith, 1991:1062). As Kingston puts it “the Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, with wet hair hanging and bloated skin, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute” (1976:16). But by drowning herself in the villager’s communal drinking well, the tragic young aunt is perhaps committing her final act of rebellion: in staining the very substance that will be washed in, cooked with, and drunk by the community, that symbolizes life, she will remain unforgotten. Her identity in the form of her dissolving body, her ghostly smell and memory will be literally be on everyone’s lips, even as she is silenced in language.

Kingston herself has said that the ‘Ghost’ in the subtitle “refers first of all to the drowned aunt, whose grievance could not be aired by her. So the aunt haunted me and had me right the wrong inflicted upon her” (quoted in Gao 1996:87). Therefore, it is Kingston who through writing *The Woman Warrior* gives the No Name Aunt an identity, something which would be impossible to restore in the place in which No Name Aunt originated, in old China. It is the narrator who retells her aunt’s story and the story is already full of the narrator’s imagination. Through retelling the story, the narrator presents a re-imagined life for No Name Aunt. For example, the narrator imagines her in love with her unknown ghostly lover, looking “at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him... She wanted him to look back” (1976:10).

Obviously, the above detailed description is from the narrator’s imagination. In this way the narrator imagines her No Name Aunt as a brave female who does not give up on her unfortunate married life, but embraces life and love, even if this is an illicit pursuit of her passions. Through the narrator’s imagination, the aunt bravely achieves her own love. Wong’s view is that “the ‘no-name woman’ is not only her aunt, but

also the narrator's concept of herself" (1993:111). We can also say that the No Name Aunt has a diasporic identity, even though she has never left her native Chinese village: left behind by her sojourner husband, her loneliness and emotional abandonment must thus be read as a symptom of diaspora, and she responds by imaginatively dislocating herself from her Chinese cultural identity. Her individualism and idiosyncratic self-expression make her different to her Chinese peers in the village. She is thus an imagined, displaced woman, and as Wang states, shares a similar hybrid identity with the narrator. But in another sense she is even more strongly diasporic: her ghostly presence travels far beyond the tragic well in which she drowned herself, and she becomes the central focus of the narrator's mother's cautionary talk-story. Through the act of narration, she therefore assumes a ghostly new life in San Francisco, sustained by the words on the pages of the book *The Warrior Woman*. Once narrated into existence by the mother, she inhabits the thoughts of the young Chinese American narrator girl to such an extent that they become fused identities. The merged identity of narrator and No Name Aunt is visible when we hear how the aunt's most intimate thoughts, feelings and intuitions are made visible.

As a result, the narrator identifies her No Name Aunt within the imaginative sphere of a generation of Chinese Americans. She is enlisted in a larger project of critiquing the oppressive sexism in Chinatown. The No Name Aunt finally becomes a powerful protest against society. She is a woman warrior in the narrator's eyes. When she "haunts" the narrator, her spirit of revolt flows over into the narrator's body and mind as well:

Always hungry, always needing, she would have to beg food from other ghosts, snatch and steal it from those whose living descendants ...gave them gifts. She would have to fight the ghosts massed at crossroads for the buns a few thoughtful citizens leave as a decoy to distract her from the village and home so that the ancestral spirits could feast unharassed. (1976:18)

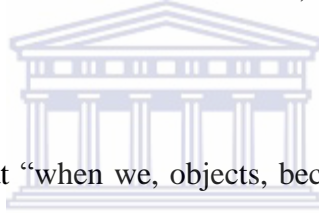
To a western reader, this might seem like a piece of interesting imagery; however, for a reader familiar with Chinese culture, this is a reference to a special custom for dead

relatives. The dead are remembered at the anniversary of their death by a family gathering and a feast which the dead are believed to come to share. Special food is prepared and placed before the picture of the deceased. The family members bow one by one before the picture. Then the food is left for the dead spirit to enjoy. After a while, the family starts to eat the ghost's leftovers. In the case of the No Name Aunt no one cares to remember her. The family has rejected her ever after her death. As the dead aunt has no one to remember her on the anniversary of her death, her ghost hopes to snatch a few crumbs from the tables of other ghosts. It is significant that Kingston shows an intimate insight into Chinese traditional culture, as her aunt is Chinese.

Chinese American girls also live in the shadow of the Chinese traditional patriarchal system, as did the No Name Aunt who was living in old China. Coming from old China, the first generation immigrants still held onto the old idea that women were inferior to men. Zhang states, "in old China, Confucianism ... is characterized by suppressing the equal rights of women" (2004:45). A woman's identity is shown in her community rather than in her own selfhood. Ester Mikyung Ghymn, in his *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* (1995), indicates that "in China, individuals are insignificant by themselves; only in the context of their families do the women find significance" (1995:18). As a result, the narrator disobeys her mother and tells the story of her No Name Aunt. It is important to note that in the book it is the narrator who replaces her aunt to avenge her.

The narrator acts in contrast to the outside world which is more tolerant towards women, than a family and community life that is discouraging and suffocating. The girl lives in a state of low self-esteem and can't recognize her identity. She is no more than a silent "Other", a powerless listener in her home. Every day she feels the weight of Chinese tradition, which demands the repression, and subordination of the individual will. Living in such a world, she is afraid to go to China, which her parents regard as their home. The parents deny America and deny the current enjoyment in

their lives whenever they talk about their home – China, but the girl does not want to go to China at all. She believes that in China her parents will “sell my sisters and me” (1976:112). Her father will “marry two or three more wives, who will spatter cooking oil on my bare toes and lie that we are crying out of naughtiness” (1976:113). In her mind, China is a horrible place, the far end of the world. What she is eager to do is to escape from the Chinese life and throw away the Chinese heritage in order to get freedom. The narrator becomes more and more polarized between Chinese and American cultures, critical of the former and fond of the latter. The elements of rationality, freedom and an atmosphere which encourages the development of creativity and individuality in American life are attractive. Sick of living in the family’s past, the girl dismisses “anything untoward” as Chinese: “I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible” (1976:87).



Gloria Anzaldua indicates that “when we, objects, become the subjects, and analyze our own experiences, the danger arises that we may look through the master’s gaze, speak through his tongue, use his methodology” (1990:7). Because of the parents’ Chinese lifestyle and the repression of patriarchal ideology, the narrator, intentionally distances herself from her motherland and Chinese culture. In male-dominating and patriarchal ancient China, the No Name Aunt’s attempt at seeking individual satisfaction is frustrated. But her courage is appreciated by the young girl. From her unsuccessful experience, the narrator learns the appeal as well as the danger of having a self.

3.3.2 Brave Orchid and “Ghost”

Like “No Name Woman”, Brave Orchid’s story “Shaman” also begins with abandonment and loss as her husband has immigrated to America in search of food money and her two Chinese-born children have died during the period of her husband’s absence. After spending some time studying at the medical school, Brave

Orchid arrives at the peak of her power. As her name Brave Orchid suggests, she is courageous and dashing enough to challenge whatever ghost awaits her. Her bravery, courage and strength are best portrayed in her fight with the sitting ghost. The sitting ghost is the supernatural figure whom the mother encountered when she was pursuing her education in a college in China. That ghost haunted a dormitory and scared other female students. With an independent warrior-like spirit, Brave Orchid waits alone for the sitting ghost in the isolated room, nonchalantly reading a textbook. When she falls asleep the hungry sitting ghost with its many black mouths assaults her, ultimately rolling over her and sitting heavily on her chest:

She did not know whether she had fallen asleep or not when she heard a rushing coming out from under the bed. Cringes of fear seized her soles as something alive, rumbling, climbed the foot of the bed. It rolled over her and landed bodily on her chest. There it sat. It breathed airlessly, pressing her, sapping her. (1976:69)

The more desperately she struggles, the more energy the sitting ghost absorbs from her. The ghost is anxious to devour Brave Orchid to satisfy its hungry appetite. Likewise, she makes frenzied efforts to defend herself from being eaten by the sitting ghost. Having realized that the ghost – the material embodiment of perpetually unsatisfied desire or hunger, feeds on her fear as well as body, Brave Orchid tries to defeat the ghost by threatening to eat it:

You will not win, Boulder...I'll get fire, Ghost... You made a mistake haunting a medical school... We have a communal kitchen with human-sized jars of oil and cooking fat, enough to burn for a month without our skipping a single fried meal. (1976:70)

She continues to belittle and frighten the ghost, “you are a puny little boulder indeed. Yes, when I get my oil, I will fry you for breakfast” (1976:71). In this way, she stops the ghost feeding on her since her blood and meat would have given it strength to totally possess her body and soul. The detailed descriptions of Brave Orchid’s struggle against the sitting ghost may, somehow, imply women’s partially repressed memory of rape or of enforced sex:

She pushed against the creature to lever herself out from underneath it, but it absorbed this energy and got heavier. Her fingers and palms became damp. Shrinking at the ghost's thick short hair like an animal's coat...the mass thickened. (1976:69)

Felling the weight of patriarchal domination, women feel terrified by the strong desire or hunger, for fear that their subjectivity as well as their delicate body will be violently suppressed by aggressive male desire. Only when they conquer their fear can they regain enough power and courage to stand against the other, reclaiming their identity and dignity as an independent and individual woman instead of a passive victim to the appetite of the patriarchal system.

In this story, Brave Orchid plays the role of ghost exorcist. This undoubtedly shows the mother's bravery and heroic quality. Just like Fa Mulan, Brave Orchid is another woman warrior. Although she is a ghost exorcist, who drives away the sitting ghost, she is not capable of exorcizing American ghosts. For lack of linguistic and cultural competence, the mother addresses the people and things that she does not understand, or cope with as "ghosts". Her story of ghost exorcism while in China highlights her quality as a woman warrior. By contrast, however, her experience in the US is not as glorious as those in the past. There is no sitting ghost in the US. Instead, the new land is haunted by things and people that are alien to Chinese traditional conventions. The mother cannot adapt to the new environment. Everything is strange to her and she has lost a sense of self, belonging and security. Consequently, she begins to dub all those differing from her own culture as "ghosts".

In Brave Orchid's eyes, all of those local Americans are "Ghosts". There is a variety of ghosts, like "White Ghosts", "Black Ghosts" and "Yellow Ghosts" according to their ethnicity, and "Gas Ghosts", "Sales Ghost", "Druggist Ghost", "Taxi Ghost" and "Police Ghosts" according to different occupations. What these different "ghosts" have in common is that they are people who are feared by Chinese immigrants and

cause them harm. Shirley Geok-Lim points out that ghosts are actually the embodiment of a threat directed at an individual's complete self-consciousness by two contradictory worlds and individual conflicts (Lim, 1993: 139). When one side threatens the other or breaks the norms and rules of the conventional life, so as to hurt the opposite side's emotions and cause their fear and humiliation, then this side becomes a ghost in the other side's eyes. The threatening side tries to avoid this countervailing force but only to be more or less controlled by it. The ghosts as controllers have broken the controlee's forbidden customs, which caused their feelings of punishment or terror or death.

In America, those called ghosts by Chinese immigrants are primarily the white Americans. The narrator's mother calls them "barbarians" (Kingston, 1976:243) from the west. It shows her position of alienation in American society. When talking about American ghosts, her mother has demonstrated her doubt and suspicion towards American culture. Take the misdelivery of the drugs as an example, where a small mistake becomes an inexcusable offence to her, because it has violated a Chinese taboo that sending drugs to a healthy person means to curse him to death. In order to dispel her bad luck, she asks daughter to beg for candy, for now the deadly sympathetic magic of the drug would be replaced by the gift of innocent sweets. The narrator believes that the Americans are terrible ghosts, but if we look at the way they are represented in the text, it is clear that ghosts are more a reflection of her insecurity, her fear of being threatened, her strangeness, helplessness, frustration, anger, and a sense of belonging nowhere.

The ghosts the mother confronts in America are therefore more complicated than the one she exorcised in China, and her power to "vanquish ghosts is reduced to no more than the ability to curse them" (Gao, 1996:37). The mother does not live happily in America and she frequently complains to her daughter: "this is a terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away ... even the ghosts work, no time for acrobatics. I have not stopped working since the day the ship landed" (1976:104).

However, she cannot go back because they “have no more China to go home to” (1976:106) after they lost their land there. After almost forty years in America, the mother has no intention to return China because she has “gotten used to eating” (1976:107) and the American way of life. Facing this reality, she adapts to the new land and even her daughter notices the change: “she recently took to wearing shawls and granny glasses, American fashions” (1976:100).

Taking the ghosts as symbolic of the difficulties Chinese immigrants encountered both in their homeland and in the new land, the narrator depicts a woman warrior with the powerful imagination of the mother – through her resolution of the ghost puzzle. As a student of Medical College at Canton, she proves her bravery as a capable exorcist by defeating the sitting ghost, and in so doing asserting herself as an independent, educated woman no longer subject to the oppressive, heavy weight of patriarchy. However, as a first-generation Chinese American, she cannot fully understand the American way of life because of her limited vocabulary in English. She cannot properly express her own idea to the Americans, so she calls all things and people alienating to Chinese culture ‘ghosts’. The conflict between the mother and the white ghosts comes from the difference between eastern and western cultures. Only gradually, the mother’s attitude towards the white ghosts changes and she begins to adapt positively. Thus she gradually finds her identity – not as a Chinese, but as a first-generation Chinese American woman – and starts to acclimatize herself to life in the United States.

3.3.4 Ghosts in America

As we have seen in the previous section, “Ghosts” are used to name Americans who dole out injustice and oppression to the narrator’s family. In the child’s memory, the land of America is a land full of “Ghosts”:

America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police

Ghosts, Fire Ghosts...Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghost, I could hardly breathe (1976: 97).

However, in real life we need to also remember, Kingston, is married to her former classmate, actor Earl Kingston, an American man. Moreover, Kingston herself works as an English teacher, fully integrated into US society. Unlike her mother figure in the narratives, Kingston has accepted these “ghosts” and their language, and so achieves her hybrid cultural identity.

The mother’s use of “ghosts” discourse reveals how uneasy and “alien” many of the Chinese American diaspora feel in America. In *The Woman Warrior*, the naming of non-Chinese Americans as “ghosts” is not only an expression of the fear of white oppression, but also a way of avenging the injustice done to Chinese Americans. Kingston’s mother, Brave Orchid, who used to be a village doctor in China, famous there for the killing of a ghost, now has to work in a laundry, sorting mountains of socks, while shielding herself from the fumes and germs emanating from piles of dirty clothing, by burning candles and holding handkerchiefs over her mouth. For example, Brave Orchid said that “this is terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away” (1976:104). Her revenge for this injustice is private: “No tickee, no washee, mama-san?” a ghost would say, which was very embarrassing for her. “Noisy Red-Mouth Ghost”, she’d write on its package, naming it, marking its clothes with its name” (1976:105).

One aspect common to most Chinese American families is the sense of being merely sojourners in an alien land. To them America is just a place in which to earn money to send home to the real “home”, where their roots are. Brave Orchid’s “ghost” discourse to designate the non-Chinese as “barbarians” and not fully human is indicative of the older generation’s need to separate their family from a world that is ignorant of their traditions and customs. From the mother’s perspective, Chinese customs are still the only right way to do anything. Even though the immigrant

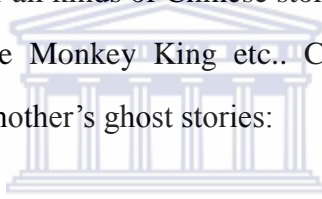
parents have lived in America for quite a long time, they still hope to return home someday:

Someday, very soon, we're going home, where there are Han people everywhere. We'll buy furniture then, real tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time. (1976:98)

Amy Ling has made comments on this phenomenon:

“Minority parents” fear of losing their cultural heritage is intensified by the fear of losing their children to the ‘foreign’ culture, and therefore they insist with greater vehemence on their children’s acceptance of family traditions and Old World ties. (1990:213)

In order to immerse the narrator in knowledge of Chinese culture and Chinese heroes, Brave Orchid tells the narrator all kinds of Chinese stories of Chinese heroes: Yue Fei, Fa Mulan, Kwan Goong, the Monkey King etc.. Consequently every night, the narrator’s mind is full of her mother’s ghost stories:



Not when we were afraid, but when we were wide awake and lucid, my mother funneled China into our ears: Kwangtung Province, New Society Village, the River Kwoo, which runs past the village. ‘Go the way we came so that you will be able to find our house. Don’t forget. Just give your father’s name, and any villager can point out our house’. I am to return to China where I have never been. (1976:76)

Through these stories, the mother creates for her daughter an invisible, ghostly world of the ancestral home in the American society. It is one built of her nostalgic world of hometown China, and it full of Chinese tradition. But to the daughter narrator, this world of ghosts seems to be something uncanny, fearful and mysterious:

When the thermometer in our laundry reached one hundred and eleven degrees on summer afternoons, either my mother or my father would say that it was time to tell another ghost story so that we could get some good chills up our backs...“One twilight,” my mother began, and already the chills travelled my back and crossed my shoulders, the hair rose at the nape and the back of the legs. (1976:87)

For the narrator, ghostliness is therefore not just associated with the American

cultural strangers but increasingly with the uncanny, mysterious and frightening ancestral Chinese past. The narrator's parents send her to Chinese school, tell her Chinese stories, and threaten her that she will eventually "go back" to China, with the purpose of preventing her from identifying herself as American.

From the American-born children's perspectives, China and their Chinese cultural heritage are mysterious and threatening. Because of the inexplicability of the Chinese culture, the American-born children find themselves forced to learn Chinese culture in a decontextualised manner. They even begin to doubt the values of this culture which their parents cherish so much. The narrator openly complains, "I don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. Maybe they didn't; maybe everyone makes it up as they go along" (1976:184). "Chinese people are very weird," (1976:185), the narrator's brothers and sisters tell each other, unable to comprehend the actions of her aunt Moon Orchid who has recently arrived from China. As such, the children refuse to identify themselves with Chinese people, viewing the newcomers as the "other". Kim explains that this is because "practices become confusing when customs are observed outside their original context, in a new social environment where they may seem inappropriate" (Kim, 1984:132). The narrator sees the teachings of her parents inappropriate and even embarrassing:

She would do something awful, something embarrassing. She'd already been hinting that during the next eclipse we slam pot lids together to scare the frog from swallowing the moon. (1976:169)

Overwhelmed by her mother's ghost stories, the narrator wants to retreat into an "American-normal" life. America is associated with day-time, with light, rationality and normality; China and its traditional culture is associated with nightmares and darkness:

To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in

Chinese, the language of impossible stories. (1976:87)

Finally, the narrator wants to escape to a ghost-free place. It is not the place her parents call “home”, because it is not the place she belongs to. The narrator ironically points out, “I am to return to China where I have never been” (1976:73), calling in question the very meaning of the word “return”.

Ironically even though the parents insist on their being authentically Chinese, they have difficulty in identifying themselves as such when confronted with FOBs (Fresh off Boats). When confronted with new Chinese immigrants, Brave Orchid feels quite different to them. She views the newcomers as the opposite of herself: “They’re Chinese, and Chinese are mischievous. No, I’m too old to keep up with them. They’d be too clever for me. I’ve lost my cunning; have grown accustomed to food, you see” (1976:107). We can therefore see that she has unwittingly become an Americanized Chinese. From this perspective, Brave Orchid has a positive diasporic consciousness.

In summary, ghosts in *The Woman Warrior* represent on the one hand a link with ancestral Chinese culture; on the other hand they are the embodiments of white people and American culture. Through the discourse of ghostliness, American and Chinese culture becomes conflated. The narrator finds herself baffled with her mother’s discourse of ghosts and with Chinese culture. In this sense her mother is a ghost in America, one she herself cannot fully understand. Huntley indicates that:

Ghosts represent the gulf between Maxine and her mother, the ambiguities in their relationship. They are ghosts to one another, strangers in some fundamental way, each finding the other disturbingly incomprehensible. (2001:95)

3.4 Hybrid Identity in Fa Mulan

In his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha asks, “What kind of cultural space is the nation?” (1990:25) Drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s concept

of nation-states as “imagined communities”, Bhabha argues that nations can come into being only through the telling of stories, such as the myths of “origin” or “foundation myths” that bind the disparate mindsets of their people together. Indeed, it hardly needs saying that the idea of America as a unified community has depended largely upon the repetition of such “foundation myths”, such as the Pilgrim Fathers landing on Plymouth Rock off the Mayflower, or the frontiersmen exploring the “Virgin Land” as the “New Adam” (1990:26). Therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese myths serve as the major vehicle for Kingston to transmit her endeavour to negotiate a ground on which Chinese Americans can find their own identity. In *The Woman Warrior*, a large number of Chinese myths, legends and customs are combined within the development of the story of an American Chinese girl, and most of them have been extended far beyond their original pattern.

Kingston is very much aware that it is necessary get beyond essentialised identity debates in order to bridge different cultures. The best way to protest against the stereotyped construction of ethnic minorities is to assert heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity in the characterization of ethnic individuals. Therefore, she changes a traditional Chinese figure Fa Mulan into a new image that is a hybrid product of multicultural interactions. For Homi Bhabha, the diasporic third space “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (1994:37). In appropriating and reading anew a traditional folktale, Kingston’s narrative therefore shows that culture has no “primordial unity or fixity”.

Kingston’s version derives from the story of Fa Mulan, the well-known heroine of *The Chant of Mulan*, which is a traditional ballad based on an oral tradition and composed by an anonymous writer in the sixth century. As was previously discussed, Fa Mulan, according to the poem, disguised herself as a man and replaced her elderly father to fight against the Tartars for twelve years. When the war is over, she refuses

to take an official rank offered to her and returns home. Putting on her robe and make-up, she resumes her girlhood. Her hybrid female-male identity surprises her fellow countrymen, who have travelled with her for twelve years without knowing that Mulan is a girl. As a popular legendary heroine in China, Fa Mulan is loved and admired for her diligence, intelligence, valiant spirit, and the ability to do both women's and men's work.

Inspired by *The Chant of Fa Mulan* told by her mother in her girlhood, Kingston purposely creates a composite, fantastic figure. This figure involves Fa Mulan, the swordswoman, and the narrator, and sometimes there is no clear distinction between the three. Like Fa Mulan, the swordswoman fights in a man's disguise, returns home after her battles are over, and is warmly welcomed by her family. Based on these fundamental similarities, Kingston makes several alterations. She creates a hybrid figure that possesses both Chinese virtues and American characteristics.

Among the doctrines in Chinese Confucianism, the important "three cardinal guides" determine ideal, normative behaviour. The Confucian rule is as follows: "monarch guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife" (Confucius, 1973:74 my own translation). Central to the doctrine is the cardinal virtue of *xiao* (filial piety) because Confucianism regards the family as the foundational unit in which all social structures are anchored. Through a young person's dedication to the family and her determination to protect an aging father, Kingston certainly affirms behaviours and values that Confucianism propagates. In Kingston's version, the swordswoman also saves her senior father from being drafted into the army and risks her life to mask her real sex in combat as a man. Her original impulse to join the army was to save her old father from suffering. This action stems from the filial value that is strongly upheld in Chinese culture. At the end of the story, the swordswoman utters her wish to be a filial daughter:

My mother and father and the entire clan would be living happily on the money I

had sent them. My parents had bought their coffins. They would sacrifice a pig to the gods that I had returned. From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled, the villagers would ask for a legend about my perfect filiality. (1976:47)

As do most Chinese people, Kingston's Fa Mulan retains a strong sense of family. To use Kingston's own words, Fa Mulan is "a story of how to come home, how to reintegrate oneself into one's family and community" (1976:28). The ending of the altered myth about Fa Mulan in "White Tigers" is her coming back home to play the role of a woman in a family. Though a brave woman warrior before, she chooses to be an ordinary woman, giving birth to more children, doing farm work and housework in her parents-in-law's house. This episode is described as follows:

Wearing my black embroidered wedding coat, I knelt at my parents-in-law's feet, as I would have done as a bride. 'Now my public duties are finished.' I said, 'I will stay with you, doing farm work and housework, and giving you more sons. (1976:47)

For Kingston, this is a myth about how people finally form a family and integrate into a harmonious community.

However, some Confucian principles suggested in the original version seem to be discarded by Kingston such as *zhong* (loyalty to the monarch). Different from the character in the traditional chant, who fights for the security of her country and is greatly devoted to the emperor, the swordswoman in *The Woman Warrior* seeks revenge for the villagers. She rebels against the tyrannical ruler and finally beheads him after marching into the capital. Loyalty to the monarchy and collectivism, which was propagandized by conventional Confucianism, has been replaced by Western democratic ideals and individualism.

Kingston also challenges the traditional patriarchal Chinese authority through her successful construction of a new but powerful image. Fa Mulan in this new version destroys the voiceless and powerless stereotype of traditional Chinese women. The

most impressive deviation in Kingston's version may be that Mulan meets her husband herself and even gives birth to a baby when she still on the battlefield. In the conventional description, Mulan is just a well-behaved and obedient daughter. She weaves all day in peacetime and joins the army to protect her home and country when both of them are in crisis, but neither world belongs to her. She lives only for her family and her country. Readers can view this Mulan as a heroine, but not as a real woman. However, Kingston sets up a new image for women in the novel. In this new image she has her own individuality, instead of just being an obedient daughter. She boldly pursues love and selects her husband herself.

I would have for a new husband my own playmate, dear since childhood, who loved me so much he was to become a spirit bridegroom for my sake. (1976:35)

Kingston even invents the episode in which Mulan gives birth to a baby after the unexpected meeting with her husband during battle. As Amy Ling points out, by having her warrior bear a child while still fighting battles disguised as a man, Kingston "increases the woman's stature and asserts that the impossible is possible" (1976:29). This reinforces the sense of freedom and empowerment within the story. Furthermore, giving birth to a boy also serves to glorify women and symbolizes the battle against sexism: as indispensable producers of men, women can do not only what men can do, but what men cannot do.

Fa Mulan in Kingston's work is a perfectly hybrid figure. She possesses Chinese virtues and American merits simultaneously. By producing the new image, Kingston shows us her model of being which transcends the barrier of race, nation and culture. The identity of an individual is not relevant to a gender or ethnic status and it is not stable all of the time. One has to learn from this new Fa Mulan to rethink his or her ethnic identity. Kingston thus establishes a persuasive model of hybrid identity. By portraying such a woman warrior, Kingston escapes the boundary of ethnically based culture and enters a new third space, namely a Chinese American space.

3.5 Hybrid Culture in Ts'ai Yen

Bhabha's "third space" concept argues for a reassessment of the idea of culture that moves beyond the categorical, binary structure. Such a reassessment must recognize and provide for dynamic hybridity of relations. He argues that

This redesign should take place in an alternative ambivalent site, a third space, where there is ongoing revision, negotiation, and if necessary, renewal of those cultural practices, norms, values and identities unscripted and enunciated through the production of bicultural meaning and representation. (1990:30)

In weaving the old cultural references from both Chinese and American backgrounds into her work, Kingston allows for a "production" of such "bicultural meaning and representation". With her linguistic advantage, Kingston has adopted the role of translator for the two cultures. By absorbing the strong points of the two cultures, she produces a new kind of culture – a Chinese American culture. It is a synthesis of select Chinese cultural values and American values of democracy and equality. At the end of the book, the adult narrator informs us that the final story is the collaboration between her mother and herself: "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" (1976:184). This final narrative hybridity suggests the recognition and acceptance of human diversity, mutual respect, and communal sharing. Both mother and daughter are Chinese Americans who share a common culture, a Chinese American culture. With the symbolic ending, Kingston maintains the availability of a healthy solution to cultural conflict for Chinese Americans who seek a negotiation between two cultures.

The story that the mother and daughter jointly tell is Ts'ai Yen's tale. In "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," the last chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston reinterprets the Chinese legend of Ts'ai Yen, a poetess among barbarians. She subverts the original moral of this legend and assigns new meanings to it, expressing her wish to

build a bridge between the two cultures.

According to Yan's *Chinese History* (2002), the original Chinese version of Ts'ai Yen runs like this: Ts'ai Yen was a Chinese poetess of the second century. Born in 177 A.D, she was the daughter of the eminent poet and statesman Ts'ai Yung [Cai Yong] (133-193 A.D) in the East Han Dynasty. During the upheavals of the civil war in North China in the last decade of the second century (the Dong Zhuo Rebellion), she was kidnapped by Huns and became the wife of a chieftain of the Southern Hsiung-nu, to whom she bore two sons. Twelve years later, she was ransomed by Cao Cao (155-220), who wanted her to complete the editing of her father's books, but she had to leave her children with the tribe. Historical facts indicate that as a woman and an outcast, Ts'ai Yen was always oppressed and lived a passive, tragic life. In fact, we know little about the historical Ts'ai Yen. The only source of the details of Ts'ai Yen's exile is found in three poems which are said to have been written by Ts'ai Yen herself. The most famous one among them is "Hujia Shibapai" ("Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe"), written in Sao meter, which was a popular literary form of poetry at that time. "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" expresses the poetess' anxiety, lamentation and sorrow in exile, and Ts'ai Yen's image in China is firmly connected with this song. The poem is presented by an autobiographical first-person narrator who tells of Ts'ai Yen's misery in exile. Longing for home after she was captured by the barbarian rebels, she endured suffering in an alien land, just as Kingston's narrator suffered in the American society. However, Kingston deliberately erases the tone of fury, grief and despondency in the original poetry, and dramatizes its potential for inter-ethnic harmony.

The reason why Kingston emphasizes Ts'ai Yen's harmony with the barbarians instead of her grief and agony is explained by Cheung who argues that

connections between fatherland and mother tongue, and between parents and children, are made not by a spatial return to the ancestral land but through

articulating and listening. (1993:32)

Kingston does not advocate a return to the homeland for Chinese Americans, for it is not the best solution to their problems. What they are in need of is to develop a mutual understanding between the two cultures with an open mind, to find their identity in a meeting of the two, so that peace and harmony can be achieved.

Kingston transmits this idea of synthesis through the episode in which Ts'ai Yen sings along to the barbarians' pipe which she had previously despised. The barbarians attach primitive pipes to their arrows so that they whistle in flight, and Ts'ai Yen thinks that this frightening noise is the nomads' only music. But one day when she hears the flutes' "music tremble and rise like desert wind", she is so struck by this music of barbarian reed pipes filling the desert that she starts to sing:

Out of Ts'ai Yen's tent, which was apart from the others, the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes. Ts'ai Yen sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by the barbarians. (1976:186)

The poetess in exile is no longer alienated. In sound and image, the passage depicts a harmonious picture, and a transcendence of differences in its discourse. Not only is her song in tune with the barbarians' flutes but its tone is perfectly understood: the barbarians understand the sadness and anger in the song, thinking that they can catch familiar barbarian phrases about endless wanderings. The former opposition disappears when the Chinese and the barbarians reach a truce, and the poetess is integrated into the "ring" that used to marginalize minority groups. In the "ring" she is no longer an "other" but "one of them". Thus Kingston's Ts'ai Yen has survived by overcoming cultural barriers through mutual understanding and emotional sympathy. The gulf between Ts'ai Yen and the barbarians, which is also the symbolic gulf

between Chinese and American culture in Kingston's world, is finally bridged. This is the goal Kingston wants to achieve throughout the book.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, a close reading of the text was undertaken, with a focus on two significant stories in particular. Through these stories, this thesis traces the meaning of the book and thus explores the author's position in relation to the cultural choices she is compelled to confront. Though Kingston insists upon her American identity more than her Chinese identity, it is clear that she is strongly in favour of blending into a hybridity of cultures, which corresponds with Bhabha's concept of a "Third Space". By creating a hybrid ethnic identity and culture, Kingston fulfils her wish to establish a third space.

Kingston's extensive use of Chinese legends suggests that these stories have become a part of her life, due to her mother's influence. The concluding legend of *The Woman Warrior* suggests that Kingston has finally learnt to mediate between Chinese and American culture. She becomes the modern Ts'ai Yen by re-appropriating her ancestress' story under similar, but modern circumstances. On the other hand, by having rewritten these myths, Kingston has made Chinese traditions and Chinese culture more accessible for American readers, and more relevant to herself. She notes that Chinese immigrants should find their new identity as Chinese Americans who embrace the multiple, and often conflicting, aspects of Chinese American culture – a blended culture in a world that is itself becoming more and more culturally hybrid.

Chapter Four

The Woman Warrior and Jade Snow Wong's The Fifth Daughter and Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club

In this chapter I will locate Kingston's novel in the context of prior and subsequent Chinese American fiction by examining Jade Snow Wong's *The Fifth Daughter* (1950) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989).

Maxine Hong Kingston once pointed out that "except for Jade Snow Wong, I am not sure that I got help from a former generation of Chinese-American writers" (Huang, 2001: 394). Yin argues that "it was *Fifth Chinese Daughter* that inspired Maxine Hong Kingston to start a literary career" (2000:149). But even though Kingston drew on Wong's autobiography, her work is a radical departure from the dominant mode of realist life-writing that characterized the Chinese diaspora at the time. In this chapter I will show how Kingston draws on Wong's work, especially her critique of traditional patriarchy, but also employs a new style of writing, namely imaginative fiction that allows her to engage with diasporic identity in new ways. While Wong's work is ultimately anti-diasporic in that the autobiographical heroine finds a way to harmoniously live with a dual identity in both American society and Chinatown, Kingston's girl protagonist mediates China and America in such a way that results in a hybrid identity.

Kingston's work however did inspire many subsequent Chinese American writers, and I will consider here one such work by Amy Tan. Amy Ling considers Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) "in part an echo and response, and in part a continuation and expansion of Kingston's book" (1990:13). As a result, Jade Snow Wong and Amy Tan

are two of the most important Chinese American female writers beside Kingston. In this chapter, the manner in which Kingston was influenced by Jade Snow Wong's works and the means whereby Kingston reflects on Wong's *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* will be explored, as well as the way in which Kingston influenced the next generation of Chinese American literature.

4.1 Brief Introduction of Jade Snow Wong and her autobiography, *The Fifth Daughter*

According to Emmanuel Sampath Nelson's *Asian American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (2000), Jade Snow Wong, a second generation Chinese American, was born in 1922 and grew up with nine siblings in a big traditional Chinese family in San Francisco's pre-World War II Chinatown. In 1942, she attended San Francisco City College and graduated from Mills College. After graduation, she worked as a secretary in the Navy during World War II. Later when she was introduced to pottery and other crafts, she discovered her talent for art that would fill the rest of her life. In the literary world, she is well-known as the author of a two volume autobiography – *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* and *No Chinese Stranger* (2000:387-389).

Fifth Chinese Daughter was written by Jade Snow Wong in 1945. The autobiography commemorates the author's first twenty four years and can be divided into twenty eight chapters which follow in chronological order. It explores a woman's independence from her family, particularly from her father, as she works hard to be successful in Western American society. Jade Snow Wong tells stories that happened in her childhood and college life, giving a vivid and authentic picture of Chinese American communities. Readers can find detailed information about Chinese American lifestyle and customs. Since sons are more important members than daughters in traditional Chinese families and Jade Snow's family does not have enough money to provide all their children with higher education, Jade Snow loses her

family's economic support when she finishes high school and is faced with the fate of becoming another uneducated housewife in Chinatown. However, she does not give up her American dream but struggles for independence. She makes some money to support her college education by doing domestic jobs in Western American women's houses. Despite the prejudice, discrimination and attitude of superiority from Western society, Jade Snow energetically participates in mainstream society, outside her marginal Chinatown. She gains several opportunities to prove the ability of Chinese Americans, utilizing her advantage of Chinese culture to attract the interest and attention of Western Americans. At the same time, Jade Snow absorbs some modern and scientific thinking from her American education, which enables her to join the mainstream society more easily. At the end of the autobiography, Jade Snow wins the admiration of her family, the Chinese American community in general while she also gains recognition from mainstream American society. When *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* first appeared in the 1950s, mainstream critics at the time regarded it highly. Cheng Aimin declares in the preface of *A Study of Chinese American Literature* that *Fifth Chinese Daughter* "is a piece of great importance in American literary history and a must for those who study Chinese American Literature, society and history nowadays" (Cheng, 2003:5).

4.2 *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and *The Woman Warrior*

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has influenced Maxine Hong Kingston to write *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston recalls the experience of reading Wong's book in her letter to Amy Ling:

I was astonished when I found the book of Jade Snow Wong in the library, and so inspired then that I defined my dream and felt engaged by the writing since it was the first time that I had found someone like her as the protagonist or even the writer of the book. (1990:120)

Both writers shared a similar cultural identity and an equivalent history of

discrimination in the American mainstream society. In terms of the argument of this thesis, both writers shared an experience of diaspora, and a crisis of dislocated identity. Bernard P. Wong argues that:

The Chinese in America have had identity crises for many years. As an ethnic minority, the Chinese operate under a series of constraints imposed on them from their host society in the New World as well as from their mother country in 'the Old World'. (1982:73)

Being Chinese American and female, Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston were both born to Chinese parents and lived in Chinatown, but they went to American public schools and worked in American society. As a result, both of them dealt with the impact of American culture, but their response, I will argue, was different. Zhang says of Jade Snow Wong that

Chinese culture is inscribed in her mind, just like a poem carved onto society like a piece of stone. It is impractical for her to be pure Chinese. So she has to find a middle way to accommodate two cultures. (2004:115)

In response to her inability to change her Chinese cultural heritage, Wong's "middle way" takes the form of a split or dual identity. When she was in American society, she assumed an American identity fitting in with her Western peers, however, when she was at home, she was a Chinese daughter. Kingston however establishes a hybrid identity. For example, in *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator is simultaneously an "insider" and "outsider" of both cultures, causing her to be dislocated from both. The narrator seems to become a permanent paradox and she feels deeply anguished when her two worlds conflict. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the narrator finally finds a hybrid identity for living between the two cultures, as is evident in the narration of the Fa Mulan and Ts'ai Yen characters.

However, unlike *The Woman Warrior*, when *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* deals with the gap between the two cultures by living a dual identity in which both cultures are

kept separate and pure. In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Jade Snow's childhood world is almost completely inhabited by Chinese who speak Chinese, read Chinese newspapers and practice Chinese culture. Her family is immersed in Chinese customs and traditional morality and isolated from mainstream American, only coming into contact with Americans through business. Consequently, although they live in America, the Wong family exists as Chinese people. Joyce Geary of *The New York Times Book Review* referred to *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as:

A narrative essay of overwhelming attraction, not only for the courage and humor among its pages, but also for the fact that it revealed how a typical Chinese family member adapted to the American environment, indulging in the American social life without losing the essence of their cultural tradition. (quoted in Huang, 2001:395)

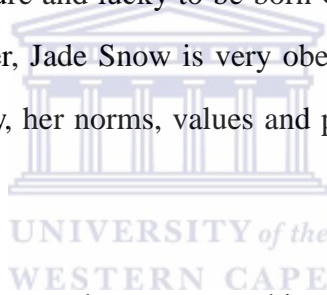
However, in *The Woman Warrior* the narrator is surrounded by Americans. Therefore, the degree to which Jade Snow and the narrator in Kingston's novel are influenced by the Chinese culture is different. Jade Snow's parents assume a strong sense of responsibility for their children, responding to the Chinese maxim that "a child is better unborn than untaught" (Wong, 1950:4). They educate her according to a series of Chinese standards, for the sake of rearing her as a cultivated Chinese woman. From a young age, Jade Snow has known the meaning of discipline very well. In a lesson given by her father, Jade Snow learns that "duty to one's father comes before duty to one's army", that is, that her father's demand is paramount to all others and children must obey it unconditionally" (Wong, 1950: 5). Dealing with such strict norms while also trying to adapt to American values inevitably led to conflict with her family:

Her college course challenged the traditional Chinese concept of education as echoing wise words of the past. Her new ideas also dismissed her parents' ideas of proper female behavior. (Wong, 1950:38)

But overall she still submits to Chinese norms when at home. This is in accordance with the Confucian laws which her father values, declaring that:

He who is filial toward elders and fraternal toward brothers and is fond of offending his superiors is rare indeed: he who is not fond of offending his superiors and is fond of making revolution has never been known. (Wong, 1950: 15)

Therefore Jade Snow's father emphasizes the importance of harmonious relationships in families, asserting that they can even have a strong influence on the peace of a country. It is therefore also clear that family plays a crucial role in Chinese life. Raised in Chinatown, Jade Snow becomes a genuine Chinese girl who follows old Chinese standards, enjoys the celebrations of Chinese festivals and displays the qualities valued by Chinese people, such as diligence, thrift, politeness, honesty, respecting the elders and caring for the young. Although she is constrained in her formal and sober life, Jade Snow still feels secure and lucky to be born Chinese. Because of the strong Chinese values instilled in her, Jade Snow is very obedient. Therefore, although she was in a diasporic community, her norms, values and practices are the same as those which pertain in China.



However, in *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator achieves a rebellious hybrid identity. The girl narrator is full of defiant thoughts both towards her Chinese culture, as well as towards the dominant American culture. This is already apparent in the very first sentence of the novel: "You must not tell anyone, my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you'" (Kingston, 1976:1). The very existence of the book and the telling of the story of No Name Woman is a defiant act of disobedience to the mother, and a defiance of the cultural norms of silence and obedience. Even though she was warned never to tell on the No-Name Aunt, she begins her narration with the entire forbidden story. In many ways, as I have shown, the No-Name woman is actually an imaginative projection of the narrator's own Chinese American hybrid identity. We can see this in many ways in the text, for example in the way she imagines the outward appearance of her disgraced ancestor. In opposition to the long, braided hair style typically worn by traditional village women, the No Name Woman wears a strikingly different short

cut American-style bob hairstyle. Though ending her life in a tragic way, this nameless aunt, who “combed individuality into her bob” and whose “hair lured her imminent lover”, succeeded in obtaining herself a lover and in releasing herself from the dissatisfaction of having merely “commonplace loveliness” (Kingston, 1976:10-11). Apart from her distinctive, stylish appearance, she also takes the initiative during courtship, not accepting a passive female role, but acknowledging her desires. This description about the aunt does therefore not follow traditional Confucian culture. In Chinese tradition, women should completely obey the code of “Three Obedience and Four Virtues”, which helped maintain patriarchal power. Amy Ling indicates that the law of

Three Obedience enjoined a woman to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her eldest son after her husband’s death. The Four Virtues decreed that she be chaste; her conversation courteous and not gossipy; her deportment graceful but not extravagant; her leisure spent in perfecting needlework and tapestry for beautifying the home. (1990:3)

This oppressive code demanded women to be faithful to their husbands and even encouraged them to commit suicide after their husbands’ death. In the narrator’s imagination, her No-Name Aunt was not that kind of woman. She became a woman who tried to seek out her own love and happiness and this imagined personality was a quiet rebellion against the Chinese community and its old traditions.

As discussed earlier, another example in *The Woman Warrior* of rebellion against traditional Chinese values is when Kingston provides us with an exciting and glamorous female heroine. The legendary Chinese heroine Fa Mulan has romantic, wild adventures in the mountains, which are very different to the original story. In the original “Ode to Mulan”, Hua Mu Lan epitomizes filial piety, humility and loyalty to her community. Kingston creates an altered image of the heroine in a modified background, thus modeling a Chinese American heroine with a distinctive feminist consciousness. This is apparent in the final retribution scene where the oppressor’s

patriarchal views are punished:

‘Then—heaven help him—he tried to be charming, to appeal to me man to man’

‘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 daughters’. He quoted to me the saying I hated.

‘Regret what you’ve done before I kill you’, I said (Kingston, 1976:51)

The Chinese American woman imagines herself as Fa Mulan in the same heroic tradition, assertively fighting male injustice, unlike the cowering, “simplering women who scurry from her path with shrill insect cries, blinking weakly like pheasants that have been raised in the dark for soft meat” (Kingston, 1976: 78). The narrator resolves that she will grow up to be a warrior woman, a heroine, and a swordswoman. The story of Fa Mulan functions not only as an indictment of injustice in traditional China, but also allows her to attain an assertive identity, compensating for the oppressive realities of Kingston's own life in America, in which she can “barely stand up to her racist bosses” (Kingston, 1976:79). Kingston’s weapons are her words; in her narratives she can re-imagine herself with a different identity.

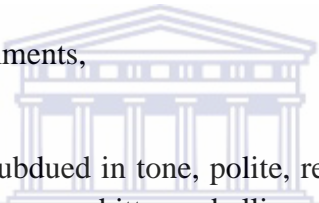
Though *The Fifth Daughter* ultimately does not question Chinese culture, there are instances of critical engagement:

my parents demand unquestioning obedience. Older brother demands unquestioning obedience. By what right? I am an individual besides being a Chinese daughter. I have rights too (Wong, 1950:125)

However, when back in Chinatown, she is still a good docile girl. Jade Snow for example is critical of those who reject their families and home values: “when an individual from a minority group personally succeeds, he too often turns his back on his own group” (Wong, 1950:153).

In comparing Kingston and Wong's works, we can therefore see that although both texts share a common Chinese cultural world, the use they put this to differs greatly. Wong deals with cultural difference by assuming a double identity while Kingston's text emphasizes a hybrid identity. In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Jade Snow Wong clung to her Chinese culture rather than to American culture, though she believed that the social environment in America would be more favorable for people like her to fulfill their dreams. For example, in *The Fifth Chinese Daughter*, at home, Jade Snow still follows the Chinese rules she once learned, but outside Chinatown, Jade Snow integrates into the larger society through her excellent social skills, and is regarded as an individual. As she puts it "a dual pattern, combining the new interests and the old familiar comforts, was established" (Wong, 1950:202).

In summary, as Amy Ling comments,



Fifth Chinese Daughter is subdued in tone, polite, restrained, well brought up. *The Woman Warrior* is angry, bitter, rebellious, and outspoken. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is a sober, straightforward narrative delivered in chronological order, as though to tell this much were effort enough. *The Woman Warrior* is poetic, experimental, fragmented in narrative line, a virtuoso performance of imaginative power and verbal dexterity. (1990:120)

Jade Snow separates the two cultures and bears a double identity – to be both a Chinese woman and an American individual by distinguishing her social life from her family life. Jade Snow succeeds in being a dutiful Chinese daughter and an American modern citizen simultaneously without confusion, despite the fact that this double identity is extremely difficult. However, for Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* is full of daring and forbidden tirades against the parents, anger against the father for his misogynist curses and anger against the mother for cutting her daughter's fraenum, that thin muscle attaching the tongue to the lower jaw. In this way, Kingston insists on her Chinese American identity, whereas Jade Snow Wong insisted on the Chinese and American cultures existing harmoniously side by side.

4.3 Amy Tan and *The Joy Luck Club*

According to Bella Adams' biography, Amy Tan was born in 1952 in Oakland, California; she is also second generation Chinese American. She grew up surrounded by influences from both Chinese and American cultures. Her parents left China for America in the 1940s and had unusual backgrounds that later provided a great deal of writing material for Tan's novels (2005:2). Like thousands of Chinese Americans, Amy Tan spent her childhood years attempting to understand, as well as to reconcile the contradictions between her ethnicity and the dominant Western culture in which she was being raised and educated. Later, as an adult, Amy Tan commented on the bicultural tensions that marked her childhood and adolescence. "They [her parents] wanted us to have American circumstances and Chinese characteristics", she told Elaine Woo in the *Los Angeles Times* (12 May 1989). That is to say, as a member of the Chinese American diaspora, her parents continue to cling to many elements of the culture of their homeland and always think in a Chinese way. However, for Amy Tan, like so many other second-generation Chinese Americans who have little or no experience with China, cultural identity is a more complex matter.

Through sixteen interconnected stories, *The Joy Luck Club* is about the lives of four Chinese immigrant women, Suyuan, An-mei, Lindo, and Yingying, and their relationships with their American-born daughters, Jing-mei, Rose, Waverly and Lena. *The Joy Luck Club* traces the journey between the multiple cultures through which these women must negotiate their lives. The club – a mah-jong (a famous form of Chinese gambling) and social investment group formed by the four Chinese immigrant women in the late 1940s – has met for over thirty years. The novel opens with the club members' first dinner together after the death of the founding member, Suyuan Woo. At the dinner, Suyuan's daughter, Jing-mei, is introduced to the club as her mother's replacement and to readers as the protagonist in the novel. After the meal, the aging club members drop a bombshell: they want Jing-mei to go to China to meet her mother's sisters whom she has never met, to tell them all about their mother's life.

Jing-mei's fulfillment of her mother's quest turns out to be a reconciliation for her of her mother's memory and legacy, and provides her with greater understanding of her own ethnic inheritance. As Amy Tan's most successful work, "*The Joy Luck Club* remained on the "New York Times" best-seller list for nine months" (Dong, 2009:138). It received rave reviews and a series of awards such as the Commonwealth Club Gold Award, and the American Library Association Award. As early as 1998, two book-length studies of Amy Tan appeared: E.D. Huntley's *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* (1998) and Patricia Gately's *The World of Amy Tan* (1995). Huntley offers a comprehensive biography of Amy Tan and detailed studies of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Hundred Secret Senses* in terms of their plots, points of view, structures, settings, character development, literary devices, narrative structures, major themes and issues. Orville Schell writes that Amy Tan has "a wonderful eye for what is telling, a fine ear for dialogue, a deep empathy for her subject matter, and a guilelessly straightforward way of writing" (quoted in Dong, 2009:138). Diane Fortuna notes "what most commends the novel are the fragments of actual Chinese history, so exotically retrieved the reader hurries through the modern narrative in order to learn more about the past" (quoted in Huntley, 1998:138).

4.4 *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Woman Warrior*

The Joy Luck Club had a similarly sensational reception as *The Woman Warrior* did thirteen years before in American literature. Amy Ling argues that "creating as great a furor on the literary scene as did Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* 13 years earlier, Amy Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), is in part an echo and a response and in part a continuation and expansion of Kingston's book" (1990:130). Following Kingston's themes, Amy Tan addresses the question of identity by telling the stories of two generations of Chinese American women living as a minority in America, where neither the immigrant mothers nor the American-born daughters can tackle the perplexity of the "between world".

In Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, mothers play a similar function as they do in *The Woman Warrior*. On the one hand, they want to protect their daughters from the oppressive circumstances that they endured in China. They are eager to provide their daughters with the best life in the new land where "nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch...[where] nobody will look down on her, ...[where] she will always be full to swallow any sorrow!" (Tan, 1989:3) On the other hand, they blame their daughters for their failure to listen to them. As was discussed in the previous chapter, in the discussion of Stuart Hall's ideas, identity and place are linked. Hall argued that "cultural identity is constituted not as an essence but as a positioning" (2006:26) and we can see here that the Chinese American daughter's identity is more defined by their American "positioning" than their ancestral "essence". The mothers hope that their daughters will continue their cultural heritage as Chinese girls in the new world, but for the American born daughters, China is only a word, an invisible place. As a result, they can no longer understand their mothers' intentions, because what they feel, and what they observe in American culture is so different. The second generation of Chinese Americans wants to be accepted as "ordinary" Americans rather than Chinese. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the conflicts are produced in this light, and mothers in some sense become the representatives of the immigrant Chinese, who fiercely attempt to retain the customs and traditions of China and consider all Americans to be "ghosts".

Amy Tan is skilled at writing about family issues, but family conflicts are symbolic of larger cultural shifts. The loss of their mothers represents the loss of the motherland for all the daughters; June's loss of her mother signifies the loss of their motherland for all Chinese American daughters. Tan puts her own experience in the context of all Chinese Americans, so her novels have more symbolism with deep cultural connotation. Zhang Longhai argues that "the conflict between mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* actually represents the clash between Chinese culture and American culture" (2004:86). Mothers represent Chinese traditional culture and their daughters, American culture. The two cultures always clash in the process of

mother-daughter communication, and the conflict between “Chineseness” and “Americanness” is represented by the misunderstanding between the two generations who have different cultural backgrounds.

The mother and daughter relationships are represented similarly in *The Woman Warrior*. On the one hand, the narrator’s mother, Brave Orchid, is very important to her personal growth, for the narrator is inspired and influenced by her. But there are also critical perspectives in which the character of Brave Orchid appears in an unfavourable, critical light. In one of the most pivotal chapters, “Shaman”, Brave Orchid is described as a brave, independent and warrior-like woman, but we are also told an event where she goes to the slave market and haggles to buy a girl slave:

‘Fifty dollars. That’s because she was sixteen years old. Eight-year olds were about twenty dollars. Five-year-olds were ten dollars and up. Two-year-olds were about five dollars. Babies were free. During the war, though, when you were born, many people gave older girls away from free. And here I was in the United States paying two hundred dollars for you.’ (1976:83)

From the perspective of the Americanised girl narrator, seeing her mother as a slave owner is highly problematic, especially when we hear that she prefers the obedient slave to her own child.

My mother’s enthusiasm for me is duller than for the slave girl; nor did I replace the older brother and sister who died while they were still cuddly. Throughout childhood my younger sister said, ‘when I grow up, I want to be a slave,’ and my parents laughed and encouraged her. (1976:82)

All of the contrasts in Brave Orchid’s life and her scary and confusing stories about it lead to the narrator’s difficulty in understanding her mother. She does not know what is true about her mother’s life.

In both of *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*, the mother figures use the traditional Chinese family hierarchy to impose their ideas, regulations and even

expectations on their daughters. However, to the American-born daughters, their mothers are beyond their Westernised comprehension, what they hear from the world of old and mythic China, and their fables, myths and narratives about the motherland is not understandable for girls raised according to Western values of democracy, human rights and individualism. Despite their rejection of Chinese culture, the daughters tend to be controlled by their mothers' authority. Perhaps the reason for telling the stories is that these mothers yearn for a feeling of hope and power, but in effect they only make the daughters dismiss China as puzzling and Chinese culture as mysterious. To the daughters, the stories told in Chinese or in Pidgin English make their mothers seem like they belong to an unknown, foreign world. Living in modern America, with their modern views, their mothers' concerns seem annoying to them and thus the conflict between mothers and daughters is unavoidable.

As a result, in *The Joy Luck Club*, mothers are the bridge between the daughters and the daughters' homeland and thus the crisis between the American daughters and their mothers is one between the American daughter and her Chinese heritage. The main reason for the conflict between the daughters and mothers is the daughters' assimilation into mainstream society. Living in a society in which racism is prevalent and Western culture is considered superior to all others, the Chinese American daughters cannot help feeling inferior. Educated in American schools, it is difficult for them to rebel against the superiority of American culture and the inferiority of Chinese culture. As a result, they try their best to become "Americanized", at the same time casting off their Chinese heritage. When they find their mothers cannot assimilate into the American culture, they feel ashamed and humiliated, and alienate themselves from them.

When the Joy Luck Club aunts hear June say that she does not know her mother, they are both shocked and eager to help. After they have said, "How can you say that? Your mother's in your bones!" (1989:23) June has a realization:

And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughter, that to these closed American-born minds “joy luck” is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (Tan, 1989:31)

Chinese cultural identity, the “connecting hope passed from generation to generation” must remain a vital resource in the diasporic community. For example, in Rose Jordan’s case, she experiences problems in her marriage after her husband’s bad business decision that leads to financial failure. Rose sinks into a psychological depression when her husband suddenly declares a divorce. Anmei Hsu, her mother, suggests that she bravely confront the problem, which is at first rejected by Rose who decides to turn to a psychiatrist instead. Her mother maintains that, “A mother is best. A mother knows what is inside you, a ‘psyche-tricks’ will only make you huluhudu, make you see heimongmong (Tan, 1989:188). Indeed, Rose does not get any help from the psychiatrist because he does not listen carefully to her explanation. Then Rose remembers her mother’s words:

‘A girl is like a young tree,’ she said. ‘You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, and running along the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away. (Tan, 1989:191)

The metaphor of identity as a directionless “weed” buffeted by the shifting cultural winds of change is a cautionary one, warning the daughters not to reject their cultural heritage out of hand. The daughters need to develop a renewed attitude towards their ethnic identity. They begin to accept their “Chinese part” and gradually they become the daughters of both American and Chinese culture.

4.5. Conclusion

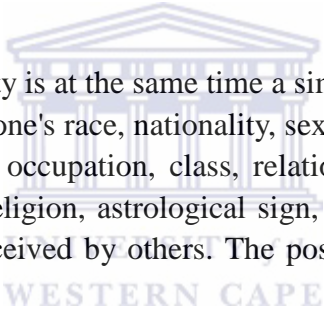
All in all, this chapter discussed three Chinese American female writers, Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, as second generation Chinese Americans. All of them have written narratives that draw from their own experiences in America. Their works depict the same culture, conflict and the challenges of shaping a new sense of self – a Chinese American identity with which they are comfortable. Jade Snow Wong's book was published in 1940, Maxine Hong Kingston's in 1960 and Amy Tan's in 1980. Because of these different writing periods, Jade Snow Wong is the predecessor who provided a model for Kingston and Tan. Because of the earlier period in which she wrote, Wong was most influenced by Chinese culture, more so than Kingston and Tan. Kingston, however, as the middle writer positioned between Wong and Tan was the connecting link between the predecessor and her successors. On the one hand, she inherited a great deal from Jade Snow Wong in terms of introducing Chinese culture, and on the other, she also developed the theme much further because she broke the silence of Chinese people in American society. Tan is the latest generation and she developed Kingston's mother and daughter relationships more incisively.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This thesis has examined Maxine Hong Kingston's novel *The Woman Warrior* within a framework of diasporic theories – notably Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory and Homi Bhabha's third space and hybridity theories. The thesis concluded that Kingston's cultural identity is neither exclusively Chinese nor exclusively American, but forms a hybrid Chinese American identity.

Amy Ling writes:



The question of one's identity is at the same time a simple and a very complex issue. It is one to be identified by one's race, nationality, sex, place of birth, place of death, place of longest residence, occupation, class, relationships to others, personality traits, size, age, interests, religion, astrological sign, salary, by how one perceives oneself, by how one is perceived by others. The possibilities seem endless. (Ling 1990: 104)

Despite Ling's attempts to locate identity not just in a race, class and gender matrix, but also through other determinants, the forms of identity that emerge in diasporic writing are fluid and subject to shift. The identity of Chinese people in the diaspora is thus very complex. Diasporic identities are therefore not fixed or given, but have to be redrawn and renegotiated in relation to each instance of traversing of a cultural boundary. This is a flexible strategy in identity politics that goes beyond the essentialist conceptions of identity. As we have seen in Kingston and other Chinese writers in the diaspora, they have undergone different stages of identity, from identifying with a mono-ethnic community to a bi-ethnic cultural negotiation and to a sense of transnational identity.

Hybridity is an important concept in understanding the constructions of self among

the minority groups in America. This thesis has indicated that Maxine Hong Kingston's writing illustrates such notions of hybridity. Kingston identifies herself neither with China nor is she wholly integrated into American culture, and therefore problematises her "hyphenated identity" (Skenazy & Tera, 1998:88) as a "Chinese-American". The thesis concludes that in *The Woman Warrior* the narrator spares no effort to transcend cultural boundaries, and in so doing to build a synthetic hybrid identity.

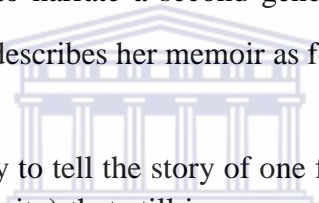
The comparison I make with Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in this thesis constitutes an attempt to analyze how Kingston develops Wong's theme by using traditional Chinese tales, including those she inherited from Wong's book. Using Kingston's mother-daughter theme, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* also highlights this relationship thematically. It is therefore important that both Wong and Tan's works were examined because by examining them Kingston's crucial contribution to Chinese American literature is better understood.

In the concluding section of this thesis I would now like to briefly look at the way in which Kingston's representation of diasporic experience in the USA is similar to the cultural patterns of the South African Chinese diaspora. Most of the historical experience of global Chinese diaspora is similar, whether in the US or in South Africa. The first generation goes abroad, often as stowaways or indentured labor, with the main objective being to earn money. As a result, when they arrive in the country that they have immigrated to, they do working class jobs and are therefore alienated by mainstream society. This historical pattern is also explored in two recent South African memoirs that deal with the Chinese diaspora.

The two Chinese South African writers who will be briefly considered are Darryl Accone's *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004) and Ufrieda Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters* (2011). Both Accone and Ho's books are the stories of Chinese families in South Africa. Accone's *All Under Heaven* is a

story of the lives of three generations in a country where Chinese once were classified non-white and are now deemed not to have been previously disadvantaged. Like *The Woman Warrior* the narrative starts in a Chinese past, depicting poverty-stricken rural China in 1911, in which Accone's great grandfather Langshi and grandfather Ah Kwok are leaving for the fabled "golden mountain" of Namféechow (South Africa). Both Langshi and Ahkwok wanted to make a fortune to take back to China, however, they never returned and became part of the Chinese South African diaspora.

Like Kingston's novel, Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters* is strongly autobiographical; the protagonist is Ho's actual father, and hers is a daughter's narrative of her family's traumatic history during apartheid South Africa. Like *The Woman Warrior*, Ho's book also chooses a memoir form to narrate a second generation Chinese South African girl's life in South Africa. Ho describes her memoir as follows:



My book was an opportunity to tell the story of one family from a community (the Chinese South African minority) that still in many ways exists on the periphery of society. By this, I mean that we still live lives that are very insular and isolated and even hidden from community outsiders. (2001:1) P E

Following Kingston's footsteps, both books explore the difficulties and the feelings of alienation which the first immigrant generations met when they arrived in South Africa. Besides the similarity with Kingston, these two books also explore the strong cultural conflicts in the diaspora. The narrator in *The Woman Warrior* once complained that her mother ate anything she could reach (for example snakes, frogs, pig's entrails), but that she would rather "live on plastics" (Kingston, 1976:88). That description indicated her rejection of her traditional Chinese identity and demonstrates her acceptance of American fast-food culture.

Ho's book has a similar episodes in which cultural identity becomes manifest in food practices: "food and eating in the Ho household was a hybrid of chopsticks and woks alongside braai tongs and toasters" (Ho, 2011:20). In blending traditional Chinese

food with the typical South African barbecue meal, a hybrid cultural identity is achieved.

There is another important point that should not be overlooked, which is that “home” in the diaspora did not really exist anymore. It is only in their imaginations. Jeffery Yen in his review of *All Under Heaven* indicates that:

Accone’s book may be seen as a claim to belong to the ‘Chinese nation’. It is also an expression of nostalgic yearning for a return ‘home’, in which the hope of belonging, of an end of alienation (that is inevitably always disappointed) is seen to lie. (2005:108)

In *Paper Sons and Daughters*, the narrator indicates that the real China is inaccessible:

I have been taken to Hong Kong and China, I have never been so deep into the interior that I have been able to get to what remains of these villages. Some relatives, though, have journeyed to the old country and returned with a bit of these rural outposts caught in megapixels of today’s digital photographic genius. (Ho, 2011:21)

Even when physically going back to China, the idea of an authentic home is out of reach and fragmented “bit[s]” of the past can barely be “caught in megapixels”. In the context of a rapidly urbanising and modernising China, the idea of a real, authentic China is irretrievably lost. As a result, the ancestral country is no longer available to the diaspora and “home” is simply in their imaginations and memories. The idea of “home” and therefore identity is therefore always destabilised. As Accone puts it:

Struggling with questions of identity and belonging, neither Eastern nor Western, not Asian, not African, the family lives in limbo. Where is home – at the trio of Africa or across the sea, as it was for their ancestors? (Accone, 2004: 218)

As a Chinese student “sojourning” in South Africa since 2007, I have gained much insight from the diasporic texts that I have studied. South Africa is a special country,

but still marked by its apartheid past where Chinese people were considered somewhat higher than black people, but lower than white people. After 1994, there is now an equality of rights, together with affirmative action for historically disadvantaged black people. However, Chinese people, until very recently, were not regarded as historically disadvantaged and continue to struggle with a legacy of discrimination. The Chinese diaspora still has difficulties in living in a racially divided society between white and black.

With the rapid development of the China's economy, and its increasingly powerful financial and political global status, the social position of the Chinese diaspora has however developed and improved. China and Chinese people are no longer only an object of disparagement and discrimination, but also are admired for their progress and modernisation. Though the cultural conflicts still exists, it is less about being looked down upon by the other developed countries. As a result, I am very proud of my Chinese identity, but as a student learning and working abroad in South Africa, I am also wanting to embrace and know new places, cultures and experiences, and develop an identity that makes me both Chinese but also part of a global world.

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