Imagining the Chinese Woman Warrior

Hsin-ya Huang

ABSTRACT

Since Maxine Hong Kingston won the National Book Critics Circle Award for her novel, *The Woman Warrior* in 1976, we have been witnessing a "consensual acknowledgement of her as a" "canonical author." This national recognition, however, has invited severe criticism from such well-known Chinese American critics as Frank Chin. Chin considers *The Woman Warrior* as a "fake" book and argues that Kingston, in her representation of the Chinese tradition, conflates the Chinese legend and deviates from the proto-text of Mu Lan. This paper analyzes Kingston's textual politics in transforming/displacing the original Chinese texts and argues that through appropriation, extension, and deviation from the Chinese tradition, Kingston in effect accomplishes her cultural mission of converting the gender/racial hurt into the hope of Chinese Americans.

KEY WORDS

Orientalist discourse
female sexuality
Chinese American literature
patriarchal logocentricism
sexual initiation
l'écriture féminine
Mu Lan legend
female body
matrilineal genealogy
Hélène Cixous
oral tradition
maternal discourse

In retrospect we see that the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975, 1976) was a remarkable event in the Asian American cultural history. While the significance of Afro-American writings had long been recognized, the Asian tradition remained obscure in the 1970's.[1] Kingston was the first Asian American author who published in the mainstream press and received national awards,[2] and *The Woman Warrior*, as David Leiwei Li points out, was "the first [Asian American] text to both enter the arena of national culture and arrest American public imagination"—"a book that changed forever the face and status of contemporary Asian American literature" (Li, *Imagining the Nation* 44). Indeed, the national recognition and numerous awards she has received attest to Kingston's success in making the Asian American tradition visible and in transforming the peripheral into the center. The initial canonical confirmation of Kingston's achievements came from such prestigious literary awards as the National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and National Book Award for *China Men* (1980).[3] Through the past two decades, we have then been witnessing "a continuous interest in her work and a consensual acknowledgement of her as a major American talent" (Li, "The Naming" 497). The first chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, "No Name Woman," for instance, becomes "the canonical elect" (Li, *Imagining the Nation* 60) in American literary anthologies,[4] while the second chapter, "White Tigers," introduces the story of Mu Lan to the Western world and transforms this ancient Chinese folktale into part of the American and world myth. Eventually, the heroine in the Disney animation "Mulan" seems to replace Snow White and Cinderella to become an emblem of loving/loved womanhood though Mu Lan's femininity remains

ambiguous. Besides, Deborah Rogin's play, "The Woman Warrior: A Girlhood among Ghosts" based on the stories from *The Woman Warrior,* makes a hit both in New York and on the West Coast. Kingston has planned to write a sequel to her story of Mu Lan (Shan 216). Her book entitled *The Fifth Book of Peace,* concentrating on the life after Mu Lan's reversion to femininity, may again arrest public interest in the near future.

Kingston's achievements, however, invite critical disputes. Her *The Woman Warrior* in effect becomes a "battleground" between the white American feminism and the Asian American ethnic criticism, as David Leiwei Li and others put it (Li, *Imagining the Nation* 50-51; Cheung, "The Woman Warrior" 234). Diane Johnson initiates a feminist reading of *The Woman Warrior* by saying that Kingston "reaches to the universal qualities of female condition and female anger that the bland generalities of social science and the merely factual history cannot describe."[5] Such white feminist affirmation of *The Woman Warrior* ignites rejections by Asian American critics. Frank Chin regards Kingston's revision of Chinese experience in *The Woman Warrior* as a device "for destroying history and literature" (Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers" 3). He criticizes *The Woman Warrior* for being insufficiently rooted in the historical reality of the Chinese immigrants in America. As it distorts the traditional legend and folklore, Chin further asserts, it exoticizes the Chinese aspect of the Chinese American experience, thereby catering to the racist/White prejudices of its readers. Chin thus calls it a "fake book," denying it from presenting any genuine experience of Chinese Americans. For Chin, it is furthermore an autobiography of Christian conversion that serves the interest of a racist art: "Christian salvation demands the destruction of all Chinese history" (Chin 11).[6]

Chin's charges against Kingston are indeed severe. Nevertheless, his perspectives, as Kim suggests, are "anti-female biases" (199). As a matter of fact, in 1974, the editors of *AIIIEEEEE!*, all male, started to criticize Chinese American women writers for reinforcing "the stereotypically unmanly nature of Chinese Americans" (xxx) and, more seriously, for subscribing to the psychological notion of divided/dual iden-

tities (xxiv-xxv). Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong base their poetics of Asian American writing on a "unitary construction of male identity" (Lim, "The Tradition" 253): "Language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility, including the style of manhood. . . . On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he is no longer a man" (*AIIIEEEE!* xlviii). Their project is to restore an authentic Chinese American identity, which is male. They confront America's emasculating, racist stereotypes of Chinese men[7] and accordingly articulate a masculinist theory of literature, taking Chinese American women writers as their target. The "inaccurate" representation of Chinese American social history in Kingston, for instance, is considered as "fake"; her blurring of boundaries between fiction (myth) and history, and between personal life stories and public historical documents becomes her original sin. While the male critics' effort to confront and correct the stereotypes produced by White hegemony should be recognized, Chin and Kingston in effect share the same point of departure. Both confront the silence of Chinese American history, the silence imposed by an Orientalist ideology.[8] As this ideology constructs Chinese in American culture as alien, emasculated, and voiceless, Chin's reconstruction of subjectivity and voice, i.e. his project of "restoring a sense of lost manhood," should be based on "real" and "authentic" heroic tradition of Chinese culture (Chin 1). In Chin's rediscovery of a Chinese "heroic" tradition, however, contradiction, dislocation, and discontinuity are covered over. The stability and centrality of the authorial "I" is maintained merely by "reducing history to an ever-smaller idealized essence" (Lee 54). Apparently Kingston addresses what Chin has omitted.

As Robert Lee rightly argues, in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston begins with a "historiographical problem in the secret history" of the No Name Woman (Lee 55). It is precisely the discontinuity, dislocation, omission, and erasure in the history of Chinese women that *The Woman Warrior* interrogates. No Name Woman's identity is that of lack (Lim 261). To fill the lack is to tell the story of this "forgotten as if . . . never born" (*WW* 3) ghost, to retrieve the lost memory, to establish historical

realities, to reconstruct the erased female identity, and to name the unspeakable female presence. As she addresses the No Name Woman as "my aunt, my forerunner" (*WW* 8), admiring her for defying conventions, breaking taboos, cultivating individuality regardless of the cost, Kingston in effect undertakes the historian's mission of inscribing "herstory." She addresses common concerns from a woman's vantage point in the hope of resolving her own cultural predicaments. This fact, however, does not separate her from Chin and other male critics. For, to them as well as to her, "sexual identity, racial identity, and national identity come together when the claim is laid on America" (Kim 199): while the place they seek is based on their acceptance as men in the American society, the place she seeks is based on acceptance of her as a woman.

Consequently, Kingston tells her history through imagining and narrating other women's histories—a mode that "masks the self's true story and yet identifies it with the community of women's stories" (Kennedy 122). She is, in effect, writing a collective autobiography that comprises the stories of herself and her female relatives, actual and legendary. Behind the No Name Woman are the mother/storyteller and the daughter/writer/historian; and Mu *Lan,* literally meaning Sylvan Orchid, is a legendary relative, who shares the generational name with the mother Brave Orchid (Ying *Lan*) and the aunt Moon Orchid (Yue *Lan*). All together they represent the true spirit of "The Woman Warrior."

In this paper, I attempt to analyze Kingston's textual strategy in reconstructing the women's historical experience from "the terrains of history, memory, and myth" (Lee 56). I would like to examine how Kingston constantly works toward understanding and integrating her Chinese heritage, and finally accomplishes this in the final section where she says, "the beginning is hers [my mother's], the ending, mine" (*WW* 206). The paper will pivot around how she appropriates and extends the Chinese tradition and how she deviates from it. Kingston's purpose is, as she confesses, to "claim America" for herself: "claiming America does not mean assimilation of American values, but rather a response to the legislation and racism that says we of Chinese

origin do not belong here in America. . . . No, we're not outsiders; we Chinese belong here. This is our country, this is our history, we are a part of America. If it weren't for us, America would be a different place" (Kingston, "Maxine Hong Kingston" 16). The history, as Foucault argues, has the form of war, embodying power relations, relations of domination and control (Foucault 114). The omission or distortion of the Chinese image originates from an institutional power that dominates and controls. This omission/distortion is also the outcome of a Eurocentric desire to alienate the Asian as the Other for the consolidation of Self (Li, "The Production" 320). Thus, Kingston writes *The Woman Warrior* to "report" the omitted/distorted culture. Writing/ "reporting" serves as a medium of resistance/protest against domination. It is an act of "revenge" as in Chinese we use the same character for "reporting" and "revenge" (報導即報仇): "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' *The reporting is the vengeance*—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (*WW* 53, emphasis added).

Therefore, "*The Woman Warrior* is an American book. Yet many reviewers do not see the American-ness of it, nor the fact of my won American-ness," Kingston insists (Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" 58). It is only by reading *The Woman Warrior* as an American book that we can make sense of its "Chinese" elements, which freely alter their sources in both spirit and letter (Wong 26). As Kingston notes, some critics are put off by the unfamiliar air of the "Chinese" elements and find in them a confirmation of notorious Oriental inscrutability; others are only too ready to be delighted by the exotic, taking all the fabulous details at face value ("Cultural Misreading" 56), whereas her purpose is to establish the legitimacy of a unique Chinese American (as opposed to "Chinese Chinese") experience and sensibility. While differentiating the meanings between Chinese-American and Chinese American, Kingston says, "I have been thinking that we ought to leave out the hyphen in 'Chinese-American,' because the hyphen gives the word on either side equal weight, as if linking two nouns. It looks as if a Chinese-American has double citi-

zenship, which is impossible in today's world. Without the hyphen, 'Chinese' is an adjective and 'American' a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American" ("Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" 60). Kingston's redefinition of "Chinese American" subverts the White's unilateral and arbitrary definition of Chinese immigrants as the alien Other. A Chinese American is a type of American, a subject, instead of an object/Other/outsider.

In spite of her decision to write her American presence, Kingston's constant efforts in appropriating the Chinese past are worth heeding. Her treatment of the Chinese heritage can be summarized in two words: transformation and displacement. Transformation is a temporal process, a lineal inquiry into the metamorphosis from the past to the present. For, as Kingston contends, "understanding the past changes the present. And the ever-evolving present changes the significance of the past" (Rabinowitz 179). Displacement highlights a spatial shift from the East to the West and from Central Kingdom (China 中國) to Beautiful Nation (America 美國) —a mechanism that makes *The Woman Warrior* an "American Book." Temporal transformation and spatial displacement then best address Kingston's textual strategy in transplanting a Chinese past in the contemporary American soil. For, Kingston realizes that recovering a Chinese tradition untransformed by her American experience is an impossible task: "I don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years" (*WW* 185).[9] The liberty of transforming/ displacing the original (past/Chinese) texts enables Kingston to transcend the limits of "Chinese facts" to reveal a reality truer in essence and spirit. To prove this, I propose to concentrate on the second chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, "White Tigers," where the ancient Chinese story of Mu Lan is transformed and displaced into a text that invites most accusations of Kingston's ethnic betrayal. By comparing Kingston's version of Mu Lan's story with its proto-text, I intend to address specifically the issue of how Kingston appropriates, extends, and deviates from the Chinese tradition and how she finally converts the gender/racial hurt into the hope.

Kingston has been seriously criticized for conflating the Chinese legends and deviating from the proto-text of Mu Lan (Li, *Imagining the*

Nation 54; Cheung, "'Don't Tell'" 169). The most obvious example is the tattooing episode. Mu Lan is not tattooed; rather, it is Yue Fei, a male general of the Sung Dynasty, whose mother is said to have tattooed four characters on his back to remind him of his loyalty to the country (精忠報國). Kingston's textual transplantation is therefore interpreted as "a concoction of Chinese misogyny, meant to destroy Chinese history" (Li, *Imagining the Nation* 54). Chin contends that this "fake" Mu Lan is "unforgivable" (Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers" 4). As Chin asserts, the heroine in Kingston's work, as being morally superior to the culture she characterizes, becomes both "the victim and destroyer" of the Chinese culture (Chin 9). The Chinese folklore of Mu Lan, a tale playing on the sounds of weaving (唧唧復唧唧，木蘭當戶織), a tale initiated with a Confucian ideal of femininity, becomes the source of the misogynistic emphasis of Chinese ethics. All this is intolerable to Chin. Kingston further turns Yue Fei's four-character maxim into a full text of "oaths and names" (*WW* 34): "rows after rows. . . . my back covered entirely with words in red and black files" (*WW* 34-35). While this tattooing scene is often taken as evidence of Chinese patriarchal domination and misogynist cruelty inflicted on women, Kingston further identifies the words on Mu Lan back with hers, the woman warrior's sword with her own pen, by saying "the swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. . . . What we have in common are the words on our backs" (*WW* 53). Finally, the ancient obedient/filial/loyal daughter in "The Ballad of Mu Lan 木蘭辭" is transformed into a contemporary champion of Chinese feminism in *The Woman Warrior*. For this reason, Chin accuses Kingston of making up stories from pure imagination. Chin calls Kingston a "fake" writer as she "takes Chinese heroic tradition for contempt for women," "[displaces] history with the stereotype," and "perpetuate[s] and advance[s] the stereotype of a Chinese culture so foul, so cruel to women, so perverse" (Chin 11, 50).

But, in answer to the charge that she violates the heroes of two Chinese myths when she puts the tattoos of Yue Fei on Hua Mu Lan's back, Kingston says, "I'm not even saying that those are Chinese myths anymore. I'm saying I've written down American myths. Fa Mulan and

the writing on her back is an American myth. And I made it that way."[10] In other words, alteration to the original story is based on Kingston's belief that "[w]e have to do more than record myth. . . . That's just more ancestor worship. The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way."[11] Repeatedly Kingston has to defend herself with her "American-ness": *The Woman Warrior* is "an American book"; in an "American myth," retold in a "new American way"; it is an "American language" though spoken with a "Chinese accent." For some Asian American critics, however, her defenses can never be justified; rather these are reflexive of her "white supremacist arrogance, reaching for mystic rhetoric" (Chin, 49).

Does Kingston's depiction of the Chinese woman warrior Mu Lan completely escape the real China and Chinese American social history? Is it "pure white fantasy," as Chin suggests (Chin, 49)? Does she subscribe to racist/Orientalist fantasy by altering Chinese history and making *The Woman Warrior* "American"? To answer these questions, we need to turn to the original Chinese story of Mu Lan.

In China, the name of Mu Lan has long been synonymous with the Chinese heroine, yet opinions differ even as to what her real family name is. Mu Lan is the name originally recorded in "The Ballad of Mu Lan," the proto-text of the Mu Lan story, but the *Annals of the Ming* 明一統志 says her surname is Chu 朱 while the *Annals of the Ch'ing* 清一統志 records it as Wei 魏. Hsu Wei 徐渭 of the Ming Dynasty offers yet another possibility when in one section of his play, "Female Mu Lan Joins the Army for Her Father 雌木蘭替父從軍," he calls her Hua Mu Lan. Such famous Tang poets as Li Shang-lin 李商隱 and Po Chu-yi 白居易 also use the surname Hua 花, literally meaning "flower," to address the femininity of Mu Lan (Ch'iu 179). There are, moreover, confusions about many other crucial details, including her ethnic origin, her hometown, the geographical locations of her military campaigns, as well as the historical period during which the "Ballad" was most likely composed. Recently Chinese scholars believe that the "Ballad" was written as early as the fifth century in the Northern Dynasty whose ruler was of nomadic origin. Hsieh-you Ch'iu and others conclude that Mu Lan might be a nomadic woman of the Hsien Pei tribe

鮮卑 in Manchuria or eastern Mongolia.[12] While the proto-text narrates the story of Mu Lan's substitution for her senile father, her disguise in the men's armor, her military hardships, and her final reversion to femininity, it is interesting to see how the historians and playwrights of the later eras transform a nomadic Mu Lan into a Han 漢 woman by giving her Han family names and, particularly in the Song Dynasty, by adding the Confucian ideal of marriage to the ending of the Mu Lan story.[13]

As a matter of fact, in addition to the proto-text of "The Ballad of Mu Lan," there are still many other versions of the Mu Lan story in the Tang, Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties as well as in the modern period, and in genres ranging from the ballad, the novel, the journal, and the opera libretto to the vernacular play.[14] If there are more than one version of the Mu Lan legend, the debate on Kingston's version in *The Woman Warrior* should not be couched in terms of how it deviates from a "definitive" one chronicling the life of a real/authentic Mu Lan (Wong 29). Kingston's story represents yet another version of the Mu Lan legend, which is transplanted in the foreign land of America. Indeed, the Mu Lan story in "White Tigers" is meant to be read in an American context as the two-fold structure of the chapters shows: the Mu Lan story is followed by a section beginning with "*My American life* has been such a disappointment" (*WW* 45, emphasis added). The one-line space between the two sections in "White Tigers" signifies the unspoken/unspeakable connection, rather than the separation, between what is ancient/Chinese and what is contemporary/American. It is necessary to write about her own life through imagining that of the Chinese woman warrior. Kingston's inner conflict is embodied in her resentment about the Chinese "female *I*" (WW 47) —Chinese women address themselves as "nu-chia 奴家," meaning "slave," a word that has been used to "break the women with their own tongues" (*WW* 47). While Confucius encourages Chinese men to educate themselves to be "real gentlemen 君子" through learning Confucian ethics, the Confucian *Analects* records that "it is hard to cultivate such inferior creatures as women and mean people 唯女子與小人難養矣." Kingston "would *have to* grow up a woman warrior" (*WW* 20, emphasis added) while the

chance is that as a female child in the Chinese immigrant family she could "[grow] up to be but [a wife] or [a slave]," as her mother warns her (*WW* 19).

Nevertheless, the proto-text of Mu Lan and a host of succeeding works, though varied in many crucial details, embrace Confucian ideology and reinforce its values. These Chinese texts are inspiring exemplars of filial piety 孝, about an obedient daughter undergoing extremity to spare her aging father from conscription. For the emperor, Mu Lan performs the duty and loyalty 忠 of a subject. Her gender is masqueraded for the purpose of fulfilling the patriarchal mission of defending the country. Mu Lan is not the only woman in the Chinese folklore who disguises her sex; Chu Ying-t'ai 祝英台 who masquerades herself as a man to attend school is another famous example. While sexual disguises in effect advance a transgression of the prescribed gender/sexual roles, patriarchal punishment for such a transgression is by all means severe. Kingston is apparently aware of the consequence of sexual transgression as she puts in her work, "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (*WW* 39). Chu Ying-t'ai dies a tragic death while two versions of the Mu Lan story in the Yuan and Ch'ing dynasties have Mu Lan commit suicide.[15] Chu Ying-t'ai and Mu Lan are not physically "executed." These disguised/transgressing females, however, are metaphorically killed by the patriarchal textual violence so that the stability of the Confucian social order can be secured.

The proto-text, "The Ballad of Mu Lan," however, does not end with death. Instead, Mu Lan returns home with glory and honor, "tak[ing] off [her] wartime gown, and putt[ing] on [her] old-time clothes."[16] "The Ballad" commences with an underlying theme of femininity and domesticity as heeded in the sounds of weaving ("Tsiek tsiek and again tsiek tsiek"), and closes with reversion to that same theme. If in the mid-section, Mu Lan's masquerade and her heroism transgress the laws that define the boundary between the masculine/public and the feminine/private, she is "domesticated" in the end of the "Ballad"—at the cosmetic table, "facing the window she fixes

her cloudlike hair, / hanging up a mirror she dabs on yellow flower powder 當窗理云鬢,對鏡貼花黃." In an effort to restore the disturbed order and to regain the lost equilibrium, the anonymous author of the "Ballad" imprisons Mu Lan in a narrative closure: the story begins and ends with a feminine and domestic Mu Lan, as Eric Yu discloses (4-5). Noticeably, Mu Lan in masquerade is neither man nor woman. Rather, she is "desexualized" (Chang 200) and reduced into a valorized emblem of Chinese heroism, "the never changed virtues of loyalty and filial piety 忠孝兩不渝."[17] The coda of the "Ballad" represents the effect of Mu Lan's transvestism in animalistic terms: "The he-hare's feet go hop and skip, / The she-hare's eyes are muddled and fuddled. / Two hares running side by side close to the ground, / How can they tell if I am he or she?".[18] This jesting remark which appears only after the narrative tension is relieved by Mu Lan's reversion to femininity undermines the significance of Mu Lan's masquerade—she is much more treasured for her femininity than for any masculine traits. She is after all a "woman," who desires no share in the public world of power and politics. When asked how she would like to be rewarded, Mu Lan wishes for nothing but a swift home-return: "Mu Lan has no craving for a minister's post. / I wish to ride a swift mount/To take me back to my home 木蘭不用尚書郎，願借明駝千里足，送兒還故鄉." Consequently, the Mu Lan myth partakes of the endeavor to perpetuate "the social hierarchy as well as male hegemony" (Li, "The Naming" 505) as expressed in the Confucian maxim of "emperor as emperor, lord as lord, father as father, and son as son 君君臣臣父父子子."[19]

All this, however, is radically altered in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston's Mu Lan is not in service to the emperor for her father's sake. Her mission is her own (Lee 59). Here Kingston touches upon the profound distinction between the Western concept of an individual self and the Chinese communal self. In China, the self is largely a function of one's social identity shaped by Confucian values of duty, filial obligation, and piety. This concept of the communal self paradoxically privileges self-effacement. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the three major philosophical trends in China, share the belief that "self-cultivation involves the development of self-lessness, and

therein lies the perfection of the self."[20] Consequently, the individualistic self and its desires and attachments are distortions to be transcended. For, the value of the individualistic self, the small "i" (小我) in Chinese, can only be defined by its contribution to *chia* (家 family), *kuo* (國 state), and *t'ian-hsia* (天下 world), the big "I's" (大我). Contrarily, however, the American cultural heritage celebrates "the Emersonian divinity in man and the Whitmanian absolute individual that eventuate in the 'I' being bigger than anything else" (Li, "The Naming" 504). Kingston's problem with the Chinese and the English "I" is striking, for in a passage she underscores her predicament in coming to terms with the symbols of "I" in two different languages:

> I could not understand "I." The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I," assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness; "I" is a capital and "you" is lower-case. I stared at that middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it. (*WW* 166-67)

Her perplexity at the American "I," as we may see, results from her inherent connection with the Chinese culture. The uneasiness with the assertive nature of the English "I," however, also addresses an age-old concern of Western women writers (Li, "The Naming" 504). The assertive "I" is alien to women, who have long been considered as the second sex, "the lower-case you." Thus, when writing about her "i," Kingston uses the disguise of Mu Lan's men's armor while her Western forerunners, Currer/Acton/Ellis Bell (Charlotte/Anne/Emily Brontë), George Eliot, and George Sand masquerade themselves with male pseudonyms.[21] But, Kingston's position is complex from the start, being marginal in several ways: she is Chinese in an American culture, American in a Chinese family, and a woman in both (Kennedy 123). Her bafflement at her marginal position is further complicated by the

concept of the Chinese female self as "slave 奴家" (*WW* 47), which I have elaborated earlier in this paper. The desire to transcend her predestined fate of inferiority eventually motivates her identifying adventure with Mu Lan: "[Mother] said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (*WW* 20).

The call to the adventure, however, is significantly put in the conditional subjective: "The call would come from a bird . . . " (*WW* 20). It seems with the conditional subjective, Kingston crosses the line that defines the reality, delves into the unconscious mind, and retrieves the ever suppressed/repressed desire and conflict that are barred by cultural laws. Kingston has detested the Chinese concept of "roundness" as embodied in the "round moon cakes and round doorways, the round tables of graduated sizes that fit one roundness inside another, round windows and rice bowls" (*WW* 13). "These talismans" of roundness have "the power to warn the family of the law" (*WW* 13): the unity, order, and wholeness. Kingston admires her No Name Aunt for her defying this law and addresses her as "my forerunner" for "the break she [has] made in the 'roundness'" (*WW* 13). Kingston, in fact, is making another break in the "roundness," which denotes confinement and imprisonment to Kingston. To answer the call to the adventure is to make such a break and to write "not just a family book or American book or a woman's book but . . . at the same moment, [her] book" (Kingston, "Cultural Mis-reading" 65).

Noticeably, Kingston's book is a daughterly text, empowered by her mother's talk-story: "I had been in the presence of great power, my mother's talking-story" (*WW* 19-20). As Shirley Lim points out, the maternal discourse, bypassing the father's position, informs the daughter to produce such strong female figures as the swordswoman, Hua Mu Lan ("The Tradition" 259). Kingston uses the term "talk-story" to refer to the oral tradition of narratives, which she transforms into her written text.[22] This oral tradition that she inherits from the matrilineal genealogy helps to create a female language radically different from the patriarchal logocentricism. French feminist critics such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray argue that women's writing

(l'écriture féminine) is "open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, *attempting to speak the body; i.e., the unconscious*, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, masterly or 'didactic' languages" (qtd. in Lim, "The Tradition" 265, emphasis added).[23] While this description of women's writing appropriately characterizes Kingston's work (Lim 265),[24] how the female body is appropriated and experienced constitutes the core of her Mu Lan text.

While the mother's "talk-story" is the source of her imagination, Kingston claims not merely affinity but difference. Mu Lan's journey in *The Woman Warrior* underlies the significance of female sexuality, which is a forbidden/unspeakable/unspoken subject in the mother's talk-story.[25] When Kingston rewrites the Mu Lan story, she turns the six-line battle scene in the proto-text into a journey of ritual trials and sexual initiation.[26] Like exemplifying the adventure archetype put forth by Joseph Campell, the journey that Kingston's Mu Lan undertakes follows the pattern of departure, initiation, and return. But revising the archetype of a male hero, Kingston supplies substantial details of female sexuality. The treatment of sex in Kingston's Mu Lan text is audacious. Kingston elaborates on how Mu Lan continues her training despite menstruation, describes the smell of menstrual blood and the red dreams Mu Lan has when menstruating (*WW* 30-34).[27] Mu Lan's masquerade, however, is depicted succinctly in one sentence: "I put on my men's clothes and armor and tied my hair in a man's fashion" (36). Even after she puts on men's costumes, people still use the female pronoun to refer to the masqueraded Mu Lan: "How beautiful she looks" (36). In the army, she finds a husband, becomes pregnant, and begets a son. Kingston depicts her pregnancy, her labor in giving birth, and her maternity in details (39-41)—the details include how "any high cry made the milk spill from [her] breast" (41). Mu Lan even dries the umbilical cord on a flagpole after giving birth and watches it fly with the red flag (40). Though the male disguise enables her to "reverse the traditional role models and establish a new set of relationships based on equality and individual fulfillment" (Li, "The Naming" 507), she

continues to experience sexuality as a woman. Virginia Woolf in her novel, *Orlando*, discloses that "[i]n every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the self is the very opposite of what it is above" (181). This statement fits Kingston's Mu Lan.

David Leiwei Li suggests that the overt sexual depictions in *The Woman Warrior* be regarded as Kingston's efforts in pleasing an American audience "who would both appreciate the toughness involved in such behavior and the humor it embeds" (Li, "The Naming" 514 n23). This comment, however, represents merely a small part of the truth. Kingston's constant references to female sexuality should be read as her American response to Chinese asexuality, and as her conscious revision to the desexualized depiction of Mu Lan in "The Ballad of Mu Lan."[28] The war for "defending the country" in the pro-text is transformed into one featuring the psycho-sexual development of a woman warrior. Finally, the mature female body becomes the bearer of his/herstory. With stories of the injustices carved on her back, Kingston's Mu Lan achieves victory over the baron at the moment he discovers that she is both a woman and the bearer of his/herstory: " 'You've done this,' I said, and ripped off my shirt to show him my back. 'You are responsible for this.' When I saw *his startled eyes at my breasts*, I slashed him across the face and on the second stroke cut off his head" (*WW* 44, emphasis added). Whereas the traditional Mu Lan is a loyal retainer, the one in Kingston's version is a rebel against a tyrannical emperor and a wicked baron. Beheading the baron whose favorite lines are "Girls are maggots in the rice" and "It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters" (*WW* 43), Kingston's Mu Lan crosses the "return threshold" (Campbell 217) and accomplishes the ordeal of female sexual initiation.

Kingston's Mu Lan outplays the Western heroine Joan of Arc by experimenting and experiencing the essence of female sexuality. Leading an army of 12,000, Joan of Arc organized the French resistance that forced the English to end their siege of Orleans in 1429. Courageous and powerful as she is, Joan of Arc becomes a canonized virgin

saint, a frozen symbol to worship like the traditional Chinese Mu Lan. Kingston's Mu Lan is superior, for, "[m]arriage and childbirth strengthen the swordswoman, who is not a *maid* like Joan of Arc" (*WW* 48, emphasis added). Moreover, while the traditional Mu Lan reveals her femininity at the last moment of glory, Kingston's has more work to do (Wong 31). After beheading the evil baron, she releases a houseful of women who cannot escape on their little bound feet. These liberated concubines, slave girls, and daughters-in-law, who are essentially family outcasts, turn into a mercenary female army and become "witch amazons" (*WW* 44-45). Like their Western counterparts, they "[kill] men and boys" (*WW* 45).[29] Kingston's invention of the Chinese Amazon results from her blending the Western myth with the Chinese reality. To contextualize this, we trace back to the Taiping rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century when female outlaws and outcasts ran away from their families to join the rebellion with its militarized gender egalitarianism. In the later part of the century, women in the Canton delta resisted marriage by delaying taking up residence in their husband's households and by joining sworn spinsterhood and convents (Lee 58). Kingston also treats historical realities in the conflated legend of Mu Lan.

Kingston alludes not only to Chinese realities but also to a large part of the Chinese cultural heritage, which she learns from her mother's "talk-stories." Taoist influences are strong as seen in the notion of self-cultivation to attain immortality, exemplified by the old couple who become Mu Lan's mentors and surrogate parents, and teach her the harmony of nature and the interconnectedness of the outer and inner, the Taoist way of life.[30] Chinese Buddhism also contributes to Kingston's writing. The episode that a rabbit leaps into the fire to provide food for Mu Lan recalls a famous Buddhist anecdote. At a time when Buddha was hungry in the wilderness, a rabbit leaped into a fire to sacrifice himself for food. From this, Buddha taught selflessness as the way to reach enlightenment (Latsch 72-73, qtd. in Van Spanckeren 47). Later, when Mu Lan recollects her experience in the forest, she confesses, "I [have] met a rabbit who [teaches] me about *self-immolation* and how to speed up *transmigration*: one does not have to

become worms first but can change directly into a human being . . ." (*WW* 28, emphasis added). The concept of "transmigration" (or reincarnation, "*lun-huei* 輪迴" in Chinese and "*samsara*" in the Sanskrit term) foregrounds Buddhist teachings in Kingston's text and transforms Mu Lan into a radically different heroine from the traditional one, who is preoccupied with the orthodoxy Confucian ideology of "this life, this worldly."[31]

Indeed, Kingston is empowered by a rich and varied cultural past, through which she learns to "make [her] mind large . . . so that there is room for paradoxes" (*WW* 29). This widened vision is dramatized in Mu Lan's enlightenment when Mu Lan experiences an enlarged "universe" (*WW* 29):

> They were light: they were molten, changing gold—*Chinese* lion dancers, *African* lion dancers in midstep. I heard high *Javanese* bells deepen in midring to Indian bells, *Hindu Indian, American Indian*. (*WW* 27, emphasis added)

This vision, in a word, embraces "four directions" of the world—the north, the south, the east, and the west. As a matter of fact, the chapter title "White Tigers" underlies Kingston's play on the Chinese concept of "directions." Chinese people locate the East in the abode of blue-green dragons 青龍, the south in that of red birds 朱雀, the west in that of white tigers 白虎, and the north in that of black tortoises 玄武.[32] Thus, with the title "White Tigers," Kingston seems to activate a movement towards the West. While the Mu Lan story originates from the ancient Oriental ballad, Kingston rewrites it into a Western/American myth. A "journey to the West"[33] thus characterizes Kingston's revised text in "White Tigers." The chapter is not just a Chinese myth "but one transformed by America" (Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings" 57).

Precisely, the power of Kingston's revised text resides in the capacity to contextualize contemporary events in her American life: "From the fairy tales, I've learned exactly who the enemies are. I easily recognize them—business-suited in their *modern American* executive

guise, each boss *two feet taller than I am and impossible to meet eye to eye*" (*WW* 48, emphasis added). The identification of the baron in the Mu Lan's tale with the boss in real life indicates a movement from mythic imagination to harsh daily reality (Li, "The Naming" 508), a movement from the East (Chinese past) to the West (American present). Racism, sexism, and capitalism continue to shackle Kingston's American life and make it "such a disappointment" (*WW* 45). Embodied in each "giant" boss is the image of a white, a male, and a capitalist in combination. In front of this image, she is belittled and alienated in an "Other."

As Li says, China is a "repressive space" for the Chinese, but for the white Americans, it is a fictional space, a mysterious and exotic Other that serves the Western subjects (*Imagining the Nation* 47). By producing the Chinese Other, the Western imagination consolidates "an inside, its own subject status" (Spivak 293). Like Chin, Kingston has been wrestling with this Otherness. By disclosing the meaning of the symbol "O," the narrator in Kingston's second book, *China Men,* underscores the frustrating experience of being ostracized: "So our dog tags had O for religion and O for race because neither black nor white. Mine also had O for blood type. Some kids said O was for 'Oriental,' but I knew it was for 'Other' because the Filipinos, the Gypsies, and the Hawaiian boy were O's" (276). America rises as an imperial power from "its systematic exploitation of the ethnic minority whose contribution has been appropriated but legal status rejected" (Li, "*China Men*" 492). In *China Men,* Kingston particularly refers to her attempts to "find out how we landed in a country where we are *eccentric* people" (*China Men* 15, emphasis added). Resenting the burden of the history of her immigrant parents, she in effect recognizes the necessity to redress the wrongs and define a legitimate Chinese American identity.

To accomplish such a task, in fact, Kingston deals with the specificity of Chinese American history from the outset of *The Woman Warrior*. The opening sentence of the second paragraph reads, "In 1924 just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings—to make sure that every young man who went 'out on the road' would responsibly come home—your father and his brothers and your

grand-father and his brothers and your aunt's new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain" (3). The sacrifice women pay for ensuring the return of male emigrants is mysteriously enclosed in two dashes. While husbands are absent for extended periods of time, wives in China, like their "bachelor" counterparts in America, are highly vulnerable to any possible intimate relationship. This may explain the context that gives rise to the no-name aunt's plight. Li further pinpoints the significance of the year "nineteen twenty-four" to disclose Kingston's political/ethnic intention embedded in this woman's text (*Imagining the Nation* 61). Kingston is accurate in date. In nineteen twenty-four, "the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act" was expanded to exclude all Asians from entry, including Chinese wives of American citizens.[34] We simply cannot neglect the historical era in which Kingston stages her narrative, a narrative about hurry-up marriage and consequent estrangement "which occurs under the shadow of legislated racism against Asian Americans" (Li 61). Sexual oppression in China is in part occasioned by this racial exclusion of Chinese in America (Li 61). Read in this light, Chin's criticism that *The Woman Warrior* dramatizes Chinese patriarchal cruelty to women by "replacing history with stereotypes" accordingly becomes partial.

In fact, for a Chinese American writer to make her mark, she has to write with the kind of cultural intelligibility and sensibility required of an Oriental. Kingston substantiates her writings by referring to the specificity of Chinese American history. While her recording of the Chinese tales certainly plays on the psychology of American readers, it also represents a successful means of "gaining power through manipulation of the cultural norm" (Li, "The Naming" 514, n19). As she capitalizes on the American enchantment for the exotic and mysterious Oriental horizon, her breakthrough into the American canon begins exactly with her "deliberate accommodation, adaptation, and appropriation" of the familiar Orientalist imagination (Li, *Imagining the Nation* 46). Consequently, the prevalence of American Orientalist discourse does not become "a condition of [Kingston's] being but rather an occasion of [her] becoming" (Li, "The Production" 329). While the Orientalist discourse of the "Beautiful Nation" continues to exert its

power, Kingston's work creates the site for multicultural challenge to the American canon. Eventually she transforms "her victim's state of cut frenum into a victor's state of full-throated song" (Ling, *Between Worlds*, 130) —by crossing boundaries, transcending differences, and becoming the center that holds.

NOTES

[1] Through its concentrated artistic and intellectual activity, the Harlem Renaissance during the 1910's and 1920's achieved a national Afro-American voice and in effect aimed to convert the illiterate and exploited aggregate of Afro-Americans into an articulated and respected ethnic whole, while the Asian American cultural production was still ignored and the Asian American works were scarcely found in public libraries in the 1970's. For the marginality of Chinese American writers' works in American literary history, see Amy Ling's preface to her *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. xi-xv.

[2] For the awards Kingston has received, refer to Li, "The Naming" 513 n2.

[3] Since Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, American ethnic women writers have harvested prestigious book awards. Toni Morrison won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 while Alice Walker won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple.* While Kingston's success indicates the beginning of American institutional recognition for ethnic women's writings, Kingston confesses her indebtedness to Afro-American male authors, her "forerunners" in minority literature. In her interview with Shan Te-hsin, she acknowledges the influence of Afro-American writers such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and LeRoi Jones (Shan 218).

[4] "No Name Woman" appears in Gilbert and Gubar's *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, 1st ed. (1985) and 2nd ed. (1996), Perkins et al.'s *Women's Work: An Anthology of American Literature* (1994), McQuade et al.'s *Harper American Literature* (1987) and Emory Elliott et al.'s *Columbia Literary History of the United States*

(1988). Other college readers such as *Crossing Cultures: Readings for Composition* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), *Bedford Reader* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), *Conscious Reader* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), *Harvest Reader* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991) also include the piece. The second chapter of *The Woman Warrior* "White Tigers" appears in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990) that has a Chinese American co-editor, Amy Ling. (In addition to Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* collects several other Chinese American writers such as David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Cathy Song, and Li-Young Lee.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* 5th ed., (1998) selects chapter one of Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*. For Kingston's canonization, see Li "The Naming" 497, 511-13 n2; *Imagining the Nation* 60.

[5] Diane Johnson, *The New York Review of Books* (1977): 19, quoted in Li, *Imagining the Nation* 49. Most feminist readings focus on the status, struggle, growth of a Chinese American woman living in the Chinatown immigrant community. Elizabeth J. Ordonez, Amy Ling, Veronica Wang, and Nancy Walker emphasize the relation of Kingston's mixing of dream/fantasy and reality to her dialectic experience of being Chinese/female in America. Others stress the autobiographical elements in the work, reading it in "the tradition of Chinese American women's life stories." See Lim "The Tradition" and Joanne S. Frye. For the critical reception and disputes of Kingston's works, refer to Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 49-53.

[6] Frank Chin regards Kingston's books as confessional autobiographies influenced by the Western tradition of Christianity. While autobiography serves as a tool of Christian conversion, Kingston's works ruin the true spirit of the Chinese culture and history. For more details, see Chin, "This Is Not an Autobiography," 125-30.

[7] The racist tradition as reflected in American films casts Chinese men as emasculated males. These stereotypes have been repeatedly explored by Chinese American critics: "the evil of Dr. Fu Manchu was not sexual, but homosexual. . . . Dr. Fu, a man wearing a long dress, batting his eyelashes, surrounded by muscular black servants in loin

clothes, and with his bad habit of caressingly touching white men on the leg, wrist, and face with his long fingernails is *not so much a threat as his frivolous offense to white manhood.* [Charlie] Chan's gestures are the same, except that he doesn't touch, and instead of being graceful like Fu in flowing robes, he is awkward in a baggy suit and clumsy. . . . *He never gets into violent things*" (quoted in Cheung "The Woman Warrior" 236 from Frank Chin "Confessions of the Chinatown Cowboy," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 4.3 (1972): 66*; emphasis added). As the editors of *AIIIEEEEE!* assert, "the white stereotype of the acceptable Asian is utterly without manhood. Good or bad, the stereotypical Asian is nothing as a man. At worst, the Asian American is contemptible because he is womanly effeminate, devoid of all the traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring physical courage and creativity" (xxxi). Recently the animation "Mr. Wong" on the internet (icebox.com) irritates Asian Americans in general and Chinese Americans in particular. Though claimed to be a "touching and heart-warming story," the cartoon uses racist stereotypes of Chinese men and creates a funny buck-toothed coolie/house servant, ticked and screamed at by Miss Parn, his boss. For Chinese Americans, the Hollywood media again adds insult to ethnic injury in poking fun at the Chinese culture. The image of the emasculated Chinese immigrants, what Robert Lee calls the "Orientalized male" (Lee 53), is best represented in Kingston's second work, *China Men*, where the initial section introduces Tang Ao, a transformed character from *Flowers in the Mirror* 鏡花緣 by Li Ju-Chen 李汝珍 of the Song Dynasty, as emblematic of Chinese sojourners in America—a feminized prototype with his feet bound, his ears pierced, his facial hair plucked, his face painted. Kingston's text serves as a mirror of Chinese immigrant reality. It reflects how Chinese men are forced into feminine positions of powerlessness and silence, into "bachelors" of Chinatowns devoid of women, and into "feminized" jobs. Kingston's representation subverts the traditional authoritative and powerful Chinese patriarchal image. Chinese masculinity is severely threatened. For a detailed discussion of Tang Ao in *China Men*, please see Goellnicht.

[8] In his work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that all re-

lationships between the West and Asia are based on the unequal power between them, and their inequality is reproduced in the realm of culture by the West's representing itself as Self and Asian as an Oriental Other. This institutionalized Western ideological science of the Orient depicts little genuine experience of Asia but rather it is used to consolidate the subjectivity of the Western Self and to rule over the "silent Oriental" (Wang 31) in a sexist, racist, and imperial manner. The nature of the Orientalist discourse in relation to the establishment of Asian American literature is the thematic concern of Li's *Imagining the Nation* and "The Production of Chinese American Tradition," and Yang's "Inventing Traditions."

[9] In her *Ceremony*, a novel about a young Native (Laguna Pueblo) American Tayo's quest for healing and identity, Leslie Marmon Silko recognizes the necessity of blending the Native and the Western knowledge into a new ceremonial vision. Betonie, Tayo's guru and the wise tribal medicine man, maintains that "after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong" (*Ceremony* 126). Silko and Kingston seem to share similar viewpoints towards the transformation of their native/ethnic traditions.

[10] In Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers," 49-50.

[11] Quoted in Wong 31 from Timothy Pfaff, "Talk with Mrs. Kingston." *New York Times Book Review* 15 June 1980: 1+.

[12] " Khan" in the line "The Khan is calling many troops 可汗大點兵" is a Mongolian/Turkish word for addressing the ruler, and "Black Mountain 暮至黑山頭" and "Mount Yen 燕山胡騎聲啾啾" are landscapes of the Chinese Northern border. The anonymous author of "The Ballad of Mu Lan" also borrows lines from "The Song of Plucking Willows 折楊柳枝歌", another famous piece of the northern nomadic folksong. These are some of the evidences of Mu Lan's nomadic origin. Also, for some critics, such an unconventional heroine can only be of northern nomadic origin (Wong 29). See more details concerning Mu Lan's place of origin in Ch'iu 177 and Lai 4.

[13] In Hsu Wei's 徐渭 play, "Female Mu Lan Joins the Army for

Her Father," the ending of Mu Lan marrying the minister 嫁校書郎 reflects the Confucian ideal of happy marriage ("Men have their roles to play and women have their homes 男有分、女有歸"). See Lai 4 and Yu 6.

[14] For the transforming of the Mu Lan texts, refer to Yu, Ch'iu, and Lai. Yu's essay, which traces thirteen different motifs in more than ten versions of the Mu Lan story in Chinese history and literature, is the most recent comprehensive discussion on this subject.

[15] Disguised as a man for school, Chu Ying-t'ai becomes intimate with one of her classmates Liang Shan-po. When Liang realizes Chu is a woman and is told about her impending marriage, he is filled with remorse and regret, and finally dies of a broken heart. Later as Chu's bridal procession passes by Liang's grave, Chu falls to her knees, weeping bitterly. The grave opens suddenly and Chu leaps inside before it closes up again. All that people can see are two exquisite butterflies dancing above the grave.

In the "Journal on Identifying the Image of General of Filial Piety and Chastity 孝烈將軍祠像辨正記" of the Yuan Dynasty, Mu Lan declines the emperor's marriage proposal as such a marriage transgresses the strict law that defines the position of the emperor and the subject 臣無媲君禮制. In the *Biography of the Loyal, Filial, Brave, and Chaste Mu Lan* 忠孝勇烈木蘭傳 of the Ch'ing Dynasty, Mu Lan is accused of participating in a revolt. In both works, Mu Lan ends up with a suicide to show her loyalty and chastity. See Yu 2 for more details.

[16] Translation of the "Ballad" is based on Frankel's *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady* with my own modification.

[17] This is a line from the Tang poet Wei Yuan-fu's 韋元甫 "The Song of Mu Lan 木蘭歌," still another rendition of the Mu Lan story.

[18] 雄兔腳扑朔，雌兔眼迷離；兩兔傍地走，安能辨我是雄雌！

[19] Subversive readings of the Mu Lan story are also possible if we focus on Mu Lan's transvestism and her heroism—the part how the disguised Mu Lan fights alone, displays masculine valor, and achieves her eternal fame as a "hero" (千古之名焉可滅). See Chang 200-201, and Li, "The Naming" 513 n17.

[20] Van Spanckeren (46) quotes Robert E. Hegel, "An Exploration of the Chinese Literary Self." *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature.* Ed. Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 3-30.

[21] Gilbert and Gubar use the term "the anxiety of authorship" to characterize this nineteenth-century female literary tradition (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 49).

[22] Kingston refers to the term "talk-story" as a common idiom drawn from Cantonese to signify any kind of oral tale, whether personal, familial, communal, or historical (Maxine Hong Kingston, "Foreword" to *Talk-story: An Anthology of Hawaii's Local Writers.* Ed. Eric Chock et al. Honolulu: Petronium 1978). Shirley Lim elaborates the term in "The Tradition" (259).

[23] Shirley Lim quotes Christiane Makward (96), "To Be or Not to Be . . . a Feminist Speaker," *The Future of Difference.* Eds. Alice Jardine and Hester Eisenstein. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980

[24] In addition to exemplifying "l'écriture féminine," Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* resembles other Western women's works in a number of ways. The use of dream can be related to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Kennedy 122); like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, it opens with "parental warnings against speech" (Cheung, "Don't Tell" 163); multiple voices and narrative structure, which focus on the affinity of women's experience, connect her work with Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, a novel weaving the myth and truth of seven women into a powerful portrait of the strength of today's American black women; the healing power of the (m) other/mythic woman is a theme shared by *The Woman Warrior* (the third chapter, "Sharman"), Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. The story of the madwoman in the fourth chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, "At the Western Palace," recalls the nineteenth-century English female literary tradition that Gilbert and Gubar treat in their renowned work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Finally, the significance of the mother takes us back to Virginia Woolf—"We think back through our mothers if we are women" (*A Room of One's Own* 79). Alice Walker also reminds us of the importance of searching for "our mother's garden."

[25] Putting the subject of "sex" in the parentheses, Kingston seems to resent the secrecy of the Chinese culture: "If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death" (*WW* 185).

[26] The six lines in the "Ballad" read,

She goes ten thousand miles on the business of war,
She crosses passes and mountains like flying.
Northern gusts carry the rattle of army pots,
Chilly light shines on iron armor.
Generals die in a hundred battles,
Stout soldiers return after ten years.
(萬里赴戎機，關山度若飛。朔氣傳金柝，寒光照鐵衣。
將軍百戰死，壯士十年歸。)

[27] This reminds us of the red room scene in the second chapter of *Jane Eyre*. Ellen Mores in her work *Literary Women* carefully analyzes the imagery and landscape of female sexuality. See Moers's chapter, "Metaphors: A Postlude" (243-66).

28 Mu Lan's eroticism, however, has been hinted in a Ming version of the Mu Lan legend, *Hua Mu Lan Conquers the North* 花木蘭征北. See Yu 7.

[29] The Amazons in the Western world refer to a tribe of female warriors cutting off their right breasts in order to use the bow more easily—amazon meaning breast-less. They have no dealing with men except for breeding and as opponents in war; they reared only their female young. Traditional Chinese female warriors, however, are either filial daughters like Mu Lan or good wives like Liăng Hung-yu 梁紅玉, either obedient daughters-in-law like Mu Kuei-ying 穆桂英 or "wise" matriarchs (enforcers of patriarchal values) like She T'ai-chun 佘太君. For details, see Liu, Hsu, Wen, and "One-Hundred Celebrated Chinese Women."

[30] There are other Taoist elements in the work, such as Kingston's play on dreams. The borderline between dream and reality is never clear in *The Woman Warrior*. This fact recalls the famous anecdote of the Taoist master Chuang Chou: Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, but when he woke up, he could not tell if he was the Chuang

Chou who had dreamt that he was a butterfly, or the butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. Kingston's blurring the borderline between dream and reality can also be attributed to "Alice in Wonderland," a little children's bed-time story (Shan 216).

[31] The keynote of Confucian ethics is *jen* 仁, a supreme virtue representing human qualities at their best. In human relations, *jen* is manifested in *chung* 忠, or faithfulness/loyalty, and *shu* 恕, or altruism. Other important Confucian virtues include righteousness, propriety, integrity, and filial piety. All these stress the predominant importance of the human relations in this life and this world. Confucius, therefore, never touches the idea of after-life in his conversations; as the *Analects* records, "if you do not have a clear idea of this life, how could you know anything about after-life"? (未知生，焉知死？) The Buddhist concept of transmigration, however, deals with what happens after this life. According to Buddhism, a living being is a temporary combination of aggregates that include the material body, perceptions, consciousness, and pre-dispositions (karmic tendencies). A birth forebodes an inevitable death, which in turn triggers a rebirth. Reincarnation is a tendency for aggregates, through craving and clinging to existence, to trigger a renewed cycle of birth, old age, and death.

[32] In her short story, "Project for a Trip to China," Susan Sontag, author of *I, etcetera* and other postmodern works such as *Against Interpretation*, *On Photography*, and *Illness as Metaphor,* identifies these equivalents as part of the Chinese myth/mystery. See Sontag 10.

[33] This is also the title of a popular classical Chinese novel (西遊記), whose story has been retold by school teachers, grand parents, story-tellers, and in films, plays and operas. The story of a monkey joining the company with a Buddhist monk on a journey in search of Buddhist sutras also becomes the prototype that Kingston dramatizes in her third novel, *Tripmaster Monkey.*

[34] As sources of his finding, Leiwei Li refers to H. M. Lai and P. P. Choy, eds., *Outlines: History of the Chinese in America* (San Francisco: Chinese American Studies Planning Group, 1971) 93, and Judy Yung's *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1986) 42. A number of works treat the Chinese immigrant

history in illuminative ways. For Chinese immigration and exclusion in U. S., see Chan; for feature films and other sources that help situate Chinese immigrants in the American history, see Lin; for early history of Chinese immigration, see Coolidge; for early Chinatown community life, see Kim 91-121.

WORKS CONSULTED

"Ballad of Mulan." *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*. By Han H. Frankel. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.
<http://www.chinapage.com.mulan-e.html> August 3, 2000.

Baym, Nina, et al. eds. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 5th ed. New York: Norton, 1998.

Brontë, Charlott. *Jane Eyre: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Richard J. Dunn. New York: Norton, 1971.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 1949. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.

Chan, Sucheng, ed. *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991.

Chang, Hsiao-hung 張小虹. *Hua Mulan chu tsou* 花木蘭出走 ("Hua Mu Lan Walks Out"). *Houxiandai/nüren* 後現代/女人 (Postmodern/Woman). Taipei: News Times Publishing, 1994.

Cheung, King-Kok. "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" *Conflicts in Feminism*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990. 234-51.

—. "'Don't Tell': Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior*." *Lim and Ling* 163-90.

Chin, Frank. "This Is Not an Autobiography." *Genre* 18.2 (1985): 109-30.

—. "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake." Chin, et al. eds. *The Big Aiiieeeee* 94-110.

Chin, et al., eds. *AIIIEEEEE! Anthology of Asian American Writers*. 1974. Boston: Howard UP, 1983.

——, et al., eds. *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese-American and Japanese American Writers*. New York: Penguin, 1991.

Ch'iu, Hsieh-you 邱燮友. *Zhonggvo lidai gvshi shi* 中國歷代故事詩 (Chinese Narrative Poetry). Taipei: San-ming Publishing, 1970.

Coolidge, Mary R. *Chinese Immigration*. New York: Holt, 1909.

Culley, Margo, ed. *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1992.

Elliott, Emory, et al., eds. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Frye, Joanne S. "The Woman Warrior: Claiming Narrative Power, Recreating Female Selfhood." *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*. Eds. Alice Kessler-Harris And William McBrien. New York: Greenwood, 1988. 293-302.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Subar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1971.

——, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1985. 2nd ed. 1996.

Goellnicht, Donald C. "Tang Ao in America: Male Subject Positions in *China Men*." *Lim and Ling* 191-214.

Hsu, T'an-huei 許錟輝. *Zhonggvo gudai ming nüren* 中國古代名女人 (Celebrated Women in Ancient China). Taipei: Kuo-wen T'ian-ti Publishing, 1991.

Kennedy, Colleen and Deborah Morse. "A Dialogue with (in) Tradition: Two Perspectives on *The Woman Warrior*." Lim 121-30.

Kim, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers." *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*. Ed. Guy Amirthanayagam. London: Macmillan, 1982. 55-65.

——. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. 1976. New York: Vintage, 1989.

——. *China Men*. 1977. New York: Vintage, 1989.

——. "Maxine Hong Kingston: from an Interview between Kingston and Arturo Islas, Professor of English, Stanford University, October 1, 1980, Berkeley, California." *Women Writers of the West Coast.* Ed. Marilyn Yalom. Santa Barbara: Capra, 1983.

Lai, Sufen 賴素芬. Tantan liangge Hua Mulan 談談兩個花木蘭 ("On Two Images of Mu Lan"). *Bulletin of Women and Gender Studies* 48 (1998): 4-6.

Latsch, Marie-Luise. *Chinese Traditional Festivals*. Beijing: New World, 1984.

Lauter, Paul, et al., eds. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Lexington, Mass,: D. C. Heath.

Lee, Robert G. "The Woman Warrior as an Intervention in Asian American Historiography." Lim 52-63.

Li, David Leiwei. "The Production of Chinese American Tradition: Displacing American Orientalist Discourse." Lim and Ling 319-31.

——. "The Naming of a Chinese American 'I': Cross-Cultural Sign/ificantions in *The Woman Warrior*." *Criticism* 30.4 (1988): 497-515.

——. "China Men: Maxine Hong Kingston and the American Canon." *ALH* 3.2 (1990): 482-502.

——. *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*. Standford: Standford UP, 1998.

Lim, Shirley Giok-lin, ed. *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's* The Woman Warrior. New York: MLA, 1991.

Lim, Shirley Geok-Lin. "The Tradition of Chinese American Women's Life Stories: Thematics of Race and Gender in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." Culley 252-67.

——, and Amy Ling, eds. *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992.

Lin, Patricia. "Use of Media and Other Resources to Situate *The Woman Warrior*." Lim 37-43.

Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*.

New York: Pergamon, 1990.

——. "Thematic Threads in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." *Tamkang Review* 14.1-4 (1983-84): 55-64.

Liu, Ying-yin 柳英吟. *Mu Guiying zhuan* 穆桂英傳 (The Biography of Mu Kuei-ying). Taipei: International Cultural Company, 1986.

McQuade, Donald, et al., eds. *The Harper American Literature*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Mores, Ellen. *Literary Women*. 1976. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. 1977. New York: Penguin, 1978.

"Mr. Wong." Created by Pam Brandy and Kyle McCulloch. <http:icebox.com/show/show_54/showpage.asp> August 3, 2000.

Naylor, Gloria. *The Women of Brewster Place*. New York: Penguin, 1983.

"One-Hundred Celebrated Chinese Women." <http://www.span.com.au/100 women/> August 3, 2000.

Ordonez, Elizabeth J. "Narrative Texts by Ethnic Women: Rereading the Past, Re-Shaping the Future." *MELUS* 9.3 (1982): 471-92.

Perkins, Barbara, Robyn Warhol, and George Perkins, eds. *Women's Work: An Anthology of American Literature*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.

Rabinowitz, Paula. "Eccentric Memories: A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26 (1987): 177-87.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: Penguin, 1983.

Shan, Te-hsin 單德興. "Tang Tingting fangtanlu" 湯亭亭訪談錄 ("An Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston"). Zaixian zhengzhi yu huayi Meigvo wenxue 再現政治與華裔美國文學 (The Politics of Representation and Chinese American Literature). Ed. Te-hsin Shan and Wen-ching Ho. Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1996. 211-21.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

Silko, Lesli Marmon. *Ceremony*. 1977. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Sontag, Susan. *I, etcetera*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988. 271-313.

Van Spanckeren, Kathryn. "The Asian Literary Background of *The Woman Warrior*." Lim 44-51.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. New York: Harcourt, 1984.

——. *The Color Purple*. New York: Pocket Book, 1985.

Walker, Nancy. "No Laughing Matter: The WASPs Climb Down." Culley 232-51.

Wang, Veronica. "Reality and Fantasy: The Chinese-American Woman's Quest for Identity." *MELUS* 12.3 (1985): 23-31.

Wen, K'ang 文康. *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* 兒女英雄傳 (The Biography of Heroes and Heroines). Taipei: World Bookstore, 1979.

Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. "Kingston's Handling of Traditional Chinese Sources." Lim 26-36.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcout, 1957.

——. *Orlando: A Biography*. 1928. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Yu, Eric Kwan-wai 余君偉. "Tsung yuefushi dao Dishini dong hua —Mulan gushi zhong de xushi qingyu han gvozu xiangxiang" 從樂府詩到迪士尼動畫—木蘭故事中的敘事、情慾和國族想像 ("From the Chinese Ballad to the Disney Animation: Narrative, Desire, and National Imagination in the Story of Mu Lan"). Paper presented in the 24th Annual Conference of Comparative Literature Association of the Republic of China. May 20-21, 2000.