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Multiple Identities/Multiple Narrative Strategies:
Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior

Gabrielle N. Dean
April 1989

I.

The Chinese never meant to stay in America. The eventual integration-- or lack thereof-- of those sojourners, fortune seekers, and refugees into mainstream America was for many an economic accident, a cruel mishap twice as bitter to swallow when longing for Home was burdened with the racism and ignorance of the American barbarians. Some did return (and had their American made nest eggs confiscated by the Communists) but for those unfortunates who had to stay, the dream of going back to China was a taste in the mouth, verbalized and daily pressed upon the palates of offspring and kin.

Children of these reluctant immigrants were thus presented with a situation in which they were neither wanted in their native born land, nor were they supposed to want it. This context is essential for understanding Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiographical novel, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts; if women's autobiography historically has been concerned with the reaffirmation and expansion of personal identifications with home, private space, and indisputable place, [1] where does placelessness fit in? For the Chinese American woman, the cultural umbilical cord leads nowhere tangible, or at least nowhere safe and recognizable, because complete subscription to the values of mainland China would probably prevent an "American" woman's identity, while participation in American definitions of femininity would certainly deny her Chinese heredity and birthright. The Third World woman has across the globe contended with her particular interstices of

oppression; the displaced woman of color must practically reproduce them in order to navigate her way out. The Woman Warrior duplicates through its structure this navigation of culturally determined definitions of race and gender, for like the Chinese American woman herself, it cannot rest in either of the proposed categories; it neither adheres to the tradition of women's writing as it has been articulated in the West, nor does it set out to document Chinese American history as it has been primarily defined by the achievements of men.

I find it especially fascinating that Hong Kingston interrupted the writing of China Men in order to write Woman Warrior, which was evidently a necessary precedent, for without first establishing her matrilinear ground and the mimesis of the bicultural identity process, the articulation of male others was impossible. The articulation of her own half of her people's experience is itself loaded with difficulties, for how to construct a matrilineage in the face of direct ideological opposition which can suppress the female voice and degrade her value to society? Chinese verbalization of the female, according to Hong Kingston, is limited to slanderous sayings and silences, exemplified by Hong Kingston's father as represented in China Men, who would sometimes not speak to his daughters for months, and sometimes only curse them. Turning to her mother, Hong Kingston finds the circumventions of ideology in her mother's songs and chants, such as the legend of the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan, and in her very example, which together contradict her spoken command to submit to patriarchal rule. Decoding her

mother's messages becomes a primary occupation of Hong Kingston's adolescence, and in order to do so, in order to separate the sources of female power from doctrinal obligations from babbled nonsense, she reconstructs the events of her mother's life which combine to form the particular personality that constitutes her sole source of information and clues. Hong Kingston's unfamiliarity with the intricacies of Chinese culture impedes her attempts, because in understanding her mother individually so as to draw the lines of mother-daughter transmission and heritage, she needs to know what is cultural status quo, what are the innovations of her mother's personality, and what are the combinations of the two which provide room for the expansion of a female identity within the culture. Perversely, it is just her mother who most defiantly blocks her way to this knowledge, because the distance and lack of confidence produced by the isolating American milieu discourage the mother from entrusting her daughter with Chinese secrets and complicate their communication.

These are the basic tenets of Hong Kingston's condition, the set of givens from which she begins. This foundation is informed by an underlying, if unexpressed, history of Chinese emigration and immigration to which the reader is not privy; despite Hong Kingston's evident choice to leave this history mute, I feel it is important for her readers and critics, myself included as a white reader of the text, to be conscious of it, as an implicit force directing her choices. Therefore, I have added a brief overview of the history of Chinese immigration to this country.

In the suppression of this history within the body of her

text, Hong Kingston is perhaps suggesting that as history focussing on the actions and achievements of men, it is alien to a female orientation and explanation of events and perhaps even irrelevant to a search for female identity through heredity. Since history has denied the voice of the female for so long, why should Hong Kingston reiterate so hostile a presence, which has its own predominant forum anyway? Rather than relegate her mother's emigree experience to paranthetical anomaly, she places her in the forefront by consciously eliminating the cacophony of other histories, particularly those which have commonly won the widest audience. For example, her rebellious aunt, No Name Woman, is a woman left behind by her fortune-hunting husband, but while her lack of a name and her mistreatment are publicized, we never even hear of her betrayed, far away husband. In tracing a matrilineage, Hong Kingston's erasure of competing sites for our attention could also be a conscious act of rebellion-- but it also necessitates the examination of questions of readership, for her text is often read entirely from within the perspective of Western femininism, or conversely, from the perspective of the Chinese American experience in its male-oriented definition. The significant absence of a traditional historical background is read not as a speaking silence but as a justification for critics to remain uninformed of that background. And readers unfamiliar with Chinese American history will overlook its essential connections to Hong Kingston's story.

Readership ultimately forms the outermost layer of the text, which is internally circumscribed by the unspoken context of

history; by the articulated dialectics of warrior and slave, fantasy and reality, that constitute its primary thematic structure; and finally by the organization of the text itself, a set of stories which defy generic categorization. This stratification of meanings is enunciated simultaneously, a configuration that contradicts, to an extent, the necessarily chronological writing of the book. And yet narrative is finally Hong Kingston's salvation, as she finds in it, in her mother's stories and in her own, a way to write identity. Indeed, my own writing about the book has been permeated by the compelling and inevitable narrative structure, for I found that the sequence of the stories was an imperative informing order, perhaps pointedly artificial and yet essential for a comprehension of the text. While it is the smaller and more compact units of single events, stories, and anecdotes that provide the fundamental schematic direction, seemingly independent of the somewhat arbitrarily distinguished stories, these events are only significant within a specific narrative context, that expands to include, eventually, the entire text. Often I found myself involved in a reiterative kind of talking story, that was only relieved by Hong Kingston's imposition of boundaries between stories, as I tried to explain the connections between and through events. And so while each individual anecdote or incident may contain the code for the deciphering of the whole, each also requires the presence of the others to make sense of the whole, reconstituting the narrative progression that is rejected by the synchronism and recurrent meaning of events themselves.

II.

Looked at from the perspective of the immigrants, Chinese migrations have created a *diaspora*, a scattering of the Chinese people over the face of the earth. A diaspora may be said to exist where group migration has occurred, where acculturation has not taken place, where a people maintain themselves in accordance with the culture of their original homeland, and where there is at least an ideology or strong sentiment calling for an end to exile. In the case of the Chinese it is clear that their migrations were not motivated by plans for colonization, settlement, or permanent residence abroad. Rather they sought the overseas areas as places where, because of accidents of opportunity, a chance was offered to enhance their status when they returned to China. A trip abroad, a few years of work in a foreign land, and a stoic acceptance of the alien land's prejudices and discrimination could, with luck, earn a Chinese sufficient wealth to return to his village in splendor. [2]

The desire of the Chinese emigrants to return to their native land, to be buried, according to tradition, in the village of their father's birth, was encouraged by immigration policy and racism in the United States. From the beginning, the flow of Chinese to the U.S. was restricted and confined as was that of few other immigrant populations. Just five years after the California gold rush brought the first Chinese to this country, a tax was imposed on foreign miners. This law was followed by others which forbade Chinese to testify in court against whites (1854), neglected to provide Chinese eligibility for citizenship in agreements for reciprocal trade, travel, and immigration (Burlingame Treaty, 1868), attempted to disperse Chinese communities by targeting overcrowded Chinatown (San Francisco Cubic Air Ordinance, 1870), required any Chinese arrested to cut off his pigtail (San Francisco, 1876), fined employers for hiring Chinese workers, halted Chinese immigration and excluded them

from citizenship by naturalization (Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882).

[3] The Chinese Exclusion Act was reenacted every ten years until it was finally repealed in 1943, as a concession to Pacific allies of the U.S. during World War II.

Why then did the Chinese attempt the long hard journey across the ocean for such paltry rewards? Most of the Chinese immigrants in this country come from one area in China, Kwangtung province, and most of those from the country of Toishan. Kwangtung is in the South, settled by pioneers and outcasts from the "civilized" North; although the climate is hot and humid, ideal for agriculture, the rocky terrain prevents cultivation of the staple crop, rice. Thus, the people of this part of the country have always searched for alternative sources of income, especially in Toishan (which means Elevated Mountain), since agriculture can only feed the population for four months out of the year. Trade became a viable alternative method, and with the British appropriation of Hong Kong, turning it into the largest port city in the Southeast, determined merchants used to their advantage the markets and shipping industry of both Hong Kong and Canton. The contact of a portion of the Toishanese population with white men and with sailing vessels made them more receptive to the news about the discovery of gold in California in 1845. The remittances sent home by "Gum Shan Hok," guests of the Golden Mountain, maintained their families in comparative wealth, allowing the children to go to school and the women to stay out of the fields, and eventually sustained the economy of Toishan until it became one of the most prosperous districts in China.

Many sojourners, despite their aspirations, never managed to return to the ancestral lands.

Discouraged from regarding America as their permanent home, most of the early immigrant men sent what they could to their families overseas and sustained themselves on dreams of a triumphant return one day as wealthy men. But since they were generally confined to low-wage menial labor as migrant farmworkers, laundrymen, waiters, and domestic servants, for most that dream never materialized. [4]

Supported by Benevolent Associations and Surname Associations, the Chinese laborers, filling the vacancies in the economy of the American West left by the lack of women, also created the Tongs, gangs operating the flourishing brothels, gambling houses, and opium dens (a habit brought to the Chinese by the British in return for tea, outlawed in China but legal in the U.S. until 1906) which were responsible for much of the violence in Chinatowns along the West Coast. The Chinatown economy, for most of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, was a bachelor's economy, due to the low immigration rates of women preventing reproduction of the traditional Chinese family on American soil: 90% of the first Asian immigrants were men, and men outnumbered women until the 1970s. [5] Women were expected to stay at home to maintain the household and formally represent the husband. Some women were sold by their relatives in China as slaves or prostitutes, a traditional response among the poor to the demands of debts or a son's bride price; others were purchased by agents posing as American husbands. Prostitution was not necessarily seen as a sign of moral degeneracy, but rather as evidence of filial piety; still, the untenable demands of the business on women, not to mention its position as the

specific target of missionaries and city government vice squads, ended Chinatown prostitution by the 1920's.[6] Legislation inhibiting the development of American-born children and anti-miscegenation laws contributed to the rise of a bachelor's society that was fundamentally bereft of women. When, in 1943, the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1924 was amended to permit the entry of Chinese wives of Chinese American citizens, and the War Brides act of 1947 removed the racial restrictions on the wives of veterans, many women were shocked by the tiny cramped quarters and rigorous schedules of their husbands-- and by the antiquated notions of the family and the status of women held by the men, who were unaware of the changes in China during their absence.

These ruptures in family life, evidence of tensions in the transcontinental relocation of Chinese communities, were a serious consideration for a population whose community values lacked the support in America accorded them in China, and were sustained in the U.S. through individual families standing in for the disappearing village. As the primary vehicle for the continuation of Chinese culture and as a support system for shouldering the racism and language barriers present in the United States, family values were pushed upon American-born children, only partially transposed to an American mode. Parents who had abandoned the possibility of careers in China resigned themselves to jobs gleaned from among the occupational leavings of the American frontier, unsatisfying perhaps but profitable; education was seen as the escape route for children, especially sons, which increased the pressure on second-generation Chinese

Americans to succeed academically as a way to prove themselves to both Chinese American and white communities.

After the triumph of the Communist takeover in 1949, the dream of returning to China was impossible to maintain. Moreover, communication to family still in China was risky, severing the most tangible bonds for the American-born children if not for the parents. It was perhaps this final estrangement which motivated the articulation and description of Chinese America by Chinese Americans, as a concrete physical and mental entity, home.

III.

Taken as a two volume autobiography, Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts and China Men contain both this "external" and male-centered history of emigration, immigration, and acculturation, and the hidden female past which has gone unrecorded. Yet while together they form a complete story, the books are separated not only by the artificial divisions of text but by the ultimate lack of reconciliation between the two perspectives: they are interdependent but incompatible. For this reason it is necessary to examine The Woman Warrior alone, for it operates within two unspoken contexts, that of Chinese history in the United States, and even more silent, that of Chinese women in the United States.

The Woman Warrior itself is divided into five parts, stories whose connections are independent of plot--for

indeed there is no plot in the traditional narrative sense. The stories constitute a repetition of themes from various angles and voices, bypassing, in the end, a conclusion, a single point on the horizon from which the autobiographer surveys the vista of experience; writing from the midst of her life, Hong Kingston represents experience as a vast array of points, related along parallel lines of thematic similarity. She cannot hierarchize and label her experiences, only choose to publicize the ones which are most significant to her vision of herself and to those themes which structure experience. Through a constant re-examination of the same themes, her vision of herself is made whole.

Hong Kingston attempts to impose an order upon the constant reiteration and twisting of her themes through the five divisions of the book, each of which adopts a different voice or combination of voices. Each also embodies a different aspect of the book's primary thematic structure, the slave/warrior, fantasy/reality dialectic, finally demonstrating that such absolute divisions are only temporarily useful in the search for identity. While "No Name Woman" is a slave in Hong Kingston's mother's incomplete but "factual" representation, her life becomes both fantastically embroidered and subtly heroic in Hong Kingston's retelling; conversely, the explicit fantasy of Fa Mu Lan reveals not only the narrator's inescapable ties to reality, but the warrior woman's inescapable ties to the patriarchal elements of that reality, for her glory is only recognized insofar as it serves that patriarchy. The stories "Shaman" and "At the Western Palace" provide "realistic" counterparts to the

slave and warrior role models, i.e. real women in Maxine's life, but again the presumably stark differentiation between the two is clouded, as Brave Orchid's life history includes an episode with a ghost, and concludes, apparently, more as a slave than a warrior, while Moon Orchid's final happiness is a fantasy world of women where she, the cast-off wife, has power and authority, at least in her own mind. The final story of the quintet, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," integrates these self-usurping categories in that all "appear" within the body of the story-- but since they did all along, actually, its accomplishments are mitigated, questioning the validity or even the possibility of that kind of integration and the necessity of the previous categorizations. The progression is thus a superficial one in terms of what it "develops"-- all was revealed in the very beginning-- but a very important one in the way that Hong Kingston manipulates her readers and her stories. To follow this progression is to participate in Hong Kingston's fantasy of order; our participation is ensured by the chronological nature of reading, and so we co-operate in the author's shift, real or imagined, from resistance to acceptance of herself as we are gradually "acculturated" to the themes that shape her existence.

Thus the book consists of a simultaneous layering of experiences, a quintet of exposures which reveal consistent elements when superimposed; ironically, this synchronic "development" can only manifest itself through diachronic means, not only because of the nature of language which is necessarily

sequential, but because for Hong Kingston, identity finds its roots in the stories her mother tells, and in the art of storytelling which her mother has passed on to her.

Hong Kingston's repetition of motifs throws light upon what is not said. Sometimes she explicitly voices the existence of silence in her life, as in her youthful preference for totally black pictures; other times, appropriately, her manipulation of and emphasis on language points to the silences in the book, silences that are revealed through a frame created by the narrative gaps and lapses. Speech and speechlessness thus constitute another crucial polarity of the book, one that is explicated from within both categories, the pronounced and the tongue-tied. For example, her evasion of traditional linear history is evident because her substitution of the personal, synchronic development of events is so devoid of any reference to the date or her age, the guides through time on which we are so dependent; thus she is freed from the limitations imposed by traditional historical representations. Similarly, after the dangers of sexuality are demonstrated in the first story, sexuality is consciously exorcised from the rest of the book in the author's attempt to evade stereotypes of the exotic Oriental courtesan and the diligent subservient daughter; she does not really provide an alternative to these existing absolute options for female sexuality, only a denial of them. Silence in the sexual realm may be a step away from negative stereotypes, rather than a step toward innovative identities.

Similarly, her lack of a direct and vocalized criticism of her racist surroundings has been overlooked by many white

critics, and has tended to separate her from the support of a Chinese American community-- undercutting her attempts to define and belong to it, and, ironically, reproducing the initial condition of isolation that commences her search for a matrilineal heritage. Although this search is, again, deliberately synchronic, its restriction to one generation is enforced by the patriarchal rules of domesticity, since Chinese wives abandon their families at marriage to reside permanently with the families of husbands. It is this foundation, of isolation, dependence, and deliberate destruction of potential sororization, that provides the paradigm with which Hong Kingston begins.

Telling a story which has been specifically designated taboo by her mother, and intentionally suppressed by her father for shame, she reveals the other half of the Chinese sojourner's adventures, the half left at home: her father's sister who besmirched the family's name by becoming pregnant in the absence of her husband. In "No Name Woman," the first vignette, Hong Kingston symbolically elaborates upon the importance of naming and language, the denial of this power to women, and her reclamation of it through the aunt and the aunt's example, no matter how notorious. In retribution for the dishonor her family denies the aunt's existence and silences her name, partly because the aunt, in a last stand of pride, has refused to tell the name of the man who impregnated her and has thus refused her family the possibility of reclaiming honor through revenge. The importance of identity is thus circuitously enforced by this name-erasing, but the cycle is reversed by the young Maxine, who

constructs the title of No Name Woman as a substitute in order to talk about this forsaken ancestor, literally creating a capitalized identity and a voice for her aunt out of nothing. In doing this, however, she is "telling" on her father, on her father's whole family, announcing not only their shame but their shameful behavior, and so in a sense, she vindicates the silent obstinancy of her aunt, who refused to tell; Hong Kingston is both shaming her family and alleviating their shame by telling on the man.

The production of language is irretrievably tied to women through the story of No Name Woman, because Maxine's mother has brought it up from the dregs of family history only to warn her daughter of the dangers of men, and, more specifically, of the dangers of female sexuality, on the event of Maxine's first menstrual period. The example of No Name Woman superficially serves as a reminder to Maxine that the exploitation of her reproductive powers and sexuality against the will of the family will lead to her severance from the family, and even to madness and death, as it did for the aunt. But Maxine finds within the story of disobedience an encouragement that her mother did not intend, because No Name Woman provides a focus for Maxine's criticism of the different treatment of males and females in her society, and a source for her imagination, which later proves to be her escape from the confines of society through writing. In her mental reenactment of the scenario, Maxine improvises many of the details her mother purposefully left out, blurring the distinction between mother's account and daughter's. Maxine views the final decision of No Name Woman to drown herself in the

family well as the result of both her complete absorption of female devaluation-- for when she gives birth to the illegitimate child, a daughter providing no hope of redemption, her choice of suicide is definite-- and of her ultimate rejection of the traditional structure of the family which has engineered her downfall, for in drowning herself and her daughter in the family well she has poisoned their water and poisoned their peace of mind, because a drowning ghost is one of the most feared of demons. Thus the story suggests Maxine's confusion over the mixed signals she receives from her mother, in these dual interpretations of No Name Woman.

Language is tied not only to women, but specifically to Hong Kingston's retrieval of a buried matrilineage-- and the dangers of that activity, for in exposing her family history she threatens the family's still insecure American status; this is particularly evident in China Men where she provides two explanations of her father's emigration, one legal and one illegal, because the underlying possibility of deportation is constant, affecting her preferred vision of the voyage. Her reconstructions therefore depend heavily upon fantasy to cover the forgotten, the unspoken, and the intentionally submerged aspects of history. Fantasy for Hong Kingston is not otherworldly, escapist, but a method of justifying and reclaiming the past, and is thus intrinsically connected to the present reality; fantasy is a way of reproducing her surrounding reality without reproducing many of the restrictive aspects of that reality.

Hong Kingston's first and most explicit concern, then, is a representation of her immediate family which will neither condemn her family, vulnerable Americans even after a generation, nor sacrifice her efforts to overcome the misogynist features of the family. It is expedient for both these reasons to disregard the male elements in this portrayal, for men have been both the carriers and the subjects of recorded history which endangers her and her family, as well as the carriers and perpetuators of sexism. Hong Kingston's matrilineage, however, can never be unaffected by the male presence, because her female ancestors have to some degree accommodated patriarchal ideology. She must read the hidden information in their messages, and this preoccupation is concentrated through the heritage of "non-traditional" language she unearths, explores, and continues; she circumvents linear narrative and substitutes "safe," that is, unanalyzed and ignored, mediums such as fantasy, legend, song, and talk-story.

While No Name Woman has little control over the telling of her own story, Hong Kingston's mother does. The mother's emphasis on the destruction wreaked by the angry villagers, in her version of the story, reveals not only her communal orientation but her understanding of the necessity of the community's retribution, which is basically an insurance of the community's survival through the enforcement of its values. Maxine, however, in her version, tries to understand why a woman would consciously submit herself to those circumstances which would inevitably lead to her exclusion and death, filling in those details which her mother may not know, or at any rate does

not tell. In testing out various explanations, Maxine incorporates her need to allow the aunt some degree of self determination and desire-- not that she was a spoiled vain child, nor a rape victim, but a woman pushed to the edge. Maxine's investigation of the aunt's psyche and her circumstances is imperative for Maxine's own identity.

But perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted. Fear at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk-- that's all-- a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. She offered us up for a charm that vanished with tiredness, a pigtail that didn't toss when the wind died. Why, the wrong lighting could erase the dearest thing about him.

It could very well have been, however, that my aunt did not take subtle enjoyment of her friend, but, a wild woman, kept rollicking company. Imagining her free with sex doesn't fit, though. I don't know any women like that, or men either. Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help. [7]

Re-inventing this aunt reduces the frightening ramifications of Hong Kingston's possible identification with her, an alliance based on individual, and not community, identity-- fundamentally, the very crime for which the aunt was punished, by the villagers and by the vastness of the universe on her night of exile, reminding her of the inconsequence of a single human being.

Maxine's invocation of her aunt, rectifying the years of wrongdoing perpetuated by her family and inaugurating her search for individuality, imperils her own position, for the drowned ghost of No Name Woman by the side of the well waits to pull down a substitute: Maxine, who exhibits the same symptoms of willful

individuality. In the second story of The Woman Warrior, "White Tigers," Maxine rejects the paradigmatic aunt in favor of a more mystical and less threatening prototype, the swordswoman Fa Mu Lan. The legend of Fa Mu Lan was also told to Maxine by her mother; the two of them singing aloud the glorious deeds of the warrior woman contradicted the spoken instructions to be a wife and a slave. Maxine's identification with the warrior woman is at first tenuous: "I would have to grow up a warrior woman," [p. 24] she infers from the shared chant, and proceeds to place herself conditionally within Fa Mu Lan's history: "The call would come from a bird that flew over our roof...I would be a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains." [p. 24] But this imaginary connection soon induces Maxine's direct identification with the story as she "becomes" the heroine of the legend, persuaded by the old couple to avenge her village. Her lessons to be quiet, to learn to combat hunger and treacherous voyages, and to copy the dragon ways, which requires a mind large enough to hold paradoxes, are peculiarly suited to the child of two cultures, but the gap between heroic fantasy and reality is irreconcilable. The Fa Mu Lan legend, no matter to what depths Maxine enters it, remains a story of filial piety and self sacrifice. Her departure from the land of white tigers and from the old people, in order to save her village from a barbaric landlord, institutes the carving of revenge on her back by her mother and father, years of military splendor, reunion with the husband who had married her in absentia according to the arrangements of her parents, and finally the

defeat of the villain with her sword.

The Fa Mu Lan model is finally no better than that of No Name, for while her name has been immortalized, the words on her back are sewn up with the duties of a daughter to her village. Ultimately, her sexuality is denied, because, Hong Kingston admits, she doesn't like soldiers. The old people who train her are asexual, living together as brother and sister, because sex cannot agree with their "natural" perfection. When she departs for her journey of revenge, she dons men's clothing and the villagers call her beautiful; after the birth of her baby she continues to fight, carrying the infant, a boy of course, in a sling inside her armour; she kills the evil landlord when, showing him the oaths and curses carved on her back, his eyes rest upon her previously hidden breasts. With victory she resigns herself to a life of domesticity and producing sons for her parents in law. Womanhood is usurped by her obligations as a member of the village. In real life, when the evil landlord takes the form of business-suited, corpulent, American bosses, rebellion gets no response at all or else results in unemployment. Straight A's in school are not considered by her mother to be at all valuable; the news of Maxine's achievement is greeted with, "'Let me tell you a true story about a girl who saved her village.'" [p. 54] Maxine's experience is at a sharp variance with the Fa Mu Lan ideal, who succeeds in becoming a boy; the closest Maxine gets is becoming a bad girl, for which she is scolded, and which only separates her further from the "village"-- already unidentifiable in Stockton, California-- because she knows her behavior would never have been tolerated in

China, extinguished instead with starvation or slavery.

Fa Mu Lan comprises the opposite end of the ancestral spectrum, but her example is as untenable in reality as No Name's. While appearing as the ideal, she is actually as compromised by masculinity as No Name is by men. Moreover, the the distance of her revered superhero status from Maxine's real life achievements incapacitate her utility as a working model. Maxine substitutes for these fantasies an accessible and hopefully more comprehensible mother, who has been present all along as narrator but in the third story becomes subject as well, allowing her ultimate autobiographical authority-- although of course at the editorial will of her daughter's pen. "Shaman" most closely approximates an indigenous definition of female power, which is contrasted in the fourth story, "At the Western Palace," to a real life counterpart to the slave option, her mother's sister Moon Orchid.

Significantly, it is not until the third story when the mother is both narrator and subject that her real name is revealed. Brave Orchid, her name illustrating both the bonds to nature considered essential in the Fa Mu Lan ideal, as well as the courage required by slaves and warriors alike, goes to medical school in China. In China Men, this decision is represented as the father's dictum, for he is an educated man who doesn't want an unschooled wife undermining his process of Americanization. In Woman Warrior, Brave Orchid presents this choice as her own entirely, as a way to occupy herself in the void created, in her husband's absence, by the recent death of

her two children, and perhaps specifically prompted by that same occurrence. Her medical school Diploma is a product of both Western and Chinese medical traditions and practices, comprising a foundation for Chinese American identity on Chinese soil; it states the holder's proficiency in "Midwifery, Pediatrics, Gynecology, 'Medecine,' 'Surgary,' Therapeutics, Ophthalmology, Bacteriology, Nursing and Bandage," [p. 68] and is embossed with eight Chinese stamps.

Maxine hypothesizes that in the drive to outperform her fellow students, twenty years younger and that much further from the gods, her mother appropriated a haunted room in the dormitory for study, evicting its ghost by sleeping there, claiming it as her territory. But the room and Brave Orchid's triumph over the ghost are then recounted by "Brave Orchid" herself, a movement from the conditional to the indicative that echos Maxine's transition from imagined participation to self-insertion in the Fa Mu Lan fantasy. In this second case, the line between fantasy and reality is stretched further by the presentation of the ghost episode as true, and by the second retelling of the story to Brave Orchid's school mates, which differs from what has just been recorded. In this version, Brave Orchid displays characteristics frequently associated with her: the interest in her reputation, for example, as she emphasizes her own bravery and self-worth ("I did not die. I am brave and good. Also I have bodily strength and control. Good people do not lose to ghosts." [p. 86]) and reveals her preoccupations as she hears the sounds of babies in the electric singing of the ghost, claiming that it has eaten babies and now wants adults. But the

embellishments of the story are reminiscent of Maxine's imaginative flair, and the fact that the story itself revolves around a ghost raises questions of Brave Orchid's autobiographical "truthfulness." At most, the text is a word for word transcription of Brave Orchid's speech, but it could as likely be Maxine talking story about her mother: Brave Orchid is a "practical woman, she could not invent stories and told only true ones," [p. 77] but Maxine produces no such disclaimer for herself.

Although the narrator's identity remains unresolved, the question of representational faithfulness seems to be confirmed via the descendance chant Brave Orchid's friends improvise to bring her back from fear and reunite body and mind. The women have to recreate a chant of descendance instantly, for even if they knew the family secrets of Brave Orchid-- which relatives to evoke, which names were unlucky-- to call her spirit back to the home village would have led her to the wrong place. Their chant, in fact, is a prototype for Hong Kingston's own line of descent, invoking "their own names, women's pretty names, horizontal names of one generation. They pieced together new directions, and my mother's spirit followed them instead of the old footprints."

[p. 89] The limitation to one generation is portrayed as reflecting female independence rather than male dominance, indicative of the power of the women for self- definition, but also of the inevitable deterioration of tradition, in the modern context. The chant mediates ghost fantasy and school reality in much the same way as it mediates between mind and body, tradition

and modern practice, implying that the stories are all to be "believed" and thus establishing Hong Kingston's absolute power as dictator of truth as distinct from the reader's own description of "reality."

This power is substantiated in "At the Western Palace" where Hong Kingston explicitly assumes her mother's voice, subsuming her own personality, which exists in the background as one of the silly Americanized children. "At the Western Palace" is both a postscript to "Shaman" and a warning; in "Shaman" Brave Orchid laments the loss of her power accompanying her transfer to the United States. In China, she protected her reputation by refusing to minister to patients sure to die; in China, she was respected, she wore silk robes and rode in a sedan chair, she had money to buy a slave girl and lichees; she evicted ghosts. In America, she has to slave in tomato fields and in laundries, and embarrasses her children. Moon Orchid's rapid deterioration in the U.S., especially after having been forced to confront her renegade husband, parallels her sister's loss of power. But Brave Orchid retains her ability to talk story, in fact she continues to protect her reputation by projecting a strong self image through her talk stories, publicizing her once-powerful past and her downfall, for which her children should reimburse her with respect and sympathy. Moon Orchid, rather than producing her own stories, lives exclusively within the stories of other people; she follows her nieces and nephews about the house, repeating to herself their actions and words, occasionally posing questions to herself about their foreign and incomprehensible behavior. While Moon Orchid's position is

similar to that of the women Maxine envies in "No Name Woman," one of those women loved enough to be supported, the disadvantage of her dependent position is tragically exemplified when her participation in other people's lives reaches completely fictional extremes: coerced into finding her husband by her sister, who insists she claim her status as first wife, she is shocked by his youthful appearance, his successful surgical practice, his young "second" wife, and most of all by his rejection of her, for he says the two old ladies are like "people in a book... read a long time ago." [p. 179] He is willing to send her money but no more for she is too weak to adapt to his new American ways.

Moon Orchid's habit of repeating people's words, describing their actions, and commenting on their peculiarities (she identifies the hoards of children according to the particular descriptions of their habits sent to her by Brave Orchid in letters) is no longer an adoption and appropriation of language, a transition to a world of ghosts; after finding and losing her husband, she realizes that she too appears to be a ghost, just as much as he does. Subsequently, her language consists of monotonous repetitions without questions; she fears the contamination of her inside safety with the unknown outside, and plugs up the house. She is happiest in her eventual confinement to a mental institution, where "she had made up a new story... 'Oh, Sister, I am so happy here. No one ever leaves. Isn't that wonderful? We are all women here. Come. I want you to meet my daughters.'" [p. 185] Moon Orchid presents a

powerfully negative solution to the dilemma of the Chinese American woman, consisting of self imposed internment: a community of related women, speaking the common language of insanity and isolation. Even the indomitable Brave Orchid is cowed by her sister's breakdown, and elicits her childrens' loyalty in the unlikely event of a second wife in her family; her daughters "decided fiercely that they would never let men be unfaithful to them. All her children made up their minds to major in science or mathematics," [p. 186] girding their potentially treacherous reserves of emotion with hard facts.

But the example of Maxine's life contradicts this family maxim; in the very next story, "Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," she compares herself to an outlaw knotmaker, knitting skeins of such complexity that contemplation of them is blinding. Rather than committing herself to hard facts, she is dedicated to twisted designs. Belatedly admitting her distance from and basic ignorance of Moon Orchid's conflict, she informs her readers that the scene was actually witnessed by her brother and only relayed to her through her sister who received a much briefer, barer version of it from the brother. In fact, Maxine declines responsibility for her elaborate version by designating her brother as the observer and storyteller; she transplants narrative authority to the brother, a heretofore undifferentiated male member of the family background whose speech suddenly is presumed to correctly represent reality: "What my brother actually said was..." [p. 189]. While Hong Kingston apparently usurps herself with this intervention of male authority, it is compatible with Moon Orchid's egalitarian if somewhat

scatterbrained view of the siblings, who are basically undifferentiated because they have lost the Chineseness that is her reference point. Hong Kingston's continuation of this perspective is partly accountable for the sudden acquiescence to her brother's factual information. Perhaps she even finds Moon Orchid's myopia comforting to her pronounced feelings of sibling rivalry, which are exacerbated by her inferior status as a daughter, painfully illustrated by her uncle's refusal to bring the nieces along on the special dates he has with the nephews. Her status as oldest daughter is continually in question, according to Maxine; when she hypothesizes about the relevance of her knotmaker tendencies to the cutting of her frenum by her mother, a torture inflicted to ensure Maxine's polylingual fluency, she immediately compares her experience to that of her brothers and sisters, who were not subjected to this strange treatment. The cutting of the frenum seems to be the appropriate circumcision for her mother's daughter, a declaration of their singular bond as family talk story tellers, but Maxine sees it as a sign of her failings as a daughter, and indeed as the cause of her embarrassing, suppressed duck voice, rather than of her unique abilities; a fear to which her mother unfortunately responds, "Why don't you quit blabbering and get to work?" [p. 191]

Maxine's fear is founded in her mother's attitude, of which this remark is typical, because the dangers in reading her mother's messages can always collapse on her at the slightest disturbance. Taught to be a warrior woman and a dragon through stories, she is nevertheless threatened with slavery. Her

dilemma is further confounded by her jealousy of her mother's former slave girl/ nurse, who challenges Maxine's position in the family and perhaps provides the impetus behind her scholastic achievements, and who is only eliminated as a competitor, ironically, by the confirmation that Maxine's hospital delivery was more expensive than the slave's price.

The tardy revelation of the brother's factual knowledge of Moon Orchid's story, versus Maxine's elaborations, also serves to fundamentally conserve her authority and her power of fantastical embroidery of the bare facts, for the sympathy and belief of readers is maintained throughout her version; such a post facto admission allows her to indulge her imagination and her need for the detailed accounts that fill the spaces left by history, and subsequently permits our viewing of this void, informing us that hers is indeed an elaboration of necessity. In a sense, she has tricked us into participation in her version of reality while she later retreats into "honesty," the kind of subtle presentation of facts that is consistent with her previous method of simultaneously telling both her own and her mother's (i.e. the long and short, "false" and "true") versions of the delinquent aunt, the warrior heroine, and the blurring of their different perspectives that occurs in "Shaman."

The power of not-revealing, of keeping secret and hidden essential facts, is thus demonstrated with special clarity and force in "At the Western Palace." In "Songs for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," Hong Kingston's anecdote of her childhood habit of painting black pictures, covering pages with layers of dark ink, resolves the paradox of silent speech by revealing, not the

secrets themselves, but the fact that it is the potential of blackness, of absence, which she finds so compelling.

My silence was thickest--total--during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top. I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. The teachers called my parents to school, and I saw they had been saving my pictures, curling and cracking, all alike and black. The teachers pointed to the pictures and looked serious, talked seriously too, but my parents did not understand English. ("The parents and teachers of criminals were executed," said my father.) My parents took the pictures home. I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas. [p. 193]

The conundrum of this Chinese American daughter is that one aspect of her paintings' possibilities is partially consummated: she wins the attention of her parents, certainly a goal for a girl who is jealous of her mother's previous slave and doubts her familial position. But her parents exist in a linguistic setting which may as well be black and empty to her American teachers; they don't understand-- or at least we are told they don't understand, even though they obviously infer something, cryptically articulated, from the conference. Silence can be protection; their experiences in China have conditioned them to that extent. So much remains unspoken in this passage: the reaction of the parents at home with their daughter remains unregistered-- do they punish her or ply her with concerned inquisitions or ignore her? Hong Kingston supplies us with the content of the paintings but not with the consequences of their significance as it has been interpreted by others; she answers a

different question than the one that is inevitably provoked by this story.

The particular conflicts which debilitate the speech of the young Maxine are emphasized in her interaction with a nameless and silent Chinese girl in her class, who is presumably all the more hateful for the resemblances she bears to Maxine, and for her embodiment of the daughter ideal: she is neat, prim, doll-like, and submissive. Maxine's taunting of this girl follows the form of her own self-hatred. In trying to force speech from the girl, she exorcises some of the ambivalence with which her voice ~~is laden; she is not degraded by her duck voice which stumps her~~ even as an adult confronted with clerks, bus drivers, and telephones, but with her voice "steady and normal, as it is when talking to the familiar, the weak, and the small." [p. 204] She aligns herself with the powerful, with the tough Mexican and Black girls who look people up and down, and with the vociferous-- the scene consists almost entirely of a monologue, the longest transcription of Maxine's voice, as opposed to her thoughts. But this power is only effected through her torment of another person, and the desperation that accompanies the act of subjugating someone who is most deserving of her empathy and identification is evident in the extent to which she cajoles and begs and threatens the other girl.

I looked right at her. "I know you talk," I said. "I've heard you." Her eyebrows flew up. Something in those black eyes was startled, and I pursued it. "I was walking past your house when you didn't know I was there. I heard you yell in English and in Chinese. You weren't just talking. You were shouting. I heard you shout. You were saying, 'Where are you?'" [p. 207]

Sniffles, cries, sobs, and noises that are almost like words

won't do, but any word will-- mama, a, the, anything that will prove the girl's ability to speak, and thus Maxine's power over another voice. Significantly, Maxine's trumped up charges betray the participation of both girls in American definitions of femininity, that is, the prissy gentility exemplified by the silent girl. Clashing notions of the constitution of femininity are especially potent in the realm of vocalization, because Chinese women are notoriously loud, unabashedly noisy; these Chinese American girls outdo their white American peers with ultra "feminine" silence.

The prim girl escapes from a jarring and conflicting society through complete silence, protected for life by her family; but for Maxine, who finds articulation to be a necessary component of sanity, silence carries with it much more threatening possibilities. Moon Orchid's monotonous repetition of stories forms the basis for her definition of insanity; her mother tells her that the way to tell the difference between crazy and not-crazy is that while both tell stories, crazy people just tell the same one over and over, without variation. Indeed, narrowness, lack of variation seems to lead to insanity, as Maxine wonders whether her village, with its high proportion of mad women strewn about the neighborhood, grew strange in isolation; in support of this theory, she notes that her villagers speak differently than any other Chinese she knows, in San Francisco, Hawaii-- it is the sudden realization of isolation, that others outside the village are different, that dialects abound (contradicting her previous assumption of a monolithic Chinese culture) that provokes her

theory.

The madness of the village women appears to follow much the same pattern in many ways: the woman next door whose proclivity to chatter away and then suddenly go silent results in her placement in a mental institution. Crazy Mary, the daughter of immigrants who was born and left in China as a small child until the age of twenty, is insane when she finally gets to America, disappointing her parents' hopes and plans; her distorted face is accompanied by unintelligible grunts and laughs, and points at things that aren't there; her failure to improve lands her in an institution. Pee-A-Nah, the only public village idiot, who chases and screams at children, disappears one day, presumably to an institution. All these women exhibit the symptoms of a failure in communication, attempted through contact with children; all are childless and, to a degree, abandoned; all are dismissed by a society which is incapable of accommodating their difference. The failure to reproduce, indeed, the insistence on remaining a sort of perpetual child, is a corollary to the failure to communicate, constituting a sort of sexual silence which is as condemning as sexual and reproductive liberty.

Maxine's fear that she exhibits such condemning features results in a combination of linguistic excess and sexual numbness; when she discovers her score of zero on an IQ test was due to its covering of black ink, she begins to resent the secrets that prevent her from full communication, that keep her from confiding in a kind ghost teacher because of the underlying threat of deportation, that ultimately keep her also in the dark, since she too is unworthy of her parents' complete trust as a

partial ghost.

They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghostlike. They called us a kind of ghost. Ghosts are noisy and full of air; they talk during meals. They talk about anything...Even the good things are unspeakable, so how could I ask about deformities? From the configurations of food my mother set out, we kids had to infer the holidays. [pp. 213-5]

It is her gaps in Chinese knowledge that Maxine finds so frightening; convinced that her parents want to sell her off to the first marriageable comer, she exaggerates her "unfeminine" idiosyncracies in order to frustrate their plan and retain her sexual independence. Assuming that Chinese tradition is threatening this independence, she releases a stream of suppressed speech to force her parents to deal "honestly" and openly with her, in straightforward American ways. But her shouting strength is of course equalled by Brave Orchid's, who is armed with a rebuttal for every one of her daughter's accusations and even confuses their oppositional situations by articulating her knowledge of some of the two hundred secrets that Maxine had meant to reveal.

"Who said we could sell you? We can't sell people. Can't you take a joke? You can't even tell a joke from real life. You're not so smart. Can't even tell real from false...I didn't say you were ugly...That's what we're supposed to say. That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite." [pp. 235-7]

Ultimately it seems as if the contradictions of her Chinese American context can only be resolved herself, through talking story: "And suddenly I got very confused and lonely because I was at that moment telling her my list, and in the telling it grew. No higher listener. No listener but myself." [p. 237]

This act of individualism is not a conclusive rejection of Chineseness, however, for the final story of the chapter characteristically obscures the location of the division between mother and daughter: the beginning is Brave Orchid's, the ending Maxine's, but the exact transition of narrators is never marked. In the story, her grandmother drags the whole family to an opera, and escapes with her whole family, despite bound feet, from the attack of bandits: a sign of the protection in plays. It is the first exposition of her matrilineage beyond a single generation, saved for last-- another belated revelation of bare fact that confirms Hong Kingston's story-talking heritage. This assurance of her traditional right to narrative authority allows her for once to identify as fantasy the reproduction of the story of Ts'ai Yen, whose songs, she would like to believe, composed parts of the operas her grandmother saw. The heroine Ts'ai Yen proposes a positive role model for the kind of warrior woman that constitutes Hong Kingston's identity: the poetess, captured by barbarians whose high, yearning flutes incite her to match the note with her own voice. Her words, which "seemed to be Chinese," [p. 243] are nevertheless understood in their sadness and anger by the barbarians. Upon returning to her own people in order to perpetuate the race (a sudden narrative necessity that leaves open questions of filial piety and sexual independence) Ts'ai Yen finds that her songs are just as potent when sung to native instruments. In fact, they are songs which continue to be sung.

IV.

Do the songs of Maxine Hong Kingston translate as well as those of Ts'ai Yen? Interpretive disagreements about The Woman Warrior render the question an imperative one. Vivian Hsu, in her article entitled "Maxine Hong Kingston as Psycho-autobiographer and Ethnographer," [8] carefully differentiates the aspects of Hong Kingston's character which are utterly personal and those which are characteristic of Chinese Americans as a whole. The necessity of this separation, ironically reproducing Hong Kingston's separation/ connection process of identity retrieval in the text itself, is sadly the result of the reviews and criticism by the mainstream press and white feminists who have appropriated and distorted Hong Kingston's message to their own cause. Rarely is Hong Kingston's identification struggle seen in the context of Chinese America, as it is constructed by history, culture, and racism in the United States; instead the emphasis on myth and reality is taken to represent universal techniques of individualization. Says Jane Kramer in the New York Times Book Review, 9 November 1976,

...a brilliant memoir. It shocks us out of our facile rhetoric, past the clichés of our obtuseness, back to the mystery of a stubbornly, utterly foreign sensibility... "The Warrior Woman" is about being Chinese, in the way the "Portrait of the Artist" is about being Irish.

A text so pointedly misinterpreted requires the inspection of readership issues. Kathryn M. Fong, in "An Open Letter to Maxine Hong Kingston," points out that "The problem is that non-Chinese are reading your fiction as true accounts of Chinese and Chinese American history. That's the price we Chinese Americans pay when so few of us...are published. Your one experience, your one story, becomes the definitive description of all of us. Chinese Americans have commonalities, but I hardly think we are so homogenous." [9] Fong sees Hong Kingston's motif of secrets, silence, and naming as a reinforcement of stereotypical caricatures of the devious Chinese; she also resents the portrayals of a girl-hating Chinese culture and harsh representations of father figures, countering these "truths" with her personal experience. But her greatest criticism is not of the author herself, who is after all writing as a single person, but of the critics who read it as something else.

I, like many of my friends, refuse to be labeled a misfit. There is a culture and history and state of mind called Chinese America and I am very comfortable there. I do not consider it "a blending fo the East and the West" like some hokey chop suey dish, nor is it some tug o'war game being played upon my body, mind and soul. The definition of Chinese America lies in the variety and complexity of all of our experiences as Chinese Americans. [10]

Opposing readings by white and Chinese Americans indicate the ambiguity of the text's intended readers; if Hong Kingston had meant to describe as extensively as possible within a semi-fictional mode the combined experiences of Chinese America for the benefit of non-Chinese Americans, she could have done so by incorporating traditional historical perspectives on Chinese

immigration, quota laws, labor, etc.; this is part of her agenda in China Men. Her eradication of these elements must be somewhat deliberate in The Woman Warrior, for in ignoring androcentric history she creates the necessary space for a female representation of the Chinese American experience. Equally significant is the erasure, within this context of matrilineage, of female sexuality in the book: its historical construction within Chinese culture as dangerous to the society in the possibility of illegitimate offspring and incest; as well as its place in America, where it was mythologically dominated by exotica and by stereotypes of the Chinese courtesan, and stigmatized by "responsibility" for Tong violence in nineteenth century Chinatown. Hong Kingston's adolescent experience of evasion and explicit rejection of sexuality is in fact a reaction to these unstated, underlying realities. Although she does not inscribe an alternative to these descriptions of Chinese female sexuality, her text does enact-- indeed, it constitutes-- an historical alternative, which finds both its structure and its source in the narratives of women.

The concentration on language throughout The Woman Warrior provides a convenient and appropriate site for an examination of readership. There are quite a few linguistic twists which would be invisible to readers who do not speak Chinese. Although Hong Kingston does elaborate on the meaning of Ho Chi Kuei, the name given to American born offspring of Chinese immigrants, partly to demonstrate her own exclusion from Chinese secrets, there are other riddles which she does not explain. For instance, the anecdote about her difficulty in school with the strongly

assertive American "I" is supposedly an indication of her culturally enforced reticence, and certainly a statement about her family name, as a description of her family position "biggest daughter," enforcing community values versus individuation. But the story does not reveal the etymology of the Chinese character for "I," which is literally person of metal, power, or wealth, i.e. swordwoman or swordman [11]-- an ideographic pun evidently known to Hong Kingston in her evocation of that same symbol. Thus, individuation does not have to be necessarily a matter of cultural translation and assimilation, the desertion of Chinese values, since the very word for "I" provides the appropriate cultural paradigm. Also, she combines Chinese mythology in the legend of Fa Mu Lan, whose back carvings are a borrowed element from the story of the warrior Yue Fei of the Song dynasty. [12] These secrets she not only keeps from white readers, as a protection against complete voyeurism, but uses to her advantage in the absence of their knowledge; however, they probably are accessible to readers reasonably familiar with Chinese cultural and linguistic heritage.

This evidence, although perhaps inconclusive, points to Hong Kingston's recognition of and orientation towards two distinct audiences, Chinese American and otherwise. Although this does not allow for immediate access to her experience by other people of color, disassembling the tentative connections she draws between all racial minorities in the United States, it does place the obligation on self-consciousness on white readers, who must acknowledge the author's deliberate gaps in "reason" and "logic,"

evident through the interplay of language and silence, fantasy and reality, and the destruction of ultimate categories. Indeed, the very exclusion of a white presence in the text, except as ghosts-- beings to be feared but ultimately avoidable and inconsequential to Chinatown-- functions in the same way as the exemption of history; that is, its absence is significant in that it allows for an alternate construction, in this case a Chinese American identity which is defined positively, in relation to other Chinese Americans, rather than negatively, the outcome of an explicit comparison to the white mainstream. The presence of white readers is thereby peripheralized, a tangible yet unstated factor, reversing the dominant dynamic of white and non-white.

However, because this reversal is by nature unobtrusive, avoidable by any reader, Chinese American or otherwise, it may also provide a pretext for the dismissal of racism on the part of white readers. It is on this level of analysis that the liberating effects of combined and sub-divided categories such as warrior and slave, fantasy and reality, are limited, for the subjection of Hong Kingston's carefully constructed Chinese American identity to the scrutiny of the non-Chinese American mainstream threatens to reduce it to racist preconceptions. That possibility can only be averted by the dedication of the publishing industry and the reading public to expand its acceptance of writing from beyond the narrow band of the mainstream, so that writers like Maxine Hong Kingston are not forced into emblematic positions that erase their individual characteristics.

Notes.

[1] Jeanne Barker-Nunn, "Warrior Women: Immigrant Mothers in the Work of their Daughters," Women's Studies, vol. 6. 1979, pp. 165-177.

Lynn Z. Bloom, "Heritages: Dimensions of Mother/Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiography," The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner. (New York: Ungar, 1980), pp. 291-303.

Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulous, "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography," Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jellinek. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 180-205.

Suzanne Juhasz, "Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millet's *Flying* and *Sita*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," International Journal of Women's Studies, vol. 2, 1979, pp. 62-75.

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Sidonie Smith, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[2] Stanford M. Lyman, "The Chinese Diaspora in America, 1850-1943," in The Asian in North America. (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Inc., 1977), p. 13.

[3] Tricia Knoll, Becoming Americans. (Portland: Coast to Coast Press, 1982), p. 9.

[4] Elaine H. Kim, "Asian Women in America," in With Silk Wings: Asian American Women at Work. (Asian Women United Of California, 1983), p. 120.

[5] Kim, p. 120.

[6] Kim, p. 121.

[7] Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 9-10. Hereafter all references to this edition are cited paranthetically by page number in my text.

[8] Vivian Hsu, "Maxine Hong Kingston as Psycho-autobiographer and ethnographer," in International Journal of Womens' Studies, vol 6, N/D 1983, pp. 429-442.

[9] Kathryn M. Fong, "An Open Letter to Maxine Hong Kingston," in Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol. 9, no. 4, Oct/Dec 1977, p. 67.

[10] Fong, p. 69.

[11] Cheng Lok Chua, "Golden Mountain: Chinese Versions of the American Dream in Lin Yutang, Louis chu, and Maxine Hong Kingston," in Ethnic Groups, vol. 4, no. 1-2, 1982, footnote p. 59.

[12] Fong, p. 67.

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