

Interpreting Silence and Voice

in Maxine Hong Kingston's

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts

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In my thesis I examine how Maxine Hong Kingston depicts a young girl's tough search for self-identity in her book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975). The thesis aims at interpreting the themes of silence and voice in Kingston's book, especially women's silence and voice. Written as a girl's childhood experience, *The Woman Warrior* recounts the life experience of Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese American woman who was born in the United States and grew up in the Chinatown in Stockton, California. Like many other children of immigrants, Kingston experienced adolescent turmoil and rebellion, vacillating between her inherited Chinese culture and traditions and modern American culture and values. Thus in her first book, *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston recalls in the memories of her childhood the struggle to reconcile her Chinese and American identities as a second generation Chinese American. Furthermore, through this book, Kingston also explores the lives and struggles of other Chinese women who were born and lived in China, or who immigrated to the United States, as well as the lives of their children.

During the past 30 years, a great number of articles and books have been written on Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*. Most of the critics praise Kingston's contribution to the formation of a new Chinese American identity for women who were long oppressed by Chinese patriarchal tradition. In addition, her skill of storytelling is said to continue the Chinese art of "talk story", which actually advances the oral traditions of literature into a written treasure. At the same time, *The Woman Warrior* has also received negative reviews concerning autobiographical accuracy, cultural authenticity, and ethnic representativeness (Yuan 2001, 1). In the theoretical section of the thesis, I firstly review briefly the development of Chinese American literature in order to introduce a context for Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Secondly, as genre and feminism are the key issues in the debates on *The Woman Warrior* and central to my research question, I explore the related theories on autobiographical writing and Asian American Feminism.

In the first analytical chapter, Chapter three, I first analyse the meaning of silence as a reflection of early Chinese immigrants and their community. Silence illustrates the situation of the entire Chinese American community in American history. Kingston describes the silence of Chinese immigrants in the US and their voiceless lives because of hard work and unfair treatment, and she writes about people who have been deliberately neglected by the mainstream society over a long period due to sociopolitical factors. Second, I focus on the silence of two individual characters – No-name Woman and Moon Orchid: silence can be seen as a symbol of female victimization in patriarchal Chinese culture and society and also in modern American

society. Thus, silence can be interpreted as a speechless revolt of a woman against the patriarchal society.

In the second analytical chapter, Chapter four, I interpret the theme of voice in *The Woman Warrior* and examine its different forms, as voice can be articulation, speaking and expressing one's own opinions, even talk-stories and oral literature which carry the Chinese classic and tradition. In particular, voice represents the feminist awareness of Chinese American women, since feminism, as traditionally understood, is speaking up, demanding women's rights, refusing to be looked down upon, which is the opposite of silence. Kingston portrays the voices of Chinese American women in the book, and, furthermore, these voices take different forms; forms which do not only include articulation and speaking up, but also refer to oral literature, writing, and literary creation, which use words as weapon to fight for women's rights. Voice can therefore be interpreted as writing and even rewriting classic literature in order to deliver a new voice.

To conclude, through the interpretation of silence and voice in Kingston's work, it is clear that Kingston has succeeded in creating many true Chinese women warriors, in the past and the present. Her purpose is to change the traditional images of Chinese women, to improve their social status and to rewrite Chinese women's history. By writing, Kingston breaks the taboo on silence and rewrites Chinese American female subjectivity in a way that transcends Chinese patriarchal tradition. Just as Ts'ai Yen, her role model, who learns the barbarian's language and lyrics and then creates a new song for her own people, Kingston masters the English language, uses voice and pen as weapons creating new pages in American literature, and gives the women warriors she writes about places in American history and perhaps immortality. Furthermore, her book can be seen as a new voice, which break the silence in the history of Chinese Americans and destroys the Orientalist stereotypes of Chinese Americans as well as "claim[s] rights" and "claim[s] America", which are the demands of the Chinese Americans for their emerging sense of identity.

Keywords: Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, ethnic literature, Chinese American literature, immigrant, autobiography, feminism, Asian American feminism, ethnic identity, cultural identity, silence, voice, racism, Chinese culture, classic literature rewriting.

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1. Introduction

During 1960s and 1970s, a substantial body of ethnic minority literatures emerged in the United States. Since then, the flow of novels, stories, poems, family histories and memoirs has grown steadily, and many Chinese American authors have become popular, such as Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Frank Chin as well as the famous playwright David Henry Hwang for his Broadway play *M. Butterfly* (1988), and some Chinese poets such as Li-Yong Lee. The works of these authors have earned readers' praise as well as academic attention, and some of their texts have been taught in colleges in many disciplines.

Maxine Hong Kingston is one of the most well-known Chinese American female writers in the late 20th century. In 1975, she published *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts*, a semi-autobiography that has earned praise in the academy as “the best-known Asian American text in print” (Talbot, qtd. in Grice et al., 2001, 164) and the most widely taught book by a living writer in US colleges and universities which gives Asian Americans such an official literary visibility (Li 2000, 45). The book has been translated into more than 20 languages all over the world and used in disciplines including American literature, anthropology, Asian American studies, composition, education, psychology, sociology, and women's studies. The success of this book has had a significant influence in the U.S., and it also established Kingston's place in the history of American literature. In 1976, the second year after its publication, this book won the National Book Critics Circle Award for “non-fiction”. Today, in the Amazon.com paperback book rankings, *The*

Woman Warrior is the #2,108 best seller among all the books published, and #1 in the category of “Biographies & Memoirs” by Chinese ethnics & nationals.¹

Written as a girl’s childhood experience, *The Woman Warrior* recounts the life experience of Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese American woman who was born in the United States and grew up in the Chinatown in Stockton, California. Like other children of immigrants, Kingston herself had adolescent turmoil and rebellion, vacillating between her inherited Chinese culture and traditions and modern American culture and values. Thus in her first book, *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston recalls in the memories of her childhood the struggle to reconcile her Chinese and American identities as a second-generation Chinese American. Furthermore, through this book, Kingston also explores the lives and struggles of other Chinese women who were born and lived in China, or who immigrated to the United States, as well as the lives of their children. She vividly portrays these Chinese American women who confronted the dual dilemmas of gender and race; in particular, she presents their psychological development processes which are closely related to her own experience as a Chinese American woman.

The Woman Warrior is divided into five chapters which mainly narrate the stories of five Chinese women, who are the inspirational figures of the woman warrior to the young Kingston in her childhood memories. Starting from old China, Kingston begins to tell about the tragic life story of her silent aunt - No-name Woman - who is considered a shame and deliberately forgotten by her family because of her illegitimate pregnancy. In the second chapter, “White Tigers”, the narrator combines Chinese classic literature with her own creative imagination and rewrites the story of

¹ http://www.amazon.com/Woman-Warrior-Memoirs-Girlhood-Ghosts/dp/0679721886/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1206548411&sr=8-1
[Internet accessed: 26th March, 2008]

the legendary Chinese woman warrior, Fa Mulan. In “Shaman”, the third chapter, the narrator describes her mother’s experience in China and her life in the U.S. after immigration. In the fourth chapter, “At the Western Palace”, she describes her aunt Moon Orchid’s story and her mental breakdown after she immigrates to the United States from China in order to find her husband. In the final story, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”, she focuses on her childhood experiences in the United States, and her struggles in finding her own voice and identity.

During the past 30 years, a great number of articles and books have been written all over the world on Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*. Most of the critics praise Kingston’s contribution to the formation of a new identity for Chinese American women who have long been oppressed by Chinese patriarchal tradition. In addition, her skill of storytelling is said to continue the Chinese art of “talk story”, which actually advances the oral traditions of literature into a written treasure. At the same time, *The Woman Warrior* has also received negative reviews concerning its autobiographical accuracy, cultural authenticity, and ethnic representativeness (Yuan 2001, 1). For example, Jeffery Chan, Benjamin Tong, and Frank Chin accuse Kingston of “distorting Asian American reality on the one hand, and catering to the demand of the dominant culture for exoticism and stereotypes on the other” (Yuan 2001, 1). Chin blames Kingston for rewriting the popular Chinese chant “The Ballad of Mulan” according to “the spec[tacle]s of the stereotype of the Chinese woman as a pathological white supremacist victimized and trapped in a hideous Chinese civilization” (Chin et al. 1991, 3). In addition to accusing her work as being “fake”, Chin continues to doubt her “very use of the autobiographical form” (Yuan 2001, 1), arguing that although autobiography, the “traditional tool of Christian conversion”, became the “sole Chinese American form of writing”, this Western metaphysical and

the Christian confession style autobiography would never capture the sensibility or the imagination of Chinese America (Chin et al 1991, 11). In response, Kingston has defended herself in her early essay “Culture Mis-readings by American Reviewers”, claiming that her work “has many layers”, so reviewing her work should be based on the emphasis of “artistic individuality”, and not on any vision or dimension of Asian America (Talbot, qtd. in Yuan 2001, 2).

In addition, Kingston has not been very satisfied with the critics and reviews of *The Woman Warrior* and has complained that “she has been very much misunderstood” (Kim 1982, xvii). There are many reasons why her book is difficult to understand. One reason is because of her ambiguous attitude towards Chinese culture and traditions. On the one hand, Kingston absorbs the essence of Chinese folklore and classic literature to represent the charms of Chinese culture, and she also places emphasis on her identity as a Chinese descendant and claims the right to belong to Chinese Americans. On the other hand, she also criticises Chinese values and traditions, and sometimes she even shows strong detestation towards them. Second, the images of women in *The Woman Warrior* differ greatly from each other, as some are very aggressive and some are submissive and docile. Thus, many Western readers are confused because these do not fit the familiar stereotype of Chinese women. Like Michael Malloy once complained, these differences are “especially hard for a non-Chinese” to understand, “and that is the troubling aspect of the book” (Talbot, qtd. in Kim, xvii).

Given such background, the aim of this thesis is to interpret *The Woman Warrior* with theoretical guidance on the basis of my personal familiarity with Chinese literature and traditions (I am Chinese, born in Beijing, China. I went to

school in China until I was 20 years old.) In particular, I will give a critical reading of *The Woman Warrior* concentrating on the following question:

When Kingston considers Chinese American culture as an extension of Chinese tradition in the US context, how does she use silence and voice to approach the institutional racism imposed upon Chinese American men and women?

I will approach this question especially through examining:

- a) In what historical, cultural and political context does Kingston situate feminist discourse in the text?
- b) Featuring in Chinese American tradition of assimilation narratives and influenced by Chinese patriarchal tradition, how does the text differ from Western autobiographical genre?

My research topic has been widely discussed by other critics before. Silence of ethnic female writers has been frequently dealt with in literary criticism, such as African American writer Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, as well as other ethnic female writers such as Mitsuye Yamada, Joy Kogawa, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Nora Okja Keller, and Anchee Min. Moreover, there is also a long critical tradition on Kingston and the theme of silence. Many critics have explored multiple meanings of silence in her writings in order to explore relationships among race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. E.D. Huntley argues that silence as the theme of *The Woman Warrior* appears in multiple forms (2001, 68). This silence can be seen as resistance of Asian American women against the various forms of oppression in their lives. However, there has not yet been adequate discussion of the multiple meanings of silence and voice, especially in relation to Chinese American literature tradition, autobiographical writing, Asian American feminism and social-justice movements in the U.S. In particular, the very notion of silence continues to invoke assumptions of passivity, submissiveness, and avoidance, while voice is equated with ethnic identity and empowerment.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston criticises both the Chinese patriarchal tradition and the American racist attitude. Both traditions have “silenced women”, taking away their agency. In the text, Kingston conveys her assailing of Chinese patriarchal tradition. The old feudal China was dominated by Confucianism that advocates male superiority and female inferiority. Confucianism has had very significant positive influences on Chinese traditions and culture; however, it is also the most important factor contributing to Chinese patriarchal tradition. One of the most important doctrines of Confucianism on women is the “three obediences and four virtues”: three obediences are that a woman must obey her father before marriage, and her husband after marrying, then her sons after her husband’s death. The four virtues set up a series of rules for her practice. First, she should know her position and behave according to the natural law of things. Second, she should guard her words and not speak too much or bore others. Third, she should be dressed well and cleanly to please men. Finally, she should not avoid her family duties (Chi 2007, 7).

Thus, deeply influenced by Confucianism, before the 18th century, Chinese women were honoured if they committed suicide after their husband’s deaths. As a result, China has more monuments constructed for women than any other nation, and most of them are constructed after the wife committed suicide.

However, since the mid-nineteenth century, China has had more contact with the West, with Christian missionaries, technology and science, democracy and egalitarian philosophies. After the establishment of new China in 1949, women have become equal with men, and the old doctrines of patriarchal tradition are disappearing. Nevertheless, as Amy Ling (1990) notes in *Between Worlds: Women of Chinese Ancestry*:

Though China may have taken great leaps forward in official statutes and public pronouncements concerning women, nonetheless, in practice, backed

by centuries of history and tradition, the old ways die hard. Moreover, Chinese who have immigrated to other countries, whether motivated by homesickness, alienation, or persecution, often hold tightly to what they have brought from the Old Country; thus, customs and attitudes that may have altered or disappeared in the mother country may still be continued almost unchanged in isolated enclaves abroad. And young Chinese women today - (even or perhaps particularly) those living half a globe away from China - are still haunted by the misogynist proverbs and attitudes of generations past.

This is true in Kingston's book, as well as in the stories by other Chinese American female writers, such as Amy Tan, who is famous for the novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989).

As noted above, in the text Kingston also criticises American racist traditions. Institutional racism is "discrimination against ethnic minorities that is systematic and embedded in the procedures, routines, and culture of an organization and not simply the product of racist attitudes amongst individual employees and managers".² In 1999 this term was raised in the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which defined institutional racism as follows: "The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin which can be detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people".³ In addition, as Lowe points out, "racism is not a fixed structure; society's notions about race are not static and immutable, nor has the state been built on an unchanging exclusion of all racialized peoples. Rather, legal institutions function as flexible apparatuses of racialization and gendering in response to the material conditions of different historical movements" (Lowe 1996, 22).

² A Dictionary of Human Resources Management, available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t162.e1664&srn=4&ssid=656420437#FIRSTHIT>

³ A Dictionary of Human Resources Management, available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t162.e1664&srn=4&ssid=656420437#FIRSTHIT>

Indeed, in history, the Chinese immigrants' lives were hard and depressing in America because of the effects of "The Chinese Exclusion Act". On May 6, 1882, "The Chinese Exclusion Act" was passed in the United States, as the only major restriction on free immigration in U.S. history: this act excluded Chinese labourers from entering the country till 1943, and also made Chinese immigrants permanent aliens by excluding them from U.S. citizenship. Moreover, the Act affected seriously the Chinese who were already in the United States in that any Chinese who left the United States had to obtain certifications for re-entry. In addition, besides Chinese, other Asian immigrants have also been treated unequally in the U.S. by various legislations and laws, and Lowe pays attention to "the Chinese as alien noncitizen, the American citizen of Japanese descent as racial enemy, and the American citizen of Filipino descent as simultaneously immigrant and colonized national" (Lowe 1996, 8).

In this thesis, I will argue that the themes of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* are silence and voice, and especially women's silence and voice. Silence, on the one hand, illustrates the situation of the entire Chinese American community in American history. Kingston describes the silence of Chinese immigrants in the US and their voiceless lives because of hard work and unfair treatment, she writes about people who have been deliberately neglected by the mainstream society over a long period due to sociopolitical factors. In addition, silence particularly signifies female victimization, which is closely connected to the oppression of Chinese women in the old Chinese culture and also in modern American society. However, silence can also be interpreted as a speechless revolt of a woman against the patriarchal society.

Voice, on the other hand, represents the feminist awareness of Chinese American women, since Western feminism, as traditionally understood, is speaking up, demanding women's rights, refusing to be looked down upon, which is the

opposite of silence. Kingston portrays the voices of Chinese American women in the book, and, furthermore, these voices take different forms; forms which do not only include articulation and speaking up, but also refer to oral literature, writing, and literary creation, which use words as weapon to fight for women's rights.

In the theoretical section, I will first briefly review the development of Chinese American literature in order to introduce a context for Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. As genre and feminism are the key issues in the debates on *The Woman Warrior* and in my research question I will explore the related theories on autobiography and Asian American Feminism.

In the analytical section chapter three and chapter four, I will focus on interpreting the theme of silence and voice in *The Woman Warrior*. In Chapter three, first I will analyse the meaning of silence as a reflection of early Chinese immigrants and their community. Second, I will focus on the silence of two individual characters – No-name Woman and Moon Orchid, as silence can also be seen a symbol of female victimization in patriarchal Chinese culture and society. In chapter four, I will interpret the theme of voice in *The Woman Warrior* and examine its different forms, as the voice can be articulation, speaking and expressing one's own opinions, even talk-stories and oral literature which carry the Chinese classic literature and tradition. In addition, the voice can also be interpreted as writing and even rewriting classic literature in order to deliver a new voice.

As Kingston once said in a guest lecture in Fu Dan University in China (Hu 2004),

As a Chinese American, I believe that writing is a new power - a source of strength, a new method of being a warrior in society. This power is based on the understanding of the history of your own nation; this power is based on accepting old stories and songs. When someone is talking stories and singing songs, others will obtain this power ...The responsibility of a writer is to build

a bridge between herself and the others, in order to help others to understand human individual selves and the society.

Indeed, for a long time Kingston has been acting as a “woman warrior” herself. She uses pen and words as weapons, attempting to influence and change American society’s misunderstanding, exclusion and discrimination against the Chinese. As a second-generation Chinese American, she also intends to reconcile her Chinese cultural heritage with her sense of identity as an American to finally reach the state of cultural integration and the formation of a new identity. Thus, her books can be seen as a new voice, which break the silence in the history of Chinese Americans and destroys the Orientalist stereotypes of Chinese Americans as well as “claim[s] rights” and “claim[s] America”, which are the demands from Chinese Americans for their emerging sense of identity.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

As part of Chinese American literature, *The Woman Warrior* is an important work in its development and widely criticized. Besides Kingston, there are also other Chinese American writers talked about women in the past. In this chapter, at first I will briefly review the development of Chinese American literature in order to introduce the general background for understanding Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, as Chinese American literature is a relatively new literary field and has its unique features. In addition, this will also explain in what historical, cultural and political context that Kingston situates feminist discourse in *The Woman Warrior*. Then I will focus on autobiographical writing and Asian American feminism, which are the key theoretical perspectives relating to Kingston's book and my research questions.

The aim of this thesis is to interpret the main themes – silence and voice – in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts*. In the book, Kingston mainly narrates the life stories of her and other women in her family, from her mother, aunts, and friends to herself. Meanwhile, she also covers a wider variety of subjects, including social problems of Chinese immigrants in America, the generation gap, mother-daughter relationship, adolescent rebellion, marginal literature, confusion of identity, oral literature, myth and legend, cultural shock, personal experience and literary recreation, Orientalism, and even political issues such as Communist China. Because of the vast amount of subjects that *The Woman Warrior* contains, readers may interpret and understand *The Woman Warrior* from different angles and points of views. However, there are two fields which are important in interpreting this book in my view - autobiographical writing as a genre and Asian American Feminism. In addition, *The Woman Warrior* belongs to Asian American

literature, particularly Chinese American Literature – one of the emerging fields in literature studies, and Kingston is one of the pioneers of this field.

2.1 Brief Introduction of the Development of Chinese American Literature

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* tells the stories of Chinese female immigrants and their children's lives in the USA. The success of this book has made Kingston popular among white American readers, which also hallmarked the entry of Chinese American literature into the American mainstream. As a new literary force which has a relatively short history, Chinese American literature has its unique history. Therefore, a brief introduction of its beginning, development and current topics is essential in understanding the importance of *The Woman Warrior*.

Chinese American literature is considered a part of Asian American Literature. As Helena Grice et al define in *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, Asian American literature is the literature by “people of Asian descent either born in, or who have emigrated to, the United States” (Grice et al 2001, 134). Therefore, Chinese American literature refers to fictions written by Americans of Chinese origin. In addition, it usually refers to the texts written in the English language, even though Chinese American literature written in Chinese language is part of it.

The development of Chinese American literature is obviously closely related to the immigration history of the Chinese to the United States. Chinese immigration to the United States began in the mid-19th century. At the time, there were several wars in China, such as the First Opium War in 1840, as well as many peasant rebellions in China nationwide and countless internal wars later (Takaki 1994, 192). In addition, there were also several severe natural disasters in China, such as drought, plague, and

flood. These factors pushed the Chinese to immigrate to other countries even later. As Kingston remarks on the late immigrants in her book,

...the men – hungry, greedy, tired of planting in dry soil – had been forced to leave the village in order to send food-money home. There were ghost plagues, bandit plagues, wars with the Japanese, floods...poverty hurt, and that was their first reason for leaving. (17-19)

At the same time, the economic development in the US needed a great number of laborers, so the Chinese were a source of cheap laborer for plantation, mining, railroad (Kim 1982, 23) and the service industry. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston describes many Chinese immigrants' lives and their work, particularly her family's laundry business and hard working conditions, with emphasis on female immigrants. Her second book *China Men* (1989) continues the stories of Chinese immigrants in America, but with a focus on the male Chinese Americans working on the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

From the beginning of the immigration history of the Chinese in the United States in mid-19th century, Chinese people have lived in America for over 150 years. However, for a very long period, Chinese Americans were silent and unheard in the mainstream American society and "Asian immigrant workers vanished without leaving behind much written account of their individual lives in America" (Kim 1982, 23). This is partly because of their relatively small number in America at the time. In addition, the heavy workload also occupied the immigrants' lives so that "their time was consumed in struggles for a livelihood" (Kim 1982, 23). Furthermore, the majority of the Chinese immigrants were peasants who were illiterate, as they were members of the lower social class who had not had the privilege of schooling in China at the time. Kim also points out that "in fact, labor recruiters [in America], in search of a docile labor force, preferred those who had little formal education" (1982, 24).

Therefore, early Chinese American literature works were “mainly limited to a few autobiographies and oral testimonies by male writers, often [in] Chinese” (Grice 2003, 135). Before the 1970s, there were only few Chinese American novelists, poets, and a playwright - Frank Chin - who had published literary works in America. In *The Chinese-American Literary Scene: A Galaxy of Poets and Lone Playwright* (1978), David Hsin-Fu Wand writes that “if you ask a man on a street, has he ever read a book by Chinese American author, he probably answers ‘I have never heard that Chinaman can write!’” (Talbot, qtd. in Zhao, 1).

In general, early Chinese American literature was limited to a few types of writings, such as poems, newspaper articles and autobiographical writings. The poems are the famous “Angel Island poems”, which were carved by unknown Chinese immigrants in Chinese language into the walls on Angel Island, where they were held before being allowed to enter the United States between 1910 to 1940 (Kim 1982, 23). Autobiographical writing is another form of early Chinese American literature, although autobiographical writing was not popular in the tradition of Chinese literature; in fact, in ancient and medieval Chinese literature history, there was little autobiography (although there were a few exceptions) until the 15th century. This phenomenon is mostly because of the influence of Confucianism, which stresses the importance of humility; therefore writing about one’s own life is obviously very self-centred. However, as Kim (1982, 24) points out, among the early Chinese Americans, autobiographical writing was the early form to record their lives, especially among the educated people, such as students, scholars, and diplomats, whose writing is “characterized by efforts to bridge the gap between East and West and plead for tolerance by making usually highly euphemistic observations about the West on the

one hand while explaining Asian in idealized term on the other”. Lee Yan Phou’s *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) is one of the first of these writings.

Later on, Pandee Lowe published *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), which is the first book-length autobiography by an American-born Chinese in English. As Kim (1982, 60) points out, the value of this book is “Lowe’s love for America coupled with respect for his ‘Oriental roots’”. Two years later, Jade Snow Wong published *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), which is “the best known and most financially successful book by a Chinese American” (Kim 1982, 59). *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has helped to popularize the belief that “American racial minorities have only themselves to blame for lack of success in American life”, since Jade Snow Wong “sings the praises of American opportunities and life” (Kim 1982, 60). Published after the World War II, when Americans became more aware of the distinctions between Asians (especially between the Japanese and Chinese), and began to view the Chinese as allies, both of these books promote the image of Chinese Americans as a model minority, and expressed their “ardent desire for acceptance by other Americans” (Kim 1982, 61). Particularly, Wong offers to her readers an autobiography from a woman’s point of view, which later influenced Kingston.

Since the late 1960s, Chinese American literature has developed and begun to occupy a visible place in American literature. In 1972, Kai-Yu Hsu published the book *Asian-American Authors (Multi-Ethnic Literature Series)*, one of the earliest collections which introduced Chinese American literature. However, in this book, Hsu only briefly described the immigration history of Chinese people in America and collected a few pieces of their essays, so the influence of Chinese American literature was very limited. The year 1976 is an important date in the history of Chinese American literature. In this year, Kingston published her first book *The Woman*

Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts, which was a significant success both academically and commercially. In the following years, many other Chinese American authors became popular, such as Frank Chin, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, as well as the famous playwright David Henry Hwang for his Broadway play *M. Butterfly* (1988), and some Chinese poets such as Li-Yong Lee. The works of these authors have earned readers' praise as well as academic attention, and some of them have been taught in colleges in many disciplines. Consequently, there is a growing number of critical works focusing on this field in the United States. Particularly since the early 1990s, new critical articles have appeared "almost monthly", covering topics including "Asian American writing and nationalism, Asian American literature and citizenship, the use of silence by Asian American women writers, Asian American poetry and images of Asian American women by Asian American women writers", and so on (Grice et al 2001, 150-151).

In general, when reviewing Chinese American literature, it is important to notice that the most significant contribution of Chinese Americans is the fact that they have portrayed the Chinese, or Asian Americans, living in contemporary United States unlike the white writers in the past, thereby challenging the Orientalist stereotypes created by white writers. Moreover, Chinese American literature has its own unique features, compared to mainstream American literature and other ethnic literatures. Firstly, it resembles features of postcolonial context in its contrast of the powerful American culture and the relatively less advantaged Chinese culture. Secondly, those Chinese American writers who have grown up in America and been educated in American schools have been deeply affected by modern American culture, and oral and written Chinese literature is the only source of their knowledge and experience of their parents' ancestral land China. Therefore, their texts always involve

a considerable amount of description of the writers' imagined past of their family's ancestral country, Chinese culture and traditions. Thus their interpretation of "China" might not be historically authentic and their interpretation of "China" might not be as accurate as the white readers might expect or believe. Thirdly, Chinese American writers sometimes also use bilingual techniques and contexts, such as adopting Chinese idioms and metaphors into English language. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston creates many new terms, such as "talk-story", which literally means oral literature. On the one hand, by using this technique, as some critics comment, "[Chinese American writers] seek ways to transplant their dialects to their texts, even if they risk being occasionally unintelligible to the reading majority" (Cheung 1988, 162). On the other hand, it helps to romanticize Chinese culture and make it more exotic. This is true with Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, which is perhaps one of the reasons of the book being so popular among white readers.

Furthermore, there is another important feature of Chinese American literature - the "otherness". Chinese Americans are always "others", both in America and China. They are outsiders to the American culture because of their physical features and they are seen to maintain Chinese traditions and culture. In addition, as Skandera-Trombley points out, "Chinese Americans, who have been subjected to genocidal immigration policies, are placed in the situation of permanent guests who must earn their keep by adding the spice of variety to American life—by selectively maintaining aspects of traditional Chinese culture and language fascinating to whites" (1998, 158). However, to the Chinese civilization, they are also outsiders: they are educated in the American way and they are seen as Americans. Being outsiders to both cultures, Chinese Americans have been confused about their identity. This is a dilemma for some Chinese-American writers, which can be seen in the different names with which

Chinese Americans have referred to themselves. In the early immigration period, Chinese Americans called themselves “overseas Chinese”, which means concentrating on their identities as “Chinese”. However, nowadays, “Chinese American” has become the official term, which emphasizes a dual identity as an “American” who is of Chinese origin. But in the equivalent translation of “Chinese American” in Chinese language, there is still ambiguity in the focus on “American” or on “Chinese”, as it either can be translated as “Chinese who obtain American citizenship” (美籍华人) or “Americans who originates from China” (华裔美国人).

With the rapid growth of Chinese American literature from the 1970s onwards and with wider attention in the United States, also in the academic field in China, including Taiwan, the discussion and critics on Chinese American literary texts have been treated with equal attention, although most of the criticism and journals are in Chinese language. For example, in January 2003, the first Chinese institute which specializes in Chinese American literature – Chinese American Literature Research Center – was established at the School of English and International Studies in Beijing Foreign Studies University in Beijing, China. The centre has been actively promoting the teaching, research, and translation of Chinese American literature and critical works in China, as well as academic exchange, such as inviting well-known Chinese American writers and critics for guest lectures and speeches. In 2008, their first research project - *Chinese American Writers* – was published, joining the collections of other critical works by Chinese scholars, such as Lu Wei’s *走向文化研究的华裔美国文学* (*Towards Cultural Studies - Chinese American Literature*), Li GuiCang’s *文化的重量：解读当代华裔美国文学* (*The Weight of Culture: Interpreting Modern Chinese American Literature*), Shan XingDe’s *銘刻與再現－華裔美國文學與文化論集* (*Inscriptions and Representations: Chinese American Literary and Cultural Studies*),

and so on. Therefore, with the efforts of Chinese scholars and the prominent literary critics in America and Europe, there will be a new era of the development in the study of Chinese American literature, which will investigate more in depth the critical issues raised in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

2.2 Autobiography as a Genre and *The Woman Warrior*

Since *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts* has been published as a non-fiction and considered an autobiography as the “memoirs” in the title suggests, the autobiography as a genre has become an important aspect in the literary and critical debates on this book.

In the Western literary tradition, autobiography is “a narrative account of an extended period of some person’s life, written by, or presented as having been written by, that person; or the practice of writing such works”, as explained in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.⁴ Autobiography is more private, focusing upon the self and the personal development of the protagonist, whereas memoir is “a narrative recollection of the writer’s earlier experiences, especially those involving unusual people, places, or events”, which focus on “notable people and events that the author has encountered, and from the journal or diary in its attempt to produce a connected retrospective account”, and further, it is usually more public and presents the protagonist in his/her social and political context.⁵ Although a memoir is distinguished from an autobiography by its greater emphasis on other people or events, and sometimes by its more episodic structure (which does not need to be limited to

⁴ *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*,
(<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t56.e109&srn=2&ssid=605430164#FIRSTHIT>)

⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*,
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e704&category=>

the personal development of the narrator) the memoir still belong to the genre of autobiographical writing, which are supposed to be non-fictional.

As was mentioned in the previous section, autobiographical writing was one of the earliest literature forms among Chinese immigrants in America. Although it is not a common phenomenon for Asians to write their autobiography, some of them did record their own stories, for different purposes in the USA. Kim points out that “Asian immigrants’ autobiographical writing can provide important insights into the social history of particular groups as well as apt of portrayals of community life” (1982, 91). In addition, from an intra ethnic point of view, their autobiographies can also be valued as “a means of preserving memories of a vanishing way of life, and hence of celebrating cultural continuity and identity; in an interethnic perspective, however, the element of display, whether intentional or not, is unavoidable” (Skandera-Trombley 1998, 157). Therefore, sometimes, some parts of the history of Asian Americans have been revealed precisely because of the publication of their autobiographical texts. For example, the autobiographies of Japanese Americans reveal the change of their social status in America and thus often reflect American racism – how they were interned into camps and lost millions of dollars of personal belongings and assets during World War II in the USA (Kim 1982, 74).

Since *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts* has been published as a non-fiction and considered an autobiography as the “memoirs” in the title suggests, the autobiography as a genre has become an important aspect in the literary criticism, even critical debates, on the book. In fact, as Grice et al. note, “much of this critical debate has centered upon the book’s troubling generic status” (2001, 164). As Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* is featuring in Chinese American tradition of assimilation narratives and also influenced by Chinese patriarchal

tradition, I would like to investigate how does Kingston's text differ from Western autobiographical genre. Therefore, in this section, I will firstly review some previous critical comments on this book concerning autobiography as a genre. Then I will analyze the features of writing style of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, particularly based on the debate on the book about the "truth" and "fiction" elements regarding autobiographical writing.

As previously mentioned, Kingston was accused by critics for issues related to autobiographical accuracy, cultural authenticity, and ethnic representativeness. For example, male writers and critics like Frank Chin accused Kingston for "reinforcing white fantasies about Chinese Americans" (Talbot, qtd. in Grice et al 2001, 165), and Ben Tong comments on this book that it is a "fashionable feminist work written with white acceptance in mind" (1997, 6). Some critics even scold its publisher – Knopf – for categorizing *The Woman Warrior* as a biography for commercial reasons when it was "self-evidently fictional" (Chan 1977, 41).

In fact, these arguments do not only refer to Kingston's works, but also to other Chinese and Asian American writers. Frank Chin, together with Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, write in the "Introduction" of *The Big AIIIEEEEE!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* that

Here, we offer a literary history of Chinese American and Japanese American writing concerning the real and the fake. We describe the real, from its sources in the Asian fairy tale and the Confucian heroic tradition, to make the work of these Asian American writers understandable in its own terms. We describe the fake - from its sources in Christian dogma and in Western philosophy, history, and literature - to make it clear why the more popularly known writers such as Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, and Lin Yutang are not represented here. Their work is not hard to find. The writers of the real are very hard to find . . . (Chin et al. 1991, xv)

Chin et al. question the literary authenticity of Kingston's work. Furthermore, they continue to accuse Kingston for the autobiographical accuracy in her writings and claim that Kingston is distorting Chinese culture in order to fulfil the expectations of the stereotype of Chinese Americans according to Western traditions:

With Kingston's autobiographical *Woman Warrior*, we have given up even the pretense of reporting from the real world. Chinese culture is so cruel and she is so helpless against its overwhelming cruelty that she lives entirely in her imagination. It is an imagination informed only by the stereotype communicated to her through the Christian Chinese American autobiography. (Chin et al 1991, 26)

Kingston defends herself that “[a]fter all, I am not writing history or sociology but a ‘memoir’ like Proust” (Chueung 1988, 79), and later, she even titled her fifth book as *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), as a response to Chin's accusation. Still, critics like Frank Chin argue that using faulty knowledge of “true” history and “real” literary tradition make her work a “false” work.

In my opinion, Chin's criticism of Kingston, particularly of *The Woman Warrior*, is troubling for several reasons. Firstly, Kingston's writing style is very unique and thus it is more difficult to identify the genre of *The Woman Warrior*. Second, I would argue this: to what extent are fictional elements tolerable and acceptable in autobiography? And how should we define autobiographical writing?

There are two reasons why *The Woman Warrior* is hard to label. First, although the narrative is chronological to some extent, the content of the book lacks a closely integrated plot. In other words, it is not “chronological” in the way that autobiography typically are. There are five chapters in the book, and each chapter mainly tells a story of women in Kingston's family. However, these stories are comparatively independent from each other. Second, although Kingston does write about her own life story, such as her childhood experiences, her college life and her career as a writer later and reveals her own thoughts and inner world in her writing,

she mostly presents important fragments of her life - but does not provide a general and continuous narrative and description covering all the important aspects of her life, such as religion, love, marriage, friendship, and others. Thus, this writing structure seems to be very different from traditional Western autobiography and memoirs.

Furthermore, Kingston admits that the main sources of information for her books are her mother's tales and her father's experiences, together with her own memories and imagination. However, she also admits that she employs writing techniques that combine truth and fiction in an autobiographical form. As Grice et al. have noted, "[*The Woman Warrior*] blends elements of several genres (fiction, myth, auto/biography and memoir) together, in a manner which is not easily categorized" (2001, 165).

The book was published as a "non-fiction" and considered a "memoir", however, it challenges the definition of a memoir and autobiography: does the autobiography describe facts or represent fictional facts? Although autobiography is subjective writing, where the subjective "I" selectively tells stories of life in order to present and sometimes even to rebuild the image of "myself", to what extent can the fictional elements exist together with the facts? In fact, there have been debates about the relationship between facts and fictional facts of autobiography since the publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Today, the pure accuracy of autobiography seems to be no longer the key element in the research on autobiography.

Ultimately, because of the postmodern and consciously fragmented plot of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's highly personal autobiographical writing is very Western in character, which represents the emergence of an individual voice, especially a woman's voice. She is well aware that her autobiography is very subjective as she

only presents her version of events, but not the version which needs to be approved by the entire Chinese-American community. In addition, Kingston is also very aware of her interpretation of facts. For example, at the beginning of the last chapter, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” Kingston confesses that her version of events is not only her own, but also her own interpretation of what she heard from others, as their “version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs” (Kingston, 147). While other autobiographers tend to present their life stories as factual, Kingston uses her experience, understanding, interpretation, as well as imagination, to illustrate her life and reveal the underlying “truth”. By stressing her subjective perspective in the memoir writing, and also being aware of its limitations, Kingston does, in a way, prove the “authenticity” of her book.

2.3 Asian American Feminism

Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* is a unique and successful literary work of the 1970s in the United States. Among the many features of the book, one which made it popular is the ethnic identity of the author – a Chinese American female, who tells the stories of female Chinese Americans. As *The Woman Warrior* is a narrative of a feminist who has an ethnic background, therefore, by narrating their silences and voices she expresses the oppression of Chinese American women and also represents their feminist awareness as minority Americans. Because of the differences in ethnic, social, historical and cultural backgrounds, the development of Asian American feminism differs greatly from the white mainstream feminist movement in the United States.

Before discussing the contents of Asian American feminism, it is perhaps useful to define the term “feminism” and present some background knowledge of the

feminist movements in the United States. “Feminism”, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is “the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes” (Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2008). In fact, feminism can be understood in two different senses. On the one hand, feminism can be understood as “theory” – “systems of concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women’s situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them”; on the other hand, feminism can also be understood as a kind of “social movement, one that may generate and be aided by theory” (Frye 2000, 195). Both of them share the idea that “women controlling adequate resources ... live well” (Frye 2000, 195). Particularly in the sense of “movement”, feminism becomes a social and historical phenomenon. When women are oppressed by social arrangements, there are tendencies among women to resistance, rebellion, and creative alternative world-making. At a certain time and place, when the tendencies intensify, they become a “movement” – “a pattern of acts and happenings that is recognizable in its context as a force oriented to critiquing and substantially changing those social arrangements” which may “generate historic change, and subside or become diffuse again over time” (Frye 2000, 196).

In general, the history of feminist movements can be divided into three periods, or “waves” (Krolokke 2006, 1). The first wave refers to the feminist movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly with the Suffrage movement, such as women’s rights of voting, inheritance, access to education and the job market (2). The second wave of feminist activity began in the early 1960s and lasted through the late 1980s and it mainly dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities, such as childcare, abortion, job market etc. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as “deeply politicized” and

reflective of a “sexist structure of power”. If first-wave feminism focused upon women’s political rights, such as suffrage, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination. The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan “The Personal is Political” which became synonymous with the second wave. In fact, second-wave feminists saw women’s cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures. (Krolokke 2006, 7-14)

The third wave of feminism, starting from early 1990s and lasting until now, is seen as a continuation and a response to the perceived failures of the second wave, though Black feminism and Asian American feminism, appeared before 1990s, started to emerge already in the 1970s. During this period, ethnic, sexual, and identity issues obtained more attention, and feminist writers and critics rooted in the second wave like Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other feminists of color, started to call for a new subjectivity in feminist voice. They sought to negotiate prominent space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities. They focus on the intersection between race and gender, for example, on the double marginalization issue – that they act both as a woman and as an ethnic minority woman. The intersection between race and gender remained prominent through the Hill-Thomas hearings in the U.S., but began to shift with the Freedom Ride 1992. This drive to register voters in poor minority communities was surrounded with a rhetoric that focused on rallying young feminists. For many, the rallying of the young is the emphasis that has stuck within third wave feminism (Krolokke 2006, 15-20).

During the history of the feminist movements, women of the United States have always been in a pioneer position. However, many of them have been white middle-class women, although already in year 1851 Sojourner Truth, a daughter of slaves, delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman” speech at Women’s Rights Convention in Ohio, which represented women of other ethnicities and classes, and thus enlarged the definition of “feminism” (“Feminism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*). From the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the collapse of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia to the women in former European colonies and the Third World have proposed “post-colonial” and “Third World” versions of feminist ideology. Some postcolonial feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, criticize U.S. and Western European feminists for being ethnocentric and isolationist. Some prominent U.S. feminists, for example, Angela Davis and Alice Walker, have shared this view. Among them, one of the most vocal critics of the women’s liberation movement has been African American feminist and intellectual bell hooks, who argues that this movement glossed over race and class and thus failed to address “the issues that divided women”. She highlighted the lack of minority voices in the women’s movement in her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984).

Being part of feminism of colour, Asian American feminism shares similarities with African American feminism. As Caroline Chung Simpson points out in her book review on *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (1999) “...the apparent solidarity of the early Asian American studies movement was often achieved at the neglect of Asian American women ...” (Simpson, 1). Because of the sociohistorical reasons, Asian American women were not involved in the feminist movements as they developed in the US. They were too preoccupied with economic

survival, lacked the language skills to communicate and integrate into the mainstream society, and they were culturally cut off from the white middle class among whom the “feminist consciousness” first developed. In fact, they were not even officially identified as a single group, for example, Asian American women. This relates to many issues in *The Woman Warrior* in connection with “silence” and “voice”. Kingston, as an Asian American feminist, is helping Asian American women find their own voice, their own feminism, and she is, in her way, providing that voice.

Throughout *The Woman Warrior*, it is very obvious that Kingston tries to employ Western feminist ideology to rebel against the patriarchal Chinese American society. She writes about the silent and victimized Chinese women, whose tragic stories result from the traditional patriarchal Chinese culture. She also rewrites the classic Chinese literature to remove the traditional Confucian doctrines on women and creates new Chinese women who demand independence and equality. For example, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston’s Mulan is different from the Mulan in traditional Chinese literature. After she comes back to the village, Kingston’s Mulan emphasizes that “I am the female revenger” (Kingston, 45). Throughout the book Kingston repeatedly shows her detestation towards some Chinese sayings such as “Girls are maggots in the rice”, “It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters” (Kingston, 45). In fact, as Madson points out (2000, 235),

In each of the five sections of the narrative, there is offered a feminine character or a feminine role (daughter, student, warrior, writer) which offers a model of feminine identity; but the effect of this multiplicity of roles is not to clarify but to render identity mysterious...[Kingston] tries to find a voice ...[to] reach an understanding of how women can relate to each other within the terms of a brutally misogynistic Chinese culture and an American culture comprised of conflicting gender values.

Indeed, Kingston does promote Asian American feminism through *The Woman Warrior*. In addition, as Madson continues to state, the emergence of Asian American

feminists, as well as other feminists of color, raises the feminist issue of “double consciousness”, which is distinct from the traditional theoretical perspective: “the perceived contradiction between what one is in oneself and the cultural image imposed by the racism of others, a contradiction that prevents women of color achieving full subjectivity or selfhood. In literary terms, these issues make urgent the problem of constructing a feminist ‘voice’ with which women of color can articulate their experiences both in literary and theoretical discourses” (Madson 2000, 213-214).

3. Silence

In this chapter, I will focus on interpreting the theme of silence in *The Woman Warrior*. First, I will analyse the meaning of silence as a reflection of early Chinese immigrants and their community. Second, I will focus on the silence of two individual characters – No-name Woman and Moon Orchid, as silence can also be seen a symbol of female victimization in patriarchal Chinese culture and society.

At the opening of the book, Kingston begins the memoir with her mother's remark on being silent: "You must not tell anyone...what I am about to tell you" (1981, 3). Indeed, silence is a constant theme in *The Woman Warrior* and it appears in every chapter of the book. In addition, by analyzing Kingston's narrative we can see that silences have multiple layers of implication. On the one hand, Kingston describes the silences of the individuals in her family, such as No-name Woman, her aunt Moon Orchid, the silence of her own childhood and other Chinese girls, her friends and playmates in school. On the other hand, in the background description and the setting of the book, Kingston also very often describes the majority of Chinese immigrants as mute. These individual silences reflect the silence of the whole Chinese American community, even the early Chinese immigrants in the United States. Thus, silence in a way characterizes the life of early Chinese immigrants in the United States as well as the life of their descendents.

Furthermore, Kingston is focusing on telling the stories of Chinese women in *The Woman Warrior*. Among them, some female characters in *The Woman Warrior* share similar features – silence and tragedy. Therefore, the silences embedded in the stories have deeper meanings: they reveal the misogynist Chinese culture and they represent the oppression of Chinese American women by both Chinese traditions and

white racist American society. In addition, they are also associated with the female victimization caused by misogynist ideology.

3.1 Silence as Reflection of Early Chinese Immigrants and Their Community

Here, I will interpret the silence in *The Woman Warrior* from a sociohistorical perspective. I will focus on the reasons which cause Chinese Americans' silence, from their work and working conditions in the US, the social and economical problems and the ethnic dilemma to the legal discrimination they have confronted.

One of the characteristics of minority literature is that the authors do not only write about their individual selves, but often also about their ethnic groups and community. This is true of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. In this book, in the stories of herself, her mother Brave Orchid, and her aunt Moon Orchid, Kingston also presents Chinatown and the Chinese immigrants in the US as the background. From her descriptions, it is obvious that the Chinese-Americans are very often marked by silence. Silence does not only indicate the social, economic, and legal discrimination Chinese Americans have faced, but it also reflects the tearful history and the unjustified treatment of the Chinese Americans. In fact, before Kingston's book, the history of Chinese Americans and their living conditions remained blank and neglected in the United States, even though Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) was very popular. Since the publication of the *The Woman Warrior* and her second book *China Men*, there have been more and more attention and studies on these issues. In this sense, Kingston's works also have an important value from a historical perspective.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston narrates touching stories of early Chinese American immigrants. Indeed, the history of Chinese Americans in the US has been

filled with hardship and tears. Although the Chinese started to immigrate to American from the mid-1840s, and contributed greatly to the construction of modern America, for example, to the construction of railways and plantations, they were not treated equally. In fact, the Chinese have been the only race who was excluded from American citizenship according to “The Chinese Exclusion Act”. The silence in the Chinatown and the silence of individual Chinese immigrants in Kingston’s book reflect the influence of this Act.

As Cheung points out, “Chinese American silences ... were reinforced by anti-Asian immigration laws” (1988, 163). Indeed, the Chinese immigrants’ lives were hard and depressing in America because of the effects of “The Chinese Exclusion Act”. On May 6, 1882, “The Chinese Exclusion Act” was passed in the United States. As the only major restriction on free immigration in U.S. history, this act excluded Chinese labourers from entering the country till 1893, and this Act also made Chinese immigrants permanent aliens by excluding them from U.S. citizenship (Gordon 1944, 237-58). In addition, the Act also affected seriously the Chinese who were already in the United States in that any Chinese who left the United States had to obtain certifications for re-entry. So the Chinese who were in America could not re-enter US if they went back to China to visit their family.⁶ Therefore, Chinese men in the U.S. had little chance of reuniting with their wives or of starting families in their new home. Gradually the Chinese community in the US became a “bachelor” society.

Meanwhile, once the Chinese immigrants obtained American citizenship after “The Chinese Exclusion Act” was abolished, their children could immigrate to the US legally according to the American law. However, as most of the Chinese in America left their wives in China, they could not have their own children in the US. Thus,

⁶ From “Chinese Exclusion Act”, accessed available at:
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/chinese_exclusion_act.htm

there is the famous “paper son” phenomenon in Chinese American history: some people pretended to be the sons of the Chinese who were already in America in order to immigrate to America as well. These “paper son” and their families have to keep their secrets, because otherwise they would be sent back to China. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston writes about the silence in Chinese community in the US that every Chinese family has an unspoken secret, that “the Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence” (Kingston, 18), and “The emigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names” (13). These refer to the “paper son” phenomenon that some Chinese immigrated to America with fake names and identities. The Chinese Americans have to keep silent in order to survive. “Don’t tell,” the narrator’s parents repeatedly admonish. They worry so much that they command their children, even though their children do not know the secrets. They have lived under heavy pressure because of fear. The parents are not only afraid of the white Americans, who are so different from the Chinese, but also afraid of being sent back to China, where there was famine and civil wars and they would have died either of hunger or of military draft.

However, life in the US is not any better for them. Kingston describes how the Chinese are having tough and arduous lives: “[t]hose in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home” (13). Dying in a foreign country without being able to return to the motherland is considered a real tragedy by Chinese people. As a Chinese idiom says, “falling leaves settle on the roots”, which represents the desire of a person residing elsewhere longing to return to his ancestral home eventually. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston’s mother Brave Orchid only meets her sister Moon Orchid when she is sixty-eight years old, after

thirty years since she left China, and her father is “the only brother [to No-name Woman who] never went back to China” (17). In fact, Kingston’s parents have not been able to visit China since they have immigrated to America, although they do want to, as they care about the news about China, wait anxiously for the letters from home (in China), worry about their relatives living in China and celebrate together with them for happiness. That is also the reason why Kingston and other American-born Chinese children have very vague ideas about the real “China” since their cultural heritage is passed from their parents, without first-hand experiences. Thus, understanding the sociohistorical background is very important if we want to understand Kingston’s book, as law and legal issues have silenced the generation of the narrator’s parents. .

Indeed, as it is discussed above, the silence of the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese community partly results from the Chinese Exclusion Act. In fact, this silence reveals the discrimination the Chinese American face as a minority group in American society. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston mentions the unfair treatment the Chinese immigrants face, which further deepened the silence of Chinese Americans. In Chapter 2, “White Tigers”, Kingston tells about her early work experience in America. When she is working in an art shop, her boss uses “nigger yellow” to refer to one paint color. Kingston is silent and weak in defending her race, “I don’t like that word,’ I had to say in my bad, small person’s voice that makes no impact” (50). Later, she works in a land developer’s association. When they choose to host a company banquet in a restaurant picketed by CORE and the NAACP, Kingston “refuse[s] to type these invitations” (NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, CORE - The Congress of Racial Equality) in a “whispered”, “unreliable” voice (50), and loses her job immediately. Therefore,

silence, which stands for the powerless, reflects the oppression Chinese Americans shoulder under the racial discrimination in the United States.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston also describes the Chinese immigrants' work in the US. For instance, in the chapter "At the Western Palace", the narrative of the workload and the working conditions of the laundry business of Brave Orchid and her family is told in a fairly vivid manner: they rise at 6 am to begin a day's work; their children are taking shifts in the laundry besides going to school; they sleep on the ironing tables in the laundry during busy time, and so on. From these descriptions, it is not difficult to notice that the heavy workloads and harsh working conditions are another reason for the Chinese immigrants being silent. As historian Ronald Takaki notes in *Strangers from a Different Shore*, "The Chinese were located in a different sector of the labor market from whites. By 1920s, 58 percent of the Chinese were in services, most of them in restaurant and laundry work, compared to only 5 percent for native whites and 10 percent for foreign whites" (1989, 240). The restaurant and laundry work is hard, which is the reason why there are fewer white people in these industries. Take the laundry work as an example: "[t]he typical workload for the laundry worker was six and a half days a week, thirteen to fifteen hours a day", and the daily routine of work "starts at 8:00 a.m., but did not close until 11.30p.m.", as recorded in the document from socialist Paul Siu (Talbot, qtd. in Yuan, 8). A heavy work load makes people silent, particularly under poor working conditions - the hot air from the ironing machine, the danger of work injuries, and the insecurity of the future. However, in this business, women and men are equal in sharing the workload and hardness. Therefore, as Cheung points out, "[s]ilence runs even deeper in the work of minority women" (1988, 163). Brave Orchid is a good example. She proudly claims that "I have not stopped working since the day the ship landed. I was on my

feet the babies were out” (122). And, it is true that her silence when she is at the work in the laundry business is an obvious contrast of her loud voice when she is in China.

Besides political reasons and the immigrants’ work and working conditions, Kingston also focuses on presenting the image of her mother - Brave Orchid. Before moving to America, Brave Orchid was a successful doctor in China. However, because of her disability in mastering English, she has to become a manual worker in the US, as most of the other Chinese immigrants. In addition, the busy manual work occupies the Chinese immigrants’ lives so that they do not have time and interest in the community and politics. Facing the significant change in work and social status, Brave Orchid becomes silent. Thus, the language barrier is also another reason causing the silence of Chinese immigrants.

In addition, because of the lack of language skills, most of the first-generation Chinese immigrants cannot communicate with local people in English so they have to keep silent, limit their lives to such a small space, Chinatown. Living physically separated from the mainstream society, they appear silent towards outsiders – the mainstream society, and stay with other Chinese immigrants: they create Chinatowns, they communicate in Chinese languages, and they try to educate their children in Chinese schools. Like Moon Orchid notices when she lands in America, “so this is the United States. I’m glad to see the Americans talk like us.” Replies Brave Orchid: “These are the overseas Chinese” (124). Therefore, for a very long time, although the Chinese immigrants have lived in America and made significant contribution to America’s economical development, and although they have physically loud voices, as Kingston comments, “[t]he immigrants I know have loud voices, unmodulated to American tones even after years away from the village where they called their

friendships out across the fields” (18), the Chinese and their community have been mute in front of the mainstream society. Therefore, the Chinese remain mysterious to the white Americans.

Besides the silence of the first-generation Chinese immigrants, in the last chapter “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”, Kingston concentrates on her own life as a second-generation Chinese American, an American-born Chinese, whose childhood is also marked with silence. Moreover, she also describes a “quiet Chinese girl”, another child of Chinese immigrants who keeps silence all her life. Based on these stories, it is important to notice that although the children of Chinese immigrants are different from their parents they still share the same feature – silence, which is mainly caused by Chinese Americans’ ethnic dilemma. As Kingston writes, “Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (13)

For these American-born Chinese, although they grow up with their parents’ “talk-story” that explain Chinese traditions and culture, go to Chinese school in the evening, eat Chinese food and are able to speak Chinese language, they receive an American education and they are deeply influenced by American culture. China, their remote ancestry country, is only a cultural symbol in their minds, a place where the “talk-stories” happen. Just as the narrator confesses, “[t]hose of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America” (13). When their parents are under the heavy pressure from work and political issues, they do not have patience to

explain everything to their children, and sometimes, they behave rudely to their children, as Kingston remarks: "...adults get mad, evasive, and shut you up if you ask." Without personal experience and close contact with China, they are confused about Chinese traditions, which are so different from American ones. Kingston notes:

[Y]ou get no warning that you shouldn't wear a white ribbon in your hair until they hit you and give you the sideways glare for the rest of the day. They hit you if you wave brooms around or drop chopsticks or drum them. They hit you if you wash your hair on certain days, or tap somebody with a ruler, or step over a brother whether it's during your menses or not. You figure out what you got hit for and don't do it again if you figured correctly...I don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. Maybe they didn't; maybe everyone makes it up as they go along. If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death.

Indeed, Chinese culture is mysterious to these American-born Chinese, as there are many taboos and complicated issues which are difficult to explain, and many aspects of cultural life are unspeakable, such as sex. In addition, their parents do not have the time and patience to explain everything clearly to their children, but simply use physical punishment to make their children remember. Therefore, these Chinese American children are more confused with Chinese culture and traditions, and begin to have a negative attitude towards them which furthermore deepen their confusion of identity and this leading to silence.

Because they are unfamiliar with Chinese culture and traditions, the Chinese Americans are in an ethnic dilemma: on the one hand, they other themselves from Chinese culture in order to acquire American recognition; on the other hand, they are still othered by the mainstream American society.

As I noted earlier, since Chinese Americans are born in the United States and educated in American schools, they are much influenced by American values and

culture. Although their parents have tried to maintain their cultural heritage and educate them in Chinese evening school, it is still difficult for them to find recognition from Chinese culture. Towards Chinese culture and civilization, they are outsiders, although they have Chinese appearance physically. In addition, because they have no first-hand experience of China, and they are so much influenced by American ideology, the image of “China” that they present is not always true and authentic, and sometimes it is very strange. For example, in Kingston’s description, she writes that

All the village were kinsmen, and the titles shouted in loud country voices never let kinship be forgotten... Any man within visiting distance would have been neutralized as a lover – ‘brother’, ‘younger brother’, ‘older brother’ – one hundred and fifteen relationship titles” ...“Parents researched birth charts probably not so much to assure good fortune as to circumvent incest in a population that has but one hundred surnames. Everybody has eight million relatives. How useless then sexual mannerisms, how dangerous (18) ...

Marriage promises to turn strangers into friendly relatives – a nation of siblings. (19)

Obviously, Kingston understands little about the complicated addressing system in Chinese culture - that children address their parents’ friends as uncles and aunts, and adults address their close friends as brothers and sisters. She is annoyed by the Chinese way of greeting each other with loud and warm voices. That is partly the reason why in *The Woman Warrior* she sometimes writes about China in such a critical way and with a hostile attitude.

However, no matter how hard Chinese Americans want to be recognized as Americans and be part of the society, they are still “othered” by the mainstream society. Racial feature is one of the reasons. To the white Americans, the black hair, black eyes and yellow skin are the features of Chinese Americans. They may say “you speak good English” in order to be friendly, but towards American-born Chinese, this is an insult, as it shows that they are not accepted as Americans even if they were born

in America and have grown up there. Furthermore, Chinese people are seen to refuse to assimilate as the Chinese have strong cultural heritage and traditions. Kingston mentions some such details of her family - how they are different from white Americans. Her mother plants vegetable gardens rather than lawns, “she carries the odd-shaped tomatoes home from the fields and eats food left for the Gods” (13), “she will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life” (13); and “Chinese do not smile for photographs. Their faces command relatives in foreign lands – ‘Send money’ – and posterity for ever – ‘Put food in front of this picture.’ My mother does not understand Chinese-American snapshots. ‘What are you laughing at?’ she asks” (58). From her narrative, it is obvious that the Chinese Americans still keep their own life style, which is very different from the mainstream American way, although they have been living in America for many years.

Thus, if physical hardship and external factors are one aspect causing the silence of Chinese Americans, the inner spiritual suffering, which is a result of the ethnic dilemma, aggravates their silence at the same time. As pioneers, although their bodies are in America, their spirits are vacillating between Chinese culture and American values. This phenomenon becomes especially serious among their children, the American-born Chinese, who have no firsthand knowledge of China. They are American-born Chinese, who have Chinese appearance but American culture inside: they are commonly named as “banana”, as they are yellow outside and white inside. If the silence of their parents’ generation is mainly because of the struggle to survive, theirs is more related to the confusion of identity. This confusion of identity is also a reason causing their silence, particularly during their childhood. As Kingston describes in *The Woman Warrior*, this silence exists in many Chinese American kids, such as the “silent girl”, Kingston’s classmate, who has never said anything, even

when she is grown up; and Kingston's sister, who was also silent for three years. Kingston herself also has this silent period. In her own childhood, she was silent for a quite long time and refused to say anything. As she narrates, "my silence was thickest – total – during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint... layers of black cover houses and flowers and suns..." (149). However, later she begins to speak again, and moreover, she finds writing as another way to speak, which symbolizes that she has solved her identity problem, established a new identity – as a Chinese American, and she begins to claim the rights of the Chinese American. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In summary, by using silence, Kingston describes the Chinese immigrants' life in America. Interpreting silence reveals Chinese immigrants hard work and harsh working conditions in the US, reveals the social and economical problems they had, the ethnic dilemma they process, and the legal discrimination they have faced.

3.2 Silence as symbol of female victimization

In this section, I will focus on the analysis of two of the most important silent female figures in *The Woman Warrior* – Kingston's aunt the No-name Woman, and her other aunt Moon Orchid, who share similar silent features and tragic destinies, although their tragedies are caused by different reasons. I will examine the root of their tragedies – the misogyny and sexist attitudes in Chinese culture.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston does not only present the situation of the community of Chinese Americans. As an Asian American feminist, Kingston has placed specific emphasis on Chinese women's lives in *The Woman Warrior*. As Cheung points it out in "“Don't Tell”: Imposed Silence in *The Colour Purple* and *The Woman Warrior*" (1988, 163), "Women authors and feminist critics have been

unusually vocal on the theme of silence” where silence is used as an “artistic tool”, as “imposed invisibility”, and as the “reticence enjoyed upon women”. Furthermore, the theme of silence runs even deeper in the work of minority women writers.

Indeed, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston describes the silence of many female characters, from her No-name aunt, who is forbidden to be mentioned by her family, to her aunt Moon Orchid, who is neglected by her husband and voiceless in suffering, to Kingston herself, who was silent during her adolescence. In addition, Kingston also describes the tragic lives of many other Chinese women in Chinese culture. It is obvious that silence is often associated with the victimization of women, particularly with the anti-female prejudice in Chinese culture.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston begins the narrative with the tragedy of No-name Woman, the aunt on her father’s side, who is deliberately forgotten by the family as a humiliation. The No-name Woman’s tragic life begins in her marriage. She barely knows her husband before marrying him, because it is a “hurry-up wedding - just to make sure that every young man who went ‘out on the road’ would responsibly come home” (11). In fact, her family found the husband for her, and her wedding night is the first time she meets her husband. Although she is lucky that he is her age and she is the first wife, she does not have a happy family life. Her husband leaves for America so soon after the marriage that she has almost forgotten what he looks like. Then she has an affair, which is not because of lust, according to the narrator: “to be a woman...in starvation time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex” (14).

Although Brave Orchid does not tell how the No-name Aunt becomes pregnant, Kingston invents several versions, one of which is that her aunt comes to the adultery on her own initiative because her happiness is out of reach after her

husband is absent. But in a patriarchal society, a woman's virtue is above her life, and adultery is forbidden. So the price for it is to die and to be forgotten. Kingston assumes "some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil" (14). However, "the other man was not...much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed" (14). In Kingston's imagination, the aunt is forced to keep silent again: "if you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you" (14). She has no choice but to suffer. When her adultery is discovered as she can not hide her pregnancy, the villagers destroy the family home as a punishment for her. The No-name Woman could have revealed the man's name as revenge, but she chooses to protect the father of her child by her silence: "[s]he kept the man's name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth" (18). This behaviour clearly victimizes her. After giving birth in a pigsty, she kills herself and the baby by drowning in the family well, although she "would protect this child as she had protected for its father" (21). Kingston writes that "carrying the baby to the well shows loving", because the mother knows that the child would not have any future. "It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys" (21). Here she clearly points towards the anti-female prejudice in traditional Chinese culture. However, the real punishment is not the raid and the hatred of the villagers, but her own family deliberately forgetting her. The No-name Woman's tragedy is caused by the negative influence of traditional Chinese culture and is also the result of a particular period in history as she could not travel with her husband to the USA. Kingston states clearly that "adultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food" (19). However, Chinese women are always victims, no matter whether they are guilty or not.

For over fifty years, Kingston's family tries to erase all memory of the No-name woman, "as if she had never been born" (3). Kingston's mother repeated: "Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her". Moreover, she uses it as a lesson for little Kingston: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The Villagers are watchful" (13). This behavior, on the one hand, is to keep Kingston's family reputation among the Chinese American community, as Kingston points out, "I have thought that my family, having settled among immigrants who had also been their neighbors in the ancestral land, needed to clean their name, and a wrong word would incite the kinspeople even here" (22).

However, on the other hand, this "silencing" of living also implies a deeper meaning, the real and cruelest punishment for a human being. Kingston realizes it only later after many years: "they want me to participate in her punishment. And I have" (22). Indeed, the real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her, as family is highly valued in Chinese culture. As Cheung comments, "to expunge her name, to delete the memory of her life, is perhaps the cruelest repudiation her kin could devise" (164). In old China, No-name Woman is a weak figure, who cannot defend herself and her innocent child. Therefore, the helpless and discarded woman has only one way to protest – to die. As Connolly asserts, "[t]o die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death of one's own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and joyfulness, consummated in the midst of children and witnesses; so that an actual leave taking is possible while he who is leaving is still there. From love of life one ought to desire to die freely, consciously, not accidentally, not suddenly overtaken..." (1991, 164). No-name Aunt's death is an act of "dignity under

pressure,” an act of keeping her self integrated. Although silence marks her tragic life as a victim, however, her silence is also the speechless revolt of a woman against the patriarchal society.

Another female victim related to silence is Kingston’s other aunt, her mother’s sister Moon Orchid. Moon Orchid moves to America from Hong Kong to look for her husband, who left China thirty years ago. Although he is not a totally irresponsible husband, as “for thirty years she had been receiving money from him from America” (114), he has no intention to take her to America, not even after he has established a successful career as a doctor in the United States. On the other hand, Moon Orchid is silent: she has never revealed to him her wish to come to the United States, as she “waited for him to suggest it, but he never did” (114). When her sister – Brave Orchid – brings Moon Orchid to visit her husband to “claim” her right as the first wife, her husband refuses to admit her because he has remarried and already has a new family. He speaks English with his new wife, his patients are white Americans, and, as he says, “I’m living like [an] American” and he doubts Moon Orchid will “fit into an American household” (139). When they meet finally in America, after thirty years, he greets her only with cold interrogations ““What are you doing here?”” and ““Why are you here?” ”, and questions her intention: ““What do you want””? Moon Orchid shrank from his stare; “it silenced her crying” (138-139). Confronted with his stare, Moon Orchid does not continue to accuse her husband and claim her rights as a wife. Facing this situation, Moon Orchid can only “open and shut her mouth without any words coming out” (138). It is her weakness that ruins her. She dare not say a word or claim the right as the first wife when facing such a husband as that who has “made her a widow” (139). Moon Orchid even smothers her crying, just like a child threatened into silence after his/her wrong-doing. She becomes insane eventually.

Obviously, the main reason for Moon Orchid's tragedy is her personality: she has no strength to defend herself, no power to fight back, and no courage to claim the rights belonging to her. These result from the yoke of the feudal ethical code on Chinese women during a long period of history. As Kingston comments at the end, "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity" (166). Indeed, silence here implies the oppression and suffering of Chinese women as victims over a long period in a male-dominated society.

From her two aunts' tragic lives, Kingston is aware that a woman is doomed to be victim if she is dependent. Only by bringing her fate under her own control can she manage to claim her rights and live in dignity. The tragedies of No-name Woman and Moon Orchid consists of their blind obedience – they are unable to possess their own selves. Tracking the root, these tragedies are caused by sexism and misogyny in Chinese culture.

When pointing out the miserable life of the two women, Kingston castigates patriarchy mercilessly. No-name Woman's adultery is exposed to the villagers' raid and family's renouncing, but her uncle, Moon Orchid's husband, marries an American woman in defiance of the existence of his Chinese wife. No-name Woman's behaviour is viewed as a crime and her name is taken away from the family tree, while her uncle's remarriage does not provoke any public accusation. His duty to the Chinese wife is no more than offering her some money: "[y]ou go live with your daughter. I'll mail you the money I've always sent you" (138). In his sense, it seems that he has done his duty to his wife, and Moon Orchid's madness has nothing to do with him. By representing the sharp contrasts, Kingston conveys her assailing of patriarchy. The old feudal China is dominated by Confucianism that advocates male superiority and female inferiority. Kingston's father is such an ardent advocate that he

conveys the idea in his speech again and again. He says, “Chinese smeared bad daughter-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ant nests. A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that” (173). Guided by such a thought, a man is free to do what he wants – to marry as many concubines as he likes – while a woman has to follow “three obediences and four virtues”: she must obey her father before marriage, her husband after marrying, then her sons after her husband’s death. The four virtues set up a series of rules for her practice. First, she should know her position and behave according to the natural law of things. Second, she should guard her words, and not speak too much or bore others. Third, she should be dressed well and cleanly to please men. Finally, she should not avoid her family duties. The No-name Woman breaks the second obedience and the first virtue. As a wife of a migrant, she is not only a practical widow, but also has the duty to serve her husband’s parents. And most importantly, she has to remain sexually faithful to her absent husband who is free to engage the service of prostitutes or take on new wives in America. Kingston does not describe No-name Aunt’s and Moon Orchid’s situations in China because their loneliness and hardship are beyond words. However, neither husband seems to realize the grievous situation of their wives.

Of course, all these are the corollary of the patriarchy in which women are always inferior and subordinate. Moreover, the misogyny in Chinese culture is also another important factor causing the females’ tragedy. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston also expresses how much she dislikes the misogynist culture. The Chinese saying “there’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls” is repeated again and again in the text, and the saying reveals the value of females in Chinese culture. In addition, Chinese family cherishes boys, and they do not hide the disappointment with girls. When Kingston and her sister go out, the Chinese

neighbours will comment “One girl – and another girl”, and Kingston’s parents are “ashamed to take us out together” (48). Because of the discrimination against women, Kingston works hard to be excellent, in order to make her parents feel proud of her. However, her efforts do not work. As Kingston writes, “I went away to college – Berkeley in the sixties – and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy”; “I was getting straight As for the good of my future husband’s family, not my own” (49). The Chinese believe that “When you raise girls, you’re raising children for strangers” that “Girls are maggots in the rice” and “it is more profitable to raise geese than daughters” (48).

Thus, this male supremacy and misogynist ideology permeates Kingston’s girlhood. She always hears the noisy women sing a folk song that best sums up a woman’s status in family and society, and blind docility in marriage:

“Marry a rooster, follow a rooster.
Marry a dog, follow a dog.
Married to a cudgel, married to pestle,
Be faithful to it. Follow it”. (173)

This song tells the reality of the marriage in old China. In those days, women had no part in deciding their own marriage. In other words, marriage was the beginning of a new but uncertain life. Some women enjoyed a happy life because they were lucky enough to end up marrying a kind husband. However, many others had to endure an unhappy arranged marriage, a tyrannical and cruel mother-in-law or simply the burdens of life itself. Most of them even suffered before they were married into another family. They could not free themselves from their positions as females in a patriarchal culture in China. They could not dedicate themselves to pursuing their life-long goals and make their dreams come true.

Of course some of the narrative related to misogyny in China in *The Woman Warrior* is based on the author’s imagination and her experiences in America. For

example, when Kingston describes her mother buying a slave girl in the market in China, her mother was checking the teeth of all the slave girls. Apparently, this description is influenced by the slave trade in America. Thus, Kingston is trying to tell stories of China which go beyond her knowledge. However, her accusation on Chinese misogyny is true.

As Kingston writes: “Women in old China did not choose” (14). Living in a patriarchal and misogynist culture, women are in a position of being discriminated against and unfairly treated, just as Kingston said, if anything happens or even nothing happens but just gossip, the blame always falls on women. Although discrimination is no longer found in official documents, which always refer to men and women as equal, disregard for women is still in people’s minds even today.

In summary, by using silence, Kingston describes the typical Chinese women living in traditional Chinese culture, women who have no rights in deciding their lives, who have to obey men, and who are victims in the patriarchal society. First, the women who live in the patriarchal society like her No-name Aunt surrender to prejudice and pressures and end up in self-destruction, in a mute protest. Another one is the gentle-wife-and-good-mother pattern. These dependent women are in danger of being abandoned by their husband because of their unconditional obedience. Moon Orchid follows the traditional rules and brings up her children all by herself after her husband goes to the United States. Unexpectedly, her husband greets her with cold interrogation and merciless rejection when she comes to see him after years of separation. Moon Orchid cries to herself without any protest, and finally becomes insane. These two types are the victims of the patriarchy, that there is no other choice for women except death and insanity. If they would be able to break the silence and to speak up, their lives would have been different.

4. Voice

In this chapter, I will interpret the theme of voice in *The Woman Warrior* and examine its different forms, as the voice can be articulation, speaking and expressing one's own opinions, even talk-stories and oral literature which carry the Chinese classic and tradition. In addition, the voice can also be interpreted as writing and even rewriting classic literature in order to deliver a new voice.

Opposite to silence, voice is another important theme in *The Woman Warrior*. Although there is the taboo of "not-tell", Kingston manages to break the silence, narrate her experience and reveal the truth into words. In *The Woman Warrior*, she publishes her No-name aunt's story, which is against her father's order. Furthermore, besides the silent female figures, such as No-name Woman and Moon Orchid, Kingston also describes women who do have voices in *The Woman Warrior*. In addition, the voices take different forms: they do not only appear as the physical sounds and articulation, but also refer to abstract forms, such as oral literature and writing, which represent deeper meanings.

On the one hand, these voices are females' voices. Thus, breaking silence, especially breaking females' silences, is connected with acknowledging female influence and female power. On the other hand, as a second-generation Chinese American, Kingston "is afraid of losing her identity, of being erased or unhinged - as her two aunts have been respectively erased and unhinged - through silence" (Cheung 1988, 164). This makes Kingston recognize the exigency of expression. In fact, in the 1970s, Kingston's represents the newly emerging voice of the Asian-American minority who are struggling to establish their place and identity in America.

4.1 Speaking up

In this subsection, I will analyse the importance of speaking-up as a form of voice. In addition, I will also examine Kingston's mother Brave Orchid, who can be interpreted as the strongest female voice in the text.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the most obvious and significant form of voice is speaking. Kingston herself realizes the importance of articulation from her own experience. At school she is considered retarded by her American teachers, because she is unable to express herself in English in class, in speech or on paper. She writes, “[w]hen I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent (148).... My silence was thickest – total – during the three years that I covered my school painting with black paint” (149). Therefore she was considered retarded and “flunked kindergarten and in the first grade had no IQ – a zero IQ” (164).

In fact, the narrator was not the only silent child. As Kingston writes,

My sister also said nothing for three years, silent in the playground and silent at lunch. There were other quiet Chinese girls not of our family, but most of them got over with it sooner than we did. (149)

One reason that leads to this is the silence deeply rooted in her parents' generation. In addition, being silent or not expressing one's opinion is also regarded as a merit in traditional Chinese culture, as “talking too much is prone to error”. And the narrator's parents try to educate their children according to the traditional Chinese value. However, it is noted that Kingston has a negative attitude towards some parts of Chinese culture, for instance, the description of the cutting of girls' tongues. On this question Kingston admitted in an interview that, partly unconsciously, when she wrote these chapters, she intended to discuss Chinese Americans' attitude towards the

acceptance and rejection of traditional culture.⁷ Apparently, Kingston appears to provide an answer to this question at the end: the quintessence should be kept, but the dross should be abandoned, especially the aspects related to women's rights, their right to speak, and their right to speak up. Therefore she is trying very hard to help the silent Chinese girl in school to talk. She cries: "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality...Talk, please talk" (162).

In addition, the silence of the children of the Chinese immigrants also reflects the racial discrimination they shoulder in America. As Kingston notes, "[t]he other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (150). The narrator recounts how in her second grade their class did a play and "the whole class went to the auditorium except the Chinese girls" (150). Apparently the Chinese students were neglected by the teacher for the play, because their "voices were too soft and nonexistent" (150). The Chinese children do not seem to have many playmates, except Chinese children and black students, as Kingston writes, "I liked the Negro students best because they laughed the loudest and talked to me as if I were a daring talker too" (149). Although they are silent in American school, "some found voices in Chinese school..." (152), where they are able to talk, read, and argue.

Realizing the importance of breaking silence and being able to deliver voice, the narrator's mother sliced the fraenum of the narrator's tongue in order to make her to talk,: "I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another." (148)

However, the difficulties of delivering voice are not related to physical reasons, but to the inner reason: the confusion of their identity. This confusion causes Chinese

⁷ Cited from Cui, Shao Yuan., "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston", *China Reading Newspaper*, 2001, 2. June., [Internet] <http://www.china.org.cn/firbry/2001-6-15/2001-06-15-20.htm>

Americans' silence. Just as Kingston says: "[r]eading out loud was easier than speaking because we did not have to make up what to say..." (150).

They realize they have the urge to be clear of their identity, as being Chinese Americans is different, which is neither Chinese nor American. As Brave Orchid answers her daughter's question that "isn't ready tongue an evil", she replies "Things are different in this ghost country." (148). Indeed, being a Chinese American is different, the difference exists in many aspects, especially in the aspects related to women's rights, their right to speak, and their right to speak up. Therefore she is trying very hard to help the silent Chinese girl in school to talk. She cries: "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality...Talk, please talk" (162).

As Kingston is aware of the importance of women's voice and articulation, besides the silent aunt and No-name Woman, she describes many women characters who are able to, and dare to, express their thoughts by articulation. As said, among them, Brave Orchid represents the strongest voice.

Brave Orchid is an intimidating, tradition-bound mother who in many ways displays the fierce determination, energy and power of the women warriors she often speaks of. At first, her name – Brave Orchid, which is not a common Chinese female's name – reveals her strong will and personality. After she moves to America, she still keeps her original name, as the narrator notes:

Nor did she change her name: Brave Orchid. Professional women have the right to use their maiden names if they like. Even when she emigrated, my mother kept Brave Orchid, adding no American name nor holding one in reserve for American emergencies. (74)

In addition, in many ways, she does not act like a traditional Chinese woman: she disobeys her husband's order and tells the prohibited stories to her daughter; she processes her own career and works hard; she has no fear of men and Western "ghost"

men; and she knows how to defend herself and protect others. For example, when she accompanies her sister Moon Orchid to visit her husband, in answering Moon Orchid's question "What if he hits me?", she replies: "I'll hit *him*. I'll protect you. I'll hit him back" (132). Her own life story represents a strong voice as well, a voice that reveals a brave and respected, powerful, Chinese woman.

Indeed, her own life has been heroic. Her husband emigrated to the United States fifteen years before her, leaving her alone in China. During that time, the couple's two young children died. Unlike the ordinary Chinese women at the time who are mostly housewives with little education, Brave Orchid invests the money received from her husband working in America into education. At the age of 37, lying about her age as 27, she gained admission to a Chinese medical college. After two years of intensive study and hospital practice, she earns a diploma in "midwifery, Paediatrics, Gynaecology, Medicine, [Surgery], Therapeutics, Ophthalmology, Bacteriology, Dermatology, Nursing, and Bandage" (57). She becomes a respected doctor in her village, a heroine in a culture that insisted women could only be wives or slaves. Just as Kingston writes about her proudly, "My mother wore a silk robe and western shoes with big heels, and she rode home carried in a sedan chair. She had gone away ordinary and come back miraculous, like the ancient magician who came down from mountains" (73).

However, when she moves to America, Brave Orchid's life takes a sharp down-turn. As she herself recalls old memories in China, "[s]ome villages brought out their lion and danced ahead of me. You have no idea how much I have fallen coming to America" (74). This sharp transition is because of her lack of professional training in America and language skills, so that she cannot practice medicine. Instead, she works at her husband's side in a laundry, and sometimes labouring as a field hand

harvesting tomatoes. Labour work changes her physical appearance: she was “small in China...[but in America she] can carry a hundred pounds of Texas rice up - and downstairs. She could work at the laundry from six thirty a.m. until midnight, shifting a baby from an ironing table to a shelf between packages, to the display window...” (97). In order to compete with other young laborers, she “dyed her hair so that the farmers would hire her” (97). By the money she earned from hard work, she also supports her relatives in China.

Moreover, at the age of 45 she gives birth to Maxine Hong Kingston, the first of six American-born children. Amazingly, she settles down very quickly into the laundry business and adopts the role of housewife and mother. Brave Orchid once said, “A man’s real partner is the hardest worker” (135) ... I have not stopped working since the day the ship landed. I was on my feet the moment the babies were out. In China I never even had to hang up my own clothes” (97) ... [and later] I can’t stop working. When I stop working, I hurt.” (99) At a senior age, when she would have started to enjoy life, she still has to work hard because of the unequal treatment as an immigrant in America. She said, “Those Urban Renewal Ghosts gave us moving money... It took us seventeen years to get our customers. How could we start all over on moving money, as if we two old people had another seventeen years in us? ... This is a terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away... (97)”. Indeed, fighting with the fate and working hard all time in her life, she uses her own example to prove it, and inspire her children.

As a mother, Brave Orchid does not act like a traditional mother figure, whose role is not only to pass the traditional culture to her children but also to defend the traditions and doctrines. Although she obeys her husband’s order, she is not the traditional Chinese woman and mother. She goes out alone for education, which is a

challenge to the traditional idea that claims a woman's ignorance is a virtue; in school, she moves alone to the ghosts' room and drives them away; in America, she breaks her husband's order on the silencing of the No-name Woman and she encourages her sister to claim her rights as a wife and fight with her husband; she tells her daughters that a woman grows up to be wife and slave, but she tells them also the legend of the woman warrior Fa Mulan. If the story of Fa Mulan is legendary and fantastic, Brave Orchid's life is real and true - she is the incarnation of Fa Mulan. Armed with unyielding spirit, Brave Orchid proves herself a brave and independent woman, a woman warrior in reality, and a role model for her children.

4.2 Talk-story and Oral Literature

In this section, I will focus on the other form of voice in *The Woman Warrior* – the talk-story. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston creates two narrators, the mother and the daughter. Both of them talk stories: Kingston's mother Brave Orchid tells stories to her children when they are little, which are stories of their family, their ancestral country China, and Chinese legends and oral literature; and Kingston also tells stories when she grows up. These stories are different: they are based on the stories from her mother but the mother's stories are embedded within her own stories, thoughts, and they are printed on paper. In this section, I will analyze the different roles of talk-story, as a form of voice, in Kingston's book.

Although the stories in *The Woman Warrior* are in the first person – except the third Chapter “At the Western Palace”, which is in the third person - there are two main narrators of all the stories: the mother Brave Orchid and “I”, Kingston herself. Brave Orchid uses talk stories to her children before sleep, and then “I” tells these stories to others by publication. In fact, “I” is divided into two parts: one is the “I” in

childhood, who listens to her mother talking story and imagines her own story at the same time; and the other “I”, who is a grown-up and able to tell her own stories. Because of the complexity of the narrators, the stories in *The Woman Warrior* are also sophisticated. As Acón Chan (2003, 125) summarizes, Kingston has applied several methods in the talk-stories: narrating parallel stories of different women from different time lines and places; creating her own versions of both Eastern and Western fables; presenting multiple, mutually exclusive versions of female ancestors; dreaming up purely fantastical accounts.

As defined by Kingston, talk-story is “an oral tradition of history, mythology, genealogy, bedtime stories and how-to stories that have been passed down through generations, an essential part of family and community life... [It] is actually part of the ‘low’ or ‘small’ Chinese culture” (Talbot, qtd. Acón Chan 2003, 125-139). Indeed, in *The Woman Warrior*, there is at least one talk-story in every chapter in the book, which is told by Brave Orchid to Kingston when she is a little girl.

Kingston’s mother Brave Orchid is a natural story teller, a “champion talker” (180). Her stories are various and colourful, from the tragic No-name aunt to the mysterious legend of the heroine Fa Mulan; from her own stories of pursuing studies in medical school to scary ghost stories. In addition, the memoir begins and ends with important talk-stories from Brave Orchid: the first one is about No-Name Woman and the last is about Ts’ai Yen, a famous ancient Chinese poetess. Therefore, Brave Orchid’s talk-story is another important form of voice, which has a significant implication in that it does not only carry on the cultural heritage to the new generations of Chinese Americans, but also assists the mother in educating her children.

As we know, the oral and the written literature are two different forms for passing cultural heritage to the next generation. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston uses her mother's talk-story, especially the stories a mother tells to her children, to pass ancient Chinese myths, legends, and literature to the next generation. These stories include the famous Chinese legend of Fa Mu Lan, stories of Yue Fei, another national hero, and poetess Ts'ai Yen. In addition, there are also stories revealing various aspects of Chinese culture, such as ghost stories, and stories about Western Palace and Eastern Palace in Chapter Four, which indicate the polygamy in old China. These stories are very attractive to Western readers. Thus, the talk-story functions as an instrument explaining the Chinese tradition and customs, memorizing the motherland and relatives in China, and disseminating cultural heritage to the American-born Chinese children.

In addition, talk-stories also act as an educational tool in the book. Kingston writes, "Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one..." (13). Indeed, Brave Orchid tells talk-stories also intending to teach her children important life lessons, and to make them behave in a certain way, particularly in a Chinese girl's way. "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to [No-name Woman] could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never born. The villagers are watchful" (13). The stories are powerful lessons in proper Chinese values and behaviour, but they are confusing to Maxine because they are appropriate to her parents' lives in China, a world she has never known first-hand.

As such, the mother's talk stories are both stifling and liberating to Kingston, responsible for many of her fears and insecurities but also providing her with inspiration. Therefore, as a second narrator, and also the key narrator of the book,

Kingston starts to “talk stories” as well. She does not merely repeat her mother’s stories; however, she reconstructs these “talk-stories” and re-tells them in her own way. In the No-name Woman’s story, Brave Orchid recalls the memory of her sister-in-law No-name Woman. She focuses on the punishment of the poor woman from villagers and her own family, in order to teach her children, especially her daughters, to behave properly and follow the virtues. As for Kingston, when “I” tells the story of No-name Woman, she cares more about her aunt’s inner spiritual world. She imagines in what situations her aunt starts adultery and whether she had affection to him; she describes her aunt’s clothing, from colour to style; and she also sets up the scene when No-name Woman gives birth and commits suicide with the baby which is purely imaginary: she tries to portray her aunt’s feminine aspects from a modern female’s point of view. Besides, Kingston also re-tells the traditional Chinese classic folklores, such as Fa Mulan’s story. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

In summary, in “talking story”, and particularly in her own way of re-telling it, Kingston contends with her mother. Kingston is not the traditional daughter, who has a passive role in the mother-daughter relationship and who can only follow her mother’s orders and receive the commands. In Kingston and Brave Orchid’s mother-daughter relationship, the mother educates her daughter by talking stories; her daughter listens the stories, but reconstructs these stories at the same time. In this relationship, the daughter does not play the passive role anymore; on the contrary, she obtains her rights of equality by talking story as well. Therefore, her voice is heard.

If at the beginning Kingston is frequently upset by her mother’s talk-stories, then at the end of the memoir she is more confident and comfortable and she tells Brave Orchid with pride that she is telling talk-stories too. She finds a way to put orality into written form, and connect myth with reality, in addition to her own

experience and understanding. In a symbolic gesture of reconciliation, the memoir also ends with a talk-story that is half Kingston's and half her mother's. "I also am a story-talker. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (184).

4.3 Writing and Written Literature

In this section, I will interpret writing as the third form of voice, an alternative to speech, in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Particularly, I will focus on Kingston's rewriting of one of the classic Chinese ballad Fa Mulan.

Writing, as an alternative to speech, is another kind of voice. As Cheung points out, "The more [women] are ordered to keep quiet, the more irrepressible their urge to cry out, if only on paper" (1988, 164). Indeed, Kingston uses literature as an effective voice to break the prohibition of "not tell" and express her own thoughts. She once said in an interview with Shelley Fisher Fishkin: "My mother says, 'don't tell what I am about to tell you,'" and I think, 'well, I'm not going to 'tell,' I'm just going to write.' And she tells it in Chinese. But what if I told it in English?" (Fishkin 1991, 785). Moreover, Kingston believes that, for a Chinese American, writing is a kind of right, a power, and a new way to be a warrior in society. This power is based on the understanding of her ancestral nation and its history, and the acceptance of the traditions and arts - myths, stories and songs (Cui 2001). Frank Chin also talks about writing as a power in his book, which is part of the social role of a writer. This point of view is symbolically expressed at the end of *The Woman Warrior*.

In the last chapter of the book, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe", Kingston employs a first-person narrative to concentrate on the stories of her own life in different phases: from a quiet, alienated little girl who has difficulties in communicating with others to a rebellious teenager who accuses her mother of

attempting to make her a wife and a slave, then finally to an adult who is embracing her past and finally applying writing as a way of finding a voice. At the end, Kingston uses the story of Ts'ai Yen - an ancient Chinese poetess – as a symbolic metaphor to her own process of finding her own voice and identity. Just like Ts'ai Yen keeps teaching Chinese and singing Chinese songs to her children after being kidnapped by the “barbarians” (There is a tradition in China that foreigners are called “barbarians”, probably because Chinese culture is one of the earliest civilization), Kingston’s mother tells talk-stories to her children; just like Ts'ai Yen uses poetry as a weapon to fight with barbarians, Kingston uses words and stories to rebel against the old patriarchal society and discrimination of women. And just like Ts'ai Yen translates the barbarians’ songs to her own people – Han Chinese – when she returns to her home country, Kingston finally combines American values and traditional Chinese cultural heritages, with the assistance of American language – English, to create a new version of second-generation Chinese American lives, which destroy the Orientalist stereotypes. As Cheung comments, Kingston reshapes her ancestral past to fit her American present, that she “is asserting an identity that is neither Chinese nor white American, but distinctively Chinese American” (1988, 169).

Besides, Kingston also expresses a new voice through the rewriting of classic Chinese literature. The second chapter, “White Tiger”, is the most poetic in the book, and there she creates the impressive heroine Fa Mulan.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston’s Fa Mulan follows a bird away into the mountains, where she starts to practice martial arts with an old couple. The life on the mountain is isolated, and filled with hardship. After fifteen years of training, she returns home and decides to replace her father to be drafted in army. Her parents take her to the family hall and carve “revenge” on her back so that “wherever you go,

whatever happens to you, people will know our sacrifice. And you'll never forget either" (38). During her army years, Fa Mulan marries and even gives birth to a baby. At day time, she makes a sling for the baby inside her big armor and rides to the battlefield; at night, inside her tent, she lets the baby ride on her back. Eventually, the army she leads defeats the enemy. They arrive at the capital Peiping, decapitate the emperor and make the peasant who leads the army the new emperor. After she goes home, Fa Mulan attacks the baron's fortress and takes his life in payment for his crimes against the villagers. Many villagers come to verify the baron's crimes. She then goes to her parents-in-law and her husband and son. Her son goes to welcome her. She and her husband hold a wedding that could not be held during wartime. Fa Mulan says, "Now my public duties are finished. I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons" (50-51).

Kingston's story of Fa Mulan is a re-writing which is based on the classic Chinese folklore "The Ballad of Mulan". Disney studio's "Mulan" is another version of this folktale. This ballad was completed around the fifth or the sixth century, and it was a folklore circulated in China at the time, not only because of its beautiful language, striking images, well-knit structure, and detailed description, but also because of its theme – the admiration towards a daughter, Mulan, who takes her father's place to be drafted. The original ballad consists of 62 lines, which are divided into five parts. The first part explains Mulan's apprehension, decision and preparation. She sighs all the time because her father, who does not have an eldest son, has to be drafted. So she is determined to take his place and prepares herself by buying a horse, saddle, reins, and a whip and so on. The second part describes her trip and her psychological movements. She leaves her family for the battle field, feeling lonely and homesick. The third part, the shortest one, with only 6 lines, turns to her life as a

warrior. In the hard conditions on the battlefield, soldiers fight fiercely and bravely, and many of them are killed. In the fourth part, Mulan returns home from the battlefield. On the way she meets the Emperor and turns down all the awards, only requiring a good horse to go home. The final part narrates Mulan's family-reunion. The whole family celebrate the news that Mulan comes back home. She stays in her room, taking off her helmet and putting on her old feminine dress. Her messmates are all astonished to discover that Mulan is a girl.

From the above contrast, it is obvious to notice that Kingston has invented a new Mulan, who is different from the traditional Chinese figure who does not kill an emperor, does not help found a new dynasty and does not marry in her camp, and her private family life is not mentioned in the Chinese chant in which Mulan does not reveal her gender until after she returns home at the end of the ballad. In fact, the only thing that we can still recognize in the girl as Fa Mulan is that she hides her gender without letting anyone in the army know it. Kingston's new version is full of fantasy and imagination.

In addition, Kingston in fact combines the stories of two Chinese legends, Yue Fei, a male general in Song Dynasty, and Mulan. In the original Chinese source, it is Yue Fei (a Chinese hero during 1103-1141), the male warrior, whose back is tattooed with four Chinese characters: Jing Zhong Bao Guo, which means "be loyal and contribute to motherland". Kingston transfers this ordeal to the woman warrior in order to empower Chinese women. This is not "mis-use of Chinese literature", as Frank Chin criticizes, and Kingston is not "perpetuating racist stereotypes by mixing the autobiography genre with traditional Chinese myth and fantasy" (1974, xxiv). It is a loud voice of a Chinese girl crying out the depression, humiliation sufferings, and anti-female prejudice which are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture.

As a Chinese descendant, Kingston should be very familiar with its contents because her mother tells the ballad to her in her girlhood. Thus, in my opinion, her version of Fa Mulan is not “mis-reading” of Chinese classical literature, but a creative rewriting of the classical folklore. In the 1970s, also white Western feminist writers started to rewrite genre stories, such as Angela Carter in her book *The Bloody Chamber*. As Cranny-Francis notes (1990, 42-43), there are two different aims of feminist writers: firstly, to imagine “otherwise” and to imagine which is “fundamental to change” (42); and secondly, to change the roles of female characters in genre fiction and to change the “conventions of ‘past literature’ which place...female characters...in unremarkable roles” (43). Therefore, to put it another way, Kingston’s Fa Mulan is not the genuine Chinese Fa Mulan anymore, but the new Chinese American Fa Mulan. In recounting the lives of her ancestors in China, Kingston relies on her mother’s talk-stories, but she also fictionalizes many details, and imaginatively reconstructs the lives of her ancestors, in order to make sense of all she has been told, and to express her voice. Just as Cheung comments, “if they are to be nurtured by their cultural inheritance rather than smothered by it, they must learn to reshape recalcitrant myths glorifying patriarchal values” (Cheung, 163).

In addition, Kingston also adds creative elements to the story of Fa Mulan. For instance, the fact that Mulan is married and has children, and when she is pregnant, sometimes enjoys appreciating her pregnant image in the mirror. These details help to enrich and strengthen the image of the female warrior, which is Kingston’s own creation. Besides, the name Fa Mulan is from Kingston’s mother’s Guangdong dialect, although the heroine’s original name is Hua Mulan.

Based on the above analysis, it is obvious that although Kingston has grown up with her mother’s talk-stories, strongly influenced by Chinese traditional culture,

she also develops her own values and independent thoughts, which are more influenced by American ideology and values. Thus, this combination is expressed by creating the new Mulan: being a Chinese American, she will not only be a wife and slave when she grows up, but a heroine, a sword woman, a woman warrior! This also solves the confusion of the identity of the Chinese American, who is not a Chinese and neither only an American, but a Chinese American. Just like Kingston explains in *Amirthanayagam*:

“Now we do call ourselves Chinese, and we call ourselves Chinamen, but when we say, ‘I am Chinese,’ it is in the context of differentiating ourselves from Japanese. For example, when we say we are Chinese, it is short for Chinese-American or ethnic Chinese; the ‘American’ is implicit”. (*Amirthanayagam*, 59-60)

From her statement, a strong consciousness of Chinese American identity is established. This also enables her to interpolate and “mis-write” Chinese classics.

In summary, Kingston uses different forms of voice, which include articulation, talk-story and oral literature, and writing and rewriting of classical Chinese literature, in *The Woman Warrior*. The multiple voices used in the book give the readers a glimpse of the story from several different angles. In addition, Maxine Hong Kingston uses a very effective narrative technique in her writing. She combines legend with truth and past with present. By doing this she combines the American way of life together with the Chinese way of life, and finally finds a way that these two can coexist.

5. Conclusion

The Woman Warrior is a book that tells the stories of Kingston and the Chinese American women in her family. These women are characterized by two sets of traits that might both appear in the same character in different periods of time: one set sheds light on feminine stereotypes like weakness, passivity, compliance, and voicelessness, and the other refers to strength, action, power, and voice. Therefore, *The Woman Warrior* can be interpreted based on the theme of both silence and voice.

The theme of silence begins with the first words of Kingston's memoir: "You must not tell anyone". It is both ironic and paradoxical; the former because Kingston is telling everyone in reality, the latter because what Brave Orchid teaches Maxine is based on telling, which gives voice to Chinese customs, traditions, and the lives of Chinese women living in the old China in the past and Chinese women living in America at present. As a whole, however, the Chinese emigrants are so guarded of their community that they keep silent about anything that could destroy it. It is often their children, as Chinese-Americans, who bear the burden of the community's silence. This leads to the silence of the children of Chinese immigrants. For example, as the book shows us, Kingston was quiet and socially awkward in her childhood. Therefore, for a long time, she was searching for a voice, a way to express herself and other Chinese immigrants' voices. In the last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe", she recounts about the process of finding her own voice. Kingston's mother is clearly both a help and a hindrance: she "cuts" Kingston's tongue in order to help her talk more, while Kingston believes her mother did it for the opposite reason. It is with some pride, however, that Kingston eventually begins to tell talk-stories herself. In the end, the very act of writing her story becomes her way of finding a voice.

In addition, although Kingston appears to only describe the silence of individual Chinese women, she does offer a glimpse of the entire oppressed and unfairly judged generation. The individual silence, in fact, represents the history of Chinese American immigrants - silence has had an important meaning in the history of the Chinese Americans. From Kingston's narrative, it is obvious that the Chinese Americans have been marked by silence. Silence does not only indicate the social, economic, and legal discrimination Chinese Americans have faced, but it also reflects the tearful history and the unfair treatment of the Chinese Americans. As one of the early works on this issue, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* contributes greatly to discovering the history of Chinese Americans and their living conditions which had not yet been discussed to a great extent in the United States in the 1970s. In this sense, Kingston's works also have an important value from a historical perspective.

If silence among the early Chinese immigrants was necessary in order to survive in America, now voice and voicing have become important for the new generation of Chinese Americans - to show their existence, to obtain personality, and to form a new identity. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston focuses on Chinese American females' voices. Therefore, breaking silence, especially breaking females' silences, is connected with acknowledging female influence and female power. In addition, Kingston also emphasises the voices of second-generation Chinese Americans, who are "afraid of losing her identity, of being erased or unhinged - as her two aunts have been respectively erased and unhinged - through silence" (Cheung 1988, 164). In this sense, Kingston also represents the newly emerging voice of the Asian American minority which is struggling to establish its place and identity in America.

Besides, in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston also expresses a new voice through the rewriting of classic Chinese literature. She creates the impressive heroine Fa Mulan, who is based on the classic Chinese folklore “The Ballad of Mulan”. By creating the new Mulan and rewriting classical folklore, Kingston announces the new voice of Chinese American women - women who have a new role and identity in society. It is worth remembering that in the 1970s also Western fairytales were rewritten from a feminist perspective, for example by Angela Carter in *The Bloody Chamber*. In my opinion, further investigation and comparison of this theme could be conducted in future studies: in other words, to study how ethnic female writers took part in the rewriting of classic or generic stories for feminist purposes.

Furthermore, although voice and voicing take different forms, all the forms are important. Now Chinese Americans are learning to articulate, to make themselves heard, which is still necessary in American society at present. In fact, the situation where Chinese Americans are discriminated against is still continuing, although the Chinese Exclusion Act was abolished a long time ago. One example is Affirmative Action, which has had an important influence nowadays in the United States. Although its aim is to increase the rate of historically socio-politically non-dominant groups to gain access to education and employment (Affirmative Action, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*), it does treat Chinese Americans unfairly, for Chinese American students have to score higher to attend universities than other minority groups.

Through the interpretation of silence and voice in Kingston’s work, it is clear that Kingston has succeeded in creating many true Chinese women warriors, in the past and the present. Her purpose is to change the traditional images of Chinese women, to improve their social status and to rewrite Chinese women’s history. As

Kingston says, she feels it is necessary for her to do it, that “it’s a mission for me to invent a new autobiographical form that truly tells the inner life of woman, and I do think it’s especially important for minority people, because we are always on the brink of disappearing” (Fishkin 1991, 786).

By writing, Kingston breaks the taboo on silence and rewrites Chinese American female subjectivity in a way that transcends Chinese patriarchal tradition: “what marks it as feminist is its persistent constructions and reproductions of female identity, the continuous namings of female presences, characters, heroines and figures” (Lim, 261). By writing, Kingston also makes Chinese Americans visible to American society and employs new roles for Chinese American writers in the society. Just as Ts’ai Yen, her role model, who learns the barbarian’s language and lyrics and then creates a new song for her own people, Kingston masters the English language, uses voice and pen as weapons creating new pages in American literature, and gives the women warriors she writes about a place in American history and perhaps immortality. Moreover, these images of women warriors also inspire Chinese women who live abroad!

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