

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lasswell's 5 W Communicational Model is made up of five parts which are "Who", "says What", "in Which channel", "to Whom", "to What effect". This study will employ the model as a basis for analyzing the cultural misreading in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* written by Maxine Hong Kingston.

Firstly, the "Who" can be subcategorized into two types: skilled and unskilled. Skilled communicators are capable of using language incisively to influence audiences into believing them. In contrast, unskilled communicators may speak the truth but have difficulty influencing audiences into believing in what they say. Skilled as ones are, if the communicators do not possess accurate knowledge they will misconstrue and mislead audiences further by making them overlook the real facts. Unskilled communicators produce similar effects with audiences since they do not prove themselves reliable or trustworthy. Thus in both cases, the result is a failed communication (Bryson 37-49).

According to the first theoretical basis for 5Ws Communication Model, "Who" are the creator and controller of the literature. In literary analysis, "Who" is the author.

Their knowledge, life experience and attitude are the most important factors to determine the content and its credibility. The author of *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston, is a second-generation Chinese American. This status determined that her sources of information were secondary coming from her parents' stories, Chinese neighbors in Chinatown, and English translated versions of Chinese materials.

Lacking genuine knowledge about China and its culture brings the book's authenticity into question. In this regard, the research aims to analyze if Kingston as the "Who" contributes to cultural misreading and if yes, to what extent.

The next component is "says What"; the message itself which relates to an area of study regarded as content analysis. In mass communication a message is intended to reach different target audiences. Therefore, the content is meticulously engineered to suit each prospective receiver in order to achieve suitable information distribution. The content of communication can also be subdivided into two types: relevant and irrelevant. Subject to the communicators, the "Who", possessing adequate knowledge of their subject, the content becomes credible. But if communicators aren't well informed about the issue they are discussing or they intentionally conceal the truth for some purpose, then the content of the communication becomes irrelevant. If the communicator is skilled, audiences are likely to become victims of misinformation in perceiving the content as true. Moreover, "in Which channel" can also control and change the content to fit their purpose. For example, a CNN report showed Tibetan rebels protesting against Chinese suppression and being aggressively restrained by the Chinese army. Meanwhile, CCTV (China Central Television) focused on the illegitimacy of the rebel's action. Clearly the two news channels adhere to alternative

policies catered for different audiences and when they face alternative channels, the same event has contrasting repercussions (Bryson 37-49). Communicators may create the initial content of communication, but the message can still undergo changes through the channel. Therefore, audiences must carefully evaluate both “Who” and “in which Channel” in order to determine whether the content is accurate, partially accurate or distorted.

According to the theoretical basis for the 5Ws Communication model, “says What” is determined and controlled by “Who” and “in which Channel”. In literary analysis, “says What” is a literary piece itself. As a second generation Chinese American writer, Kingston wrote about Chinese traditions and culture in *The Woman Warrior*. The China which she depicted comes from Chinese stories, Chinese neighbors, and English translated Chinese materials. This learned version of China is indirect and certainly not representative. The Chinese described could not be claimed as real either. In other words, China and the Chinese people in *The Woman Warrior* are partial, incomplete, or even fictional (赵 (Zhao) 19-22). Moreover, being brought up in America, Kingston would have been affected by the stereotypical images of China embodied in American minds. In order for her book to be widely read, and for herself to be accepted into mainstream American literary circles and Western society, she played along and wrote about the China her Western audiences expected to read about. In this matter, the research is determined to find out what cultural aspects were misread when compared with factual information about the modern development of China

The third component, “in Which channel”, is the carrier of the message. The advertisement of an innovative eco-car, for instance, is carried via both visual and verbal channels on television or published in a magazine. Studying this aspect involves *media analysis* to achieve the success in defining the proper channel as well as the relevant target audiences. As an example, message senders take great care in determining a possible medium for an anti-aging supplementary drink. They would want to ask themselves questions like:



What are the conventions of the medium and the restrictions for advertising in a magazine?

How will the target audience, the middle aged or the look conscious women get a hold of it?

Is the medium, the upscale magazine, affordable to them?

Is this medium, the very magazine, appropriate for this message, the ad itself?

Can the medium explicitly carry the message or can the magazine present it clearly?

Will only the verbal medium, words, do or are visual means also required?

The channel is made up of two kinds of message senders: manipulators and handlers. The handlers include printers, distributors, dispatchers and messengers,

none of whom play any role in changing the content of communication. However, those who play a more important role in the process of communication are manipulators such as editors, censors, propagandists and publishers. All of these can control the channel as they desire to filter the content of communication either directly or indirectly (Bryson 37-49).

In literary analysis, “in which Channel” is the publishing channel. Editors and publishers are entitled to change the content and determine the style, form or genre of the writing piece to be published. Kingston originally intended to publish *The Woman Warrior* as a novel but her publisher convinced her to publish it as a memoir, making it appear as her autobiography for commercial reasons.

The next component is “to Whom”, target audiences, message receivers, prospective buyers or readers themselves. In any form of interpersonal communication, the audience is vitally important to any successful endeavor. Therefore, meticulous *audience analysis* is required to make justified assumptions in ensuring success (Bryson 37-49).

For example in the advertising of upcoming, high end winter apparel, the advertiser determines whether their prospective customers would be opulent teenagers, firmly established business people, fashionable women and men or average citizens.

The last part of Lasswell’s model is “to What effect,” the intended achievements or the impact upon the target audience. This involves *effect analysis*, an important measure in inspecting the success of communication activity. In analyzing this end result, the message sender looks for feedback. If the responses from the target buyers

of the winter clothing discussed above are positive as seen in great sales upon the product launch, the sender will surely stick to the same strategies for products of a similar nature. If not, they may need to re-evaluate their measure and come up with a more innovative one. This certainly requires re-evaluating the prior four components altogether as they are related in mass communication of every kind and none is a separate entity.

The effects on the audiences reading Kingston's book which was originally intended to be published as a work of fiction, but then believing it to be non-fiction amount to an obvious case of cultural misreading. American readers, with limited knowledge of China and its culture tended to regard the content as true. However, their understanding may not have been correct and could even have been distorted. When audiences receive authentic information, the communication is efficient. This notion is well supported by Bryson when he stated that when audiences receive the wrong information, the communication is not efficient (Bryson 37).

To illustrate more clearly the practicality of Lasswell's model, the case of the winter clothing presents itself as a good example. The sender or the manufacturer, the "Who", needs to reconsider whether they possess adequate knowledge of product design at all to have resulted in such a loss or not. He may also need to ask himself what could have gone wrong, probably in the design, material, color or sewing. If, in fact, he has shown himself to be untrustworthy, he certainly needs to correct his flaws and redeem himself. The next matter is the message itself, the "says What".

Unsatisfactory sales are obviously the result of inappropriate message content. The advert could be irrelevant to the product and the audiences may not perceive the

intended message as convincing or worthy of purchase. Had the content been relevant, sales could have been fortuitous. Evidently, for desired sales figures to be achieved the advert needs to be restructured. Aspects such as advert size, design and content must be taken into consideration. Then, rewriting the advert would certainly be required. The third in line is the channel in which the content is distributed. Matters deserving re-examination include the advert being put in a daily newspaper which may not reach target audiences. If the advertiser of the clothing persists, he may consider major adaptation or resort to more practical schemes. Following on are the target customers, the communication terminal receivers. Clearly they have made rational judgments based on the advertisement's content authenticity and as a result they are not convinced that the clothes are worthy of purchase. Here the whole communication is inefficient. In this case, the target audience would need to be re-evaluated. In addition the advertiser needs to specify another target group along with other components discussed previously for a better chance of improved sales.

To conclude, this independent study will be based on Lasswell's 5Ws Communication Model in analyzing *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* written by Maxine Hong Kingston. Initially it was intended to be published by the author as a novel, but for commercial reasons it was published as a memoir. The book was widely regarded in favor of her writing but more in disfavor of her representation of her secondary experience of Chinese people and their culture. Cultural misreading in diaspora writing is a common accusation against the book. Analyzing the author, content, reader, channel of distribution, and the effects the book has on the reader can determine potential cultural misreading and its roots regarding

certain aspects. Moreover, a new intriguing scenario can also be envisioned through analysis in presupposing the matters are totally different from the actuality. What if the five components of the book had been rooted, presented or aimed in a different light? This includes the author possessing genuine knowledge of Chinese culture, the content of the book truly reflecting Chinese contemporary culture or the book itself being published as a novel, as initially intended. Then, cultural misreading could possibly have been prevented from happening. People of different races and cultures will understand each other as they truly are. Mutual understanding is said to lessen the conflicts be they cultural, social or economic and to lead to world peace. Among the five components, content analysis and control analysis will be of major focus.



Figure 3: Harold Dwight Lasswell