

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF *THE WOMAN WARRIOR: MEMOIRS OF A GIRLHOOD* *AMONG GHOSTS*

In Chapter 4, Lasswell's 5Ws Communication Model which is "Who", "says What", "to Whom", "in Which channel", "to What effect" will be used to analyze cultural misreading in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* written by Maxine Hong Kingston.

4.1 "Who"—Author

According to the 5Ws Communication Model of Harold Dwight Lasswell, "Who" is the first component which plays a significant role in effective communication. It needs to meet two conditions. The first condition is that "Who" must be a skilled communicator to persuade audiences into believing that their work is true. In literary analysis, "Who" is the author and in the case of *The Woman Warrior* the author is Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for non-fiction and *Time Magazine* rated it as one of the decade's top ten

non-fiction books (Fishkin 782). Such critical acclaim certifies that Kingston is a highly skilled writer capable of convincing audiences to believe in her work. The second condition requires that the author is well informed of their subject material. If they are ill-informed then the message can be distorted, even if they are skilled communicators. Thus, the effectiveness in convincing the audience is dependent on their relevant experience and knowledge. In order to explore and analyze the authenticity of Kingston's writing about China and its culture, it is appropriate to explore her relevant life experience, attitudes and knowledge.

Maxine Hong Kingston's parents migrated to America from Guangdong Province, China. Arriving in California, USA in 1925, they began working in a laundry business. Eight children were raised by them and Kingston was the third. She was born in Stockton, California, on 27 October 1940, an American Born Chinese (ABC). The name Maxine belongs to a famous blonde luck gambler and is a representation of the American dream from a Chinese perspective. In 1962, she graduated from Berkeley University and in the same year married the actor Earl Kingston. After becoming involved in the anti-war protests of the late sixties, the couple moved to Hawaii, where Maxine taught English and began writing *The Woman Warrior*. She was perceived as American by her family and Chinese by American nationals. Growing up in an American society conflicted with the traditional Chinese values expected of her and caused her to deny these expectations and instead search for a cultural identity of

empathy. She yearned to break free from the shackles of a small Chinese family and to integrate into American society, but paradoxically at the same time she drew influence and thrived on Chinese culture.

Praise was hailed on her writing by American society while Chinese natives questioned the negative portrayals and numerous derogatory descriptions about China and its culture in *The Woman Warrior*. During a speech at a Hong Kong University some Chinese students asked her why she wrote negatively about the Chinese and why she could not have written about them more positively. In response, she claimed to be American and not Chinese, stating that all of her books belonged under American literature, and that all the characters in her books were American, even the Chinese were actually Chinese American (Kingston as quoted in Rabinowitz 71-72). Her statements were contradictory to the fact that her writing was primarily about Chinese culture. It was through the very description of Chinese culture that she received critical acclaim in American literature.

The title page of *Maxine Hong Kingston: a Critical Companion* by Greenwood Press in 2001 displayed a full-page photo of Maxine Hong Kingston with her hand on a large volume of the “New English-Chinese Dictionary”, stating that her Chinese is basic. Much of her knowledge of China comes from her parents’ stories and the other half comes from secondary English translated material of China and her imagination.

She even stated in an interview with Gary Kubota in 1977, in response to a question if she did any research before writing the book.

I don't do research when I write. I believe there's some creative source in people, and if they can tap it, they don't need to do research. The stories within the book are based mostly on my past experiences as a child living with my parents in Stockton, California. They operated a laundry in the downtown area, and while growing up, I was constantly listening to them and my relatives talk-story. Their recollections of myths, fables and Chinese history turned out to be amazingly accurate. After the book was published, several people pointed out the presence of these stories in anthropology and art books. It seems that our family had an oral tradition that was really accurate.



Kubota 1977 page 2

In turn, her understanding about Chinese culture is incomplete and as a result, misreading occurs throughout the book. An example of her poor understanding can be found in the Chapter 2, "White Tigers", where she attempts to explain the meaning of a simple Chinese word, confidentially stating "the words for 'bat' and 'blessing' homonyms" (Kingston 23). This statement is only half-correct. The word for



Figure 4: Maxine Hong Kingston with her hand on a book about China in the English language and a Chinese-English dictionary

“bat” in Chinese is “蝙蝠” (biān fú) and the word for “blessing” is “祝福” (zhù fú). The final syllable of each word has the same pronunciation “fú” which means luck; thus “蝙蝠” (biān fú) is only regarded as a representation of good luck and not a blessing as she implied. Likewise “blessing” in Chinese has two words “祝” (zhù) and “福” (fú). The first word is similar to the pronunciation of “竹” (zhú) which is the word for bamboo and the second word comes from “bat” “蝙蝠” (biān fú)’s “蝠” (fú).

The representation of “blessing” “祝福” (zhù fú) is the combination of “bamboo” and “bat”.

Further occurrences of Kingston’s limited Chinese knowledge are apparent in the use of the word “ghost” with the most pertinent example in the books subtitle, “Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts”. Indeed many ghosts appear throughout the book. There are approximately 202 references on 57 pages to ghosts. Of these only 89 occurrences are correct representations with the other 113 times being incorrect representations. For example, on page 98, ghost references appear 22 times, including “the ghost language”, “Burglar Ghost”, “Wino Ghost”, “Hobo Ghost”, “The White ghost”, “ghostly purpose” and so on (Kingston 98). However, all of them are incorrect translations since none actually represent a ghost. This type of misreading is a result of Kingston’s ill-informed knowledge about the composition, development and evolution of the Chinese character.

The Chinese character for ghost is “鬼” and is pronounced as guǐ. It is an ancient Chinese hieroglyph  that originates from  (Ritual) +  (mask) +  (the “Shaman”) = . This represents a “Shaman” who during a ritual wears a mask and tries to play as a ghost and a monster. A later version of the hieroglyph omitted  (Ritual) leaving  (), the lower part, to represent people and the upper one a terrible head, similar to an imaginary monster. In the Chinese language, the word

ghost has many different meanings. The Ancient Chinese Dictionary titled *说文解字* (*Shuo Wen Jie Zi*) states that, “鬼” (guǐ) means a ghost that hurts people and it is the final destination for humans. Superstitious people believe that after death the human soul will become a “ghost”. Not only does ghost represent the dead, it can also be used for the living to display an emotion of disgust. It can even be used between lovers to signify their close relationship. In addition, “鬼” (guǐ) also means sinister plot, dirty trick. One example is “鬼话” (guǐ huà) meaning a lie. From the literal meaning “鬼” (guǐ) is ghost and “话” (huà) is language, Kingston then translated it literally as “ghost language” (Kingston 98). Another example is “鬼目的” (guǐ mù de), because “目的” (mù de) means purpose, so Kingston translated it as “ghostly purpose”(Kingston 98). However, it means sinister plot. It is obvious at this point that Kingston’s use of the word “鬼” (guǐ) is limited to devil, apparition, and ghost. However, she was unaware of other several meanings the word “鬼” (guǐ) has accumulated over time.

According to *A Chinese-English Dictionary* in 1978, “鬼” (guǐ) has the following meanings:

1. The original meaning of the word “鬼” (guǐ) is ghosts, spirit or apparition.

“鬼魂” guǐ hún (ghost);

“不信鬼，不信神” bú xìn guǐ, bú xìn shén (to believe in neither
ghosts nor gods)

2. The second definition of the word “鬼” (guǐ) when used as a contemptuous term or
curse word denotes people who are devil-like, addicted to bad habits and behaviors
and there are many others as shown in the following examples.

“懒鬼” lǎn guǐ (lazy bones);

“胆小鬼” dǎn xiǎo guǐ (coward);

“酒鬼” jiǔ guǐ (drunkard);

“烟鬼” yān guǐ (smoker);

“色鬼” sè guǐ (goat);

“吝啬鬼” lìn sè guǐ (miser);

“鬼子” guǐ zǐ (a term of abuse for foreign invaders)

3. stealthy; surreptitious.

“鬼鬼祟祟” guǐ guǐ suì suì (sneaking; furtive; stealthy)

4. sinister plot; dirty trick:

“心里有鬼” xīn lǐ yǒu guǐ (have a guilty conscience);

“这里边有鬼” zhè lǐ biān yǒu guǐ (There's some dirty work going on here);

“鬼把戏” guǐ bǎ xì (sinister plot);

“鬼话” guǐ huà (lie)

5. terrible, damnable:

“鬼天气” guǐ tiān qì (terrible weather);

“鬼地方” guǐ dì fāng (a damnable place)

6. [Informal] clever; smart; quick.

“这家伙真鬼” zhè jiā huǒ zhēn guǐ (he's an artful devil)

7. nickname for a lovely fellow.

“小鬼” xiǎo guǐ (little fellow);

“机灵鬼” jī líng guǐ (clever fellow)

According to the second definition, “鬼” (guǐ) can be used as a curse word against people, who are devil-like, addicted to bad habits and behaviors, such as “酒鬼” jiǔ guǐ (drunkard) and “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) (a term of abuse for foreign invaders). The term “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) originates from the Qing Dynasty. During this period Chinese people developed xenophobia towards foreigners as a result of foreign aggression. They called foreigners “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ), translated as devil or depicting a distrust for them and associated their stereotypical Caucasian appearance of yellow hair and blue eyes as being similar to ghosts. Around 1899 a poster about “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) which is “神助拳，义和团，只因鬼子闹中原……洋鬼子，尽除完，大清一统靖江山” was publicized. In this poster, “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) and “洋鬼子” (yáng guǐzǐ) did not represent ghost but instead represented Western invaders who were later followed by Japanese invaders. Thus in turn “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) evolved to represent non Chinese and the different terms became “西洋鬼子” xī yáng guǐzǐ (the Western foreign devil) or “东洋鬼子” dōng yáng guǐzǐ (Eastern foreign devil). The term “鬼子” (guǐ zǐ) lasted for at least a century to express an aversion to aggressors. This included white and black people whose appearance was different to the Chinese. The white people were called

“白鬼” bái guǐ (white foreign devils), and black people were called “黑鬼” hēi guǐ (black foreign devils, negroes). Japanese, who wantonly invaded were called “日本鬼子” rìběn guǐzǐ (Japanese devils). Kingston translated “鬼子” (guǐzǐ) into ghost which is its literal meaning, but was unaware that it is a negative expression used to refer to foreigners.

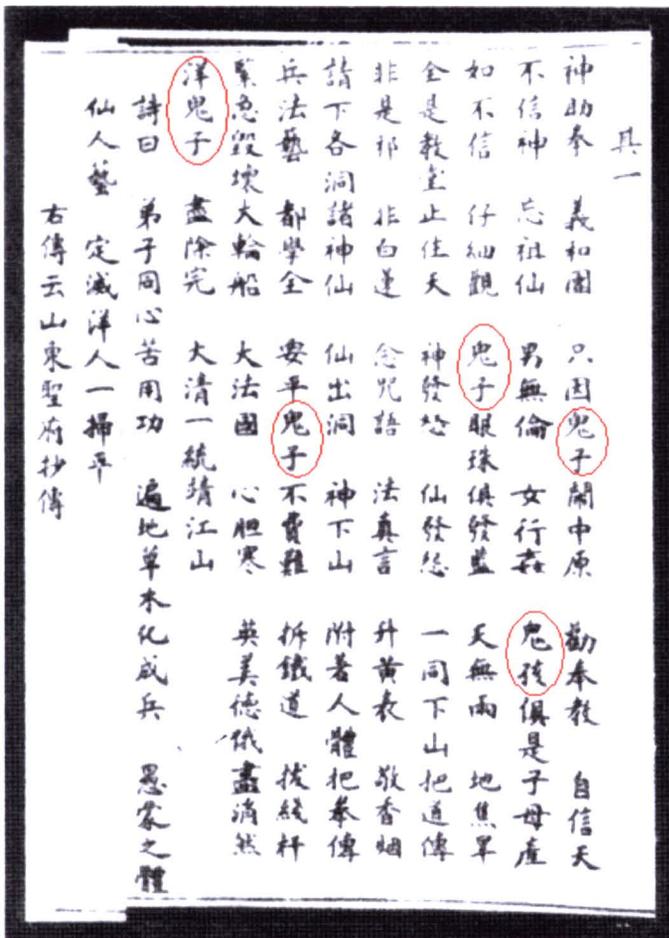


Figure 5: A poster about “鬼子 guǐ zǐ” referring to Western invaders from around 1899

Cantonese, the language Kingston's parents communicated in features many words that express resentment towards foreigners. Living in her overseas Chinese community Kingston was far removed from how words have developed. The word used to represent foreign devil or specifically to label white people in Cantonese is “鬼佬” (guǐ lǎo). Cantonese used a variety of words to represent foreigners. Such as “鬼婆” (guǐ pó) which represents the foreign devils' wife or white woman. “鬼仔” (guǐ zǎi) represents foreign devils' son or white boy. “鬼妹” (guǐ mèi) represents foreigner devils' daughter or white girl. In overseas Chinese communities, the words are still used, but fewer stigmas are associated with them.

In modern times, the imperialist influences in China have decreased and a new era has evolved. China has more foreign friends and “鬼子” guǐ zǐ (foreign devil) has become outdated with many Chinese agreeing that it did not respect other people and should be changed. After World War II it was replaced with “外国人” wài guó rén (foreigner). From the end of the 1970s until now, “老外” (lǎo wài) has become a popular term for foreigners. Originally used for layman, “老外” (lǎo wài) consists of two characters. “老” (lǎo) is the prefix and “外”(wài) is the root which means foreigner. When “老” (lǎo) is added as a prefix in front of the root which means people, it often connotes a positive emotion or signifies a close relationship.

When Kingston was interviewed by Maggie Ann Bowers, she admitted that her



family raised her on traditional Chinese talk stories before she could read or write.

When she was older, she wanted to put together all the stories into a written text (Bowers 49). In response to her mother's request to return to her homeland in China, Kingston who had never visited there stated on page 66 "I am to return to China where I have never been". Then stating, the book was written from her imagination, "I imagined China before going to China" (Bowers 53). Previously she wrote in an article in a magazine describing the significance of China that she feared that China did not exist and she had just been creating it. China, her country of origin, was a place she had never visited, existing only in the negative portrayals found in *The Woman Warrior*. For example, in "Shaman" on page ninety nine she stated, "I did not want to go to China. I did not want to go where the ghosts took shape nothing like our own." In contrast, her feelings towards America were far more positive, as shown in "Shaman", on page 108, "I don't want to hear Ghost, I've found some places in this country (America) that are ghost-free" (Kingston 108). It wasn't until October 1984 that she visited China for the first time, years after the book was published, during a day trip to Shenzhen via Hong Kong which left a strong impression on her. She claimed "I imagined China before going to China... I felt very glad that my powers of imagination were affirmed by reality" (Bowers 53).

The evidence presented proves Kingston's possible lack of experience relating to China and her obvious negative attitudes towards it, a place which existed only in her

imagination. Furthermore, it can be inferred that *The Woman Warrior* was written from her somewhat limited information about Chinese culture received from her parents and older generations. These people were removed from the modern realities of China in the early part of the last century when the first generation of immigrants left China for the USA, and are outdated. Her knowledge of China came also from secondary material which was translated, and her imagination. Resultantly, descriptions about China in her book are certainly not from her direct experience and nor are they from her direct insight into China, its people and culture. Conclusively, all forms of misreading about Chinese culture and characters contributed to China being depicted as a terrible place filled with ghosts in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*.



Figure 6: Kingston displaying her American citizenship

4.2 “Says What”—the Book Content

According to the 5Ws Communication Model, “says What” corresponds to content analysis of the text and is reliant upon two elements, “Who” and “in Which channel”. If the “Who” is knowledgeable of their subject matter and is competent at communicating, then the “says What” can be trustworthy and the communication is effective, and vice — versa. Incidentally, the “in Which channel” is also critical as it is a means by which the subject matter produced by the author, the “Who”, is conveyed to readers. In literary analysis, the “says What” is the context of *The Woman Warrior*. The book was published as a non-fiction autobiography, a memoir, of the author, Maxine Hong Kingston and was awarded by the National Book Critics Circle. Hailed by Western readers as a wonderful account of Chinese culture, it became controversial amongst Chinese readers, including English reading audiences living in China. As previously discussed, the reliability of content depends to a high degree on Kingston’s knowledge, composition and writing attitude. As a Chinese descendant who was educated in America, she is more apt to identify with the Western society she is accustomed to. With the lack of knowledge and her writing style, it is not too difficult to imagine the ways in which she would choose to present the Chinese and their culture.

The Woman Warrior consists of five stories based around mother and daughter relationships both in China and America. The mother generation represents China whilst the daughter generation represents America. Kingston writes under the guises of an American, a Chinese, and a Chinese American. Throughout the book there are a significant number of folk sayings, such as “girls like maggots”, and “women are born to be slaves”, all of which serve to show the low status of women in China. In addition, all kinds of strange thoughts and behaviors are exhibited by the mother, Brave Orchid which displays the backwardness of China to unknowing readers.

Questions are omnipresent throughout the book. Do her stories reflect the spirits of Americans or Chinese? Why does she rewrite Chinese mythology and in doing so is there a loss of spirit or a remodeling of spirit? Is it an authentic representation of China and did the descriptions of Chinese life reflect their true values and tastes? Even Kingston stated hers was an American story, but it's obvious that she primarily represented China, its people and culture. She based the fundamentals of her portrayal exclusively on the bad elements of China. Incidentally, good and bad elements can be found in the history of any nation, its people and culture. Since she focused exclusively on the bad elements of China, cultural misreading occurs in her writing. Through critical analysis, Kingston portrays the Chinese in four distinctive, fundamentals of culture that reveal how she misrepresented China. In her book, the Chinese image is depicted as barbaric and regressive, their behavior is portrayed as

rude, their relationships between men and women are depicted as unequal and their food and eating habits are portrayed as odd and awful. In order to determine if the content of *The Woman Warrior* represents an authentic China, the text will be analyzed on these four points. They are as follows: Chinese image, Chinese behavior, Chinese sex and gender and Chinese food. This is because the four aspects mentioned are dominant and are found in significance throughout the book, encompassing the ways of China, as well as its people and culture.

4.2.1 Chinese Image

A plethora of negative Chinese images are exhibited in *The Woman Warrior* which show the author's prejudice and misreading of the Chinese. They are depicted as being cruel to animals, children and handicapped people, such as pregnant and insane women. These stories are characterized by bloodshed, cruelty, insanity, greed, hypocrisy, and superstition.

4.2.1.1 Barbaric and cruel

Barbaric and cruel are some of the first words Kingston uses to describe the Chinese in Chapter 1, "No Name Woman". The chapter tells of a story told to Kingston by her mother. Her father's sister became pregnant in China a year after her husband had immigrated to America during the gold rush. After discovering this fact,

the villagers assumed she had committed adultery with another man and decided to punish her since she might bring them bad luck. Kingston created a savage picture of merciless barbarians the day that her aunt gave birth. Villagers wearing white masks with long hair hung over their faces raided her house breaking in through the front and back. They ripped up clothes and overturned furniture as they searched for the aunt. Screams of slaughtered animals and the roar of the villagers could be heard as they spread blood around and chanted “Pig” and “Ghost”. The village abhorred adultery and as a result of the manhunt the aunt jumped into the family well with her new born child killing them both (Kingston 3-5).

Further depictions of cruel and barbaric Chinese can be found in Chapter 2, “White Tigers” and Chapter 3, “Shaman”. In the former chapter, Kingston imagined herself being trained to become a woman warrior under the guide of two Chinese Kung Fu masters. One time when struck by hunger, she met with a rabbit and recalled childhood memories of her Chinese parents teaching her to mistreat animals. They taught her to hit rabbits over the head with wine jugs, and then skin them for fur vests (Kingston 26).

In Chapter 3, “Shaman”, according to her mother’s experience as a country doctor, Kingston told three stories about Chinese cruelty. The first was about a Chinese child born without an anus. After birth, his family left him in the outhouse to die. Their

cruelty was emphasized by the fact that they kept returning to see if he was dead yet (Kingston 86). In another story her mother displayed cruelty when she said that if a new born baby happened to be a girl, the midwife should prepare a box of ashes to push its face into (Kingston 86). The third story exaggerated the cruelty of the Chinese by showing that not only did they mistreat animals and children, but also savagely attacked an unarmed madwoman during a peaceful afternoon. Some villagers were hiding in a mountain cave to avoid bombs from American planes. A crazy village lady wearing a headdress with small mirrors on sticks was playing by the riverside. The villagers watched as sunlight reflected from the mirrors and water. Firmly believing she was a Japanese spy signaling to the planes, they proceeded to stone her to death (Kingston 95-96).



Figure 7 : Five main virtues of Confucianism

China is a land of decorum with a five thousand-year history. Historically it is distinguished for its rites, etiquettes, and religions which primarily stressed ethical cultivation. They have long cultivated the traditional virtues of Confucianism “仁 rén、

义 yì、礼 lǐ、智 zhì、信 xìn” which are “Benevolence, Justice, Courtesy, Wisdom, and Faith”. “Benevolence” is the essence of the virtues and is “仁爱” (kindheartedness) which means to be merciful and peaceful. It teaches Chinese to express a high degree of concern and sympathy for others. 孔子(Confucius), an outstanding educator and philosopher of China who was born about two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago, stated, “仁者爱人” which means “benevolence means to love others” in 《论语》 (*The Analects*). In the same book he stated that “己所不欲勿施于人” means “what you do not want to be done unto yourself, do not do unto others”.



Figure 8 : Confucius and his book *The Analects*

孟子(Mencius) was another famous Chinese philosopher who stated in his book 《孟子》 (*Mencius*), “闻其声不忍食其肉,是故君子远庖厨” which means “when hearing the cries of dying animals, compassion is felt and moral integrity will prevail

far away from the kitchen”, to show that Chinese value life and are humane.

Refraining from killing or hurting others are fundamental ethics of benevolence.

Mencius’s statement in his self titled book *Mencius*, states that “仁者无敌”(the

benevolent has no enemy and is invincible). In addition to refraining from killing,

Chinese people also emphasize loving each other. Mencius had an old saying, “老吾

老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼”， which teaches that the Chinese must “not only

love our own parents but also others’ parents; not only love our own children but also

love others’ children.” These thoughts and old sayings reflect Chinese values that

remain popular. The first sentence in 《三字经》 (*three character primer*), one of

three Chinese classic enlightenment books, is “人之初，性本善” which translates that

human nature at birth is good and kind. For Chinese being kind to others is

customary behavior.



Figure 9 : Mencius and his book *Mencius*

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston depicted China as a nation full of violence, bloodshed and cruelty. According to her statement that she is American and not Chinese, it's undeniable that she has no sense of national Chinese identity. Consequently, she is ineligible and incompetent of deciding on how China should be represented in Western society. Additionally, she fails to understand the quintessence of Chinese traditional culture or the attributes of a compassionate community and of a national character. The subjective and objective causes lead to a misreading and misrepresentation of Chinese as being barbaric and cruel.

4.2.1.2 Abnormal and crazy

Many abnormal Chinese characters appear throughout *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston tells of the many crazy girls and women in her Chinese community in America, with and half a dozen living only within a few blocks of her house. Her writing style comes across as being overwhelmed with a guilty conscience to explain that perhaps their little village in America was odd and that the sane people stayed in China to build a new sane society (Kingston 186).

In Chapter 1, "No Name Woman", Kingston inserted a vignette about her grandfather who behaved strangely after a Japanese soldier hit him on the head with a bayonet. After which he displayed a loss of dignity through his outrageous behavior, such as placing his naked penis on a table and laughing hysterically (Kingston 10).

In Chapter 4, “At the Western Palace”, Moon Orchid, the sister of Kingston’s mother leaves Hong Kong for America in search of her doctor husband who has established himself there with a new wife. Eventually she went crazy and died alone in a mental hospital. Her behavior was strange and her actions quizzical (Kingston 95-96).

A multitude of strange Chinese women are characterized in Chapter 5, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”. Next door to Kingston’s house lived a woman who was brought from China by her husband who was later taken to a mental hospital (Kingston 186). Then there was Crazy Marry, the only mad child in her family who was born in China. Kingston is quoted as saying “Their other children, who were born in the U.S., were normal... I was glad that I was born nine months after my mother emigrated” to emphasize that only children who were born in America were sane and healthy (Kingston 187). She explained in detail how most people from China were crazy and that their fates all come to a sad end.

Through the ages, to Western people, the orient has been perceived as irrational, depraved, immature and with “‘abnormal’ behavior” (Said 1978 54). In reality, human beings, regardless of race and background are fundamentally the same. Undeniably, strange people, extraordinary circumstances and abnormal conducts or behaviors are evident in all cultures. Kingston’s prejudice against the Chinese is clearly reflected in

her descriptions of their conducts, traditions and beliefs. Had she been better informed or received firsthand experience and not had a fixed stereotypical idea, the portrayals could have been more accurately represented and not as negatively exaggerated. The fact that she chooses to present only the abnormal parts of the Chinese culture shows her negative attitude towards the country and its people. It is important to research this point about Kingston in order to gain more understanding of her view of China and how she sees her connection to it.

4.2.1.3 Greedy and desperate

From the book's outset and throughout, the Chinese are described as greedy and desperate. In Chapter 1, "No Name Woman", after killing all the animals and destroying the aunt's house, the villagers made sure to steal anything which had not been broken and then to cut the meat of the animals they had massacred (Kingston 5).

When they left, they took sugar and oranges to bless themselves. They cut pieces from the dead animals. Some of them took bowls that were not broken and clothes that were not torn.

"No Name Woman" page 5

In Chapter 2, “White Tigers”, Kingston quoted letters from Chinese relatives insistently requesting them to “send money”. They sought sympathy with their stories of a miserable life in China and continually pressured them to send money. Kingston’s parents felt guilt and often became frustrated with all the lies. The relatives would not request money outright. Instead they sought sympathy through persisting to talk about their terrible life in China.

Some suddenly began writing to us again from communes or from Hong Kong. They kept asking for money... The aunts in Hong Kong said to send money quickly; their children were begging on the sidewalks, and mean people put dirt in their bowls.

“White Tigers” page 50

In Chapter 3, “Shaman”, Kingston stated that the Chinese did not smile in pictures as an act of looking for sympathy with the words “send money” written on all over their faces.

My mother is not smiling; Chinese do not smile for photographs. Their faces command relatives in foreign lands —“Send money”—and posterity forever... My mother does

not understand Chinese-American snapshots. “What are you laughing at?” she asks.

“Shaman” page 58

In Chapter 4, “At the Western Palace”, Kingston’s mother told her sister to start working in a hotel like many new Chinese immigrants where they could steal leftover clothes and belongings. All the while she complained that the new immigrants stole from the store owners rather than doing their jobs.

“You could be a maid in a hotel, “Brave Orchid advised. “A lot of immigrants start that way nowadays. And the maids get to bring home all the leftover soap and the clothes people leave behind.”

“At the Western Palace” pages 126-27

Immigrants nowadays were bandits, beating up store owners and stealing from them rather than working. It must’ve been the Communists who taught them those habits.

“At the Western Palace” page 127

In Chapter 5, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”, Kingston stated that she wanted to return to China to see if her relatives really were so poor that they could not buy salt or if they were lying for money. Her mother also grumbled that she was fed up with her relatives at home persistently asking for more money. They were never concerned about her struggle in America and that she had her own family to feed.

Soon I want to go to China and find out who’s lying—the Communists who say they have food and jobs for everybody or the relatives who write that they have not the money to buy salt. My mother sends money she earns working in the tomato fields to Hong Kong. The relatives there can send it on to the remaining aunts and their children and, after a good harvest, to the children and grandchildren of my grandfather’s two minor wives. “Every woman in the tomato row is sending money home,” my mother says, “to Chinese villages...”

“A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” pages 205-06

What I’ll inherit someday is a green address book full of names. I will send the relatives money, and they’ll write me stories about their hunger. My mother has been tearing up



the letters from the youngest grandson of her father's third wife. He has been asking for fifty dollars to buy a bicycle. He says a bicycle will change his life. He could feed his wife and children if he had a bicycle. "We have to go hungry ourselves," my mother says. "They don't understand that we have ourselves to feed too." I've been making money; I guess it's my turn. I'd like to go to China and see those people and find out what a cheat story is and what's not. Did my grandmother really live to be ninety-nine? Or did they string us along all those years to get our money.

"A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" pages 205-06

Historically, China was one of most developed countries in the world. Until the Qing Dynasty, during the Opium War of 1840, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The long war exhausted the country. Before the foundation of a new China by the Mao government in 1949, the old government decamped and moved the central government revenue to Taiwan. In addition to three years of environmental adversity, mainland China was left as one of the poorest countries in the world. Inevitably, those with overseas relations sought help from their

better off relatives. However, Chinese traditions emphasize “人穷志不短” (poor but proud). As the second element of the five traditional virtues of Confucianism, “义 yì” means justice, honesty and legitimacy. “義 yì” is the original complex form of “义 yì”. 《说文解字》(*Shuo Wen Jie Zi*) explains “義, 己之威仪也。从我从羊。” which means “義 yì” is the outside image and inside is self-restraint. Its character components are “我 wǒ” (I) and “羊 yáng” (sheep). In ancient Chinese, when using “羊 yáng” (sheep) as a character component, the meaning must relate to good things, such as “美 měi”(beautiful) and “善 shàn”(kindness). Chinese culture emphasizes that people must act as sheep, with nobility, purity, warm-heartedness, morals and justice. Comparing “义 yì” (moral or justice) is “利 lì” (interest or benefit). 孟子 Mencius, propound a doctrine titled “义利 yì lì” which discusses the relationship between morals and justice. It emphasizes that “利己 lì jǐ” (self-interest) must be based on “利人 lì rén”(benefit other people). So “义利 yì lì” is “利人利己 lì rén lì jǐ”(benefit other people as well as oneself). “见利忘义 jiàn lì wàng yì”(Forget one’s integrity when tempted by personal gain) and “损人利己 sǔn rén lì jǐ” (profit oneself at the expense of others) is ignoble behavior for Chinese and is socially unacceptable. Kingston misunderstood true Chinese culture and exemplifies the actions of a minority who existed in a short period of history to unfairly generalize all Chinese.

4.2.1.4 Insincere and hypocritical

Kingston exhibits disdain for the Chinese for not saying exactly what they are thinking. In Chapter 2, “White Tigers”, the protagonist followed a bird into the mountains where she met with two Kung Fu masters who were having dinner. They asked her whether she had eaten or not, to which she replied ‘Yes I have.’ even though she hadn’t. Her reply was a generic Chinese response to show politeness. In Chapter 3, “Shaman”, the same topic is addressed when Chinese greet each other asking “Have you eaten yet?” To which they both answered yes, regardless of whether or not they had. Kingston alludes that the Chinese are liars and states she was “mad at the Chinese for lying so much”. Contrary to her complaint, Chinese traditional culture actually places great emphasis on “信 xìn” (Faith) and emphasizes practicing honor from an early age. Many ancient proverbs exist to certify the beliefs, “信 xìn” (Faith) existed in 《论语》(*the Analects*), such as “言必信,行必果 yán bì xìn, háng bì guǒ” (Promise must be kept and action must be resolute) and “言而有信 yán ér yǒu xìn”(reliable or trustworthy words). Kingston’s lack of understating of language and culture contributed to her misreading of the Chinese as hypocritical liars.

Unaware of the profound level of Chinese cultural issues, Kingston merely understood the basics. Saying “Yes I have eaten” is replied so as not to burden the

asker with the task of offering to sharing their meal or to leave their meal so as to prepare another for the guest. This is similar to many other cultures, especially among Asians. Kingston's interpretation would lead most foreign readers who are unfamiliar with the greeting into thinking that Chinese are liars. A concrete example exists in the study of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. When students are learning Chinese the first greeting they become familiar with is “吃了吗? chī le ma” (have you eaten yet?). Unaware of its application, they may use it in an inappropriate context such as with a Chinese person they meet in a toilet who would find such a question humorous.

In fact, there are a multitude of Chinese greetings. Examples typically used in formal occasions include “你好! Nǐ hǎo!” (Hello!) and “你好吗? Nǐ hǎo ma?” (How are you?). Examples according to when people meet are used more frequently, that is to ask about things related to what they are doing. For example, when people meet in the morning, they will greet each other with “起来了? qǐ lái le?” (Have you got up?) “早啊! zǎo ā!” (Morning!). Depending on the time people meet, they might ask, “上班呀? shàng bān ya?” (Are you going to work?), “出去呀? chū qù ya?” (Are you going out?) or “下班啦? xià bān lā?” (Have you finished your work?), and “回家啦? huí lái lā?” (Are you going home?). These are some of many more examples that are used in everyday life and are some of the most common expressions for greetings.

The communication is more casual and relevant to daily life which elicits empathy between people.

Some greetings are a civil greeting of politeness and do not require an answer. For example, when asking “去哪儿? qù nǎr” (Where will you go?) as a greeting, the asker does not really want to know where you are going. A suitable reply would be “出去一下. chū qù yī xià.” (Go out) or “去那边. qù nà biān.” (Go there). It is similar to “Hello” in English. Coincidentally, the asker does not really want to know if you have eaten or not when they greet you with “吃了吗? chī le ma” (Have you eaten yet?). It is just a greeting, so you can answer “吃了 chī le” (Yes) or “还没 hái méi” (Not yet). But if the one who greets you is eating and you are not a close friend then normally you would choose “吃了 chī le” (Yes, I have) as a polite reply and so as not to burden them. However, if you are a close friend or relative, the answer “No” is acceptable and will prompt the asker to willingly find something to share with you. People unfamiliar with the customs are likely to misinterpret them as lying.

4.2.1.5 Superstitious

One hundred and thirty one references to ghosts appear in Chapter 3, “Shaman”, portraying the Chinese as highly superstitious. During Kingston’s mother’s education at the To Keung School, students talked about ghosts every day. Inside the school she fought a ghost who spread itself over her arm before she finally overcame it (Kingston

66-75). Upon graduating, she returned to her home town to practice medicine. Her talent in medicine was significant and she could tell if a person would die from what she saw reflected in the face of the patient's daughter-in-law one year before (Kingston 82). Due to Chinese superstition, nobody wanted to see a doctor on New Year's Day and so the mother stayed alone (Kingston 84).

When a sick person was about to die, my mother could read the face of it a year ahead of time on the daughters-in-law's faces. A black veil seemed to hover over their skin. And though they laughed, this blackness rose and fell with their breath.

“Shaman” page 82

If it had really been New Year's, she would have had to shut herself up in her own house. Nobody wanted a doctor's visit in the first days of the year.

“Shaman” page 84

In Chapter 4, “At the Western Palace”, the mother behaved superstitiously when her sister Moon Orchid arrived. She fed her children candy to prevent them from

speaking unlucky words to their aunt and she appeared to be talking to spirits.

With a slam of her cleaver, she cracked rock candy into jagged pieces. "Take some," she urged... it was very important that the beginning be sweet... They'd put the bad mouth on their aunt's first American day; you had to sweeten their noisy barbarous mouths. She opens the front door and mumbled something. She opened the back door and mumbled something. "What do you say when you open the door like that?" Her children used to ask when they were younger. "Nothing. Nothing," she would answer. "Is it spirits, Mother? Do you talk to spirits? Are you asking them in or asking them out?"...When she came back from talking to the invisibilities, Brave Orchid saw that her sister was strewing the room.

"At the Western Palace" page 121

When a delivery boy from the Rexall Drugstore mistakenly sent a box of pills to Crazy Mary and then took it back to the store, mother sent her children to receive an apology and to avoid tempting fate by begging for candy from the drugstore. Western people in the drugstore regarded the children as homeless begging for food. Incidentally, this is clearly influenced by the Westerners ignorance and their

stereotyped perception of Chinese immigrants. Another occurrence of superstition is exposed when the mother affirms her belief that an “eclipse” is a frog swallowing the moon and if the villagers’ continue being loud and obnoxious the shadow will recede. This is not true among Chinese and Thai people. When an eclipse occurs, Thai villagers, especially the elders, will bang on the walls and trees to make loud noises so as to frighten the invader and release the moon from its mouth. Such belief and actions have remained unchallenged. As Kingston said, to Westerners, there is no nation as miserable or unbelievable as China. Even just hearing the word, “China” immediately relates associations of ancient ceremonies composed of superstition and exoticism (Kingston 56).

Under Kingston’s pen, Chinese superstition was pushed to ridiculous extremes. However, she was unaware of the reasons behind superstitious actions. When she jeered at her mother’s superstitious beliefs and behaviors, she did not know whether the “eclipse” metaphor of a frog swallowing the moon was true or false. Chinese regard “智 zhì”(Wisdom) as one of the five traditional virtues of Confucianism, they also value cognition of self, understanding society, knowledge of natural environment and distinguishing right from wrong. So the main purpose of this story is to reflect Chinese people’s acute observations and appreciation of nature, as well as astronomy. Unfortunately Kingston only explored the surface levels of superstition and in doing so was unable to understand the moral of the story.

4.2.2 Chinese Behavior

Chinese people in *The Woman Warrior* are portrayed as being impolite, ignorant, loud, and intrusive. They are juxtaposed against Americans who are associated with politeness and higher values.



4.2.2.1 Impoliteness and ignorance

“礼 lǐ” (Courtesy) is the third of the traditional virtues of Confucianism. China is regarded as a state of ceremonies. Chinese pay high attention to courtesy and adhere to following rules or norms. A Chinese old saying is “没有规矩不成方圆 méi yǒu guī jǔ bú chéng fāng yuán” which means “nothing can be accomplished without norms and standards”. These include observing conventions of polite behavior, forms of ceremony and etiquette. Kingston’s limited knowledge and prejudice attitude against China, results in its natives being misrepresented as ignorant and impolite. Examples of ignorance can be found in “At the Western Palace”. Kingston’s mother, Brave Orchid, was waiting for her sister at the airport and complained that the chair hurt her and requested more chairs to put her feet up. She then took a blanket and spread it out to make a bed for herself. Upon meeting Moon Orchid, a native of China in America, she began to behave rudely like a scruffy woman from the countryside shaking hands with her sister whilst they carelessly blocked a doorway (Kingston 113-18).

“No, this chair hurts me. Help me pull some chairs together so I can put my feet up.” She unbundled a blanket and spread it out to make a bed for herself. On the floor she had two shopping bags full of canned peaches, real peaches, beans wrapped in taro leaves, cookies, Thermo bottles, enough food for everybody... At last the niece called out, “I see her! I see her! Mother! Mother!” Whenever the door parted, she shouted, probably embarrassing the American cousins, but she didn’t care... Finally Moon Orchid gathered up her stuff, strings hanging and papers loose, and met her sister at the door, where they school hands, oblivious to blocking the way.

“At the Western Palace” pages 113, 117, and 118

She (Moon Orchid) was turning the light off and on in the goldfish tank.....held up each dish between thumb and forefinger, squirted detergent on the back and front, and ran water without plugging up the drain...leaving the iron on the shirt until it turned yellow

“At the Western Palace” pages 122, 135, and 137

4.2.2.2 Speaking loudly

In Chapter 1, “No Name Woman”, Kingston complained about her mother’s outbursts in public libraries and over the telephone. She attributed the behavior as stereotypically Chinese, speaking loudly in comparison to Americans who spoke in an inaudible voice. In this particular situation, Kingston showed contempt towards her mother’s Chinese attitude whilst projecting herself as a true American, walking gracefully with confidence and speaking softly. Here she regards herself as a Westerner looking at a Chinese woman with contemptuous eyes. Western readers are led to believe she is associated with them and contributes to the harsh criticisms received from Chinese as betraying her own race.

“I have not been able to stop my mother’s screamed in publish libraries or over telephone. Walking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which are Chinese-feminine) and speaking in an inaudible voice, I have tried to turn myself American-feminine. Chinese communication was loud, public. Only sick people had to whisper.”

“No Name Woman” page 11

In Chapter 4 “At the Western Palace”, Kingston tells a story about her aunt, Moon

Orchid. Moon Orchid's daughter, was one of the first Chinese immigrants to marry an older Chinese American. When Kingston's mother, her children and cousin went to meet her aunt Moon Orchid at the airport, the cousin shouted, "There she is!" She continued calling out, "I see her!" "Mama! Mama!" (Kingston 117). Kingston's mother complained that her children who grew up in America shied away instead of calling out with their cousin, "Why don't you call your aunt too? Maybe she'll all of you call out together." However, her children slunk away. Kingston was quoted as saying "Maybe that shame-face they so often wore was American politeness" (Kingston 117-18). To Americans, silence in public is seen as politeness whilst loud public outbursts such as those of her Chinese immigrant relations are seen as being impolite.

In Chapter 5, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe", again Kingston complained about the loud Chinese. Her father was quoted as saying "Why is it I can hear Chinese from blocks away? Is it that I understand the language? Or is it they talk loud?" (Kingston 171). Following the question from her father, a succession of dramatic descriptions about loudly Chinese showed the readers how Chinese are rude to an obscene degree. In context, it may be that the circumstances dictate a need to talk loudly. Instead, Kingston took the neighbors as a generalization of all Chinese people and made it appear that they all communicate in such a manner.

“How strange that the emigrant villagers are shouters, hollering face to face. My father asks, ‘Why is it I can hear Chinese from blocks away? Is it that I understand the language? Or is it they talk loud?’

“A son for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” page 171

Kingston satirized the Chinese who turned their radio up full blast to hear operas, not caring if it would hurt their ears. When Chinese watched a performance, they would yell over the singers with spit flying and big arm gestures. Kingston was quoted again as saying “You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that... Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian”(Kingston 171). She described a scene of a piano recital where the Chinese audience laughed and hollered. Chopin’s music to them was just casting pearls before swine. Chinese language was guttural peasant noise to her. To be different from Chinese women’s strong voices, Chinese American girls, such as Kingston had to whisper to show themselves as Americans.

They turn the radio up full blast to hear the operas, which do not seem to hurt their ears. And they yell over the singers that wail over the drums, everybody talking at once, big arm gestures, spit

flying. You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that. It isn't just the loudness. It is the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian. We make guttural peasant noise and have Ton Duc Thang names you can't remember. And the Chinese can't hear Americans at all; the language is too soft and Western music unhearable. I've watched a Chinese audience laugh, visit, talk-story, and holler during a piano recital, as if the musician could not hear them. A Chinese American, somebody's son, was playing Chopin, which has no punctuation, no cymbals, and no gongs. Chinese piano music is five black keys. Normal Chinese women's voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans.

“A son for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” page 171-72

Kingston is not the only person to comment on the loudness of the Chinese, almost all foreigners think similarly. To them the language is indelicate and crude. However this prejudice is a misunderstanding of the Chinese phonetic features and

Chinese culture. Chinese is a tonal language consisting of four tones. Mastering the tones is the key to speaking Chinese. Some syllables with different tones can denote different meanings and as a result sentences will make absolutely no sense if the tones are used incorrectly.

As seen in the diagram below, tone contours are related to tone pitch, which determines the real pronunciation of tones. A tiered incremental range of five pitches ranging from low (1) to high (5) is used. According to the pitch, each of the tones has different pronunciation characteristics:

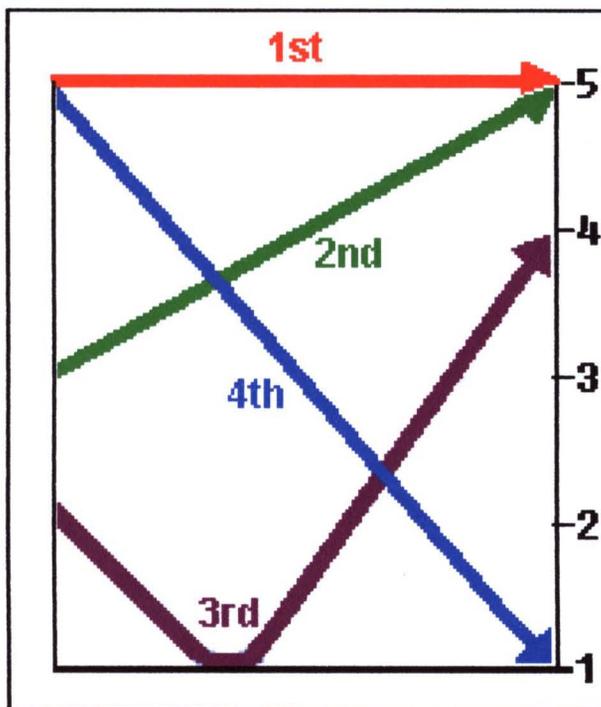


Figure 10: Chinese pronunciation using four tones with five pitches

(1) The first tone is a high-level tone and has a high-level pitch. The tone goes from pitch 5 to pitch 5 and the contour is called 55, for example, 妈 mā (mom).

(2) The second tone is a rising tone. Its pitch starts at a mid level (3) and rises to the highest pitch (5) and the contour is called 35 as in 麻 má (hemp).

(3) The third tone is a falling and then rising tone. Its pitch starts low at level 2, dips to the bottom (1), and then rises towards the top (4). The contour is called 214 as in 马 mǎ (horse).

(4) The fourth tone is a falling tone which starts from pitch 5 and falls sharply to the bottom pitch 1 and its contour is called 51. An example is 骂 mà (curse).

According to pronunciation characters, the first, second, and fourth tones are all related to the highest pitch (5). The third tone is related to the second highest pitch (4). Chinese pronunciation characteristics contribute to loud speech, which from a foreign perspective may appear rude. English language on the contrary is not a tonal language and as a result sounds softer. Tones in English are generally used to express emotion and so to English speakers Chinese people may sound highly strung, angry or intense. Language pronunciation and expression do not reflect the character of an ethnic group and would be a false judgment of them.

In a culture, a quiet voice and a loud voice have different connotations. Loud voices can be associated with straightforwardness, power, confidence, enthusiasm, hospitality, and friendliness. Chinese speak and sing loudly as a show of enthusiasm and emotion. It is customary and nobody will feel uncomfortable. When two people meet, to greet each other loudly is a display of rapport and friendship. On the other hand, speaking too softly would be regarded as unenthusiastic. Chinese have used a term “声若洪钟” (voice loud and strong like a clock striking) to judge if people are grand and heroic since ancient times. To speak loudly is an appreciation of beauty, but it becomes ugly when mild mannered foreigners are present. In such situations Chinese are received as disregarding the dynamics of other languages or as showing no empathy towards them. Western society has long negatively stereotyped the Chinese and in doing so has disregarded their language and its idiosyncrasies. Resultantly, this has accumulated in negative perceptions of them being rude and obnoxious. Some Chinese living outside of China, including Kingston, also sympathize with Westerners' damnation and accuse Chinese people of destroying Western civilization.

Numerous descriptions about the Chinese listening to the Beijing Opera are contained in *The Woman Warrior*. As the quintessence of Chinese culture, the Beijing Opera is both a national cultural heritage and a world cultural heritage. To shrill out a high tune is its form of artistic expression. Clapping is not the only way for Chinese

audiences to applaud, they will also shout out “bravo” during an opera. Chinese emphasize unity and assume everyone must be friendly and easy to be around. Shouting “bravo” in chorus displays the audience’s appreciation and as a sign of respect to the cast. When Western music was first introduced to China many audiences continued shouting “bravo” in choruses as a sign of respect. Westerners who are unfamiliar with the customs perceive the Chinese as noisy and impolite. In addition, when Chinese are abroad they continue to display native customs which may seem socially inappropriate to soft spoken Westerners. Understanding different cultures and their customs is crucial to avoiding confusion. Such misunderstandings can be countered with profound knowledge and intensive research. Kingston, as a Chinese American writer is responsible for truthfully introducing Chinese culture to Western audiences.

4.2.2.3 Intrusiveness

In Chapter 4, “At the Western Palace”, many instances of Chinese intrusiveness appear. Moon Orchid is a character with a strange manner and an inquisitive mind. When she finds her sisters locked desk drawer she has the audacity to ask, “Why do you keep it locked” Moon Orchid asked, “What is in here” (Kingston 123).

She follows the children around and talks to them at an uncomfortably close distance. She creeps up behind them to smooth their hair with a comb and barges into



their room without knocking and proceeds to choose the clothes for them to wear. She even eavesdrops on them, whilst talking to herself like a maniac “She’s brushing her teeth.” “Now she is coming out of the bathroom.” and “Now she’s shutting the gate” (Kingston 141). Her behavior is not acceptable to the Chinese American children and they look upon her as a strange and ridiculous Chinese woman. They yell at her, “You’re breathing on me. Don’t breathe on me” (Kingston 132). They complain, “She’s driving me nuts!” (Kingston 141) and “Chinese people are very weird” (Kingston 158). Moon Orchid’s strange behavior is exaggerated and is likely a result of misunderstanding Chinese and American cultures.

Americans treasure independence, but Chinese regard cooperation and compassion as important. For Americans, enquiring about personal matters and having conversations at close proximity or interfering in private matters will create discomfort and unease. However, to the Chinese it is an expression of care and deep concern. Moon Orchid wants to help her sisters’ children make up their hair and choose their dresses. Talking at a close range is an attempt to build rapport and familiarity with the children. As second generation, American born Chinese, Kingston and her siblings did not understand Chinese traditional culture. When judging Chinese culture based on American standards, Moon Orchid is distortedly projected as a freak who acts impossibly rude.

4.2.2 Chinese Sex and Gender

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston presented Chinese women as lower class citizens. Inequality in relationships exemplifies their lower status in a male dominated environment where they were ruled by their parents, husbands, parents-in-law and society. American critics frequently claimed she empowered Chinese women through mythology, but was that really the case? Paradoxically she wrote about her dream as a powerful woman warrior in the mythological world, whilst contradictorily projecting the low status of Chinese women.

4.2.3.1 Unequal gender relationships in families

Kingston quoted many old Chinese proverbs to convey Chinese females' inferiority. In actuality, the majority of the proverbs are relatively unknown in mainland China, applicable only to Chinese communities in America and Kingston's fabricated writing. When juxtaposing the seemingly miserable life of Chinese women against the splendor of her imagination as a woman warrior, a much stronger contrast of the differences is presented.

“Girls are maggots in the rice.”

“It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.”

“Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds.”

“There’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls.”

“When you raise girls, you are raising children for strangers.”

“White Tigers” pages 43, 46

In linguistics, Chinese gender issues are presented mostly as being equal. The Chinese idiom dictionary contains only two idioms which represent unequal gender relationships, “重男轻女 zhòng nán qīng nǚ” (male domination over female) and “男尊女卑 nán zūn nǚ bēi” (man is superior to woman). The majority of idioms “男 nán” and “女 nǚ” are coordinating clauses which represent equal gender relationships. The following examples serve as proof:

“善男信女 shàn nán xìn nǚ” (male and female devotees to Buddha)

“男才女貌 nán cái nǚ mào” (the man is able and the woman is beautiful)

“男耕女织 nán gēng nǚ zhī” (men till the land and women weave cloth)

“男婚女嫁 nán hūn nǚ jià” (a man should take a wife and a woman should take a

husband)

“生儿育女 shēng ér yù nǚ” (birth son and daughter).

Some idioms even portray both sexes negatively as a pair, such as:

“男盗女娼 nán dào nǚ chāng” (man steal and woman of the streets)

The only famous old saying Kingston quoted is “嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗 jià jī suí jī, jià gǒu suí gǒu” (marry a rooster, follow a rooster, marry a dog, follow a dog).

However, Chinese also have many other sayings to cherish both sexes equally.

“女儿是爸妈的贴心小棉袄 nǚ ér shì bà mǎ de tiē xīn xiǎo mián ǎo” (daughters are the apple of the parents’ eyes)

“女婿是丈母娘半个儿子 nǚ xù shì zhàng mǔ niáng de bàn gè ér zǐ” (son-in-law is the half son of his mother-in-law)

“糟糠之妻不下堂 zāo kāng zhī qī bú xià táng” (a wife who shared her husband’s hard lot must never be abandoned).

Merely quoting Chinese proverbs unheard of in mainland China and choosing to neglect foundational proverbs forged in the mainland results in an imbalanced

preferential view, further widening and deepening the foreign readership's stereotyping.

Further references to the significance of a son rather than of a girl occurred in the old proverbs told by her parents and villagers in Chinatown. Great shame would be brought to a family should a girl be born. Villagers ridiculed Kingston's family because they conceived many girls and her parents were too ashamed to take the girls out together until they had a son.

I minded that the emigrant villagers shook their heads at my sister and me. "One girl—and another girl," they said, and made our parents ashamed to take us out together. The good part about my brothers being born was that people stopped saying, "All girls,"...

"White Tigers" Page 46

Another example of unequal gender relationships in families was evident in her great uncle's attitude towards girls. The ex-river pirate's differential treatment of her and her brother was surely unappreciative of the female gender. Girls were always told to stay at home every time the great uncle wanted to go shopping with the children. With many boys seen tagging along, the great uncle would be the admiration

of everyone.

“Come, children, Hurry. Hurry. Who wants to go out with Great- Uncle?”... “I’m coming... Wait for me.” When he heard girls’ voices, he turned on us and roared, “No girls!”... The boys came back with candy and new toys. When they walked through Chinatown, the people must have said, “A boy—and another boy—and another boy!”



“White Tigers” Page 47

Kingston said such treatment did not only happen in her family, but also in her cousins’ family who had no son. Their great-grandfather only wanted grandsons and always shouted out to the family girls, “Maggots!” during the mealtime.

“Maggots!” he shouted. “Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons! Give me grandsons! Maggots!” He pointed at each one of us, “Maggots! Maggots! Maggots! Maggots! Maggots! Maggots!” Then he dived into his food, eating fast and getting seconds. “Eat, maggots,” he said. “Look at the maggots chew.”

“A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” page 191

In addition to the different gender attitudes in families, the unequal status of women was also illustrated in terrible descriptions that occurred in the same chapter. In a Chinese ink drawing, Kingston saw a poor family pushing baby girls down the river.

They only say, “When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls” because that is what one says about daughters. But I watched such words come out of my own mother’s and father’s mouths; I looked at their ink drawing of poor people snagging their neighbors’ flotage with long flood hooks and pushing the girl babies on down the river. And I had to get out of hating range.

“White Tigers” page 52

4.2.3.2 Unequal gender relationships in marriage

In Chapter 1, “No Name Woman”, Kingston wrote about issues of gender inequality in Chinese marriages. Women had no choice, having to obey their husbands and other men.

Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had

commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil... His demand must have surprised, then terrified her. She obeyed him; she always did as she was told.

“No Name Woman” page 6

After marriage, women also had to obey their husbands’ parents. Kingston spoke metaphorically about Chinese women as an object to be sold, mortgaged, and stoned by their parents-in-law.

...a synonym for marriage in Chinese is “taking a daughter-in-law.” Her husband’s parents could have sold her, mortgaged her, and stoned her.

“No Name Woman” pages 7-8

Women were also expected to do as their family told them and unconditionally accept the traditions of married life. On the contrary, men were at their own free will to choose what they wanted and experienced a life of freedom and adventures.

They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could

fumble without detection.

“No Name Woman” page 8

Because of existing inequality between men and women, decadent marriage ideas such as widowhood and polygamy were apparent in Chinese minds. In Chapter 4, “At the Western Palace”, Kingston detailed two dim and comical Chinese women. Kingston’s mother (Brave Orchid) encouraged her sister (Moon Orchid) to leave Hong Kong in search of her estranged husband in America. The trip turned into a nightmare resulting in Moon Orchid going insane and ultimately dying in a mental hospital. The most important reason leading to this tragedy was the decadent thoughts of widowhood and polygamy. Moon Orchid was a woman who adhered to Chinese traditions and morals. For thirty years she had lived like a widow, even though her husband was alive, somewhere in a foreign land and out of her reach. She was satisfied with her life in Hong Kong. However, when Brave Orchid heard that her brother-in-law would remarry another woman, she decided to force her sister to come to America and get even with him. To her husband, Moon Orchid no longer existed, whilst she had become a victim whose life was destroyed by her husband’s neglect and her sister’s erratic thoughts.

4.2.3.3 Unequal gender relationships in society

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston presents conflicting and paradoxical opinions regarding Chinese women in society. She stated, “When we Chinese girls listen to the adult’s talk-stories, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves”. (Kingston 19). Incidentally, this contradicts her statement that if Chinese women are successful they would be executed.

Chinese executed woman who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations.

“White Tigers” page 39

“White Tigers” is a narrative based on a historical Chinese story about Hua Mu Lan, a girl who replaced her father in the army. Mu Lan could not reveal the fact that she was a girl because if the King found out she would be killed. However, this is another misreading. No sexual discrimination was involved, the only reason why she would be killed is not because of gender, but rather because anybody, regardless of sex, caught lying to the King paid the ultimate penalty, death.

In Chapter 2, “White Tigers”, Kingston attributes the Chinese female *I* as the

word “slave” in support of her descriptions about Chinese women.

There is a Chinese word for the female *I* — which is “slave.”

Break the woman with their own tongues!

“White Tigers” Page 47

China was one of the first civilized ancient countries in the world and it has long been known as the “land of ceremony and prosperity”. Chinese people are particular about “温 wēn、良 liáng、恭 gōng、俭 jiǎn、让 ràng” (temperament, kindness, courtesy, restraint, and magnanimity). A person’s modesty will win them praise, a prestige originating from ancient times. When speaking about themselves, the ancients would do so humbly and in a self-deprecating manner. If we are unaware that it is self-deprecating to show others modesty and only know the literal meaning then it will lead to misreading. For example, a king will call himself “寡人” (guǎ rén) because “寡” (guǎ) means “alone”, “寡人” (guǎ rén) literally means “alone person”. However, it is a self-deprecating statement and the meaning is “people who are short of some moral nature”. It means the king is being modest and believes that his moral nature is not yet perfect. A monk will call himself “贫僧” (pín sēng) and “贫” (pín) which means poverty. If we translate “贫僧” (pín sēng) as “poor monk” the translation would not be accurate. As “贫僧” (pín sēng) is also self-deprecating, it means the monk is humble because he believes his knowledge is insufficient and

undeserving of acclaim. “奴家” (nú jiā) is a self-deprecating term for a woman originating from ancient times. “奴” (nú) means slave, Kingston simply translated the Chinese word for female (*I*), “奴家” (nú jiā), as slave. Additionally, she stated that the Chinese word for female (*I*) represents a slave in her description of a Chinese female slave world. “奴家” (nú jiā) represents a female who disguised herself as a servant out of modesty to suggest to other people that she is willing to be at their disposal all the while expressing respect to others. Men also have many self-deprecating terms such as “不才” (bú cái) and “鄙人” (bǐ rén). “不才” (bú cái) represents people who are disabled or incapacitated. “鄙人” (bǐ rén) represents a man who lives in the countryside with less knowledge and experience in comparison with others. Sometimes males will also call themselves “奴家” (nú jiā) as a gesture of humbleness. Giving credence to Kingston’s writing and pertaining to literal translations fails to acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of language and misinterprets situations such as when parents introduce their children to others they may use “犬子” (quǎn zǐ) or “犬女” (quǎn nǚ). “犬” (quǎn) means a dog, so the children will become dog’s son and dog’s daughter. However, in Chinese culture, it is because parents are being humble thinking their own children are not as good or clever as other’s children.

Because of Kingston’s misreading of the definition of “奴家” (nú jiā), she thought the female *I* represented a slave in China. In Chapter 3, “Shaman”, Kingston

created a slave world of her own where Chinese girls were tied up with ropes, kept in cages and water tanks to be sold at the market. Conclusively, this deepens the Westerners' impression that Chinese women are slaves in society.

...she had come to market to buy herself a slave... Among the sellers with their ropes, cages, and water tanks were the sellers of little girls... My mother would buy her slave from a professional whose little girls stood neatly in a row and bowed together when a customer looked them over...

“Shaman” page 78-79

She further exaggerated the situation during a conversation with her mother.

“How much money did you pay to buy her?”... “One hundred and eighty dollars.”... “How much was it American money?” “Fifty dollars. That’s because she was sixteen years old. Eight-year-olds were about twenty dollars. Five-year-olds were ten dollars and up. Two-year-olds were about five dollars.”

“Shaman” page 83

Compared to the cheap slaves in China, Kingston stated that a child born in America is more expensive to keep than a girl for sale in China.

“How much money did you pay the doctor and the hospital when I was born?”... “Two hundred dollars.”... “That’s two hundred dollars American money.”

“Shaman” page 83

Strangely, all these stories influenced her impressionable younger sister who then wanted to become a slave. The parents just laughed and teased the girl by urging her on.

Throughout childhood my younger sister said, “When I grow up, I want to be a slave,” and my parents laughed, encouraging her.

“Shaman” page 82

Upon second handedly learning about gender inequality in family, marriage, and society, Kingston imagined a miserable life in China and at the end of Chapter 3 stated that she did not want to go there.

Whenever my parents said “home,” they suspended America. They suspended enjoyment, but I did not want to go to China. In China my parents would sell my sisters and me. My father would marry two or three more wives, who would spatter cooking oil on our bare toes and lie that we were crying for naughtiness. They would give food to their own children and rocks to us. I did not want to go where the ghost’s tool shapes nothing like our own.



“Shaman” page 99

Kingston is less knowledgeable on the history of China, and could not bring herself to understand why Chinese families preferred boys to girls, or that the status of women in society had improved. Universally, it is in human nature to show love towards females and to be close to them, especially for Chinese. At critical moments in life, Chinese people often shout, “我的妈哟! wǒ de mā yō!” (Oh! My mom!). Nobody calls out, “我的爸哟! wǒ de bà yō!” (Oh! My dad!). The truth is that in the ancient civilization, women were held at high esteem and, in some regions, were revered as goddesses. For example, in a matriarchal Clan society in particular the status of women was higher than men. In those times growing crops was not fruitful due to many unfavorable factors, harsh weather among them. Primitive tribes

survived through fishing, hunting and gathering. During that time, women were the nucleus of society and families. The first river in China, 黄河 Huáng hé (the Yellow River), is called “母亲河 mǔ qīn hé” (Mother River). Chinese also glorify “祖国 zǔ guó” (own country) as “我的母亲 wǒ de mǔ qīn” (my mother). However, things were different when China became a feudal society. During this time it became a large agricultural country and farmers were the mainstay of society. Plowing in the wasteland, farming in fields, and carrying food were all hard forms of physical work that required manual labor within the farmers’ family. Male in Chinese is “男 nán”. Its upper part is “田 tián” which means field and the lower part is “力 lì” which means power. The implication is evident here that power in the fields lies with men and that it is their responsibility to toil the land. Physiologically, men are much stronger than women and thus it is not difficult to understand why a son is more valuable, for his physical stamina, than a daughter is to a farmer’s family. When parents become old, responsibilities fall onto the sons. As a result, females were subjected to all kinds of ill treatments such as feet binding and being sold to lessen the family burden.

Descriptions of Chinese women told by Kingston’s mother are outdated, relevant only to the time when her mother left China but not to the modern times. In modern times, Chinese women continue to fight sexism and for their rights. Sun Yixian took an official post in the Nanjing Provisional Government in 1912 and started to reward schoolgirls as encouragement, implemented coeducation, and forbid unfair, sexist

customs such as foot binding. Chinese women have continued to attain equality with men in society. International Women's Day is a festival for women around the world to achieve peace, equality and development. The United Nations began celebrating this festival on March, 8th, 1975. Much earlier in 1924 Chinese women began a commemoration activity day for Women, known as 'Woman Day'. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, several hundred Chinese women gathered together in Guang Zhou. He-Xiangning presided over the meeting and declared March the 8th Chinese Woman Day. In 1936 the Chinese Soviet Republic promulgated the Chinese Soviet Republic Marriage Law. The law stated that men and women should be free to marry whomever they want and strictly prohibits arranged marriages, child brides, and forced widowhood, strict prohibition of taking slave girls or concubines and polygamy. Marriage and divorce must be achieved by freedom of choice between the two parties, and property is to be evenly divided upon divorce. By establishing the equality of sexes in marriage, China broke the hold of feudalism on family life and liberated Chinese women. The Peoples Republic of China was founded in 1949 and the leader Mao-Zhedong presented a slogan "妇女能顶半边天!" "Women can hold up half the sky!" In the same year the Chinese government formally established March the 8th as "Woman Day," a day when all working females get half a day off to celebrate. In modern day China, women and men hold equal rights, facts that go unrecognized in Kingston's book. Incidentally, she even read in anthropology books that girls are cherished in China, but believed the statement was

false and maintained her deep-rooted prejudice of Chinese women's low status.

I read in an anthropology book that Chinese say, "Girls are necessary too"; I have never heard the Chinese I know make this concession... I refuse to shy my way anymore through out Chinatown, which tasks me with the old saying and the stories.

"White Tigers" pages 52-53

4.2.4 Chinese Food



Figure 11: Chinese food popular worldwide

Chinese food has long been one of China's most treasured domestic ancestral elements. Throughout the world it has gained popularity and is now eaten by a third of the world's population every day (Helms, "How to Cook Books: Master the World Famous Cuisines"). Chinese food has many famous dishes, such as Beijing Roast Duck (北京烤鸭) in Quan Ju De Restraint (全聚德) and Boiled Mutton (涮羊肉) in Dong Lai Shun Restraint (东来顺). Both have over a hundred years of history and have retained worldwide popularity. However, the delicious Chinese food and eating

habits were depicted as odd, awful and disgusting in *The Woman Warrior*. Food is comparable to the Chinese who create and eat it, appearing odd, barbaric, and cruel.

In Chapter 1, “No Name Woman”, Kingston exhibited a great dislike of Chinese food, even sneering at it. When talking about her aunt who committed adultery, she asked rhetorical questions, which revealed sympathy for her aunt and an unsympathetic disdain towards Chinese food and eating habits.

Could people who hatch their own chicks and eat embryos
and the heads for delicacies boil the feet in vinegar for party
food, leaving only the gravel, eating even the gizzard
lining—could such people engender a prodigal aunt?

“No Name Woman” page 6

In Chapter 3, “Shaman”, Kingston spoke of how in Chinese stories the characters could eat anything such as scorpions, snakes, cockroaches, worms, and more. This was further ridiculed in the case of Chinese eating meat of ghosts on a stick, implying that they eat an assortment of odd and horrible things.

Another big eater was Chou Yi-han of Changchow, who fried
a ghost. It was a meaty stick when he cut it up and cooked it.

But before that it had been a woman out at night.

“Shaman” page 89

Wei Pang, a scholar-hunter of the Ta Li era of the T’ang dynasty (A.D.766-799). He shot and cooked rabbits and birds, but he could also eat scorpions, snakes, cockroaches, worms, slugs, beetles, and crickets.

“Shaman” page 89

Chinese ancient emperors were said to eat the hump of the dromedary, a species of camel, using chopsticks made from rhinoceros horns, and to eat ducks’ tongues and monkeys’ lips.

“The emperors used to eat the peaked hump of purple dromedaries,” she would say. “they used chopsticks made from rhinoceros horn, and they ate ducks’ tongues and monkeys’ lips.

“Shaman” page 90

Chinese food and eating habits are written about in a contemptuous manner, such

as when Kingston's parents plucked out fish eyes to eat them.

...my mother won in ghost battle because she can eat anything—quick, pluck out the carp's eyes, one for Mother and one for Father.

“Shaman” page 88

Kingston made a list of more than ten wild and protected species of animals her mother cooked which are in no way ordinary. The very idea of consuming raccoons, skunks, hawks, city pigeons among others could cause an abhorring sense to the tongue. This portrays Chinese as cruel people who mistreat animals and eat anything available.

My mother has cooked for us: raccoons, skunks, hawks, city pigeons, wild ducks, wild geese, black-skinned bantams, snakes, garden snails, turtles that crawled about the pantry floor and sometimes escaped under refrigerator or stove, catfish that swam in the bathtub.

“Shaman” page 90

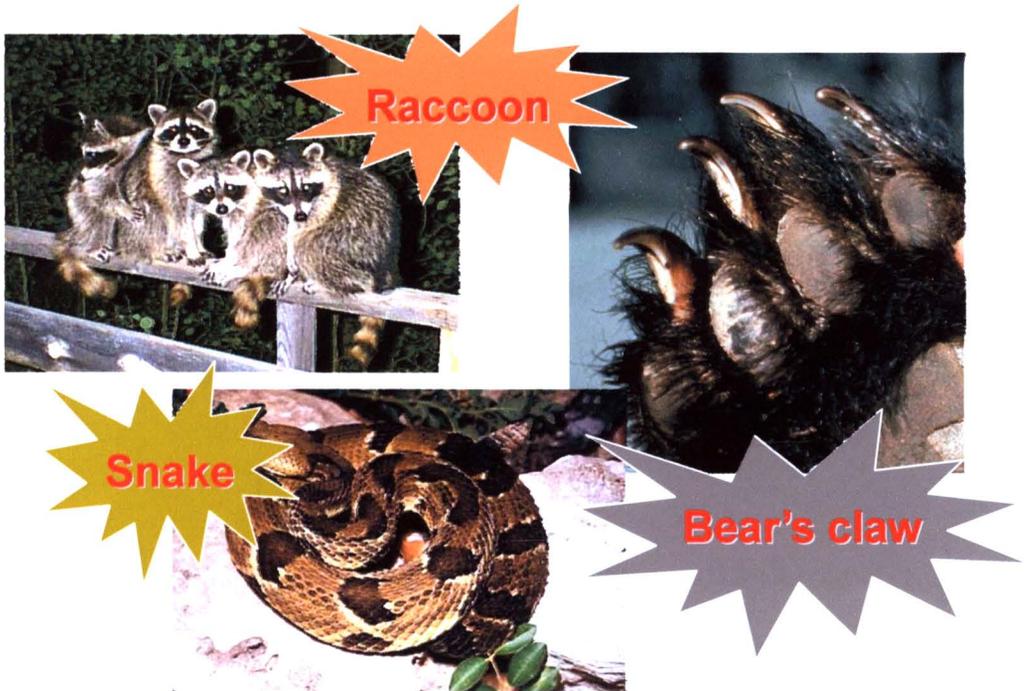


Figure 12: Odd and awful Chinese food in *The Woman Warrior*

Chinese cruelty is depicted during her father's hunt for owls and when her mother dismembered a skunk. Further graphic descriptions can be found throughout the chapter.

I shook when I recalled that perched everywhere there were owls with great hunched shoulders and yellow scowls. They were a surprise for my mother from my father.

Once the third aunt who worked at the laundry ran out and bought us bags of candy to hold over our noses; my mother was dismembering skunk on the chopping block. I could smell the rubbery odor through the candy.



“Shaman” page 91

Children in her family who grew up in America were scared by the cruel practice of cooking. Even when they hid under their beds, they could still hear the screams of birds and smell the rubbery odor of skunk.

We children used to hide under the beds with our fingers in our ears to shut out the bird screams and the thud, thud of the turtles swimming in the boiling water, their shells hitting the sides of the pot.

“Shaman” page 91

In addition to the many descriptions of strange Chinese eating habits, many examples of their cruelty towards animals can be found. The bear is a protected species. However, Kingston’s mother kept a big brown bear’s claw.

In a glass jar on a shelf my mother kept a big brown hand with pointed claws stewing in alcohol and herbs. She must have brought it from China....She said it was a bear's claw, and for many years I thought bears were hairless.

“Shaman” page 91

The most shocking story told by Kingston's mother was about Chinese eating monkeys alive during a feast. To inform and shock Kingston her mother described in detail of how they tied up a monkey's hands, then used a surgeons' saw to open its head and spoon out its brain.

“Do you know what people in China eat when they have the money?” my mother began. “They buy into a monkey feast. The eaters sit around a thick wood table with a hole in the middle. Boys bring in the monkey at the end of pole. Its neck is in a collar at the end of the pole, and it is screaming. Its hands are tied behind it. They clamp the monkey into the table; the whole table fits like another collar around its neck. Using a surgeon's saw, the cooks cut a clean line in a circle at the top of its head. To loosen the bone, they tap with a tiny hammer and wedge here and there with a silver pick. Then an

old woman reaches out her hand to the monkey's face and up to its scalp, where she tufts some hairs and lifts off the lid of the skull. The eaters spoon out the brains.”

“Shaman” pages 91-92

Chinese food was known as “色香味俱全 sè xiāng wèi jù quán” (the perfect combination of aroma and taste), but in Kingston's description it was disgusting and flavorless.

She boiled the weeds we pulled up in the yard. There was a tender plant with flowers like white stars hiding under the leaves, which were like the flower petals but green...It had no taste. ”

“Shaman” page 90

Facing blood pudding, squid eye, brown masses, and day old leftovers, Kingston finally shouted out, “I would rather live on plastic.” From her writing attitude and complaints, it's evident that she despises Chinese food and eating habits. Such an attitude could make her exaggerate many things. One could say that she buries her life deep in the artificial/plastic world as opposed to the Eastern world of nature.

“Eat! Eat!” my mother would shout at our heads bent over bowls, the blood pudding awobble in the middle of the table.

“Shaman” page 92

We’d have to face four- and five-day-old leftovers until we ate it all. The squid eye would keep appearing at breakfast and dinner until eaten. Sometimes brown masses sat on every dish.

“Shaman” page 92

“Have you eaten yet?” the Chinese greet one another. “Yes, I have,” they answer whether they have or not. “And you?” I would live on plastic.

“Shaman” page 92

When describing Chinese food, Kingston reaffirmed her stereotypical impression of the Chinese as cruel and barbaric. To Westerners who strive to protect endangered species of animals, Kingston’s descriptions regarding Chinese food are abominable. However, her judgmental and generalized approach reflects naivety and ignorance to

realize that not all Chinese food is the same as what her parents cooked.

Kingston's parents came from Guangdong Province, as first generation, Chinese immigrants they retained many traditional Guangdong food habits. The food of Guangdong has two characteristics, the first characteristic concerns taste. Natural flavors are preserved without seasoning which gives an insipid taste. The second characteristic concerns ingredients. An exaggerated joke describes the eating habits of Guangdong people, “除了四足的桌子和天上飞的飞机, 广东人什么都吃!”, which means, excluding a table or an airplane they can eat anything. According to Kingston's descriptions about the taste and ingredients of food we can easily see that the Chinese food she talks about in *The Woman Warrior* is Guangdong food.

Guangdong Province is a plain, small, and mountainous region with many rivers where it is difficult to grow rice and wheat. In addition, many refugees seek asylum in the region. These factors contribute to a constant shortage of food. As a popular saying goes, “Those living on a mountain live off the mountain, those living near the water live off the water.” Therefore, locals do not have enough rice to eat and out of necessity they eat animals. Located in the South of China, Guangdong Province is a coastal city with a hot and humid climate. Refrigerators did not exist in ancient China and as a result, food was difficult to maintain. Under such conditions, hygiene and eating fresh food was paramount to avoiding illness. Techniques such as

cooking live animals were a necessity to keep food fresh, not because of cruelty. As a result, food was mixed with natural medicines induced from animals such as, snakes, rats, ants and endangered species. This is survival wisdom that Orientalized Westerners failed to learn from or appreciate. What seems normal in one culture becomes abnormal in another. The latter view comes from narrow mindedness to the wider world. It's a shame that Kingston is far away from balancing or correcting her prejudice. Only this will make her appreciate her ancestor's culture.

Evidently, Guangdong food and customs appear strange and cruel to foreigners who may perceive the natives as primitive killers who sadistically butcher animals. However, Guangdong food is a small representation of Chinese food, which includes another seven varieties and even seems strange to the Chinese from other provinces. The first nature reserve established by the Chinese government in Guangdong Province was named 广东鼎湖山自然保护区 (Guangdong Dinghushan Nature Reserve). Nature reserves refer to areas including, land, inland water bodies, or marine districts, various natural ecological systems, areas concentrated with rare and endangered animals or plants, or where natural traces or other protected objects being of special significance are situated. All of which are under special protection and administration according to relevant laws. Until 1965 there were nineteen nature reserves, until 1979 there were fifty nine, until 1985 there were three hundred and sixty and until 1990 there were six hundred and six. In 1979 the Chinese government

promulgated “环境保护法” (Environmental Protection Law Of The People’s Republic Of China) and in 1989 they promulgated “野生动物保护法” (Law Of The People’s Republic Of China On The Protection of Wildlife). The latter was designed for the purpose of protecting and saving rare species, whilst protecting, developing and utilizing wildlife resources to maintain ecological balance. 中国野生动物保护协会 The Chinese Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA) was established in December 1983. 中国小动物保护协会 and The Chinese Small Animal Protect Association (CSAPA) was established in September 1992. Presently the Chinese government is drafting 《反虐待动物法》 various anti-cruelty laws. Naturally, like many other countries China has some lawbreaking traders. According to Chinese law, anyone who illegally catches, kills, sells, purchases, and illegally imports and exports wildlife will be punished. If the circumstances are serious enough, they will be prosecuted in accordance with the law. If the type of lawbreaking traders, engaging in illegal business operations as Kingston mentioned existed, they would face legal penalties.

There are 34 provinces in China and Guangdong is just one of them. Kingston makes generalizations about all Chinese food based on Guangdong food and all Chinese people based on the minority she knows. Her way of writing portrays the Chinese and their culture as odd and barbaric and aligns with the Chinese stereotypical image forged in Western minds. It is not difficult to understand why her

book, categorized as a biography fails to influence Chinese people into believing it is about China whilst receiving appraisal from Western society.



Figure 13: Map of China

4.3 “In Which Channel” — the Publisher

According to the 5Ws Communication Model, not only “Who” but also “in Which channel” influences “says What”. This is because in a successful communication, the channel must be appropriate to the message receiver. In literary analysis, the channel applies to the publishers. The genre of publication is decided by editors and publishers who also have the power to change content. *The Woman Warrior* was published as a non-fiction book and won the general non-fiction award from the National Book Critics Circle. The book’s subtitle “*Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*” categorizes the book as a memoir and not a fictional work. From the outset, Maxine Hong Kingston had wanted to publish it as a fictional work. However, her American publisher Charles Elliott convinced her that if it were published as a memoir it would become a bestseller. Kingston was convinced and consented to such publication. She mentioned in her interview with Kubota that her editors’ reason for publishing the book as non-fiction is that “I was told by my editors that most first books that are fiction don’t usually sell out their first printing and that critics are hesitant to review a young writer’s first published novel. In nonfiction, everyone feels they have a grasp on the story. Critics review it and people can more readily identify with the characters” (Kubota 2). When the book came out, controversy occurred among readers, especially the Chinese. Had the book been published as a work of fiction, then any misreading of China and its culture could be disregarded as creative

license. However, classified as a memoir, all descriptions are then regarded as the author's real experiences. Moreover, because the content complies with Western societies stereotypical perceptions of Eastern society it adds merit turning negative impressions into perceived truths. This further aggravates Chinese readers as they believe Kingston doesn't truly understand her own heritage, her own culture and people, and worse, sells them off as cheap.

According to the online *Oxford Dictionary* 2012, the two words, novel and memoir, are distinctly different. "Novel" is defined as "a fictitious prose narrative of the book length, typically representing character and action with some degree of realism". However, "memoir" is defined as "an account written by a public figure of their life and experiences." Palimpsest in his own memoir, *The Memoirs of Gore Vidal*, gave a personal definition of what a memoir is: "a memoir is how one remembers one's own life, whilst an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts double-checked" (Vidal 3). It is more about what can be extracted from a part of one's life than about the outcome of their life as a whole. In this regard, a memoir can be said to be about the author's life experience and contain elements of truth. Biography, as well as a memoir is classified as non-fiction which means it is about real people, events, or ideas. The convention of non-fiction is something that is real and it presents fact. In contrast, fiction involves made-up characters, and events which are called the plot and are often narrated. "Fiction has three main elements: plotting, character, and place or setting" (Morrell 151). From a literary perspective, "the author of fiction invites the reader to engage in a kind of make-believe" (Currie 386). The most



obvious conceptual difference between a novel and a memoir is the clarity of truth.

When interviewed by Maggie Ann Bowers, Maxine Hong Kingston stated that before she could read or write her family raised her on talk stories. When she was older, she decided to combine them into a written text. As a result she wrote her first book, *The Woman Warrior*. Passages of the book set in China were written before she had ever visited there. She was writing about an imaginary China, stating the fact “the first long trip through China... *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* had already been written” (Bowers 53). She was curious to see whether the China she had imagined would relate to what she saw in real life. In hindsight, after her first journey to China, she wished to have known of the reality before writing to add authenticity to her prose. To her the fiction she wrote would not be true if she found that China was different from her imagination. Accordingly, she never found anything contradictory and she claimed to be very happy after visiting China, feeling that her imagination was close enough to the truth (Bowers 53). In response to Sau Ling Cynthia Wong stated that Kingston is talking things into existence, she enthusiastically replied that turning imaginary ideas into reality was what she had intended (Bowers 50). According to her statements, *The Woman Warrior* is a book based on her imagination. Aware of this fact the publisher convinced Kingston to publish it as a bibliography, a shared responsibility which resulted in it being perceived as truth. The book included many Chinese folk stories that through metamorphosis became her presumably real experiences. In the Chapter 2, “White Tigers” was a fabrication of the folk stories. To analyze if *The Woman Warrior* is a work of fiction or non-fiction, the two Chinese folk stories about Hua Mulan and Yue Fei appearing in this chapter will be

investigated.

1. Ancient story of 花木兰 (Hua Mulan) — a girl joined the army on her father's behalf.

In Chapter 2, “White Tigers”, Kingston imagined herself as a woman warrior through rewriting an ancient Chinese story about a heroine named 花木兰 (Hua Mulan) from Henan Province. A famous long narrative poem 《木兰辞》 (*poetry of Mulan*) was based on this story that took place in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Mulan's father taught her reading and writing and from a young age she helped her parents with housework. She was an adventurous girl who liked horse riding and shooting with a bow and arrow. When the north nomadic country Rouran invaded the south, the imperial court in the Northern Wei Dynasty recruited soldiers to resist foreign aggression. It was compulsory for one person from every family to join the army. Since her father was too old and her brother was too young, Mulan decided to join the army where she disguised herself as a man for twelve years. She fought bravely and became an invincible warrior admired and praised by her comrades as a bold man. When the war was over the King bestowed her with high reward and a fine record of service for accomplishing meritorious services. However, Mulan rebuffed official position, money and reward. Her only request was to be allowed to return home immediately. The king concurred and dispatched her comrades to guard her home journey. Mulan's parents were jubilant when they knew she was coming home and

went out of the city to meet her. Her younger brother butchered a pig and a goat to honor his sister who had fought so honorably. Arriving home she changed from her uniform into a female dress. Her comrades were shocked when they realized that they had been fighting for twelve years with a beautiful girl!



Figure 14: Mulan, the epic female soldier

The name 花木兰 (Hua Mulan) has been synonymous with the word “heroine” for hundreds of years in Chinese society and culture. Kingston transposed herself into the story, imagining herself as the heroine joining the army in her father’s place. In the storytelling, the subjective future tense verb “would” was used at least nineteen times and then suddenly changed to definitive past tense speech, in effect turning imagination into reality.

She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman... The call would come from a bird... The bird would cross the sun and lift into the mountains... I would be a little girl... The brambles would tear off my shoes... I would keep climbing...to follow the bird. We would go around and around the tallest mountain... I would drink from the river... I would meet again and again... We would go so high... the river that flows past that village would become a waterfall... the clouds would gray... I would only see peaks... There would be just two black strokes...I would not know how many hours or days passed... I would break clear into a yellow, warm world. New trees would lean toward me... it

would have vanished under the clouds. The bird... would come to rest on the thatch... The door opened, and an old man and an old woman came out... “have you eaten rice today, little girl?” they greeted me.....

“White Tigers” pages 20-21

In her book, Hua Mulan became an empowered Kingston. She learned Chinese Kung Fu with two old masters. After taking her father’s place to fight in the army, she fought with a giant metamorphosis of a snake, a genie prince who mixed the blood of his own sons with metal for his swords and also beheaded an emperor. Kingston rewrote this Chinese folk story but in doing so misunderstood how to convey a folk tale. Magnolia was a good daughter and replacing her father in the army was indeed a display of love and loyalty to the motherland and her family, a heroine characters expected performance. But beheading an emperor was not the main purpose of “Fa Mu Lan” and it is not something that traditionally appears in Chinese culture, it is more a Western idea.

2. Yue Fei’s historic story — tattoo on the back.

岳飛 Yue Fei (1103 — 1142) was an eminent general during the Southern Song Dynasty, hailed for his loyalty to the country. He was born into a farmer’s family of

the Yue Village in Henan Province where most people held the surname Yue. The moment he was born, his parents saw a flight of geese heading south for winter which influenced their decision to name him, 岳飞 (Yue Fei). 飞 (Fei) means fly and they hoped he would be able to fly far and high like geese. Yue Fei was no ordinary man. He was studious, brave, and intelligent. From a young age he displayed extraordinary strength. Even before reaching puberty, he could lift a 150 kg weight and stretch a huge bow. He became a character of absolute uprightness and integrity. When he was sixteen years old, the northern Jin Nationality invaded the Southern Song Regime. Southern Song's government was corrupt and incompetent. When they were in peril, Yue Fei's mother asked him what he planned to do and he told her that he would go to the military front line to kill the enemy and to serve the country with total loyalty. Prior to his departure to defend his country against the Jin Army, his mother tattooed four Chinese characters “精忠报国 jīng zhōng bào guó” (Total Loyalty to Serve the Country) on his back. She asked Yue Fei: “Are you scared of the pain?” Yue Fei removed his clothes and answered, “If I am scared of a little needle how can I go to kill the enemy on the front line?”

At the age of thirty, Yue Fei was already a leader of an unbeatable army. He had participated in hundreds of battles, commanding and training his own troops. Considered to be tough but fair, he was very successful with combat tactics and was usually able to defeat enemies that outnumbered him. Because of his abilities, it was

said, "it is easier to move a mountain than Yue Fei's army". For ten years he fought the Jin Army with great courage and won every battle.



Figure 15: Yuefei's mother tattooing on his back

Kingston transcribed this famous historical piece and mixed it with Mu Lan's story to empower herself through mythology.

My father had a bottle of wine, an ink block and pens, and knives of various sizes... I kneeled with my back to my parents... "We are going to carve revenge on your back," my

father said. “We’ll write out oaths and names.”... My father first brushed the words in ink, and they fluttered down my back row after row. Then he began cutting; to make fine lines and points he used thin blades, for the stems, large blades. My mother caught the blood and wiped the cuts with a cold towel soaked in wine...I saw my back covered entirely with words in red and black files, like an army, like my army... A white horse stepped into the courtyard... On the hooves of its near forefoot and hind-foot was the ideograph “to fly”.



“White Tigers” pages 34-35

Yue Fei regarded “精忠报国 jīng zhōng bào guó” (Total Loyalty to Serve the Country) as his motto and become a national hero for his bravery and loyalty. When the Chinese talk about this story, they emphasize his Confucian tradition of courage, tenacity, and loyalty to the country. However, this kind of Chinese spirit cannot be found in Kingston’s “White Tigers”.

Both Hua Hulan’s taking her father’s place to fight for country and Yue Fei’s loyalty to serve the country are examples of Chinese education that emphasized patriotism. Many times foreigners have invaded and left bad memories with the Chinese, who are fully aware that without their country, there will be no home.

Patriotism is intrinsic in their nature and when the feeling is strong enough, it can upsurge in them considering martyrdom for their country. Significant patriotic saga exists in Chinese history and heroic deeds are glorified as they are passed down through generations. When Frank Chin accused Kingston of misreading Chinese folk stories, she claimed that she was recreating Chinese myths and complained that he failed to realize that it is a way of introducing them to Western culture. As Chinese-American, Kingston was far removed from China and as a result ignored and misrepresented the traditional culture found in Chinese folk stories.

Conclusively, the use of the two folk stories is another reason why many critics regard the book as a fictional work and adds further evidence that it should not have been published as a work of non-fiction. Especially since Western readers who understand little about the East would believe the work to be authentic and based on the writer's own personal experience. Thus in turn reinforcing a negative stereotype of China, its people and culture in Western reader's minds.

4.4 “To Whom”—Audiences

According to the forth-theoretical basis of the 5Ws Communication Model, “to Whom” refers to the target group of the message; that is the audience. When facing the communication, the audience members should have their own rational judgments, and then the communication is effective, otherwise the communication fails. In literary analysis, “to Whom” are the readers of *The Woman Warrior*. In terms of nationalities, they can be divided into two groups, Westerners and Chinese.

4.4.1 Western Readers

In 1976, *The Woman Warrior* was published in an English language version in America. The author, Kingston, claimed to be an American and that it is an American story. Incidentally, the story primarily concerns China, its people and culture and Chinese American immigrant life. The dominant reader group was Western readers, who besides reading for pleasure are presumably seeking knowledge of China and its culture through Chinese immigrant’s lives. Often, their knowledge is influenced by stereotypical imaginings immersed in their culture and media. Understanding their perspectives requires knowledge about their historical background and current affairs relevant to the publication of *The Woman Warrior*.

1. Historical background

According to Orientalism, stereotypical ideals of the East have long existed in

Western minds. To many Westerners the Chinese are mysterious, barbaric, and ignorant. For many years, China remained a mystery for Westerners with the only knowledge drawn from a book written during the Ming Dynasty named 《马可·波罗游记》 (*The Travels of Marco Polo*) which described China as “worthy”. Trade relations between the West and the East were founded with exports of tea, ornaments, silk and controversially opium for huge revenue. In 1864, the Chinese Official Lin Zexu sought to eradicate opium in Human, Guangdong Province through its confiscation and burning. With their economic benefit jeopardized, the West retaliated with the first and second Opium War whilst Japan waged the Sino-Japanese War. China lost in all the wars. Imperialist powers repeatedly forced the late Qing Dynasty to concede territory and pay indemnities. As a result China lost Hong Kong and Macao. After the Opium War of 1840 China was reduced to the status of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society, and became known as “东亚病夫 *dōng yà bìng fū*” (the sick men of East Asia), a derogative that lasted for many years in Western minds.

2. Political affairs

In 1949, Mao Zedong led the Chinese people in establishing the Republic of China. The old Chinese Government took exile in Taiwan, leaving Mao in control of the mainland. The international community disregarded the new China leaving it isolated, staunchly advocated by America and Taiwan. The Taiwanese government continued to represent China in the United Nations (UN), lasting until the early 1970s.

As tension mounted between America and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, America manipulated its relations with China in its psychological games. Anxious to cleanse itself of the stigmas of the Vietnam War and in an effort to counter the Soviet Union, America sought to improve relations with China. The serendipitous situation provided an appropriate setting for the continuance of dialogue and improved relations between the two countries. On December 25th 1971, the mainland Republic of China replaced the Taiwanese government as representing China in the UN. American President Nixon visited China helping to normalize relations and was followed by President Ford on February the 21st 1972. On January the 1st 1979, American president Carter built up the official relationship with China and agreed that the Republic of China was the only legal government to represent China.

Within this context, it was evident that the 1976 publication of *The Woman Warrior* conformed to the trend of times. When the door of China, which was closed for twenty years, opened to the West again, many Westerners hoped to learn about China. *The Woman Warrior* became an easy source. Contributing to its reliability was its publication as a work of non-fiction. The publisher's request to publish it as non-fiction was pivotal to the zeitgeist and its best-seller status. Under the influence of the non-fiction genre, Western readers were prompted to believe what they read was real. Kingston misreading China and its culture through her parents' stories and unreliable, secondary information contributed to the misrepresentation. The

stereotypical image she conveyed of China as twisted, ignorant and barbaric struck a chord of familiarity with Westerner's preconceived impressions of China and Chinese people. As a result the book became an overnight success and was accepted by American society, whilst causing uproar among Chinese readers.

American readers learned about China through reading a novel classified as a work of non-fiction and as a result their stereotypical perceptions of Chinese were confirmed through the book's vivid and distorted portrayals. Conclusively, misreading transferred to Western readers from the Chinese American author and the American publisher. If the book was in fact non-fiction and it came from real experience, then the reading would be just. However, through content analysis it is evident that it would be more reasonable and appropriate to publish it as a novel, not a memoir. Thus cultural misreading could have been lessened or even prevented.

4.4.2 Chinese Readers

Chinese became the second reader group interested in the lives of Chinese immigrants in America and the way that Chinese American authors wrote about China. The readers came from two distinct backgrounds, Chinese readers versed in English who read the original and readers of a Chinese translated version published in 1998. When comparing their experiences in China with the writing in *The Woman Warrior*, some were shocked to discover many misrepresentations of China and its culture. Questions pertained to the book's classification. Some Chinese American authors

campaigned for readers to write reviews against Kingston's fake, illusionary writing. Frank Chin wrote a short story to satire Kingston in creating a fake China. The story involved a female character named Meijin who was born in the south of China. Her parents came from France and immigrated to China to start a laundry business. As an adult, she wrote a book about France according to her experiences and imagination. Resultantly, France became an illusion. Frank Chin stated significantly that most Chinese have never visited France or interacted with French and thus their only source of information was from the book. To them, Meijin represented France and its people (Chin as quoted in 杨 (Yang) 44). In the same way, according to her parents' stories and secondary information, Kingston introduced China, a country with a five thousand year history to Western readers as a mere account of her life, dreams and experience. To them, the China in her book represented China in its entirety. Amid speculation and controversy, Kingston wrote an article named "Cultural Miss-readings by American Reviewers" in which she stated that she was miss-read by American Reviewers (Kingston 55-65). However, if she was really miss-read by American reviewers, then who is responsible for the misreading of China its people and culture in *The Woman Warrior* if not herself and her publisher?

Chinese readers were more skeptical about *The Woman Warrior*'s depictions of China and its culture than Western people since they were more knowledgeable of the subject matter. As a result, when faced with descriptions of China they could make

rational judgments and discard what is untrue to them. However, Western readers with their limited knowledge of China easily fall victim to failed communication. In this scenario and for just reading, the readers must retain an attitude of skepticism that is non-judgmental. They must understand the author's creative background and the books contextual, historical background. If the readers research the same topic from many different sources, they will be able to make more informed rational judgments.

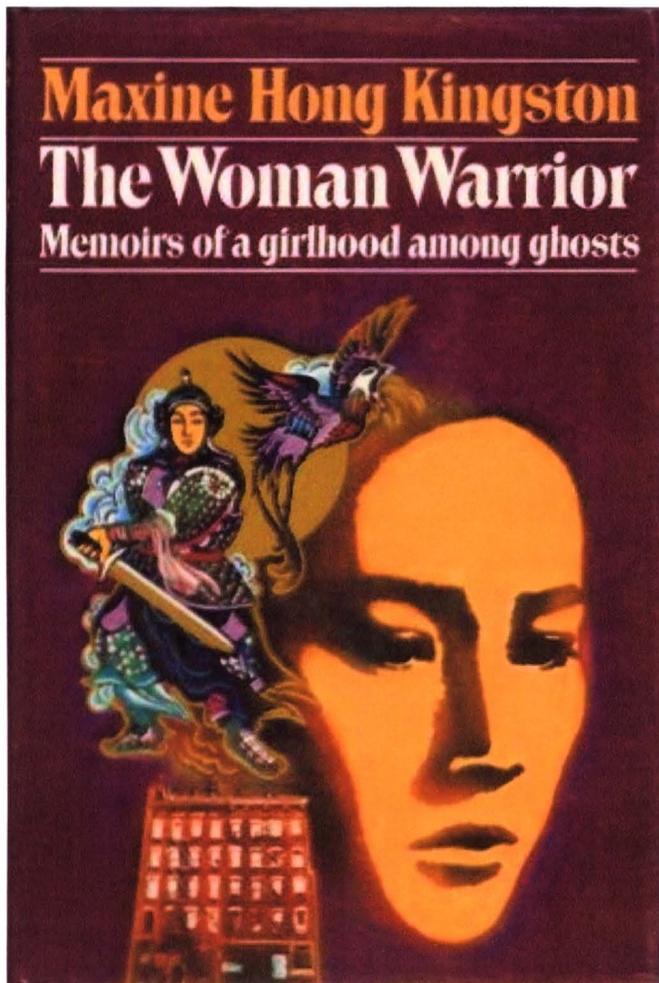


Figure 16: The book cover of the second edition



4.5 “To What Effect”—China, its People and Culture are Misread

According to the fifth theoretical basis of the 5Ws Communication Model, “to What effect” refers to the communication result, the perception of the intended message by the message receiver. It is not only a process that communicators use to send a message to audiences; it also includes the acceptance of information and audience reaction. In literary analysis, “to What effect” is both how context affects the readers, as well as their feedback. It serves as an important measure in inspecting whether communication activities are successful or not. The effects on the readers and their reaction can be determined by two factors. Firstly is the authenticity of “says What”, the communication content which can control the efficiency of communication. As previously discussed, both “Who” and “in Which channel” can control and change “says What”, since the communicators’ knowledge determines the authenticity, and the media can distort the truth of content. When audiences receive correct information, the communication is efficient. Nevertheless, when audiences receive incorrect information, the communication is inefficient. Secondly is “to Whom” which involves the audiences’ judgment and how it can affect communication efficiency. When audiences are able to make a rational judgment, the communication becomes efficient and successful. However, if audiences have irrational judgment, the communication will be inefficient.

Maxine Hong Kingston wrote *The Woman Warrior* with her limited

knowledge of China and thus her writing became unreliable. However, her writing skills and the book's publication as a biography misled readers to believe that what was written was factual truth. As a Chinese American writer, Kingston conveyed the story from an immigrant's perspective, so the text itself determines the reader's reading angle. What is more absurd is the fact that American readers read a Chinese story written by a Chinese author, whilst Chinese readers read a Chinese story written by a Chinese American author. Regardless of the author's conception, the reader's cultural identity, knowledge and background definitely affect their interpretation.

To sum up, Western readers who possess limited knowledge about China read *The Woman Warrior* without rational judgment and are subject to low efficiency communication. They will relate to an alien culture with preconceived notions when they are presented with a misrepresentation of China. Kingston's secondary knowledge of China, Western society's stereotypical perceptions and curiosity of China are all factors significantly contributing to cultural misunderstanding. When Orientalism and Oriental tastes have been formed in the minds of Western readers as a stereotypical image, it becomes justified in the works of Chinese American writers. Western society tends to believe that no real development or progression has happened in China for thousands of years. If these prejudgments remain unchanged, Western readers will continue to misread China, its people and their culture. Chinese readers will regard the prejudice presented in books written by Chinese American writers as a form of betrayal for the sake of a sense of perceived glory and Chinese critics have long crusaded against this kind of behavior.