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A Palimpsestuous Writing: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* *

一种复写：汤亭亭的《女勇士》

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Abstract: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is one of the most successful Asian American literary works. Rather than reading the book as an autobiography of an Asian American girl growing up in Chinatown in America, I view it as a multifarious telling and writing of the stories of Asian American women in their interrelated relationships living in both the past and present in their hyphenated lives between China and America. With her palimpsestuous writing strategy, Kingston reexamines what it means to be an Asian American woman. She not only uncovers what is forbidden, hidden, unspoken, wronged, or covered in the "official" history of Asian Americans but also rewrites and reinvents it. Nevertheless, she does not intend to use her story to erase or replace the other versions. Instead, while writing herself and women like her into the history, she has various voices and versions complement and sometimes even contradict one another to form its reality. Furthermore, with her new genre of writing, she writes the dreams, fantasies, and imaginations of Asian American women into the history too. Thus, transgressing various boundaries, Kingston rewrites the history of Asian American women by representing the interaction of multiple voices and versions. In this way, Kingston not only makes herself a woman warrior but does so also for all women who contribute to the struggle.

Keywords: palimpsestous writing; Asian American literature; woman warrior; autobiography; women's writing

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Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is one of the most successful Asian American literary works. Rather than reading the book as an autobiography of an Asian American girl growing up in Chinatown in America, I see it as a multifarious telling and writing of the stories of Asian American women in their interrelated relationships living in both the past and present in their hyphenated lives between China and America. In other words, the work is not about one person or one story, but rather a collage and a collection of people, including Kingston herself, her mother, her aunts, her family, and historical Chinese women, who together form the community of Asian American women. In her writing, Kingston not only uncovers what is silenced and forbidden in "official" Asian American history but also intermixes dreams, memories, and imaginations with reality, and finally recreates this history.

Maxine Hong Kingston poses questions that resonate for all Chinese Americans or other immigrants living in the United States: "Chinese Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?"[1] With her own experience as a case in point, Kingston gives an answer to this complexity. That is, there is no one fixed, stable, single, or pure version of being a Chinese American. The composites are multiplex and entangled, and they are not only multilingual, multicultural, transgenerational, and transnational but also complementary and conflictual. Furthermore, Kingston makes it clear that they are made up of not only facts but also fiction; that is, there are not only memories and history but also dreams and imaginations. In other words, the lives of Chinese Americans are convoluted, unstable, and unsettled. There are multiple versions, meanings, and understandings of the identities and experiences of Asian Americans. These meanings and understandings also change over time. While the older generations pass their stories on to the younger ones, the younger generations also write their new lives and meanings side by side or on top of the older ones. In this regard, I propose that Maxine Hong Kingston employs a palimpsestuous writing style in depicting the lives of Chinese Americans living in the US.

The term "palimpsestuous" is derived from the word palimpsest, which *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines as: "1: writing material (such as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased; 2: something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface."[2] In other words, the literal meaning of palimpsest primarily concerns "underwriting" or overwriting. According to Sarah Dillon, the publication of "The

[1] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 6.

[2] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "palimpsest."

Palimpsest" by Thomas De Quincey in 1845 marked the inauguration of the consistent metaphorization of the term from the nineteenth century until now.[3] In defining the term, De Quincey said that "a palimpsest, then, is a membrane or roll cleansed of its manuscript by reiterated successions."[4] The concept has been widely employed in diverse areas and especially featured in works of an interdisciplinary nature. Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida both use the metaphor of the palimpsest to describe the movement of memory. That is, human memory never dies but is in constant movement. The interior turns into the exterior, the lower level becomes the upper level, and vice versa. As a result, the present is constantly remade and becomes forever new by continually modifying the past. Roland Barthes expresses a similar thought about the written text:

> Even when written (fixed), it does not stop working, maintaining a process of production.... As soon as the text is conceived as a polysemic space where the paths of several possible meanings intersect, it is necessary to cast off the monological, legal status of signification, and to pluralise it.[5]

Hence, a text is never static or final but changeable and plural in meaning. In culture, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin believe that

> [t]he concept of the palimpsest is a useful way of understanding the developing complexity of culture, as previous "inscriptions" are erased and overwritten, yet remain as trace within present consciousness. This confirms the dynamic, contestatory and dialogic nature of linguistic, geographic, and cultural space as it emerges in post-colonial experience.[6]

In literature, Kevin Cryderman addresses the connection of the trope of the palimpsest to the genre of memoir, in which memory, individual or collective, is mediated via history and power.[7] Patricia Hampl sees memoir writing as a political act:

> Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past. Created: that is, real in the sense of tangible, made of the stuff of a life lived in place and in

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[3] Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 1.

[4] Thomas De Quincey, *The Palimpsest of Human Brain*, teuwissen.ch/radiofamilie/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/quincey_palimpsest_of.pdf, [February 19, 2020].

[5] Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 37.

[6] Bill Ashcroft, et al., *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 176.

[7] See https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v613/cryder.htm, [February 19, 2020].

> history. And the down side of any created thing as well: We must live with a version that attaches us to our limitations, to the inevitable subjectivity of our points of view. We must acquiesce to our experience and our gift to transform experience into meaning. You tell me your story. I'll tell you mine.
>
> If we refuse to do the work of creating this personal version of the past, someone else will do it for us. That is the scary political fact.[8]

Hence, memoir writing has special significance to ethnic writers in the Western world.

As a model of the form of palimpsest, Dillon defines "palimpsestuousness" as "a simultaneous relation of intimacy and separation... preserving as it does the distinctness of its texts, while at the same time allowing for their essential contamination and interdependence."[9] She uses palimpsestuous almost as a synonym of "involuted"; in the same vein, De Quincey explains that "our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of concrete objects... in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled."[10] The emphasis is on the interrelatedness. Dillon further distinguishes the differences between palimpsestic and palimpsestuousness:

> According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the official adjective from "palimpsest" is "palimpsestic," meaning: "that is, or that makes, a palimpsest." In contrast, "palimpsestuous" does not name something as, or as making, a palimpsest, but describes the type of relationality reified in the palimpsest. Where "palimpsestic" refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest, "palimpsestuous" describes the structure that one is presented with as a result of that process, and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script.[11]

That is to say, "palimpsestuousness" is not so much concerned with the final outcome as with the interaction of the composites. The ideas resonate with Kingston, who deliberately intends to catch the changing nature of memory and text and especially the political import of rewriting the history and culture for Asian American women both as individuals and as a collective group.

The strategy of "palimpsestuousness" allows Kingston to defy rather than conform to the fixed conventions and stereotypes in many aspects in the lives of Asian American women, including race, gender, Chinese tradition, American biases, and autobiographical and memoir writing. Rather

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[8] Patricia Hampl, "Memory and Imagination," in *I Could Tell You Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 32.

[9] Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, 4.

[10] Ibid., 4.

[11] Ibid.

than treating history and tradition as dead, sacred, or taboo, she sees them as alive and growing with their influences and interpretations continued in each generation and in her life as well. She also sees that the understandings, impacts, and interpretations of the past are different among different generations and with different people, even in the same family. Furthermore, she includes dreams, imagination, and fantasy—i.e., things invisible, intangible, and immaterial—as part of history. In this way, there are many voices, versions, and histories in her narration. History, legend, myths, facts, imagination, stories of her mother and other family members, and Kingston's writing and rewriting are all intertwined. These different versions or resources are not of equal weight or proportion. Nevertheless, they complement and also challenge one another. Furthermore, the aim is not to cover, replace, or erase one with another. Instead, all of them are acknowledged in their productions of meanings, identities, and histories of Asian Americans, especially women like her.

In her book, Kingston tells five stories, "No Name Woman," "White Tigers," "Shaman," "At the Western Palace," and "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." These five stories do not center on herself or follow the chronology of her growth. Instead, they are stories of "other women," who are either her family members or historical or legendary Chinese women figures. Nevertheless, they are all relevant to her, as they are to all Chinese American women. They are part of her and she is part of them. By revisiting these old stories that accompany or define her childhood, Kingston is able to reclaim herself as well as other Chinese American women with her own way of telling, writing, and rewriting interrelated with the old stories.

The first story, "No Name Woman," is a family secret or taboo. The narrator's aunt, who is married to a man working in America, is pregnant with the child of another man at home, and consequently the whole family is attacked on New Year's Eve. The next day, after the aunt gives birth in a pigsty, she drowns herself and the baby in the well. After that, the aunt, as well as the story, is buried by the family as sources of shame. Kingston stirs up the dirt by making the story public. Furthermore, she does not merely repeat the version her mother told her. Rather, she lets her mother start the narration, then she herself begins to undo the story. In this way, the story is no longer the same old story with the same old meaning but has multiple versions. They originate from the same beginning but have different developments and impacts. These different versions exist side by side, complementing and conflicting with one another.

The mother's voice starts the writing: "'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you.'" [12] It is a story of admonition. It has facts, but it is mostly made up of suppositions. Since the mother is not always present for the events of the story, what she narrates is not always the truth. Nevertheless, this is the authoritarian version that has been dominating Kingston's life. The story is not to be challenged but to be listened to. Its meaning is already

[12] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 1.

prescribed. From her harsh, warning words where the mother leaves off, Kingston takes over the narrative. She first adds her own context, which is that of living as a Chinese American girl, to the moral of the mother's story. Together with the quotation marks she uses for her mother's voice, the context brackets her mother's version of the story. In this way, the mother's version is confined and circumscribed. After that, Kingston reexamines and retells the story.

Kingston not only challenges the details of the mother's version, but, more importantly, she restores the aunt as a subject rather than merely as a silent object. She imagines her aunt having an affair out of love, desire, or wild nature. There can be many possibilities for how the relationship develops; she might be passive with the man, or rebellious. Nevertheless, eventually as a woman, the aunt is a victim of her situation. The man who has sex with or rapes her is never mentioned or punished. Instead, she is the one who suffers and dies for this affair. In her retelling, Kingston imagines many versions of the aunt and the relationship. Although the result is the same, these versions completely change the nature and meaning of the story. Furthermore, Kingston thinks that the aunt's action of drowning herself in the well is an act of vengeance. Accordingly, the aunt is no longer a forbidden name that can be deliberately erased from the memory of the family. Instead, she demonstrates her power and writes her name on people's lives and memories, even after her death.

In this palimpsestuous writing, Kingston does not intend to substitute her version of the story for her mother's. Rather, she lets both versions exist. It starts with her mother narrating the story in her original voice, as Kingston heard in her childhood. Then, Kingston follows it with her interpretation. If the mother's version represents the official and authoritarian version, which is also patriarchal, then the narrator's represents the personal and rebellious one, which is feministic. Apparently, they contradict. Nevertheless, they also relate and overlap. The mother's version serves as the background and context of Kingston's version. It shows that the power of patriarchy that represses her aunt and her mother continues in her life. In this sense, they are victims in different forms. Thus, by writing on top of her mother's story while departing from her mother's narration, Kingston strives to liberate them all in their connection underlined not only by their blood relationship but by their common fate as women.

Kingston and her mother, representing two generations of Chinese Americans, have different understandings of Chinese and American lives as well as the gender issue. Their different tellings and understandings of the story of the aunt not only reveal their different backgrounds and perspectives, but also help the readers construct a multi-layered understanding of the lives of Chinese people, women in particular, in China as well as in America. As Melchior writes, the effect is that

[t]he chapter, as it continues, encourages a proliferation of non-coherent interpretations,

> almost as if we are looking at simultaneous worlds all occupying the same space. The narrator's speculations concerning motive and action are contradictory, yet her verb tenses (alternating between the expected hypothetical and the simple past) convert speculation into actual history.[13]

Thus, with her version of the story of her aunt superimposed on her mother's, Kingston disrupts the single, authoritative, and patriarchal history. As feminist writing, Kingston's version gives life back to her aunt and lets her live as a subject, and also reclaims her and reconnects their relationship. Nevertheless, the traces of the older version of her mother can still be seen, heard, and felt. The palimpsestuous writing allows Kingston to display both versions in the manner of collage. That is, her version does not erase the old version: while it grows out of it, it acts as a critique and a rebellion, and continues to fight with it.

"White Tigers" originates from the Chinese household tale of Hua Mulan 花木兰, a woman hero who disguises herself as a man and fights for twelve years on the battlefield in place of her father and finally returns home to her female life. Kingston adapts the story significantly. Although she uses first-person narration for the whole chapter, there are also several types of retelling/rewriting. The way she retells/rewrites not only embeds the well-known tale in her own growing environment but also rewrites the familiar legend in her own way.

Kingston does not retrace the well-known legend of Hua Mulan. In fact, although Hua Mulan is a household name in China, there is no verified origin of the tale. It is generally agreed that an anonymous folk ballad, *Mulan Ci*《木兰辞》("The Ballad of Mulan"), is the start of later versions and interpretations. This poetic song, which summarizes the experiences of Mu Lan in thirteen stanzas, is often included in Chinese primary school textbooks. It is against this tradition that Kingston tells her story of Hua Mulan, a version that mixes her inheritance from her mother and her own fantasy and imagination on top of the legend.

If the household tale of Mulan serves as the first layer or the foundation of the palimpsestuous writing, then what impacts her personally is the second layer, her mother's version. She writes:

> After I grew up, I heard the chant of Fa Mu Lan, the girl who took her father's place in battle. Instantly I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village.[14]

Unlike the first chapter, in which Kingston uses her mother's voice and words directly, in this

[13] Bonnie Melchior, "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiographical Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *Biography* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 283.

[14] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 24.

chapter she does not distinguish her mother's words from her own. Rather, Kingston feels that her mother's tale is part of her life already. Speaking of a particular story her mother would tell, Kingston writes:

> This was one of the tamer, more modern stories, mere introduction. My mother told others that followed swordswomen through woods and palaces for years. Night after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroine in my sleep.[15]

Thus, although the official, "original" version is not there in writing, it has been written and rewritten many times in different forms: constituting retelling, memory, dreams, and reality in Kingston's life. All these forms are blended together; accordingly, they are no longer merely words or stories but become reality. As Kingston recalls: "When Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen."[16]

Kingston's retelling of the Mulan legend is considered controversial by some. Most notable among these critics is Frank Chin, who denounces Kingston's representation of Chinese culture as false and based on white stereotypes. Chin claims that "the works of Kingston, Hwang, and Tan are not consistent with Chinese fairy tales and childhood literature... They are, thus, reflexive creatures of the stereotype"[17]. However, what Chin misses is that Kingston is not in the position of merely recounting Chinese traditional fairy tales but is constructing and reconstructing her life in America as an Asian American. Thus, she tells a version of Mu Lan that is different from what her mother told her and thus departs vastly from the Chinese "original" one. The two conspicuous changes she makes with the historical version are that she uses first-person narration and that she furnishes the heroine with supernatural powers and thus turns her version into a fairy tale. In other words, Kingston recreates the thousand-year-old household Chinese legend as a myth of her own.

Mystification allows Kingston to construct the Chinese household tale in her own way. If it is safe to say that the "original" Mulan story is considered real by most Chinese, then Kingston deliberately makes her version surreal to emphasize or even exaggerate the power of women. "Myth is a system of communication,... it is a message," Roland Barthes argues, "it is a mode of signification, a form."[18] Similarly, Alan Watts states that myth "is to be defined as a complex of stories—some no doubt fact, and some fantasy—which, for various reasons human beings regard

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[15] Ibid., 23–24.

[16] Ibid., 23.

[17] Frank Chin, *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 8–9.

[18] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 107.

as demonstrations of inner meanings of the universe and human life."[19] The meaning of Kingston's myth is illuminated by the reality she lives in, including the widespread racial discrimination in the US and rampant gender discrimination in China. In reality, Kingston does not have the supernatural power that she imagines herself to have. Instead, what she faces in life is pervasive hostility and a deeply-rooted patriarchal tradition. Nevertheless, the narrator feels compelled to change the world. And she shares traits with Mulan, the swordswoman: "What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words."[20] In this way, Kingston finds her weapons—the pen and the act of writing—in her life to make the change.

Furthermore, unlike the first chapter, "No Name Woman," in which the palimpsestuous writings contradict one another and Kingston's later version rebels against and betrays her mother's early story, the multiple writings in the second chapter, "White Tiger," primarily complement one another. Not only are the positive traits of courage, bravery, tenacity, and community support familiar, but the patriarchal suppression and oppression also persists. In this sense, Kingston's rewriting of her mother's talk-story and the household legend of Hua Mulan carries on the feminist legacy; women's power struggle needs to be continued, only in a different fashion and in a different situation.

If rewriting is a symbolic form of palimpsest and cutting and etching are a physical form of palimpsest, then Kingston performs two forms of palimpsestuous writing in this chapter. She applies the physical form of palimpsestuous writing by letting Mulan's parents etch revenge on her back: "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."[21]

During this process, Kingston actually transfers another historical figure, General Yue Fei 岳飞 (1103–1141) of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), whose mother tattooed the four characters *Jingzhong baoguo* 精忠报国 ("serve the country with adamant loyalty") on his back, onto Mulan. The meaning—honoring the family and the nation—is the same. By grafting a man's story onto a female figure, Kingston permits the mission and obligation of Mulan to transcend her gender. Furthermore, as Diane Simmons argues, Kingston's Mulan is a lifelong warrior, rather than a temporary one as in the traditional story:

For unlike the traditional Mulan, Kingston's swordswoman cannot ever shed her battle garb,

[19] Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (London: Beacon Press, 1971), 7.

[20] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 62–63.

[21] Ibid., 41.

> returning to her prescribed female life as if nothing had happened, as if she had not been called on to save the world, as if her experiences had not hinted of the breakdown of patriarchal order.[22]

Simmons's statement insightfully reveals the meaning of Kingston's rewriting; that is, she is not only a woman warrior like Mulan who is called on in emergency, but, together with other Asian American women, she leads a lifelong fight against patriarchy.

If, in Mulan, Kingston highlights her physical power and the physical action of etching as a form of palimpsestuous writing, then in her own life Kingston emphasizes the power of writing. She sees that the connection between them is verbal: "What we have in common are the words at our backs. The ideographs for *revenge* are 'reporting a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words."[23] Nothing can better illustrate palimpsestuous writing than words: the traces of words are always there and can never be wiped out.

"Shaman" is mainly a story about Kingston's mother. It is made up of reminiscences from the mother's early years in China and her later years in America. When studying at medical school, the mother is not only a smart student but also a brave one who heroically fights away ghosts while spending a night in a haunted room by herself. Later in her life, she encounters other kinds of strange creatures and ghosts and she prevails over all of them. On the whole, Kingston suggests that it is the mother's life attitude that allows her to overcome all of the difficulties and fear in her own life and that of her family.

In the first half of the chapter, Kingston uses the third person to narrate her mother's experiences in China, and when there are dramatic scenarios, she cites her mother's own words in long paragraphs. Then, in her mother's later life in China and early life in America, Kingston uses her mother's own voice. Towards the end of the chapter, the language changes to dialogues between the mother and the daughter. The change of narrator as well as place gives different meanings to her mother as a shaman. In China, the mother is capable and powerful; on top of that, she is at home with everything. Although her perseverance and diligence help her through her difficulties in the US, she finds herself alienated in her American life. She has to resign herself to the realities in her life, including not being able to keep her daughter close to her.

The palimpsestuous writing in this chapter is not displayed through different versions of the same story but through the different understandings of a shaman of a Chinese woman. In the woman's early years in China, it simply means bravery and courage. Then, in America it means

[22] Diane Simmons, *Maxine Hong Kingston* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), 69.

[23] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 62–63.

hard work and compromise in dealing with American culture. By the dialogues with the daughter, we can infer that while the mother is still stubbornly attached to her old way of life, she becomes soft and vulnerable. These meanings seem to conflict with one another in the definition of shaman. However, they constitute the many facets of the life of a first-generation Chinese immigrant as a shaman, who turns from a Chinese to a Chinese American in her different life phases.

At the same time, as the daughter of a Chinese woman and yet a Chinese American born in the US, Kingston deals with different forms of ghosts in her own life, a life that is vastly different from her mother's. In fact, the tradition and life that her mother tries to pass on to her can also be a form of ghost when the traditions do not fit her life. Therefore, at the end of the chapter both the mother and daughter come to terms in their understanding of each other. The daughter confesses: "I don't want to hear Wino Ghosts and Hobo Ghosts. I've found some places in this country that are ghost-free. And I think I belong there." The mother replies: "It is better, then, for you to stay away."[24] Lee Ken-fang asserts that by translating and retelling her mother's ghost stories Kingston successfully constructs a hybrid "in-between" space for Chinese Americans. Lee stresses that "'in-betweenness' is not a static referent but a process of hybridization. It involves interaction and intersignificance between 'culture-sympathy and culture-clash.'"[25] While all Asian American women, including Kingston and her mother, strive hard to construct this in-between space, Kingston and her mother also learn from their experiences that they need to build their own space while sharing their common one. In other words, the Asian American women do not have one lifestyle, one way of writing, or one meaning. While they share their commonality, they also have their individualities and differences. Like palimpsestuous writings, they overlap and also separate.

The chapter "At the Western Palace" is full of contrasts and ironies. The "western palace" of the title itself has multiple meanings. It literally refers to the Western world, or America, compared to China and the East. Also, as the US is economically more developed than China, it was considered a palace, a place of comfort and luxury, by many Chinese at the time. Metaphorically, especially in Buddhism, "the west" also refers to the final destination of the long journey to enlightenment. However, the irony is that instead of finding her peace and happiness, Kingston's aunt, Moon Orchid, is culturally shocked and mentally distraught and finally dies there. Therefore, the multiple meanings are already played out in the title itself.

The story involves two sisters, Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid. Brave Orchid lives in the US, and Moon Orchid lives in Hong Kong. Brave Orchid works hard at a small laundry house with her husband whereas Moon Orchid lives on the money sent by her doctor husband, who is remarried in

[24] Ibid., 127.

[25] Ken-fang Lee, "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's 'Ghost Stories'," *Elusive Illusions: Art and Reality* 29, no. 2 (2004): 116.

the US. He supports her financially but does not allow her to come to the US. Thinking that it is unfair for Moon Orchid to live a life like a widow, Brave Orchid brings Moon Orchid to the US to find her husband and claim her right as "the first wife." The whole time, while Moon Orchid listens to Brave Orchid, she also lives a culturally displaced life after she comes to the US. Then, after the planned meeting with her husband, whose coldness shames and crushes her, Moon Orchid begins to feel insecure and paranoid. Eventually, she dies in a mental hospital.

The contrast between Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid is vast. Brave Orchid is strong, brave, capable, and controlling. She immigrates to the US in her thirties and gives birth to six children afterwards. In addition to being a housewife and a mother, she also helps her husband run the family laundry business. Moon Orchid is everything opposite. She lives a relatively comfortable life with her daughter in Hong Kong on a regular amount of money sent by her husband in the US. For thirty years, she takes an ostrich-like attitude towards her husband, who never comes back to see her and leads another life with another wife in the US. Finally, Brave Orchid brings Moon Orchid to the US to confront her husband. When Moon Orchid really faces her husband and the truth, she cannot deal with it. She becomes mentally distressed and dies in this country that challenges every aspect of her way of life.

It is easy to place Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid in opposition, as one who is right and the other who is wrong, one who is strong and the other who is weak, and consequently, one who survives and the other who fails, in their different lives in America. However, just as with the differences between Kingston and her mother as two different generations of Chinese women, the differences between Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid only illustrate the differences of Chinese women of the same generation and even of the same family. They just have different personalities and lead different ways of life. These two ways of life are two meanings that each represents, and accordingly they contribute to the collective names of "Chinese American" or "Asian American" women.

Brave Orchid, who is more hardline and aggressive, forces her way of life upon Moon Orchid's, which leads directly to the peril of the latter. Yu Su-lin sees this is a form of Orientalism:

> Brave Orchid's forceful liberation of Mood Orchid can be read as the desire of the Western feminism to liberate Oriental women. Brave Orchid is trying to get Moon Orchid to behave in a modern, self-interested manner, to assert herself and her individual rights and to make her husband accountable for his marriage to her.[26]

In the sense of palimpsestuous writing, while Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid make different

[26] YU Su-lin, "Orientalist Fantasy and Desire in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," in *National, Communal and Personal Voices in Asian America and the Asian Diaspora: New Perspectives on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers*, eds. Begoña Simal and Elisabetta Marino (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 78.

transcriptions of their lifestyles and signify different meanings, Brave Orchid tries to force her writing (life) style onto Moon Orchid and eventually causes the end of the latter's life. The story becomes a tragedy—one that can be viewed as a result of personality but also as an outcome of power. As Yu argues, by forcing Western feminism onto Moon Orchid, Brave Orchid actually indirectly uses Western power to force change in her sister, who represents a traditional Chinese woman or a newly arrived Chinese American woman. In other words, these two sisters of Asian American women can both become victims of Western power with one who comes earlier internalizing its authority and using it on the later-coming one. Moon Orchid's death signifies that her writing and meaning are forcefully taken away from her.

In narration, Kingston has three versions of this story. Using an omniscient third-person perspective, Kingston fills the fifty-five pages of this chapter with a detailed depiction of the full events of the story. However, right after this, she begins the next chapter with the phrase: "What my brother actually said was..."[27] In this way, she contradicts herself by implying that her version was merely unreliable hearsay. The brother's version is only two pages long. Actually, the best information he reveals is just one sentence: "I drove Mom and Second Aunt to Los Angeles to see Aunt's husband who's got the other wife."[28] The rest of the passage constitutes his answers to Kingston's questions. One can hardly glean any information from his answers because most of them are fragments: "Nothing much." "I didn't go." "I don't remember." "No, I don't think she said anything."[29] This indicates that what her brother witnesses is minimal; Kingston inflates the incident with her conjecture and imagination.

Kingston emphasizes the disparity between her version and her brother's by pointing out that "in fact, it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her."[30] That is to say, what Kingston knows is already second-hand information. There is another version, her sister's, which acts as the middle one between Kingston's and her brother's. The value of its existence outweighs its content. Simply put, there are many versions and many readings of the same event. Kingston makes such a comment by comparing the two versions of the story: "His version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs"[31]. What Kingston implies is that her version is a convoluted one, explaining this with the following:

Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls.

[27] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 189.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 189–90.
[30] Ibid., 190.
[31] Ibid.

> There was one knot so complicated that it blinded that knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker.[32]

With knot-making as an analogy, Kingston clearly declares her position—she defies the law/rule to adhere to her convoluted way of writing. By implying that Moon Orchid is in peril by not speaking or telling whereas Brave Moon prevails in an opposite way, Kingston shows that telling is powerful. Nevertheless, she is not content with telling itself. As Brave Orchid states: "The difference between mad people and sane people... is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over."[33] Like a scrupulous craftsman, a knot-maker, Kingston makes it her point to craft her writing in her way —a convoluted (palimpsestuous) telling.

The last chapter is based on a historical figure, Ts'ai Yen (Cai Yan) 蔡琰 (178–post 206; or 170–215, or died 249; or 177–250). It is made up of two stories: Kingston's and her mother's. The title of the chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," comes from a poem of Ts'ai Yen. In this chapter, Kingston's narration reverses the chronological order. She starts with the excruciating experience of suffering from silence by herself and other Chinese girls when she is young. Right after that, she narrates a story told by her mother, beginning with these lines: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending mine."[34]

During the upheavals of the civil war in North China, at the age of twenty, Ts'ai Yen was abducted by barbarians and became the wife of a chieftain of the Southern Xiongnu, to whom she bore two sons. Ts'ai Yen lived with this minority tribe for twelve years before she was ransomed back alone by the Hai government. The life of Ts' ai Yen was bitter and sad, as she first experienced displacement as a cultural exile and then the grief and sorrow of leaving her children behind. It was in such a mood that she composed the poems of "Hu Chia shih pa p'ai"《胡笳十八拍》(Hujia shiba pai), or "Eighteen Songs from a Barbarian Reed Pipe," to express her sorrow and pain. The tone of all the poems is distressing: they " reveal a woman who is homesick, psychologically bereft, and somewhat given to self-pity."[35] This is the general portrayal of Ts'ai Yen and her poems in history. It is also the story Kingston heard from her mother when she was young.

In retelling the story, Kingston makes light of Ts' ai Yen' s lamentation and wailing, but

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 184.

[34] Ibid., 240.

[35] E. D. Huntley, *Maxine Hong Kingston: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 100.

stresses her way of transcending linguistic and cultural gaps by incorporating the sadness of barbarian music into her Chinese poems. The result turns out to be optimistic and inspiring. "It translates well,"[36] comments Kingston on Ts'ai Yen's poems dealing with transcultural feelings. Needlessly to say, Kingston is drawing a parallel between her own life and Ts'ai Yen's, both of whom are writers and are culturally displaced. In a sense, both of them were suppressed to silence in a culture that is alien to their own. However, with difficulty they eventually are able to find their voices and ways of expression. With a view to making Ts'ai Yen a model from whom she can draw strength and inspiration, Kingston changes the tone of Ts'ai Yen's story from darkness and sadness to brightness and positivity. In this way, she also acknowledges what her mother does to her—cutting her tongue—in her childhood. Kingston recalls the conversation between her and her mother:

> "Why did you do that to me, Mother?"...
>
> "I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would able to move in any language. You will be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything. Your frenum looked too tight to do those things, so I cut it."
>
> "But isn't 'a ready tongue an evil'?"
>
> "Things are different in this ghost country."[37]

In a way, her mother helps her to speak in this country, which favors speech over silence. By doing that, her mother helps her adapt to the cultural difference. This is not only in the physical sense of "cutting her tongue" and the mental sense of enabling her to talk, but also in the psychological sense of emboldening her with Ts' ai Yen' s story. Stella Bolaki thinks this chapter can be considered "coauthored" in that "the two stories are connected yet separate: the turn from the mother's story to the daughter's is made subtly, in such a way that the second is not privileged over the first."[38] In fact, that is both the strategy of Kingston's writing and also her intention. As Bolaki states: "Driven by multiple and complex demands of relevance, she wavers between fitting the past to the present, with the dangers of domestication, Orientalism, and the disfiguration this brings, and letting its ghosts, in the various formal deviations discussed, return to unsettle a smooth narrative."[39] Although Kingston's translation and narration upset her mother's version, this is not a betrayal but a return. It symbolizes the reconciliation of the two generations of Chinese American women and

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[36] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 243.

[37] Ibid., 191.

[38] Stella Bolaki, "'It Translated Well': The Promise and the Perils of Translation in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *Translation and Alternative Forms of Literacy* 34, no. 4 (2009): 52.

[39] Ibid., 54–55.

their different ways of embracing Chinese tradition as well as their American life. As Donald Goellnicht keenly observes:

> The voices of mother and daughter, of Han and "barbarian," merge and mingle here, but neither dominates or assimilates the other; instead, they enter into dialogue, seeking identity through mutual difference, through the heterogeneity and hybridity of multiple, shifting subject positions.[40]

It can be seen that in all the chapters of *The Woman Warrior*, there are always multiple versions of the stories, narrators, perspectives, or meanings. Although the main thread and focus is Kingston's own, she never intends to wipe off the other versions or meanings. Instead, she either writes on top of the earlier version or reveals or stresses the existence of other versions. In other words, Kingston's writing is palimpsestuous, in that it lays bare the fact that there is no single, fixed version of story or telling. Rather, there are differences, conflicts, and contradictions in different ways of story telling. The multiplicity marks Kingston's politics of writing.

Conclusion

> By introducing the *status of word* as a minimal structural unit, Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them. Diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in light of this transformation, *linear* history appears as abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure. History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts. The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture.[41]

In 1966, shortly after arriving in France from her native Bulgaria, Julia Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" by introducing the idea that "the 'literary word' is an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than *a point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings."[42]

Palimpsest overlaps with intertextuality. In *Palimpsests*, Genette uses intertextuality in a

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[40] Donald C. Goellnicht, "Blurring Boundaries: Asian American Literature as Theory," in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 356–57.

[41] Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, trans. Alice Jardine, Thomas Gora, and Léon S. Roudiez, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 36.

[42] Ibid.

narrower sense than Kristeva. He first uses the term "architext" to describe the subject of poetics. According to him, "architext" refers to "the entire set of general or transcendent categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text."[43] Later, he redefines it as "transtextuality," which incorporates not only architextuality, but also intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality.[44] All these terms emphasize the textual relationship. It is true that Kingston's different versions of stories in each chapter highlight the tensions of the pheno-texts and the geno-texts, in Genette's terms; and whether they are traditional Chinese myths, legends, or talk-stories of Kingston's generation or her mother's, they are all intermingled and interrelated. However, what Kingston strives to achieve is not merely the textual relationship but the subjectivity that both constructs and deconstructs this relationship.

The palimpsestuous writing reveals and heightens the position Kingston takes as a writer, a speaker, and a narrator; as a daughter and a woman; and as a person of Chinese descent, an American, and a member of her fellow Chinese groups and community. As Stuart Hall astutely points out: "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the position of *enunciation*... What we say is always 'in context,' *positioned*."[45] While some other ways of writing take the position for granted or simply neglect the subjectivity of position, the palimpsestuous writing foregrounds the positions of speakers so as to lay bare the multiplicity of narration. Donald Goellnicht calls these "hybrid positions," comprising "a web of multiply intersecting and shifting strands in which the precise location of the subject is extremely difficult to map."[46] Goellnicht states that Kingston "teaches us that subject positions are not the result of essential determinants but are culturally produced (in relation to other positions) and socially learned, a complex and continuous process."[47] In other words, the simultaneous occupation of different cultural places and times determines that there will always be multiple versions of the stories of Asian American immigrants.

The multiplicity of positions is the direct result of the diversity and fluidity of Asian American culture. As Lisa Lowe argues, "we might conceive of the making and practice of Asian American culture as nomadic, unsettled, taking place in the travel between cultural sites and in the multivocality of heterogeneous and conflicting positions."[48] In the dynamic relationship between spatial and temporal terms, Asian Americans live and write on a terrain of intergenerational,

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[43] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1.

[44] Ibid., 1–2.

[45] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

[46] Goellnicht, "Blurring Boundaries: Asian American Literature as Theory," 340.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 39.

intercultural, interracial, and international characteristics, and at the same time the landscape is diasporic and transnational. The transnational approach, which according to Linda Trinh Moser, "highlight[s] the state of being outside of, in between, across, or beyond nations will also question lines of inquiry that attempt to promote notions of culture as static and, therefore, challenge distinctions between 'real' and 'fake' versions of culture."[49]

With the hybrid and transnational positions of her and her characters, Kingston's palimpsestuous writing strategy challenges such categories as ethnicity and identity that are used to stereotype the image of Asian Americans. Lisa Lowe aptly summarizes as follows:

> The making of Asian American culture includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented; Asian American culture also includes the practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American cultures as "other." As the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* suggests, perhaps one of the more important stories of Asian American experience is about the process of critically receiving and rearticulating cultural traditions in the face of a dominant national culture that exoticizes and "orientalizes" Asians.[50]

Kingston challenges the stable, fixed, or homogeneous typecast of the ethnicity of Asian Americans imagined by the dominant American culture and presents it as diverse, changing, and inventive. She is not concerned with portraying an authentic or authoritarian version of Chinese American culture but critically engages with it. She struggles to recollect, reflect, and rethink where she comes from. At the same time, she also reforges and recreates Asian American culture. The result is that it no longer alienates or intimates but empowers her and people like her.

From gender and racial points of view, Kingston's writing strategy both reveals and undercuts the silenced situation of Asian American women. The voices she employs include timid girls, strong mothers, passive aunts, her sisters, schoolmates, and neighbors, as well as historical Chinese figures. While the communal nature of Asian American culture determines that Kingston cannot write about herself without writing about people around her, Kingston consciously makes her writing communal rather than individual. As Bonnie Melchior points out, "Kingston affirms its communal nature, for stories live and are modified in the communal memory."[51] Robert G. Lee sees the multivocality as necessary to counteract the objectified and silenced position of Asian

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[49] Linda Trinh Moser, "'What Is Chinese Tradition and What Is the Movies?': A Transnational Approach to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*," in *Critical Insights:* The Woman Warrior *by Maxine Hong Kingston*, eds. Linda Trink Moser & Kathryn West (New York: Grey House Publishing, 2016), 68.

[50] Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," 65.

[51] Melchior, "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiographical Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," 285.

American women:

> It is precisely the discontinuities, dislocations, and erasures in the history of Chinese women in the United States that *The Woman Warrior* interrogates, thereby challenging both the silence imposed by Orientalism and the authoritarianism of a reasserted patriarchy that threatens to seal Chinese American women's experiences off in its masculinized revision of history. This interrogation, an intervention in Chinese American history, must break the silence imposed on Chinese women not only by racism but by the material conditions of their existence both in Chinese and in American society. This intervention requires a strategy that emphasizes uncertainty and multivocality in the reconstruction of a historical experience from the terrains of history, memory, and myth.[52]

As Lee insightfully points out, by letting various Asian American women speak up, Kingston restores their roles in building up their own history. Consequently, they together rewrite the history of Asian Americans. In this move, memory plays a significant part, as Rocío G. Davis explains:

> One of the ways in which the problematic nature of historical knowledge manifests itself in ethnic literature is through the articulation of the process and function of memory. Because memory is "a potentially unstable form of representation," it helps challenge any simplistic notion of objectivity and realism, and effectively merges issues of conflict and inheritance; as personal and family history develops against the background of the country's historical events and movements, the collision of personal memory and past events leads to "a powerfully sustained critique of received history."[53]

In Kingston's case, while she highlights the function of memory in forming her own history and that of Asian Americans, she especially underlines the nature of incoherence and fragmentation of personal memories. The "flawed" memories call forth multiple versions of telling. The so-called "unreliable" memories and retellings not only contradict and complement the history made by the previous generation of Asian Americans but also challenge the Chinese tradition that both forms and oppresses their subjectivities. Furthermore, Kingston writes fiction into the history of Asian Americans. As Linda Hutcheon argues: "What the postmodernist writing of both history and

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[52] Robert G. Lee, "*The Woman Warrior* as an Intervention in Asian American Historiography," in *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's* The Woman Warrior, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1991), 55–56.

[53] Rocío G. Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short-story Cycles* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2001), 104.

literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past."[54] By highlighting the role that memory and fiction play in history, Kingston highlights the creative role that all Asian Americans play in constructing their history—a history of multiple formats and voices that are made up of not only facts but also dreams and imaginations.

One of the most controversial aspects of Kingston's writing is the question of its genre. Whether it is from a positive or negative point of view, critics find fault with the label of "autobiography" for Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. For instance, Donald Goellnicht sees the traditional labels of autobiography and biography difficult to apply to *The Woman Warrior* because there is neither a single autobiographical "I" nor a central biographical figure, nor is the history she narrates immune from her own imagination. Therefore, Goellnicht concludes that "the text, then, has few of the conventions we have come to expect in 'traditional' (that is, white, Western, male) autobiography, which is linear, chronological, progressive, and individualist."[55] This view is insightfully augmented by Bonnie Melchoir:

> Kingston deconstructs autobiography and the male American ideologies associated with it by problematizing its assumptions about the nature of the self and the nature of "fact." Reading her text implies that *I* is not causal; it is a textual construct, open-ended, that exists only paired with *you*. A self is not a product that is made, but a participatory process. Neither is the meaning of a text (or a life) linear. Her text constantly folds back on itself, reflexively contradicting meanings it had seemed to support, as the very title illustrates. This is autobiography that inhabits a postmodern world.[56]

If the traditional genre of autobiography fails to define or confine Kingston's work, Davis categorizes *The Woman Warrior* instead as a short-story cycle: "a hybrid, occupying an indeterminate place within the field of narrative theory, resembling the novel in its totality, yet composed of distinct stories."[57] This hybrid form allows Kingston to write five distinctive stories about three of her women family members and two historical women figures while still relating to and integrating with the thread of growing up as Asian American in America. Especially as "a form with deep roots in the oral tradition and the literatures of the world,"[58] it allows her to be both personal—to take advantage of the "talk-story," an oral literary form that Kingston's mother

[54] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 20.

[55] Goellnicht, "Blurring Boundaries: Asian American Literature as Theory," 343.

[56] Melchior, "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiographical Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," 282.

[57] Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions*, 18.

[58] Ibid., 3.

fosters in her in her childhood—and at the same time to be public—to engage in the world of literature by writing Asian American experiences into this unconventional literary form. Thus, this hybrid format becomes both a means and an end for Kingston.

Finally, Kingston's writing challenges readers and traditional reading habits. *The Woman Warrior* is known for producing confusion and frustration among readers, due to what Julia Lee refers to as a "self-reflexive emphasis on not-knowing [which] is one of Kingston's most consistent hallmarks and what is perhaps most identifiably postmodern about her work."[59] Vicente F. Gotera confirms this through the questionnaire conducted with his students. Some of the notable responses from his students are that the book is "a totally different book and I've never read anything like it" or that "a lot of the book was written in a confusing manner [because] the author was unclear in her writing."[60] The remarks expose the standards or expectations students have for books. Arnold Itwaru argues that the unspoken, underlying standard in Anglo-American literature is related to issues of power in reading. He calls it "cultural imperialism" and explains that our way of reading literature reflects a certain perception that "bears always certain traditions of seeing." These traditions maintain the practices of the dominant order in the guise of cultural codes which shape one's understanding of what is being read."[61] Itwaru explains that while we follow what appears familiar to us in reading, we actually have been taught and constructed to do so unconsciously in "obedience to the institutions of control."[62]

As Kingston's transcultural writing breaks different kinds of conventions, she forces her readers to come out of their old, "traditional" habits of reading. In particular, they have to form a new experience of understanding of Asian Americans. As Davis writes:

> Transcultural writing proposes new strategies of reading through, among other things, a heightened participation by the reader, and initiates a new awareness of *who* are reading these texts. The evolution of Asian American and Asian Canadian literature implies a parallel development in literary audiences who appreciate these texts' creative engagement with expanding American and Canadian experiences.[63]

This creative engagement can be testified by a paragraph cited by Jennie Wang from one of her

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[59] Julia Lee, *Understanding Maxine Hong Kingston* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 9.

[60] Vicente F. Gotera, "'I've Never Read Anything Like It': Student Response to *The Woman Warrior*," in *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's* The Woman Warrior, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991), 64.

[61] Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, "Literature as Cultural Imperialism in Canada Glorious and Free, You Say?" in *Closed Entrances: Canadian Culture and Imperialism*, eds. Arnold Harrichand Itwaru and Natasha Ksonzek(Toronto: TSAR, 1994), 45.

[62] Ibid., 9.

[63] Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions*, 18.

students:

> The most significant thing about this novel was the way in which the author made me question my own stereotypes of others, without her ever asking me directly to do so. She didn't start out by trying to prove that I was wrong in any obvious way; in fact, she met me where she knew most people are, in the midst of their own generalizations, and led me to the point that she did not have to question me, but rather I question myself.[64]

The reflection illustrates well the impact of Kingston's writing on her readers. True to her words, Kingston changes the world with her pen.

In *Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, Dillon proposes that "the palimpsest reifies Foucault's assertion of genealogy."[65] Foucault's genealogy is opposed to

> [t]he form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development.[66]

In other words, what Foucault combats is a linear, authoritarian, totalitarian, homogeneous, and universal history. That is also what Kingston battles with. With her palimpsestuous writing strategy, Kingston reexamines, rewrites, and reinvents the Asian American history in which she grew up. Nevertheless, she does not intend to use her story to erase or replace the previous or other versions. Instead, while writing herself and women like her into history, she takes care to have this new history encompass all the versions including the ones that once oppressed or depressed her. She shows that they together form the reality in which she and other Asian American women live. However, she and other women are not restrained or defined by this reality. She includes dreams, fantasies, and imaginations of Asian American women in this reality as well as the new genre of writing. In this way, Kingston breaks through various boundaries to make Asian American women agents and subjects and to have their multiple voices and versions interact and intermingle with one another to recreate the genealogy of Asian American women. Thus, Kingston not only makes herself a woman warrior but does so also for all women who contribute to the struggle.

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[64] Jennie Wang, "The Myth of Kingston's 'No Name Woman': Making Contextual and Intertextual Connections in Teaching Asian American Literature," *CEA Critic* 59, no. 1 (1996): 31.

[65] Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, 8.

[66] Ibid.

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摘要: 汤亭亭 (又名马克辛·洪·金斯顿) 的《女勇士》是最为成功的亚裔美国文学作品之一。本文并未将此书当作一名在唐人街长大的亚裔美国女孩的个人自传来阅读,而是将它看作是对那些在追忆和当下之间徘徊、以中美纽带的符号形象存在的亚裔美国女性故事的全面讲述与书写。汤亭亭以其独特的复写策略重新审视了亚裔女性的生存意义。她不仅揭露了有关亚裔美国人的"官方"史册中禁忌的、隐匿的、不言而喻的、被误读或被掩盖的事实,而且还改写并重铸了这段历史。尽管如此,她并不打算用她的故事来抹去或取代其他故事版本。与此相反,当她把自己和像她一样的女性写进历史的时候,各种不同的声音和版本于书中互补,有时甚至相互冲突,从而形成了历史的现实。不仅如此,她还以全新的写作风格,将亚裔女性的梦想、幻想和想象也写进了历史。正因为此,汤亭亭超越了各种界限,通过多重声音和不同版本的互动,改写了亚裔女性的历史。她不仅以这种方式使自己成为一名女勇士,更使所有为这场斗争贡献力量的女性成为了女勇士。

关键词: 复写;亚裔美国文学;女勇士;自传;女性写作

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