ON "GOLD MOUNTAIN": MAXINE HONG KINGSTON-A CHINESE LIFE IN AMERICA

K. SUNITA NARAYAN

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Hoshang Merchant

Lecturer in English,
University of Hyderabad,
Hyderabad - 500 134.

Certificate

This is to certify that Ms. K. Sunita Narayan worked under my supervision for the M.Phil. degree in English. Her dissertation entitled "On 'Gold Mountain': Maxine Hong Kingston--A Chinese Life in America" represents her work at the University of Hyderabad, and it has not been submitted for a degree or diploma elsewhere.

H. Merchant

Date: 14 Aug '91

(HOSHANG MERCHANT)

Dean,
School of Humanities,
University of Hyderabad,
HYDERABAD-500 134.

17.8.91

for my Parents,

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Note on Abbreviations Used

The references to the primary and secondary texts will be incorporated in the dissertation itself in parentheses which follow immediately after each reference. For example, if a sentence has been quoted from The Woman Warrior, the reference in the parentheses is indicated thus: (WW: 7). Here WW indicates The Woman Warrior; the number 7 indicates the page cited. The three books of Kingston have been cited frequently in the text. All these books are referred to in short form. They are:

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts: WW

China Men: CM

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book: TM.

Full publication data of secondary sources are given in "Works Consulted" at the end of the dissertation.

The other abbreviations used are: EA for The Encyclopedia Americana and HEA for The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

China is the largest of all Asian countries and contains ¼th of the world's population, as we all know. The Chinese civilization is known to be the world's "oldest contemporary civilization," Encyclopedia Americana tells us that China has inherited a complex legacy of cultural patterns from the past. It can boast of having the oldest surviving civilization but not of its early development--it was not until the Mongoloids settled in the northern part of China that the changes started occurring gradually. The Chinese had managed to preserve their cultural heritage in spite of the repeated foreign invasions and have managed to pass it on to their descendants. Yet for the past fifty years we cannot say that the Chinese were reluctant to give up a few values which they felt were no longer of any social or cultural use (EA, 1984: 492-93).

The traditional Chinese people attached great importance to the Confucian doctrines whose concern was social order and personal dignity. Family was an institution of prime importance and allegiance to one's parents was a dominant principle. A family should have enough sons to reproduce itself. It was a sin for a man to die without an heir. Even today a traditional Chinese family is a joint family which is made up of several small patrilineal units. They lived in the same house and worked as a close unit. The family structure of an ideal family was hierarchical accord-

ing to generations, age and sex. The head of the family was the eldest male, he ruled the rest of the members. After him, usually, the family is taken over by his eldest son or sometimes by the son who is considered most worthy. Wives were brought into such joint families strictly by the elders themselves and not by individual decision. These wives were subservient to the husband, his mother and other family members (EA, 1984: 501).

As revealed by Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, in the nineteenth century political and social situation in China deteriorated. Corruption and oppression of the poor were the order of the day. Around the same time (1839-1842) China entered into the Opium War with England and other countries, in which China was defeated. The war resulted in economic problems for China. The situation was intensified by the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) that shook the empire to its very roots. The inside story was just as bad as the outside one. The local secret societies took advantage of the unstable political situation and started a series of insurrections. To add to all these problems, Civil War broke out between Hakka and the Cantonese dialect group villages in 1856 and lasted till 1867 devastating these villages. This political chaos and economic dislocation in China forced many people to leave their homeland and look towards prosperous countries in the West (HEA, 1980: 218).

The destiny of many Chinese people was influenced by the changes taking place around the world. The new continent (U.S.) at that time was developing its industries and

required abundant supply of cheap labour which the impoverished Chinese peasants and labourers were eager to provide.

Though a number of Chinese came to the U.S. prior to the year 1820, the records of the Immigration Commission reveal that the Chinese started migrating from the year 1820. As S.W. Kung said, the years 1820-1882 are very important in the history of California because they are linked with the Chinese immigration to the U.S. (Kung, 1962: 64). In 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, which attracted huge numbers of people from all quarters of the globe, of which most of them were Chinese. Once the gold fever subsided, the entrepreneurs started looking for new avenues. The next important job was the linking of the West to the more populous East in order to compete in the national market. This started the era of the railroad building.

Steiner tells us that in the early days of the railroad era, the Chinese were not employed. Their strength, hard work and integrity were underrated. They were teased as too "effeminate" to do a "real man's work" as laying the rails. However, the acute shortage of labour forced Charles Crocker, one of the "big four," to employ the Chinese to build the railroads. Charles Crocker soon realized their worth and came to rely on them completely. This again gave the white man another chance to make fun of them as the "Crocker pets." The roads laid by the Chinese were longer than the ones laid by any other gang working on the railroads. This dealt a powerful blow to the ego of the white workers (Steiner, 1979: 129-33).

As Harvard Encyclopedia tells us, the Chinese were gradually employed to build a number of interstate railroads, but the first large-scale use of Chinese labourers was in the construction of the Central Pacific portion of the trans-continental which was completed in the year 1869. After the completion of the railroads, some Chinese settled in those towns while others migrated in search of new jobs and established new Chinatowns. White labour was highly paid and since there was a great need for cheap labour, the impoverished Chinese workers were welcomed. The Chinese readily took up jobs which were considered menial by the white man, like cooking, gardening, carpentry and they even worked as domestic servants. Many of them worked in factories making books, shoes, cigars, cloth and so on for meagre wages and were very cooperative with their employers (HEA, 1980: 219).

The Chinese were very ambitious. Soon, some of the labourers raised themselves to the position of entrepreneurs and started their own shoe, cigar, garment factories and expanded so much that by the 1870's they owned several enterprises and started employing workers discharged from the Caucasian owned factories. They developed the shrimp fisheries which, after 1880, were exporting a million pounds of dried shrimp and shells annually. They were also the mainstay of the canneries (HEA, 1980: 219).

The hardworking Chinese were not only an exploited lot but were also the favourites of the white bosses. This aroused hatred in the white labourers' hearts. It was in the mining camps in 1852 that the Chinese, for the first

time, found severe opposition. The Chinese became the victims of the pent-up emotions, frustrations and prejudices of the white labourers. They were the victims, not only of physical assaults and unequal treatment, but also of discriminatory legislation.

In California the opposition to the Chinese was mainly a working class opposition. The Caucasian workers expressed their anger thus:

> We're working like a swarm of bees
> scarcely making enough to live
> and two hundred thousand Chinese
> are taking home the gold that we ought to have.
> (Steiner, 1979: 120)

It was from this conflict that the anti-Chinese agitation began and out of this agitation was born the racist ideology which still survives. The causes responsible for the anti-Chinese movement were the workers' opposition, the presence of the southerners in California with their principle of white man's country, the doctrine of know-nothingism which led to the attitude that America is for Americans and that all foreigners, particularly those of a different colour, were interlopers and trespassers. The depression setting in at this time resulted in unemployment, and native employees who were thrown out of jobs blamed their hardships, at least partly, on the Chinese whose presence seemed to have deprived them of jobs. This set off the anti-Chinese crusade (Kung, 1962: 68).

As S.W. Kung describes, during the business recession of 1854 and 1862 and the national panic of 1873 the Chinese, the railways and the banks were blamed. The Californian

legislature started imposing several new Foreign Miners' License Tax Laws, but it was the decision of the Federal circuit court in 1867 declaring the Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalization that affected the Chinese more than anything else (Kung, 1962: 69).

S.W. Kung informs us that on one side the Government of California was passing anti-Chinese bills and on the other side workers assaulted the Chinese physically and destroyed their houses. The largest riot occurred in Los Angeles on 24 October 1871, in which 18 persons were killed and Chinatown was reduced to ashes within four hours. Those people who employed the Chinese workers were also attacked and sometimes met death at the hands of lawless hoodlums. The politicians, in order to capture votes, conducted anti-Chinese campaigns. The Republicans and the Democrats were both determined to solve the Chinese question. The labour groups opposed the Burlingame Treaty which recognized the right of voluntary immigration. The constitutional convention which met in 1878 to frame the second constitution of California reeked with anti-Chinese feelings. As a result, the Federal Government sent a Commission to China to modify the Burlingame Treaty. The Chinese Government permitted the U.S. to "regulate, limit or suspend" for a limited time the entrance of the Chinese labourers (Kung, 1962: 67-68).

After the revision of the treaty of 1880, seven exclusion bills were introduced in the first session of the 47th Congress (1881-1882). After some debate, Congress voted a twenty-year exclusion bill which was vetoed by

President Arthur. Another bill passed on April 29, 1882 reducing the duration to ten years, was signed by the President, which became law on May 6, 1882. Once the bill was passed, it was extended after the expiry of ten years and continued in various forms till its repeal in 1943 (Kung, 1962: 76).

During the exclusion period the Chinese were forced to live in slums without medical care. Later these slums were turned into Chinatowns by the hardworking Chinese. Chinese children were no longer admitted into English schools. The Chinese were discriminated in every possible way in every field. Chinese students were segregated in colleges, theatres and were refused services in barber shops, restaurants and other public places. They were barred from some towns. All these developments induced the Chinese withdrawal and isolation from the mainstream of American life (HEA, 1980: 223).

Then the movement for repeal started. The first demonstration after the birth of nationalism in China was directed against the United States and it came in the form of economic boycott. Merchants refused to buy or sell American goods, refused to ship cargo in American ships, children were not sent to American schools, Chinese working as interpreters and servants also resigned (HEA, 1980: 226).

The Exclusion Act was slowly being relaxed. Exceptions were made for government officials, visitors, students, teachers, ministers and treaty traders. Among the other factors underlying the movement for repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the most crucial was the heroic resistance of

the Chinese against the Japanese onslaught in the Sino-Japanese war which began in 1937. The Chinese participation in the second World War aroused vast pro-Chinese feelings among the Americans. Public sentiment remained to be translated into actual legislation. President Roosevelt who had done much to facilitate the legislation finally signed the bill on December 17, 1943 (Kung, 1962: 105).

After this, the slow process of assimilation started. Most of the Chinese people who entered the U.S. legally were however naturalized during the exclusion period and became legal Chinese-Americans. "Assimilation" is "the process by which a minority adopts the dominant group's culture, fading into the larger society" (Thio, 1985: 240). Most of the early immigrants had resisted the pressures of assimilation and tried to retain their native culture. However, in the twentieth century, the situation began to change. In 1870 only 10% of the Chinese were American born, in 1900 the figure read 20% and it reached 52% in 1940. The second generation children coming from Chinese Christian homes were influenced by the ways of the larger society, especially through schools, the Protestant churches, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A. and the Boy Scouts. The young ones easily took to social dancing, dating and competitive sports. They became more progressive and egalitarian in outlook than their elders. By the 1930's most of the youth had an adequate command of the language. While the old immigrants considered thrift as a virtue, the younger generation followed the current American trend of comfort and good living. The present generation easily

abandoned their customs without giving them a second thought. They had started to choose their own marriage partners which was previously done by their elders (HEA, 1980: 225).

Another change brought by the second generation was the formation of new organizations. By 1935 the second generation also founded the Chinese Digest, the first Chinese-American newspaper in English. The parents of the second generation youth were often in a dilemma whether to be angry or amused at the behaviour of their children. A father received a letter stating:

> Dear Pop,
>
> Gotta run back to school for the game.
> Need my black shoes for dance tonight.
> Be a sport and polish them for me. Polish
> in upper drawer. Thanks.
>
> Eddie. (Sung, 1967: 151).

The father wondered what to do when faced with such a situation because, to his generation, a father was like a God. The cardinal virtue was filial piety, but to Eddie, his father was as good as a friend, in keeping with the American traditions which placed emphasis on easy camaraderie between father and son. This shows that more and more Chinese-Americans were becoming more American. However, the future of the Chinese still depends largely on how well they are received as they adjust themselves to the American community.

The signs of some sort of writing being undertaken in English by the Chinese-Americans was seen when the Chinese Digest was founded. During the past few years the process

accelerated. Broadly, the literature produced by them is classified as Immigrant literature or as Asian American literature. Elaine H. Kim has defined Asian American literature as,

> Literature written in English, during the last hundred years by Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Korean American writers concerning their identity and experience in the United States . . . . Asian American literature reflects the Asian experience in the United States, which has been shaped by American racial policies from the beginning of Chinese immigration in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Exclusion and anti-miscegenation laws, social and economic segregation, relocation and internment, and the Civil Rights movement provide the complex social context of Asian American literature. (Kim, 1984: 41)

One such author who reflects almost all these problems in her works is Maxine Hong Kingston. Maxine Hong Kingston is a Chinese-American who shares the same anguish as other Asian American writers like Younghill Kang, Carlos Bulosan, Jade Snow Wong, Pardee Lowe, etc. Kingston was born on 27 October 1940 in Stockton, California. She is the daughter of Tom and Ying Lan Hong. She was married in the year 1962 to Earll Kingston. To date, Kingston has three books to her credit. Her first book, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, published in the year 1976, is the winner of the 1976 National Book Critics Circle Award for Non-fiction. The second book, China Men, published in 1981, is also non-fiction. It has also won the National Book Award. The latest book, Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book, winner of PEN West Award in Fiction, was published in 1989. It is her first attempt at writing fiction. These three books belong to the postmodern era. She also has

some poetry to her credit.

The several problems or themes we come across in her books are: the themes of feminism, quest for identity, immigration, exclusion and repeal of the exclusion law, racism, the mother-daughter relationship, etc.

Feminism is a movement which belongs very much to our century though it started almost two centuries ago. The struggle for women's rights was marked by Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women, Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Simon de Beauvoir's The Second Sex. This movement regained vigour in the 1960's, the age of revolutions. As quoted in A Feminist Dictionary, feminism means,

> a movement seeking the reorganisation of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom. (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985: 158)

The feminist movement is a protest against the male-dominated society, its inequities, restriction, penalties and denials. Kingston is certainly not a hard core feminist. She is trying to fight the injustice meted out to her sex. She, like her mother and grandmother, does not believe in being confined to the kitchen. By comparing and contrasting the characteristics of her characters she is trying to expose the sexual discrimination rampant in her contemporary society. The feminism she uses is "liberal

feminism."

Liberal feminism believes that the general subordination of the woman is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that try to hinder the efforts, progress and success of women in this world. The male-centred society falsely believes that women are by nature intellectually and physically less capable than men. It excludes women from the academy, the forum and the market place. Kingston is merely trying to prove this belief as incorrect. The feminism we come across in The Woman Warrior is not total feminism, in the sense that none of the characters denies the traditional role of a wife or mother, though they fight for equality and identity. Being a feminist meant "a rejection of the traditional manner of female fulfilment--motherhood" (Sevenhuijen and de Vries, 1984: 13).

Kingston often encountered women who believed in the society "where 'marriage' was often used as a euphemism for sexual relations, where sexual oppression thrives and where women lack even the knowledge of their oppression" (Yudkin, 1986: 88). So Kingston grew up revolting against such a society.

Since all her books belong to the postmodern era, it becomes necessary to give some sort of definition to postmodernism. As M.H. Abrams says (1981: 110), the term postmodernism is commonly applied to the literature and art produced after the second World War. Postmodernism not only continues some of the counter-traditional experiments of modernism, but it also makes efforts to break away from some of the forms of modernism. Modernism broke away from

conventions but in course of time it created new conventions of its own. Now postmodernism is breaking away from such conventions. Postmodernist writings seek to reveal the emptiness of existence itself. This has given birth to anti-novel which is constructed in such a way that it violates traditional norms established among readers by the novelists and the conventional past. In these works we are given perceptions, mainly visual, of which we may draw our own conclusions. The heroes are mostly anti-heroes. They are neither epitomes of dignity nor are they stately. They are like any other ordinary human beings with lots of weaknesses.

Of postmodernism, says Ihab Hassan, "no clear-cut consensus about its meaning exists among scholars" (Garvin, 1980: 120). Postmodernism, like modernism, breaks away from traditions set in the past for fiction. Both believed that art need not be "realistic." Some of the differences between them are: while modernism lays emphasis on form, postmodernism is anti-form, i.e. it does not stick to any form. It is constructed much the way the mind functions. Modernism remains within the boundaries of a genre but postmodernism is protean and playing with the limits of a genre is one of its leitmotif. While modernism stands for creation and totalization, postmodernism stands for decreation and deconstruction. Postmodernism asserts and at the same time underplays the principles of value, order, meaning, control and identity. Some of the features of postmodernism are Apollonian and Dionysian, diachronic and synchronic. Its form is anarchic and decreative.

In short Ihab Hassan defines postmodernism as:

> Postmodernism veers towards open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silences--veers towards all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities. (Garvin, 1980: 125)

In the chapters following the Introduction, I hope to examine the problems of the Chinese-Americans as seen and felt by Kingston as a sexual/racial minority writer.

Chapter 2: The Woman Warrior: Woman as Hero

"I am not going to be a slave or a wife. . . . I won't let you turn me into a slave or a wife," declares Kingston in her prize-winning book, The Woman Warrior, in a voice which is typically that of a feminist (WW: 201). Feminism is a major theme in most of women's literature these days. In the past, even the term women's literature was unknown and if it was known, it was not considered important. However, the situation has been altered to a great extent after the feminist movement which started nearly two centuries ago.

In this century, says Tillie Olsen in Silences, "we have access to areas of work and of life experience previously denied. . . ." Women are highly educated and have "for the first time in human history, freedom from compulsory child bearing; freer bodies and attitudes towards sexuality; a beginning of technological easing of household tasks. . ." (Olsen, 1978: 23).

At last, free of all restrictions, many women belonging to the minority groups are able to express themselves through autobiographies. Kingston's The Woman Warrior has been termed an autobiography. She has made her book a weapon to express her feminist views. The book is unique in more than one sense. The fact that it falls in the category of sexual minority as well as racial minority makes it all the more unique. Her aim is to achieve freedom, not just for herself,

but for the female race itself. Belonging to the racial minority, her movement is towards Americanization. There is no doubt that she brings in numerous Chinese myths and legends which make it read like a Chinese book but this is her way of bringing together Chinese and American cultures. This indirectly indicates her assimilation into American culture: she reads the typical American concerns--individual liberty, the self--into the Chinese myths and legends and uses her reading to deal with them.

The contents of the book are divided into five chapters, each dealing with the life of one woman. A dominant theme that runs through all the five chapters is that of feminism. The five main women in the book are Kingston's paternal aunt, Fa Mu Lan, a legendary figure, Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid, Kingston's maternal aunt and finally, Kingston herself. The incidents and stories are narrated to us, some as Kingston's memories and some others as Kingston's mother's memories. Now let us examine how the theme of feminism runs through all the five stories, how the efforts of some of the characters were defeated and the others achieved success.

In the first chapter,"No Name Woman," Kingston deals with the efforts of her paternal aunt to achieve freedom and fulfilment of the self. The title itself suggests that it deals with the identity of a woman or at least with the lack of it. The aunt is described as a lone romantic in a mean, old-fashioned and narrow-minded society:

> But perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted.

> Fear at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears,. . . . For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk--that's all--a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. (WW: 8)

The society in which the aunt lived was such that the girl was to marry anybody who was chosen for her without protesting: "She was lucky that he was her age and she would be the first wife, an advantage secure now. The night she first saw him, he had sex with her. Then he left for America" (WW: 7). The laws of the society, as Paul John Eakin puts it, ordain that "the attempt to lead the life of a single, separate person is against the law of nature" (Eakin, 1985: 257).

So the aunt who was married for one day, being a romantic, became an easy prey to another vile man's charms:

> The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: She followed. "If you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you. Be here again next week." No one talked sex, ever. (WW: 7)

Subsequently, Kingston's aunt is accused of committing adultery. She is on the verge of giving birth to an illegitimate child when the villagers organize an attack on her and her family and force her to commit suicide. They feel that it is a threat to their social set-up that a woman (after all only a woman) can live among them, yet apart from them. Their attitude can be summarized in a sentence: "one human being flaring up into violence could open up a black hole . . ." (WW: 12). So they set out to destroy her, not so much, says Kingston, for the act of adultery itself, but

"for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (WW: 13).

Kingston's aunt and Kingston are both similar in the sense that both are seeking an identity for themselves by fighting against the rules set for women by society, the aunt by giving in to her sexual desires and Kingston by self-expression through writing. However, the aunt is defeated because society at that time was much too strong and rigid for her. The woman has to take a beating for a sin committed by both man and woman, because society accepted the man's share in the sin not as a sin, but as if he had a right to it. The incident of the nameless aunt can be viewed either as the act of a woman who was romantic and wanted to assert her independence or as that of a woman who was forced into committing the act. Either way, she is the victim of the male dominated society and the result of her effort is that her name and picture are wiped off the family album.

Perhaps Kingston narrates this story, which she is asked never to talk about, "You must not tell anyone. . ." (WW: 3), to redeem her aunt of her pain and help her soul rest in peace, ". . . I alone devote pages of paper to her. . ." (WW: 16).

In "White Tigers" Kingston presents the story of a mythical figure of ancient China, Fa Mu Lan. She is a woman who is brought up by an old couple. They teach her martial arts and all the skills needed for a warrior and make her a woman warrior. Contrary to the docile image of the archetypal Chinese woman, she wears men's clothes, leads a huge

army and defeats all her enemies. She is a direct contrast to the nameless aunt in "No Name Woman." The lady warrior is as different from the nameless aunt as day from night. While one bears her child in shame, the other bears hers with pride. The way Kingston presents one story after the other makes it appear as if the "warrior" were mocking the aunt who, unable to fight the unfair society, gives up her life, whereas the "warrior" takes the place of her father, carries her new-born baby in her armour and enters the battlefield to kill greedy and oppressive landlords to avenge the wrongs done to her villagers.

This feminine legendary figure that Kingston creates is

> a modern, militant heroine--a strong and dangerous swordswoman, a visionary sensitive to ecological concerns, an athlete unaffected by her menstrual days, a feminist wife and mother, a female avenger, the fierce enemy of sexism, racism, and all other forms of injustice. (Yalom, 1985: 97).

The paradox of the book lies in the fact that Kingston presents two contradictory types of women at the same time: one, the archetypal woman (whose existence is at the feet of men) and the other who leads an army and achieves victory.

In the third chapter, "Shaman," we have Kingston's mother displaying a lot of courage, almost playing the role of the brave heroine whose story she has narrated to Kingston. She is a character with a dual personality. Early in life she plays the role expected of her (subordinate and submissive woman) but later joins a medical school and by displaying a lot of courage, succeeds in killing a

ghost. After years of separation, she joins her husband in America, takes over his life and house, has four children and rules them with an iron hand for as long as the children allow her to.

Much as she hates the American way of life, she copes very bravely and adapts herself to the fast life. Although she comes from a country where she has lived royally and where life is relatively slow, in America she works as a fruit picker, as a servant, a laundress and even runs the house when her husband loses his job in the gambling house. Through all this, Kingston's father remains ". . . but a wafer-thin figure behind her mother's massive form. . ." (Yalom, 1985: 109).

Being a very efficient woman, she plays the different roles of a wife, a mother and a sister. Even at the age of sixty-eight years she does not resign from her duties. In order to save her sister's marriage she invites her to come to America and urges her to go after her Americanized husband who has abandoned her for an American woman. She pumps courage into her sister to go and reclaim her husband by narrating a mythical story about emperors. A long time ago, she says, emperors had four wives, each at the four points of the compass. The empress of the West was very cunning and yearned for power and locked up the Earth's emperor in the "Western Palace" while the Eastern empress who was very kind and good frees him. So Kingston's mother asks her sister to go and break the "strong spell" that has been cast on her husband by the American woman, like the Eastern empress. This chapter gets its title "At the Wes-

tern Palace" from this story. However, the whole venture fails and the sister ends up in a mental asylum.

In the fifth chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," Kingston gives us details of her childhood, how under the tutoring of her mother she grows up having a very strong personality, though she has problems initially. She grows up into an "American" girl and hates the archetypal image of the "Devoured Woman" (Jelinek, 1980: 200), choosing to be a "warrior woman": "I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (WW: 20). The vein of feminism seems to be running in Kingston's family right from the time of her grandmother who had been a very brave and outstanding woman, unwilling to accept home as a concentration camp. Very often she used to take her entire household to the theatre--of which she was extremely fond--without fearing the attack of bandits, and had even survived one such attack.

After having summed up the book briefly, the streak of feminism becomes evident, for it describes the traditional and superstitious Chinese women of different generations, waging war against the male-dominated society contrary to their old traditions and customs. Though the earlier women lost (Kingston's mother is an exception), we can see the success of the woman of the later generation (Kingston).

". . . I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother. . ." (WW: 20). Thus, by following the mother, the daughter finally finds "the lost mother" (Davidson and Broner, 1980: 254). It is after the women's movement in the sixties, which took the world by storm, that the woman

has become aware of herself and her counterparts and the theme of matrilineage has become an established theme in most of the "minority women's literature."

It has become clear for us to see, as Natalie M. Rosinsky says in her "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group," the enemy was the social forces and patriarchal norms that estranged the mother and daughter (Davidson and Broner, 1980: 280). Recently, with the realization that they have much more strength collectively, rather than individually, women have become united against (and as a consequence of) the oppression they are subjected to by various social forces.

More often, it is women of racial, ethnic, sexual and economic minority groups that write about this indispensable and intricate relationship. It is no wonder at all that women belonging to oppressed minority groups look for the support of other women. As Maglin states in the Introduction to "The New Matrilineage," the daughter suddenly came to realize the presence of the mother, recognizing the fact that they share similar problems (Davidson and Broner, 1980: 254). Thus started the successful search for the lost mothers.

The mother-daughter relationship has become a dominant theme in the novels of many of the writers such as Maya Angelou, Simon de Beauvoir, Sally Carrighar, Nikki Giovanni, Jane Howard, Margaret Mead, Jamaica Kincaid and Maxine Hong Kingston. The theme of mother-daughter relationship is so deeply woven into the structure of <u>The Woman Warrior</u> that it is impossible for a reader to miss it.

Just as a lost person has to inspect his surroundings, find out where he is and then has to get out, so also Kingston looks within and outside herself to find herself. Within herself is one war (against silence), but outside herself she has to compare and contrast herself with another person (and who else but the most highly esteemed person in a woman's life, the mother).

Kingston's mother believes, to adapt Bannan's words in reference to a belief of the Southwestern Native American societies, that "One of the principal traditional methods of educating children is story telling. . ." (Davidson and Broner, 1980: 269). Helen M. Bannan states in "Spider Woman's Web: Mothers and Daughters in Southwestern Native American Literature" that

> . . . relationships between mothers and daughters bear much of the responsibility for holding the web of life together by reciprocal rights and obligations that provide solidarity and continuity to the culture as a circular whole. (Davidson and Broner, 1980: 269)

Similarly, to keep the Chinese culture alive, Kingston's mother hands down her values, morals, traditional ways and manners to her daughter through "talking story." In Chinese "talking story" means "to tell a story," as Kingston informs us in The Woman Warrior.

Through songs, legends and stories Kingston gets acquainted with her mother's private, isolated self. When her mother had first come to the U.S., she had come with all the Chinese customs, culture, in fact, a small China packed within her. In order to keep her culture and her little China alive, she tries to pass them on to her daughter. She

also feels that it is her duty to retain Kingston's identity as a Chinese girl, so she infuses in her the various Chinese customs, superstitions and traditions of her native land.

The book starts by showing the close rapport existing between mother and daughter. The mother is introducing her daughter to the dangers she may have to encounter on entering adulthood:

> "You must not tell anyone what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born." (WW: 3)

She goes on to reveal that her aunt had committed adultery and had consequently been expelled from the family. And then comes the warning: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born" (WW: 5).

It is through her mother's stories that Kingston finds out another world called China, her grandmother, her eccentric grandfather, her aunts and great uncles. Thus she finds her roots and her place in her family. Her mother's songs of brave women and heroines indirectly teach Kingston to take up an independent career as a writer through which she finds her identity in society.

However, Kingston's relationship with her mother is only through these stories. The rapport that appears to exist between them is only superficial. This relationship, like all other relationships, has its ups and downs. It is a relationship of mixed feelings of love and hate. In the

process of finding herself, Kingston has to stretch the bond to such an extent that it almost breaks. The cultural gulf that exists between them is the reason for the existence of more dissimilarities between them than similarities.

Kingston's mother had been born and bred in China, she had entered the United States as a middle-aged woman with considerable regard for her native country. Therefore, the chances of her transformation into an American had been very few. On the other hand, Kingston was born and bred in America. For her, China existed only in her mother's stories and American influence was inevitable, despite her mother's strong Chinese influence.

In order to explain the cultural gulf between mother and daughter, it becomes necessary to explain the term "culture." The term culture is used in a variety of contexts and meanings. As Robert Young defines:

> Culture refers to the varied systems developed by human societies as media for adaptation to the environment in which their members live; in its totality, a cultural system constitutes the means through which the group to which it pertains achieves survival as an organised society. . . . When we speak of the culture of a society or community, we have reference to the entire gamut of tools, institutions, social values, customs, traditions, techniques, concepts and other traits that characterize the way of life of the group. (Abrahams and Troike, 1972: 35)

The Woman Warrior is a complicated blend of Oriental and Occidental cultures and the mother and daughter belong to these different cultures respectively, which makes their relationship complicated. Though the mother lives in

America, her mind still wanders in China and she is unable to break away from the haunting memories of her Chinese past and culture. She refuses to accept their way of life and their characteristics. To her Americans are not people but ghosts. Even her children are "half ghosts": "They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves half ghosts. They called us a kind of ghost" (WW: 183).

Anything that meant home to her mother was far from home to Kingston. To her as a young girl, China is unreal and pertains only to bedtime stories. She is completely assimilated to the American ways and fails to understand her mother's traditions and superstitions.

Kingston's mother is a more advanced lady when compared to other Chinese women. The mother says: "The old ladies in China had many silly superstitions" (WW: 76). She laughs at these old Chinese women but she herself is superstitious. For example, when the delivery boy from a drugstore brings a packet of medicines by mistake to their laundry, Kingston's mother refuses to believe that it is a mistake. "Revenge. We've got to avenge this wrong on our future, on our health, and our lives. Nobody's going to sicken my children and get away with it," she says, and as reparation, she sends a very reluctant Kingston to bring candy from the store (WW: 169).

Her mother partly accepts the docile and subordinate image of a woman and tries to teach Kingston to be a wife and slave and that a woman's existence depends on obedience to the male-dominated society. But Kingston always fights to establish the fact that women are in no way inferior.

Her depiction of characters who believe in the subordinate state of a woman, who are helpless and feel that they cannot strike back at society is perhaps her way of protesting. In a way she tries to redeem their sufferings and strike back at society: "When I saw his startled eyes at my breasts, I slashed him across the face and on second stroke cut off his head" (WW: 44).

Both her aunts are images of helpless and defeated women who could not protest. The plight of her maternal aunt was: "Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. . . . She obeyed him; she always did as she was told" (WW: 6). The other aunt was so spineless and timid that she came to the U.S. to reclaim her husband at the instigation of her sister. But when her sister asks her what she is going to do about her husband, she says, "I don't know. Do we have to do something?" (WW: 124).

Kingston's mother can be described as partly modern, in the sense that she does not accept bigamy. She urges her sister to reclaim her husband. She takes her sister to her husband and tries to knock sense into his head. Brave Orchid says, "She is only your second wife. This is your real wife" (WW: 153). Coming from a country where bigamy is accepted as a normal practice, Brave Orchid puts up a fight against a man who is thoroughly Americanized. But when she fails in her efforts to illegalize her brother-in-law's second marriage, she accepts it with just lunch as compensation, whereas Kingston fights against such society from her childhood:

> When one of my parents or emigrant villagers

> said, "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds," I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn't talk. I couldn't stop. (WW: 46)

It was a painful experience for Kingston as a child and adolescent to grow up in an atmosphere of dual cultures; the spiritual and orthodox East and the modern and materialistic West. Her mother comes from a society that considers it a waste to bring girls up, but Kingston belongs to a country where men and women enjoy equal status.

The struggle for Kingston begins when she joins an American school and comes in contact with other American children. A shy girl, who knows only Cantonese and exposed to Chinese culture, traditions and superstitions, nourished only by Chinese folk tales and legends, she turns in a poor performance at school academically and otherwise. She confesses that in "first grade /she/ had no IQ--a Zero IQ" (WW: 183), and blames her mother for it in a childish outburst: "The only reason I flunked in kindergarten was because you couldn't teach me English, and you gave me a Zero IQ" (WW: 201). Gradually, she comes out of it: "I studied hard, got straight A's. . ." (WW: 195). Although she progresses well in her studies, she lags behind socially. At one point her American teachers take her aside and say: "You ought to develop yourself socially as well as mentally" (WW: 196).

Throughout her childhood and adolescence she continues her war against her mother's culture and it is in her adulthood that she finally comes to terms with the existing situation. As a child, she had dreamt of proving to

the world that she had a place in this world and that she would never be a defeated or a "devoured woman."

> I went away to college--Berkeley in the sixties--and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy. I would have liked to bring myself as a boy for my parents to welcome with chickens and pigs. That was for my brother, who returned alive from Vietnam. (WW: 47)

This dream of hers comes true in the chapter "White Tigers": "They would sacrifice a pig to the Gods that I had returned" (WW: 45). In her childhood, not surprisingly, Kingston did not have a mind of her own, because her mother forced her to think her way. But Kingston slowly learns that she has to think for herself if she has to find herself. We can see her efforts to find herself in the following lines: "I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (WW: 205). In order to succeed she decides to make herself "American-feminine."

Suddenly, she discovers her parents' next plan--to get her married. In a traditional Chinese family Chinese did not have the freedom to choose their life partners, their parents did it for them. But Kingston who has, by now, made herself "American-feminine," refuses to accept it and declares that she intends to become a career girl. She does exactly what a typical American might do in a situation like this; she declares that she will not marry a mad boy that her mother has chosen for her, that she is no longer the gauche girl she was earlier and that she is capable of win-

ning scholarships and thereby joining a college:

> I'm smart. I can do all kinds of things. I know how to get A's, and they /teachers/ say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself. So you don't have to find me a keeper who's too dumb to know a bad bargain. (WW: 201)

Kingston associates herself with Fa Mu Lan, the legendary figure, in more than one way. She says, "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar" (WW: 53). For example, she is not a "devoured woman" like both her aunts, but like the swordswoman, she is successful in her venture. For a start, she makes herself "American-feminine," she makes her dream--"I marched to change the world"--come true in the following two incidents: she finds a place and respect in her family after becoming a successful career woman: "When I visit the family now, I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I am worthy of eating the food" (WW: 52). Earlier on she heard words like "Girls are maggots in the rice" (WW: 43), but now she says, "I read in an anthropology book that Chinese say, 'Girls are necessary too'" (WW: 52).

As for her war against the male race, she continues to fight for a little longer. When asked by the greedy landlord, "Who are you?", she proudly declares, "I am a female avenger" (WW: 43). We see her getting her final revenge in the first chapter of China Men in the form of stripping a man of his manhood.

The relationship between herself and her mother is often stifling; yet, they are often indispensable to each other and both come to terms with the situation in which

they are placed. Just as the mother agrees to make her home in America, "I watched our parents buy a sofa, then a rug, curtains, chairs to replace the orange and apple crates one by one. . ." (WW: 191), Kingston gradually outgrows her childishness and accepts her identity as not just an American but as a Chinese-American. She confesses that "what I once had was not Chinese-sight at all but child-sight that would have disappeared eventually without such struggle" (WW: 205). She not only declares that "I've found some places in this country that are ghost-free. And I think I belong there. . ." (WW: 108), but also her intentions of going to China: "Soon I want to go to China. . ." (WW: 205).

The concluding section of the book that narrates the story of Ts'ai Yen may be used to prove that Kingston has accepted her identity as a Chinese-American. Ts'ai Yen, a poetess, was kidnapped by a chieftain and was held a prisoner for twelve years. During this time she had two children but never left her tent to join the barbarians and the children did not speak Chinese. But at the end of twelve years she accepts the barbarians and her children accept their Chinese identity. The barbarians heard her singing:

> Her words seemed to be Chinese. . . . Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases. . . . Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians. (WW: 209)

Ts'ai Yen could stand for Kingston's mother who first refused to compromise and accept Americans as people rather than ghosts. The barbarians can be understood as Americans

and her children could be Kingston and her brothers and sisters. Just as Ts'ai Yen joins the barbarians and uses barbarian phrases, Kingston's mother becomes a Chinese-American willingly and the children accept the situation likewise and sing the Chinese song with the mother.

Themes in the book are interlinked and run into one another. The other themes apart from feminism and mother-daughter relationship are silence and from silence another theme takes birth, i.e. the theme of madness. Silence, as quoted by John Auchard, from Carlyle's Sartor Resartus:

> Silence and Secrecy! . . . . silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together; that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of life which they are thenceforth to rule. . . . Speech is of time, Silence is of Eternity. (Auchard, 1986: 8)

Perhaps to the Chinese, silence means all this, but to an outsider (Westerner) it might look a bit silly because the essential "difference between the literatures of the East and those of the West," as Yasunari Kawabata says, is that for ages, the main concerns of Chinese and Japanese literature has been the potentialities of the silent, the absent and empty while it is a very new phenomenon to the Westerner (Auchard, 1986: 14). Kingston being an American girl hates the silence and secrecy of her Chinese parents. She fails to understand why they have to be silent and she expresses her dislike in these words,

> sometimes I hated the secrecy of the Chinese. "Don't tell," said my parents, though we couldn't tell if we wanted to because we didn't know. (WW: 183)

The veil of silence is quite thick in The Women Warrior. The Chinese say, "a ready tongue is an evil" (WW: 164). To them even "the good things are unspeakable" (WW: 185). For a long time Kingston was divided into two parts, one which belonged to her mother (Chinese) and the other, herself. But a time comes when Kingston realizes that "things are different in this ghost country" (WW: 164). For example, Kingston's mother lets her into the family secret, though her intention is purely to instil fear into Kingston rather than to let her into the secret and she expects Kingston to be silent about it. When Kingston finally breaks free of her mother's influence, she lets us all into the family secret, breaking out of the old Chinese tradition and exclaims: "Ha! You can't stop me from talking" (WW: 202).

Though kinship was given a lot of importance in the East, a communication barrier exists among the family members. For example, the silence that prevails in the book is the silence of the daughter who is unable to communicate with her mother because of all the restrictions placed on them: "I had grown inside me a list of over hundred things that I had to tell my mother so that she would know the true things about me. . ." (WW: 197).

At home, talking about love, sex and other family secrets with children is taboo: "I have believed that sex was unspeakable. . ." (WW: 15). There is only fear and reverence for their parents which stop the children from expressing their love for their parents freely, unlike in the Western world where the parents and children ideally enjoy an easy camaraderie. Kingston's mother often tells them stories, yet

we get the feeling that she is a teacher talking to a student and not a mother talking to a daughter.

In the early years of her life, with the culture barrier still very high, Kingston is unable to communicate with the American society: "When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent" (WW: 165). It takes her three years to break out of this silent spell, "During the first silent year I spoke to no one at school. . ." (WW: 165). Her sister also does not talk, in fact, Kingston soon realizes that "silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (WW: 166), because other Chinese girls did not talk either. This silent fever which affects most of the Chinese children appears to have been a result of the repressed childhood. Young girls are especially deprived of both speech and sex, because both of these are potential instruments of self-expression, their road to freedom. In the case of Kingston, this repressed childhood leads to a partial dumbness which in turn leads to a temporary derangement of her mind. Hence we find a number of mad characters in Kingston's books; perhaps, they are her own fears which are portrayed in the form of different characters. A theme which has now developed into a subgenre is the subgenre of the psychological novel. We find the themes of madness right from the 5th century B.C. but till the twentieth century, this literature was explored only by male writers like Sophocles, Shakespeare, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Salinger, etc. But from the mid-twentieth century, women writers like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Joanne Greenberg, Marie Cardinal, Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin, Margaret Atwood,

Maxine Hong Kingston, etc. have dealt with the theme of madness in their works:

> The treatment of madness in literature reflects human ambivalence toward the mind itself; madness, comprising its strangest manifestations, is also familiar, a fascinating and repellent exposure of the structures of dream and fantasy, of irrational fears and bizarre desires ordinarily hidden from the world and the conscious self. (Feder, 1980: 4)

To keep oneself sane, one must talk and express oneself or else go mad slowly. Kingston declares: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity" (WW: 186). Coming from a traditional background, where silence is a virtue and being a victim of a strict upbringing, it becomes very difficult for Kingston to talk and express herself. This has a deep effect on her mind but we see her fight and overcome both silence and madness.

She explains, "It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery" (WW: 166). The incident where she beats up, verbally as well as physically, another Chinese-American girl who does not talk, explains her efforts to defeat the silence, and in the process, madness itself. Perhaps, the dumb girl is her inner self which refuses to talk.

She starts her fight for freedom of speech and expression with the following words: "You're going to talk," and "I am going to make you talk, you sissy-girl" (WW: 175). She tries to goad the girl into fighting back, makes her cry, ends up crying herself. "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality" (WW: 180). She tries to bribe the girl, "I'll give you my pencil box. I'll buy you some candy. . ."

(WW: 181). Her attempt to make the silent girl talk represents her attempt to regain sanity; for she believes that to be able to talk is what differentiates a person from being sane or insane. She chooses a successful career as a writer and keeps herself sane.

For a temporary period Kingston is confused about several things, she is almost paranoid and her fears are externalized in the form of different characters. From a very early age Kingston's mother feeds her with ghastly stories, e.g. the story of "No Name Woman" and stories of deformed babies. Kingston says that "my aunt haunts me. . ." (WW: 16), so do the deformed babies, "As a child, I pictured a naked child sitting on a modern toilet. . . I had to flick on the bathroom lights fast so that no small shadow would take a baby shape. . ." (WW: 86). She also says, "My Mother has given me pictures to dream--nightmare babies that recur, shrinking again and again to fit in my palm" (WW: 86).

Her maternal aunt ends up in a mental asylum. The reason for her mental illness is perhaps the stress of migration as well as deception, as Dorothy S. Thomas says in the Introduction to Migration and Mental Disease in reference to Odegaard's speech on mental diseases: "The explanation may be that overseas emigrants encounter more serious environmental difficulties and a more strenuous task of social readjustment" (Malzberg, 1956: 30). Kingston tells us about another woman, "There was the woman next door who was chatty one moment--inviting us children to our first 'sky-movie'--and shut up the next" (WW: 186). Perhaps she is another one who could not adjust to the Western environment.

Then there is "Crazy Mary" who as a toddler was left in China by her parents who went to the "Gold Mountain." By the time they earned money to send for her, she was twenty and crazy. Perhaps she suffered from isolation and alienation. Kingston perhaps was haunted by these fears and later she heaves a sigh of relief that "I was glad that I was born nine months after my mother emigrated" (WW: 187).

Kingston's mother's personality itself is a split one as Kingston puts it: "She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan" (WW: 20), and with the contradicting stories, e.g. the "No Name Woman" as against Fa Mu Lan, and the heroine who invented the "white crane boxing" against the crazy aunt. It is not surprising that the daughter stands on the borders of madness:

> I had vampire nightmares; every night the fangs grew longer, and my angel wings turned pointed and black. I haunted humans. . . . Tears dripped from my eyes, but blood dripped from my fangs. . . . I did not want to be our crazy one. (WW: 190)

It is only by actively trying to make herself "American-feminine" that she manages to emerge from this spell of madness.

Kingston herself has listed The Woman Warrior as a work of non-fiction, perhaps, because where the American racial minority writers are concerned, "publishers have determined it to be the most marketable" (Kim, 1984: 43). Autobiography which was earlier on an "inferior" form of writing and a field which was somewhat confined, is no longer so. Earlier on, only works marked "Autobiography"

or "Personal Narratives" were considered autobiography. Now autobiography has developed into being a genre and occupies a privileged place besides poetry, drama and the novel. While autobiography mainly employs facts, it can also use fictional material.

Currently, autobiography is the most frequently used literary genre by American minority writers for self-expression. In autobiography the author often invents, alters and romanticizes facts. The Woman Warrior is a blend of fiction and fact: "Thoughts and memories are interrupted by fantasy and dreams, all of which are equally real or unreal" (Kim, 1984: 44).

Kingston's book is an autobiography in the sense that she narrativizes her life story, starting with her childhood dreams, her adolescent desires, the problems she faces while growing up in two alien and conflicting cultures and then accepting her Chinese background and embracing the American culture. The indispensable relationship that she shares with her mother, i.e. her dependence on her mother for her roots and her mother's dependence on her because she stands for the promise of the future. While recreating and interpreting her childhood and maturing self, she makes use of history, songs, oral tales, quips and reminiscences.

All these facts pertaining to Kingston's life are fictionalized in the book, because "recording of a life necessarily represents the fictionalization--to a greater or lesser degree--of the life lived" (Blasing, 1977: xi).

The Woman Warrior is a fantastic blend of opposites; of fiction and non-fiction; of the past and the present; of the

traditional and the modern; of reality and imaginative; and of two different worlds, each exotic in its own way, i.e. the traditional East and the modern West.

The language is partly simple and partly exotic and clearly drives home the messages Kingston wants us to know. Her search for an individual identity becomes very clear, as also the way(s) in which she goes about achieving it. We come across dreams, fantastic heights of imagination, legends of heroines and devoured women, success and failure, humiliation and pride. As Jelinek so aptly describes,

> The Woman Warrior is about trying to be an American, when you are the child of Chinese emigrants; trying to be a woman, when you have been taught that men are all that matter; trying to be a writer, when you have been afraid to speak out loud at all. (Jelinek, 1980: 231)

Chapter 3: China Men: Man on "Gold Mountain"

China Men, the second book of Maxine Hong Kingston, is "a counterpart to The Woman Warrior," as E.M. Broner puts it (1980: 28). Though the technique used in both books is similar in the use of history and legend, myths, dreams and memoirs, "China Men is not a sequel to The Woman Warrior but a companion piece, an amplification" (Tyler, 1980: 32). China Men, like The Woman Warrior, is an autobiography, revolving around Kingston's family background and history, but while The Woman Warrior deals with the women in Kingston's family, China Men deals with the menfolk.

While The Woman Warrior is a quest for the mother, China Men is a quest for the father-figure. Taken together the two books thematize the author's cultural roots. Though the mother-daughter relationship is not without its ups and downs, we can feel a bond existing between them in The Woman Warrior. But in China Men we are confronted with Kingston's efforts to build a proper relationship with her father. There is a slight difference in the construction of both these books. The first book is much simpler in form; it consists of five stories, each dealing with a woman character, one of them with the story of a mythical woman warrior from whom the mother and the daughter draw their strength. Each chapter deals with the theme of feminism. China Men has eighteen chapters, of which six are directly

connected with Kingston's family members, giving us a brief account of the Chinese immigration to America. These six main chapters are either preceded or followed by shorter stories, mythical in nature.

Though the latter part of the book is in proper sequence, we find a discontinuity in the first part of the book, keeping in tradition with the postmodernist philosophy of anti-form. The book starts with the father in China, then moves to America and gives us details about the life of her great grandfather, her grandfather and finally, her father and brother. Kingston was of the opinion that history in a chronological manner would make the narrative boring, so she puts it down as it comes to the mind (Kim, 1984: 44). In a sense, therefore, the narrative is spatialized:

> At its simplest, the spatialization of time in the novel is the process of splintering the events that, in a traditional novel, would appear in a narrative sequence and of rearranging them so that past, present, and future actions are presented in reversed, or combined, patterns; when this is done, the events of the novel have been "spatialized," . . . (Spencer, 1971: 156)

The themes of silence, madness and horror are found in the second book as well. Kingston has also used myth very extensively. Myth, as defined by M.H. Abrams, is as follows:

> In classical Greek, "Mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or false. In its central modern significance, a myth is one story in a mythology--a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, as well as to establish the rationale for social customs and observances and the sanc-

> tions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. . . The term has also been extended to denote supernatural tales which are deliberately invented by their authors. (Abrams, 1981: 111-12)

The first chapter, "On Discovery," is a myth perhaps created by Kingston. The theme of this chapter is feminism. It is Kingston's way of taking revenge on the male-dominated society. It is a revolt against masculinity, in which the women triumph over a man by making him shed his masculinity. Tang Ao, the man, enters the "land of women" in his search for the "Gold Mountain," is captured by the women and gradually made into a woman: "'Let us help you off with your armour and boots,' said the women" (CM: 9). This may be taken to signify the shedding of the male identity. They pierce his ears, bind his feet and start feeding him with feminine drinks and food. The women remove his facial hair, they also paint his cheeks and lips. One day, he serves a meal at the queen's court; his hips sway and his shoulders swivel because of his shaped feet and the guests comment that "She's pretty, don't you agree?" (CM: 10), and thus the metamorphosis is complete, as also the revenge.

The following two chapters "On Fathers" and "The Father from China" are Kingston's sorrowful efforts to find her father. "On Fathers" narrates a strange incident which reveals how little Kingston, her brothers and sisters know about their father. One day, while waiting at the gate for their father, they see a man coming towards their house. The children run towards him, surround him, "BaBa! BaBa!," they say and hug him, taking his hands and reaching into his pockets for chocolates. The man laughs and says, "But I'm

not your father. You've made a mistake" (CM: 11). This incident draws our attention to the fact that the gap between the father and the children is so wide that they cannot even recognize their own father.

While in The Woman Warrior Kingston tries to loosen her ties with her mother to find her own identity and to make an independent life for herself, in China Men she tries to bridge the gap between her father and herself in order to find her family roots: "You fix yourself in the present, but I want to hear the stories about the rest of your life, the Chinese stories" (CM: 18). Her attempt to break the thick wall between them in "The Father from China" is touching. She recalls: "Father, I have seen you light-hearted: 'Let's play airplane,' you said. 'I'll make you a toy airplane'" (CM: 15). Later, she says, "But usually you did not play. You were angry. You scared us. Every day we listened to you swear, 'Dog vomit. Your mother's cunt. Your mother's smelly cunt'" (CM: 16). She is used to her mother "talking stories" so she pleads with her father to "talk story," she wants to build such a close rapport that she says, "I want to know what makes you scream and curse, and what you're thinking when you say nothing, and why when you do talk, you talk differently from Mother" (CM: 18).

In her efforts to find her roots she traces her father's history as she imagines it to be from what she has heard and gathered during the years. She asks her father to tell her all that he knows, "I want to be able to rely on you, who inked each piece of our own laundry with the word 'Centre,' to find out how we landed in a country where

we are eccentric people" (CM: 18). Her father, she says, was the youngest and the smartest of the four brothers. He was prepared for the Imperial Examination right from his childhood by Kingston's grandmother, Ah Po: "Even before BiBi could talk, she fed and lodged itinerant scholars, who stayed the night or week to read to him" (CM: 26). Kingston is trying to present a picture of the Chinese as people of standing and not the "gooks," as prejudiced white Americans take them to be.

She recalls her BaBa as being a very studious boy. Unlike his brothers, he never gambled but either hummed poems or practised handwriting. At the age of fourteen he left the village to take the Imperial Examination. He did not pass the examination with top honours. Otherwise, Kingston feels, he would probably have had a better life and not come to the "Gold Mountain" at all. Nevertheless, he got the job of a village school teacher, but soon got tired of teaching. He lost weight teaching students who not only made his days terrible but invaded his dreams as well: "There came to be small difference between his day life and the nightmares" (CM: 41). He realized that "Mental work was harder than physical work, although it was not exactly the mind that teaching strained. He yearned for the fields with their quiet surprises. . ." (CM: 43).

One day he neglected grading papers and decided to go to the "Gold Mountain" because he felt that it was time he earned some gold. As a part of the history of the Chinese immigration, Kingston gives us details of how most of the Chinese entered America with false papers, but she claims

that her father entered America legally. He came the legal way, something like this: Arrives at San Francisco and is held up indefinitely on Angel Island by the immigration department. People were held up for months together, questioned for weeks and fed with rotten food. The men entertained themselves by staging skits, puppet shows and heroic parts of operas, juggled fruit, bottles and the new rubber ball. Some of them wrote patriotic verses on the walls and even sang songs. Sometimes, they woke up to find men and women who killed themselves for not being granted entry into America. Some of them hung themselves and there was a woman who killed herself by shoving a sharpened chopstick through her ear (CM: 55).

The day arrived when "the legal father" was interrogated. He was asked several questions and sent back to the gaol, where he had to wait for some more weeks. He was called again, interrogated and sent back to the barracks. They called him yet again and asked the same questions and when they were satisfied with the answers, they said "You may enter the United States of America" (CM: 61). Kingston is trying to establish her identity as an American by saying that her father entered America legally, and not like a W.O.P. (without papers). Though Kingston belongs to the racial minority group, her movement in this book as in the others is towards "claiming America"; at the same time she devotes pages to fight the racial discrimination towards the Chinese. She plays her part in redeeming her ancestors of the sorrows they had to face.

In America her father (Ed) along with three other

friends sets up a laundry in San Francisco. On week days he works uptil midnight and on Saturdays he goes to tea rooms and dances with blonde girls. He also saves money to bring his wife to America, and after fifteen years of separation he sends a ticket for his wife. Soon after her arrival, the father's independent life ends; his three friends cheat him and swindle him out of his share of the laundry. Ed and his wife then make their way to California. In this chapter she establishes the legitimacy of both her parents' arrival to the U.S., in a way her own existence in the U.S.

The following chapter, "The Ghostmate," is a short myth. It may be seen either as an allusion to the myth of "Rip Van Winkle" or even the father's journey to take the Imperial Examination as told to Kingston, which she now reimagines as a story; a new myth. She says that the following incident occurs many a time to young men who walk along the mountain road from home. The young men could be scholars who either passed or failed the Imperial Examination or even a farmer, an artist, cobbler, etc.

The young man walks aimlessly, without any thought for the past or the future, just admiring the sun and the nature around him. Suddenly, the atmosphere turns sinister and it starts to rain heavily, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The young man is eager to find shelter and spots a house in the woods. The house is shrouded in mist and is sometimes opened by a servant or sometimes by the mistress herself, who happens to be a very beautiful woman. She leads him through corridors until he feels that he has lost

his way and then gives him rich food and lots of love. He begins to lead a new life and experiences love which he never experienced with his wife. After years of living with her, he suddenly realizes that it is time for him to leave for his home. The lady tries to talk him out of it and delays him, but when he finally breaks free and gets out, his appearance startles people, the village looks different, children are not allowed to talk to him, merchants leave the place when they see him. A friend comes by, recognizes him, enquires as to where he had been all these years and guides him along the mountain road towards his house. As the young man is walking along the mountain he hears something and feels as though something is pulling him into the tall grass and he is reminded of the beautiful woman. As he gets closer to the place where the house had been, he finds a grave and discovers that the woman had been dead for years. The young man shudders and runs from the lonely spot. He reaches his home and is reunited with his wife and family. The return of the young man to his village reminds us of Rip Van Winkle. The story ends with the phrase: "fancy lovers never last." Perhaps it implies that the China man who sets out to live an adventurous life abroad has plenty of fancy lovers but has to return home to his wife and country, as most of the early Chinese did. So stories and myths, whether Chinese or American, are alike. In stories all humanity becomes one.

The book, in general, is a record of the history of the Chinese-Americans--why the Chinese left China, the difficulties they faced on their journey to America and in

America, their contribution towards the building of America, the anti-Chinese movement, the repeal of the laws and the beginning of assimilation.

It is a record of Kingston's memory of her father's memory and memoirs. The book is constructed much like the way the mind functions, just as we first know our parents, then our grandparents or great grandparents through our parents' stories, i.e. history becomes a constructed story, a fiction and from this history develops a whole mythology. The book has a discontinuity established by a rationale of retrieved memory, a memory of events in which the narrator is not a participant.

In China Men each generation stands for one phase in history, i.e. all the first Chinese immigrants are made into one character, the great grandfather, and the story of the great grandfather is the story of the first Chinese immigrants. The story of the grandfather becomes the story of the next generation and so on and so forth.

Just as our ancestral history narrated to us is in no specific order so is Kingston's. After the story about her father in China she imagines the stories of her great grandfather. "The great grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains" is about Bak Goong, the great grandfather who came to Hawaii to grow sugarcane at the invitation of the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society. We are given an account of the reason for the emigration, their journey to the U.S. and the hardships the first immigrants faced. The pressures at home were oppressing and depressing so the Chinese people decided to go to the Promised Land where they could

earn money. But the agents took undue advantage of the situation. They were promised "free passage," "free food," "free clothing and housing," but what they got was a very different treatment:

> The Chinese passengers were locked below deck though they were not planning to escape. Their fresh air was the whiff and stir when crew men exchanged the food buckets for the vomit and shit buckets. (CM: 95)

Bak Goong worked as a crew man to make extra money while travelling: "After three months at sea, Bak Goong smelled in the wind a sweetness like a goddess visiting" (CM: 97).

On shore, they waited for their bosses, then in groups they started to walk out of town. After walking for miles and miles they arrived at the place where they were to work in the middle of the work day. The mean white bosses made them start work immediately. The account of the problems faced by the Chinese men is heart rending and all just for a dollar a week. They were brought to Hawaii to tend sugar-cane but "It was their job to hack a farm out of the wilderness, which they were to level from the ocean to the mountain" (CM: 99), and to do this they were given "a machete, a saw, an axe, and a pickaxe. The green that had looked like grass at a distance was a tangle of trees so thick that they shut out sunlight" (CM: 99).

To top all their problems, a new rule was imposed on these workers, "a rule that they not talk at work" (CM: 101). The rule was so absurd that Bak Goong was thrown off balance

for sometime:

> He needed to cast his voice out to catch ideas. I wasn't born to be silent like a monk, he thought, then promptly said. "If I knew I had to take a vow of silence," he added, "I would have shaved off my hair and become a monk. Apparently we've taken a vow of chastity too. Nothing but roosters in this flock." (CM: 101)

The great grandfather was a man who lessened his problems by talking about them aloud and one day, unable to bear the silence, he began to talk and was beaten up by the "demons."

Bak Goong slowly started to fall ill, and the inability to talk or express his feelings and ideas made it worse. He was not alone in this world of silence (which leads to insanity), there were other men ill and depressed. One day he woke up and, as Kingston describes, "He neither sang nor spoke. Unhealthily, he wet handkerchiefs and plastered them on his head" (CM: 116). That evening he discovered that silence was the reason for their illness and narrated a story to all his friends: "I have an appropriate story to tell. It cannot be left unsaid" (CM: 116-17). The great grandchild speaks (tell stories) for the silenced (weakened and oppressed) great grandfather and, in writing, redeems his suffering after three generations.

The story narrated by the great grandfather was the story of a king whose son had cat's ears. The king managed to keep it a secret for a very long time, but when his son was older, he could no longer conceal the secret. So he dug a hole in the earth and yelled his secret into it, thus relieving his heart of its burden. In a similar manner, Bak Goong and his fellow men dug a hole and spoke out their

hearts into the hole and rid themselves of their despair and depression. We find that Kingston herself is doing exactly that in her two books, letting out the pain of the Chinese-American experience.

The theme of silence appears in both the books of Kingston. In her first book, it is the inability of a partly Chinese girl to communicate with the American world and the inability of a partly American girl to communicate with her fully Chinese parents and when Kingston is able to break the silence, she becomes a fully confident American woman. In China Men, when these men break the silence, they become normal human beings.

In this book we find the theme of speech vs. silence. The two chapters following the chapter on the great grandfather are myths dealing with the theme of silence, but here the emphasis is on not breaking the silence.

The chapter "On Mortality" is the story of Tu Tzu-Chun, who was twice given riches by a Taoist Monk, twice he squandered away the money, but the third time he made good use of it. He said: "I've used up all your money on unfortunates I've come across" (CM: 120). At this point the monk asked him to repay his money by working for him.

The monk gave him three pills to swallow and said, "All that you'll see and feel will be illusions. No matter what happens, don't speak; don't scream(CM: 120). Tu thought it an easy task and descended into nine hells and saw ox heads, horse faces, and the generals killed in the war; he saw all this and was able to laugh, next he saw his wife cut into pieces and heard her screams, was himself tortured but kept

himself from screaming by reminding himself that they were only illusions. Thereafter, Tu was made to be born as a mute girl who got married and gave birth to a child. Her husband felt that it was out of her obstinacy that she was not talking, so he threatened to smash the child's head if she did not talk. Still she did not talk and, true to his word, he smashed the child's head and immediately she screamed "Oh! Oh!" No sooner did she break the silence than she appeared before the Monk as Tu. The Monk then told Tu that he was preparing elixir for immortality and though he had conquered hate, death, evil and desire, he had demonstrated his inability to transcend love, thus spoiling the formula of immortality for the human race.

The next chapter, "On Mortality Again," is yet another myth dealing with the theme of silence. A Polynesian demi-god, Maui, the trickster, was in search of immortality for mankind. If he has to have it, he has to steal it from "Hina of the Night," for which purpose he advises human beings, beasts, birds and other elements to be silent and goes in search of Hina. He finds her asleep in the ocean and slowly enters her body and takes her heart and tries to wriggle out of her body. At the sight of this scene a bird laughs and wakes up Hina, who immediately shuts herself killing Maui. Once again mankind is deprived of immortality by the breaking of silence.

China Men is a "Mobile." That means:

> It may remain stationary, but it may also move, for its individual parts are movable. It retains its formal integrity regardless of the angle from which it is viewed. But despite the facts that its parts may be separated from the

> whole and read in isolation and that these parts possess structural coherence in themselves, the work as a whole has a single unifying form. (Spencer, 1971: 219)

China Men is constructed in such a way that it can be

> read from the back toward the front, or vice versa, or dipped into at any point. One may start or stop anywhere without losing either the theme or the feeling of the book, for it insinuates its being in all conceivable directions. (Spencer, 1971: 212)

Whichever way it is read the meaning is intact, and the work as a whole has a single entity.

Next in the line of history comes the grandfather's generation, the era of railroad building. The chapter, "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains," is an important phase in the history of American development as well as in the "making" of many Chinese immigrants into Chinese-Americans: "Your grandfather built the railroad" (CM: 125), the adults say to the children. Kingston feels that

> Grandfather left a railroad for his message: we had to go somewhere difficult. Ride a train. Go somewhere important. In case of danger, the train was to be ready for us. (CM: 126)

By looking at the railroad she tells us the story of the railroad and the difficulties faced by the Chinese. It is her way of redeeming their sufferings. This chapter is a tribute to all the Chinese railroad builders.

Her grandfather had come to the U.S. in the later part of 1863, but the work had already begun in January. Their first job was to fell trees and clear the place to lay rail-

roads. In the first year they were given axes to chop trees which was a slow and laborious process, then they started using gun powder which was slightly faster but dangerous. For all the hard work they did, they were paid a dollar a day, an improvement over the pittance that had been paid to the great grandfather. His fellow workers gambled, but grandfather couldn't gamble, so his main pass time during the nights was to watch the stars.

Night after night he watched the stars:

> Altair and Vega, the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy, far, far apart. He felt his heart breaking of loneliness. . . . The railroad he was building would not lead him to his family. (CM: 129)

and reminded himself of the story of the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy. The Spinning Girl and the Cowboy had met on earth, fallen in love and got married. Long after their marriage they still remained enchanted with each other and neglected their work. The Queen of the Sky became angry and separated them by making a river between them, but the King of the Sky took pity on them and allowed them to meet one day in a year. Therefore, every year on the seventh day of the seventh month, magpies form a bridge and help the lovers meet. The lovers spend a night together and, on their parting, the girl cries so much that her tears become the summer rains. It was believed that this water would stay fresh ever and cure everything. For six years Ah Goong, the grandfather, watched the stars meet and part over America, the same stars he watched over China.

The problems the Chinese workers faced and the number

of deaths were large. When they were faced with ravines and overhangs, they had to either fill them up or build bridges which was very dangerous. They used gun powder to blow up rocks. But not only did the rocks blow up, the workers were blown up too. Ah Goong was a basket man and he had to go down into the valley in a basket to dig holes and insert gun powder and fuses. During the ride in the basket he saw plenty of China men falling off their baskets, down into the valley: "Godlike, he watched men whose faces he could not see and whose screams he did not hear roll and bounce and slide like a handful of sprinkled gravel" (CM: 132). Often, Ah Goong wished he had hands long enough to help the men falling down but he was helpless and had to see them fall. This horror of the day time haunted him during the nights and he longed for home, wife and security. After pounding the rocks for three long years, a white man invented dynamite which also invented new ways of death for the workers: "The dynamite added more accidents and ways of dying. . ." (CM: 136).

They were still paid a dollar a day and made to work eight hours. Later they were promised four dollars for ten hours of work. A literate China man planned a strike because he realized that "No China Men, no railroad" (CM: 140). So the China men went on a strike for nine days, at the end of which many of them lost their lives due to lack of food. Ah Goong being a good hoarder, saved himself by setting aside extra helpings from each meal. During these nine days he also bought himself American citizenship for a bag of gold. The strike ended with the Chinese workers

getting thirty-five dollars a month for eight hours a day. In 1869 the transcontinental railroad was completed. Even before the workers could get a proper look at the finished work, they were driven out.

Another chapter in which Kingston raises her voice against the injustice done to the Chinese immigrants is "The Laws." The Chinese who came to America to make a few fast bucks because of the poverty and pressures back home, were soon disillusioned because they were not only paid less but also faced a lot of opposition from the Caucasian workers. The Caucasian workers felt they were being deprived of their jobs and started a crusade against the Chinese. The politicians and legislators joined them. The Chinese were made to pay numerous taxes, they were beaten up, their houses were burnt, and worse still, the Exclusion Bill was passed and enforced as a law. Kingston says,

> Encouraged by fanatical lobbying from California, the US Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act. It banned the entrance of Chinese labourers, both skilled and unskilled, for ten years. (CM: 153)

The Exclusion Bill was repealed only in 1943. During this period the Chinese were put through innumerable difficulties.

"The Making of More Americans" is a chapter which establishes how the Chinese gradually started to regard themselves as Americans, felt and behaved like Americans and regarded America rather than China as their home.

Some more of Kingston's male relatives are introduced to us. Bak Goong's brothers, Say Goong and Sahm Goong, grow

vegetables and make a living out of them. In this chapter Kingston brings the Chinese custom of propitiating ghosts. The belief in the conscious existence of the soul after the death of the body, a feature very much Oriental is given importance here. Worshipping ancestors is a custom of the Chinese, they believe that this custom will strengthen the virtues of people.

One day, after Say Goong's death, Sahm Goong visits Kingston's mother and tells her that Say Goong keeps appearing at the stable. Kingston's mother believes that ghosts come back with messages from other ancestors. She asks Sahm Goong: "What does he have to say?" (CM: 166). In the following conversation between her mother and Sahm Goong, Kingston is hinting at the belief of the conscious existence of the soul: "'You know he's dead, don't you?' 'Yes. It must be his ghost standing there. He comes to visit me every day'" (CM: 166). Perhaps Say Goong's soul feels neglected at not being worshipped and comes to remind his brother of the custom of worshipping the dead, ". . . the worship of ancestors is obligatory upon all. . . ., to honor them is religion; . . ." (Martin, 1898: 262). When Sahm Goong urges him to go to China, Say Goong goes back, perhaps thinking that his soul will get better treatment back home. In life, America had been their home, but in death it is China. "'Go home,' Sahm Goong said sternly. 'Go back to China.' 'Go now. To China.' His voice was loud in the bare shed" (CM: 168) and "Say Goong disappeared. . . . He had been startled away, reminded of something" (CM: 168).

The Zulus, prior to their contact with the

> white settlers of the Cape, were accustomed to account for disturbing dreams and bodily disease by saying that they were troubled by the spirits of their ancestors. . . . At the dawn of history we find the same belief already rooted in the Chinese mind. (Martin, 1898: 259)

We find another incident in the book which proves that the Chinese believe in the conscious existence of the soul. The third grandfather had a grandson, Sao, who establishes himself as an American citizen. This account also shows how more and more Chinese are accepting American ways and manners. Sao joins the army, thus making his citizenship legal and invites his wife to America: "The new couple, young and modern (mo-dang), bought a ranch house and car, wore fashionable clothes, spoke English, and seemed more American than us" (CM: 169). Sao's mother in China is a very possessive woman who feels that Sao is violating the cardinal virtues of the Chinese (filial piety) because he is taking very good care of his wife and daughters who are with him in America and therefore neglecting her. She is not happy with the money he sends her regularly and wants him to leave his wife and children and come to China and live with her. She writes terrifying letters stating that she is starving and tries emotional blackmail on Sao hoping that he will send more money to her. Either she nags him to return or send her more money. Even before he receives a letter informing him of her death, her ghost comes to America and starts torturing him. He keeps talking to his mother's ghost, apologizing to her, throwing money and food at her. He goes almost insane with her ghost's presence and decides

to take her back to China even if it costs him the earth:

> He returned his mother to the village. He went directly to her grave, as if led by her . . . . "You're home now. I've brought you home. . . . Rest, Mother. Eat." He heaped food on her grave. He piled presents besides it. He set real clothes and real shoes on fire. He burned mounds of paper replicas and paper money. He poured wine into the thirsty earth. . . . He set off firecrackers near her grave, not neglecting one Chinese thing. "Rest now, heh, Mother. Be happy now." He sat by the grave and drank and ate for the first time since she had made her appearance. He stepped over the fires before extinguishing them. He boarded the very same ship sailing back. . . . He hurried home to America, where he acted normal again, continuing his American life,. . . . (CM: 176)

Although he practises quite a few Chinese customs for his mother, he leaves no doubt in our mind regarding his American identity. The line "He hurried home to America . . . ." proves how the Chinese are gradually getting assimilated.

The history of the Chinese-American fashions, films, etc. is a part of the history of America in which the immigrants (now settled and trying to belong) participate by mutation and not by contribution, as Kingston finally does.

Another relative of Kingston's, Kau Goong, also claims America as his home. Kau Goong is over 90 years and he receives a letter from his wife: "Now we're surely in our old age. Why don't you come back, and let's spend a few years together before we die" (CM: 180). Kau Goong, instead of joining his wife in his ripe old age, decides to stay back: "'I've decided to stay in California.' He said that 'California. This is my home. I belong here.' He turned and, looking at us, roared, 'We belong here'" (CM: 182).

The chapter, "The Adventures of Lo Bun Sun," is yet another myth. It can be read as an allusion to the story of Robinson Crusoe. Lo Bun Sun is a sailor and after a ship-wreck lands on an island and lives there for twenty-five years without human company. After that, he rescues a man from the cannibals on a Friday and names him Sing Kay Ng. After three years, the two of them save two men from cannibals, one of them the captain of a ship and the other Sing Kay Ng's father. After sometime he returns home and at the age of sixty, gets married and has three children. He goes to sea again after the death of his wife and has many more adventures with Sing Kay Ng before Sing Kay Ng is killed and Lo Bun Sun retires at the age of 72.

This chapter reflects the general attitude of the very first Chinese immigrants: their adventurous spirit, their journey to America to earn money and then in their old age their return to China to settle down with their wives and children.

Kingston's search for her father and her efforts to establish a relationship with him do not end with the chapter "The Father from China." She continues it in the chapter "The American Father." In "The Father from China" she bombards her father with questions about him but soon realizes that she is not making much progress. She, therefore, turns to her mother:

> When I asked MaMa why she speaks different from BaBa, she says their parents lived across the river from one another. Maybe his village was America, the river an ocean, his accent American. (CM: 231)

Her mother may be taken to represent China and her father America. She is able to communicate with her Chinese mother to a considerable extent but she is unable to communicate with her American father. This is symbolic of Kingston's state of mind, i.e. her ability to come to terms with her Chinese background while she is still making an effort to join the mainstream.

She pathetically follows her father, sneaks into his favourite places, "when I explored his closet and desk, I thought, this is a father place; a father belongs here" (CM: 231). She sneaks into his places and tries to associate with him behind his back because she does not have the courage to do it outright. Another of his favourite places was the "dirt cellar." One day she finds the cellar door open and finds her father there:

> I had been following him, spying on him. I went into the cellar and hid behind some boxes. He lifted the lid that covered the bottomless well. Before he could stop me, I burst out of hiding and saw it--a hole. . . deep and alive. BaBa shouted, "Get away." "Let me look. Let me look," I said. "Be careful," he said as I stood on the brink of a well, the end and edge. . . . "What's it called?" I asked to hear him say it. "A well." I wanted to hear him say it again, to tell me again, "Well." (CM: 232)

We can perceive her agony in the words "I wanted to hear him" as if just listening to him talk is everything in life for her.

She says:

> another father place was the attic of our new house. . . . I watched for the day when he left a ladder under the open trap door.

> I climbed the ladder through the kitchen ceiling. (CM: 233)

She prowls around her father's favourite places to feel one with her father to smell and feel his presence: "The best of the father places I did not have to win by cunning; he showed me it himself. I had been young enough to hold his hand. . ." (CM: 233). The "best" place is a gambling house. Her happiness knows no bounds when her father shows his "best" place to her and that implies that he is showing interest in her: "As we walked, he pointed out sights; he named the plants, told time on the clocks, explained a neon sign in the shape of an owl, which shut one eye in daylight" (CM: 233). In this way slowly but steadily she gathers information from him.

Her father, she says, after being duped by his partners in New York, had come to Stockton. An owner of a gambling house, a fellow ex-villager, had paid their fare to Stockton where he had started working in the gambling house and her mother as a servant in the owner's house. Both of them had worked very hard to repay the owner as well as to return to China. They decided not to go to China and bought a house for 6,000 dollars across the railway station, very much like the owner's house. During the second World War, policemen raided the gambling house. After this, the father stopped working and became a very disheartened man: "He was always home. He sat in his chair and stared, or he sat on the floor and stared" (CM: 240-41). He becomes unpredictable. His wife forces him to look for a job, "You piece of liver. You poet. You scholar. What's the use of a poet and a

scholar on the Gold Mountain?" (CM: 241). Kingston is trying to draw our attention to the fact that Chinese education is of no value in America.

Kingston does not like to see her father as a defeated man. "He seemed to have lost his feelings" (CM: 242), she laments. The only event that gets him out of his easy chair is the newspaper. She says that he almost went mad: "He screamed in his sleep" (CM: 244). All this worries Kingston and her sister so much that one day "We children became so wild that we broke BaBa loose from his chair. We goaded him, irked him--gikked him--and the gravity suddenly let him go" (CM: 246). After that he never went back to "his sitting." She describes his rebirth in the following passage:

> He shaved, put on some good clothes, and went out. He found a friend who had opened a new laundry on El Dorado Street. He went inside and chatted, asked if he could help out. The friend said he had changed his mind about owning the laundry. . . . My father bought it and had a Grand Opening. (CM: 247)

Kingston feels proud when she sees her father back in form again: "So my father at last owned his house and his business in America" (CM: 248). After reestablishing himself he often sings "The Song of the Man of the Green Hill," the end of which goes like this: "The dishevelled poet beheads the great whale. He shoots an arrow and hits a suspended flea. He sees well through rhinoceros-horn lenses" (CM: 248-49). These lines symbolize the victory of the father against the forces of oppression.

"The Li Sao: an elegy" is a myth. It is the story of Ch'ü Yüan, China's earliest known poet, a Homer. He was a minister in the Chou kingdom and a very honest man. He was

banished from the Chou kingdom for advising the king not to go to war against Ch'in, but the king listened to the warmongers and fought a losing war. After his banishment he wandered from one place to another singing about his miserable condition. During the course of his journey he met several celestial beings and reached Heaven: "The lady of the clouds took him to nine continents and four seas. . . He sang to the goddess who dries her hair in the rising sun" (CM: 251). He felt like an orphan. He says that he was once rich and handsome but that he is a nobody now. He longed to go home to his wife. He called himself the "phoenix dispossessed." Finally, one day he committed suicide. Only after his death people realized his greatness and sincerity. They prayed for his return. Poets sang songs enticing him to return to the earth and even threw rice into the sea to propitiate him.

Perhaps Kingston subtitled the chapter "an elegy" because it is full of lamentation. First Ch'ü Yüan laments his misfortunes, later the people lament the death of Ch'u Yuan.

The history of the poet-father's disillusionment is followed by a myth of similar import to pinpoint that throughout history, poets have been ill-treated. An analogy can be drawn between the father and Ch'ü Yüan. They are both poets. They are deprived of their jobs. But while Ch'ü Yüan sings about his miseries, the father does not express his miseries verbally. Both are in exile. The words "phoenix dispossessed" apply to both of them. Ch'ü Yüan is raised by people after his death whereas the father raises

himself one morning like phoenix from its own ashes and makes himself a successful man all over again.

While old cultures have myths to dispense with pain, new cultures force man into silence and insanity. Perhaps Kingston is talking for herself. She is a poet and empathizes with the poets in her family who died horrible deaths because they were not recognized by the Americans.

After the stories of the great grandfather, the grandfather, the father and the great uncles, Kingston tells us the story of her brother. "The brother in Vietnam" gives us details of how most of the Chinese were anti-war (Vietnam). The Chinese used various devices to dodge drafting. Some drank ink to make the photograph come black, while some tried to become fat, the others starved themselves. Some took drugs to paralyze their vocal chords.

The brother was a school teacher before he was forced to enlist himself in the navy. He taught the children the disadvantages of war. He himself could not escape war: "He could not escape induction. He did not have physical disabilities. He was not married. He was not in a job vital in defence" (CM: 276). He was left with the choice of either living the rest of his life as a fugitive in exile or enlisting himself in the navy. Since he did not want to live like a fugitive he joined the navy and reasoned out his decision, saying that

> In a country that operates on war economy, there isn't much difference between being in the Navy and being a civilian. . . . Everything was connected to everything else and to war. (CM: 277)

After serving in the navy for four years he boarded a plane to the U.S. and came home. He had lost his youth in Vietnam fighting people racially allied to the Chinese simply because his forefathers had become Americans.

In the last two chapters, "The hundred-year-old man" and "On listening," Kingston tries to summarize the story of the Chinese leaving China in search of money and gold: "Do you know the Chinese came to the Philippines to look for the Gold Mountain?" (CM: 300). She describes their life abroad:

> And they built roads and railroads and cities on their way to this mountain. They filled swamps. They had children. And on a certain mountain they sifted rocks and dirt looking for a gold needle. They asked the man in chains where the gold was, and he said that all they saw was gold. (CM: 301)

Though Kingston's first book deals with women and her second book only with men, these books were originally intended to be one single book. Later she decided to put the women in one book and men in the second book.

Suzanne Juhasz terms them as the ". . . two-volume Autobiography" (Rainwater, 1985: 173). In both books Kingston has fictionalized fact. An autobiography is also a construction from selected or highlighted "facts." Hence, even an autobiography becomes "fiction."

In The Woman Warrior myths are not contained in separate chapters as they are in China Men. In The Woman Warrior they are incorporated into the chapters, either narrated by the mother to the daughter or the author to the reader. The women, says Kingston in an interview with Rabinowitz, draw

their strength from myths, whereas the men don't:

> In the men's stories, I tell a myth and then I tell a present-day story, a myth, and then another present-day adventure story; they are separate narratives. (Rabinowitz, 1987: 179)

As Kingston herself says in the interview, the reason for the slight difference in the structure of both books is that ". . . the men's myths and memories are not as integrated into their present day lives. . ." as they are in the women's present day lives. So in The Woman Warrior myths and real stories are combined but in China Men they are in separate chapters.

China Men in no way deals with women characters. The only connection between women and the book is the narrator. The daughter has to imagine and piece together the stories narrated to her by her father. In making her father, Kingston makes her own roots.

The book may be termed as an open structured book, in the sense that ". . . the perspectives may take the form of a great many narrative points of view focused on the same subject" and even "in rejecting the border line between art and life" (Spencer, 1971: 52-53).

Marina Warner describes the book in Sunday Times as

> . . . the history of the Chinese who sailed the Pacific to the "Gold Mountain" to make their fortunes. . . . She tells the story of her origins, and makes it the story of Chinese America. (quoted on the back cover of China Men)

Chapter 4: Tripmaster Monkey: Man as an Artist

Kingston's third book, Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book, marks a turning-point in her mode of expression. While the first two books belong to the subgenre of "Auto-biography," the third book falls in a differert category that of fiction. While the first two books may be termed as Fictional Autobiographies, the third book is not just fiction but also metafiction. The book also has features of the Black Humour novel.

The theme of the question of identity runs through all the three books. Although the genre of this book is diffe-rent from the first two, Kingston continues her search for identity. In this chapter we shall discuss the question of the dual identity of the Chinese-Americans in general and Kingston's in particular, and the theme of racism. The book will also be discussed as a book of the sixties and as a postmodernist novel.

The protagonist of the book is Wittman Ah Sing. The book is divided into nine chapters. In the first chapter, "Trippers and Askers," Kingston gives us details of Wittman's parentage and of his college life. On the bus, on his way to meet his collegemate, Nanci Lee, he reads Rilke's Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge to the other passengers, meets Nanci Lee and it is through their conver-sation that we come to know of his backgrcund. Wittman Ah

Sing is the son of Ruby and Zeppelin Ah Sing. Ruby is a stage actress, well-known as Ruby Long Legs. His father was first a stage door Johnny, then a backstage electrician and later an emcee on stage. Wittman is a twenty-three-year old, fifth generation Chinese-American. Later, he takes her home and reveals his intentions of writing and staging epic plays. He also tells her that he is an incarnation of the Chinese monkey god (who brought back the Buddha Sutras to China) and that he wants to bring back the "brief and dying /Chinese/ culture" to the Chinese-Americans (TM: 6).

In the second chapter Kingston gives us details of Wittman's brief career as an assistant salesman in the toy department of a departmental store. He makes friends with a Yale Younger Poet who is a stockboy in the store. He also meets Louise, a salesgirl, and attends a business party (launching of new products and releasing new commercials) with Louise. The chapter ends with Wittman quitting the job. He quits the job before the authorities throw him out for placing a toy monkey on top of a Barbie Bride doll and making it look "obscene."

In the third chapter, "Twisters and Shouters," he is again on the bus; this time on his way to a party. The party is given by Lance and Sunny Kamiyama. On the bus he meets a Chinese-American girl, Judy Louis. In the party he meets several people including Nanci and Tana, the girl he later marries. The chapter ends with Wittman and Tana becoming lovers.

In the fourth chapter, "The Winners of the Party,"

Lance Kamiyama, his bride Sunny, Wittman Ah Sing, Tana De Weese, Nanci Lee, Charley Bogard Shaw and Judy Louis are declared the winners of the party for staying up all night. In the morning Wittman reads out his play to the guests at the party. Later on in the chapter Wittman and Tana go for a ride in the car and they meet Gabe. Gabe was earlier Greg but to dodge the draft he becomes a priest and changes his name to Gabe. In this chapter Wittman marries Tana and also becomes a priest. In the fifth chapter, "Ruby Long Legs' and Zeppelin's Song of the Open Road," Wittman takes Tana to meet his parents, takes Tana on a honeymoon--a trip to Sutro's. He also meets his aunts. He finds out that his grandmother PoPo had been abandoned by his parents and goes in search of her.

In the sixth chapter, "A Song for Occupation," he realizes that he has to create a theatre for Nanci Lee, find his PoPo and that he has to keep Tana "for richer, for poorer." Tana volunteers a plan for the rest of their lives: "alternately, each spouse work half the year and collect Unemployment the other half" (TM: 223). He goes to the unemployment office and registers himself. Later goes and meets an old fut and after a great deal of persuasion Wittman manages to convince him to lease out his house to stage his play. The chapter ends with Wittman finding his grandmother as well as a venue for his theatre. In the seventh chapter, "A Pear Garden in the West," Wittman invites all his friends, parents, aunts and acquaintances and they decide among themselves who will play which role. The chapter ends with Wittman extending an invitation to

everybody to attend his play on Hallowe'en.

In the eighth chapter, "Bones and Jones," Wittman's theatre draws huge crowds:

> All hell broke loose on the third night of this play, for which the audience kept growing. The public, including white strangers, came and made the show important. The theater went beyond cracking up family, friends and neighbors come to see one another be different from every day. The take at the box office paid for the explosives for the climactic blowout. The audience sat on the staircase and windowsills; there was no longer an aisle. (TM: 296)

The theatre was the coming together of Wittman's community: "Friends and enemies find one another. Agon" (TM: 297).

The last chapter, "One-Man Show," starts with a passage from Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge:

> It came to you to be yourself. Your fellow-actors' courage failed; as if they had been caged with a pantheress. . . . But you drew them forward, and you posed them and dealt with them as if they were real. Those limp doors, those simulated curtains, those objects that had no reverse side, drove you to protest. You felt how your heart intensified unceasingly toward an immense reality and, frightened, you tried once more to take people's gaze off you like long gossamer threads--:. . . . (TM: 305)

The passage reflects exactly what Wittman is going to do in this chapter. He is trying to find himself and finally with great difficulty he finds his identity. He says:

> "Once and for all: I am not oriental. An oriental is antipodal. I am a human being standing right here on land which I belong to and which belongs to me. I am not an oriental antipode. . . ." (TM: 326-27)

He also proudly declares, "I am deeply, indigenously here.

And my mother and father are indigenous. Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden State" (TM: 327).

A major theme in this book is the search for identity. The main aim of the minority groups is to find their individual identity and identify themselves with the mainstream. One of the Chinese-American youth expresses his desire for identity and recognition which forces him to join some racial group or the other. At first he hated being a Chinese because they were not given recognition. He was of the opinion that there were only two groups of people in the world, "Blacks and Whites" and he says: ". . . if you're gonna make it in this world you'd better be part of one or the other." Because he grew up in a black neighbourhood, his friends were black. He had no choice but to join the black group. "Later on in the year," he says, "the Chicanos and Asians were beginning to get together. . . . I quickly jumped on the band wagon. Actually I really didn't care but I wanted and needed a group to relate with . . . ." (Spiegal, 1973: 374-75). Thus slowly he turns towards his race and even begins to defend it.

Similarly, Wittman hates to be identified as a Chinese. He, being a fifth generation Chinese-American, is more American than Kingston, who is a first generation Chinese-American. He does not want to belong to the minority--hyphenated--society because he was born and bred in America and regards himself as an American. His complaint, as Le Anne Schreiber puts it, is that while: "It takes one generation to lose China. How many does it take to gain America?" (Schreiber, 1989: 9). Because he claims America,

but America rejects him. He feels that he is in exile in his own home. Though he grows up like the native American children with the same rhymes and the same cartoons, they refuse to accept him as an American just because he has black hair, yellow skin and slant eyes. The following lines explain how much he hates to be identified as a Chinese. Kerouac describes the Chinese as "twinkling" and "little." Wittman feels that these words refer to him and explodes:

> Shit. The "twinkling little Chinese" must be none other than himself. "Twinkling"?! "Little"?! Shit. . . . Jock Kerouac. I call into question your naming of me. I trust your sight no more. You tell people by their jobs. And by their race. And the wrong race at that. If Ah Sing were to run into Kerouac--grab him by the lapels of his lumberjack shirt. Pull him up on his toes. Listen here, you twinkling little Canuck. What do you know, Kerouac? . . . . You don't know shit. I'm the American here. I'm the American walking here. . . . Just for that, I showed you, I grew to six feet. May still be growing. (TM: 69-70)

The Chinese were originally not very tall. So, by telling us, "I grew to six feet," he implies that even physically he does not resemble the Chinese.

He always refers to the other people of his race as "Then--here they come--'orientals,' all in a group" (TM: 58). It sounds as if he were not one of them or at least does not want to be associated with them. Later on, he makes some concessions. He says that "the orientals--alright, the Chinese-American--were sitting together near the front" (TM: 59) stresses on their hyphenated identity, but excludes himself. He describes the attitude of some of the Chinese-Americans: "They've set up the section where we're all supposed to come sit, which they'd done to the school

cafeteria of every school he ever went to" (TM: 59). But he never joins any of them because he felt one with the Americans.

When Judy (the girl he meets on the bus) guesses that he is a Chinese, he vehemently denies that "I not Chinese . . . I hate being taken for a Chinaman" (TM: 75). The lines,

> Our water is your water.
> Our food is your food.
> Our hunger is your hunger.
> Our stories are your stories. (TM: 125)

show the desire of the Chinese to throw their lot in with the Americans uninhibitedly and their eagerness to get assimilated.

He wants to belong to America but soon realizes the futility of his efforts because all the time people refer to him as Chinese. "You Chinese?" asked Mrs. Chew and left with no other option "yes," he says (TM: 228). "You Chinese?" asked Mr. Sanchez yet again: "Yeah," says Wittman. "It shows, huh?" (TM: 241). He hates the racist feelings inherent in the American people.

His aim is to bring back the Chinese culture which is fast disappearing from the Chinese-American society due to negligence and racism. Now that he is jobless and has much time to spare, he makes use of it to fulfil his dream. He feels that most of the Chinese-Americans are ignorant of discrimination, so he wants to educate them. He says:

> "I'm going to start a theater company. I'm naming it The Pear Garden Players of America. The Pear Garden was the cradle of civilization, where theater began on Earth. Out among the

> trees, ordinary people made fools of themselves acting like kings and queens. As playwright and producer and director, I'm casting blind. That means the actors can be any race. Each member of the Tyrone family or the Lomans can be a different color. I'm including everything that is being left out, and everybody who has no place. My idea for the civil rights movement is that we integrate jobs, schools, buses, housing, lunch counters, yes, and we also integrate theater and parties. The dressing up. The dancing. The loving. The playing. . ." (TM: 52)

Thus starts his war against racism:

> Racism is a virulent form of prejudice. Prejudice is the detrimental, preconceived judgement of individuals or groups on the basis of their skin, colour, culture, speech patterns, mode of dress, or whatever. . . . Racism leads to discrimination. When we discriminate, we exclude certain groups. When we perceive a difference in others, we compare them to ourselves or our group and irrationally decide that they are inferior because they are different from us and therefore should not share our society or privileges. (Monte, 1972: 15)

Racism and discrimination against the Chinese having started almost as soon as they entered the U.S. was carried on through the gold rush and railroad era. It became severe during the 1880's. They kept the early immigrants from being naturalized and if they were naturalized they were not allowed full participation in any activities. Discrimination still continues in one form or the other.

Kingston, through Wittman, is expressing her dislike for such discrimination. It is very clearly expressed in the last chapter, "One-Man Show," where Wittman as playwright, in a long speech, says: "I want to talk to you. I'm Wittman Ah Sing, the playwright. I'm one of the American Ah Sings. Probably there are no Ah Sings in China. . . ."

He explains from where he might have got his name "Ah Sing": "I know it's just a sound. A vocative that goes in front of everyone's names. Ah Smith. Ah Jones. Everyone has an ah, only our family writes ours down." He explains:

> In that Ah, you can hear we had an ancestor who left a country where the language has sounds that don't mean anything--la and ma and wa--like music. Alone and illiterate, he went where not one other Chinese was. Nobody set him straight. When his new friends asked him his name, he remembered that those who wanted him had called, "Ah Sing." So he told the school marm, "Ah, Sing, ma'am," and /she/ wrote down for him the two syllables of a new American name. (TM: 307)

After establishing the legitimacy of his American identity, he shows us, how the native Americans nevertheless discriminate against him and his race. He talks of the newspaper reviews of the epic plays he has staged:

> "So. You were entertained. You liked the show, huh? I myself have some complaints and notes but. . . . You like the reviews? I am sore and disappointed. Come on, you can't like these reviews. Don't be too easily made happy. Look. Look. 'East meets West.' 'Exotic.' 'Sino-American theater.' 'Snaps, crackles and pops like singing rice.' 'Sweet and sour.' Quit clapping. Stop it. What's to cheer about? You like being compared to Rice Krispies? Cut it out. Let me show you, you've been insulted. They sent their food critics. They wrote us up like they were casting Chinese food. . . . 'Savor beauteous Nanci Lee, it says here. . . .'" (TM: 307)

All through he is lamenting that their talent and basic idea for staging the play hasn't been recognized by the Americans. He says that they are treating them like Chinese and not Chinese-Americans and that they certainly would not

have treated the blacks in a similar manner:

> "They wouldn't write a headline for Raisin in the Sun: 'America Meets Africa.' They want us to go back to China where we belong. They think that Americans are either white or Black. . . . I have a nightmare--after duking it out, someday Blacks and whites will shake hands over my head. I'm the little yellow man beneath the bridge of their hands and overlooked. . . ." (TM: 307-08)

Throughout his long speech he harps on the treatment meted out to the Chinese-Americans. To make them aware of the discrimination and to arouse in them an urge to fightback, he gives his audience several examples.

He declares in his speech that the chanting about Chinese: "East is east and west is west" (TM: 308) must stop. He declares that there is no East in America and that "West is meeting West. This was all West. All you saw was West. This is The Journey In the West. . . They've got us in a bag, which we aren't punching our way out of" (TM: 308). He is trying to say that there is no separate existence for the Chinese as "Chinese" in America but everyone belongs to America and that they are all Americans.

Wittman states that the Americans are discriminating against them:

> "'I think," he tried explaining, "that history being trapped in people means that history is embodied in physical characteristics, such as skin colors. And do you know what part of our bodies they find so mysteriously inscrutable? It's our little eyes. . . .'" (TM: 312)

Most of the Chinese women, in their efforts to join the mainstream, have their eyes operated upon. Wittman advises

such women not to do so. In his speech he reveals:

> "They can't see inside here past these slits. And that's why you girls are slicing your eyelids open, isn't it? Poor girls. I understand. And you glue on the false eyelashes to give your scant eyes some definition. . . ." (TM: 312)

He asks them to be proud of their eyes and heritage. As a responsible director and a man, he tries to stop his actresses from mutilating themselves. He also asks the other Chinese-American men to help him in trying to dissuade the women from committing such a ghastly act upon themselves.

Here we can see Kingston using "Black Humour":

> baleful or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called a "tragic farce" in which the events are simultaneously comic, brutal, horrifying, and absurd. (Abrams, 1981: 2).

The way the Chinese-Americans had their eyes, nose, chin, etc. operated upon just to call themselves Americans is horrifying and absurd. "And that one over there came back from winter break with a Jackie nose. . . . Her friends said, 'Nose Job'" (TM: 99). They used a lot of make-up and thick false eyelashes to look more like the whites. Many of them abandoned their customs and traditions in the hope that they will be accepted as Americans. Their efforts are both grotesque and funny.

Wittman is a contradictory character. Though in the beginning he claims to be an American, in the latter half of the book he sings a different song. He goes out of his way to defend his race. He gives us a very clear picture

of the way the Americans treat the Chinese who want to be Americans while at the same time retaining their Chinese-ness. They are treated badly and made fun of:

> "All my life, I've heard pieces of jokes--maybe the same joke in fragments--that they quit telling when I walk in. They're trying to drive me pre-psychotic. I'm already getting paranoid. I'm wishing for a cloak of invisibility." (TM: 316)

These American racist jokes are making the Chinese-Americans feel inferior: "White men let little yellow men overhear that twat joke to make them littler and yellower" (TM: 317). The Americans are all the time trying to enslave the Chinese. Wittman continues:

> "They have an enslavement wish for us, and they have a death wish, that we die. They use movies to brainwash us into suicide. . . . The Yellow Man lusts after a white girl, he has to kill himself--that's a tradition they've made up for us. . . . Don't ever kill yourself, You kill yourself, you play into their hands." (TM: 319)

He asks the Chinese-Americans not to fall into the trap the Americans are laying for them. He says that the Americans have another custom for the Orientals:

> "Deranged by gratitude, an oriental has to have a master, and will tail after a white man until enslaved. . . . Every few days they show us a movie or a t.v. episode about us owing them, therefore thankfully doing their laundry and waiting on them, cooking and serving and washing. . ." (TM: 320)

He says that every time a Chinese makes an attempt at naturalization by marrying an American, his effort is nipped in the bud. Wittman talks of another movie where the man is

killed because he loves a white girl. The name of the movie is "The Bitter Tea of General Yin." Wittman explodes angrily: "They named him that to castrate us. General Yin instead of General Yang, get it? Again the Chinaman made into a woman" (TM: 322). He complains that the Chinese are repeatedly shot, stabbed, kicked, socked, skinned, machine-gunned and blown up.

He asks the Chinese-Americans to fight against the absurd inquiry by the Americans regarding their identity: "Are you Chinese or Japanese?" by questioning the Americans in return, "Where's our name that shows that we aren't from anywhere but America?" (TM: 326).

At the end of his long speech he realizes that it is their own fault that they are still called "Gook and Chinky China man" even though they came before Columbus because they failed to identify themselves as Americans while the others changed themselves into Americans:

> "For a moment a hundred years ago, we were China Men. After all, the other people in the new world were Englishmen and Frenchmen and Dutchmen. But they changed themselves into Americans, and wouldn't let us change into Americans. And they slurred 'China Man' 'Chinaman,' they said dactylically." (TM: 326)

He gives us another example of how the Chinese-Americans are treated. It is his personal experience, this incident happened when he volunteered for an experiment in college for fifty bucks:

> "So we Chinese-hyphenated-schizoid-dichotomous-Americans were gathered in this lab . . . . The shrink or lab assistant asked us to fold a piece of paper in half and write

> 'Chinese' at the top of one half and 'American' at the top of the other. Then he read off a list of words. Like 'Daring.' 'Reticent.' 'Laughter.' 'Fearful.' 'Easy-going.' 'Conscientious.' 'Direct.' 'Devious.'. . . 'Subtle.' 'Outgoing.' We were to write each word either in the left-hand column or the right-hand column." (TM: 328)

Wittman wishes he had torn the paper and stopped the test but instead he says that

> ". . . I gave the Chinese side 'Daring' and 'Laughter'. . . . But my bold answers were deviated away in the standard deviation. The American side got all the fun traits. It's scientifically factual truth now--I have a stripe down my back. Here, let me take off my shirt. Check out the yellow side, and the American side." (TM: 328)

He complains that the Americans are psychologically messing up the Chinese. He says that he was treated no better than a lab animal and that he never got over the experiment which left him with aftereffects--acid flashbacks: "I'm not making this up. I tell you, there's a lot of Nazi shit going on in the laboratories. Don't fall into their castrating hands" (TM: 328).

He calls on his people to come and prove that they too can demonstrate love and affection publicly. He throws a challenge and calls for a kissing contest. He asks them to kiss one another: "You need to be taught a lesson, accusing me of affection. I'm going to unbrainwash you from believing anymore that we're a people who don't kiss and don't hug" (TM: 329).

He warns the Chinese-Americans not to call themselves "Chinese" among Americans who are ready to send them back to

where they think they belong:

> "But 'Chinese-American' takes too long. Nobody says or hears past the first part. And 'Chinese-American' is inaccurate--as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out--'Chinese American.' 'American,' the noun, and 'Chinese,' the adjective. From now on: Chinese Americans." (TM: 327)

He refuses to be a total Chinese and since he is not accepted as an American, he comes to accept his identity as a Chinese-American. He is trying to make a time and place for himself; the time being the twentieth century and the place America, at the same time not forgetting China. The Chinese-Americans talk of the "unreal" China as if it were real and their American reality is undone by racism. What Kingston is trying to make is a Chinese-American reality in the fictional character of Wittman within the pages of the book.

The book represents the sixties. The decade of the sixties was marked by different kinds of movements: racial, political, social, sexual and educational. It started as an age of youth and optimism, but ended in gloom, pessimism and frustration. The women's rights movement and the Civil Rights movement were at their peak in the sixties. The family was disintegrating. Self-fulfilment and sexual freedom had become the most sacred tenet. Prior to the sixties, religion and utilitarian individualism were given more importance. But the sixties with its contradictory ideas left the people with unstable beliefs.

The sixties saw the birth of counterculture and hippie culture. People started living in communes. The hippies

were non-conformists and opposed all traditions. They brought with them a lot of drugs and lived freely. Men wore their hair long and dressed flamboyantly. There was a change in every field, art, literature, music, theatre, etc. There was a newness in the theatre. Drama was moving into a poetic realm of metaphor. University campuses were full of radical politics, new styles, etc. Burning of draft cards, protest marches and student strikes were all a part of daily routine. The key word of the day was liberation--liberating that which had been repressed for too long. People wanted to choose their own style of living to have a say in the rules and structures which governed and regulated their lives.

Kingston portrays all these characteristics in Tripmaster Monkey. As is typical of the youth of the sixties Wittman is a perfect example of a being who is intelligent but whose thought is split. His mind oscillates from one extreme to another. The book starts with Wittman contemplating suicide almost every day:

> Wittman Ah Sing considered suicide every day. Entertained it. There slid beside his right eye a black gun. . . . He was aware of the run of his mind, that's all. He was not making plans to do himself in, and no more willed these seppuku movies--no more conjured up that gun--than built this city. (TM: 3)

Morose and grim thoughts are immediately followed by casual thoughts, as if they were everyday thoughts. Perhaps they are an outcome of his loneliness and dejection. His conscience is split to such an extent that on the one hand he claims he is an American and on the other he thinks himself to be the "chosen one" to save the dying Chinese culture.

He thinks himself to be in love with Nanci Lee but ends up marrying Tana on impulse. He attends parties though he is not a social being. He is a poet and a playwright. He is a university drop-out. He is an artist who creates his own world which is at war with the real world. His world is constantly threatened. He is trying to revive traditions, which is a very difficult task. The task is both painful and funny at the same time. He has a volatile temperament and is constantly at war with everything, enters into silly arguments with friends and enemies alike. Lance is his only childhood friend but that does not deter him from fighting with him. He is a total misfit in this world. He himself confesses: "Oh, God, I don't belong on this planet."

Wittman is also paranoid about several things:

> Electric street-cars rage ringing through my room. Automobiles run their way over me. A door slams. Somewhere a window-pane falls clattering: I hear its big splinters laugh, its little one snicker. . . . Someone is climbing the stairs. Coming, coming incessantly. . . . A girl screams: Ah tais-toi, je ne veux plus. . . . Someone calls. People are running, overtake each other. . . . More than one pane of glass has fallen; an entire glass side of a building has crashed down, but the next day, if he remembers to look, the street will not be covered with glass. The electric cars do not run on this street at four in the morning. (TM: 42-43)

He is suspicious of the natives. He feels that they are always cracking racist jokes and that they stop as soon as they spot him: "I'm already getting paranoid. I'm wishing for a cloak of invisibility" (TM: 316). Lance also calls him paranoid: "You're really paranoid man" (TM: 117). He is suspicious of Chubby Checker (Chubby Checker was the King of

twist), "Paranoid again. Like we were last summer. What if Chubby Checker does not mean us well? What if Chubby Checker is up to no good?" (TM: 110). He feels that there are many animals in the disguise of human beings around him. He says: "Let me warn you. Some of them only appear to be human. There are non-humans in disguise as men and women amongst us" (TM: 80). He is always gripped by some sort of fear. He confesses that "I am always afraid" (TM: 167). He is paranoid about marriage as well, "I face the utter paranoia of marriage" (TM: 174). He feels that the natives are trying to get him and the other Chinese-Americans paranoid: "The way they get you paranoid is you can't tell whether they're admiring the car and the chick, or they're giving you racist red ass" (TM: 212).

In the book Kingston records the anti-war (Vietnam) feelings that existed among the people of the sixties. Wittman is against war and tries to dissuade men and women from joining the war. For instance, in the chapter, "Linguists and Contenders," when Louise, the salesgirl, tells him that she is going to meet a couple of guys in the navy, he bursts out: 'Be a responsible citizen, "Fuck the war out of them, Louise," he said.' When she replies that she only dates them and nothing else, he says, "As long as nice girls like you think that men look cute in uniforms, they're going to keep warring and killing" (TM: 56). While working in the toy shop, he advises customers not to buy toy guns or toys which resemble guns or those which have triggers. Wittman says that "for the good of the kid, your grandson, you should not buy him this thing that is really a gun" (TM:

46). When the old lady tries to argue that it is only a basket ball game, he tries to dissuade her by saying "you don't want the kid to grow up to be a killer, do you?" (TM: 47). He asks her not to buy it because the toy has a trigger with which the boy would have to shoot the ball and might grow up liking the feel of a gun or the feeling to pull the triggers. Even the threat that he might lose his job does not bother him. When the old lady asks him: "Are you one of those people against war toys?" he openly declares that "Yeah, I'm against war toys. I'm anti-war. Look, I'm looking after your grandkid better than you are if you're going to let him grow up to be a draftee" (TM: 47). In a conversation with Mr. Sanchez in the unemployment office he declares that "I want to save the world from the bomb" (TM: 241). At another time he declares: "No guns. No bombs. I'm using my deepest brains to ban bombs" (TM: 143).

Wittman's mother is also against war. She tells him not to go to war:

> "But now you're draft-age I'm not sending you off to Viet Nam. I'm not helping drop the H-bomb. Don't you think about Viet Nam? What's the matter for you? You're too carefree, like your father. I want you to run for Canada. Go" (TM: 270)

and in reply Wittman says that "I do think about Viet Nam, Ma. I'm against it. . . ." (TM: 270).

Wittman is a draft dodger. On Gabe's advice he decides to get married as well as become a priest. Gabe gets Wittman married to Tana and says that "the exemption for married guys is going to stop any day" so ordains him, "I

ordain thee a minister of the Universal Life Church," making his excuse not to join the war extra strong. Tana marries Wittman not so much for the reason that she loves him but to save him from the draft: "I'd be glad to save you from the draft Wittman," she says (TM: 163). He asks his mother to conduct anti-war campaigns. He says that

> "Ma, if you can stir up a war with your dancing, you can stop one, right? Why don't you and the aunties make up an Anti-War Bond show, and see what happens? If it doesn't work, I'll go to Canada." (TM: 270)

He also expresses his idea to hide till the war is over so that he does not have to fight in the Vietnam war or any other war, "he made up his mind: he will not go to Viet Nam or to any war" (TM: 340).

The book also records the hippie culture of the time: "Hippies are many things, but most prominently the bearded and beaded inhabitants" (Howard, 1982: 208). The young men and women wore their hair long and unruly. Wittman is an example of it, "too much hair," said Auntie Sadie. "Much too hairy." "You go shave," said mother. "Shave it off! Shave it off!" (TM: 179). His mother does not understand their passion for long and unruly hair, but some of the aunts understand and try to explain to her:

> "'Hair, Big City style, isn't it, dear?' said Auntie Dolly of San Francisco, ruffling his hair. 'Beard in high style, Ruby. Wit Man Big City guy now.' The ladies at his mother's table were comforting her. 'Hairy face, fashion on a plate,' said Auntie Sophie." (TM: 180)

The youth of the time also wore brightly coloured clothes,

Nanci Lee, for example. There was "a wildness in her clothes and something about her dry hair" (TM: 22). Wittman confesses that he is a hippie, but a hippie, where music is concerned, "I'm hip," said Wittman "I'm hip to accordion time" (TM: 49). He loves music so much that he makes it a point to attend jazz festivals.

Drugs was another feature of the sixties. Several drug addicts appear in the novel. Wittman at one point used drugs. While working in the toy department, Wittman meets a "Yale Younger Poet." The Yale Younger Poet is a drug addict. The conversation between the "poet" and Wittman is as follows:

> "Have a seat," he said, passing Wittman a roach in a paper-match holder.
> "No thanks. I'll have some coffee, though . . . . I used to dope, I don't dope anymore. I've seen all there is to see on dope; the trips have been repeating themselves, looping like Dead of Night. I liked dope; I learned a lot. I felt religious. I felt communal. I believed in all sorts of things: the possibility of getting so far out that we pop through to another reality. Change one's head, change the universe. The paranoia was driving me nuts, however. Too ripped. I don't like getting wasted any more." (TM: 48)

In the bus on the way to Lance's party, Judy Louis, the Chinese-American girl, occupies the seat beside him and makes conversation with him even though it is obvious that he does not want to be pulled into conversation. Suddenly

Judy Louis appears like a wild bear to him:

> "It seemed a long ride; this voice kept going on beside his ear. He looked at the girl again, and she looked blue-black in the dark. He blinked, and saw sitting beside him a blue boar. . . . Little shining eyes. Not an illusion because the details were very sharp." (TM: 77)

After they both get down from the bus, he talks to himself, "what the fuck had that been about? Nevermind. It's gone. Forget it. It doesn't mean a thing. No miracle. No miracles forevermore, because they may be drug flashes" (TM: 81). Though he stopped abusing drugs, his mind still goes on trips.

Another scene which was popular during the sixties was the youth parties:

> The street was jampacked with cars and music, no room in the air for one more decibel. The trees held loud speakers in their arms; their bass hearts were thudding. Wittman made his way among the bodies, some already fallen on the lawn. Above huddles of four or six, there hung oval clouds of smoke, like thought balloons. (TM: 81)

Another scene of the sixties depicted in the book is:

> Lance flipped the picture again, and the sun was again important and warm. Because we saw it this way first? The audience, patient on dope, and never tiring of taking out a somewhat aphasic brain and playing with it, were wowed. (TM: 93)

Yet another drug scene is recorded in the book:

> Where the tube was on. He sat himself down and was intercepted by a joint, which he passed on, eschewing the taking of a hit. Contact high already all over the house. The picture wasn't coming in, but the viewers were entranced, chu-

> ckling, commenting. "Wow." "Oh, wow." "Do you see what I see?" "Beautiful, yeah." Wittman had not tried the snow show straight before. (TM: 94)

These scenes make it clear as to how the youth spent their time: attending parties and high on drugs.

During the sixties, the institution of the family was constantly threatened. This is another aspect which is recorded in the book. Though Wittman had both his parents, they lived separately. Zeppelin Ah Sing left Wittman and his mother during the second World War and never came back to live in the same house. He lived mostly in camps. Wittman's grandmother (PoPo) was abandoned by Zeppelin and Ruby:

> "Your father drove high, high; he wound around in the mountains so I didn't know east or west . . . . At the top of the mountains, they stopped, and your father lifted me down from the pick-up. He carried me. He said, 'Upsy Daisy.' Your mother handed me the blanket and said 'spread the blanket under that tree, PoPo.' They put the bag of duck on the ground. . . . Those Kai dai got in the truck and drove away . . . ." (TM: 264)

PoPo complains to the old man who later marries her: "I have been forsaken by ungrateful children. 'Aiya,' the old man said, 'no-good children. Come with me. Come home with me. I've been seeking a wife'" (TM: 266).

Let us now examine the book as a postmodernist novel. In these unconventional books, the boundary lines between different genres are done away with. Two different genres coexist and are interlinked. Kingston's first two books are perfect examples where two genres coexist. Though she claims that The Woman Warrior and China Men are non-fiction,

it is not true because Kingston has taken facts and used them in such a way that they coexist with legends, fancy, etc. Hutcheon says that China Men can be termed as "the novel and autobiography" (Hutcheon, 1988: 9).

In postmodernist fiction, we usually find the participation of the author. The author is an omniscient narrator. In Tripmaster Monkey, Kingston has created Wittman to put forth her ideas. It is through him that she is fighting a war against racism which is denying her and her race their American identity. She is radical in her views and places the book in the sixties to match the mood. She makes her presence felt at the end of the chapters by making comments like

> Our Wittman is going to work on his play for the rest of the night. If you want to see whether he will get that play up, and how a poor monkey makes a living so he can afford to spend the weekday afternoon drinking coffee and hanging out, go on to the next chapter. (TM: 35)

and "Our monkey man will live--he parties, he plays--though unemployed. To see how he does it, go on to the next chapter" (TM: 65).

Keeping in tradition with the postmodern features, the book has no proper order. It starts with Wittman entertaining thoughts on suicide, then the next minute his mind wanders elsewhere. Kingston makes it appear as if Wittman were claiming America on the one hand, and on the other she makes him write epic plays from the very first chapter to bring back Chinese culture. She portrays him as an American citizen on the one hand and as a Chinese Messiah on the other.

Wittman's epic play is not narrated to us in a continuous form but it is narrated in bits and parts through his conversation with others or his deliberate recital to an audience or by mono acting. Kingston gives us a series of perceptions and leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

The book is an inter-text, another feature of the postmodernist fiction. In the Acknowledgements she clearly states:

> Thanks To friends whose stories inspire my stories: Earll Kingston for the railroad reader of the West, the man with the addictive sperm, the Osaka Stock Exchange, and more. James Hong for his role in The Barrets of Wimpole Street. . . . Jack Chen for his Pear Garden in the West, etc.

The book incorporates the paratactical style, a feature of the postmodernist fiction. The book is a Parataxis. M.H. Abrams defines paratactical style as

> One in which the members within a sentence, or else a sequence of complete sentences, are put one after the other without any expression of their connection or relations except (at most) the noncommital connective, "and." (Abrams, 1981: 191)

In Tripmaster Monkey Kingston is not playing with words or sentences but with diverse imagery, culled from varied sources. She is making the Chinese and American cultures coexist knowing fully well that they will never meet and in the process the seam is visible to one and all.

Her paratactical style is evident in the way she brings in Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge and puts it within Tripmaster Monkey. She has used the romanticism of Rilke as against the reality of the modern grey city of San

Francisco. In the bus Wittman feels like a convict in the grey and grim city. People's postures, gestures, their walks, their noseblowing , their way of dressing and their general behaviour offend him. It is for such "gone days" Wittman carries, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge in his pea coat and starts reading to the passengers. Kingston juxtaposes the two different scenes; the eloquent banquet scene from Rilke:

> ". . . always, whenever the family entered, the candles were burning in the ponderous branched candlesticks, and in a few minutes one forgot the time of day and all that one had seen outside. This lofty and, as I suspect, vaulted chamber was stronger than everything else." (TM: 8)

and the depressing scene of San Francisco city. None of the passengers complained because "It was pleasant, then, for them to ride the bus while Rilke shaded and polished the city's grey and golds" (TM: 9). Kingston's book, like Rilke's, is a bildungsroman; a type of novel concerned with the education, development and maturing of a young protagonist or Kunstler roman; a type of novel concerned with the making of an artist, but while Rilke has a hero, Kingston has an anti-hero.

Rainer (René) Maria Rilke was born on December 4, 1875 in Prague. He was a major Austro-German whose contribution to twentieth century German literature has won worldwide recognition. His father was a minor civil servant and his mother was a pretentious woman who had a penchant for the nobility and high society.

Rilke's education was fragmentary. He enrolled in the

military lower Realschule of Sankt Polten (Austria) and four years later entered military upper Realschule (Bohemia). Ill-health forced him to leave school but later with the help of a paternal uncle completed his education.

Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge (The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge) was published in 1910. It is a prose counterpart to the Neue Gedichte. The two works complement each other. In this we find Rilke's major themes: love, death, the fears of childhood, the idolization of woman, and, finally, the matter of "God" which is treated simply as a "tendency of the heart." "The work in its entirety must be seen as the description of the disintegration of a soul--but a disintegration not devoid of a dialectic mental reservation: 'Only a step,' writes the narrator (Malte), 'and my deepest misery could turn into bliss'" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1983: 846: 47).

There is yet another Parataxis when Kingston places the Chinese epic against the Chinese-American reality. The monkey God is placed against the monkey character of Wittman. The Chinese epic is Romances of the Three Kingdoms and Wittman reenacts this in his "fake book." As John Leonard says, Romances of the Three Kingdoms is "a kind of Chinese Terry and the Pirates" (Leonard, 1989: 768). There is a band of 108 bandits who are the enemies of a corrupt social or In this book Wittman Ah Monkey fights against racism and communism along with his other Chinese-American friends. In the first part of the epic, the "Monkey King" collects and trains an army but fights the war alone: "I'll go by myself," he says. "It's best to meet the enemy one by one on his own

turf. I'll stop him from coming here to ruin our country . . ." (TM: 137-38). Wittman imagines that if his epic was to be screened he would simultaneously show another epic story with the help of a split screen. As John Leonard says, The /original/ epic "glorifies a third-century revolt of Liu Pei and his mentor, Chu-ko Liang, against the military dictatorship of Ts'ao Ts'ao" (Leonard, 1989: 771). The character in Wittman's epic is also named Liu Pei. He has two friends, Chang Fei and Gwan Goong (the war God). The three heroes swear to be brothers and fight for a common cause. Their war is against communism. Their friendship is a sign of community living, a ritual, one thousand six hundred and twenty-nine years old which was brought to the Gold Mountain by their great-great-grandfathers. Their ritual of friendship was invented in the "Peach Orchard." "The Oath in the Peach Orchard" was performed continuously from the first time the oath was taken. Suddenly, for no reason, the theatre died. He wants to revive the theatre by staging these epic plays. But the theatre that he wants to create is an American theatre and not the Chinese theatre of olden days. His theatre is an activist theatre fighting the present day enemies, racism and communism. At the same time he wants to establish communal living (a feature of the sixties). He expresses his idea in these words:

> "But, Uncle, we bad. Chinaman freaks. Illegal aliens. Outlaws. Outcasts of America. But we make our place--this one community house for benevolent living. We make theater, we make community."

and he succeeds: "The one hundred and eight bandits, bani-

shed from everywhere else, build a community" (TM: 261). Through his theatre he not only wants to entertain but also to educate (instruct and please): "To entertain and educate the solitaries that make up a community, the play will be a combination revue-lecture. You're invited" (TM: 288). As Leonard says:

> His play is a "fake war." He'll substitute his theater for all the wars in the history of the world. From Monkey King and Havoc Monster,. . . he will ordain a Peaceable Kingdom . . . . (Leonard, 1989: 171)

Another technique used by the postmodernist writers is metafiction. Though the term 'metafiction' is fairly new, the practice is quite an old one. Its wide usage started during the sixties. Even then it was not willingly accepted. Most of the public did not respond to it as it stood against all the principles that they had come to accept as fiction. Metafiction is fiction which explores the style and theme of fiction itself:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh, 1984. 2)

Tripmaster Monkey is metafiction in the sense that it is a fiction which examines the fiction within it. The book is about Kingston recording a story written by Wittman who in turn is using another fiction to change the world, so it is like a box within a box (a Chinese box). One opens into another and whoever the author, he/she has to create what these characters do.

These non-traditional works display self-consciousness and are mainly concerned with metafiction. The central character presented in these works is usually

> . . . lonely, alienated, disaffected, skeptical; these characters also feel themselves victimised by a repressive, cold social order to such an extent that their lives seem meaningless, drab, fragmented; in response to this powerful sense of personal isolation and violation, these characters decide to create or invent a system of meaning which will help to supply their lives with hope, order, possibly even some measure of beauty. (McCaffery, 1982: 4)

These characters are so bored and insecure that when they do start some system they get immersed in them to such an extent that they become controlled by their creations.

Wittman is very much a metafictional character. He is bored, frustrated, lonely and alienated. At the time we are introduced to him, he is contemplating suicide, which is proof of how dejected he is in life. He is paranoid, loves to read. He is a "fool for literature." As Leonard puts it, "this Wittman is stoned on books" (Leonard, 1989: 768). He is a misfit in the real world. He finds himself to be a victim of American racism. He decides to create a system to fight it. Thus the activist theatre comes into existence. He becomes so involved in reading, writing and creating his system that he loses himself in it. One day, he realizes it and says: "Wittman, the fool for books, ought to swear off reading for a while, and find his own life" (TM: 168).

He stages his plays which are a great success among the Chinese-Americans as well as Americans but he is not very happy about it, and talks his heart out in front of his

audience. Through this speech he achieves his goal of making his race aware of the injustice meted out to them and to fight and not give in.

As quoted from Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's The Mythopoeic Reality,

> "metafiction" is ultimately a narrational metatheorem whose subject matter is fictional systems themselves and the molds through which reality is patterned by narrative conventions . . . . Metafiction more than other modes of transfiction is conscious of its own fictivity, and, in contrast to the interpretive novel, which operates with the aesthetic assumptions of verisimilitude, exults over its own fictitiousness, which it uses as the very terms of its narrative ontology--it is a "mask which points to itself. . ." This intense self-reflexiveness of metafiction is caused by the fact that the only certain reality for the metafictionist is the reality of his own discourse; thus, his fiction turns in upon itself, transforming the process of writing into the subject of writing. The credibility of fiction, therefore, is reestablished not as an illuminating commentary on life but as a metacommentary on fiction itself. (McCaffery, 1982:5)

Wittman, as Nicci Gerrard says, is an extraordinary and unforgettable creation" (Gerrard, 1989: 28). Like a "Messiah" he wants to guide his people to find themselves an identity and to bring about communal living. "Wittman is a 'tripmaster,' a friendly guide to the stoned in their travels through acid-time" (Leonard, 1989: 768). The word "acid-time" stands for the sixties. Like the Indian monkey God "Hanuman" who brings Lord "Rama" and "Sita" who were separated by the evil "Ravana" together, Wittman brings the Chinese culture back to the Chinese-Americans. He is, as Kingston calls him, "Hanuman, the white monkey" (TM: 290).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Kingston being a fairly new and contemporary author little critical attention has been given to her works. Hence, this gives me an occasion to locate her in American literary field.

As a writer her place would be among the ethnic American writers or Asian American writers. Asian American literature may now be defined as literature written and published during the past century in English by Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Burmese and Korean American writers.

The Southeast Asian American population is less in comparison to the other Asian population and, therefore, the literature contributed by them is also not much compared to the other Asian American writers like the Chinese and the Japanese. Amy Tan is another Chinese-American writer. Monica Sone, John Okada are two of the Japanese American writers. The most prominent Indian American writer is Bharathi Mukherjee.

The reason for such little literature produced by the whole minority community is that though the migration had started a long time ago, the racial discrimination by the native people and legislation forced them to be concerned more about their daily bread through other means (like farming, railroad building and mining) than creative writing.

As we can see, most of the early immigrants were labourers and not scholars. When they finally settled down to write, their literature comprised their social problems, immigration problems, culture conflict, social discrimination, personal as well as collective experiences--problems specific to their condition as immigrants.

As the process of assimilation began, the need to belong to the mainstream had become so strong that they expressed through their writing their desire to throw their lot in with the Americans. Thus started the conscious attempt to turn away from their culture, "in exchange for a tentative place in American society" (Kim, 1984: 63).

Kingston yearns to be an American because America stood for everything that she wanted, it was an epitome of success, modernity, freedom and independence. To find her place in the white society where racial discrimination thrives was no easy job. There came a time in her life when it became necessary to shun her past, her Chinese culture and her parents. She declares:

> I'm going away. I'm going away anyway. . . . I'm going to get scholarships, and I'm going away. And at college I'll have people I like for friends. . . . And I'm not going to Chinese school any more. (WW: 201-02)

She also says, "I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing" (WW: 204).

In The Woman Warrior we see Kingston growing through the different phases of discovering her Chinese roots, rejecting her Chinese heritage, claiming America and finally accepting her Chinese-American identity, just like

a child has to pass through difficult phases of a constantly changing self in its attempts to forge a sexual and social identity of its own.

Kingston is a bit frustrated that "All the time I was having to turn myself American-Feminine, or no dates" (WW, 1977: 47). Kingston definitely possessed certain Chinese traits unconsciously (because of her mother's influence until she was exposed to the other children at school), but she was desperately trying to be an American or there will be "no dates." Dating was a Western habit which was shunned in the East. Her desire to date shows her inclination to become American. She wants to be a career girl as opposed to the traditional roles expected of her, of wives or slaves, as we can see from this piece of conversation from her childhood: "What do you want to be when you grow up little girl? A lumberjack in Oregon" (WW, 1977: 47). She had her future chalked out, even as a child. While their mother was trying hard to keep the atmosphere Chinese, "we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves" (WW: 19). "Why didn't you teach me English?" (WW: 46) she demands, because it had delayed her process of assimilation.

She explains to her mother (who still regards China as her home) that they belong to the world at large and not just to China. "We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet. . . . Will American flowers smell good now?" she asks her mother. In a way, she is trying to convince her mother that America too is lika-

ble (WW: 107).

In spite of claiming that she is American and that America is her home, she is aware that there is a little Chinese girl lurking behind the American facade. On the one hand, the American part in her wants to be independent; on the other, the Chinese part wants to be loved enough to be supported:

> Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure. Then I get bitter: no one supports *me*; I am not loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet. (WW: 48)

That her mind is being torn between wanting to be American and Chinese is clearly evident.

Childishly she throws tantrums in her attempts to dissociate herself from the Chinese culture, but later she discovers that she would have grown out of it even without kicking up such a fuss and that it was all a part of growing up. She comes to a decisive conclusion that both the cultures are fused in her like the two sides of a coin, yet belong to different poles like the North and the South (or rather East and West).

In all her books we find her looking for a permanent place in American society but we discover that her physical features and colour make it impossible for the Americans to accept her. She manages to find her past and see into future and is reconciled to the present. This feature is seen in all her books. Much as she tries to suppress the Chinese in her it keeps emerging now and then.

In China Men she takes the stance of an American and

shows how many of the Chinese are assimilating into the American culture. Her main concern in the book is "claiming America":

> What I am doing in this new book is claiming America. . . . That seem to be a common strain that runs through all the characters . . . . Chinese American people are claiming America. . . (Pfaff, 1980: 1)

Though most of the Chinese labourers entered America illegally, she claims that her father was a legal immigrant, she also has proof that her mother entered the U.S. with legal papers. Now that she has legalized her identity as an American, she goes on to show how her characters are claiming America as their home.

In the chapter, "The Making of More Americans," Kingston shows how more and more Chinese are regarding America as their home. Kingston says, "The new couple, young and modern (mo-dang), bought a ranch house and car, wore fashionable clothes, spoke English and seemed more American than us" (CM: 169). Buying a house and making a home itself is enough proof of their claiming America: "He hurried home to America, where he acted normal again continuing his American life, and nothing like that ever happened to him again" (CM: 176). Kau Goong claims America wholeheartedly. He said, "'California. This is my home. I belong here.' He turned and, looking at us, roared, 'We belong here'" (CM: 182). And breathed his last on American soil (his adopted home) after he was 90. In the condolence meeting, "the old men and a politician told how Kau Goong had come to the Gold mountain and stayed. He was a Gold Mountain Man. They said 'Gold Mountain' a lot. . ." (CM:

183). We hear Kingston's desire and intentions to be an American in different voices--of the modern couple, Kau Goong and another uncle, I Fu, who declares: "'Let's sell the show business and go back to the United States.' 'Return,' he said. 'Return to the United States'" (CM: 210-11).

Even the fresh immigrants soon became ashamed of their Chinese names and heritages:

> But when we asked his name, he suddenly stood still. He and his sister looked at one another and down at their shoes. The girl, who was older, pointed to her brother and muttered something, and he turned red. "What?" I asked. She said it again. It was his Chinese name, and we could hardly hear it. "Her name is Lucille," he said. And Lucille was easy for him to say and easy to hear. He was proud to be able to give an American name though it wasn't his. So, they'd already learned to be shamed by a Chinese name. (CM: 207)

Another aunt declares, "We shouldn't have left the United States." She complains that "American police and American people are honest" (CM: 210). She has more confidence in America and American people. She warns Kingston, "Be warned not to travel to China." She also told her that "Chinese are crooks" (CM: 216), and then they packed their bags and went for the second time to America and this time for good.

Tripmaster Monkey deals with the same theme, the search for an American identity. The search is begun, not by Kingston herself, but by Wittman Ah Sing, a fifth generation Chinese-American. Kingston has made Wittman a representative of the fifth generation to draw our attention to the fact that the position of the Chinese-Americans is not

any better than it was for her (first generation) even after four generations.

While most of the minorities obstinately decided to remain Orientals due to racist attitudes of the whites, there were others who were cowed down by American racism and abandoned their original race and culture and longed to belong to the dominant American section of the society. When they tried to remain Oriental they were denied naturalization. So the only alternative was to shun their race and join the mainstream. As Elaine H. Kim describes Kazuko's predicament in Monica Sone's Nisei Daughter: "The only way she can survive, in America's 'mainstream. . . with my oriental eyes' is by leaving her disintegrated family and community behind" (Kim, 1984: 51).

But it was not so in Wittman's case. Wittman leaves behind his disintegrated family and community behind him and tries to parade as an American, even marries a white girl but soon returns home because his 'oriental eyes' are a dead give away. The homecoming is significant because it marks the emergence of the hidden Chinese side of him. Returning home is like finding the link between the past and the future.

He thinks himself to be the 'Chosen One' and attempts to reconstruct the long ignored heritage and culture of China by staging epic plays. He stages plays, night after night, for a week and his attempts are a grand success. After failing "to melt like rain drops in the ocean of the white society" (Kim, 1984: 52), he declares in his speech to accept his identity as Chinese-American but without the hyphen between the two words: "'Chinese-American' is in-

accurate--as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out--'Chinese American'" (TM: 327).

The theme of trying to "claim America" happens to be a common one in most of the Asian American writings. Bharathi Mukherjee in Jasmine is trying to show how she is fleeing from her Indian past:

> They assumed I had a past, like them, about which I didn't tell too much. . . . I didn't have a child, but I had a past that I was still fleeing. Perhaps still am. (Mukherjee, 1989: 34)

We find her desire to become American, "I told him I wanted a green card more than anything else in the world, that a green card was freedom" (Mukherjee, 1989: 149). Finally, she says, "I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory" (Mukherjee, 1989: 165).

In Wife we come across these lines:

> "That's a good sign," Amit said, smiling. "You're becoming American, but not too American, I hope . . . . It's a celebration. I mean, we have to celebrate my job and your Americanization, so go on, take a sip of beer." (Mukherjee, 1990: 112)

Taking a sip of beer is a sure sign of Americanization.

Jing Mei Woo, in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, declares that while the younger generation is claiming America, their mothers are unable to break away from their past. The mothers see in their daughters an impatience for the Chinese culture:

> And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see

> daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. . . . They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (Tan, 1989: 31)

Kingston is a feminine liberator in more than one sense. We see her fighting against sexism, racism and communism.

The Woman Warrior is indisputable proof of her war against sexual discrimination and the double standards of the male society. The stories of her defeated aunts narrated to her when she is on the threshold of womanhood serve as a very good motivation. She knew then that she would never allow herself to be bulldozed by men.

She draws her strength from the legendary "Fa Mu Lan" and fights every obstacle that comes her way and wins the race. She begins as a silent, inhibited girl, but emerges as an aggressive woman warrior. We see her final success in China Men when she desexualizes a man.

Her antagonism towards racism comes through in all her books. In The Woman Warrior it is said that

> "I once worked at an art supply house that sold paints to artists. Order more of the nigger yellow, willya?" the boss told me. "Bright, isn't it? Nigger yellow. I don't like that word," I had to say. . . . The boss never deigned to answer. (WW: 48)

She gives up that job and another as well because she couldn't tolerate working with a racist.

The second and third books are much more virulent in their campaign against racism. China Men gives us a detailed account of the racial discrimination the Chinese

underwent, and are still undergoing, starting with the way many of the Chinese labourers were brought to the new continent under false promises and how they were treated no better than slaves.

They were made to cut down forests and flatten mountains in order to lay rail beds. The white bosses did not value the lives of the yellow labourers. They made them use dynamite and watched as they were blown to pieces, disinterestedly. The white bosses "in white suits walked gingerly inspecting the char" (CM: 105). The grandfather, father and sons cursed the racists while toiling in the fields and laying railroads,

> get-that-horse-dust-away-from-me-you-dead-white-demon-Don't-stare-at-me-with-those-glass-eyes. I-can't-take-this life. (CM: 105-06)

Their persecution did not stop there:

> The demon pushed sick men out of the door. He pulled a boy by the hair. Bak Goong could tell he is saying, "Aha! I caught you malingering, you fake, lazy, sneaky China man." He pointed the whip towards the cane. "Go work, Pake. No stay sick." (CM: 116)

We hear one of the characters saying, "Ah, sad, sad America, which does not respect the poor" (CM: 190).

Then came the discriminatory laws: "In 1868, the year of the Burlingame Treaty, was the year 40,000 miners of Chinese ancestry were Driven Out" (CM: 151). In 1882 the U.S. Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act. It was finally repealed in 1943.

The very repetition of the problem of racial discrimination in one book after another is an indication of how big

the barrier is for the yellow race to cross and join the mainstream: "The wish to 'disappear' by being fully assimilated into white society" (Kim, 1984: 52) is still a dream which is eluding the Chinese.

In Tripmaster Monkey Kingston gives us examples of how the Chinese are shunned and not recognized as Americans by the racists, in spite of their being assimilated for almost five generations. They not only refused to recognize them as Americans but were hell-bent on regarding them as Chinese. Whenever Asian American actors approached American film-makers for parts in films, they were treated as Orientals: "You just be the orientals you are. They think you behave oriental without having to act. 'Just say something Chinese,' says the director, throwing you into the movie, 'do something Chinese'" (TM: 325). This provokes Wittman into a tremendous fit of anger:

> "... take whatever stereotype part. They ask you to do Chinese shtick, make free to say whatever you want. True things. Pass messages. 'Eat shit, James Bond. Kiss my yellow ass.' 'Fuck off, John Wayne. I love Joang Fu.'" (TM: 325)

He warns his race, "Don't fall into their castrating hands. Even if you don't go off into long term or side effects physically or chemically. You're fucked up philosophically" (TM: 325).

Let us now examine how Kingston fights against communism. In The Woman Warrior while discussing problems of

racism that she encountered in her jobs she says,

> It's not just the stupid racists that I have to do something about, but the tyrants who for whatever reason can deny my family food and work. My job is my only land. To avenge my family, I'd have to storm across China take back our farm from the communists. (WW: 49)

In China Men too, the "next enemy was the communists" --a fever she intended fighting:

> Grandmother and the aunts wrote letters on the deaths of every last uncle. If the uncles could have figured out what the communists wanted of them, they would have complied, but communism made no sense. . . . Maybe it had to do with no sex; the men were separated from the women. Children were put into motherless, fatherless camps for training, they were taught to report on their parents. . . Communists were people who had gone crazy and perverted. They made order by rationing food, a cup of oil per family per week. . . . They were saying nonsense, pretending they knew the classics when they were not teaching from real books . . . . The number of people the communists killed was sixty million. (CM: 268-69)

In Tripmaster Monkey we have yet another confession from Kingston:

> His plan is to fight this monster in the neighborhood of the party. He'll drop in sweating heroically. A monster led me a chase this way. Has anyone seen a havoc monster? You having a party? Chase that monster crashing through their party. (TM: 138)

The war goes on for a long time. Kingdoms rise and fall. And finally we hear Wittman's voice, "I crashed the party in the sky, and ate up the food," which is definitely optimistic. There is a pun on the word "party." It is the Communist Party, the monster is communism, and Wittman wants to crash through the Party and destroy the monster.

This is how Kingston has reacted against the "problems" of Sexism, Racism and Communism. The nucleus of the problems is identity. Her works can be interpreted as a continuous story of a Chinese-American woman's quest for identity and self-fulfilment.

She started in silence as her mother's daughter but ended up being her own self. To her writing was fighting with the help of a pen. She has used autobiography as a means of expressing her anger against sexism and racism in an ordinary Chinese-American's life. Her urge to seek an identity for herself compelled her to use autobiography because "personal identity is the root and result of the autobiographical act" (Stone, 1981: 2). Kingston finally reaches selfhood as Juhasz says, "It is through words--through finding them, forming them, saying them aloud, in public--that Kingston reaches selfhood" (Jelinek, 1980: 236).

After her autobiographical attempts to find her identity, she turns to fiction. Her total identification of herself with the "problems" and her urge to fight them have made her stick to the same problems in all her works. Kingston goes outside her race to be independent, to be human, but still remains Chinese enough to be different from the white, maintains her racial individuality and loves her Chinese culture. Her uniqueness as a writer lies in the way she has presented the problems of Chinese-American women writers of contemporary America.

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