"Race," as explained in *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, (is a) "term sometimes applied to a physically distinctive group of people, on the basis of their difference from other groups in skin color, headshape, hairtype and physique. Formerly anthropologists divided the human race into three hypothetical racial groups: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid. However, scientific studies have produced no proof of definite genetic racial divisions. Many anthropologists, therefore, completely reject the concept of race, and social scientists tend to prefer the term ethnic group (or ethnicity)."\(^1\)

Graham C. Kinloch is of the opinion that race is a "'social definition' - an artificial and imposed category that has evolved out of a society’s historical development, particularly the extent to which that development was ‘colonial’ in nature .... Such definitions change over time, particularly with industrialization, resulting in the redefinition of particular race groups as well as their view of the dominant elite."\(^2\)

Race and ethnicity are overlapping terms. The word “ethnicity” is derived from the Greek word "ethnos" meaning “a people.” Ethnicity can be described as people’s own sense of cultural identity; a social term that overlaps with such concepts as race, nation, class and religion. Ethnicity is seen as “belonging and being perceived by others as belonging to an ethnic group.”\(^3\) J. Milton Yinger defines the ethnic group as “a segment of a larger society whose members are thought by

\(^1\) *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 1988.
themselves or others to have a common origin, and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients.\textsuperscript{34}

Though the use of the word is relatively modern yet it is taken for granted and considered as a relatively fixed category. Ethnic groups are considered to be eternal and certain myths, characters and traits are attributed to each ethnic group. Great emphasis is laid on the survival of the group in the face of hardships. In popular media, “multicultural” is frequently used as a substitute for the earlier term “multiracial.” Therefore, it is difficult to exclusively occlude race from the vocabulary of multiculturalism. The shift from race to ethnicity is a necessary move away from the essentializing construction of race.

One of the most important effects of racism is its impact on the “self” and “identity”- how the ethnic individual sees and feels about himself and his world. Harry Kitano is of the opinion that “the concept of an ethnic identity – the ‘who am I?’ – is compounded by the essentially negative connotations saddled upon the questioner if he happens to have identifiable racial features, at variance with what is considered ‘desirable’ in the United States.”\textsuperscript{56} The sociologist Milton Gordon is also concerned with the problems of identity. He opines that there are various layers that comprise the core of American identity.\textsuperscript{6}

Assimilation is considered to be the foe of ethnicity. Michael Banton is of the view that the word “assimilation” was used to

\textsuperscript{3} Werner Sollors, “Introduction,” \textit{The Invention of Ethnicity} (Oxford University Press, 1987) xiii.
\textsuperscript{5} Harry Kitano, \textit{Race Relations} (Prentice Hall, Inc. nd.), 118.
\textsuperscript{6} Milton Gordon, \textit{Assimilation in American Life} (Oxford University Press, 1964) 24.
designate a process by which the collectivity (the majority society) was expected to absorb another (the immigrant minorities) without itself undergoing any significant change.\textsuperscript{7} Writing about assimilation and dissimulation, Václav Havel notes that “the selfsame word can be true at one moment and false the next, at one moment illuminating, at another deceptive. On one occasion it can open up glorious horizons, on another, it can lay down the tracts to an entire archipelago of concentration camps.”\textsuperscript{8}

But to stress only the ethnic differences and to rule out any possibility of transethnic similarity may ignore the dynamic potential of the text. Sollors is of the view that the effect of “authenticity (is) achieved not by some purist, archival or preservationist attitude towards the ability of a specific idiom to interact with ‘outside’ signals and to incorporate them.”\textsuperscript{9} Despite the interaction and syncretistic borrowing at its core the ethnic consciousness does not become weak. This awareness can lead us to a better understanding of the ethnic phenomenon and various literary texts on this subject, especially the works of Maxine Hong Kingston.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s \textit{The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts} has often been regarded as a feminist text. Critics tend to ignore the racial question that this book raises. The fact is that \textit{The Woman Warrior} is a “dialogic text”\textsuperscript{10} which subverts singular definitions of racial and ethnic identity. Feminism and ethnicity are more closely related than many critics would like to

\textsuperscript{9} Werner Sollors xv.
believe. Malini Schueller writes, “The subversions of institutions and cultural norms ... are goals for all marginal and oppressed groups. Marginal groups have little investments in concepts of unity, coherence and universality because their own political efficacy depends upon forcing a recognition of the value of difference and diversity upon the dominant culture.”¹¹ These groups need to question the concept of a stable and independent self. Maxine Hong Kingston is aware of this need to subvert cultural and racial definitions. *The Woman Warrior* is an affirmation of a radical intersubjectivity as the basis of articulation.

*The Woman Warrior* is Kingston’s memories of growing up in a Chinatown amidst poverty and squalor. She reveals the endemic racism, the traumas of acculturation amidst hostile environment. She identifies herself with the woman warrior and tries to subvert cultural hierarchies. The narrator is torn between her two cultural selves. Whenever she goes to the American school her voice is reduced to a whisper and she is overcome by dumbness. So she surmises that “silence had to do with being a Chinese girl” (TWW, 166). She finds her voice when she is in the Chinese school. But this voice is strained one, “You could hear splinters in my voice, bones rubbing jagged against one another” (TWW, 169). Her accounts of being tortured by silence can be seen as the limitations the marginal writer has to face in order to be heard. She has affinity with various African-American writers like Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, who portray characters trapped in silence. Kingston’s voicelessness is the symbol of the refusal of the culture to give legitimacy to her voice. She “deconstructs the oppositions between American and Chinese, male and female and most importantly between Self and Other by

¹¹ Schueller 422.
articulating herself through a language in which opposed and diverse voices constantly coexist.”¹² Kingston questions the concepts of the autonomous self and definitions of racial/sexual identity.

Kingston treats race as a play of differences. Kingston is aware of the denigration suffered by the Chinese-Americans. Even though she is aware of the dehumanizing stereotypes her race is subjected to, she does not want to perpetuate them by merely inverting hierarchies – Edward Said has explained how such hierarchies depict the “Oriental” as the passive and denatured Other.¹³ Kingston questions such oppositions that make sterile racial definitions possible.

The narrator of *The Woman Warrior* is “uniquely positioned to dialogically question racial oppositions.”¹⁴ Her parents consider America as their temporary home but the fact is that they will have to live in America. For Maxine, America is the only country she knows. But it is the America of the margins; she cannot define her position in its hierarchy. Her undefinable position is a metaphor for the way ethnicity operates: “I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes .... The dragon lives in the sky, ocean, marshes, and mountains; and the mountains are also its cranium ... It breathes fire and water; and sometimes the dragon is one, sometimes many” (TWW, 29).

Reed Way Dasenbrock considers *The Woman Warrior* as a “multicultural” text, one that is not only about a multicultural society, but one which is implicitly multicultural in “inscribing readers from

¹² Schueller 424.
¹⁴ Schueller 428.
other cultures inside (its) own textual dynamics." On the obvious level Kingston speaks in the voice of the monocultural reader. American life appears to be free, concrete and guarantees individual happiness. Chinese life is illogical, superstitious and weighed down by community pressure. So, when there is an eclipse, the Chinese "slam pots lids together to scare the frog from swallowing the moon" while the American school tells them that eclipse is "just a shadow the earth makes when it comes between the moon and the sun" (TWW, 169). In America if she gets straight A's, she can go to college or otherwise become a lumberjack. On the other hand if she goes to China she fears she will be sold as a slave or within the immigrant community she will be married to any Fresh Off The Boat Chinese (a new comer to America).

Kingston sets up these hierarchies to subvert them and make the singular position undecidable. The very subtitle of the book Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts is designed to question cultural oppositions. The term "ghost" is perhaps the most "dialogically used term in the book because it describes the experience of living within both Chinese and American cultures." Reed Way Dasenbrock sees the use of the term "ghost" in the book as "... defamiliarization not so much of the word as of our self – concept" because the non-Chinese readers are forced to change their conception about themselves. Kingston describes ghosts as "... shadowy figures from the past" or unanswered questions about unexplained actions of

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16 Schueller 430.
17 Dasenbrock 14.
Chinese, Whites and Chinese in America. The term "ghost" is used for any concept that cannot be clearly interpreted. The young narrator inhabits a double ghost world. Her Chinese world is full of legends, stories, rumors, strange ancestors and the American world has its own ritual ghosts. Thus we have Brave Orchid, the exorciser of ghosts, the No Name Aunt whose wandering ghost haunts the narrator and various American ghosts like Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts etc. Thus as Schueller points out, the "continued use of the term across cultures does not deny the idea of difference but that of hierarchical separation and thus definition."19

Along with defamiliarization, subversion is another technique that Kingston employs. Just as the conventional reader may start feeling comfortable with the hierarchy of American normal and Chinese deformed, she subverts it. On the one hand we are told that, "To make my waking life American – normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories" (TWW, 87). But in the same breath she challenges this view, "When the thermometer in our laundry reached on hundred and eleven degrees on summer afternoons, either my mother or my father would say that it was time to tell another ghost story so that we could get good chills upon our backs" (TWW, 87).

The kind of ruthlessness her family had to face in China also shows up its ugly face in the slum violence of the Chinese ghetto. In China her No Name Aunt is punished for transgressing her role as a wife and daughter-in-law and is forced to commit suicide. But she

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19 Schueller 430.
does have an American counterpart in another aunt, Moon Orchid. This aunt fails to woo back her Americanized husband and is thus driven to insanity.

Kingston’s questioning of oppositions and definitions are intensely political strategies. For a marginal writer this can be seen as a strategy of survival. The early reviews of her books reflected the conventional definitions she was fighting against. A critic praised the book for its “myths rich and varied as Chinese brocade” and prose that has the “delicacy and precision of porcelain.”

To resist cultural definitions she presents Chinese culture as a conglomeration of diverse, multiple and often contradictory values that she does not attempt to explain. So some of the critics are confused as to why some Chinese women depicted by her are aggressive, while others are docile and self-effacing. Such critics often suggest that Chinese women have a singular identity. Kingston believes that the Chinese culture cannot be represented. She is of the view that there are “Chinese-American writers who seek to represent the rest of us, they end up with tourist manuals or chamber of commerce public relations whitewash.”

The representation of the Chinese life in The Woman Warrior resists generalization. There is a striking contrast between her mother Brave Orchid and her aunt Moon Orchid. Brave Orchid fights against odds and become a doctor in China and fights for her rights in America. But Moon Orchid is happily playing a long-distance wife. She is too weak to question her fate.

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20 Kim xvi.
Not all the immigrant Chinese are the slum dwellers. They range from wealthy Americanized Chinese to the Chinese who maintain native village affiliations. The difference between the immigrants and the Chinese from narrator’s village is so vast that Moon Orchid says, “I’m glad to see the Americans talk like us.” Brave Orchid was amazed at her sister’s stupidity, “They aren’t the Americans. These are overseas Chinese” (TWW, 136).

Kingston’s narrative is deliberately anti-mythic. She uses Chinese myths and traditional cultural material to question the concept of a unified culture. Myths have been viewed as playing the conservative function of creating and presenting cultural unity. T.S. Eliot explains the mythic method as “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history … a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward … order and form.”

Myths are supposed to have a stabilizing function in the society as they are supposed to serve “order, shape and form.” Roland Barthes also sees myths as traditional forms which oppose change and present themselves as complete. Although Kingston is aware of the conventional function of myths, she uses them in order to subvert this function.

She illustrates that all myths and legends are based on some social necessity. And she is also of the view that the function of the myths changes with the transformation in the society. Therefore she alters some of the conventional myths thus adapting them to her needs.

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23 Schueller 432.
preserving only those aspects that are important to her. She modifies the myths to suit her point of view.

Kingston deliberately mutilates the Chinese legends and is unwilling to stick to the original. She wants to approximate a flexible oral tradition. She explains, “We have to do more than record myth ... That’s just more ancestor worship. The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way.” Her writings are aimed precisely at dismantling the traditional authority.

In the first chapter “No Name Woman” Maxine’s mother narrates her the story of an aunt, whose name and memory has been erased from the family history. Her aunt became pregnant when her husband was in America. Therefore, the angry villagers force her to kill herself as well as her new born baby. Though the story is narrated by Brave Orchid as a warning to her daughter to regulate her sexual behaviour, Maxine does not fail to understand its fictitious aspect. Maxine’s mother could not have witnessed the attack as she and her aunt were not living in the same household. But this ambiguity enables her to recreate the myths and thus question the privileged access to truth that myths claim. In this process Kingston destabilizes the functions of myths. Rabine is of the opinion that she “observes the custom of ancestor worship in such a way as to destroy its fundamental principle that of maintaining patriarchal descent intact.”

In the next chapter “White Tigers” she identifies herself with the legendary Fa MuLan and makes its patriarchal moral about filial piety incidental. In the traditional Chinese folklore Fa MuLan is celebrated for her devotion to her parents, village and husband’s family. She is a

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woman warrior who fought against injustice and got freedom for her villagers and family. After fulfilling her functions as the woman warrior she resumes her duties towards her husband and his family. In Kingston’s version of the story, Fa MuLan can represent the female avenger but she can also represent a continuation of patriarchy and thus serve Kingston’s purpose to create uncertainty.

Many reviewers are of the opinion that the legend of Ts’ai Yen illustrates “the superiority of Chinese civilization over cultures beyond her borders, the irreconcilability of the different ways of her life.”\textsuperscript{27} But in Kingston’s version Ts’ai Yen’s tale about her captivity by barbarians and her return home is a tale of intercultural understanding rather than being an ethnocentric tale about Chinese cultural superiority.

In her works, especially \textit{The Woman Warrior}, myths create moral and cultural conflicts instead of solving them. Kingston blurs the boundary between myth and history, never settling on the validity of either. Chinese myths are replete with misogynistic rituals like smearing bad daughters-in-law with honey and tying them on ant nests, keeping ash ready near a birthing bed in order to suffocate a potential female child and so on. She questions the truth status of both myth and history by presenting historical facts and legendary stories as if both are equally true. When she talks about her mother as a doctor in China, she used the occasion to talk about rope bridges used by Chinese laborers in Malaysia and also about her mother’s encounters with the ghosts while walking on similar bridges in China. As she is writing about the Japanese occupation of China and narrating the story of a

\textsuperscript{27} Rabine 485.
Kingston subverts all the forms that can provide cultural stability and unity. She writes from the viewpoint of a Chinese-American woman who confronts the patriarchal white American culture, but she does so from a position that is radically unstable. Even though she writes as Chinese-American, she questions racial definitions. Kingston’s refusal to give us a traditional position from which to articulate complicates the question of authorship. But this does not make this text apolitical. As Schueller observes, she radically transvalues the categories of race and gender by “making them dialogically interactive.”

In the United States the writers have to face different kinds of audiences. The dominant group takes the writer to be the representative of his/her group. Therefore his/her works are considered as symbolizing the experiences of a whole group. Thus the dominant group refuses any individuality to the ethnic writer. For such an audience the color, race, origins, etc., are the only factors that can determine the work of any ethnic group. Generally the readers have set ideas in mind while reading the works of a minority writer.

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28 Schueller 433.
On the other side if the writer is able to gain the attention of the majority, he/she immediately becomes the object of suspicion in the eyes of his/her own community. The group wants to know if the writer has sold out to the majority community and has catered to their hunger for stereotypes. The ethnic community also wants that he/she should present a favorable picture of the group in the eyes of the majority. Automatically he/she is taken to be the spokesperson for community. The writer is supposed to write about the injustices suffered as well as about the achievements of the community. The writer’s job is supposed to aim at a faithful representation of the ethnic group.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s success and critical acclaim has triggered a debate within the ethnic scholarly community about her being a spokesperson for the community. These controversies mostly center around the question whether her works (a) depict the coming into being of a Chinese-American (b) whether it reinforces the American stereotype of exotic Oriental and the duality of a Chinese in the United States.

Many critics take her works literally. They use her works to make a general assessment about the Chinese-American community. The critics on both sides do not allow her freedom that every writer is entitled to, thus negating her personal experiences. Diane Johnson thinks that the Chinese-Americans are the most unassimilated culture. She writes, “It is not unusual in San Francisco to find a fourth or fifth generation American born Chinese who speaks no English. Once Maxine’s teachers, call her parents in, but there can be no communication, only in part because the parents speak no English.
The parents would say nothing anyway, because in China, the parents and teachers of criminals were executed.  

The Chinese-Americans had no other alternative but to prove that these assertions are wrong. Jeffery Chan makes it a point to deny this statement. He writes, “all [Chinese-American] children attend school” as did their second generation parents. Thus critics like Johnson perpetuate the stereotypical notions of Chinese as foreigners living in the United States.

Chan criticizes Kingston’s story of the no-name aunt and for not knowing her father’s name. What Chan does not understand is the fact that the story of the no name aunt is her mother’s folktale for teaching sexual and moral responsibilities. The idea of a Chinese or a Chinese-American having no name would have easily subdued the young woman or any woman to chastity.

As for the question of not knowing her father’s real name, her ignorance can be but a questioning of the truth. Is her father’s name really the one she was told? In her stories she has intermingled fact and fantasy to protect the Chinese in America from deportation. Another point to be taken into consideration is that fathers and daughters in Hong Kingston’s generation were not close enough to share secrets. No matter how hard she tried her father would not communicate his experiences to her.

The fact that readers should keep in mind is that Maxine Hong Kingston cannot be taken as the spokesperson for every Chinese-American. To some extent Maxine’s accounts are authentic but they

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cannot stand as a generalized account of entire Chinese-American community. By pointing out the inaccuracies of her works, Chan puts forth the point that no one author can possibly speak for the whole of any people’s experience.

The young Maxine is baffled by her mother’s China and by monocultural America. She cannot find out what is traditionally Chinese and what is peculiar to her family: “Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother, who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (TWW, 5-6). Her mother’s habit of telling only the important and useful parts of the story add to her confusion.

When she goes to kindergarten, she discovers that the cost of becoming an American girl is silence. She becomes silent when she discovers that she has to speak English. “It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery…. I read aloud in first grade, though, and heard the barest whispers with little squeaks come out of my throat. ‘Louder,’ said the teacher, who scared the voice away again. The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew that silence had to do with being a Chinese girl” (TWW, 66). Maxine’s mother tries to loosen her daughter’s tongue by cutting her frenum to enable her tongue “to move in any language” (TWW, 164). But the author also suggests another reason for Maxine’s problem: to be a Chinese [and a girl] in American school can leave one tongue-tied. Since she is unable to speak English in the school, she is accorded a “Zero IQ.” She writes, “My silence was thickest – total during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black
paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top. I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. The teachers called my parents to school, and I saw they had been saving my pictures, curling and cracking, all alike and black. The teachers pointed to my pictures and looked serious, talked seriously too, but my parents did not understand English. (‘The parents and teachers of criminals were executed,’ said my father). My parents took the pictures home. I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath mighty operas” (TWW, 165). Here we are aware of the bipolar consciousness of a child who is monitoring her own exuberant imagination and the negative judgements passed on her. The black pictures are seen by the teachers as an evidence of her inability to communicate whereas they are full of potential.

The child accepts this verdict and casts herself as a criminal. But as she grows older she shifts the blame to her family and her race. “The only reason why I flunked kindergarten was because you couldn’t teach me English, and you gave me a zero IQ” (TWW, 201). In the author’s viewpoint the blame rests on the American educational system which refuses to accept a bicultural heritage. The silenced bodies are transformed when they go to the Chinese school, “After American school, we ... went to Chinese school .... There we chanted together, voices rising and falling, loud and soft, some boys shouting, everybody reading together ... and not alone with one voice. When we had a memorization test, the teachers let each of us come to his desk and say the lesson to him privately .... The girls were not mute. They screamed and yelled during recess ....” (TWW, 167).
Maxine is confused by the differences in cultural evaluations of silence. While the American culture discourages silence, the Chinese mentor in her fantasy cautions against speech. “The first thing you have to learn … is how to be quiet” (TWW, 23). But the Chinese seldom adhere to these preachings. Many of the Cantonese, including her mother, are champion talkers. She notices that Chinese-American women are bossy and talked loudly.

As a young girl Maxine unquestioningly accepts the American norm about the importance of speech. In this context, speech has a valence not unlike in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Maxine’s savagery against the mute Chinese girl takes place in the American school. It is reminiscent of the psychological violence suffered by people because of the white standards. Maxine detests that girl’s muteness and her “China doll haircut” (TWW, 173). The words she uses to lure her into speech (“don’t you ever want to be a cheer leader? Or a pompon girl” (TWW, 180) reflects her aspiration to be member of white society. Her cruelty echoes many imaginary and real bullies in her life. The Chinese man she imagines to have raped the no name aunt, the long-distance Americanized husband of Moon Orchid, her racist white bosses etc. Her lingering illness after the incident of her torturing the mute Chinese girl, an illness which deprives her of speech, indicate that speaking under the aegis of American school exacts a toll. The young Maxine realized that to become articulate in the Western discourse, she will have to parrot self-denigrating western assumptions. The tussle with her ethnic double represents a phase in the narrator’s life when her racial self-hatred is most acute and when she has totally accepted the white norms. Implicit in her vocal
assertions is an America that epitomizes enlightenment, freedom and opportunity.

She looks at the Chinese and Chinese customs from a critical distance. She mocks the young male immigrants and calls them “all funny-looking FOBs, ‘Fresh-off the Boats’…. Their eyes do not focus correctly – shifty eyed – and they hold their mouths slack, not tight-jawed masculine” (TWW, 193-94). She also dislikes the sounds of Chinese words. While watching the behavior of Brave Orchid and her sister Moon Orchid, both Maxine and her American born siblings conclude that “Chinese people are very weird” (TWW, 158). She also cannot follow the inscrutable rituals followed by her parents, “Mother would pour Seagram’s 7 into the cups and, after a while, pour it back into the bottle. Never explaining … The adults get mad, evasive, and shut you up if you ask. You get no warning that you shouldn’t wear a white ribbon in your hair until they hit you and give you the sideways glare for the rest of the day” (TWW, 185).

This point of view brings out the slippery distinction between an insider and outsider. Although an insider, she has taken the perspective of an alien observer. In her Chinese American context this ignorance seems glaring. Schooled in another set of values, Maxine can only judge her mother’s behavior as weird. She also does not like the Chinese custom of showing modesty by deprecating oneself or one’s kin in front of others. A mother may say that her daughter is ugly when she is in fact beautiful or that she is stupid, when she is a genius. Maxine does not like the way her mother tends to “say the opposite” (TWW, 203). She resents when Brave Orchid coalesces figments and facts, “I can’t tell what’s real and what you make up” (TWW, 202).
If the young narrator fights her way out of the restrictions imposed by both the cultures, the adult narrator capitalizes on her cultural upbringing. Although the young Maxine tries to identify herself with the dominant culture yet the extensive use of Chinese legends, although in mutated forms, suggests, that these stories have become a part of the narrator’s (as well as the author’s ) self. These stories and the American experiences, inform her ways of knowing, and becoming. The concluding legend of Ts’ai Yen suggests that the narrator, now a writer, has learned to draw upon both the cultures and is constricted by none.

In the last chapter of the book “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” she reinterprets the Chinese legend of Ts’ai Yen and subverts its original moral. The legend describes a woman kidnapped by the barbarians and forced to become a concubine and to raise her children on unfamiliar soil. In the original version she is ransomed back to the Han people. Kingston’s version, by contrast, dramatizes inter-ethnic harmony through the integration of disparate art forms.

It is by analogy to Maxine, alienated from the Chinese as well as the American culture that Ts’ai Yen’s full significance emerges. The barbarians attached primitive pipes to their arrows, so that they whistle in flight. Ts’ai Yen used to think that this was her nomadic captor’s only music. But now, night after night she hears from those very flutes “music tremble and rise like desert wind” (TWW, 208). “Then, out of Ts’ai Yen’s tent … the barbarians heard a woman’s voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes …. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger …. She brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is ‘Eighteen
Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,’ a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well” (TWW, 209).

Even though Maxine does not want to return to China she reconnects with her ancestral culture through her works. Now she does not struggle with her Asian past or her American present. Instead she seeks to emulate the poet who sings to foreign music. Although the sadness and anger is still there, the lyrical ending suggests that the narrator and the author have merged and has worked the discords of her life into a song. The last line suggests that different worlds can be bridged together by the narrator/author as by Ts’ai Yen. But one can wonder what she’s trying to translate. Is she trying to translate the Chinese culture into Chinese–American culture. If we adhere to the literal meaning of the word then her work is a poor rendering of the Chinese material. What Kingston implies is that she has been fashioning new shapes. But “if we judge her book as a personal and creative transposing of Chinese culture from a distinctively Chinese–American perspective and in hybrid idiom then the author has improvised boldly, poetically and magnificently.”

Kingston evinces deep ambivalence toward her cultural heritage. She is at once critical and appreciative of her legacy. Rabine notes that she “simultaneously relives the young girl’s negative feelings for her mother, her family, the community and its myths and also measures the distance that bestows on them their positive and irreplaceable value.” She is interested in recovering her Chinese past, and her mother is the only source through which she can know her past heritage but her

32 Rabine 477.
mother is not reliable as she mixes fact and fiction. Debra Shostak notes, “Irony is that Kingston’s relationship to her mother resembles the reader’s relationship to Kingston’s narration; the narrator also flouts the distinction between reality and fantasy, fiction and nonfiction in her efforts to rethink her culturally assigned roles.”

In the end she understands that her true identity lies not in abandoning one culture for the other but in taking positive aspects of both the cultures.

*China Men* is written as a sequel to William Carlos Williams’ *In the American Grain*. After reading the masterpiece she felt that the story of the American nation was half-told. The history of America is incomplete without the Chinese. So she takes up the American history from the point where William Carlos Williams left it. She writes, “I directly continue William Carlos Williams’ *In the American Grain*. He stopped in 1860 and I pick it up in 1860 and carry it forward.”

*China Men*, is almost exclusively devoted to historical and communal portraits of men. Suzanne Juhasz is of the view that Kingston has developed a “female” mode of narration in *The Woman Warrior* and a “male” mode in *China Men* because “a daughter’s relation to her mother is psychologically and linguistically different from her relation to her father, so is the telling of these stories different.”

*The Woman Warrior* is the story of an adolescent girl looking for a viable female and racial identity, but the narrator in *China Men*

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35 Suzanne Juhasz, “Maxine Hong Kingston : Narrative Technique and Female Identity,”
can grasp the tangle of race and gender in Chinese-America and is able to extend her feminist sympathy to men. Kingston writes, “To best appreciate *The Woman Warrior*, you do need to read *China Men*. You’ll see that ‘I’ achieve an adult narrator’s voice ... ‘I’ am nothing but who ‘I’ am in relation to other people. In *The Woman Warrior* ‘I’ begin the quest for self by understanding the archetypal mother. In *China Men*, ‘I’ become more whole because of the ability to appreciate the other gender.”

The narrator in this book has a clearly developed critical consciousness.

In *China Men* as well as in *The Woman Warrior* the author is skeptical about the portrayal of her (male) ancestors, so she deploys polyphony against male as well as the white authorities. The two forms of double-voicing noted in *The Woman Warrior* have parallels in *China Men*. It is found in her overlapping awareness of gender and race and her mediation between fact and fiction. She moves between fact and fantasy and in *China Men* this strategy is used to challenge the authority of “facts” and to reclaim (through the imagination) a forgotten cultural biography. She interweaves personal and national events, memory and imagination and thus weaves not only a family saga but also a Chinese–American epic. She gives voice to many China Men whose presence was unacknowledged for decades in American history.

The opening fable of the book collapses racist and sexist oppression while mythologizing Chinese–American history. This legend has been adapted from an eighteenth century Chinese classic,
Flowers in the Mirror\textsuperscript{37} by Li Ju-Chen. In Kingston’s version, Tang Ao is captured in the Land of Women and is forced to have his ears pierced, his facial hair plucked, his feet bound, his cheeks and lips painted. He is transformed to an Oriental courtesan. But the most important thing to notice is that Tang Ao speaks only once in the course of his painful ordeal. This episode gives us hints about the two causes of silence explored in the book: the inability to speak and the inability to hear. The book has many China Men who are not allowed to talk or whose voices are shut out of history.

This fable has a lot of significance. The story concludes as follows, “Some scholars say that that country (the Land of Women) was discovered during the reign of Empress Wu (AD 694-705), and some say earlier than that, AD 441 and it was in North America” (CM,5). The association of the Land of Women with North America is purely Kingston’s imagination. Kingston in her love for invented sources has her predecessor in George Eliot. This method is the parody of the patriarchal tradition of authorities and a form of self-authorization. She presents fiction as though it were history and thus not only challenge the historical construction of China Men but also gives alternative accounts as countermemory.

The humiliation suffered by Tang Ao in a foreign land symbolizes the emasculation of China Men in the United States. The three main patterns that were common in the process of emasculation were a) personal denigration supported by society; b) collective slavery instigated by collective interest group; c) sexual deprivation and that too sanctioned by law.

The first and probably the most painful form of emasculation is sexual deprivation. Most of the Chinese in the U.S. before 1949 were “married bachelors.” The overseas Chinese stayed in America for a decade or so, returned home to see their families and wives, squander their money, hopefully father a son and come back to America for another decade or two to work. Many a times they saw their children when they were fully grown up. The family back in China was usually dependent upon the overseas Chinese and had little idea about the hardships endured by most of the Chinese in America.

The agony is vividly dramatized in the episodes concerning Ah Goong “Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains” (CM,123). He longs for his home and he feels his heart breaking at the thought that “the railroad he was building would not lead him to his family” (CM,129). He is so sexually deprived that he wonders “what a man was for, what he had to have a penis for” (CM,144). On one occasion when he is lowered into a valley in a wicker basket to drive support for a bridge, his desire spills over, “One beautiful day, dangling in the sun above a new valley, not the desire to urinate but sexual desire clutched him so hard he bent over in the basket. He curled up, overcome by beauty and fear, which shot to his penis. He tried to rub himself calm. Suddenly he stood tall and squirted out into space. ‘I am fucking the world,’ he said. The world’s vagina was big, big as the sky, big as a valley. He grew a habit: whenever he was lowered in the basket, his blood rushed to his penis, and he fucked the world” (CM,133).

This passage underscores the anguish of China Men and their strategies of survival through powerful imagination. Pathos and humor are blended in Ah Goong’s defiant act of impregnating the world’s vagina. Ah Goong contradicts the stereotypical image of the Chinese as
serious and earth bound. Ah Goong is gifted with an indomitable spirit. A subversive imagination and the capacity to transform tragedy into comedy enables him to survive inspite of the odds. Kingston consciously writes against the stereotypical notion of Asian-Americans as being serious, “I think I might overemphasize showing how Chinese and Chinese-Americans are the most raucous people .... And so in China Men and in Tripmaster Monkey I really go overboard to emphasize that part of the character.”

The theme of sexual deprivation and single husbands is again treated in the chapter “The Father from China.” This consists of four “married bachelors” in America. The narrator’s father Ed, and his three friends operate a laundry in New York. At first they really enjoy their freedom as single men, “The Gold Mountain indeed free: no manners, no traditions, no wives” (CM, 61). They go to the expensive dance clubs to have the company of white dancing girls. They idolize blondes changing the wording of passionate lyrics from “dark as her hair” to “yellow as her hair” (CM, 62). The description of Ed’s humorous erotic encounters is immediately followed by a brief section titled “Ghostmate.” In this Chinese fable a young man is pampered and kept by a beautiful widow only to discover that she is a succubus.

This placement of Ed’s adventure next to the “gothic” romance yields covert authorial commentary. This fable operates on various levels. It is at once critical and sympathetic to China Men. This romance is the collective fantasy of many young men who look for unexpected fortune, “I can give you your wishes,” says the beautiful widow (CM, 77). She pampers him with sumptuous meals, cosy

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lodging, love, wealth and raw materials for the craft. "She brings glazes in textures, blues, and greens the potter has not been able to mix, mounds of white lamb's wool to the weaver, paper with deer and willow and mountain water-marks to the poet, rolls of leather and cloth, threads like skeins of rainbows to the cobbler and tailor" (CM, 78). His adventures are in sharp contrast with minimal existence of Ed and his friends. They have to make the ironing tables into beds and have to live long without women. Ed cannot fulfill his artistic and sexual dreams, unlike the young man in "The Ghostmate," he is frustrated on both counts. The man who might have been an artist has to do the book-keeping instead of practicing calligraphy. The eloquent man from China is inarticulate in America. His demand for sexual favours from a blonde, "You like to come home with me?" (CM, 66) is politely but firmly rejected.

But at some points their experiences are similar. Like the young man from the fable, Ed enjoys his freedom. For the traveler the "ghostmate" is the most beautiful woman. Similarly Ed moons over the blonde dancer. The young man finds the widow to be much more seductive than his toiling and bad smelling wife. In the same way Ed and his friends try to push the memory of their wives and kids behind, "Not one of the four of them told any blonde that they were married and were fathers" (CM, 66). The young man's wife " is waiting at home, cooking roots and bark for the children .... She is a brave cooking wife. She has never had a romantic dinner for two. He will have to ask her if she can manage without sweating so, and he doesn't like the calluses on her hands and feet either" (CM, 77). When Ed tells his wife that he had danced with blondes, all she says is "You danced with demonesses?" (CM, 71) providing a direct link between the
ghostmate and the white belles. The juxtaposition of these two romances show that Ed's carefree interlude in America was nothing but a fool's paradise. The American women are interested in a fleeting, materialistic relationship. So the narrator concludes "The Ghostmate" with "Fancy lovers never last" (CM, 81).

Many of the Chinese immigrants also faced the language problem. Their lives were limited and circumscribed within the imaginary walls of their ethnic ghetto. They could not venture out because they did not know English and also because they feared violence. This added to their misery as they were dubbed inscrutable. The narrator's father was once cheated by the gypsies and then harassed by a policeman "When the gypsy baggage and the police pig left, we were careful not to be bad or noisy so that you (Baba) would not turn on us. We knew that it was to feed us you had to endure demons and physical labor" (CM, 13). At another place the narrator writes, "You screamed wordless male screams that jolted the house upright ... worse than the swearing and nightly screams were your silences when you punished us by not talking. You rendered us invisible, gone" (CM, 13-14). The narrator ascribes his bad temper to the kind of behavior that is meted out to him.

Silence, that acts as a mask for her father's humiliation is inflicted on her great-grandfather Bak Goong. Bak Goong work as a temporary worker in Hawaii. There the Chinese laborers are forced to observe the "rule of silence" (CM, 100), and Bak Goong was "fined for talking" (CM, 102). He is forced to find other ways to express his anger like coughing out Cantonese invectives against the foreman. "The deep, long, loud coughs, barking and wheezing, were almost as
satisfying as shouting. He let out scolds disguised as coughs” (CM,104). Bak Goong would like to sing like a farmer in the opera. To make him silent is like castrating him, he complains, “If I knew I had to take a vow of silence …. 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,100). Norman Alarcon points out in reference to This Bridge Called My Back that the “silence and silencing of people begins with the dominating enforcement of linguistic conventions, the resistance to relational dialogues as well as the disenablenment of people by outlawing their forms of speech.”

But as the white bosses of these laborers tried to dominate and shut them up they found novel ways to let their voices and grievances out. So to relieve themselves of this congestion, the men dig a hole for themselves through which they could shout their longings and frustrations to China. They shout everything into the hole believing that their messages will be conveyed to their relatives in China and their mother-land. The hole receives the long stifled voices of the China Men and also acts as an orifice for their pent up sexual feelings. Their white bosses are scared of the noise and leave them alone “Talked out, they buried their words, planted them. ‘Like cats covering shit’ they laughed” (CM,188). These acts are depicted as acts of heroic survival and potent imagination. This shout party suggests the contained resistance of the early China Men and the mass burial of their voices. In this they can be compared with the African slaves who used to bang on pots to cover up such bold songs as ‘Oh Freedom.’

Moreover the white historians are deaf to the contribution of China Men. Their adventures and exploits remained untold and uncredited. The chapter ends over the spot inseminated with the words, “… the new green shoots would rise, and when in two years the cane grew gold tassels, what stories the wind would tell” (CM,118). But for generations there is no willing listener. Ultimately a great granddaughter comes seeking ancestral voices in the Sandalwood Mountain, “I have gone ... as far as Hawaii, where I have stood alongside the highway at the edge of the sugarcane and listened for the voices of the grandfathers” (CM,88) and “I have heard the land sing” (CM, 90).

This makes clear that the story of her great-grandfather is the creation of her imaginations and informed inspiration. Kingston draws most of the details of Bak Goong’s character from Ovid’s account of King Midas, although the traditional story has been changed according to her needs. She brings these changes in the traditional story to set it in the Chinese-American context. Ovid’s Apollo punished King Midas by giving him the ears of an ass. In Kingston’s version, a son with cat’s ears is born to a king. The king is unable to hold the secret and tells.

The theme of silence is pursued in the chapters “On Mortality” and “On Mortality Again.”

Bak Goong and Ah Goong are quite distinct from the narrator’s father, Baba. Even they had to undergo unspeakable torture and anguish, they continue to assert themselves through talk-story and imaginative subterfuge. On the contrary Baba loses his voice as well as his humor. One reason can be ascribed to this kind of behavior is that the other two know that they are sojourners and will one day return to
China. But Baba understands that he has to stay and staying entails brutal self-transformation. The narrator remembers a time when her father was light-hearted and affectionate. She remembers him creating an airplane out of a dragonfly for each of his children. He is a man who imagined himself to be Fred Astaire dancing on the steps in front of the New York Public library. But he is treated shabbily by everybody including his countrymen and friends. He loses his job and gradually he sinks into a long depression. China is too painful for the memory:

“You say with the few words and the silences: No stories, No past, No China.

You only look and talk Chinese. There are no photographs of you in Chinese clothes nor against Chinese landscapes …. Do you mean to give us a chance at being real Americans by forgetting the Chinese past?” (CM, 14).

This last question explodes the myth of America as a pluralist country. Baba’s self-flagellation parallels that of his daughter at her American school. Both the father and daughter pay a high price to become real Americans. But the daughter is able to regain her ethnic past as well as her voice. Although she claims autonomy she reinforces her participation in a culture as she exploits its conventions for literary discourse. Like Malcolm X 40 she uses her works in the construction of a cross-cultural identity in which she uses the materials of both the cultures. She uses her works as an imaginative bridge between the two cultures. The highly dramatized narratives depict an ever increasing

tension/conflict between the two cultures and the resolution of that conflict in author’s life.

Just as her father’s silence and taciturnity provokes the narrator to invent his life story, in the same way the exclusion of China Men from the white American history provokes the narrator to create an alternative history by extrapolating from the meager resources that are available. She completely distrusts the received information and one-dimensional lore of traditional historians. This may be related to her mother’s refusal to distinguish between a true story and just a story. Earlier this had posed a great difficulty to the child but it also helped her develop a sense of vigilance which will not allow facts to be taken for granted.

In the chapter “The Wild Man of the Green Swamp” the narrator suggests that insanity may be a matter of interpretation and that skin color may well play a part in the judgment of a person. The narrator reads about a Chinese man arrested in 1975, after hiding for months in a mosquito-infested swamp. At first they could not comprehend what he was speaking, “he made strange noises as in a foreign language” (CM, 221). He told the police that he worked on a Liberian freighter to support his family in Taiwan. He resisted his shipmates’ attempt to confine him to an asylum in Tampa by escaping into the green swamp. When the US police decided to send him back to Taiwan he hanged himself.

The narrator does not believe in the facts that are put before her. Her habitual inquisitiveness make the reader wonder whether the man was really deranged. The assertion made by the police that “… no one
could live in the swamp. The mosquitoes alone would drive him out” (CM, 221) is proved incorrect. The official version is also proved wrong by the photograph of the wild man. Neubauer observes that the narrator’s “careful eye spots the important details – the shirt tucked in, the white undershirt, the short hair, which strongly suggest to her that the man may be temporarily disoriented by his interrupted seclusion in Green Swamp but is far from wild.”41 The narrator ends the episode with a parallel case when “there was a Wild Man in our slough too, only he was a black man …. The newspaper said he was crazy; it said the police had been on the look out for him for a long time, but we had seen him every day” (CM,223). These men surely have reasons to seek invisibility.

The China Men have been rendered invisible in the American chronicles. Not a single Chinese laborer appears in the historic photographs taken at the completion of the railroad. The narrator’s paternal grandfather Ah Goong and others worked on those railroads in the nineteenth century. But in the end, “While demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs.” (CM,145).

This last sentence captures the erasure of the China Men from the memory as well as history. The men who risked their lives to blast holes through mountains were immediately forgotten. Kingston’s “imaginative rendering of the lives of various male ancestors must be

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41 Carol E. Neubauer, “Developing Ties to the Past: Photography and Other Sources of Information

read in the context of such misrepresentation and under-representation.” The narrator holds that the Americans are not alone in having such prejudices. She relates the harrowing experience of a black woman brought back to China as the third wife of the narrator’s maternal grand-father, “When she came to China, she ‘jabbered like a monkey,’ but no one answered her, ‘Who knows what she was saying anyway?’ She fell mute” (CM, 86). Both this incident and that of the Wild Man suggest that the beastly perception imposed on the Other has to do with racial and linguistic difference.

Bak Goong’s opium trip provides a contrast to the laws of the ruling fathers. On the voyage from China to Hawaii, Bak Goong takes opium and in the ensuing vision, he feels affiliated to everyone. He thinks, “Men build bridges and streets when there is already an amazing gold electric ring connecting every living being as surely as if we held hands, flippers and paws, feelers and wings . . . . Even the demons above deck let out a glow” (CM, 95). This dream is thrice removed from reality because it is just hallucination, he is badly treated not only by whites, but also by his own countrymen, and finally this dream is the narrator’s reconstruction. Yet this episode shows the narrator’s utopian and pacifist world view.

The pacifist views of the narrator are incorporated in the last chapter “The Brother in Vietnam.” The narrator’s brother is entirely confused by the war because the Vietnamese looked so much like him. The narrator recalls another degrading portrayal of Chinese-Americans in the American popular literature. In a comic strip Blackhawk, the

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42 Provocative Silence 118.
Chinese soldier Chop Chop is the only one who is portrayed as feminine, weak and funny. “Chop Chop was the only Blackhawk who did not wear a blue-black pilot’s uniform .... He wore slippers instead of boots, pajamas with his undershirt showing at the tails, white socks, an apron; he carried a cleaver and wore a pigtail, which Chinese stopped wearing in 1911” (CM,274). Chop Chop is drawn more like a cartoon. Such insulting portrayals of China Men as made popular by the media could not possibly bring in the brother any strong sense of pride in belonging to the U.S. Army.

The brother’s experience in the Far East complements Bak Goong’s vision who feels a bond with everybody. The brother is haunted by the dreams in which he cannot distinguish between a kin and an enemy. “He takes up his sword and hacks into the enemy, slicing them; they come apart in rings and rolls. He grits his teeth and goes into a frenzy, cutting whatever human meat comes within range. When he stops, he finds that he has cut up the victims too, who are his own relatives. The faces of the strung-up people are also those of his own family, Chinese faces, Chinese-eyes, noses, and cheekbones. He woke terrified” (CM,291).

Most of the reviewers of China Men concentrate on the anger within the context of women versus men. They tend to ignore the factual historical section of the book. “The Laws” documents the facts about Chinese exclusion, politically and socially, from the United States is completely overlooked. Even while concentrating on anger they neglect the point that anger in this book derives, in part, from the treatment of the Chinese people in the U.S.
Kingston’s next book *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* is based on the sixteenth century classic *The Journey to the West* \(^{43}\) by Wu Ch’eng-en which is about the life of the Monkey King, and his search for enlightenment and his efforts to obtain Buddhist scriptures from India. Kingston does not parody the book in the narrow sense of the term, that is mockery of a thing copied. She uses Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s idea of the book and the world as an “aparallel evolution,” two separate entities simulate yet distinguish themselves from each other. \(^{44}\) *Tripmaster Monkey* does not mock its predecessor, but affirms our existing tradition and the text’s membership in that tradition though asserting its uniqueness.

Kingston is “capturing the code” \(^{45}\) of the classic and creating a new meaning by juxtaposing the two works. The title of the book is not only a playful allusion to the controversy over Kingston’s use / misuse of classical myth but also a defense of her work.

In *Journey to the West* the pilgrims first get the blank scriptures. They believe them to be false. When the pilgrims return to request the real scriptures from the Buddha, he responds, “As a matter of fact, it is such blank scrolls as these that are the true scriptures. But I quite see that the people of China are too foolish and ignorant to believe this, so there is nothing for it but to give them copies with some writings on.” \(^{46}\) These words keep on echoing in the background of *Tripmaster Monkey* and are a powerful critique of those who claim knowledge of what is real and what is fake. Kingston’s text “extends and disseminates the


\(^{45}\) Deleuze and Guattari 10.
agenda of the original narrative ... while at the same time using this content of the narrative to its own ends of asserting the ultimate unreality of monologic constructions of identity and experience.\textsuperscript{47}

The fake or the copy reinvents itself as the real that only the enlightened can understand.

Kingston borrows not only from the Chinese sources but also from the European and American classics. She transcends racial and linguistic boundaries to fulfill her artistic imperatives. She blurs the boundaries between the mainstream and the marginal literature and culture thus asserting the collaborative and changing nature of American art. After Ch'eng-en, the second most alluded to author in the pages of \textit{Tripmaster Monkey} is James Joyce. Joyce's influence is more visible when Wittman is discussing his artistic goals or when the narration follows Wittman and his thoughts through the streets of San Francisco. Her use of both Asian and American sources subverts the idea of a single linear "real" American tradition of an "original" and an Other. Kingston believes that tradition is created out of multiplicity rather than uniformity.

The point that arises is can a character, even a fictional character, with an Asian last name, be an all-American hero? Wittman Ah Sing is conceived in the democratic tradition of American letters and is the spokesman of the common people. He is born and brought up in America and is named after Walt Whitman who once framed the national identity of the Americans. He may also be named after

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Journey to the West} 287.

Norman Asing, a naturalized U.S. citizen, who, as early as 1855, served as a spokesman of his people by writing to Governor Bigler of California, claiming his identity as an American and protesting against the exclusion of the Chinese from America. The main question is whether Wittman will be accepted in his own times as Walt Whitman was not.

Kingston in her *Tripmaster Monkey* uses the parodic technique to face the conflicting notions of individuality and community. She dismantles the fundamentalist notions of the community and insists on “inclusive community.”48 This community will consist of individual identities and would not stand in opposition to the individual identity. It is through the collaborative communal effort that Wittman Ah Sing is able to achieve his communal goal. Even though he is the fifth generation Chinese American, a graduate from Berkeley in the 1960s, the “Yale Younger Poet of 1967 or 1968 or 1969” (TM, 51). And now a director of his own theater in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. He is an actor/activist, a King Kong on the Bay Bridge, a Cowboy in the city of San Francisco, a China-town Hamlet/Garrick.

The Tripmaster Monkey does not bother whether he is accepted or not. No matter what, he puts forth many challenging questions before the reader or the critic – Can a Chinese be American and an American have Chinese features? Can a Chinese–American writer create a character that is American?

Many people accept Kingston’s Monkey as “an extraordinary and unforgettable creation, indeed an American creation.”49 He has

49 Leonard 786.
been accepted as “a sixties Berkeley rebel, an overwrought theatrical visionary,” a Jack Kerouac or James Baldwin or Allen Ginsberg, “a modern American hero.”

But there are many people who consciously or unconsciously, exhibit their racist views and their politics still remain under Chinese Exclusion Act. They can still view this fifth generation U.S. citizen as an immigrant alien, an activist egomaniac or a Chinese.

Le Ann Scheriber speaks of the heart of the matter, “Wittman is American, as American as Jack Kerouac or James Baldwin or Allen Ginsberg, as American as Walt Whitman … as American as five generations in California and a Berkeley education in the 1960s can make him. The problem is, if he is so American, how come everybody think he’s Chinese? How can someone raised on Mickey Mouse and Life magazine still seem so exotic, so ‘inscrutable’ to his countrymen?”

Kingston is aware of the racial bias and the denigration most of the Asian-Americans have to face. She uses her writing as a forum of protest against racial attitudes.

In “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers” she exposes the kind of racism that exists in literary criticism and forewarns the reader not to look for any conventional stereotype in her works. She asserts her legacy as an American writer, “Actually, I think that my books are much more American than they are Chinese. I felt that I was

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51 Scheriber 23.
building, creating, myself and these people as American people, to make everyone realize that these are American people, Also I am creating part of American literature ... adding to American literature. The critics haven't recognised my work enough as another tradition of American literature." In this novel Kingston removes the hyphenation of “Chinese-American” because this will make “Chinese” only an adjective, and “America” the real authentic name.

Jennie Wong is of the opinion that this book carries an epistemological argument with a dominant ideology of the day. Kingston is constantly at war with the racist readings of her books. Wittman speaks after he has staged one of his shows, “They’ve reviewed us already, thinking that opening night is no different from the second night and tonight ... Look, Look ‘East meets West,’ ‘Exotic,’ ‘Sino-American theater,’ ‘Snaps, crackles, and pops like singing rice’. ‘Sweet and Sour’... they sent their food critics. They wrote us up like they were tasting Chinese food .... They want us to go back to China. Where we belong. They think that Americans are either white or Black” (TM, 307). Kingston presents us with no fixed cultural identities. With comic touches and ironic distance, she deconstructs the word “American” while disseminating the word “Chinese.” Kingston asserts, “I’m having to give instruction. There is no East here West is meeting West. This is the Journey ‘in’ the West. All you saw was West” (TM, 308). Tripmaster is Kingston’s platonic concept of herself.

54 Cultural Misreadings 60.
55 Jennie Wong, “Tripmaster Monkey: Kingston’s Postmodern Representation of a New China Man,”
In the Western literary tradition the “Monkey face” is almost always associated with the African or any colored race. But with Kingston’s “black humor her subversive self-fashioning, her exuberant representation of Tripmaster Monkey, self-parodic but self-possessed, tragicomic but happily optimistic - such laughter may be productive, if only the reader is capable of being inspired.”56 The reader laughs at her and fails to be inspired. And that is what Kingston’s design is to “let the gringo Anglos do some hard hearing for a change” (TM, 138).

Linda Hutcheon in her The Politics of Postmodernism helps to explain Kingston’s post-modern design, “The Postmodern initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entitles that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’… are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us.”57

Thus Kingston demystifies the American cultural myth of the “Monkey face”. She deploys the postmodern strategy of self-parody to undermine the stereotypical racist image. She draws from the Western literature as well as from the Chinese legends and literature, borrowing the mask from the Chinese theater to paint the ‘Monkey face’ anew and thus reinstitutes the image of the ‘Monkey face’ with radically different features. Thus Kingston reconstructs a positive image of the colored face, a new American identity with Oriental values.

Even though Wittman is possessed with dual cultural and literary heritage and is often subjected to racial discrimination, history is not his burden. He is heroic in the sense that he is not caught in a

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56 Wong 106
"dual authenticity," rather he feels blessed with his dual heritage. His bicultural heritage enables him to transcend the limits of both cultures.

The monkey emerges as a New China Man. What his name represents is a "new model of cultural assimilation in which crossing the boundary from the ethnic minority into the white mainstream of American society, one does not have to 'sell out' in order to 'fit in,' one does not have to deny one's cultural heritage in order to create one's individual self-identity." Wittman is and is not the American poet Whitman. He is and is not the Chinese "Wittman." Wittman's individual identity, his first name, is identified with Walt Whitman, the American poet. In the same way his ethnic identity is preserved into his Chinese surname. This means that he looks Chinese because of his Chinese parentage. But in essence he is a self-made common "China Man" who “celebrates Walt Whitman’s democratic spirit and carries on the American literary tradition of ‘I Sing.’ To establish the legitimacy of a new identity, Kingston has ‘fixed the name’ right.”

Like Whitman, Wittman Ah Sing considers himself as the creator of identity of his race. He presents himself as a representative of the contemporary American "en masse." Kingston did not want that Tripmaster Monkey should receive the same kind of reader response The Woman Warrior did. So she warns the reader, “And again whammed into the block question: Does he announce now that the author is - Chinese? Or, rather, Chinese-American? And be forced into autobiographical confession. Stop the music - I have to butt in and introduce myself and my race .... Wittman wanted to spoil all those stories coming out of and set in New England Back East - to黑en

58 Wong 108.
59 Wong 109.
and to yellow Bill, Brooke and Annie" (TM, 34). So he proposes, "A new rule for imagination: The common man has Chinese looks. From now on, whenever you read about those people with no surnames, color them with black skin or yellow skin" (TM, 34).

Le Ann Scheriber argues for the legacy of Wittman’s American identity, “It only takes one generation to lose China. How many does it take to gain America.” Wittman speaks for himself in the book: “Chineseness does not come to an actor through genetic memory. The well trained actor observes humanity and the text” (TM, 23). The book opens with a reference to the Hamlet complex - “To be or not to be.” The opening chapter contains almost nothing of Chinese literature or myth. So Wittman’s initial psychological and intellectual crisis has nothing to do with his Chinese origin. It has its origins in Shakespeare and British literature.

The Monkey has a critical eye and he is fully aware of the injustice done to his race and his forefathers. He is determined to fight against it. Unlike Stephen Daedalus, our Postmodern China Man has a strong sense of locality. This fifth generation Californian is firmly rooted in his own world. For him humanity means the real world he lives in. ‘The text’ is the world of language and signs that surrounds and envelops him, the language he learns from school, street, media, movies, especially the books assigned to him as a Cal English major—this language system that has cultivated his sense and sensibility and indoctrinated him consciously or unconsciously, in short, imposed upon him a cultural identity, an unreal alien identity. Hamlet/Oliver is his primordial mirror image, Ishmael/Melville his role model. Both are

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60 Scheriber 23.
tragic characters both lead him nowhere in his search for identity.\textsuperscript{61} This postmodernist believes that “Pen is mightier than the sword.” He shrugs from the violence and is of the opinion that, “What is crazy is the idea that revolutionaries must shoot and bomb and kill, that revolution is the same as war” (TM, 305). The three priorities on his theatrical agenda are - the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and the problem of unemployment. These issues share the concerns of the sixties’ radical movement. But \textit{Tripmaster Monkey} transcends the movement’s disillusionment.

Many non-Asian American reviewers tend to take Kingston’s works as an another addition to the American melting pot. Critics refuse to acknowledge that she is an American writer, writing about her experiences. She takes inspiration from various sources including Chinese, British, American and so on. This does not make her peculiarly Chinese, as borrowing from Chinese sources made Ezra Pound any more Chinese. Her sources invigorates her and she has more knowledge of the world coming into her. It is unfair to judge her as a Chinese who is trying to destroy her cultural heritage and become one with the dominant group. It should be understood that she writes in the new Chinese American tradition.

However, many critics have a kind of fixation with the idea of America as a melting pot. Paul Gray writes. “Thousands of books have bubbled up out of the American melting pot. This should be one of those that will be remembered.”\textsuperscript{62} Most non Asian American reviewers also believe that no matter from what ethnic background a person may

\textsuperscript{61} Wong 111.
come from, s/he/ eventually adopts the values of white American culture. Sara Blackburn writes, “Here’s the real meaning of America as the melting pot.”\textsuperscript{63} These kind of reviewers deny any individuality or a different point of view.

But Maxine Hong Kingston emphasizes the emergence of a new Chinese - American culture. Throughout her works, from the struggle of understanding her womanhood in the U.S. to the newly created tradition of the Chinese workers in Hawaii, to the forceful monologue of Wittman Ah Sing in \textit{Tripmaster Monkey}. She emphasizes the blending of the two cultures. This new culture does not represent a continuity from China. Maxine Hong Kingston makes the point that the Chinese-American culture is not static and upbraids the critics for ignoring its constant evolution. This continuation of false duality keeps the American of Chinese ancestry in the status of foreigners.

\textsuperscript{63} Sara Blackburn, \textit{Ms January} (1977).