

School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

**When Tiger Mothers Meet Sugar Sisters: Strategic
Representations of Chinese Cultural Elements in Maxine
Hong Kingston's and Amy Tan's Works**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Signature:

Date: 5/12/2017

Abstract

This thesis examines how two successful Chinese American writers, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, use Chinese cultural elements as a strategy to challenge stereotypes of Chinese Americans in the United States. Chinese cultural elements can include institutions, language, religion, arts and literature, martial arts, cuisine, stock characters, and so on, and are seen to reflect the national identity and spirit of China.

The thesis begins with a brief critical review of the Chinese elements used in Kingston's and Tan's works, followed by an analysis of how they created their distinctive own genre informed by Chinese literary traditions. The central chapters of the thesis elaborate on how three Chinese elements used in their works go on to interact with American mainstream culture: the character of the woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan, who became the inspiration for the popular Disney movie; the archetype of the Tiger Mother, since taken up in Amy Chua's successful book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*; and Chinese style sisterhood which, I argue, is very different from the 'sugar sisterhood' sometimes attributed to Tan's work. The final chapter is a discussion of the literary influences of Kingston and Tan on two younger authors, Marilyn Chin and Lisa See. I argue that the use of the Chinese elements in Kingston's and Tan's narratives can be regarded as a writing strategy to articulate resistance against racial stereotypes; this strategy in turn has opened up space for both Chinese culture and Chinese American writers to gain access to and interact with mainstream society in the West, even as, paradoxically, these narratives may also be seen as simultaneously reinforcing stereotypes.

In this thesis, I aim to achieve a new reading, informed by an interdisciplinary approach which combines both literary and cultural studies, of how, in Kingston's and Tan's works, Chinese elements are represented and metamorphosed, and in turn become enticing to Westerners and lead to their adaptation as popular cultural phenomena in the United States.

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Notation of Chinese Characters

In referencing Chinese sources such as book titles and proper names in this thesis, I adopt the *pinyin* system since it is the standardised usage in mainland China. However, if these sources have been mentioned in other forms, such as the Wades-Giles system in the books I quote, I leave them as is and add *pinyin* after the original quotations as explanations if necessary. For some classics well-known to Westerners, such as *The Art of War*, I use the English version directly without *pinyin* or Chinese characters to avoid repetitions. I use Chinese characters when *pinyin* or English versions alone cannot provide with accurate information.

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Introduction: How to Win without Fighting

During the summer break in 2005, in my hometown Hangzhou, China, I first encountered Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, just before I started my Master's degree in American literature. I read the book as a general reader as I knew nothing about literary criticism at that time. I was mostly fascinated by the second chapter, 'White Tigers'; a similar response to that of many of her American readers: Kingston once complained that the Americans pick this chapter as their favourite out of their oriental fantasy (Kingston 1982, 57). I had not really read any Chinese American text before, and Kingston's narrative seemed so unique to me. The story in 'White Tigers' looked familiar but strange at the same time. I was quite confused as to whether Kingston had borrowed the legend of a Chinese heroine Hua Mulan¹; indeed, I thought the character more of Indian origin when she described the rabbit's sacrifice for the narrator on the mountain. The story of Hua Mulan that I learned from my middle school textbook when I was growing up in China is quite brief, and it contains no such fancy fairy-tale style adventures as in Kingston's version.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* has been more popular among Chinese readers because some excerpts of the book have been selected in English textbooks in China since the 1990s. I watched the movie version of *The Joy Luck Club* in a cross-cultural communication course in 2006. I did not really understand why our teacher, an Italian, showed us this movie, but some scenes were quite impressive to me. For example, An-mei's mother has to cut a piece of flesh from her arm as a medicine for her dying mother to show her filial piety. I had no idea whether or not this was a Chinese tradition, since I had never heard about it, but I have to admit that it was its exoticism that attracted me, even though I was supposed to know more about Chinese culture than the Italian teacher.

These were my initial response to Kingston's and Tan's works when I was still quite ignorant about literary studies. I find it interesting that it was these strange but familiar Chinese cultural elements that caught my attention. If these are Chinese cultural

¹ In Mandarin, we pronounce it as Hua Mulan, while Kingston uses Fa Mu Lan, a dialect version of the name. In the Disney animation, the character's family name is not mentioned. I use different versions of spelling in the following thesis according to context.

elements, then why did I feel so confused about their origins? And why did Kingston and Tan present them to Westerners? Perhaps this was my initial motivation to start this research, although these questions were rather vague and not academic.

My curiosity about the two Chinese American writers, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, gradually turned into my research interest. After working in a university for many years, I decided to become a student again and research how Kingston and Tan use Chinese cultural elements as a strategy to challenge stereotypes of Chinese Americans in the United States. I chose to study Kingston and Tan not just out of fondness, but because they are, arguably, the two most successful female Chinese American authors, and their writings share common features, such as mother-daughter storytelling and a mixing of genres, but more importantly, for me, an extended use of Chinese culture in their English texts. My research mainly focuses on but is not only confined to two texts: Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). These two books are the authors' representative and most discussed works, and therefore can be the most persuasive cases for my research. My thesis is not traditional literary criticism; rather I employ an intercultural approach and extend my analysis beyond literary texts to include other cultural forms.

Before I start discussing what I aim to achieve in this project in detail, I think it is necessary to clarify some key terms in the title of my thesis:

Chinese Cultural Elements: Since the publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, successive works by Chinese American writers, especially female writers, have deployed Chinese cultural elements frequently in their works. This phenomenon should not be interpreted in a simplified way: they are of Chinese origin, so, accordingly, they write about China. In this thesis, I argue that the use of the Chinese elements in Kingston's and Tan's narratives can be regarded as a *writing strategy* to articulate resistance against racial stereotypes; this strategy in turn has opened up space for both Chinese culture and Chinese American writers to gain access to and interact with mainstream society in the West, even as, paradoxically, these narratives may also be seen as simultaneously reinforcing stereotypes.

These Chinese popular cultural elements, which sometimes I refer to as 'Chinese elements' or 'Chinese culture', are a generic category that references traditional Chinese culture, symbols, stories and customs that are familiar to most diaspora and

mainland Chinese people. They are seen to reflect the national identity and spirit of China. Chinese elements can include institutions, language, religion, arts and literature, martial arts, cuisine, stock characters, and so on.

Strategy: The two most influential ancient military works in China are *The Art of War* and *Thirty-Six Stratagems*. The former is the comprehensive meditation on military strategy and tactics by Master Sun (aka. Sun Zi or Sun Tzu) and the latter is a collection of specific tactics that can be applied to politics, war, and civil interaction. Master Sun said that:

It is the rule in war, if our forces are ten to the enemy's one, to surround him; if five to one, to attack him; if twice as numerous, to divide our army into two. If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him. (Sun Tzu 2009, 12)

Chinese Americans have retained disadvantageous status in American society, and as a result, it is less likely that they are able to challenge stereotypes in one stroke when they are confronted with injustices from the mainstream. Similar to the tactics utilised in a war, Chinese Americans are less influential politically, economically and culturally, and therefore it might be more effective to resort to alternative methods to achieve articulation. In her 2003 book, *The Fifth Book of Peace*, Kingston argues that '*The Art of War* is about preventing war: How not to have war. How to win without fighting. Sun Tzu's highest value was peace; he advised going to war only when all other ploys failed' (Kingston 2003, 49). *Thirty-Six Stratagems* advises that when in a disadvantageous situation, a tactic called 'The Beauty Trap' or 'Honeypot' can be used to corrupt the opponent who is stronger, while avoiding direct contact. In Kingston's and Tan's artistic creations, I argue, they present various Chinese cultural elements which can be viewed as the tactics of honeypot, to charm mainstream readers and open up spaces for later generations of artists to experiment with new art forms, although this may risk reinforcing stereotypes of the Chinese American community. I summarise their use of honeypot tactics in three steps: the foremost is to give out an inviting aroma of honey: narrating exotic stories to attract mainstream readers; the next is to get the opponent stuck to the honey: making Westerners believe these Chinese elements to be authentic; the final stage is to cover the honeypot and capture the opponent: outsmarting Westerners and achieving articulation.

Tiger Mothers and Sugar Sisters: Tiger Mother is a term that originated from Amy Chua's bestselling book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011). Researchers have suggested that the Tiger Mother archetype can be traced back to *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* (e.g. Fickle 2014a; Lee 2016). Chinese women hardly migrated to America during the Chinese Exclusion Act period (1882-1943) and Chinatown became a bachelor society. Therefore there were very few mothers able to live in the U.S. at that time. In light of the fact that there used to be so few Chinese American women in the community, it is interesting to see that motherhood has become a popular topic among Chinese American writers (Lee 2016, 63-4). The relation between Amy Chua's contemporary concept and the literary archetype of strict mothers created by Kingston and Tan is an intertextual one: the latter inspires the former, and the former revives the latter. Kingston's, Tan's and Chua's versions of Chinese American motherhood are closely linked with Chinese American identity, which, as Julia Lee notes in the essay 'Model Maternity', is 'constituted and remade by the interplay between the domestic and the foreign, the national and international, the immigrant and the imperial' (Lee 2016, 62).

The term 'Sugar Sister' comes from Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), in which the mother character, Winnie, calls her cousin Peanut 'Sugar Sister':

And that's how we came to be as close as sisters once again for the rest of the time I had left with my family. In fact, from that day forward, until I was married, we called each other tang jie, "sugar sister," the friendly way to refer to a girl cousin. (Tan 1992, 154)

This phrase has been criticised by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, in her essay "Sugar Sisterhood." Situating 'the Amy Tan Phenomenon', as problematic, Wong wrote:

The phrase "sugar sister" is an egregious mistranslation based on Amy Tan's confusing two Chinese homophones, while the accompanying explanation of how the two young women come to address each other by that term betrays a profound ignorance of the Chinese kinship system. (Wong 2009, 55)

Wong also created a new term, 'sugar sisterhood', by adding a suffix to Tan's phrase, to 'designate the kind of readership Amy Tan has acquired, especially among white women' (Wong 2009, 55) and pointed out that Tan's writing contains orientalist and counter-orientalist gestures at the same time.

My thesis negotiates Wong's criticism of 'sugar sisterhood' and examines Kingston's and Tan's readership and their concept of sisterhood. I argue that their sisterhood functions as an aspect of survival strategy, and it is not as sugary as some critics assume.

'Tiger Mother' risks reinforcing the stereotype that all Chinese mothers are cruel to their children; 'Sugar Sister' tends to cause misunderstandings of Chinese kinship and gives a false impression that Chinese American female writers cater to white readers. Despite, or perhaps because of, these negatives, both phrases are influential in popular culture – 'Tiger Mother' has influenced discussions on parenting styles and entered 'into our everyday lexicon' (Wang 2011, 135); 'Sugar Sister' is about the making of a popular gendered readership, about how the book has been accepted by both Asian American and white readers and its influences on mainstream society – a central point in my whole thesis. Focusing on these key phrases in the title of my thesis, I aim to read Kingston's and Tan's works together with selected texts of Chinese culture and American popular culture, analysing how the former inherit and depart from Chinese culture and how they have influenced Chinese/Asian American identity and mainstream popular culture.

Self-orientalism and Anti-orientalism

Kingston and Tan are excellent story-tellers of old China who can arouse readers' interest with their vivid narratives. Here comes the question: Does their imaginary China cater to Westerners' fantasy? To answer this question, I have to examine whether their descriptions of China fall into the pitfall of self-orientalisation.

In her essay "The East is Where Things Begin": Writing the Ancestral Homeland in Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston', Ruth Maxey analyses Kingston's and Tan's self-orientalising tendencies drawing on Edward Said's theory of orientalism. According to Said, 'The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences' (Said 1979, 1). Maxey points out in her essay that Kingston and Tan have represented China as a place of 'haunting memories' and 'remarkable experiences', the two phrases borrowed from Said, particularly in the descriptions of 'famine, deformity, and the loss of children' in China (Maxey 2005, 7). Maxey presents several reasons for Kingston's and Tan's orientalising of China: China may

‘offer limitless opportunities for adventure’ compared with mundane life in America; China ‘allows temporal escapism’ as an ‘ahistorical homeland’; which ‘provides an irresistible creative wellspring and wide poetic licence for Kingston and Tan to construct it as they wish’; the tragic difficulties in old China are a vindication of ‘the older generation’s decision to emigrate’, writing about China may be their ‘attempt to find their genetic bearings and to reconcile the competing influences of family and America’, and there may also be ‘commercial factors’ (Maxey 2005, 11). It is clear that Maxey regards Kingston’s and Tan’s China to be self-orientalising, and ‘open to the charge of pandering to popularity and financial success’ (Maxey 2005, 11).

I agree with Maxey’s opinion that Kingston and Tan have self-orientalising tendencies when portraying old China as an exotic place: misogyny, the mountain and the swordswoman, the ghost stories, and the bizarre superstitious traditions, all give the impression that, back in China, everything seems to be primitive and strange. Girls are useless in China, they are called ‘maggots in the rice’ (Kingston 1989b, 43); the women have to keep their chastity, otherwise they must commit suicide like the no name woman in *The Woman Warrior* or like An-mei’s mother in *The Joy Luck Club*; the mothers give their daughters lectures based on superstitious beliefs. Compared with civilised and rational American society, patriarchal China is a horrible and incomprehensible place for the American daughters in Kingston’s and Tan’s texts. In this sense, Kingston and Tan have treated China as the Other, joining the club of those orientalist writers who ‘have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on’ (Said 1979, 2-3).

Despite such evidence of their self-orientalising gestures, however, I argue that this is a strategic form of self-orientalism, which, to some extent, can be viewed as anti-orientalist. By strategic, I mean that Kingston’s and Tan’s presentations of China aim to attract Westerners, to win readers, rather than to demonise Chinese people and culture as most orientalists would do. The Chinese people in their works are not always the stereotyped submissive women and emasculated men of Western desire. Nelly Mok points out that Kingston, in *The Woman Warrior*, ‘questions the Western perception of the Asian woman and Asian femininity, upsetting the Orientalist stereotypes attributed to her sex and to her race’ (Mok 2014, 61). Mok analyses how Kingston refuses to use a simple strategy of gender reversal, but ‘makes the anti-

essentialist claim that the Chinese American woman's integrity lies in paradoxes and can be recovered only in her de-essentialized (self-)perception', and challenges 'the solely race-based, culture-based delimitation of the Chinese/Asian community' (Mok 2014, 75). Melanie McAlister, in her essay '(Mis) Reading *The Joy Luck Club*', views the fragmented structure of *The Joy Luck Club* as 'a strategy against the discourse of Orientalism. By having each of her characters tell her story, in her own words, of who she is and how she has come into her own, Tan confronts an Orientalist discourse that depends on the sameness of Chinese difference' (McAlister 2009, 10). Eleanor Ty notes in *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* that those activities such as 'playing mah-jong, shopping for treats, or making a meal' performed by mothers after migration in Tan's work 'signify resistance and survival' (Ty 2004, 102).

I argue that Kingston and Tan adopt an anti-orientalist stance by working through complexities and contradictions of Chinese American female identity, combining and recombining various elements in ways that are provocative, dangerous and at times ambiguous, as the female characters are depicted as rebellious, radical and irrational at the same time.

Sheng-mei Ma points out in *The Deathly Embrace* that 'in order to retire racist stereotypes, one [i.e., the Asian American writer] is obliged to first evoke them; in order to construct ethnicity, one must first destruct what is falsely reported as one's ethnic identity. Both result in an unwitting reiteration of orientalist images' (Ma 2000, XI). Kingston and Tan, as two minority authors, are telling their own experiences with their own languages, combining their understandings of Chinese culture and American values. To build a new Chinese American womanhood, Kingston and Tan have to revisit the misogynous old China, although their purpose is to dismantle the China doll and dragon lady stereotypes. Self-orientalism and anti-orientalism coexist in their writings, just like the contradictions between being American citizens and inheriting ancestral traditions do for many ethnic writers.

Chinese American Literature

The term 'Chinese Americans' refers to 'persons of Chinese ancestry residing permanently in the United States regardless of nativity' (Wong 1997, 39). Sometimes the term is written as 'Chinese-American', but nowadays the hyphen is mostly

removed. In the essay 'Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers', Kingston says she prefers to 'leave out the hyphen in "Chinese-American"' because with the hyphen, it 'looks as if a Chinese-American has double citizenship', while without the hyphen, 'a Chinese American is a type of American' (Kingston 1982, 60). Almost all subsequent critics have adopted this usage as well as the term 'Chinese American literature'. Recently some scholarship tends to reclaim the hyphen in Chinese American literature when there are some Chinese authors writing about China in English, as pointed out in King-kok Cheung's *Chinese American Literature without Borders* (Cheung 2016, 9-10). What I mainly focus on in my research are those texts written by Chinese American writers, and therefore I employ the term hyphen free.

Representations of Chinese Americans in Popular Culture

Chinese American identity and literary studies are intertwined with Asian American studies. Chinese Americans are among the main representatives of Asian Americans, although the heterogeneities of different Asian American groups should not be overlooked.

Chinese arrived in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century for the Gold Rush. They were welcomed by the Americans initially because they 'provided a much-needed labor force and brought with them "exotic rituals" of celebration', but the policy changed after the early 1850s as more Chinese immigrants poured into the States (Yin 2000, 15, 17). Chinese Americans, along with other Asian Americans, have been categorised as 'the Oriental', 'an alien body and a threat to the American national family' (Lee 1999, 8). Robert Lee, in his work *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, summarises six representations of the Oriental in different historical periods. The first one is regarding Asians as a 'pollutant' in mid-nineteenth century, when the Chinese were no longer the objects of exotic fantasy but signified 'the moral chaos of the Gold Rush', and as 'the harbingers of industrial wage slavery' were excluded from California in the late 1860s (Lee 1999, 9). In the 1870s and 1880s, Chinese workers were represented as coolies, 'a threat to the white working man's family' (Lee 1999, 9). The third type Lee identifies is the 'deviant', referring to the Chinese servants who worked in white people's households (Lee 1999, 9). They were accused of being potential seducers of 'interracial sex' (Lee 1999, 10). The fourth representation, the 'yellow peril', formed at the turning point between the nineteenth and the twentieth

centuries, are the intruders who might erode and ruin Western civilisation. These four representations of the Oriental were created during the Chinese Exclusion period, when Chinese immigrants were generally demonised. For example, an early representative of the evil Chinese in American literary works is Ah Sin, a character first appearing in Bret Harte's poem 'The Heathen Chinese' (1870) and later in *Ah Sin* (1877), a play co-written by Harte and Mark Twain. The story is about a Chinese named Ah Sin who cheats in a card game with two white men. The racism of the depiction is evident in the name of the protagonist, 'Sin'. Another example is the notorious figure of Fu Manchu first created by the English novelist Sax Rohmer in 1913, where detectives hunt out the evil master convict Chinese Fu Manchu. This image was later adapted into movies, TV and comic books, forming into an archetype of the criminal Yellow Peril, 'a sexual threat to White women and a political threat to Western civilization as he attempts to rule the world' (Chan 2001, 3).

Not all Chinese images are of the evil type during the anti-Chinese period; sometimes they were portrayed as amicable, meek and obedient. The classic stereotype is Charlie Chan, a fictional figure created by American writer, Earl Derr Biggers. Unlike Fu Manchu, the master criminal, Charlie Chan is a detective who maintains social order. This seemingly friendly gesture towards Chinese, in fact, reinforces the stereotype that Chinese males are submissive, castrated and a type of 'benevolent Other', a precursor of the model minority (Kato 2007, 138). In the poem 'Parents', the Chinese American poet Fay Chiang tells how her father, who came to America as a 'paper son' during the anti-Chinese period and worked in the laundry, was called 'Charlie' by the customers.

he,
came to America
aged 11 washing people's socks

slept in class
a paper son with false papers
bought back in the village
because America restricted aliens.

I have a cameo photograph of him.
New York Chinatown. 1939.
out with the boys on Sunday
(america only let the guys in)
hey! That dude was some snappy dresser.
during the war, they let him work
the navy yards
as an apprentice steelwelder
but when the soldiers came home
laundry customers called him,
Charlie. (Chiang)

The excerpt vividly described the prejudice experienced by Chinese American men during the Chinese Exclusion period.

In this period and even much later, Chinese Americans are indelibly associated with the evil of opium. Chinese appear as friends of gangsters in the movie *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), in which the Chinese opium den offers a shelter for the leading gangster 'Noodles'. Opium is depicted as an evil force that destroys people, and a threat to the great civilisation of the West; what remains unmentioned is that opium was used as a weapon against China by Britain in its imperialist project when opium was smuggled to China by British merchants and the British waged wars against China to legalise the opium trade for financial purpose in the mid-nineteenth century (Pletcher 2010, 231-6). In orientalist representations, the opium den stands for the primitiveness and impotence of the Chinese race as well as their humiliating history as a semi-colonised nation.

After the invalidation of the Chinese Exclusion Act, new popular representations of Chinese immigrants began to appear. According to Robert Lee, after the 1950s, Chinese Americans were viewed as model minorities, successful and assimilated immigrant role models for other minorities (Lee 1999, 10). The sixth representation of

the Oriental was formed in the 1970s, the gook – ‘the invisible enemy and the embodiment of inauthentic racial and national identities’ (Lee 1999, 11).

Immigrant Acts and Cultural Identity

In her interdisciplinary monograph, *Immigrants Acts*, Lisa Lowe discusses the contradictions between ‘the use of Asian labor in the development of capitalist America’ and ‘distancing [of] Asian Americans – even as citizens – from the terrain of national culture’ (Lowe 1996, ix). This distancing makes it possible to understand Asian American culture as ‘an alternative cultural site and the place where the contradictions of immigrant history are read, performed, and critiqued’ (Lowe 1996, ix-x). Although marginalised, Asian American culture, as one of the United States’ major alternative cultural sites, is able to reveal how ‘law, labor exploitation, racialization, and gendering work to prohibit alternatives’ (Lowe 1996, x). The meaning of ‘Immigrants Acts’ is multi-layered: it can refer to the laws that reject Asian Americans from being legal residents as well as to how immigrants act to counteract immigration laws through their alternative cultural forms and performative social acts. The relation between the immigrants and laws (acts) becomes dynamic, and immigrant culture plays a vital role in laying bare the racist nature of America as a nation state.

Chinese American literary creations, as an alternative cultural form, are thus a site that can be made to reveal the contradictions of American immigrant history, of how Chinese immigrants were accepted in workplaces and markets but marked as perpetual foreigners. My research focuses on Kingston’s and Tan’s achievements in entering the realm of mainstream publishing market. Kingston’s and Tan’s **acts** are performed through depicting seemingly exotic aspects of Chinese culture while simultaneously, they may be able to expose the **acts** that prohibit Chinese immigrants and position Chinese American culture as permanently alternative, when interacting with mainstream popular culture. In their works, mothers stand for Chinese tradition, which is incompatible with the American society and makes them outsiders; however, it is the ancestral tradition that the daughters can draw on to form their unique language and narratives that attract Western readers so much. When **acting**, or telling their own experiences to mainstream readers, they are able to resist the six representations of Chinese Americans in popular culture as mentioned earlier, and to transform their identity from misfits to victors. Their **acts** of transformation can be viewed as

performing ‘a strategy for maintenance and integration with society’ that ‘becomes a site of creative empowerment’, to borrow Eleanor Ty’s words (Ty 2004, 28).

Resistance vs. Accommodation

The 1960s witnessed a new era of Chinese American literature with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, the second wave feminist movement and the movement against the war in Vietnam. Authors like Maxine Hong Kingston and Frank Chin both ‘demonstrate ethnic pride as they recount and redefine the Chinese American experience’ during this period (Yin 2000, 230), despite the fact that they belong to opposite camps and have carried on a pen war for a long period. Frank Chin and his group belong to the male nationalists, who highlight the authenticity of Chinese culture represented in literary works. In the introduction to *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), the first anthology of Asian American literature, Chin defines a true Asian American sensibility as ‘non-Christian, nonfeminine, and non-immigrant’ (quoted from Wong 1993, 8). Later in 1991, in the introduction of the revised and expanded version of the anthology *The Big Aiiieeee!*, titled *Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake*, Chin cuttingly criticises Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang and Amy Tan as writers who ‘so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian American lore in history’ (Chin 2005a, 135). This pen war lasted for decades.

The contradictions in Asian/Chinese American immigrant history and the conflicts within Asian/Chinese American literary circles such as the pen war mentioned above are evidence of Viet Thanh Nguyen’s statement that ‘Asian American literature literally embodies the contradictions, conflicts, and potential future options of Asian American culture’ (Nguyen 2002, 3). Critics like Frank Chin show a stance of resistance to mainstream society, preferring ‘the bad subject’, rather than ‘the model minority’ in their literary works (Nguyen 2002, 5-6). Nguyen calls instead for ‘flexible strategies’ (Nguyen 2002, 4) in Asian American academia when reading and evaluating Asian American literary works, replacing the rigid doctrine that has been institutionalised since the 1960s. Nguyen borrows the term ‘panethnic entrepreneurship’, which can be applied in contemporary academia as a flexible strategy to blur the ‘distinction between resistance and accommodation’, and to negotiate ‘struggle, survival, and possible assimilation’ (Nguyen 2002, 5). In the first

chapter of this monograph, Nguyen uses the stories of the Eurasian Eaton sisters – the ‘good’ Edith (aka. Sui Sin Far), who wrote about Chinese American community, and the bad Winnifred (aka. Onoto Watanna), who pretended to be Japanese and wrote popular romance – to criticise the resistance-vs-accommodation approach within Asian American academia. Sui Sin Far is praised as ‘one of the first to speak for an Asian-American sensibility that was neither Asian nor white American’ (Chin et al. 1974, xxi) even by Frank Chin and his group, who mainly acclaimed male nationalists. Nguyen argues that Onoto Watanna should also be respected because her ‘[c]ompliancy and accommodation are flexible strategies that were and remain important political choices for Asian Americans that are overlooked by assumptions about Asian American identity as being inherently, or desirably, oppositional’ (Nguyen 2002, 26).

Nguyen’s research offers a new theoretical approach through which to evaluate Kingston’s and Tan’s texts beyond the debate on whether their representations of Chinese culture are authentic or whether their stance is a sell-out; this approach also indirectly explains the contradiction between self-orientalisation and anti-orientalisation in their writings, which I have discussed earlier. Kingston and Tan, by using Chinese cultural elements, not only realise articulation but also try to change the alienated status of Chinese American culture and to influence mainstream culture. However, I do not think Kingston’s and Tan’s works, especially Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, fully fall into Nguyen’s ‘accommodation’ model, because there are many resistive elements in their texts, despite the fact that they are more understandable and accessible for mainstream readers.

‘Social Facts’ and the Constraints of Genre

The rigid standard in Asian American scholarly circles that Nguyen aims to criticise takes a mainly socio-political approach when reading literary works, overlooking the artistic aestheticism within their creations. In *Narrating Nationalisms*, Jinqi Ling has noted the tendency of ‘a privileging of content over form’ in Asian American literary criticism (Ling 1998, 7). In this book, Ling’s analysis of the much-debated attitude in Frank Chin’s *Aiiieeeee!* confirms Chin’s cultural nationalist proclamations on the one hand, while revealing its political naivety and racial exclusionary tendency on the other.

In recent years, some Asian American scholars have directed their attention to studying the role of genres (e.g. Zhou and Najmi 2005; Lawrence and Cheung 2005). Among them, Betsy Huang's *Contesting Genres* not only has noticed the recent trend of cross-genre works in Asian American writing but also examined literary texts through a cultural studies approach. Confronted with the fact that the 'representational vocabulary' still focuses on 'a set of conventionalized clichés and stereotypes' through the perspective of social politics, rather than reading Asian American works as 'aesthetic objects', Huang explores three types of genre – immigrant fiction, crime fiction, and science fiction – which are 'highly structured' but marginalised in academic circles, arguing that these genres help 'rewrite the generalized narratives about Asian American history, culture and identity' (Huang 2010, 3-7). Based on her comprehensive analysis of these three popular genres, and the chosen texts in which those writers resist dominant imperatives and expectations, Huang concludes that genre constraints should be eliminated in Asian American writing in order to reorganise Asian American identities and subjectivities.

Kingston's and Tan's mixed genres, which, I argue, have been influenced by traditional Chinese fiction writing can also be viewed as a strategy to dismantle conventional Western genre boundaries and mainstream genre imperatives that equate ethnic works with life writing, and sometimes consider the latter as entailing less creativity. Both authors' notable works are written in first-person narrative, which may imply that the stories are based on real experiences of their own or of the community. This misleading assumption is likely to make mainstream readers seek the truthfulness and authenticity of these writings rather than appreciate them as creative works. On the other hand, it is difficult to categorise Kingston's and Tan's works according to traditional genre classifications: Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* are a mix of tales, myths and autobiographical, biographical and historical materials (Lim 1986, 68); Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* can be viewed as 'at once a collection of short stories and a coherent novel' (Dong 2009, 20), and the structure of the work resembles the mah-jong game, containing four sections for each family, with each section subdivided into four stories by different narrators. According to Western genre theory, genre 'actively generate[s] and shape[s] knowledge of the world' (Frow 2005, 2) and 'as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity' (Derrida and

Ronell 1980, 57), which implies that mixing the genre conventions will violate the Western knowledge system and destabilise people's understanding of the world. In this sense, Kingston's and Tan's cross-genre writing can be regarded as a weapon to challenge mainstream norms and regulations. Therefore, I argue that their paradoxical use of first-person narrative and cross-genre writing needs to be further explored; more importantly, I analyse the connections between their genres and traditional Chinese fiction writing and other art forms in Chapter 2. I explore their adoption of talk-story, non-linear narration and other techniques, which I argue are legacies from traditional Chinese art forms, to investigate how they challenge Western autobiographical and fiction imperatives and how they transcend the boundaries of genres to realise aesthetic achievements.

Huang's *Contesting Genres* also directs me to the field of mass culture, in which Asian American writers perform their strategies of survival. In Kingston's and Tan's case, they draw on Chinese cultural elements both in genre and content to attract mainstream readers and open up windows on the walls that divide white society and Asian/Chinese American communities, despite perpetuating negative stereotypes simultaneously.

Chinese American Literary Texts and Popular Culture

Asian/Chinese American literary studies is interrelated with Asian/Chinese American cultural studies. However, there is a dominant trend in the critiques of Asian American studies that considers these literary texts 'as a kind of social fact' (Lye 2008, 92). This is the situation that Nguyen and Huang have criticised, as discussed above, arguing that scholars within Asian American communities tend to adopt a socio-political approach and risks viewing literary works as merely social facts rather than artistic creations.

In the case of the two authors that I focus on, the authenticity of the Chinese elements represented in their works has been heatedly debated within Asian American academia in the early years. For instance, Katheryn Fong interrogates Kingston's personal experiences, arguing they 'do not totally represent the identity of all Chinese American women' (Fong 1977, 67). Although Frank Chin and Amy Ling represent different groups of Asian American literary critics, i.e., cultural nationalists and feminists, they both try to judge the authenticity of literary works, including in Kingston's and Tan's writings. Chin aims to criticise female writers who sell out their Asian community and

Asian culture by following ‘the Christian autobiographical tradition’ (Chin 1985, 110) and becoming ‘yellow agent(s) of stereotype’ (quoted from Kim 1990, 76), while Ling considers their books to be ‘authentic’ by delineating real personal experiences (Ling 1990, 15). In my opinion, it is problematic to focus on the authenticity of Kingston’s and Tan’s works. Instead, it is of greater significance to find out how and why Kingston and Tan are so enthusiastic in using Chinese elements, and what they have achieved in their artistic articulation and interaction with mass culture.

In this thesis, I avoid the persistent focus on the authenticity or otherwise of the representations of Chinese elements in Chinese American writings. I negotiate this debate by analysing the reasons and contexts of Kingston’s and Tan’s adoptions of the prism of Chinese culture in their writings, and discuss how Kingston and Tan have both inherited and departed from Chinese culture. Also, I conduct the research from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines literary, racial and cultural studies approaches: I not only work on the Chinese elements that have been borrowed in Kingston’s and Tan’s works as a form of textual analysis; rather, I investigate the link between the Chinese elements represented in the texts and the emergence of popular culture inflected by Chinese cultural elements in the United States. Most of the existing research on the use of Chinese elements of Kingston and Tan still applies the traditional approach of literary studies. For example, Yan Gao’s *The Art of Parody: Maxine Hong Kingston’s Use of Chinese Sources* (1996) mainly discusses the materials borrowed from traditional Chinese literature and explains some Chinese-style linguistic features in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey*. Gao’s argumentation is quite comprehensive and inspiring, but the author’s major focus is on Chinese sources from historical and literary angles, rather than an analysis on the influence of Kingston’s books on American popular culture.

While there has been some interdisciplinary scholarship on Chinese/Asian American literary works, such as the monographs by Lisa Lowe, Viet Thanh Nguyen and Betsy Huang (as discussed previously), I hope my research may expand the knowledge in interdisciplinary studies specifically on Kingston and Tan. I explore in particular the relationship between the works of Kingston and Tan and their emergence in mainstream popular culture and the entertainment industry. For example, I propose that the Disney animation *Mulan* (1998) and the Oscar nominated feature film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) draw on the figure of the swordswomen in

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston creates a modernised and rebellious female role model in her character, Fa Mu Lan, based on a Chinese folk story to 'establi[sh] a bridge between two cultures that leads to the heroine's popularity in America' (Dong 2011, 7). Although Disney's *Mulan* is commercialised and seems to 'supplemen[t] Orientalist fantasies with contemporary youth culture' (Ma 2000, 127) in some critics' eyes, we cannot downplay the fact that the image of Mulan has become one of the rare positive role models for girls in the Disney family of characters (Yin 2011, 54). Mulan is not as weak and vulnerable as are the traditional Disney female figures fabricated for patriarchal tastes, such as Snow White and Cinderella, encaged and awaiting male heroes to save them; on the contrary, Mulan is an independent and liberated heroine who protects her people and pursues self-fulfilment.

A further example of the interaction between literary works and popular culture is the movie adaptation of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, a box-office success that was the outcome of active collaboration among producers, cast and author, who are all from Asian American communities, and who established a sisterly bonding during the filmmaking. The strange-but-familiar theme of the mother-daughter relationships as represented in this movie was highly successful with mainstream audiences, and further cultural products based on Tan's well-acclaimed works are planned, such as the opera version of her novel *Bonesetter's Daughter* (Chang 2015). Through these means, once marginalised Chinese American voices and characters enter the mainstream, and the sisterhood within Asian American communities provides its members with intellectual, financial and emotional support.

A third significant instance is the literary model created by Kingston and Tan, which has opened the door for successors to new possibilities and styles to assert a place in the white-dominant society. The authoritative mother figures described in Kingston's and Tan's works are echoed in *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011) by a Chinese American Harvard scholar, Amy Chua. The book, a bestseller about what is represented as 'Chinese style mothering', led to heated discussions of Eastern and Western modes of education. Amy Chua's strict Chinese American mother bears marked similarities to the mothers in Kingston's and Tan's works: all have high expectations of their children and emphasise academic achievements more than other skills. Self-described Tiger mother Amy Chua's practice is quite common among mothers of Chinese ancestry and is strongly opposed by some Americans, but also

provokes their reflections on reassessment of Western laissez-faire methods of education. I explore the interaction between Chinese American writings and mainstream culture and analyse whether, and if so, how, it helps challenge, or, reinforce stereotypes when Chinese American writers are in the paradoxical situation of being assimilated and excluded at the same time.

My analysis of how Kingston and Tan use Chinese elements in their works is also a form of intercultural research, because I will inspect the diasporic Chinese elements from a mainland Chinese perspective, drawing on my own understandings of traditional Chinese culture rather than relying on Chinese American or white American points of view. Wenche Ommundsen points out in her essay, 'Transnational Imaginaries: Reading Asian Australian Writing: Introduction', that recent research has focused more on 'writing in the migrant writer's native language', which calls for 'multiple literacies' of 'acknowledging linguistic, formal and generic influences from other traditions' (Ommundsen 2012, 3-4). Although Kingston and Tan mostly write in standardised American English, characters such as the mothers in their texts tend to speak a Chinese-inflected English and sometimes Chinese. As a bilingual reader, I aim to bring another form of cultural and linguistic literacy to my research, in which I recognise the linguistic features of those mother characters as a type of World English, or Chinese English that is not so comprehensible to English speakers but makes sense from the perspective of bilingual speakers.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 'A Critical Review of Kingston's and Tan's Chinese Cultural Representations' is a brief and critical exploration of the most important and relevant Chinese elements described in Kingston's and Tan's works, and establishes certain connections between these cultural elements and the following chapters. Scholarship has already covered many aspects of the Chinese elements in their works, and therefore I only highlight those relevant to my argument. I focus on the borrowed myths and classical Chinese literary works as well as the linguistic influence from Chinese language in Kingston's and Tan's works. I also analyse the 'Ghost' image in both authors' writings for its multi-layered meanings and thematic functions. In order to challenge the stereotype of Chinese being fascinated with bizarre food, I explore how different culinary and dining concepts between mothers and daughters in Kingston's

and Tan's writings stand for a generational gap and a clash between tradition and Americanisation, rather than serving solely as an exotic element. Last but not the least, I work on the game mah-jong, which functions as a key element for both the content and the form of *The Joy Luck Club*. The significance of mah-jong for those mothers lies in its function as a way of survival in wartime and as a medium to form sisterhood.

Chapter 2 'Kingston's and Tan's Cross-genre Writing' focuses on form and genre. I argue that Kingston and Tan incorporate Chinese traditional fiction styles and other art forms into their ambiguous genres as an artistic articulation to counteract stereotypes. Kingston's and Tan's experimental genres bear a few similarities to traditional Chinese fiction writing, such as non-linear storytelling and mah-jong style fragmented narratives, and as a result, their works are hard to define as novels or short stories, which are strictly regulated in Western norms. The ambiguity of their genres also lies in the mixing of fiction and nonfiction. Kingston's and Tan's life writing style does not follow the canonised Western autobiographical tradition, but bears a resemblance to Chinese autobiographical tradition, a field that has been ignored by many Chinese as well as Western scholars. Kingston's and Tan's writing style is also embedded within traditional Chinese art forms, especially the concepts of emptiness and mobility, which symbolises the shifting and transforming aspects of Chinese Americans as well as their ambition to challenge the Western knowledge system.

Chapters 1 and 2 are couched more as explorations of literary sources, while from chapter 3 to 5 I adopt an interdisciplinary approach which combines literary studies with cultural studies to explore how Kingston's and Tan's works interact with American mainstream culture. These chapters are the core of my thesis and analyse new cultural symbols and figures that are different from the old stereotypes of Chinese Americans in previous Chinese American writings.

The first new Chinese cultural figure I examine is that of the female warrior, Fa Mu Lan in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. In Chapter 3, 'Mulan's Trip to the West and back', I trace the historical background information about this figure in China and analyse how Kingston transforms Fa Mu Lan into a mixed identity girl who lives in America and is confused about her ancestral culture. Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is not a copy of the Chinese version since her writing context is different from that of patriarchal premodern China. The new Fa Mu Lan image is independent and a model

of androgyny. Kingston's revised Fa Mu Lan has been criticised by a group of Chinese Americans represented by author Frank Chin; however, it is her adaptation that introduced Fa Mu Lan into the Western world. Kingston's rebellious woman warrior Fa Mu Lan has given inspiration to the Disney Company, leading to the birth of the animation *Mulan* (1998), a rare Asian face on a Disney screen. Despite the fact that Disney's *Mulan* is not as feminist a fighter as in Kingston's version, the positive aspect is that the age-old Chinese heroine becomes well-known in American popular culture. The fact that *Mulan* has become the cultural icon of a Chinese woman warrior shatters the stereotype that Chinese American women are all submissive and vulnerable. The transformation of the Chinese legendary heroine to Kingston's woman warrior and then to one of the Disney princesses reveals the mobility and fluidity of culture.

Chapter 4 'Tiger Mother, Burning Bright' explores another new Chinese American phenomenon – Tiger Mothering. Although the term Tiger Mother is newly coined by Amy Chua, I argue that this Chinese style parenting has existed in Chinese American writing for a long time. I examine legends of mothering in premodern China and investigate the mother images in Kingston's and Tan's works as well and comparing the two with Amy Chua's model of Tiger Mothering. It is true that the Tiger Mother phenomenon risks reinforcing the impression that Chinese parents are strict and their children obedient and nerdy, but it is also a way for Chinese females to articulate in American mainstream society. Julia Lee points out that 'Reading *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* means recognizing that Asian American racial formation is both imposed upon a racialized population and embraced and revised by Asian Americans themselves' (Lee 2016, 72). I focus on the performativity in Kingston's, Tan's and Chua's texts on mother-daughter relationships to see how they form their racial identity when merging into mainstream society.

Chapter 5 'Yellow Sisterhood' is about Chinese style sisterhood and its influence in Kingston's and Tan's books. Sisterhood is not a fresh word to the feminist movement in the Western world, but Chinese style sisterhood is rarely touched upon in this scholarship. In this chapter I examine the historic materials about Chinese women's societies in premodern China as well as the descriptions of the 'Land of Women' in traditional Chinese literary works. I argue that there is a certain connection between the ancient Chinese sisterhood tradition and Kingston's and Tan's world of women. I compare traditional Chinese women's alliances with the fictional sisterhood portrayed

by Kingston and Tan to see if sisterhood is a way of survival for women in a foreign culture. Sisterhood not only appears in their artistic creations in Chinese the American community. The literary sisterhood formed among Kingston, Tan and their followers explains why there have been so many female authors of Asian ancestry appearing in the West. I also elaborate on another aspect of Chinese American sisterhood in the movie industry, where the movie adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club* has proved that Asian-themed movies can achieve success and has promoted Asian American actors in mainstream culture.

Chapter 6 'Version 2.0: Two Updated Works' examines two more recent works by two younger Chinese American authors, Marilyn Chin and Lisa See. I view the two books as updated versions of Kingston's and Tan's writings in the new millennium. This chapter is also an extension of the literary sisterhood embodied in the previous chapter. Marilyn Chin's *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* (2009) can be regarded as an upgraded version of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, but it has departed from the latter on various levels. The use of double protagonists, avoidance of mother-daughter narratives, and particularly the wild sexuality presented in Chin's book further extends these aspects of feminist articulation which were not fully developed in *The Woman Warrior*. As to the Chinese cultural elements, I focus on the vixen image tradition in Chinese literary history and how it is represented in Chin's writing. Lisa See's *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2005) depicts various Chinese symbols and rituals, including footbinding, *laotong* (a special relationship between two girls) and *nu shu* (a mysterious writing system used only by women), which also aroused interest from the movie industry. I analyse how See's writing inherits Kingston's and Tan's matrilineal tradition and rediscovers the trauma of their female ancestors. The two newer books updated Kingston's and Tan's writings and prove that Chinese American female authors have found their way of articulation drawing on their cultural inheritance. However, Kingston's and Tan's legacies are not completely the same and therefore they opened up different directions for their followers: Chin's writing contains more resistive elements while See's points to a wider readership.

The thesis focuses on how Chinese cultural elements are represented in Kingston's and Tan's works and how they use them as a survival strategy to counteract mainstream stereotypes of Chinese Americans. I mainly analyse Kingston's and Tan's early works, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The*

Kitchen God's Wife (1991), particularly their representative works *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*, which have been widely circulated among Western readers. Although there has already been research on similar topics both in America and China, interdisciplinary studies have not been fully emphasised in the field of Chinese American literary studies. Most of the studies on the two authors mobilise traditional literary approaches, while new readings are only emerging recently (e.g. Lee 2016; Fickle 2014c) and there is space for new perspectives. Kingston's and Tan's popularity amongst mainstream readers shows that interaction with popular culture is an effective method to keep ethnic literary creations alive. This is also true of Chinese American literary studies.

By analysing Kingston's and Tan's use of Chinese elements as well as the influence on American popular culture, I hope to bring a new perspective, which combines literary texts with popular culture, and reads Chinese American literature, particularly the canonised works of Kingston and Tan, within a broader field which is not restricted to textual analysis. These texts have influenced popular culture as well as Chinese American identity as the constitution of the Chinese American population along with the American society has changed over the years. It is meaningful to examine how the texts and popular culture interpenetrate each other.

Chapter 1. A Critical Review of Kingston's and Tan's Chinese Cultural Representations

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things you are in 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? (Kingston 1989b, 5-6)

Living among white people and Chinese immigrants, the narrator, as well as Kingston herself, feels it quite impossible to tell what Chineseness is. Chinese traditions cannot be separated from their representations such as the mother's tales and the Hong Kong movies that circulate in diaspora Chinese communities. The narrator is not asking her fellow Chinese Americans how to define Chineseness, but rather trying to explain that she cannot really tell how China is. As a Chinese born and brought up in mainland China, I am confident to say that I can easily identify Chinese elements and their representations, but I still find it difficult to summarise them in a systematic way because China is made up of many aspects and layers, a nation of long histories and vast territories. It is unsurprising that Chinese Americans such as Kingston and Tan find their ancestral culture bewildering when they were brought up under mixed cultural influences from immigrant parents and communities as well as from mainstream society. Therefore, it seems not so surprising that Chinese elements exhibited in their works turn out to be exotic according to Western eyes, while on the other hand, they seem not so authentic for Chinese readers.

As to their representations of Chinese culture and their popularity among Western readers, critics have expressed opposing attitudes. The most famous statement was that made by Frank Chin and his *Aiiiiieee!* group, accusing Kingston and Tan of 'so boldly fak[ing] the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history' (Chin 2005a, 135). This was provoked mainly by Kingston's rewriting of Hua Mulan's story in *The Woman Warrior* and Tan's adoption of the swan story in the opening chapter of *The Joy Luck Club*. Chin repeatedly emphasised that Kingston's and Tan's representations of Chinese culture are full of errors and are a degradation of Chinese masculinity and heroic tradition. Ruth Maxey reckons that the China image Kingston and Tan create 'is characterized by feudal decay, outlandish customs, misogyny, and natural and political cataclysm' and 'it is

by no means inevitable that they should rely on it so heavily as a textual resource' (Maxey 2005, 2). This harsh criticism points out that Kingston and Tan expose the evil side of old China with neither solid historical knowledge nor national pride.

To the second-generation Chinese Americans, surviving in white-dominated society and gaining fame as writers resembles a game of chess, in which one must learn and follow the American rules, the prerequisite of survival. As to how to succeed, as in winning a chess game, one must have 'the clearest plans for both attacking and getting out of traps' and sometimes one 'need[s] to lose pieces to get ahead' as Tan puts it in her debut work *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan 1998, 94, 97). Adopting Chinese elements seems to be the secret trick for writers like Kingston and Tan to transcend their marginal status and become popular in mainstream society. While they become well-accepted by the white readers, it may be unavoidable to arouse attacks from all sides: it may come from the Chinese in China who think they are more authoritative to represent and promote Chinese culture, and it may also be triggered out of jealousy from Chinese American male authors who could be equally talented but still remain comparatively obscure in the marketplace. This just resembles the strategy of losing pieces to get ahead in chess playing.

In this chapter I will analyse a series of Chinese elements exhibited in both Kingston's and Tan's works. These elements are often reminiscent of the culture in China and some of them are frequently picked up in previous critiques. I view these elements as Chinese due to the fact that they are recognised as such by both Chinese such as me, and by some diasporic Chinese scholars and readers. I will not work on all the elements in detail because previous scholarship has tackled this topic and it is impossible to deal with every aspect of the massive Chinese cultural system in such a short chapter. My focal point in this chapter is to examine the function of the adoption of selected Chinese elements in Kingston's and Tan's books according to my understanding of Chineseness. Do they merely work as a kind of five-spice powder to add exotic flavour, or are they an integral part of the narratives? I will select some essential Chinese sources including traditional literature and language, the ghost image, culinary tradition, and the mah-jong game, to probe into Kingston's and Tan's narrative strategies in this context.

Literature and Language: Myths and Classical Literary Works, Literal Translation of Chinese Words, Symbolic Meanings of Characters' Names

As ethnic writers, Kingston and Tan have absorbed alternative literary and oral traditions and have been influenced by their family environments in linguistic expression. This part of the chapter elaborates on the aspects related to Chinese traditional literature and Chinese style language in their works.

Chinese Literary Tradition

The appropriation of Chinese myths, folklore and classical literary works in Kingston's and Tan's works might be the most controversial aspect among the Chinese elements they use, and they are also the focal point of most negative comments. Zhang Ya-Jie, a visiting scholar in America from China back in the 1980s, wrote an article stating that Kingston's remarks and revised stories in *The Woman Warrior* have 'offended my sense of national pride as well as my idea of personal discretion' at first impression because 'the stories in it seemed somewhat twisted, Chinese perhaps in origin but not really Chinese any more, full of American imagination' (Zhang 1986, 103). Another Chinese reader, Qing-yun Wu, found Kingston's 'bold rewriting of some Chinese tales to be disturbing' for Kingston merges Chinese tales into her family saga, making her 'an unreliable author' (Wu 1991, 87-8). Of course, the archrival of Kingston and Tan, Frank Chin, inevitably considered that their works 'are not consistent with Chinese fairy tales and childhood literature' (Chin 2005a, 139).

Kingston and Tan have adopted and revised several Chinese myths and literary works in their books, which appear to be exotic not only to Westerners but also to the Chinese. The most evident case is the rewriting of the Chinese legendary figure Hua Mulan into a feminist role model in the second chapter, 'White Tigers', of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Most critics think that Kingston merges Hua Mulan with another Chinese historical figure, Yue Fei. I will elaborate on this rewriting in Chapter 3 due to its huge impact on various areas including feminist literature, American popular culture and Chinese mass culture. But here I want to mention that in this Fa Mu Lan story, Kingston's wording and description is infused with Chinese literary tradition, rather than a simple rearrangement of Hua Mulan's and Yue Fei's tales. For example, when the narrator is treated by an old man and an old woman on the mountain, she sees that the teapot and the rice pot 'seemed bottomless' (Kingston 1989b, 21). This reminds

me of the story 'The Taoist Priest of Lao-shan' in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Pu Songling of the Qing dynasty, in which a villager called Mr. Wang, when having a meal with some Taoist disciples, wondered 'how seven or eight people could all be served out of a single kettle' of wine while all of them 'failed to empty the kettle' (Pu Songling 1880, 18). In the later part of 'White Tigers', Kingston mentions that the narrator and her followers lay 'against the Long Wall and cried like the women who had come here looking for their men so long building the wall' (Kingston 1989b, 43). Here the 'Long Wall' is a literal translation of the Great Wall, and the crying women are just like Lady Meng Jiang (or Meng Jiang Nü) in a famous legend. It tells about this Lady Meng Jiang, who cried over the Great Wall and made it collapse. The legend aims to reveal the cruelty of Emperor Qin and the miseries of common people in building the Great Wall. Obviously, Kingston also targets the emperor when alluding to this tale. Such seemingly casual references create a fantasy-like atmosphere especially when readers are not familiar with traditional Chinese legends.

Kingston also shows her techniques of reconstructing the male Chinese American history by borrowing from Chinese literature in her second book *China Men*. The opening story, 'On Discovery', is based on Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror (Jing hua yuan)* of the Qing dynasty. In Kingston's narration, the scholar Tang Ao is captured by a group of women, who have his feet bound and ears pierced and threaten to sew his lips together. At last he is turned womanlike to serve the queen. In Li Ruzhen's original version it is not Tang Ao, but his brother-in-law Lin Zhiyang, a merchant, who is caught. This change seems to be deliberately made because in traditional Chinese society, scholars are highly respected while the merchants are looked down upon. Li Ruzhen's Tang Ao is a scholar who wants to find the lost flower fairies and attain immortality along the way, and Lin Zhiyang accompanies him in hopes of monetary gain, while Kingston's Tang Ao is 'looking for the gold mountain' but gets trapped in a land of women in 'North America' (Kingston 1989a, 3, 5). The transgender story here does not function as a humorous plot as in some Hollywood movies, e.g., Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon wearing exaggerated female costumes in *Some Like It Hot* (1959), or imply the disordered gender identity of males as represented in *Dressed To Kill* (1980), in which the psychiatrist, who actually is a psychotic killer, commits murders when dressed as a woman. It not only aims at reversing gender power relations and emphasising patriarchal cruelty, as some critics

point out from the feminist point of view (e.g. Rabine 1987; Ling 1990), but also ‘foreshadows the male Chinese American experience as the focus of the work’ (Li 1990, 488) in the sense that foot-binding and ear-piercing symbolise the emasculation of Chinese males and their status of semi-slaves in America, doing women’s work such as cooking and laundry, as well as their bachelor life after the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943) was executed. The title ‘On Discovery’ also functions ‘as a prelude to a part of American history – the history of the Chinese American – that has been buried’ (Gao 1996, 67) and is then unearthed by Kingston through her artistic creations.

Similarly, Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* also begins with a mythical tale, ‘Feathers from a Thousand Li Away’. The original story was recorded in *The Lushi* (路史), telling that an emissary from a kingdom attached to the Tang dynasty was visiting the emperor of Tang with some treasure, among them the most precious being a white swan. The emissary took the swan with great care, but one day the swan flew away from the cage when being watered in a river. The emissary tried hard to catch the swan, only to collect some feathers. He was frightened at first, but later he put the feathers into a piece of silk and wrote a poem, expressing that the swan feathers stand for deep friendship as they are sent from a thousand li away. When the emperor finally received the feathers, he praised the emissary for being honest and loyal. Later, we Chinese people use the saying ‘feathers from a thousand li away’ to describe friendship in a modest way, i.e., the presents are not expensive, but the friendship is profound.

Tan’s swan story has dramatically changed the plot and theme of the original. In her version, a Chinese woman buys a swan, which was once an ugly duck, before she leaves for America. She talks to the swan on her way to America, wishing her American-born daughter to have a bright future. When she lands in this new nation, the immigration officials pull away her swan, leaving her only one swan feather. Years later, her daughter grows up with perfect English and Western junk food like burgers and Coca-Cola, but the woman still hopes to show the feather to her daughter: ‘[t]his feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions’ (Tan 1998, 17). This swan story has completely departed from the Chinese one, and has borrowed some elements from Hans Anderson’s ‘The Ugly Duckling’. The theme here is to foreshadow the traumatic experiences of the first-generation immigrants and the cultural gap between mothers and daughters, as well as mothers’ nostalgia towards China. Mothers want to communicate with their daughters about

their past in China; however, ‘only a mature daughter, who has overcome the psychological and cultural gap separating her from her mother is capable of coming to terms with this experience’ (Shen 2009, 7-8).

The departure from the original references in both Kingston’s and Tan’s works may seem to be problematic to some Chinese background readers, including both Chinese in China and diasporic Chinese: it risks reinforcing the stereotypes that Chinese are backward and misogynist and thus the narratives being unreliable and biased. However, in my opinion, their books are creative works rather than anthologies of Chinese tales, therefore it is not a vital point to verify the authenticity of their appropriation. Just as Kingston has expressed that ‘a myth only stays alive if it changes, and it dies if it is fixed’ (Kingston 2014, 23), the Chinese tales experience a rebirth in Kingston’s and Tan’s works when they are exported to a foreign place and grow in new soil.

Literal Translation

The unfamiliar English used in Kingston’s and Tan’s works sometimes confuses non-Chinese readers. The ‘broken’ English, particularly spoken by the mother figures, ‘records a historical moment, a diasporic phenomenon that cannot be as precisely said in any other language’ (Ch’ien 2005, 106).

Kingston remarks that,

There are puns for Chinese speakers only, and I do not point them out for non-Chinese speakers. There are some visual puns best appreciated by those who write Chinese. I’ve written jokes in that book so private, only I can get them; I hope I sneaked them in unobtrusively so nobody feels left out. I hope my writing has many layers, as human beings have layers. (Kingston 1982, 65)

For instance, Kingston notes in ‘White Tigers’ that ‘revenge’ means ‘report a crime’ (Kingston 1989b, 53) because the Chinese character ‘*bao*’ (报) can mean reporting and revenge in different contexts, which is ‘an ingenious re-vision of the Chinese idiom’ that ‘reinforces the pacifist author’s redefinition of heroism from physical prowess to verbal power’ (Cheung 2015, 11). Another example is when the narrator gives birth to a child, she ties the umbilical cord to a flagpole. This behaviour is really unusual but if we understand that ‘cord’ and ‘flag’ are both pronounced as ‘*qi*’ in Chinese (Gao 1996, 20), it would be easier to appreciate Kingston’s wordplay. To be honest, I could not relate this cord to a flag if I had not read the book I referenced as it

is such a weird description that we Chinese would not think in that way. But it is just Kingston's semi-acquisition of Chinese that brings the effect of estrangement, a quite particular artistic aesthetics. In terms of visual puns, Kingston uses some ideographic terms of Chinese characters to describe that the shape of the bird resembles 'the ideograph for "human"' (人) when it leads the narrator to the mountain, which 'look[s] like the ideograph "mountain"' (山) (Kingston 1989b, 20). The inclusion of ideographs not only adds some romantic colour but also builds up some barriers for Westerners, since Kingston does not give any notes in her book. In her second book *China Men*, she uses this trick again. When early immigrants signed any forms, because they were illiterate peasants, they made an 'X', 'a cross like the ideograph *ten*' (十) (Kingston 1989a, 92, 96). By writing 'ten', those witty China men made 'the cross symbolizing Jesus's crucifixion their signatures' and 'become legitimate Christian Americans' (Gao 1996, 80). These puns mentioned above, only understandable by people who know Chinese, are all wordplay to outsmart Westerners. I will examine these visual puns as well as other visual aspects in detail in Chapter 2 as I think they are a distinctive feature in Kingston's cross-boundary writing.

Apart from puns, Kingston's defamiliarising linguistic features appear mostly in the form of literal translations of Chinese characters into English. The most frequently discussed is the connotations of the word 'ghost' in *The Woman Warrior*. The subtitle of the book is 'Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts', which can be misunderstood as a girl's recording of deceased ancestors' stories. However, the Chinese counterpart of the ghost, 'Kuei' (Kingston 1989b, 88), does not simply refer to dead people. Kingston points out that 'America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts' as well as 'White Ghosts', 'Black Ghosts' and 'Gypsy Ghosts' (Kingston 1989b, 96-7). Here 'ghosts' is a swear word in Chinese to degrade 'foreigners' (Kingston 1989b, 93). This does not mean that the narrator and her fellow people are racists who hate foreigners but expresses that their rage comes out of the fact that Chinese Americans are treated unequally in America, and therefore they resort to cursing to release their anger and angst without violating social norms.

In contrast to Kingston's literal translation, Amy Tan employs a large amount of *pinyin*, a Romanisation system for Standard Chinese in *The Joy Luck Club*. Tan expresses her

ideas through Rose Hsu Jordan that some Chinese expressions ‘can’t be easily translated because they refer to a sensation that only Chinese people have’ (Tan 1998, 188). It is interesting that mothers’ Chinese expressions are recorded in the *pinyin* form, and are always followed by the English translation. Or, in the main narrator Jing-mei Woo’s words, mothers speak ‘their special language, half in broken English, half in their own Chinese dialect’ (Tan 1998, 34). For example, Lindo Jong uses ‘*chiszle*’ when she is angry, which means ‘mad to death’, and ‘*choszle*’ means ‘stinks to death’; Suyuan Woo calls ‘Caucasians as *wai guoren*’, which means ‘foreigners’; An-mei Hsu refers to ‘a small stove for burning coal’ as ‘*houlu*’ when telling her mother’s sad story; Ying-ying St. Clair describes herself to be ‘*lihai*’, meaning ‘[w]ild and stubborn’, and sees no ‘*chuming*’ in her daughter Lena, i.e., she has ‘no inside knowing of things’ (Tan 1998, 34, 168, 199, 225, 243, 248). This seems to claim the redundant status of Chinese language from the daughters’ point of view since the English translations function well to make readers understand, while on the other hand, it may also imply the fact that the daughters are unable to write Chinese characters and therefore they use *pinyin* and translation to cover up. The daughters’ recording of the mothers’ spoken Chinese shows a language gap between the two generations, i.e., mothers still linger in Chinese language while daughters have mastered English as their mother tongue. However, the mothers’ *pinyin* form is not the standard one used in modern China, but an informal and dialect one. For example, Lindo’s ‘*chiszle*’ and ‘*choszle*’ mentioned earlier should be ‘*qisile*’ and ‘*chousile*’ in standard Mandarin, An-mei Hsu refers to filial piety as ‘*shou*’, which in fact is ‘*xiao*’ in China today; Ying-ying’s version of ‘*Dajya*’, meaning ‘[a]ll the family’ should be ‘*dajia*’; and the place called ‘*Kweilin*’ where Suyuan Woo left her two babies behind is now ‘*Guilin*’ (Tan 1998, 44, 70, 39). This is because after the foundation of People’s Republic of China, in 1958, the government published a reformed system of *pinyin* based on the old system developed from the late Qing dynasty, when the mothers would have been already living in America. Although mothers are longing for their original tongue, their way of speaking has become outdated, not the Mandarin that people use today.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston also expresses the narrator’s unwillingness to translate her mother’s words into English when she wants to bargain or get something for free in a shop. The mothers’ inability to express themselves properly makes the narrators ashamed in both Kingston’s and Tan’s works; they cannot realise that the

once well-off mothers have tried hard to survive in America where they fall into the lower classes due to ‘their racial and cultural characterization’ as well as ‘their English language deficiency’ (Kondali 2012, 108). Mothers become double outsiders in both the new environment of America and the home culture of China. When daughters make efforts to record or translate mothers’ oral language, though in an awkward fashion, it ‘subverts and disrupts the established norms of official written discourse to create a special mode of discourse’ (Sondrup 2009, 40), regaining voice in a mixed language.

Symbolic Meanings of Characters’ Names

The female character names in *The Woman Warrior* can be categorised into two groups: one is the transcription of Chinese characters such as Fa Mu Lan and Ts’ai Yen, the other is the translation of Chinese characters such as Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid. David Leiwei Li notes in ‘The Naming of a Chinese American “I”: Cross-Cultural Sign/ifications in “*The Woman Warrior*”’ that Mu Lan means ‘Sylvan Orchid’ and Ts’ai Yen means ‘Well-wrought Jade’ which are commonly used female names ‘attached to the notion of femininity’, and therefore Kingston’s use of ‘sound symbols’ rather than translating the meanings into English ‘has discarded the patriarchal reinforcement of woman as sexual/aesthetic object and material commodity’ (Li 1988, 501). Kingston, in her book *Tripmaster Monkey*, also reveals her intention of not translating the names of Chinese heroines, ‘We keep the men’s Chinese names, we keep the women’s names untranslated too, no more Pearl Buck Peony Plum Blossom haolefied missionary names’ (Kingston 1990, 138). Li also points out that the contradiction in the name Brave Orchid in the sense that ‘Orchid’ refers to femininity while ‘Brave’ contains ‘masculine quality’, which ‘tellingly replicates the person’s contradiction of cultural expectations’ or ‘serves as a transitional token that Kingston means to transcend’ (Li 1988, 502). In contrast, Brave Orchid’s sister Moon Orchid’s name foreshadows her failure and miserable ending in America, since ‘Moon’ is Luna in Latin and implies ‘Lunacy’ (Li 1988, 502). As sisters, Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid both bear the last name ‘Orchid’, an indicator to show their kinship, however, due to their different personalities reflected in their middle names, they step on different life paths².

² Chinese usually put their family names before their given names. Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid are their given names and their family names are not mentioned in the book.

Although Orchid is a popular name among Chinese women, I do not think Kingston picks it at random. Since Mu Lan can be literally translated as ‘Sylvan Orchid’, it is likely that Kingston intends to connect the narrator’s mother and auntie to the legendary woman warrior, and aims to create a ‘symbolic sisterhood’ between the three (Wong 1991b, 32). Coincidentally, or perhaps as an intertextual link back to Kingston, Amy Tan comments on the orchid in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, in which she describes how ‘[o]rchids looked delicate but thrived on neglect [...] They never died – you could count on them to reincarnate themselves forever’ (Tan 2003a, 38). These sentences seem to imply that strong-willed Chinese women are like orchids, who fight for their destiny and will pass on their spirit. I will elaborate on this Chinese style sisterhood in Chapter 5 and explain its relation to American popular culture.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan’s intention in naming her characters can be best reflected in the names of the narrator Jing-mei “June” Woo and her late mother Suyuan Woo. Although the mothers still keep their Chinese names, they have already conformed to the Western convention of putting their family names at last. This seemingly unimportant change shows ‘the [Chinese] culture’s emphasis on the membership of a person in the family lineage’ (Li 1988, 501) is no longer applicable to Chinese Americans once they arrive in America. Now it is the American individuality that counts more than Chinese family order despite the mothers’ wish to stick to traditions as they still maintain their Chinese names. At the end of the book, the narrator’s father finally reveals the hidden meaning of her deceased mother’s name when they visit her sisters left behind in China,

“‘Suyuan,’” he says, writing more invisible characters on the glass. “The way she write it in Chinese, it mean ‘Long-Cherished Wish.’ Quite a fancy name, not so ordinary like flower name. See this first character, it mean something like ‘Forever Never Forgotten.’ But there is another way to write ‘Suyuan.’ Sound exactly the same, but the meaning is opposite.” His finger creates the brushstrokes of another character. “The first part look the same: ‘Never Forgotten.’ But the last part add to first part make the whole word mean ‘Long-Held Grudge.’ Your mother get angry with me, I tell her her name should be Grudge.” (Tan 1998, 280)

So Suyuan can mean both ‘Long-Cherished Wish’ and ‘Long-Held Grudge’. On the one hand, her name symbolises the motif ‘Never give up hope of fulfilling your dreams’ (Emerick 2009, 60) of the Joy Luck Club group. On the other hand, the ‘Grudge’ shows

her frustration with her daughter Jing-mei's resistance of Chinese tradition along with her agony at leaving her twin babies behind in wartime China and missing the opportunity of reunion.

Suyuan's daughter Jing-mei is the only one among the four daughter characters who still has a Chinese name, although she usually uses her American name, June, instead. At first she does not like her Chinese name and can only comfort herself with the wishful thinking that it is 'becoming fashionable for American-born Chinese to use their Chinese names' (Tan 1998, 37). It is also at the end of the story that her father tells her the meaning of her name,

“‘Jing’ like excellent jing. Not just good, it’s something pure, essential, the best quality. Jing is good leftover stuff when you take impurities out of something like gold, or rice, or salt. So what is left – just pure essence. And ‘Mei,’ this is common mei, as in meimei, ‘younger sister.’” (Tan 1998, 281)

From this explanation, it is not so hard to see that this name implies two layers of connotation. The first one is that Jing-mei should have some sisters before she was born since she is called ‘Mei’, a ‘younger sister’ – as later revealed in the story, Suyuan did leave two babies behind in China. The other aspect is that this name embodies the best wishes from her parents that she inherit the essence of Chinese tradition as she finally realises that ‘Me, the younger sister who was supposed to be the essence of the others’ (Tan 1998, 281). This explains why she has to be the new hostess of the Joy Luck Club and go to China to find her long-lost sisters. All of this is to fulfil her mother's long-cherished wish and relieve her long-time grudge and regret. By doing so, Jing-mei not only completes her mother's wish list but also ‘has found her Chinese roots and become one with her mother’ (Emerick 2009, 60). Although she keeps on denying her Chineseness, Jing-mei finally becomes reconciled with her mother, as the aunties predict at the beginning of the book ‘Your mother is in your bones’ (Tan 1998, 40).

According to the explanation of Jing-mei's meaning in *The Joy Luck Club*, it should be translated into Chinese as ‘精妹’ (pronounced as Jing-mei). However, in the most popular Chinese translated version of *The Joy Luck Club* published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House (STPH), the name is transcribed into ‘精美’ (also pronounced as Jing-mei) (Tan 2010, 273), with the first character referring to essence

while the second one means either beautiful or America. This could be the translator's intention of adding another layer of meaning to the name, since I have checked the translated paragraph in which Jing-mei's father tells her the meaning of her name: the translator has omitted the 'younger sister' part. I think it is reasonable to have a preconceived idea that her name should mean America rather than younger sister. In fact, before I reached the last part of the book, I had a similar concept of her name as the translator. This may indicate the uncertainties of writing Chinese name in Romanised letters as well as Amy Tan's ambiguous intention of naming her characters.

As these analyses of Kingston's and Tan's adoption of Chinese traditional literature and their unconventional combination of English and Chinese languages, reveal, they have not only brought old tales to a new context but also boldly experimented with English. This hybrid style diction and narratives belong to Chinese Americans, who are part of the American nation.

Ghost

Be careful what you say. It comes true. It comes true. I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, TV dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (Kingston 1989b, 204)

The girl narrator in *The Woman Warrior* is haunted by all types of ghosts and is struggling to find a place that is 'ghost-free' in America (Kingston 1989b, 108). The term ghost is related with superstitious colour, and contrasted with logical and scientific Western thinking patterns. Ghost is a profound cultural phenomenon in China due to the influence from various religious beliefs such as Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. In Kingston's and Tan's works, the ghost figure is multi-faceted, a recurring symbol that weaves the stories together.

In the opening chapter of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the no name woman is persecuted by her own family and villagers because she has committed adultery. She has no choice but to jump into the family well with her illegitimate child, which is definitely a miserable fate, but is as well a way of taking revenge for other women like her. Kingston reckons this is a 'spiteful suicide' because the dead woman pollutes the

water that people drink from; at the same time, she becomes a drowned ghost, who 'waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute' (Kingston 1989b, 16).

There is a similar story in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. An-mei Hsu's mother is called a ghost by her family because she becomes a concubine of a rich man, Wu Tsing, who actually rapes her shortly after her husband dies. An-mei narrates:

When I was a young girl in China, my grandmother told me my mother was a ghost. This did not mean my mother was dead. In those days, a ghost was anything we were forbidden to talk about. (Tan 1998, 42)

An-mei's mother is cursed in this way by her natal family because she has disgraced them, like Kingston's no name woman. However, she still comes back home and cuts off a piece of flesh from her arm in order to save her mother, although it is too late. She is also a caring mother, who tries her best to protect her daughter from Wu Tsing and his other wives when she takes An-mei with her after the grandmother's death. As a fourth concubine in this household, An-mei's mother has no status and she finally commits suicide. However, her spirit returns on the first day of the lunar new year when 'all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow' (Tan 1998, 240), commanding Wu Tsing to honour An-mei and endowing An-mei power to control her own life.

These sad and terrifying stories are vivid illustrations of how gods, ghosts, ancestors and humans are related in Chinese traditional beliefs. Unlike the Western belief in Jesus, there has never been a dominant religion in China. Premodern Chinese (mainly peasants) usually practised polytheism and pantheism, believing in 'a mixture of Chinese Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism and folk traditions' (Zhen 2011, 225). When ancestors died, they became either gods to bless the descendants or transform into ghosts to harm the living if no descendants worship them (Butcher 2011, 229). Therefore, the no name woman becomes a childless ghost rather than a god when she drowns herself with her baby. In this way, she holds the power to frighten the villagers and practices her revenge. Moreover, the point of finding a substitute for the drowned ghost does not lie in killing for mere revenge, but to pursue 'rebirth' (Lee 2004, 113) to escape from the traumatic status of remaining between gods and human beings, i.e., to seek any opportunity of reincarnation. In the case of An-mei's mother, she is a helpless ghost when she is alive, but her dead soul is capable of protecting her child

from miseries. In this sense, she becomes a goddess after death and is commemorated by An-mei when she passes on the story to her own daughter.

The above ancestral ghost stories are the epitome of women's inferior status in premodern China where chastity and sexual repression were emphasised. Women were persecuted not only by their abusive husbands, but also by their families and communities. By recording their stories, Kingston and Tan try to establish a spiritual connection with these female ancestors, who use death as an extreme means to fight against patriarchal institutions.

The ghost figures do not only reveal women's miseries, but also resemble the status of 'unidentified ancestors' (Sato 1991, 143) – the early Chinese immigrants in America. Lena in *The Joy Luck Club* narrates that her great-grandfather was haunted by the ghost of the man he sentenced to die. The ghost says it is not the worst part when he is cut down by the sword; instead, 'the worst is on the other side' (Tan 1998, 102). This symbolises that the miseries before moving to America are bearable, though considered to be the hardest, while the experiences of Chinese Americans when they finally arrived at the other side of the Pacific Ocean is unspeakably traumatic. The early immigrants were mostly forced to leave the homeland out of financial pressure or political persecution, struggling to settle in the new land, only to find that they were not treated equally by American mainstream society and were unable to connect to their homeland, living 'in a double exile' (Minh-Ha 1994, 9).

These ghost stories remind me of ancestor worship in my own family as well as in other households. In China today, we still have a national public holiday, the Qingming Festival, or Tomb-sweeping Day, usually on April 5th, when we go to public or private grave sites to honour our ancestors. Like Australians do on Anzac Day, Chinese also worship revolutionary martyrs and soldiers who died during wars, some of whom having no offspring. The core value of worshipping the deceased lies in preserving the tradition, the roots, rather than in showing condolences to the dead people in China today. This tradition might be inscribed in every Chinese's soul, no matter where he or she is, as reflected in the ghost stories told by mothers. The Chinese tradition resembles the ghost images that will always haunt the narrators. And, in return, their recording of the ghost stories works as an alternative way of commemorating the ancestors and traditions.

Ghost not only refers to the dead ancestors but also signifies the living. When Chinese Americans lose their identities, they become ghostlike. They are inscrutable Others in Westerners' eyes, just like the narrator in *The Woman Warrior*, who is a 'zero IQ' (Kingston 1989b, 183) student and behaves like Ralph Ellison's 'invisible man' in the basement. Within Chinese American communities, on the other hand, the more assimilated later generations are ghostlike from their elders' point of view. As mentioned previously, Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior* uses the term 'ghost' to indicate foreigners, who are others from Chinese. From her perspective, '[h]er American children could not sit for very long. They did not understand sitting; they had wandering feet', and they seem to be non-human when speaking English with 'their noisy barbarous mouths' (Kingston 1989b, 113, 121). She calls them 'Ho Chi Kuei', or 'Ho Chi Ghosts' (Kingston 1989b, 204), a term that signifies 'a hybrid identity' (Lee 2004, 116) that the narrator tries to constitute, aiming to survive in a society among white ghosts. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Ying-ying St. Clair calls her American husband 'a ghost' (Tan 1998, 252) as well because he does not understand Chinese culture and makes her feel that he is soulless and uncommunicative. Ironically, the 'ghosts', the so-called foreigners are real American citizens, while the first generation Chinese Americans might be considered as foreign in Anglo Americans' eyes. Therefore the notion of ghost again hints the uncertainty of their identity and the lack of belongingness – they still think they are Chinese.

Another facet of ghosthood is represented in *The Woman Warrior* as an expression of feminist quest. The first case is that the narrator becomes a 'ghost' (Kingston 1989b, 31) when she turns into Fa Mu Lan in her fantasy. This is a self-imposed ghosthood because she has to experience training that is beyond ordinary human capacity and has to endure isolation from family and human beings. Gayle Sato points out that Fa Mu Lan's adoption of ghosthood in the mountain leads to 'loss of human identity' and 'empowers the self to return from exile with a greater capacity for life and knowledge of human connectedness' (Sato 1991, 141). This temporary loss of identity aims to achieve higher self-realisation as a female, who is supposed to be a wife or a slave, instead of becoming a woman warrior. This positive experience of ghosthood stands for the hope of Chinese Americans, especially females, to fit into mainstream society. When they lose touch with ancestral culture and encounter prejudices, they have to

build up inner strength, such as academic achievements and financial independence, to cope with difficulties in reality and to transcend their 'in-betweenness' dilemma.

Sato also notes in her essay that Brave Orchid brings the narrator's self-imposed ghosthood in her Fa Mu Lan fantasy into practice (Sato 1991, 141). Her battle with Sitting Ghost in the haunted room makes her temporarily isolated from her classmates. The encountering of the ghost signifies her anxiety of being rejected by her husband in America because she feels guilty that their children died when they stayed with her in China and having no offspring is a sin for the Chinese, as well as her ambition of being a professional woman as a doctor. She spends a night in the haunted room and sees her classmates coming the next morning. She admits her fear of getting lost and asks them to call her mind back. So they start chanting,

“Come home, come home, Brave Orchid, who has fought the ghosts and won. Return to To Keung School, Kwangtung City, Kwangtung Province. Your classmates are here waiting for you, scholarly Brave Orchid. Come home. Come home. Come back and help us with our lessons. School is starting soon. Come for breakfast. Return, daughter of New Society Village, Kwangtung Province. Your brother and sisters call you. Your friends call you. We need you. Return to us. Return to us at the To Keung School. There's work to do. Come back, Doctor Brave Orchid, be unafraid. Be unafraid. You are safe now in the To Keung School. All is safe. Return.” (Kingston 1989b, 71-2)

From this chant, it is clear that her classmates admire her academic achievements and her help with their lessons, and they really want her to come back from her state of isolation and join their companionship. It is not until Brave Orchid is called back by the other students that she finally completes the process of exorcising the ghost. This mutual relationship can be regarded as a simple sisterhood among these female students, in which individuals might be weak but when united, they can protect each other. I will further explore this Chinese style sisterhood in Chapter 5.

To sum up, the ghost image is multi-layered. It functions as a superstitious belief to counter Western logic; symbolises women's miseries in patriarchal society and Chinese Americans' in-betweenness, loss and quest for identities, and females' angst for self-realisation and the consolation of sisterhood.

Food: Whose Kitchen Rules

My Australian friends always ask me if the Chinese eat dogs and snakes, and I have to reply that it is true we eat them, but only occasionally, not like in their imagination that we are frantically fond of gamey meat. This passes on to me the information that we Chinese have a really bad reputation in regards to eating, that we Chinese eat like barbarians.

Eating is perhaps the most important part of human life. Kingston and Tan describe numerous scenes of how the Chinese and first-generation immigrants eat and cook in alternative ways. This may seem obvious, since most characters in their books are female, naturally born food providers in the kitchen, but I think food and eating mainly function as metaphors of how early generation of Chinese Americans struggle to survive and how mothers and daughters interact with each other.

In *The Woman Warrior*, when Brave Orchid is awaiting her sister Moon Orchid's arrival in America in the airport, she takes bags of homemade Chinese food there. This shows that Brave Orchid does not want to buy food at the airport because it is cheaper to eat her own food brought from home, and also implies that she is still not used to Western food. Sometimes her food may be tasteless, but Brave Orchid believes that 'Big eaters win' (Kingston 1989b, 90). As Kingston mentions that Chinese greet one another with 'Have you eaten yet?' (Kingston 1989b, 92) instead of 'How are you', eating presents an essential part of survival and may symbolise the 'ability to cope with the constraints and persecutions Asian Americans have had to endure as immigrants and racial minorities' (Wong 1993, 25). Apart from economic factors, mothers' attachment to home-cooked food reflects their emotions towards the past and the homeland. Food such as the 'taro leaves' may bring back memories of Southern China, and the large amount of 'two shopping bags' (Kingston 1989b, 113) she brings to the airport represents the typical large family sharing together, not only with her own children but also her sister and niece.

Similarly, in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, food plays a vital role in the mothers' lives. When Suyuan Woo was still in China during wartime, she formed a Joy Luck group with three other women in order to 'raise [their] spirits' (Tan 1998, 23). They treated themselves with dumplings 'stuffed mostly with stringy squash' and oranges 'spotted with wormy holes' (Tan 1998, 23), but it is already a luxury compared with common

people in wartime. So they ate 'sparingly' (Tan 1998, 23) to cherish the rare moment that they could stop stressing about their future. This eating mode continues when the Joy Luck Club is re-held in America, as in Jing-mei Woo's eyes, eating is 'not a gracious event' for the older generation, it is 'as though everybody had been starving' (Tan 1998, 32). This mentality of being starved reflects the undernourished status of immigrants both financially and psychologically.

Mothers not only eat for survival, but also cook in an alternative fashion. Kingston displays how Brave Orchid cooks and eats in an unappetising way to the narrator in the fourth chapter of *The Woman Warrior*. Brave Orchid cooks all kinds of wild animals and tells her children about how people have monkey feasts in old China. To the narrator, her mother's cooking and eating stories seem disgusting according to American standards. Likewise, Amy Tan also mentions in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, how people in China are fond of eating eels. In my opinion, both the narrators and mothers exaggerate their descriptions. The mothers' cooking could be quite common, but in the daughters' eyes, it is bizarre for it is not Western style. On the other hand, eating gamey food functions as a remote and cherished memory that makes the mothers relive their past experiences in China.

However, there is indeed some exceptional food that Chinese do not eat. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, when the narrator's mother Winnie first meets her American husband Jimmy at a party, she has an embarrassing experience over American desserts and cheese. Although Winnie marries Jimmy and lives in America afterwards, she is still 'loyal to Chinese food' (Hsiao 2000, 217) and cannot overcome the cultural barriers reflected in the form of food.

Slavoj Žižek notes that '[t]he element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated' (Žižek 1993, 201). Food can be this type of 'Thing' that connects people with similar cultural background. While the second-generation Chinese Americans are fascinated by American fast food, Chinese mothers still stick to their traditional cooking and have a strong tendency to pass it on to their offspring in the hope of maintaining their ethnic identity.

Chinese mothers are also proud of their eating because they view it as healthier than Western fast food, and in Chinese culinary tradition, there is a concept that food and medicine are of the same origin. Food's function is not only to stop hunger, but also to cure. In *The Woman Warrior*, the mother would shout at the narrator 'Eat! Eat!' and 'If it tastes bad, it's good for you' (Kingston 1989b, 92) to show her good intentions. In contrast, Lena's American father in *The Joy Luck Club*, dies of a heart attack because he 'enjoyed his five slices of bacon and three eggs sunny-side up every morning' (Tan 1998, 150), which is unhealthy according to Chinese standards. As to the function of food as disease treatment, Tan, in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, describes how the narrator, Pearl, finally solves the communication problem with her mother, Winnie, and decides to go back to China together to find herbal medicine to cure her illness that has confused American doctors. Traditional Chinese medicine, mainly extracted from various kinds of herbs and plants, is 'influenced by Chinese philosophy' and 'stresses both the unity and the correspondence between man and nature' (Men Jiu Zhang and Guo Lei 2010, 9). It emphasises the balance within the human body as well as that between exterior and interior. In Tan's work, Chinese medicine represents the traditional culture that Winnie cherishes and functions as the placebo to appease her inner conflicts caused by two different cultures. The fact that Pearl resorts to Chinese medicine reflects that she finally understands her mother's tradition and that the medicine treats her not only physically but also psychologically.

However, due to their already assimilated life styles, most of the narrators in both Kingston's and Tan's works fail to follow their mothers' kitchen rules and play the role more of spectators than practitioners (Pearl's acceptance of Chinese herbal medicine may be an exception when she is frustrated with Western treatment). They even show contempt towards the way their mothers prepare and cook food. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-mei expresses that she cannot bear to see her mother cook live crabs. Apparently, this type of Chinese cooking, compared with Western industrialised food processing in which food consumers see no blood or anything unpleasant, seems to be too cruel, too primitive. In general, the Chinese culinary in Kingston's and Tan's works stands for the otherness and unassimilated aspects of the mothers and the Westernised and assimilated nature of the daughters.

Kingston and Tan exaggerate the daughters' resentment towards Chinese cooking in order to separate the narrators from Chinese tradition, a way to present the conflicts

between mothers and daughters. Amy Tan once expressed in an interview that she wanted to have canned spinach instead of her mother's fresh vegetables because in her fantasy of America, 'Fresh vegetables are what poor people eat' (Jaggi 2001). This shows the reason why the daughter generation reject their mothers' cooking: it does not lie in the weirdness of the mothers' cooking but in daughters' yearning for Americanised life styles. Therefore presenting eccentric food and eating does not aim to demonise mother figures, but to symbolise the complicated mother-daughter relationships, a core issue in their books. The kitchen thus becomes one of the battlefields between the two generations and an essential site of Chinese American's daily lives. In fact, these kind of conflicts between traditional harsh mothers and Americanised rebellious daughters are everywhere in the two authors' books, and cooking is only one aspect of the whole scenario. I will further explore the generational conflicts in Chapter 4 to see how Chinese American mothers educate their coke-and-burger daughters.

Mah-jong

This part will examine the most famous Chinese game, mah-jong, in Kingston's and Tan's writing, especially in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

Kingston mentions mah-jong once in *The Woman Warrior*, but she calls it the 'hemp-bird game' (Kingston 1989b, 139), a literal translation of *Maque* (an alternative name of mah-jong, which in fact means sparrow rather than hemp-bird). She depicts some Chinatown women who are obsessed with mah-jong, indicating that they used to be part of the leisured class: 'like rich women in China with nothing to do' (Kingston 1989b, 139). The narrator's mother, Brave Orchid, reckons it a bad habit, 'A person could get up one day from the gambling table and find her life over' (Kingston 1989b, 139). This is understandable because Brave Orchid has to work all day in the family laundry to make a living; playing games in any form would be a sin for her. However, Kingston does imply that through playing mah-jong, those immigrant women get some kind of connection to their root culture and are able to socialise with women of their race.

In Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, mah-jong functions as an entertainment for the mothers during wartime and a means for meeting other Chinese immigrants after their arrival in America. This game is usually played by four people and one needs both strategy

and luck to win. The skills are similar to Western card games but in mah-jong, people use tiles to replace cards. The purpose of playing mah-jong in Tan's book is not merely for pleasure, it is 'a method of survival in troubled times' (Emerick 2009, 59). In the mothers' game, the winner takes the small amount of money everybody invests, and the losers take the leftover food, so 'everyone can have some joy' (Tan 1998, 30). The philosophy of playing lies in providing consolation, not competition. It also resembles Kingston's and Tan's writing strategy: survival counts.

Ronald Emerick addresses the symbolic meanings of Walls, Winds, and Dragons (three types of mah-jong tiles) in *The Joy Luck Club* (see Emerick 1999). However, I felt very confused about the term 'Dragon tiles' used in this article at first and had to google both Chinese and English references on mah-jong terms and rules. I found in Chinese sources that the counterpart of Dragon tiles are called *Jianpai* (箭牌) or *sanyuan pai* (三元牌), which can be translated as Arrow tiles or Three yuan tiles respectively. There are three symbols in the original Chinese Arrow tile set – *zhong* (中), *fa* (發), and *bai* (白) – meaning central, rich and white, while the English versions are Red, Green and White. According to Wikipedia, 'Some sets, notably American, use a green dragon in place of the character (發)' (Mahjong Tiles) and therefore I assume Dragon tiles is an American term. This departure from the Chinese mah-jong in Ronald Emerick's commentary article coincides with Jing-mei Woo's attitude towards mah-jong in *The Joy Luck Club*: they both learn mah-jong from Western sources and use Westernised terms. Jing-mei is reluctant to play mah-jong with her late mother's friends because she has only played Jewish mah-jong, the one her mother looked down upon, in which '[t]here is no strategy' (Tan 1998, 33). Her mother's stance towards Chinese mah-jong, compared to the Jewish game, made her feel that they 'spoke two different languages' (Tan 1998, 34).

Metaphorically, the difference between Chinese mah-jong and Jewish mah-jong stands for the cultural gap between mothers and daughters. For the mothers, sticking to authentic Chinese mah-jong comes from their nostalgia, while the daughters' inability to play Chinese mah-jong, together with Ronald Emerick's Americanised terms, indicates that once the game is played in America, there would be new rules. Emerick also points out that Jing-mei's taking over her mother's role in the mah-jong group symbolises the 'first step in her journey toward understanding her mother and the

mother-daughter relationship' (Emerick 2009, 53). I agree with this, but the daughters' acceptance of the mothers' tradition is not an adoption of the original form; the daughters' understanding of the mah-jong game is already Americanised – there is no distinctive differentiation from the daughters' perspective between Chinese mah-jong and Jewish mah-jong.

Gloria Shen indicates Tan's 'structural experiments' (Shen 2009, 6) in her essay 'Born of a Stranger: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Storytelling in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*' but has not seen the resemblance between the structure of the book and that of the mah-jong game as Emerick does later (Emerick 2009, 55). I will explore how Tan adopts the concept of the mah-jong game in *The Joy Luck Club*'s structure and its visual effects in Chapter 2.

Mah-jong is also a device to glue the four mother characters together from strangers to sisters. Tara Fickle, in her essay, 'American Rules and Chinese Faces', compares mah-jong playing to 'a fantasy role-playing game' (Fickle 2014a, 69) as the four immigrant women would dress up in traditional Chinese dresses which are rarely seen in modern China and appear weird to American spectators. Fickle points out that their dress-up 'testifies not simply to the performative aspects of ethnic identity but to the game's ability to alter kinship relations through play' (Fickle 2014a, 70). This is because when the mothers put on their old dresses from premodern China, they experience a *déjà vu* of their youth, when they were still back in their homeland with friends although it was during wartime. This *déjà vu* links the four friends into a simulating blood connection to each other when the daughters are told to call them 'aunties', and as a result, the four women become 'sisters' accordingly. Mah-jong playing has united the four mothers to take care of each other as well as their offspring. I will further elaborate on the significance of sisterhood in the mah-jong group in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at several introductory aspects of the Chinese elements represented in Kingston's and Tan's works. Others will be discussed later as it seems impossible to grasp all the elements just in one introductory chapter.

For Chinese Americans who were born in the United States like Kingston and Tan, 'it is difficult to distinguish between what is particular to one's own family and friends

and what is generally true of Chinese and Chinese American culture and society' because they 'live in a society where there are multiple and conflicting images about China and Chinese culture' (Louie 2008, 199). This may explain why there are so many taboo stories about women in China in Kingston's and Tan's works, despite the fact that the real China may not be so misogynous, as well as other stereotypical descriptions of old China.

Both Kingston and Tan have an ambiguous attitude towards Chinese culture. They emphasise their American identity at times but still embrace Chinese culture when they feel frustrated with the mainstream society they live in. Their versions of Chinese culture do depart from the authentic one, which may cause confusion and misunderstanding amongst Westerners and the younger generations of Chinese Americans; however, it is precisely their reinterpretation of Chinese elements that empowers ethnic writers to articulate a different voice. Cultural elements are thus an indispensable part of their texts, reflecting the way the older generation used to live and the daughters' struggles of understanding their mothers and forming their own identities. Although the two authors do risk perpetuating the stereotypes by frequently using Chinese elements as a survival strategy in literary circles, their efforts to challenge mainstream bias should still be highlighted.

Chapter 2. Kingston's and Tan's Cross-genre Writing

Kingston and Tan arouse readers' attention not only by their exotically flavoured stories, but also with their unique writing styles which combine traditional Chinese artistic elements with postmodern textual strategies. By postmodern, I mean the two authors are quite good at using techniques such as unreliable narrators, fragmentation and mixed genres. For example, in *The Woman Warrior*, Moon Orchid's story is told through different versions – one from the narrator's mother, and one from her brother – and thus leading to incompatible versions and an unreliable narration. Since publication, the genre of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* remains controversial: is it fiction or nonfiction, memoir or (auto)biography? Similarly, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* cannot be simply categorised as a novel or a collection of short stories. The genre characteristics bear the traits of postmodernist writing but on the other hand, I suggest, embody typical Chinese style narrative tradition as well. In this chapter, I will examine how Kingston and Tan incorporate traditional Chinese fiction writing styles as well as other art forms into their ambiguous genres and how their writings counteract stereotypes.

Features of Traditional Chinese Fiction Writing

Traditional Chinese fiction differs considerably from Western literary genres and conventions. There is no accurate counterpart of the Western term 'novel' in Chinese fiction writing and Chinese fiction 'has, in the process of development, formed a system of fictional practice and theory that cannot be adequately accounted for by the realistic tradition' (Gu 2006, 3). Most of its features are 'narrative ploys deliberately designed to advance the art of fiction, and some anticipate modern, modernism, and even postmodern techniques of fiction writing' (Gu 2006, 3). Although fiction writing has a long history in China, full-length works did not flourish until the Ming and Qing dynasties, during which the Four Great Classical Works of Chinese literature were created: *Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

It is difficult to define traditional Chinese fiction writing in Western terms. American sinologist Andrew H. Plaks used the terms 'full-length Hsiao-shuo' (see Plaks 1978) and 'extended vernacular prose fiction' (Plaks 1977, 321) at first to refer to the fiction

writing in the Ming and Qing dynasties, but he describes the Four Great Classical Works mentioned above as the ‘Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel’ in his later critiques (see Plaks 2015). In China, Lu Xun, the leading figure of modern Chinese literature, wrote a collection of essays, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (1925), in which he adopted the term ‘Hsiao-shuo’; however, when translating this work into English, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, the famous translator couple in China, ‘great translator[s] of *Red Chamber Dream*’, mentioned in Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace* (Kingston 2003, 51), still resorted to Western terms to indicate different types of ‘Hsiao-shuo’, such as ‘romances’ and ‘novels’ (see Lu Xun 1973). Since these Western terms are not so applicable to Chinese fiction writing, it is not surprising that there are some unique features in Chinese fiction.

Traditional Chinese fiction writing, particularly the full-length works, originated from the popular story-telling tradition. This may not be an uncommon phenomenon in other cultures, since stories usually originated from mythologies, folklore or legends in oral forms. What is unique in China is that before the thriving period of full-length fiction writing, popular circulation of fiction was conducted through professional story-tellers, who performed the stories on the stage. This art form is called *shuoshu* (literally meaning talk-book).

Since Chinese full-length fiction writing was developed from this oral art, it has inherited some characteristics of the latter. The first one is the episodic, cyclical but unitary narrative structure (see Plaks 1977). Fiction writing has absorbed some narrative techniques from story-tellers, including ‘frequent use of formulaic phrases [...] which could have been part of the storyteller’s jargon; and suspense at the end of each chapter, supposedly copied from the storyteller’s strategy to lure the audience back to the next session’ (Ge 2001, 64). In both oral story-telling and full-length fiction works, each chapter is called ‘a “hui” (回) – a “turn,” a round, a session’ and the chapters ‘form an interlocking sequence, a serial aggregate, much like the links on a chain. Each is tied to the preceding and succeeding “turn”’ (Eoyang 1977, 57). That is to say that each chapter in those written works is an individual story with complete plot, while it is connected to the previous and following chapters to form a more complicated plot. For example, in *Water Margin*, one of the Four Great Classical Works, which tells the stories of 108 outlaws, there are several main characters who are vividly portrayed, such as Wu Song, the hero who kills the tiger with bare hands,

and Lu Zhishen, the monk who breaks the Buddhist rules. Each character's story can be read separately and at the same time all the characters' stories can form a complete work with a central theme: peasants' rebellion against government oppression. Although traditional Chinese full-length fiction works are not narrated in a linear sequence, as are most Western classical narratives, they are still 'unitary'.

Another structural feature originating from story-telling in traditional Chinese fiction narratives is that there are always some very short lead-in stories before the main plot commences. When story-tellers start a new story, they tend to use some lead-in content to entice listeners, which might seem to be irrelevant to the plot but in fact implies the theme. This tradition has been inherited by written fiction works, either full-length works or short story collections. For example, in *Water Margin*, the lead-in part is the prologue, usually 'a mythical parable or a biography of an ideal figure – [and] may serve as a metaphor for the novel as a whole' (Kao 1977, 237). In the short form fiction stories by Ling Mengchu (1580–1644), there are an introduction and a prologue before the main story; the introduction 'controls the angle from which the main story is viewed', and the prologue, 'usually a kind of apologue', 'reinforces the point made in the introduction' (Hanan 1977, 89).

In the following part of this chapter, I will focus on Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* as cases to analyse the use of traditional Chinese fiction writing styles and how this functions to challenge stereotypes.

Kingston's and Tan's Adoption of Traditional Chinese Fiction Writing

Kingston uses the term 'talk-story' many times in *The Woman Warrior*. As to the origin of this term, Wendy Ho explains in her monograph, *In Her Mother's House*, that Kingston may have adopted oral traditions from both China and Hawaii, which are not exclusively unique to the two cultures but can be found in other places as well, and that Kingston's 'talk-story' is an expanded one that 'include[s] women's experiences and imaginative stories' by 'retell[ing] traditional stories and/or invent[ing] subversive stories to account for the varying social, economic, cultural, and historical circumstances of Chinese women, families, and communities in the United States' (Ho 1999, 27-8). This 'talk-story' is different from the story-telling art '*shuoshu*' in China, which I mentioned previously, but the essence of the two is similar: both pass on myths, legends and stories in oral form. In Kingston's case, the story-teller is her mother,

instead of a professional, and her 'talk-story', resembles both 'shuoshu' and traditional Chinese fiction works in several aspects.

Apart from the contents that are derived from ancient stories which I have touched upon in Chapter 1, I will look in more detail at the structure of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. There are five chapters in *The Woman Warrior*, each telling a story of a certain character. If we choose any chapter from the book, we can understand its plot without reading the other parts. For example, the first chapter is about the no name woman who commits adultery and is persecuted by her fellow villagers, and the third chapter is about how the narrator's mother came to America. However, the five stories are interrelated. There is a central theme in the whole book that all the female characters are warriors, and therefore all the stories are pieced together to form a unitary whole, rather than several loosely connected parts.

In Kingston's next book, *China Men*, the structural influence from Chinese fiction writing is more evident. The contents page of the book lists 18 chapters; however, the chapter titles are printed in different fonts. For instance, the titles of the first two chapters, 'On Discovery' and 'On Fathers', are italicised and the chapters are of quite short length, while the title of the third chapter "THE FATHER FROM CHINA" is capitalised and the chapter contains sixty-odd pages. When turning to the starting page of this long chapter, we can see a seal with four Chinese characters '金山勇士', meaning Gold Mountain Warriors. The next chapter is a short one, 'The Ghostmate', followed by a long one, 'THE GREAT GRANDFATHER OF THE SANDALWOOD MOUNTAINS', with the seal again on the beginning page. This pattern continues for the whole book. It is not difficult to see that the capitalised chapter titles with a seal deal with the main plot, about the experiences of male Chinese Americans, while the italicised short chapters mainly concern legends or historical facts.

In the six main chapters of *China Men*, Kingston narrates individual stories of Chinese immigrants, including father, great grandfather, grandfather, other male relatives, and brother. The stories take place in various locations and time periods, but are still arranged in a unitary form in the style of the classical Chinese fiction. Yang Chun points out in her article that Kingston successfully makes *China Men* a unitary book by dividing the father's stories into two parts, between which she narrates other forefathers' stories, to mingle the imaginary characters and real family members

together in an interrelated structure; by adding a first-person introduction of the female narrator before the male immigrants' experiences in each long chapter, she also links historical plots and the present (Yang Chun 2007, 58-9). This structural arrangement avoids splitting facts and stories mechanically and simultaneously symbolises the author's hybrid identities of combining diversities in a unity. Kingston's adoption does not stop at the structural level, but with the seal of Chinese characters '金山勇士' in each long chapter as well as in the title page, she encapsulates the central motif of the whole book – Gold Mountain Warriors. In fact, 'Gold Mountain Warriors' is the original title of *China Men* (Li 1990, 484), which proves Kingston's intention of recording male Chinese Americans' experiences in her fiction narratives; this seal gives the text a symmetry with *The Woman Warrior*.

According to Kingston, '*China men* is like a six-layer cake and the myths are like icing, and the rest are like the cake' (Bonetti 1986, 41). This implies that the short-length stories in between the main chapters function to reinforce the theme, just as prologues do in traditional Chinese fiction. For instance, the first chapter 'On Discovery' is an adapted Chinese story, which works as a metaphor for revealing the early immigrants' trauma: looking for the 'Gold Mountain', they were finally captured in 'North America' with disillusionment and forced to be emasculated and keep silent (Kingston 1989a, 3,5). I think this chapter can be viewed as a general prologue to foreshadow the theme of the whole book, while the last chapter, 'On Listening', in which the narrator tries to record an ambiguous story of how Chinese constructed America in their search of a gold needle, can be seen as a coda, for it implies that Chinese Americans have made great contributions to America and thus should qualify as American citizens. 'Listening' is also related with the audiences of story-telling, who 'listen to different dialogical voices' (Zhang and Wang 2013, 1032). The whole book is enwrapped by these two chapters. As to other short chapters in between the main stories, they are added to further explain the author's intention in the main stories. There is a minor difference from Chinese fiction tradition: Kingston's short story follows the main plot instead of being a lead-in, but it still has a similar function. For example, 'The Adventures of Lo Bun Sun', following 'THE MAKING OF MORE AMERICANS', is a wordplay on Robinson Crusoe since Lo Bun Sun is the Cantonese pronunciation of Robinson. In her rewriting of the British classical figure, Robinson Crusoe is tortured and castrated,

Lo is “toil,” what one does even when unsupervised; he works faithfully, not cheating. Lo means “naked,” man “the naked animal,” and lo also sounds like the word for “mule,” a toiling animal, a toiling sexless animal. Bun is the uncle who went to China to work on a commune. And sun is like “body” and also “son” in English and “grandson” in Chinese. Sun as in “new.” Lo Bun Sun was a mule and toiling man, naked and toiling body, alone, son and grandson, himself all the generations. (Kingston 1989a, 226)

This not only echoes the oppression of some other male relatives of the narrator, which has been described in the main story, but also serves as a variation to repeat the ‘master trope’ in the opening chapter ‘On Discovery’ (Gao 1996, 92), that Chinese men are asexual and have to labour hard like mules. In fact, this Robinson Crusoe wordplay is not so weird according to Kingston’s knowledge, because she thought it was a Chinese figure until she went to school (Chin and Kingston 1989, 70). This is quite interesting because *Robinson Crusoe* is generally considered to be the first English novel, and the hero of the novel is ‘the true prototype of the British colonist’ (Joyce 1975, 356). Castrating Robinson Crusoe thus can be seen as a playful degradation of colonialism, empire and the Anglo-Saxon forefathers of mainstream Americans. By adopting traditional Chinese fiction structure, which may seem to be fragmented when viewed according to the Western fictional tradition, Kingston has endowed *China Men* with the power of ‘demystifying the coherence of received history and in historicizing myths in ways that allow the emergence of perspectives that defy the telos of both history and myth’ (Ling 1998, 120).

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan further elaborates on Kingston’s experiments with traditional Chinese fiction structure and techniques. Gloria Shen points out that *The Joy Luck Club* bears the features of postmodernism ‘because it rejects artificial unity and espouses the fragmentary’, identifying ‘[t]he rejection of organic unity and concentration on the fragmentation of language games, of time, of the human subject, of society itself’, as characteristics of postmodernism (Shen 2009, 4, 15). Ronald Emerick explains the resemblance between Tan’s text and the game of mah-jong:

Like a game of mah jong, the novel is structured into four major divisions, each division consisting of four parts and each part representing one of the four mothers or one of the four daughters. Therefore, the sixteen-chapter structure is the first indication that mah jong is a controlling metaphor for the novel. (Emerick 2009, 55)

I agree with these opinions, and think that Tan has incorporated one of the postmodernist features, fragmentation, with Chinese elements such as mah-jong game. The delicate design of mah-jong structure also coincides with the fragmentary but unitary features of traditional Chinese fiction. The first and the fourth parts of the book are narrated by the mother generation while the second and the third are by the daughters. In each part, mothers and daughters tell stories in a circular sequence of the mah-jong game – from east to north – and every story in each part works on a similar topic. The first part, ‘Feathers from a Thousand Li Away’ is mainly about the mothers’ childhood stories, except for the first story, narrated by Jing-mei Woo, about her late mother Suyuan Woo’s experiences during wartime. The second part focuses on the childhood of the daughter generation, followed by their conflicts in adulthood in the third part. The mothers’ voices recur in the final part, recounting their choices in life. The four parts seem to be individual, but they revolve around the central theme – mother-daughter relationships. The whole book can be seen as a sequence of dialogues between mothers and daughters, from which they gradually gain mutual understanding. Also, the stories in the four parts are told in such a sequence – mothers, daughters, daughters, and mothers – which creates a visual effect that daughters are embraced and protected by mothers (Zhang Ruihua 2001, 99). This not only resembles the walls in mah-jong game, but also echoes the motif of mother-daughter relationships. Moreover, since the mah-jong group is organised for survival in hard times, whether during wars or exile in a foreign land, their story-telling ‘functions as a social glue between the women, as they trade gossip and generate stories around the mah jong table’ (Singer 2001, 333). In this sense, their narratives become unitary, a reconciliation between generations and cultures.

Another distinctive feature of *The Joy Luck Club* is that each part begins with a prologue, ‘defining the theme of that section while disclosing certain aspects of the problem in the mother-daughter relationship’ (Shen 2009, 7). This applies particularly to the first prologue, ‘Feathers from a Thousand Li Away’, which functions to ‘highlight the nature of this relationship in the book and summarize the whole novel’ (Shen 2009, 7). I analysed this revised version of a Chinese parable in Chapter 1; here I examine another prologue as it foreshadows the main stories. The second part of the book is called ‘The Twenty-six Malignant Gates’, in which the lead-in story is a conversation between a mother and her daughter. The mother warns the daughter not

to ride her bicycle around the corner because she knows her daughter will fall down. The daughter does not listen to her mother and suffers a fall at the end. This parable symbolises the conflicts between mother and daughter. Mothers are ready to protect daughters, although mothers seem to be superstitious, while daughters are unable to understand mothers' good intentions. In the following four childhood stories told by daughters, they express their unwillingness to obey their mothers. Waverly fails to become a chess prodigy after her fight with her mother in 'Rules of the Game'; Lena longs for real communication with her mother in 'The Voice from the Wall'; Rose feels regretful that she does not believe her mother's theory about fate and faith in 'Half and Half'; and Jing-mei gives up her piano practising after the clash with her mother.

This alternative writing style which contains Chinese fiction writing tradition allows Kingston and Tan to explore individuality and community values at the same time. Just as the stories are separate while linked, the characters in their books all have their distinctive personalities and status, but at the same time they belong to the Chinese American community. A balance can be found to manage the conflicts between individuals and community with this narrative technique.

Chinese (Auto)Biographical Tradition

Although Kingston's and Tan's works are hard to classify into any specific genre, they do contain some (auto)biographical features. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* was published as a memoir, and can be seen as 'her autobiography with her mother's biography' (Smith 1999, 70); Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is regarded as semi-autobiography (Adams 2005, 2). Their archrival Frank Chin, in his essay 'This Is Not An Autobiography', argued that 'Christian Chinese American autobiography is the only Chinese American literary tradition' and asserted that the 'peculiarly Christian literary weapon: the autobiography' has nothing to do with Chinese literary tradition (Chin 1985, 109). According to Chin's statement, some Chinese American writers, such as Kingston and Tan, have betrayed their national pride and heroic tradition by taking to a Western literary genre – autobiography – and their writings are merely 'confessions', like those of the two prototypical Western autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau.

In the following section, I aim to look at the relation between autobiography and assimilation, and to analyse how Kingston and Tan have adopted both Western and Chinese (auto)biographical elements in their narratives, to challenge the canonical Western genre rather than writing confessions as Frank Chin stated.

Generally speaking, autobiography is the writing of one's life story or stories by oneself. In Western autobiography, the subject is usually 'an accomplished and exceptional individual' (Smith and Watson 2001, 112-3), such as the narrator in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, who is a male role model telling his experience of realising the American dream through hard work. According to Frank Chin's criticism of certain Chinese American writers, adopting autobiography means assimilation into this tradition, being filled with self-contempt and betraying the Chinese national spirit by indulging in Christian self-examination. It is true that quite a large number of Chinese American works were published as autobiographies to attract mainstream readers where '[a]utobiography may be the preeminent kind of American Expression' (Sayre 1980, 147). In contrast, there are not so many autobiographies in China, as this genre is understood in the West, and that might explain why Frank Chin associated autobiography with assimilation. In order to correct this fallacy, I will examine the history of the autobiographical tradition in China and show how Kingston and Tan have been influenced by both Eastern and Western styles.

In fact, there has been a long history of autobiographical writing in China, although those writings cannot be strictly categorised as Western style autobiographies. The counterpart of the Western term autobiography in China is called 'Tzu-Chuan' (*zizhuan*), which was mentioned by Liu Zhiji in *Shitong* (710 AD) (史通). Liu Zhiji considered the first work of this genre to be Qu Yuan's (c. 339 BC–unknown; alt. c. 340–278 BC) narrative poem 'Li Sao' (Nienhauser 1986, 842). During the Qin and Han dynasties, there was a large number of autobiographical writings, usually in the form of an autobiographical preface or postscript, forming a part of another literary genre rather than a stand-alone work. One of the most influential examples is Sima Qian's (c. 145 or 135 – 86 BC) 'Autobiography of the Grand Historian' (*Taishigong zixu*) in the last chapter of *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*), in which the author told his life stories and explained that his aim in writing the book was to fulfil his father's will. Autobiography formed an individual genre in the Jin dynasty after Tao Yuanming's (365–427) 'The Life of the Sire of Five Willows' (*Wuliu xiansheng*

zhuan), a self-portrait of a poet who leads a reclusive life, indifferent to fame and fortune. The uniqueness of the short autobiographical prose piece lies in the fact that it was written in third person and appeared to be fictional, aiming to transcend the dissatisfying reality. Tao Yuanming's fictive autobiographical style was inherited by a host of later autobiographies, such as poet Bai Juyi's 'The biography of Master Drunken Singer' (*Zuiyin xiansheng zhuan*) (Huang 1995, 45). Later in the Tang and Song dynasties, autobiographical writings took to a new sub-genre called 'self-written epitaph', which were '[c]arved on stone to commemorate the lives of officials and other prominent people' (Wang 2015, 323). A large amount of autobiographical writings appeared in the Qing dynasty, among which Shen Fu's *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* (*Fusheng liuji*) in the eighteenth century was considered by some scholars to be 'the first Chinese autobiography in the Western mold, revealing a new interest in subjective description and a skillful handling of daily life' (Nienhauser 1986, 843-4).

From the brief introduction above, it is clear not only that there is an autobiographical tradition in China, but also that it emerged much earlier than the Western counterpart. Among the ancient Chinese autobiographical writings, Qu Yuan's 'Li Sao' and Cai Yan's 'Hujia shibapai' are quite prominent, the former being the first one of this genre and the latter the most well-known female piece. I will summarise some typical features of ancient Chinese autobiographical writing by focusing on these two works, because both have been mentioned in Kingston's books, and then compare the similarities between Kingston's and Tan's books with the two ancient pieces.

Kingston alludes to Qu Yuan's 'Li Sao' in the chapter 'The Li Sao: An Elegy' of *China Men*, and Cai Yan's 'Hujia shibapai' in 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', the final section of *The Woman Warrior*. Both 'Li Sao' and 'Hujia shibapai' were written in first person and expressed the poets' sorrow of exile and nostalgia towards homeland. Qu Yuan was a minister of the state of Chu during the Warring States period of ancient China, and was persecuted by his peer officials and exiled by his lord. There are two parts in 'Li Sao': the first part is about the poet's life experiences, and the second is his quest for future and truth through his trip across China, both physically and spiritually, a mixture of reality and imagination. The poet not only expressed his anguish at leaving his homeland but also his concern about the state and people, and therefore, we Chinese people commemorate him on Dragon Boat Festival Day for his patriotism. The artistic achievement of this autobiographical poem is that it presents a

fantastic imagination by combining fictional figures with reality, and it also shows local colour in language by its use of Chu dialect. Cai Yan's 'Hujia shibapai' is considered to be the second best narrative poem after 'Li Sao' in China. It is also in first-person narrative, describing the hardships of the poetess Cai Yan in the northern area. In this poem, she told the audiences that she spent twelve years in the northern lands before she was able to go back to her homeland, but it was so traumatic to go home because she had to leave her children (with the chieftain) behind. The poem reveals that patriotism and personal happiness cannot be satisfied at the same time. The exile of Cai Yan reveals 'a number of emotional and cultural traits frequently found among Chinese migrants today' (Zufferey 2009, 118), a nostalgic feeling for the homeland, though not necessarily a loyalty towards the empire. Compared with Western autobiographical writing, as represented by Benjamin Franklin, the Chinese style does not highlight personal achievements, but accentuates collectivism.

Western canonical autobiographical writing is white-male-dominated, while Kingston's and Tan's main characters remain marginal and female. The autobiographical elements in their books cannot be simply viewed as attempts at assimilation. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong has done research on minority autobiography in her essay 'Immigrant Autobiography', in which she challenges William Boelhower's model of immigrant autobiography, considering it to be Eurocentric; instead she proffers two different terms, 'autobiography of Americanisation' and 'immigrant autobiography' specifically applicable to Chinese American writing to distinguish autobiographical writing of Americanisation by later generations and narratives by first-generation immigrants, because 'first- and second-generation ethnics cannot be said to experience and perceive "Americanization" in the same way' (Wong 1991a, 152, 148). Wong intends to say that the first-generation Chinese immigrants heavily focus on their experiences before immigration, while the second generation are more interested in their Americanised extraordinary selfhood. In my opinion, Kingston's and Tan's autobiographical elements cannot be simply labelled as belonging in either of Wong's categories because theirs are a mixture of both types; their stories depict both life in their imagined China and in the States, and both show their concern with collectivism and individualism. That is to say, they combine both Chinese autobiographical writing tradition and American life writing styles. The Chinese tradition firstly lies in the fact that both Kingston and Tan tell of ancestors' experiences

in China and America. In *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*, Kingston and Tan describe the mothers' experiences before and after migration, revealing their hardships and trauma in patriarchal and racially unequal societies. In *China Men*, Kingston tries to reconstruct male Chinese American history by recording how several generations of Chinese males came to build various places in America, but could not be verified as citizens. Kingston and Tan have recorded the history of the forerunners by writing down their stories, conveying their compassion and respect for their ancestors. As individuals of the in-between generation who are confronted with both ancestral and mainstream cultures, Kingston and Tan also convey their own anxiety towards the obstacles of fitting into white-dominated society. This universal theme may risk strengthening the stereotype that Chinese American writings are homogeneous: they win sympathy from readers by telling traumatic stories and playing the role of cultural informants. However, we should not ignore the fact that racial discrimination does exist and is a major problem for the survival of Chinese Americans. Chinese Americans have been treated as 'Other' ever since they entered America – yellow fever in the nineteenth century, and model minority after World War Two, the latter being an ironic term to segregate Chinese descendants from both the white and other coloured peoples camouflaged in a flattering term – and are still perceived as an incongruous group by the mainstream, in the form of economic threats or cyber hackers. As a result, it is unavoidable that Chinese American authors reveal the stereotypes of their fellow people, and the group portrait is just a natural overflow of protest. Just like Qu Yuan and Cai Yan, who felt frustrated in exile but remained concerned about their people, Kingston and Tan also fight for the Chinese American community by recording their history as a collective group.

However, it should be noticed that Kingston and Tan are Americans, who have been educated in a Western system and have been unavoidably influenced by mainstream culture. The individualist 'I' aspect is also evident in their writings. The daughter narrators in their works tend to be rebellious against their mothers' parenting and try to find their individualities in mainstream society. For example, the narrator in *The Woman Warrior* is confused by Chinese and American concepts of self-consciousness:

The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I," assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own

name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness; “I” is a capital and “you” is lower-case. (Kingston 1989b, 166-7)

From this statement, I can see that the narrator is trying to find her American self. Her *Fa Mu Lan* fantasy illustrates her hope to be as independent and equal as the white male through her own capabilities, a reflection of the influence from Western autobiographical writing represented by Benjamin Franklin. Autobiography, as a Western term, serves ‘as a particularly powerful genre for the individual achievement of liberty through ethical education and civilization’, ‘the liberal genre par excellence’ (Lowe 2015, 46). Born as American citizens, Kingston and Tan have always been internalising American values, which is reflected in the mother-daughter conflicts and inter-racial marriages both in their works and their real lives. However, the reality is that Chinese Americans are still marginalised no matter how assimilated they have become. When examining African American autobiography, Lisa Lowe points out that it ‘both illuminates features of this liberal genre and calls attention to the tensions and inconsistencies that arise when the genre of liberty shapes the story of a former slave’ (Lowe 2015, 47). This is also true of Chinese Americans when they have not acquired equality in the white-dominated society. Kingston’s and Tan’s first-person narrators all give readers an impression that they try hard to be straight A students or female warriors who can enjoy equal rights with males when they believe they could be successful through personal struggles in the land of freedom. However, autobiography as a genre of individual freedom is always interrupted by a collective voice when Kingston and Tan resort to ancestral culture as consolidation of their unprivileged condition, and add Chinese autobiographical tradition to make up for the limits of this Western canonical genre. King-kok Cheung points out that Kingston’s life writing has paid ‘deep homage to ancestral, especially maternal, heritage and resound to the drumbeat of the Asian American movement of the seventies in asserting a distinct ethnic consciousness’ (Cheung 2015, 7). Tan has extended this consciousness in a similar fashion. Their life writing style is a mixture of Chinese and Western elements, rather than merely a Christian confession or Franklin style self-promotion.

Besides the collectivist consciousness in their writings, the fantasy style and non-standard English language usage also find their origin in Qu Yuan’s ‘*Li Sao*’. Autobiography is supposed to record a person’s life story, but Qu Yuan

unconventionally used some imaginative narratives in his 'Li Sao'. For example, he wrote his fantasy of pursuing beauties in the mythologies:

I wandered eastward to the palace green,
And pend[an]ts sought where jasper boughs were seen,
And vowed that they, before their splendour fade,
As gift should go to grace the loveliest maid.
The lord of clouds I then bade mount the sky
To seek the steam where once the nymph did lie;
As pledge I gave my belt of splendid sheen,
My councillor appointed go-between.
Fleeting and wilful like capricious cloud,
Her obstinacy swift no change allowed.
At dusk retired she to the crag withdrawn,
Her hair beside the stream she washed at dawn.
Exulting in her beauty and her pride,
Pleasure she worshipped, and no whim denied;
So fair of form, so careless of all grace,
I turned to take another in her place. (Qu Yuan)

This fantasy seems to be irrelevant to his life but it was based on the poet's political disillusionment and therefore the quest for beauty 'is used as an allegory for the virtuous minister's search for a ruler worthy to be served, one who will recognise his talents and employ him' (Wang 2015, 309).

Kingston compares Qu Yuan to the narrator's father in *China Men*, also a scholar away from his hometown who fails to realise his dreams. The Fa Mu Lan story in *The Woman Warrior* is quite similar to Qu Yuan's fantasy in 'Li Sao': both function as part of the author's wish to transcend their frustration in reality, to quest dreams in imagination. The self in *The Woman Warrior* 'is either overshadowed by or jostles against other members of the family, or historical and legendary figures' (Cheung 2015,

6). The author not only traced back family history but also employed myths to reinforce the collectivist self. In an interview with Kingston, Seshachari called *The Woman Warrior* ‘a “mythopsychic” autobiography’, meaning ‘a psychic autobiography which draws heavily on mythology’, and Kingston expressed that she liked this term and said that ‘To write a true autobiography or biography, I have to know what the other person dreams and how her imagination works. I am less interested in dates and facts’ (Seshachari 1993, 198). Sidonie Smith regards *The Woman Warrior* as ‘fantasy autobiography’, which embodies a ‘truly subversive “story” of female empowerment’ (Smith 1999, 66). This fantasy style life writing enables Kingston to better express the narrator’s consciousness in a poetic fashion, going beyond the confinements of mere facts.

Apart from collectivism and fantasy, there is another interesting feature in ‘Li Sao’ and ‘Hujia shibapai’: they both use alternative languages to counteract mainstream narratives. ‘Li Sao’ was composed in the dialect of Chu, which was not the standard language of China at that time, and thus presents an exotic flavour. Cai Yan’s poem also absorbed linguistic features from the Huns (see Guo Moruo 1960). Similarly, Kingston’s and Tan’s writing features Chinese English diction and non-standard Chinese (see Chapter 1). The use of Chinese style English functions as an indicator of minority colour, a gesture to reject total assimilation to some extent. Also, this language style makes their life writing more believable since people of Chinese origin do speak in this way.

Although consciously ‘ethnic’ works are often assumed to be forms of autobiographical or life writing, and are supposed to provide information about their root cultures, the literary aspirations and significance of Kingston’s and Tan’s works should not be downplayed. Eleanor Ty explains the autobiographical features of ethnic writers in this way: when they try to ‘rewrite and re-present their subjectivity, they have recourse to myths, to personal and collective memories, to oral narratives, and to recorded as well as unrecorded history’ (Ty 2004, xiv). Kingston and Tan have borrowed some autobiographical devices while in fact creating cross-boundary works; they reconstruct Chinese American subjectivity while rewriting past experiences of their ancestors. The unconventional autobiographical narratives in Kingston’s and Tan’s works have challenged the Western canonical autobiographical genre by shattering the ego of individualism, using fantasy events and non-standard English.

Their cross-genre writing can be regarded as a weapon to challenge mainstream norms and regulations.

Mobility and Emptiness from Chinese Art

There is a well-known ancient Chinese folklore about painting: ‘Once upon a time there was a painter who always boasted that his painting was very realistic and flawless. One day, a kid pointed out some mistake in the painter’s work. The painter felt embarrassed but did not want to admit it, so he asked the kid to paint something to prove his talent. The kid took the brush and drew a patch of black ink on the paper. When everyone was confused, the kid said that it was a black bull in the dark night.’

Obviously, the moral of the tale is to educate children to be humble. I find the interpretation of the black painting in this kid’s tale quite witty and poetic. Kingston mentions a similar painting in *The Woman Warrior* when the narrator suffers from communication problems at school:

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 the 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. (Kingston 1989b, 165)

Here Kingston uses the black curtain as a metaphor to imply the inability of the narrator and her parents to articulate in a normal way thanks to their disadvantageous racial identities in the white-dominated society, as well as the narrator’s confusion about her ancestral culture (Bonetti 1986, 33). Not only in her writing, but also in an interview, Kingston expressed her enthusiasm for painting,

After college I thought I was a painter because I always see pictures, and I see visions before the words came, and it’s always a secondary step to find the words. So at one time I thought that I could go directly from picture to picture because when I write I

want the readers to see the pictures. So why not forget the words and just paint pictures? I did that for a year until I realized that I had already put in twenty years of apprenticeship with words, and that in order to be as good a painter as I was already a writer, I would need to paint for another twenty years. So I quit doing that and continued writing. (Kingston in Bonetti 1986, 33)

Although Kingston did not become a painter, the influence of art has been unconsciously or consciously merged in her writing style. Coincidentally, Amy Tan also dreamed of being an artist when she was a child (About Amy Tan). In this part, I will probe into the visual aspect of the two authors' writings, compare it with Chinese painting, and examine its effects.

The ultimate goal of a traditional Chinese painter is to 'to capture not only the outer appearance of a subject but its inner essence as well – its energy, life force, spirit' (Hearn 2008, 3). Unlike Western painting, which emphasises details and concreteness, Chinese painting seeks spirit and abstraction. According to the Chinese French writer, poet and calligrapher François Cheng in his monograph *Empty and Full: The Language of Chinese Painting*, Chinese artists aspire to 'the ideal of realizing a living microcosm in which it is possible for the macrocosm to function' (Cheng 1994, 2). This is to say that Chinese painters aim to grasp the wholeness of the objects instead of detailed preciseness. In order to create this kind of spirituality, Cheng explains the concept of 'emptiness' in Chinese painting, which 'emerges as pivotal to the way the Chinese conceive the universe' (Cheng 1994, 35). In Chinese Taoist philosophy, on which Chinese arts are based, the universe is in an eternal transformation; it is emptiness that 'introduces discontinuity and reversibility into a given system and thus permits the elements composing the system to transcend rigid opposition and one-sided development' and 'offers human beings the possibility of approaching the universe at the level of totality' (Cheng 1994, 36). Emptiness makes the flow in a binary system possible, but it is 'not merely a neutral space serving to defuse the shock without changing the nature of the opposition'; it is 'the nodal point where potentiality and becoming interweave, in which deficiency and plenitude, self-sameness and otherness, meet' (Cheng 1994, 51).

Kingston's and Tan's texts are full of visual symbols and structures which resemble the features of mobility and emptiness in Chinese art. In 'White Tigers', Kingston presents a description of the 'mountain-water' type of Chinese painting and 'oscillates

between a linear narrative and an ink brush' (Perrin-Chenour 2014, 130-1), as pointed out by Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour in her essay, 'Between Postmodernity and Taoist Beliefs: Metamorphosis in "On Discovery" by Maxine Hong Kingston':

The call would come from a bird that flew over our roof. In the brush drawings it looks like the ideograph for "human," two black wings. The bird would cross the sun and lift into the mountains (which look like the ideograph "mountain"), there parting the mist briefly that swirled opaque again. I would be a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains. The brambles would tear off my shoes and the rocks cut my feet and fingers, but I would keep climbing, eyes upward to follow the bird. We would go around and around the tallest mountain climbing ever upward. I would drink from the river, which I would meet again and again. We would go so high the plants would change, and the river that flows past the village would become a waterfall. At the height where the bird used to disappear, the clouds would gray the world like an ink wash.

Even when I got used to that gray, I would only see peaks as if shaded in pencil, rocks like charcoal rubbings, everything so murky. There would be just two black strokes – the bird. (Kingston 1989b, 20)

Perrin-Chenour presents a detailed analysis of how, at the beginning of this quotation, the picture seems to be static, but becomes fluid when the bird appears; then the picture regains stillness again when the bird transforms into the ideograph 'human'. In the following sentence, the bird moves again: it 'would cross the sun and lift into the mountains'; and then the scene turns into stillness when the bird transforms into the ideograph 'mountain'. In Chinese arts, painting and calligraphy are closely interrelated, both seeking to 'capture the *li*, the inner line of things, as well as the breath that animates them' (Cheng 1994, 66). In the quotation above by Kingston, we can see that painting and calligraphy, as well as writing, blur the boundaries among the three. It is narrative, painting and animation at the same time. Perrin-Chenour also notes that the modal word 'would' that appears in the first sentence is repeated in the next paragraph ('when I got used to that gray, I would only see peaks as if shaded in pencil, rocks like charcoal rubbings'), which indicates that the narrator, who at first only wishes to become a warrior, 'has become the heroine of the legend' and 'has entered the painting' (Perrin-Chenour 2014, 131). This is quite similar to one of the unique qualities of Chinese painting – 'double perspective': 'the painter is supposed to stand on a height from which he commands an overall view of the landscape', 'but at the same time, he

seems to move across the picture, joining himself to the rhythm of a dynamic space and contemplating things from afar, from nearby, and from different sides' (Cheng 1994, 91). The narrator of 'White Tigers' is both the painter and the heroine Fa Mu Lan in the picture, which makes the painting 'dynamic and animated' (Perrin-Chenour 2014, 131). However, all the description in this writing is not concrete, leaving empty space for readers to speculate what the text really implies: Is the narrator a village girl or a swordswoman? Is the narrator telling her life story or a fairy tale? It is the emptiness that separates the binary oppositions, but at the same time changes and interweaves them, which enables the text to cross the boundaries between writing and painting, reality and myth, nonfiction and fiction.

In *China Men*, Kingston also begins her narration with a myth which bears some traits of 'water-colour' painting. The main character, Tang Ao, went overseas to look for the Gold Mountain, but came to the Land of Women. Ocean, mountain and land here are three elements that Chinese artists favour. After telling the emasculation story of Tang Ao, Kingston leaves a blank space between the story and the following paragraph, and reveals that the Land of Women might be in North America. This opening chapter is quite ambiguous and seems to imply that there will be Gold Mountain stories following. It is true that in later chapters the stories take place in the sites with mountains, but China men did not find gold there. The high mountains in Hawaii where the narrator's great grandfathers cut down trees to grow sugarcanes, and the Sierra Nevada Mountains where her grandfather blasted through with dynamite to build the railroad, are another form of the black curtain metaphor in *The Woman Warrior* (Kingston 1987, 5). When the narrator unveils the black curtain, the scene is not amazing, but turns out to be ugly and cruel – the Chinese American forefathers were forced to work as cheap labour in their dreamland Gold Mountain and construct this nation that does not allow them to be naturalised. The dynamic moment of drawing the black curtain leaves anticipation and suspense to the readers, however, the following stories are traumatic history alternated with myths. Although myths and history are told in separate chapters, they mingle together to claim the Chinese American history as Kingston foreshadows in the opening chapter: that Chinese discovered North America 'during the reign of Empress Wu (A.D. 694-705)' or 'A.D. 441' (Kingston 1989a, 5). The dynamic feature of water-colour painting thus is presented first with the drawing of a black curtain (opening a new roll of paper), then a false imagination of gold and sugarcanes followed

by the disillusionment of a splash of black ink all over the paper. It is a process from black to misty water-coloured scenes and then back to black again. Interestingly, another magic aspect of Chinese painting is that painters only use black ink to express different colours. So the scene in *China Men* can be interpreted as drawing a picture in several steps with different shades of black rather than painting a Western style picture with all colours and then destroying it with black colour.

The mah-jong game in *The Joy Luck Club* also reflects the qualities of mobility and emptiness in Chinese painting. When playing the game, the four mothers, or later three mothers with Jing-mei to replace her late mother Suyuan, have to build four walls with the mah-jong tiles. In the whole structure of the book, there are four rounds of stories representing four rounds of game. The story titles printed on the contents page seem to be static; however, when it is related with game-playing, it suddenly becomes dynamic by the noise of shuffling and tossing mah-jong tiles. Also, the stories are not told by a single narrator, instead, seven different speakers take turns on their own narratives. This fluidity is also interlinked by emptiness: the whole book is divided into four sections and each section consists of four stories, while the stories are comparatively quite independent to each other; however, there is some hidden theme in the book that combines the separate stories into a unitary entity. This is quite similar to the mah-jong game, players do not know what tiles their opponents have got in hand, and they can only perform their strategies in every step, but their goals are the same: to win and to entertain, and this makes the players interact and the game tiles circulate.

There is a further instance that mirrors the essence of Chinese painting in *The Joy Luck Club*. The original hostess of the mah-jong group was Suyuan, who has died recently. Her daughter Jingmei has to take her place as the hostess and tell her mother's stories in the book. Therefore, Jingmei's voice appears four times in the book rather than twice, as in the case of the other daughters. When Jingmei is narrating in different sections, she has to veer between the identities of a daughter and of a mother, although she narrates her mother's part in third-person perspective. This identity change reaches its climax in the last part of the book when Jingmei arrives in China to meet her half-sisters on behalf of her mother. When Jingmei steps out of the plane in Shanghai airport,

Somebody shouts, "She's arrived!" And then I see her. Her short hair. Her small body. And that same look on her face. She has the back of her hand pressed hard against her

mouth. She is crying as though she had gone through a terrible ordeal and were happy it is over.

And I know it's not my mother, yet it is the same look she had when I was five and had disappeared all afternoon, for such a long time, that she was convinced I was dead. [...]

And now I see her again, two of her, waving, and in one hand there is a photo, the Polaroid I sent them. As soon as I get beyond the gate, we run toward each other, all three of us embracing, all hesitations and expectations forgotten.

“Mama, Mama,” we all murmur, as if she is among us. (Tan 1998, 287)

In this scene, Jingmei finds her mother in her two sisters and the sisters consider her as the representative of their mother. They cuddle and whisper ‘Mama, Mama’ amongst them. At this moment, mother, daughters, and sisters become one being. The identity flow is based on the absence of the mother, Suyuan, leaving space for Jingmei to reconstruct her understanding of her mother and to look at the two cultures she lives in from an alternative angle. The identity transformation is thus realised through the process when the daughter only retells her mother’s story at first but finally finds her mother in her bones, which conforms to the concept of ‘double perspective’ in Chinese painting.

A good Chinese painting is usually accompanied by a seal, which not only explains the motif but also strengthens the spirituality of the picture and inspires the reader’s imagination (Pan Tianshou 1978, 36). In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston uses the image of a bird that resembles the Chinese character ‘human’ in a whole page before each chapter begins³. This bird functions as a metaphor of the narrator’s wish to be an independent human being and to fly away from bondage, an image that resonates in each chapter as the female characters are all rebellious in different fashions. In *China Men*, Kingston adopts the seal in a similar way. Before each chapter, there is a page with a seal of four Chinese characters ‘金山勇士’, Gold Mountain Warriors, to indicate her intention of writing the book: to reconstruct the history of male Chinese Americans which has been buried by mainstream society. Amy Tan also uses a seal in

³ In the 1989 Vintage edition of *The Woman Warrior*, there was a bird at the beginning of each chapter, while in some earlier editions such as Knopf and Picador, it was a seal of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan. I assume the Fa Mu Lan seal to be more clichéd while the later version of the bird seems to make more sense.

The Joy Luck Club, which consists of four traditional Chinese characters ‘喜樂僥幸’ and two English words ‘JOY LUCK’ as an explanation of the Chinese counterpart. This points out that the purpose of having a mah-jong group amongst the mothers is to enjoy themselves even when they are in adversity. Therefore, all the three seals reveal the main idea of the texts, and bring before the readers visual items that are of great novelty as the seal characters are not so easy to identify even for the Chinese. The abstractness and visual qualities contain the Chinese philosophy within extreme simplicity. The use of seals again combine painting, calligraphy and writing together, creating a mixed art form that goes beyond Western canonical genre imperatives.

Chinese characters have been attracting Western scholars for a long time for their visual qualities, which are distinctively different from the Western writing system. Ezra Pound was enthusiastic in relating Chinese characters to the pictorial system in a mechanistic way. Examples can be found in ‘The Chinese Writing Character as a Medium for Poetry’ that ‘Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature’ (Fenollosa and Pound 1991, 331). Derrida used Chinese characters to develop key concepts in his deconstructionist theory such as ‘arche-writing’, ‘trace’ and ‘différance’. Derrida resorted to Chinese script to challenge logo- and phono-centrism from Plato to Saussure, according to which speech is considered superior to writing, and from which binary oppositions such as presence/absence derive (see Derrida 1997). Despite the fact that he simply overgeneralised Chinese writing to be ideographic, Derrida greeted it with ‘idealism and utopianism’ and bestowed on it ‘the value of a primitive logic, a pre-Western past in which are to be found the West’s many “posts” or futures’ (Chow 2002, 65).

Kingston’s and Tan’s use of seals emphasises the visual and poetic qualities of Chinese characters. Unlike Pound’s over-reading of Chinese characters in his essay ‘The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry’, Kingston’s and Tan’s seals do not misinterpret these characters in a bewildering manner; the seals are quite faithful to either their Chinese meaning or the themes of the works. The use of seals also bears the traits of Derrida’s deconstructionist ideas in the sense that Chinese characters serve as a vehicle to challenge Western phonology and to dismantle binary oppositions such as white/coloured. Their seals are simple but sophisticated, revealing the theme

without over-explaining the meaning, achieving visual attraction without disrupting the main text.

Apart from the texts, the two authors, spokespersons of the daughter narrators in their writings, are also representatives of mobility and emptiness. Being Chinese Americans, they are living between mainstream and ancestral cultures. Although they were born as Americans and married white husbands, they cannot stop their yearning for the imaginary China which they have described in their creative works. Kingston expressed her joy after her trip to China, 'The trip gave me a lot of faith in the power of my imagination. And I was also affirmed in my belief in talk-story – that the ancestors and my mother had passed on a tradition that's thousands of years old and yet entirely accurate. I had all kinds of affirmations' (Skenazy 1989, 134). Kingston even named her son Joseph Lawrence Chung Mei, in which 'Chung Mei' means China and the United States. Likewise, Amy Tan's parents named her An-mei in Chinese, which means 'Blessing from America' (Dong 2009, 1). The story-telling and music traditions Kingston inherited from her mother have inspired her son and nieces and nephews to do music and show business (Kingston 1987, 6). Amy Tan also wrote 'Welcome back to China' (Tan 2003b, 175) after her 1990 trip to China, a place where her inspirations always come from. These in-between identities endow Kingston and Tan 'the power to interrupt, to trouble, to intervene tactically rather than strategically in the interrogation of the dominant discourses' (Ang 2005, 2). They incorporate two cultural elements in an organised entity in their writings as their way to counteract racial prejudices.

Significance of Transcending Genres

As genre is related with Western people's outlook of the world, changing genre conventions can be considered as an act to challenge the established Western knowledge system. Recent scholarship on ethnic writings have acknowledged the issue of form, such as Betsy Huang's study, *Contesting Genres*, in which she explores three types of genre which are highly structured but marginalised in academic circles, arguing that these genres help rewrite generalised narratives about Asian American history, culture and identity. Although Huang does not focus on Kingston's and Tan's works, she points out that 'Genre experimentation is, by its very nature, a troubling act' (Huang 2010, 3).

The conventional Western thinking pattern is based on binary oppositions – the white are superior to the coloured, males are stronger than females, and the Western world is more civilised than the East. In the field of literary form, people tend to regard fiction as more creative than non-fiction because the latter is considered to require less imagination and effort. Kingston's and Tan's works cannot be purely pigeonholed into any of the established Western genres, but are a combination of fiction and non-fiction, Western and Eastern literary traditions, and Chinese artistic techniques. The Chinese literary and artistic aspects in their genre creation further add more rebellious colour to the mixed genre. The ambiguity and hybridity in their works threatens the well-organised Western ideology and is highly likely to shake binary oppositions because, if the boundaries of genres can be crossed, the differences between races and genders should be eliminated as well. Therefore the significance of cross-genre writing not only lies in creative experimentation but also in laying bare racial and gender discrimination in the United States. Transcending genres thus becomes the trope of dismantling Western stereotypes.

As ethnic writing has always been treated as life writing, which is not as creative as fiction works, Kingston and Tan experiment with their unique writing styles to challenge mainstream readers' presumptions. Even the non-fiction aspects in their works can be perceived as a deliberate attempt to entrap readers to believe that their information about China is authentic, though it is in fact imaginary. They outwit Western readers by bringing up controversial debates on Chinese traditions, women's trauma, and prejudices towards Chinese Americans, which are mostly buried and unheard of in the past.

Another significance of hybrid genre writing lies in its experimental aspect, which shifts from the socio-political focus of ethnic writing to its aesthetic value. This does not aim to downplay the socio-political function, but to emphasise the creative aspects of ethnic works. Since general readers tend to pay more attention to the plots and how the stories are told rather than to the critical meaning, works with novelty are likely to receive greater market share. For example, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, which is well-accepted by mainstream readers, has also drawn attention from scholars and studies not only in literary studies but also in gender, history, and military studies (see Lim 1991).

Conclusion

Kingston and Tan have not only transcended the conventions of Western literary genres such as novel and autobiography by borrowing Chinese fiction and life writing styles, thus making their texts exotic and original, but also embodied the spirit of traditional Chinese painting. Unlike Ezra Pound and Jacques Derrida, who were fascinated by Chinese characters but after all could not delve into this complicated system thoroughly, Kingston's and Tan's adoption of Chinese is more subtle, despite the fact that their understanding of Chinese may not be direct. The significance of creating mixed genres lies in challenging the established Western conventions, transcending the binary oppositions that are deeply rooted in Western philosophy: white/black, male/female, etc. This is a key trope of resisting mainstream stereotypes cast on Chinese Americans. At the same time, the seemingly Western autobiographical writing style that fits into general Western readers' presumptions, mixed with other genres, functions as a survival strategy to make their stories circulate in the marketplace.

Chapter 3. Mulan's Trip to the West and Back

Maxine Hong Kingston intended to write the second chapter of *The Woman Warrior* 'The White Tigers', as a 'childish myth', a 'kung fu movie parody' (Kingston 1982, 57); however, Western readers consider this part their favourite of the whole book, and the story of Hua Mulan (Fa Mu Lan in Kingston's version) became well-known in the U.S. and worldwide afterwards, a rare legendary image from an Asian source. This unexpected popularity of Mulan has drawn attention from the mainstream to marginalised Chinese American writing together with its culture, and has aroused scholarly discussion on Mulan's cross-cultural transformation from both the West and China. In this chapter, I will look at the sources of Mulan in Chinese history and in Kingston's background to analyse her departure from the original version. Also, I will examine the interaction between Kingston's Fa Mu Lan and U.S. popular culture as well as its influence in the West and China.

Chinese Sources of the Hua Mulan Story

Hua Mulan is one of the four heroines in Chinese folk tales who takes her aged father's place in the army to defeat the enemy. Mulan is well-known in China but it is hard to source any accurate information on this figure, because she is not, strictly speaking, a historical character, with a name, ethnicity, hometown, etc. In spite of the heroine's various origins, due to the myth's circulation in different regions, most students in China can recite some lines from *The Ballad of Mulan (Mulan Shi)*, the most widely known source of Mulan's story. It is commonly acknowledged that *The Ballad of Mulan* was first collected in the *Musical Records of Old and New (Gujin yuelu)* edited by Zhi Jiang, a monk in the Chen dynasty (557-589), and was later included in Guo Maoqian's (1041-1099) *Music Bureau Collection (Yuefu shiji)* in the Song dynasty (960-1279). The ballad is a narrative poem and is generally believed to have 'c[o]me to China from the oral tradition of the non-sinitic Xianbei (Särbi) people when the Xianbei Tuoba (Tabgatch) clan established the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535)' (Mair and Bender 2011, 326). This non-sinitic origin can be inferred from the use of 'Khan' (Guo Maoqian 1979, 374) in the ballad, which refers to a ruler mostly in Turkic and Mongolian languages. When compiling the ballad, Guo Maoqian made a note: 'Mulan, name unknown' (Guo Maoqian 1979, 373). This ambiguous statement may

imply that Mulan could be either a family name or a general notion of a girl rather than a real name. Although Mulan's family name remains controversial in literary history (various versions including Zhu, Mulan, Wei, Hua, Han, etc.), there is no solid historical evidence to prove any one of them correct and people generally assume it to be Hua (pronounced as Fa by Cantonese in Kingston's book) after the Ming dynasty playwright Xu Wei (1521–1593) recreated the image of Mulan in his *Female Mulan Goes to War in Her Father's Place* (*Ci Mulan tifu congjun*). At the very beginning of this play, Mulan tells the audiences that 'My family name is Hua and given name Mulan [...] My family have lived in Wei County, Hebei for generations. My father's name is Hua Hu' (Xu Wei 1983, 1198). This play is mainly based on the content in *The Ballad of Mulan*, depicting how Mulan takes her father's role in the army under the disguise of a boy and defeats the enemy, only adding a happy ending featuring Mulan's marriage to Mr. Wang. Mulan is also mentioned in another influential Chinese literary work, *Heroes in Sui and Tang Dynasties* (*Suitang yanyi*) written by Chu Renhuo (1625-1682) in the Qing dynasty. In this fiction, the basic background information on Mulan is similar to that mentioned in Xu Wei's: her family name is Hua and her father's name is Hu and they live in Hebei (Chu Renhuo 1981, 428). While in Xu Wei's version, Mulan comes home and gets married, under Chu Renhuo's pen she commits suicide because she is not willing to become a concubine of the Khan of the Western Turks.

Although there are different versions in Chinese literary history, either oral or written, the above mentioned three works can be regarded as the most influential and significant to the formation of Mulan's story that Chinese people are familiar with nowadays. The key facts include that her full name is Hua Mulan, she disguises herself as a man to take her father's role when he is conscripted by the emperor to protect the nation, and she is admired by the people for her bravery when fighting against the enemies. Another point is that these three texts, although in written form, can easily reach common people of all walks of life. *The Ballad of Mulan* is in fact a song, *Female Mulan Goes to War in Her Father's Place* can be played on stage, and *Heroes in Sui and Tang Dynasties* is widely adapted in storytelling and Chinese opera all across China. Gradually the image of Mulan has been enriched by all types of art forms and become a synonym for heroines and a role model of national loyalty and filial piety in China.

Transgender Women in Ancient China

Despite the fact that premodern China was dominated by patriarchal institutions, representations of heroic women are not rare in historical and literary works. According to a doctoral dissertation by Xiaolin Li, ‘forty women warriors in ancient China have been identified’ (Li 1995, 111). For example, the first Chinese female army leader written in history is Fu Hao, one of King Wu Ding’s consorts of the Shang dynasty (c.1600BC-c.1046BC). Based on the information on oracle bone inscriptions, she led military campaigns against neighbouring tribes and the number of soldiers in her army reached dozens of thousands (Yang Shanqing 1995; *The Tomb of Lady Fu Hao*). Other women generals who served in the imperial army such as Liang Hongyu (1102-1135) and Qin Liangyu (1574-1648) can also be found in history and have been honoured by the common people. Apart from these women commanders, there were also women leaders of peasant rebellions in history, such as Chen Shuozen (620-653), the first self-claimed female emperor, and Yang Miaozen, ‘who contradicts every stereotypical view of her gender’ by committing adultery, an offence ‘absolutely unforgivable, least of all in a woman warrior’ (Wu 2002, 137, 167).

Besides military women recorded in history, women warriors are common in ancient Chinese literary works. In *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era (Taiping guangji)*, a collection of fiction stories compiled by Li Fang (925-996), there are several stories featuring female gallant knights-errant, including Xie Xiao’e in ‘*Xie Xiao’e*’, the merchant’s wife in ‘*Guren qi*’, Lady Jing the Thirteenth in ‘*Jing shisan niang*’, Cui Shensi’s concubine in ‘*Cui Shensi*’, the curly-bearded stranger in ‘*Qiuran ke*’, the woman in the carriage in ‘*Chezong nüzi*’, the mysterious girl of the Nie Family in ‘*Nie Yinniang*’, Red Thread in ‘*Hongxian*’ (Li Fang 2005). All of these female figures are endowed with supernatural martial skills while the depiction of their physical appearance is not as feminine and delicate as those common to females in ancient fiction works. The second case is in one of the Four Great Classical Works *Water Margin*, a book about a bandit uprising written at the turn of the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, in which three female outlaws are particularly outstanding. The most well-known one is Sun Erniang, nicknamed Female Yaksha (*Mu yecha*), a bold and coquettish killer. The second, Hu Sanniang, whose nickname is Ten-Foot Black Hair (*Yizhang qing*), is a stunning beauty and sacrifices her life to

save her dwarf husband. The third one, Gu Dasao, though nicknamed She Tiger (*Mu Dachong*) for her unpleasant appearance, is in fact very cunning and courageous. Another extremely important heroine, Mu Guiying, was vividly described in Xiong Damu's *Romance of the Generals of Yang Family (Yangji Jiang yanyi)* in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). Mu Guiying is one of the daughters-in-law of the Yang family, who leads the Yang Family widows to defend the nation from foreign invasions after all the male family members sacrificed their lives in war at the end of the Song dynasty (960–1279). She enjoys similar fame and respect as Hua Mulan and is an icon of steadfast women.

These female military figures in history and literature have been circulated in popular culture in various artistic forms, mostly in theatrical and storytelling performance. For instance, the stories of Mulan, Mu Guiying and the three female bandits in *Water Margin* are popular topics in Chinese opera, an artistic form that still has great appeal in Chinatowns everywhere (Rao 2011). Chinese opera, as an indispensable part of Chinese culture, can date back to the Qin and Han dynasties and includes a unique feature of cross-dressing. For example, in Beijing/Peking opera (a sub-genre of Chinese opera), all the female characters are played by 'female impersonator[s]' (Li 2003, 1), i.e. male actors, whereas in other sub-genres such as Shaoxing Opera and Kunqu Opera, all the performers are female. Besides this, a more important gesture of cross-dressing can be reflected in the playwrights' interest in creating cross-dressed characters. The pioneering playwright Xu Wei in the Ming dynasty portrayed two cross-dressed heroines based on existing tales. One is Mulan in *Female Mulan Goes to War in Her Father's Place*, which I have mentioned in previous paragraphs. Another one is a girl named Huang Chongjia in *Female Top Graduate Declines a Shephoenix and Gets a He-phoenix (Nü zhuangyuan cihuang defeng)* who outperforms her male competitors in the imperial test and, disguised as a boy, becomes an official. Moreover, in the Cantonese-speaking region where Kingston's ancestors came from, Mulan is a popular figure in Yue Opera. Her name is pronounced as 'Fa Muk Lan', which was adopted by Kingston later as 'Fa Mu Lan' in *The Woman Warrior* (Kwa and Idema 2010, xxx-xxxii).

Kingston's Fa Mu Lan

As a descendant of Chinese immigrants, Kingston spent her childhood in the Chinatown of Stockton, California, where she spoke Cantonese with her parents and neighbours. Within this community, she was exposed to opportunities of watching 'Chinese opera on stage and on the screen', especially when 'Chinese theatre was alive and well in California, in contrast to what was happening in the old country' (Huntley 2001, 5). Also, the neighbours who spoke Cantonese around her provided her with their unique 'talk-story', a way to circulate legends, myths, gossip and family tales. Through these sources, it is highly likely that Kingston gained access to the legend of Hua Mulan as well as other stories about cross-dressed female figures. In fact, she has mentioned numerous Chinese heroines in her book *Tripmaster Monkey*, 'Red Jade, Flower Wood Orchid, the fighting aunties from the Sung Dynasty, the ladies and goodwives of the Water Margin, Night Ogress and Pure Green Snake alias the Tigress' (Kingston 1990, 138), which refer to Liang Hongyu, Hua Mulan, the Yang Family widows, as well as the female fighters in *Water Margin*, heroines I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs (Transgender Women in Ancient China).

Kingston collected all the myths, legends, historical facts she acquired from her mother, her community and anywhere else, and mixed them together to make her own version of Fa Mu Lan. Compared with these ancient women warriors including the traditional Hua Mulan, Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is dramatically different.

It may seem to be confusing that so many cross-dressed female images appeared in patriarchal ancient China, as it is so stereotypically acknowledged that Chinese women were disciplined to follow the Three Obediences (*Sancong*), that 'a woman is under the authority of, or dependant upon, a male relative during all three stages of her life' (Knapp 2013, 524). These female images, though they appear to be unconventional and unorthodox, are still 'well defined within the Confucian doctrine of the so-called *zhong xiao jie yi* (loyalty, filial piety, integrity, and righteousness)' (Lai 1999, 78). The Chinese version of Mulan is the best example of such a type of heroine, who has crossed boundaries but still can be viewed as a role model. She joins the army to protect her nation and to prevent her aged father from conscription. Therefore, she shows loyalty to the ruler and filial piety to her father. At the end of *The Ballad of Mulan*, she refuses to be an official in the imperial court and returns home instead, which indicates

that she is not ambitious but family-centred. In Xu Wei's version, Mulan also returns home after war and is happy with a marriage under her father's arrangement. This shows the authority of the father as well as the daughter's obedience. Further, in *Heroes in Sui and Tang Dynasties*, Mulan commits suicide because she refuses to be a concubine of a Khan. This is a declaration of her chastity because a Khan is the ruler of the barbarian clans rather than a Han Chinese (the dominant population in China). Therefore, all three versions of Mulan were created under patriarchal aesthetics despite the heroine's masculinity in the battlefield.

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Fa Mu Lan is unrelated to feudal residuals. Looking at the title 'White Tigers', it is, in my opinion, an extremely daring insult to patriarchy although seldom have critics noticed the hidden meaning of the phrase. According to Chinese mythology, the white tiger represents the direction of the West and military power; however, in vernacular slang, it refers to erotic women who have no pubic hair and will bring misfortunes to their husbands.⁴ So Kingston's use of this term can be understood in this way: women in the West can be either warriors or sluts without conforming to moral doctrines. Ironically, when 'White Tigers' is viewed as a mountain, it seems to be a romantic setting, adding some fantastic flavour that usually appears in martial arts fiction. Under this title, I cannot expect Kingston's Fa Mu Lan to be an obedient daughter without any free will. In the following discussion, I will examine how Kingston's Fa Mu Lan departs from the traditional image of the maiden in China.

Kingston begins the story with a dreamlike narration, with images of swordswomen dancing and boxing between the lines, and even the narrator cannot 'tell where the stories left off and the dreams began' (Kingston 1989b, 19). The narrator remembers that her mother tells her that she would 'grow up a wife and a slave' but also teaches her 'the chant of Fa Mu Lan' (Kingston 1989b, 20), a song of a warrior woman. Then

⁴ Seldom do scholars mention the meaning of the title 'White Tigers'. I only found one article which explained this phrase to be 'a rude way to refer to a woman' (Lai 1999, 105). Amy Tan also mentions 'white tigress' in her 2013 book *The Valley of Amazement*, about a practice among courtesans of shaving their genitalia (Tan 2014, 171).

the dream proceeds and the narrator goes to the mountain led by a bird and becomes the heroine Fa Mu Lan.

I was enchanted by this dreamlike fantasy style when I first came across this text. To me, it is more like a martial arts story than the traditional Hua Mulan legend. The strangely familiar atmosphere carried me away, like the magic of Scheherazade from the Harem. In the beginning of Kingston's story, the narrator's training experience is described in detail, while in the Chinese version of Mulan, this part is not mentioned. The bird that guides her to the mountain, the old man and old woman who teach her martial arts and the test she undergoes in the forest all remind me of kung fu movies and religious myths. This training can be interpreted as a way to change an ordinary girl's destiny of ending up as a wife or a slave. After several years' training, she becomes a woman warrior and returns home to avenge the villagers. When she learns that her father has been drafted, she takes his place like the Chinese Mulan, however, her motivation is not filial piety or patriotism, but more due to her self-confidence and self-realisation. As she has emphasised several times, that she wants to avoid a girl's fate of becoming a wife; she has to seize the opportunity of protecting her villagers and turning herself into a real heroine rather than remaining in the domestic field.

Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is also a mix of all sources of legends and stories, both from the East and West. Before the narrator sets off to fight against the evil baron, her parents carve some characters on her back. This can easily remind Chinese readers of Yue Fei, a Chinese military general in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1229). It is said that Yue Fei's mother tattooed his back with four Chinese characters '*Jing Zhong Bao Guo*', meaning 'to serve the country with the utmost loyalty' and he practiced this towards his imperial ruler even though he was wronged and killed at last. This combination of Yue Fei's story with Fa Mu Lan's was harshly attacked by Chinese American critics such as Frank Chin, who considered that this confirms that the Chinese 'brutally tattoo messages on the backs of women' (Chin 2005a, 134). Chin's judgement seems to be an overgeneralisation, and Kingston has revealed that her intention of adopting Yue Fei's legend is 'to take his power for women' (Kingston 1991, 24).

Kingston's Fa Mu Lan has also absorbed nourishment from Virginia Woolf's androgynous character, Orlando, not only because she puts on 'men's clothes and

armor' (Kingston 1989b, 36), but because of her double role as male and female at the same time. The fact that she fights for her villagers shows her masculinity, and the scene of giving birth to a baby on the battlefield reveals her feminine nature. This coexistence of both sexes in one individual makes Fa Mu Lan enjoy more strength and power than the original Mulan. bell hooks says that 'Sexism leads women to devalue parenting work while inflating the value of jobs and careers' (hooks 2015, 48), indicating that if a woman only focuses on achievements while giving up family life it is an alliance with sexism. This means that under the influence of sexism, women tend to look down upon the traditional female roles, which they aim to get rid of; but at the same time they tend to divide gender roles into two opposite types: submissive and dominant, and therefore when they try not to be submissive, they are likely to think house chores and parenting less important. According to this view, Fa Mu Lan's childbirth and her final return to her parents-in-law do not weaken her image as a feminist pioneer but rather reflect her mature understanding of real womanhood.

Warriors in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*

As Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is a hybrid of various heroines, her debut book is also a constellation of all types of women warriors. Kingston considers Fa Mu Lan to be 'Ulysses and Penelope in one' (Kingston 2014, 25), which means that she is not only a soldier, but also a weaver. 'The chant begins with the sound of her shuttle and loom: "Jik Jik Jik" 'Weave weave weave.' I love it that *texture* and *text* come from the same root word' (Kingston 1991, 25). Fa Mu Lan, as a weaver, is able to join other female warriors' stories to form a broader view of women of Chinese ancestry. They can be regarded as warriors because they dare to challenge patriarchal and racial discrimination. Similar to the characters in kung fu movies who have their killing tools, such as meteor hammers, nunchakus and flying guillotines, Kingston's women warriors have different weapons to transcend their misfortunes.

The no name woman in the first chapter, though fragile at first glance, is a desperate female avenger. She is left behind by her husband after some 'hurry-up weddings', in which men were supposed to marry their wives before they departed for America (Kingston 1989b, 1). Her husband has been working and seeking fortune in the United States and never comes back. She becomes a living widow, commits adultery and becomes pregnant. As adultery is unforgivable in feudal China, she chooses to commit

suicide with her baby in a well as a revenge over the villagers and her family. Her dead body makes the well poisonous and useless, her dead soul becomes a water ghost that haunts and terrorises the villagers, and more profoundly, her forbidden story circulates among female descendants and titillates their wild imagination from old China to the United States where her husband seeks fortune. Therefore, No name woman becomes triumphant with this 'spite suicide' (Kingston 1989b, 16). 'Pages of paper' have been devoted to her by the narrator to record her trauma and make her the first woman warrior in the book (Kingston 1989b, 16).

Fa Mu Lan's story follows no name woman's, a swordswoman's fantasy. She uses the sword in her hand to take revenge, avenging the no name woman and the persecuted females of patriarchal society. The next woman warrior is the narrator's mother Brave Orchid, who tells her the no name woman's lesson and warns her to keep it secret. Unlike no name woman who has to exact revenge through her death, Brave Orchid is more like a sister of Fa Mu Lan, whose name is 'Sylvan Orchid' if literally translated character by character (Wong 1991b, 32; Li 1988, 501), and survives in white-dominated America with her weapon – strong willpower.

Brave Orchid is financially independent in China, although her husband sends her money from America. After arriving in America, she is forced to give up her profession as a doctor and to take up the manual work in the laundry. She is a typical representative of the immigrants who arrived in America before 1943 and she survives and succeeds in a new environment, supported by her Chinese warrior woman's willpower.

The last woman warrior appears in the coda of the book, Ts'ai Yen, a poet and musician in the late Eastern Han dynasty (25-220). In Kingston's narration, Ts'ai Yen is captured by a barbarian chief and bears two children. She is surrounded by sharp and cold barbarian music which finally inspires her to create the famous 'Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe'. It matches the barbarian flutes and translates her sadness and anger well to both the Chinese and barbarians. As a 'captive soldier' (Cheung 1988, 171), Ts'ai Yen learns to appreciate the barbarian culture instead of resisting and tries to understand difference rather than being resentful. On this point, she is more mature than Fa Mu Lan, for her weapon is no longer a sword that only kills, but words, that enable two parties to communicate and negotiate.

Above all, the ambushed woman warrior in this book is the narrator herself. As a second-generation immigrant in the United States, the narrator has to fight against racial discrimination as well as the bondage from her ancestral culture. Her fantasy of Fa Mu Lan's success does indeed reflect her disappointment in real life: a yellow girl with 'no dates' at school and a disobedient 'tongue-tied' kid at home (Kingston 1989b, 12, 164). However, she transcends the child's myth to become an artist like Ts'ai Yen, recording the trauma of the no name woman and her mother Brave Orchid, articulating her desire to be accepted by mainstream society and to be understood by her mother. She is like Fa Mu Lan, a weaver, who weaves her ancestors' past with myths and legends, as well as a swordswoman, who rebels against gender and racial injustice. She is also similar to Ts'ai Yen, a translator, who interprets her mother's stories into new hybrid versions, and an artist, who uses her pen to transform Chinese stories and make them travel to the West.

Roland Barthes says that history is 'constituted only if we consider it, [and] only if we look at it' (Barthes 1982, 65). Kingston has made her contributions to reconstruct Chinese American history with vivid pictures of women's experiences that she weaves into *The Woman Warrior* and furthered her mission of completing a broader view of Chinese American history by recording the males' epic in *China Men*.

Similar to Fa Mu Lan and her sister warriors, the male characters in *China Men* are portrayed as Gold Mountain 'heroes who lay claim on America for Chinese Americans and who refuse to be silenced or victimized' (Kim 1982, 212). Starting with an appropriation and transformation of Tang Ao's myth from Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror*, a scholar named Tang Ao, who is looking for the Gold Mountain, gets captured by women. With ears pierced and feet bound, he is made the empress's consort. This description of castrated Chinese males is prone to attacks from the *Aiiieeeee!* group led by Frank Chin, seen as showing 'self-contempt and self-destruction' (Chin et al. 1974, xxviii). However, just like the trauma in *The Woman Warrior* undergone by females, the emasculation of males functions as a metaphor for the persecutions of Chinese Americans as a whole in the United States. If women's repression is unbearable in a modernised world, racial discrimination is equally vile. Chinese labourers came to the United States as coolies to build the transcontinental railroads, plant sugarcane in Hawaii, risk their lives in the Alaska mines, and work in the

laundries and restaurants in Chinatowns. Despite their contributions to the prosperity of the U.S., they were not granted citizenship and their wives were not allowed to join them. Kingston presents readers with the trauma of fathers, great grandfathers and brothers on the one hand, and reveals the unspoken humiliating history of Chinese Americans by ‘redeem[ing] them from cultural misconception and historical obscurity’ on the other hand (Li 1990, 488). With a dream of seeking fortune in the Gold Mountain, China men finally ‘found a gold needle in a mountain’ (Kingston 1989a, 308). Having undergone all the humiliations and persecutions, Chinese immigrants survived, and ‘claim[ed] America’ (Pfaff 1980, 14).

While China men were busy ‘making a new myth’, Kingston, as a descendant of Chinese immigrants, ‘wrote the characters so that the women have memories’ (Rabinowitz 1987, 180) and inherited the heroic tradition of Chinese Americans. Her portraits of warriors in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* become alternative records of Chinese Americans.

Mulan vs. Guan Gong

Sau-ling Cynthia Wong elucidates the idea of ‘art as play’ in *The Woman Warrior*, pointing out that Kingston achieved ‘interested disinterestedness’ through ‘meditations on the fate of women who dare to play and become martyrs to the cause’ (Wong 1993, 192). Indeed, Kingston’s ‘White Tigers’ is a girl’s fantasy, in which Fa Mu Lan is presented as a kung fu movie character. However, it is this playful figure that has caused debates within Chinese American academe, inspired later Chinese American artists such as David Henry Hwang, and more significantly, aroused Westerners’ interest in swordswomen, becoming one of the Disney’s Princesses.

Since the 1980s, Kingston’s rewriting of Fa Mu Lan has been accused by the *Aiiiiiiii!* group led by Frank Chin, one of her classmates at the University of California, Berkeley. The famous pen war within Chinese American academic circles mainly focused on Kingston’s use of Chinese legends, especially the story of Mulan. The dispute between the two camps, i.e., Kingston’s group and Frank Chin’s, developed into a vehement war. The two classmates became two parties on the battlefield, the so-called wrestling between Mulan and Guan Gong commencing.

In a 1985 article titled *This Is Not an Autobiography*, Frank Chin compared himself to Guan Gong (Kwan Kung in Chin's spelling), a famous figure from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* who symbolises heroism, expressing that Kingston and her group fake 'Chinese history and culture in terms of the Christian stereotype' (Chin 1985, 110) while he himself aimed to revive the real Chinese heroic tradition in his artistic practices.

Later in 1988, Chin wrote a parody of Kingston's Fa Mu Lan in a short-story collection, *The Chinaman Pacific and Frisco R.R. Co.*, in which he coined the most popular book in China to be 'the autobiography of a white woman born and raised in a French hand laundry in south China' titled 'Unmanly Warrior' by Smith Mei-jing (Chin 1999, 23, 24). Obviously, this 'Unmanly Warrior' is a spoof of *The Woman Warrior*, insinuating that Kingston's warriors are all morbid and feminine. More mockingly, the fictional author's name Mei-jing implies 'the flavor enhancer used in oriental cookery' (Leong 1988, 163), implying that Kingston deliberately warps Chinese traditional legends to cater to Caucasian taste.

In the introduction titled 'Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake' of the Asian American anthology *The Big Aiiieeeee!*, Chin cited and translated *The Ballad of Mulan* to demonstrate that Kingston's version has been 'destroying history and literature' (Chin 2005a, 135). When I was examining Chin's translation, I found his expertise in Chinese to be problematic because, apparently, he confused one traditional Chinese character 聞 (*wén*) with another character 問 (*wèn*) that both appear in this ballad several times⁵. The first one means 'to hear' while the second means 'to ask'. Therefore, in his translation, the third and fourth lines of the ballad mean 'Do not ask how the shuttle shifts. / Do ask why a girl cries herself sick' (Chin 2005a, 136)⁶. In other English translated versions, the German-American sinologist Hans Frankel translated the above two lines as 'You don't hear the shuttle's sound, / You only hear Daughter's sighs.' (Frankel 1976, 69), and Kwa and Idema translated them as 'One

⁵ Traditional Chinese characters have been replaced by simplified Chinese characters in mainland China since 1949, but are still being used in areas such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Chinatowns.

⁶ The third and fourth lines of *The Ballad of Mulan* in traditional Chinese Characters are: 不聞機杼聲/ 唯聞女嘆息.

did not hear the sound of loom and shuttle,/ One only heard her heave these heavy sighs' (Kwa and Idema 2010, 1), which are correct according to the knowledge of my mother tongue. Although this cannot be regarded as a major mistake, Chin's level of proficiency on authentic Chinese culture remains suspect. I have discussed in previous section that it is difficult to offer accurate information on Mulan and there have always been adapted versions, I therefore reckon it is not so meaningful on Chin's part to attack Kingston's elaboration of traditional sources.

What is more urgent for Chinese American academe, in my opinion, is to promote their artistic creations to the mainstream market instead of criticising fellow artists. Kingston is no doubt a role model in this respect, due to the fact that a group of new writers took up literary careers under her influence, such as Japanese American writer Garrett Hongo, who expressed that '[i]f it weren't for Maxine Hong Kingston, I wouldn't have my imaginative life' (Hongo 1995, 17), and David Henry Hwang, who used the concept of Mulan in his debut play *FOB* inspired by Kingston.

Hwang expressed his debt to Kingston in an interview, affirming that it was 'reading *Woman Warrior* that made me feel that I could find my own voice. As an Asian-American, she was the first author who spoke in a voice that seemed special, directly related to me' (Lyons and Hwang 1999, 241). As a son born to first-generation Chinese immigrants, Hwang has also experienced the dilemma of being assimilated and discriminated against. Hwang tried to resolve the tension between assimilation and tradition in his Obie Award-winning play *FOB* (1980), by presenting clashes between established Chinese Americans and FOBs – 'Fresh Off the Boat' newcomers. There are altogether three characters in this play: Dale, an American born Chinese, Dale's Cousin Grace, a first-generation Chinese American, and Steve, an FOB from Hong Kong. Dale is completely assimilated and shows his stereotypical attitudes in the opening scene, claiming that FOBs are 'Clumsy, ugly, greasy', 'Loud, stupid, four-eyed', 'Big feet' and 'Horny' (Hwang 1990, 6). Hwang was aware that the 'assimilationist model was dangerous and self-defeating' (Hwang 1990, xi), and therefore, he resorted to the legendary Chinese figure Hua Mulan (Mu Lan in Hwang's spelling) to describe the spirit of a modern time university student, Grace, who struggles to find a balance between assimilation and tradition. The 'playfully non-realist' atmosphere (Jew 2006, 196) is reflected in the 'Group Story' game-playing

part when the conflict between Grace and FOB Steve is exhibited in a surrealistic conversation between Mulan and Guan Gong (Gwan Gung in Hwang's version), whose name recalls Chin's character. Steve, who calls himself Gwan Gung, finally holds hands with Grace, the spokesperson of Mulan, who helps him embrace both ethnic heritage and his own individuality, perhaps an oblique comment on the need for reconciliation between the two types of Chinese American identity represented by Chin and Kingston.

Mulan in Disneyland

On the one hand, Kingston's creation of Fa Mu Lan and other warrior images has inspired younger generation of Asian American artists. On the other hand, her playful adoption of ethnic mythical images has intoxicated the Western readers who are eager to learn more about the archetypes presented within the text and could end up being loyal fans of ethnic cultures. As a result, the mainstream acceptance of her book has endowed this age-old legendary figure Mulan with new vitality and made her become familiar to English-speaking audiences.

Before Kingston's 'White Tigers', there had been numerous screen and stage adaptations of Mulan's story in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but due to language barriers, they had little influence outside of Chinese-speaking areas. While in English-speaking countries, *The Ballad of Mulan* was available in translation before Kingston's work appeared – for example, 'the 1881 publication of W.A.P. Martin's "Mulan, the Maiden Chief" by Harper & Brothers in New York, apparently the earliest English translation of the "Ballad"' (Dong 2011, 179), and Hans H. Frankel's version in *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* – these were probably only noticed by academics, and received little public attention. It was most likely Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, 'one of the most widely circulated and frequently taught literary texts by a living American author' (Wong 1999, 3), that popularised Mulan in the West.

During the 1990s, Kingston's Fa Mu Lan became the 'source and inspiration of the film' (*Mulan*) by Disney Company (Pers 1999, 122). After Disney's release of an animated movie titled *Mulan* in 1998, the fame of this legendary Chinese maiden reached its climax. Becoming the second-highest grossing family movie of the year,

earning Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations, and winning several Annie Awards, *Mulan* was commercially successful in the United States. It is not surprising that this movie aroused much interest from critics both from the West and China since it was the first time that a Chinese figure took centre stage among the Disney family. Mimi Nguyen suggests that Asian Americans should ‘juggle [their] critiques and [their] pleasures with the complexity of analysis’ when confirming the positive aspects of *Mulan* as a role model, trying to find a third space between appraising the representation of Asian images on the Disney screen and regarding the identification as mass mind-control (Nguyen 1998). The critical reception reflects this ‘juggling’. Joseph Chan reckons that *Mulan* has been Americanised and universalised, and blurred the ‘boundary between global and local culture’ (Chan 2002, 241). Two academics from China, Chuanmao Tian and Caixia Xiong, examine cultural adaptations from *The Ballad of Mulan* to *Mulan*, expressing that cultural survival and innovation can be sustained by intercultural rewritings (Tian and Xiong 2013, 873). Negative opinions can be heard from Sheng-mei Ma’s statement that ‘*Mulan* supplements Orientalist fantasies with contemporary youth culture’ (Ma 2000, 127). Lan Dong considers the pro-feminist plot in *Mulan* to represent ‘a false feminist mentality’ because *Mulan*’s male disguise is in fact ‘a strategy for seduction’ and she ends up with constructing a ‘proper womanhood’ after the war is over (Dong 2011, 174). Likewise, Nancy Taber supports this mistaken representation by saying that military women are ‘still constrained by societal expectations of gender norms’ (Taber 2013, 95). On the other hand, *Mulan* is also acclaimed as an independent role model in contrast to other Disney princesses (Klein 1998; Simons 1998).

In spite of some negative views of Disney’s adaptation, we cannot deny the fact that *Mulan* did receive great international fame. Disney’s adaptation of *Mulan* is an alternative to the studio’s previous works and also a meaningful gesture to hail Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*. In order to examine Kingston’s role as a bridge between the Chinese legendary *Mulan* and the Disney *Mulan*, I will compare the similarities and disparities between the two versions in the first place.

Different from the Chinese mythic *Mulan*, both Kingston’s *Fa Mu Lan* and Disney’s *Mulan* leave home due to dissatisfaction with their situation rather than out of patriotism and filial piety. Kingston’s *Mu Lan* goes to the mountain to avoid becoming

a wife or slave and later becomes a warrior in the war to protect her people as well as to realise her individual value. The statement she makes after the war, that ‘the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality’ (Kingston 1989b, 45) emphasises her ambition to be remembered as a heroine instead of being an obscure housewife. Mulan in Disney’s movie is not a traditional maiden but a naughty and smart tomboy; she takes her father’s place in the army to realise her individual freedom rather than as a form of filial piety; although her devotion to the family cannot be totally denied. In the opening scene, she makes her pet dog help her feed the chickens, and refuses to recite a boring script for the matchmaking interview, although she secretly copies some characters on her arm. These are very mischievous deeds in traditional Chinese culture in which girls were educated to follow rules and trained to be ladies. If she only behaves like a naughty kid in the beginning, then after being humiliated by the matchmaker, Mulan begins to doubt her value, singing ‘Look at me, I will never pass for a perfect bride, or a perfect daughter [...] When will my reflection show, who I am inside?’ (Cook and Bancroft 1998). Failing to fit into society and live up to the expectations of her parents, she needs some opportunities to avoid the disgrace, and this foreshadows her fleeing from her family in the name of substituting for her father in the army. In this respect, both Kingston and Disney describe this girl to be a disobedient heroine who fights for her own destiny.

Unlike the Chinese Mulan whose real gender remains secret (here I use the story based on *The Ballad of Mulan* for convenience due to its wide acceptance), both Kingston’s Fa Mu Lan and Disney’s Mulan are revealed as female in the fighting scene. In the original ballad, ‘Her comrades are all amazed and perplexed./ Travelling together for twelve years/ They didn’t know Mu-lan was a girl.’ (Frankel 1976, 70), and therefore her real identity is not told until the war is over. In contrast, Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior* claims herself as ‘a female avenger’ before she kills the baron (Kingston 1989b, 43). In the Disney animation, Mulan gets wounded and loses consciousness when she is trying to save her sweetheart Captain Li Shang, and as a result, her gender is revealed by Li Shang. By law Li Shang should have killed her, but finally spares her out of gratitude. Then the movie reaches its climax when Mulan wins a victory over the enemies and, dressed as a woman, saves the emperor. Moreover, she is even allowed to hug the emperor before returning home, which is definitely against

Confucian doctrine in which boundaries between genders and classes should not be crossed.

Another similarity reflected in both narratives is the attitude towards gender relationships and marriage. In Kingston's story, Fa Mu Lan's husband is her childhood playmate from whom she has been separated for years. He finally joins her when she is leading her army against the emperor. They ride side by side into battle just like when they were kids playing together. In Disney's version, Mulan meets Captain Li Shang in the troop and they develop affection towards each other after they fight together for a long time. Therefore, Mulan in both versions builds her relationship out of love and free will, while in the Chinese stories, Mulan either remains a maiden or is arranged to marry someone under her father's will. Moreover, both Kingston and Disney promote a harmonious relationship between genders, and emphasise how the Chinese concept of 'yin and yang' are interconnected and complementary in romantic relationships⁷. The best example of this in *The Woman Warrior* is when the narrator witnesses the old couple who teach her martial arts turn into angels and dance in a particular way:

I saw two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances. They turned so perfectly that together they were the axis of the earth's turning. They were light; they were molten, changing gold – Chinese lion dancers, African lion dancers in midstep. I heard high Javanese bells deepen in midring to Indian bells, Hindu Indian, American Indian. Before my eyes, gold bells shredded into gold tassels that fanned into two royal capes that softened into lions' fur. Manes grew tall into feathers that shone – because light rays. Then the dancers danced the future – a machine-future – in clothes I had never seen before. I am watching the centuries pass in moments because suddenly I understand time, which is spinning and fixed like the North Star. And I understand how working and hoeing are dancing; how peasant clothes are golden, as king's clothes are golden; how one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman. (Kingston 1989b, 27)

⁷ In traditional Chinese philosophy, yin and yang are two basic descriptions of the opposite or contrary forces in nature that are complementary, interconnected, and interdependent. Yin is usually symbolised by the black side with the white dot in it, and yang is the white side with the black dot in it.

This scene suggests that the old man and the old woman enjoy equal status rather than one dominating another. Rabine notes that the language in this paragraph makes the gender separation into gender difference, 'It is difference, rather than separation, that allows change, motion, integration, and connection to happen' (Rabine 1987, 476). They are in a status of eternal changing and interacting, which implies equality in their relationship. Kingston also informs us that their relationship is hard to define for the narrator often glimpses a young man or a young woman, but when she looks directly, 'he or she would be old again'; she guesses from their manner that the old woman is to the old man 'a sister or a friend rather than a wife' (Kingston 1989b, 28). This description expresses a viewpoint that the couple's relationship is not against each other but a harmonious one that is peaceful, equal and natural. Disney's animation also adopts this concept when dealing with Mulan and Li Shang's romance, especially in the succeeding film *Mulan II* (2004), in which the symbols of 'yin and yang' are visualised as talismans for Mulan and Li Shang to witness their love. Also, the three princesses, who are forced into political marriages and are escorted by Mulan and Li Shang, are finally liberated and find their true loves. Nowadays girls have the right to choose partners both in China and the West, but in premodern time, it was forbidden. Choosing one's own partner is a core value in American individualism that Westerners fought for in the past. For example, in novels by Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, all the heroines are seeking true love. In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), which also features a matchmaking scene, the Jewish girls find their love outside their ethnic community and finally receive their father's blessing. Romantic love stands for individual fulfilment for women in the Western tradition. In the animation *Mulan*, Mulan not only finds her love but also enters the male sphere of protecting her nation and people. This is an extension of the Western tradition of individualism.

However, compared with the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan in Kingston's work, Disney's Mulan is weaker and more conservative. First of all, Disney's Mulan still serves as a tool to maintain the authority of the ruling class, although the emperor seems to be depicted as democratic. While in *The Woman Warrior*, the emperor is the root of people's oppression, and as a result, Mu Lan's mission is to behead the ruling class and liberate the people. Her image can be viewed as a revolutionary, not merely that of a brave soldier. Second, Kingston's Mu Lan is a more radical feminist fighter, an icon of androgyny. The marriage scene in the book does not aim to add romantic or

erotic atmosphere but to make Mu Lan a more mature figure. The narrator points out that '[m]arriage and childbirth strengthen the swordswoman' (Kingston 1989b, 48), which shows that real heroines should be toughened up by these two tasks instead of being undermined. In contrast, Disney's *Mulan* still falls into the traditional heterosexual romance formula, in which Mulan meets Li Shang, a general, when she is away from home, and they clash at first but when there is danger, they save each other, and finally they live happily ever after.

Despite the departures of Disney's adoption from Kingston's creation, Kingston's role in introducing this Chinese figure to the Western entertainment industry should not be downplayed. What I hope to highlight next is why the image of Mulan was chosen by Disney and resonated in American popular culture.

The traditional Disney princesses, such as Snow White and Cinderella are confined to the domestic arena. Although they try to escape from old homes, which are mainly controlled by stepmothers, they usually passively wait for the arrival of a prince to save them and reinvent new hearths. In Disney's prime years, these figures were typically fabricated for patriarchal tastes. This model has been substituted later in Disney's renaissance from 1989, which was 'marked by the birth of a new breed of newly born women' (Byrne and McQuillan 1999, 66). According to Byrne and McQuillan, the Disney company felt the need to transform women's roles in domesticity in the post-war era (Byrne and McQuillan 1999, 66). Disney has experimented with this plan by releasing films of unconventional figures such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1990), Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin* (1992) and Pocahontas (1995) in the film of that name. All three heroines are adventurers and dream-seekers. They are also not white. The legend of Mulan was a suitable source for Disney to continue this trend, with a Chinese heroine more daring and conspicuous than the established ones. The cross-dressing theme used in this animation is in fact not of recent creation in Western narratives. Classic cross-dressed female images can be found in both the Western literary canon and in movies: Shakespeare's Viola (*Twelfth Night*), Virginia Woolf's Orlando, Barbara Streisand's Yentl, Hilary Swank's Brandon Teena (*Boys Don't Cry*), to name just a few. However, when this practice is applied to an Asian girl, it seems to become novel and gives rise to different responses. Generally

speaking, Disney's *Mulan* embraces the American-style individualism of Kingston's Fa Mu Lan and wins her final victory as a woman when she is not in male disguise.

As a highly commercialised movie company that aims to guarantee maximum profit, it is quite natural that Disney wanted to seek for an alternative but safe character. According to Joseph Chan, the adaptation of foreign stories functions on two levels: 'It adds variety to Disney's productions, giving it a more global image; and it reduces the risk of production because these stories have stood the test of time in their home cultures' (Chan 2002, 231). This is quite reasonable. However, there are more legendary heroines in *The Woman Warrior*, why does Fa Mu Lan gain resonance rather than other figures such as Ts'ai Yen? The main reason might be that 'White Tigers' is the most popular chapter in *The Woman Warrior*, about a girl's growing up story, which is suitable for the young audiences. Having been taught in university courses all over the U.S., *The Woman Warrior* and Fa Mu Lan have become very familiar to broad U.S. audiences, not just to the Chinese. Also, the story has endured the test of hundreds of years in China and been tested in the mainstream market by Kingston's rewriting. Moreover, Mulan's story is quite abstract and concise in *The Ballad of Mulan*. 'It was a deliberate choice to try to keep the story as simple as possible', Tony Bancroft, one of the directors of *Mulan* said, 'The nice thing about the original tale is that the components of her journey are very simple, which really gave us a chance to elaborate on her character and the characters around her. Playing off of that, it just seemed logical that we'd want to keep the visual style as simple and as graphic as possible' (Strauss 1998). This indicates that while definitive information about Mulan never existed, there will be more space for adaptations and fewer restrictions to endow her with new identity.

When producing this animation, it seems that the Disney Company also tried to incorporate typical Chinese elements such as those Kingston has adopted in her book to attract Western audiences (Chan 2002, 234). As early as in the summer of 1994, the *Mulan* team went to China for research, including exploring landscape, architecture and costumes (Schroeder and Zoehfeld 1998, 9-15). Similar to Kingston's fantasy style writing, Disney also learned to omit 'details' to highlight the 'main point' in the scene, such as using a 'soft, out of focus look' in the background, 'leaving detail for the primary story action', and using 'fog, mist or even smoke' to increase 'empty space' and achieve 'poetic simplicity' (Schroeder and Zoehfeld 1998, 39). The flavour of

otherness is attractive to mainstream audiences, especially when they can comfortably sit in the cinema without the labour of travelling to the imaginary primitive places. When China started rising as an emerging power in the 1990s, it is likely that more Western audiences would want to know about this developing, while ancient, country. On the other hand, the social context after the publication of *The Woman Warrior* coincided with the period when Chinese Americans began to form a powerful community from being a working class one, and have been able to better consume popular cultural products such as English movies. Therefore, using Chinese elements was not a blind attempt by Disney but was made after consideration and research. This animation was targeted to the Asian market as well, and it was proved to work well according to box office profits in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Flannery 1998).

Popular culture nowadays bears the traits of being ‘constitutively, irrevocably multicultural, mixed, mestizo’ (Stam 2001, 482). Mulan’s trip from ancient China to Chinatown and then to the American mainstream market and capitalist Disney workshop shows the inevitable effect that race plays in a multinational society and the influence in everyday life that minorities cast. It is against this background that Kingston is able to transform the cultural image Mu Lan with her own imagination and make her travel from one culture to another.

It was not a coincidence that Kingston’s Mu Lan becomes a princess in Disney’s animation. Audiences’ acceptance and expectation, Kingston’s market fame and multicultural trends function together to make this hybrid Mulan come into being. Despite the fact that the cultural elements presented in Disney’s *Mulan* are not so faithful to the original Chinese culture, and the story is still more or less confined to Disney’s commercialised narrative mode, it is still meaningful in different ways. If Kingston’s ‘White Tigers’ made Fa Mu Lan well-known to mainstream audiences, Disney’s animation has provided a more visualised and influential character. The cartoon image of a skin-tanned and mischievous Asian girl is immediately related to the ancient Chinese name Mulan since there is no fixed visual presentation of her in China. Moreover, this Chinese girl is depicted with positive characteristics: intelligent, courageous, independent, faithful, a sharp contrast to the demonised stereotypes of Asian females represented on Western screens: dragon ladies, geisha girls, China dolls and prostitutes. This is encouraging for Asian Americans to feel their connection to Disney princesses. Further, the universal theme of an independent girl in this animation

sets up a positive role model not only for Asian girls but also for white females. The conventional model of a princess awaiting her prince has been replaced by an updated version of girls controlling their own destinies. This is no doubt more realistic in the postmodern era when gender roles have been transformed dramatically.

Mulan's Sisters on the Mainstream Screen

In *The Woman Warrior*, female fighters appear as a group, playing their roles to illustrate what heroines mean. Likewise, in the movie industry, women warriors are not only mirrored by Disney's *Mulan*, the depiction of swordswomen in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) is another mutation of *Mulan* that echoes Kingston's.

As the Best Foreign Language Film of the 73rd Academy Awards, the martial arts theme in this movie is not a new topic that attracts Westerners. What distinguishes it is the successful depiction of the two female swordswomen, Yu Shu Lien and Jen Yu. They are either independent or rebellious, unlike those stereotypical virgin/whore types of women who appear on the Western screen. Martial arts, like Kingston's child's play, functions as a medium in the movie, aiming to seduce and outsmart audiences who fantasize exoticism, while in fact the swordswomen presented are equally liberated as the Western females, reflecting the individualist values in the West. The character Jen Yu in the movie runs away from her wealthy family to avoid an arranged marriage, lives a life of adventure, and is brave to look for romance. Even her suicidal scene at the very end can be interpreted as 'a leap to freedom and escape and that she might indeed be alive and well, considering that she has displayed such expertise in the art of qing gong' (Chan 2004, 14). This type of female figures can resonate with the Western audiences who share similar values of freedom and individualism. Also, the focus on female characters shatters the traditional kung fu movie concept in which masculinity is emphasized. The swordswomen not only are proficient in martial arts but also seek self-realization, unlike Bruce Lee types who show off their big muscles without appealing personalities but more of 'A Sexualized Object of Desire' (Chan 2001, 73).

Under the cover of dreamlike kung fu elements, once marginalised Chinese American voices and characters enter the mainstream stage and influence mainstream popular

culture. At the same time, the revised version of Chinese stories both in Kingston's and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, in which women are depicted as warriors also challenge the stereotypes cast on Chinese Americans.

Mulan as a World Traveller

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has not only communicated with American popular culture by promoting Mulan's image in the Western world and inspiring Disney's adoption of Mulan, but also made waves in Mulan's homeland, China. After the release of Disney's *Mulan*, Mulan has become a favourite topic in the cultural industries of China, including TV series, movies, operas, acrobatic shows, and online games.

Among these works, the 2009 movie *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* is the most influential, directed by Hong Kong director and writer Jingle Ma, and starring Zhao Wei and Chen Kun from mainland China, Jaycee Chan from Hong Kong (Jackie Chan's son), Asian American singer Nicky Lee, and Vitas from Russia. It has been screened in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Singapore, with a box office of approximate 110 million RMB (about 22 million AUD) and won several awards and nominations. Similar to Disney's *Mulan*, this movie has two parallel plots: the war and the romance. The difference is that the screenwriter didn't apply the happy-ever-after ending; instead, Mulan departs with her sweetheart, who has to sacrifice his happiness for a political marriage. This can be regarded as an attempt to break through the clichéd narrative of commercial movies, leaving the audiences some space for meditation. It is quite interesting to see that in mainland China, there had never been a commercial movie adaptation of Mulan before Disney's success. Obviously, this Mulan has been influenced by Disney's and Kingston's versions in individual realisation, seeking her own love and fighting for her people. It suggests that cultural industry in mainland China is updating traditional culture and following the trends of the Western world.

Another performance worth mentioning is 'Mulan Acrobatic Show' by Chongqing Acrobatic Art Troupe of China. The troupe debuted the show in Beijing in October 2009 and then toured in Europe, America and Australia, featuring the ancient legend of Mulan with jaw-dropping performances that won applause all over the world. The focal point of this show is acrobatic art, while the plot is simplified thanks to the fact that overseas audiences are familiar with the story through Disney's *Mulan* (Ning

Genfu and Huang Jienong 2012, 73). The significance of this show lies in its combination of the cultural icon Mulan with old-school acrobatic art, which endows the latter new vitality and further promotes the international fame of the former. It also shows that Chinese artists are making use of Western cultural products to promote their own creations in the globalised era.

Apart from those cultural products, the most significant event for Mulan might be the inclusion of the legend of Mulan in the list of National Intangible Cultural Heritage of China on June 7th, 2008. This indicates that China has officially re-examined the importance of Mulan and her cultural influence and reclaimed her origin after she has enjoyed world fame due to Maxine Hong Kingston and the Disney Company.

Mulan is embraced by her compatriots who again try to promote this heroine image to a worldwide platform. One of the best examples of Mulan's expanded influence by Disney is that in the Rio Olympics 2016, where the Chinese cycling team put on helmets with Peking opera masks, one of the faces is that of Hua Mulan. This eye-catching Mulan face painted on top of the helmet has been familiar to Westerners thanks to the Disney movie and is thus an icon of a female warrior, which provides the athlete with novel self-expression but also strikes her opponent with some fear and pressure (Robertshaw 2016). This case again shows the vitality of this age-old character and the uniqueness of ethnic elements that can survive in today's consumer society.

Conclusion

As Raymond Williams pointed out, 'cultural tradition can be seen as a continual selection and re-selection of ancestors. Particular lines will be drawn, often for as long as a century, and then suddenly with some new stage in growth these will be cancelled or weakened, and new lines drawn' (Williams 1965, 69), culture is a process of fluidity and mobility, a matter of tradition and recreation. Kingston's adoption and rewriting of Mu Lan's legend inherited traditional Chinese mythical elements on the one hand, and on the other absorbed Western cultural influences on her journey to becoming a literary icon. Her interpretation of Mu Lan as a new face of Chinese cultural heritage is the outcome of her racial legacy and the social context she lives in. The creation of Mu Lan is a hybrid product of both Eastern and Western traditions and resonates on

both sides of the Pacific. The interaction between her work and American popular culture together with the response from China shows that the cultural evolution of Mulan has just been ignited.

Chapter 4. Tiger Mother, Burning Bright

In this chapter, I analyse the mother figures and mother-daughter narratives in Kingston's and Tan's works and relate them to traditional Chinese parenting styles, as well as to the popular term 'Tiger Mother' coined by Amy Chua. I argue that Kingston and Tan have developed the archetype of the Tiger Mother in their literary works. It bears a resemblance to traditional Chinese style mothering, while at the same time opening up a window for Chinese American women to claim and gain attention within mainstream popular culture (Fickle 2014a, 72).

Mother is a sacred word, usually a symbol of love, while the tiger is a ferocious beast and therefore the term 'Tiger Mother' seems to be an odd combination, an oxymoron like Virgin Mother. In order to better understand this unusual term, I will first look at the cultural meanings of the tiger in China, and outline some features of traditional Chinese parenting.

Tiger Symbolism in China

The tiger is an important cultural symbol in China. The White Tiger, a term that appears as the title of the second chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, is one of the four mythological creatures in the Chinese constellation of guardians (along with the Azure Dragon, the Vermilion Bird, and the Black Turtle). The connotation of the tiger co-evolved with the development of Chinese culture in various forms.

The image of the tiger in China is similar to that of the lion in the West: both beasts are auspicious but ferocious. On the one hand, the tiger represents courage and ambition. In the Han Dynasty Chinese dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*, the word tiger is defined as the 'king of the mountainous beasts' (Xu Shen and He Zonghui 2000, 200). On the other hand, encountering a tiger in the forest could be fatal, and therefore this animal also symbolises danger and oppression. For example, in the Confucian canon's *Book of Rites*, Confucius met a woman who told him that all her family members were killed by tigers because they would rather move around in this area where tigers were rampant than be persecuted by a harsh government (Xu Chao 2000, 60-3). This story has become a proverb '*kezheng mengyu hu*', which means harsh government is worse than a tiger. Generally speaking, the word 'tiger' indicates power in Chinese whether it refers to the big cat or symbolises the controlling class (Wang Binling 1998, 1). The

regal dignity associated with this beast is so adored by people that they make talismans of tiger parts for children to ward off misfortune. However, ironically, this adoration of the tigers became the cause of their extinction when people killed tigers for profits.

In spite of the fact that traditional Chinese culture is interrelated with the tiger, it is unusual to compare women to tigers, especially when women appear as mother figures. In 2011, a Chinese American mother, as well as Yale law professor, Amy Chua, coined the term 'Tiger Mother' to refer to Chinese style mothering in her bestselling book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The book challenged the common understandings of mothers as gentle, uncritical and endlessly supportive, and led to heated debates worldwide (e.g. Su 2011; Maslin 2011; Adams 2013; Bronson 2011). Since the tiger stands for power in Chinese culture, it is not so difficult to understand the meaning of the Tiger Mother: harsh Chinese mothers who push their children to be successful. However, this strange combination of mother and tiger is not a completely new creation. In fact, the harsh mother archetype can be found in earlier Chinese American creative writings such as Brave Orchid in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Suyuan Woo and Lindo Jong in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. The narratives of similar mother figures and of mother-daughter relationships in their works have been criticised as stereotyped and clichéd as 'your typical Asian American mother/daughter sweet stories, your cross-generational stuff, your intercultural relationship jive' (quoted from Sarna 2002, 22) that should be transcended by later generation artists. The descriptions of harsh mothers and Chinese style mothering is an important literary model for their successors to inherit, imitate and recreate through new styles in order to assert a place in the social life of the U.S. mainstream where they are still marginalised and unable to express themselves freely. Amy Chua's success could be a persuasive case to prove that this unusual Chinese mother term just has the magic to arouse mainstream attention and evolve into a controversial debate in the U.S. popular culture.

Traditional Chinese Parenting

In premodern China, obedience was a core value in hierarchical relationships, as expressed in the Three Bonds (*sangang*) by Dong Zhongshu, one of the representatives of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty: the authority of rulers over ministers, fathers over sons, husbands over wives. Therefore parents expected children to be absolutely controlled and obedient during childrearing and remain loyal when they grew up. The

Song Dynasty politician Sima Guang also pointed out that it would be a father's fault if he did not educate his children, indicating the vital role of parents, especially fathers, in children's education. Besides the Three Bonds, there were Five Virtues (*wuchang*) to regulate interpersonal relationships, including benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*) and fidelity (*xin*). The third virtue, propriety (*li*), required children to respect parents and fulfil filial piety, while on the other hand, parents, the first teachers of children, were responsible for guiding their offspring to live up to the Five Virtues. This pattern of parenting was based on strict control and training, in which parents were superior and enjoyed authoritative power while children were passive and lacked individual freedom.

In *The Family Instructions of Master Yan (Yanshi jiaxun)*, the scholar Yan Zhitui (531–591) set a model of family education for later Confucian educators. He mentioned the strictness of parenting in his own family, for example, he and his brothers had to walk properly as if they were showing reverence to elders (Huang Yongnian 1991, 3). He also emphasised that children should be trained from infancy with strictness so that they could become discreet and loyal when they grew up (Huang Yongnian 1991, 8). It is human nature to love one's children, but traditional Chinese parenting called for strictness rather than freedom in order to cultivate virtues from childhood. In spite of this patriarchal essence of traditional Chinese parenting, it is also true that parents do show affection towards their children, although in a more controlled manner. Chinese parents usually performed their educating responsibilities through the process of *guan* (管), a Chinese term that connotes both 'to care for' and 'to govern' (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1991, 93; Chao 1994, 1112; Xu, Zhang and Hee 2014, 16). This may be partly due to the fact that Chinese seldom openly reveal their emotions thanks to the rigorous parent-child hierarchy.

In traditional Chinese families, fathers were respected as 'all-fulfilling and all-powerful godlike' figures (Slote 1998, 39). There is a Chinese saying, 'strict fathers and kind mothers', showing that fathers play an authoritative role while mothers tend to be more affectionate in parenting. This is also another aspect of gender roles reflected in domestic life, that males should be more dominant and decisive while females are passive and subordinate. However, in most cases, fathers tended to be less active in childrearing when they were occupied with breadwinning and it was mothers who stayed at home and educated their children. A mother's 'nurturance, supervision,

and sanctioning were daily and continuous', and as a result she became 'the primary force' at home (Slote 1998, 40, 41). Some mothers became quite demanding towards their children and this could be partly caused by the negligence and oppression by husbands which was then in turn targeted towards the children (Slote 1998, 42-3). Another factor may have come from their wish to be the central influence on their offspring in the long run, so as to find reliance and support when they became aged (Ping-Chen 1994, 110).

In ancient Chinese history, strict mothers were not rare and were honoured as paradigms of mothering. The most well-known example is that of Mencius's mother, who moved house three times to find a suitable neighbourhood for her children's upbringing. This legend was recorded in the form of an idiom '*Mengmu sanqian*', literally meaning 'Mencius's mother, three moves'. Mencius's mother was not only aware of the influence of a good environment for children but also attached much importance to academic achievements. In another equally famous legend, she was so angry to learn that Mencius avoided school that she cut through the thread of her shuttle. She compared study to weaving, which requires diligence and persistence, to warn Mencius of the peril of idleness. Mencius felt shocked by this and worked hard afterwards and became a great philosopher (see Liu Xiang).

Another famous instance is the story of General Yue Fei's mother, who tattooed the Chinese characters '*Jing Zhong Bao Guo*', meaning 'to serve the country with the utmost loyalty', on her son's back with a needle to inspire his patriotism (Qian Cai 2009, 157-163). This seemingly abusive deed is understandable when the future of the nation was hanging in a balance: how can a man fight for his people if he could not bear the minor pain of a needle? This story finds its way into *The Woman Warrior* through the episode in 'White Tigers' where the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan's parents carve words on her back, urging her to victory, before she goes to the battlefield.

There is a Chinese saying that '*Gunbang dixia chuxiaozi*', similar to the English idiom 'Spare the rod spoil the child'. As a result, harsh mothers also resorted to physical punishment to regulate children's behaviour in ancient China. A story, recorded in *Garden of Stories (Shuoyuan)* by the Han Dynasty scholar Liu Xiang, tells of the mother of Han Boyu who would beat him whenever he made mistakes. This practice did not arouse resentment from Han Boyu but made him a role model of filial piety.

One day, when his mother beat him, he wept and explained that he felt sad for the fact that his mother was getting aged and weak because the beating no longer made him feel pain (Rainey 2010, 144).

The above mentioned three cases are examples of legendary harsh mothers in Chinese history who express their love for and expectations of their children through stern and rigorous treatment. Their deeds have been honoured and praised for thousands of years as successful education practices. They are the precursors of the strict mother archetype that Kingston, Tan and Chua in turn draw on in their works, although they were not related to the ‘Tiger’ image at that time.

Tiger Mother Archetype in Kingston’s and Tan’s Works

There is an idiom in China called ‘*Jiangmen huzi*’, which can be literally translated as ‘a tiger son from a General’s family’ and metaphorically interpreted as ‘a capable young man from a distinguished family’. My father sometimes calls me a ‘tiger daughter’ when I have made achievements, although my family is merely a humble one. Therefore it is not difficult to see that the word ‘tiger’ can be used as an adjective to describe people who are determined and courageous. But usually Chinese parents tend to get satisfaction from praising their children instead of boasting about themselves. Harsh mothers did not proclaim themselves to be Tiger Mothers before Amy Chua’s book was released, although the meaning of ‘Tiger’ is quite obvious and has been used in similar ways.

In this section, I argue that before Amy Chua’s invention of the term Tiger Mother, Kingston and Tan had already described a group of tough mother figures who can be categorised as Tiger Mothers.

In the opening of *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator’s mother, Brave Orchid, says to her daughter, ‘You must not tell anyone’ about her father’s sister who committed adultery and then killed herself in China (Kingston 1989b, 3). Brave Orchid uses this lesson about the no name aunt to warn the narrator of the importance of virginity now that she has started to menstruate. Girls in premodern China (and throughout much of the twentieth century in the Western world as well!) considered chastity to be valuable because they had to remain virgins in order to be marriageable, otherwise they could not survive at a time when women usually did not work outside of the domestic arena. Therefore, it is mothers’ responsibility to make their daughters sexually disciplined.

However, Brave Orchid's use of the no name woman's tragedy seems to be too harsh, for she still applies this premodern Chinese social norm to guide her American-born daughters in the post-WWII context. Under this discipline, the narrator dares not behave like the American girls she knows, instead, she considers herself to be unattractive and accordingly has 'no dates' (Kingston 1989b, 12).

Brave Orchid not only monitors the narrator's sexuality, but also aims to control her speech. She cuts her daughter's tongue, as she explains later, to help her with speaking foreign languages, although unfortunately the narrator turns out to be silent and tongue-tied instead. The tongue-cutting becomes 'the symbol of the mother's overwhelming power over the daughter, in a sense, a castrating power' (Ling 1990, 127) as speech is related to one's individuality. When the narrator has just recovered from being mute, she forces another girl to talk: 'If you don't talk, you can't have a personality' (Kingston 1989b, 180). This can be viewed as a projection of her resentment towards Brave Orchid, who has deprived her of her right to articulation.

If the mother in *The Woman Warrior* focuses more on the daughter's basic survival, mothers in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* aspire to more: they want their daughters to become prodigies. Both Jing-mei Woo's mother, Suyuan, and Waverly Jong's mother, Lindo, expect their daughters to be talented and they make their daughters compete with each other. When Waverly asks Lindo what Chinese torture means, she replies that 'Chinese people do business, do medicine, do painting. Not lazy like American people. We do torture. Best torture' (Tan 1998, 91). This implies that Chinese descendants are excessively hardworking and competitive in all areas, not only in making a living but also in the arts, as if they were torturing themselves. When Lindo finds out that Waverly is gifted at chess, she gives her the privilege of not having to do household chores as she needs to hone her chess skills. Waverly takes part in all kinds of chess tournaments and wins championship titles to live up to Lindo's expectations. This wears her out and makes her lose interest in chess, although at first she is eager to learn all the tricks of this game. She describes the way her mother supervises her when she is practising at home:

My mother had a habit of standing over me while I plotted out my games. I think she thought of herself as my protective ally. Her lips would be sealed tight, and after each move I made, a soft "Hmmmmph" would escape from her nose. (Tan 1998, 98)

This reveals that on the one hand the daughter needs freedom and privacy, while on the other hand the mother feels a strong responsibility for guiding her daughter to avoid unnecessary mistakes and to do the right thing. The sad part is that the mother never realises that her good will is not appreciated by the daughter and her bossy style leads to Waverly's withdrawal from chess playing.

If Waverly does have some talent in chess, then Jing-mei Woo is forced to play the piano just because her mother Suyuan wants to compete with Lindo in childrearing. At first Suyuan does not know what kind of talent Jing-mei has, but one day when she sees a Chinese girl playing the piano on a TV show, she is suddenly inspired to decide that Jing-mei could be such a prodigy. Jing-mei is not worried about her mother's whim because their family cannot afford to buy a piano. However, a Tiger Mother's determination will not be held back by any obstacles, and she 'traded housecleaning services for weekly lessons and a piano for [Jing-mei] to practice on every day, two hours a day' (Tan 1998, 136) with Mr. Chong, a deaf piano teacher, who could be seen as a caricatured Chinese Beethoven. Jing-mei is reluctant to play the piano and considers it a heavy duty. As with Lindo and Waverly, a clash takes place between Jing-mei and Suyuan when Jing-mei fails in the talent show where all their friends from the Chinese community are present, including their 'archenemies' Lindo and Waverly. Both mother and daughter are disgraced. Later, Jing-mei refuses to play the piano again and fails to be an 'obedient daughter' (Tan 1998, 142).

The above descriptions are just a few examples of the Tiger Mother archetype created by Kingston and Tan, constructing the idea that mothers of Chinese background tend to be harsh and aim to cast their children into model minorities. However, just like the myths and legends used in Kingston's and Tan's texts, which are not faithful to the original and cause accusations from Chinese American nationalists, the harsh mother stereotype may not be literal representations of Chinese mothers. In the following pages I suggest that Kingston and Tan play to an exaggerated image of the Tiger Mother to draw readers in and simultaneously outplay them as well.

Performativity in Kingston's and Tan's Mother-daughter Narratives

There is a general agreement among critics and readers that the mother-daughter conflict in these texts stands for the clash between Chinese and American cultures, in which 'mothers' experiences [...] are significantly embedded in Chinese traditions and

ways of being and thinking, which have been further dislocated and relocated – culturally, geographically, and historically – in the U.S.’ (Ho 1999, 41). On the surface mothers appear to train their daughters to be typical Chinese high achievers in the U.S. with their use of Chinese mothering techniques, but in fact their purpose may be different; it seems that they really want their daughters to be less Chinese. Brave Orchid’s cutting of her daughter’s tongue aims to improve her English, not her Chinese; Lindo trains Waverly to play chess rather than a Chinese game; and Suyuan exchanges her labour for Jing-mei’s piano lessons, an instrument associated with Western high culture. In these three cases the skills that mothers urge their daughters to acquire are Western, despite the fact that they adhere to Chinese parenting styles to achieve these ends. They want their daughters to act as Americans in language, game-playing and art: adaptation with a Chinese face. In doing so, they perform a gesture of assimilation and develop new dimensions of Chinese American mothering in racist America.

According to Richard Schechner, performance can occur in ‘everyday life’, ‘the arts’, ‘sports and other popular entertainments’ or ‘ritual’ (Schechner 2013, 31). John Clammer points out that ‘[p]erformance is essentially the creation, presentation or affirmation of an identity (real or assumed) through action’ (Clammer 2015, 2160). I assume that harsh mothers in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* engage in a similar performance as they bring up their daughters in an assimilated fashion, making them fit into white-dominated society. Tara Fickle, in her research, has used game theory to analyse ‘the performative aspects of ethnic identity’ in both Kingston’s and Tan’s works, developing comparisons between games and immigrant experiences, and exploring fantasy role-playing features in both authors’ works (see Fickle 2014c, 2014a, 2014b). Inspired by Fickle’s use of game theory in analysing Chinese American writing, I aim to examine the function of performativity, which includes aspects of game-playing, in evolving Chinese American identity in Kingston’s and Tan’s mother-daughter narratives.

The narrator of *The Woman Warrior* undergoes the tongue-cutting process, a ritual performed by Brave Orchid to free her vocal organ from the obstacles of speaking a foreign language (although in fact English should be the narrator’s mother tongue as she was born in the U.S.). While the mother herself can speak only ‘broken’ English, she demands that her daughter becomes a fluent English speaker. This reveals that the mother knows the importance that language plays as an everyday performance in

mainstream society. Without proper English skills, Brave Orchid cannot communicate well with the Americans and has to rely on her daughter as a translator; more importantly, the language barrier is one factor that makes her a menial worker in the laundry shop rather than the respected doctor she was in China. As to the daughter, the narrator, after the tongue-cutting, she would ‘curl up [her] tongue in front of the mirror and tauten [her] frenum into a white line’ and see ‘no scars in [her] mouth’ (Kingston 1989b, 164). This behaviour, to some extent, is similar to Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’, during which a child can ‘recognize his own image as such in a mirror’, which is understood ‘*as an identification*’ (Lacan 2006, 75, 75, 76). To the narrator, the tongue-cutting brings confusion as language is related to individuality and identity. The coexistence of both languages, Chinese and English, is not so dissimilar to her bafflement as to ‘What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies’ (Kingston 1989b, 6). Looking at the mirror and checking her tongue thus symbolises her attempt to sort out her identity. Her silence after the tongue-cutting can be considered as a performance of a resistance against her mother’s manipulation, which leads to her identity confusion; her recovery from silence is a performance of acceptance of her identity as a Chinese American.

Lindo, in *The Joy Luck Club*, sees opportunity for acceptance and success in her daughter’s chess playing. As an extremely shrewd girl herself in her youth, Lindo knows immediately that one needs to follow ‘American rules’ (Tan 1998, 94) when playing the game, even though she herself is unable to read the chess instructions. As Fickle notes, chess, in Lindo’s eyes is ‘a symbolic opportunity to reconsider Asian American assimilation as a form of gameplay’ (Fickle 2014a, 80) so that Waverly can play chess in a Chinese way, i.e., ‘to have a foresight, a mathematical understanding of all possible moves, and patience’ (Tan 1998, 94). Chinese strategy is applied to this American game and the ultimate goal is for Waverly to learn to fit into American society, just as Lindo herself succeeds in immigrating to America when she uses her Chinese wisdom to play with the State’s legal system, ‘observing tells and knowing when and how much to reveal about oneself’ (Fickle 2014a, 79). However, Waverly, as a second generation Chinese American, has already lost some of her Chinese features, according to Lindo: ‘you [Waverly] don’t even need to open your mouth. They [Chinese] already know you are an outsider’ (Tan 1998, 253). Chess is good for Waverly only as an American game, but when it is understood as a marker of Chinese

shrewdness and honour, she feels reluctant to play. This might explain why she finally gives up playing chess – a stance to shackle off the unwanted Chinese gaming strategy advocated by her mother and embrace her identity as an American citizen.

Unlike Waverly's chess set, which is a second-hand donation from the church, cheap stuff, Suyuan Woo designs a luxurious plan for her daughter Jing-mei, to enable her to play the piano. The piano is an instrument that is related to fine taste. Even a naughty child would look elegant when he or she sits in front of this instrument with its black and white keys, giving out a pleasant smell of solid wood, his or her 'little hands chas[ing] after each other and r[unning] away from each other' (Mansfield 1981, 407). Playing the piano would partly counter Jing-mei's problem of having 'an uneven mass of crinkly black fuzz' hairstyle that makes her look like 'Negro Chinese', and make her 'perfect' (Tan 1998, 133). In order for her daughter to play this expensive instrument, Suyuan is willing to exchange her physical labour, revealing her ambition to nurture a better player than Lindo. If chess playing emphasises strategy, piano playing calls for investment of money and time. Compared with Lindo, who manages to get out of a loveless marriage in a rich family, Suyuan does not complain about her first marriage to a military officer in China. Her choice of the piano may signify her taste as an upper class lady back in China and her aspirations to raise her daughter in a Western upper-class fashion although she has been reduced to becoming a menial worker after immigration. Similar to chess, when playing the piano, one also needs to follow the rules for the keyboard written on the music score, and perform them with caution and precision on the black and white keys. Each note is for a specific white or black key, no mistakes allowed for confusing black and white, which symbolises the Western binary thinking pattern. The essential point for Jing-mei to succeed in her performance is to follow the music score; however, thanks to her slackness, an opposite of a Chinese prodigy, she fails to deliver an errorfree melody in the talent show.

From the above analysis, both the mothers wish their daughters to learn American skills and to become model minorities, while the daughters fail to live up to the mothers' expectations because of these same American identities. This paradoxical conflict between mothers and daughters shows the process of how the daughters' Chinese American identities are formed in a context where Chinese and American cultures both coexist and clash.

In a racist society, Chinese Americans are still treated like aliens in Kingston's and Tan's works. The narrator of *The Woman Warrior*, a straight A student, is humiliated by her boss when she complains about the phrase 'nigger yellow'; and another time she is fired because she refuses to type the invitations for a banquet which is going to take place in a restaurant picketed by civil rights organisations (Kingston 1989b, 48-9). Rose Hsu Jordan, one of the Joy Luck daughters, is mistaken for a Vietnamese by her boyfriend's mother, who tries to ask Rose to leave her son for the sake of his career (Tan 1998, 118).

Brave Orchid and the Joy Luck mothers are all educated women from China, but cannot find decent jobs in America. Minorities are judged by their skin colour, not their abilities. In order to achieve a secure position in this bigoted society, a Chinese American female has to perform as extraordinarily excellent, shedding more sweat and tears before she receives certain acceptance. Therefore it is reasonable that the mothers expect their daughters to develop exceptional talents, and their insistence on 'rules and discipline are signs that they deeply care about their daughters' survival and happiness' (Ho 1999, 156). When mothers expect daughters to fit into mainstream society, they have already given up part of their traditional values and embarked on the road to assimilation – although in appearance they still adopt a Chinese parenting style. Kingston's and Tan's mother figures all devote their energy to cultivating their daughters to be financially independent in Western society, rather than making them more marriageable as was the expectation in premodern China. This is a sign of assimilation but also a consequence of Chinese parenting in a racist context.

Not only are the mother and daughter characters performing their ethnic identities, but also the two authors are playing with their words to create contexts for the characters to act as Chinese Americans. The mother-daughter conflicts described in their books may just be exaggerations rather than what really happens in Chinese American families, while the non-Chinese readers may feel pleasure reading these dramatic accounts. In doing so, the two authors are creating opportunities for themselves as minority artists to enter the mainstream market by attracting more general readers.

The confrontation between mothers and daughters in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* may not be as serious as it appears to be. The no name woman's story sounds more like gossip circulated among women than a mother's guidance to her

daughter about how to be a decent woman. The opening sentence of the story told by Brave Orchid ‘You must not tell anyone’ (Kingston 1989b, 1) seems to indicate that ‘The concise maternal narrative concludes with forceful injunctions and powerful maxims inscribing the filial obligations of daughters in the patriarchal order’ (Smith 1999, 60). What makes her so serious about this story does not really lie in the moral lesson of the disgraceful no name aunt, but more in her concern for her husband, who ‘does not want to hear her [no name woman’s] name’ (Kingston 1989b, 15). As one of the woman warrior characters in this book, Brave Orchid is not an ally of the patriarchal order; she challenges it by telling stories. Just like her ghost stories which are so vividly described and enchant her children, the no name woman story may still be one of Brave Orchid’s masterly presentations. The opening sentence ‘You must not tell anyone’, together with the ‘commanding’ voice, has granted Brave Orchid ‘authority and legitimacy’ (Smith 1999, 58) as a storyteller and forced the audience/the narrator to keep the promise of keeping it secret⁸. The talk-story here can be regarded as a gameplay, according to Fickle, because ‘we witness the “don’t tell” only after it is already told, we are forced to treat the sentence as if we were a player in the Telephone game: as a phrase that must be passed on, as the story has been, in order for the game to complete its narrative cycle’ (Fickle 2014c, 67).

The very reason that guarantees the success of this talk-story as a game is precisely that it is a forbidden story. Brave Orchid, as a master storyteller, knows this well. The art of storytelling is to attract listeners like the narrator, who dares not ask for details but believes in the story and will continue playing the ‘Telephone game’. The more forbidden the story that is told, the wilder the narrator’s imagination would grow. When recording the no name woman’s story, the narrator has expressed her anger towards the practitioners of patriarchy, who deliberately ‘forget’ the aunt as a punishment (Kingston 1989b, 16). This is the trap that Brave Orchid has set for the narrator, to ensure she will circulate the story rather than forget it. As a master performer, Brave Orchid avenges her sister-in-law, i.e., the no name woman, through her daughter’s pen, not mouth, and therefore both of them have followed the rules of the ‘Telephone game’ while cunningly not violating, in any direct way, the patriarchal rule of ‘don’t tell’. This performance is made under the camouflage of teaching her

⁸ The narrator keeps it secret since she does not ‘tell’ it but only writes it down. As long as it is still in written form, it can still be viewed as an untold secret.

daughter about virginity, the doctrine prescribed by patriarchy, while the real target is to challenge patriarchy.

In this ‘don’t tell’ story, the narrator also plays a ‘spy’, who resembles the protagonist in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s Pulitzer winner *The Sympathizer*, with ‘two faces’ and ‘two minds’ (Nguyen 2016, 1), when she secretly writes down this forbidden story although she is not ‘telling’ it in an oral form. She records the story as if it was told by her mother but in fact it is her own version, and therefore her narration is double-angled and embodies both her mother’s and her own opinions.

Brave Orchid’s ‘don’t tell’ effect lingers on until the last chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, where the narrator has recorded different versions of Auntie Moon Orchid’s tragedy. She compares herself to ‘an outlaw knot-maker’, meaning one who talks too much, and assumes this to be the reason why Brave Orchid cuts her tongue (Kingston 1989b, 164). After the narrator has compared her tongue with other children’s tongues and found no difference, she still believes the tongue-cutting really happened. It is obvious that Brave Orchid is only joking with the narrator, according to their conversation,

“Why did you do that to me, Mother?”

“I told you.”

“Tell me again.”

“I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You’ll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You’ll be able to pronounce anything. Your frenum looked too tight to do those things, so I cut it.”

“But isn’t ‘a ready tongue an evil’?”

“Things are different in this ghost country.”

“Did it hurt me? Did I cry and bleed?”

“I don’t remember. Probably.”

[...]

“Why didn’t you cut my brothers’ and sisters’ tongues?”

“They didn’t need it.”

“Why not? Were theirs longer than mine?”

“Why don’t you quit blabbering and get to work?” (Kingston 1989b, 164)

Maybe Brave Orchid’s joke is too real to the narrator, as the mother is always a master storyteller and can easily blur the boundary between facts and imagination.

In the mother-daughter interaction in *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid is in a more controlling position as the original storyteller and the daughter is a comparatively passive listener – although she herself, in her role as the narrator, is also in charge of the stories that she (re)tells. The Joy Luck mothers and daughters are both active performers. In the battle between Lindo and Waverly as well as in that between Suyuan and Jing-mei, the mothers and daughters resemble the animation figures Tom and Jerry – mothers play the cat and daughters the mouse, and the cat tries every means to catch the mouse, while in fact they appear to be semi-mates rather than enemies.

In the case of Lindo and Waverly, they behave like co-players in a fortune-seeking game. When they first receive the second-hand chess set from a white lady, Lindo asks her son to throw it away out of dignity. But when she finds out that Waverly can play chess well, she suddenly becomes enthusiastic about this game, forcing her daughter, the mouse, to win trophies for her. In order to perform well in this game, Lindo, the cat Tom, has to give Waverly some benefits, such as exemption from household chores. They fail in the game at last because Waverly gives up and Lindo does not force her to pick it up, like a Tiger Mother would. The two just cannot continue their cooperation in this tiring game.

As to Suyuan and Jing-mei’s battle, it follows the pattern of a cartoon comic even more closely. It could be predicted that it would end up as a farce when the deaf piano teacher, Mr. Chong, comes on the stage. Even though Suyuan could not afford to pay the tutoring fee, it was still not wise of her to hire a deaf teacher. After Jing-mei discovers the secret of Mr. Chong, she takes advantages of it by just keeping the rhythm of the music but ignoring the mistakes on notes. This shows that Jing-mei is quite skilled at this cat-mouse game and saves herself the effort of doing something that she does not like; she behaves like a little ‘spy’, taking advantage of every loophole in the communication between her mother and Mr. Chong. Although she is such a cunning child, she cannot achieve success without practice, and it leads to her failure in the real performance and her resentment against ever playing the piano again.

Through the exaggerated deeds of strict mothers and the farce-like battle scenes, Kingston and Tan present the archetype of Tiger Mothers who play into the stereotypes of harsh parenting, while simultaneously they are portrayed as unreliable story-tellers and game players, who turn out to be not so strict mothers. Since these mother characters are artistic creations, they are, of course, not to be taken literally. However, general Western readers tend to read ethnic works as truthful representations, and as a result, the harsh mother archetype and conflict-laden mother-daughter narratives risk reinforcing the stereotype that Chinese American mothers are demon-like creatures who want to turn their children into overachievers. On the other hand, the mainstream readers seem to be fond of stories of such mother-daughter relationships in ethnic narratives of assimilation, a fact that benefits the success of Kingston and Tan. When portraying such stereotyped mother and daughter characters, Kingston and Tan are performing their artistic creations for the mainstream market, and finding a way to articulate as minorities, borrowing from previous literary models such as the traditional Chinese mother. Simultaneously, the two authors are forming their own identities as Chinese Americans, who need to hide some cards and show some cards when merging into mainstream society.

Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother

The mother-daughter narratives in Kingston's and Tan's works became very popular following the books' publication, especially welcomed by women readers from Asian communities (Ho 1999, 49-54), although they have been 'exoticized by mainstream publishers and media and damned as mostly popular Orientalist fare for evidently uncritical Anglo (and Asian American) audiences' (Ho 1999, 57). Their writing has not only led to a thriving wave of Asian American women's writing, but also caused an unusual phenomenon in that 'non-Asians (as well as Asians) want a share of the market for things Asian and Asian American' as Lan Nguyen notes (quoted from Ho 1999, 57). The strict mother archetype has become a profitable formula to attract more mainstream readers. In a 1999 book *Leaving Deep Water: Asian American Women at the Crossroads of Two Cultures*, the editor collected first-person narrations of Asian American women, some focusing on Asian style parenting. These women's stories of child-parent relationships mainly express the idea that Asian parents tend to be dominant and controlling, always interfering with their children's education, career and choice of partners. The narrators complained that their parents wanted them to

major in practical subjects such as medicine and engineering, rather than arts and language; to have secure and respectable careers instead of doing volunteer work; and to marry people of Asian ancestry but not date whites or people of other races. Similar situations can also be found in popular culture at that period, such as Ang Lee's film *The Wedding Banquet* (1993). However, these first-person narratives in *Leaving Deep Water*, although they should be viewed as one of the fruitful results of the Asian American female writing formula, have enlarged the stereotypes of Asian parents even within the Asian American community, a consequence of mainstream visibility. This is to say that a daughter of Asian ancestry tends to adopt a warped attitude towards her parents, as she seems to regard herself as 'the white child imprisoned in a Chinese body' (Chow 1999, 21). In her mind, her parents are trying hard to maintain ancestral tradition in her upbringing, while she herself, as an American-born person, should be embraced by mainstream society as "one of us" rather than "one of them" (Chow 1999, xvii). Her skin colour is likely to hinder her from passing for a white person although she assumes herself to be white inside. This dilemma may strengthen her misunderstanding and denial of her parents' culture.

However controversial, Kingston's and Tan's performances of Chinese American mothering have been inherited by many Asian American writers, as in the cases mentioned above. One of the most influential continuations is probably the release of Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* in 2011.

The word 'Battle' in the title is reminiscent of war, vaguely indicating the mother is a type of warrior who may fight against either the children's upbringing or against racial discrimination, quite similar to Kingston's use of 'warrior'. In the very beginning of Chua's book, there is a list of 'don'ts' for the two daughters:

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play
- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A

- not be the #1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin. (Chua 2011a, 3-4)

This list reminds me of the first sentence of *The Woman Warrior*, “‘You must not tell anyone,’ my mother said’ (Kingston 1989b, 3); prohibitions are central to this form of mothering. The injunction about the piano practice also recalls Jing-mei’s efforts in *The Joy Luck Club*.

Amy Chua is a second-generation Chinese American lawyer and Harvard academic, who, with her Jewish husband, has two daughters, Sophia and Louisa. Before her *Tiger Mother* best-seller, she was already a mature academic author. It is generally considered that in her book she vividly depicts what she describes as the Chinese way of parenting that she learned from her parents in her attempt to make her daughters stereotypically successful (see Dong 2016). Although this book is generally viewed as Amy Chua’s personal experiences, I do not think it is strictly a memoir, as I discuss further below.

Ever since its publication, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* has given rise to a few controversial debates. Some negative voices claim that ‘Chua’s abusive parenting is motivated by her own unhappiness’ and will ‘leave lifelong scars’ on the children (Su 2011); others characterise Chua as a ‘narcissist’, who records her ‘constant demanding, wheedling, scolding and screaming’ in a book (Maslin 2011). Some scholars led by Su Yeong Kim conducted research to prove Chua’s theory wrong: ‘The kids of strict tiger parents had lower grades, were more troubled emotionally and were more estranged from their families than kids whose parents were what Kim categorizes as “supportive” and “easygoing”’ (Adams 2013). Amy Chua’s description of harsh mothering has also provoked reflections on reassessment of Western laissez-faire methods of education as ‘American mothers and fathers are dying for permission to be a little tougher on their kids’ (Bronson 2011). Scholars have also analysed Chua’s book from socio-political perspectives. Julia Lee notes in her essay ‘Model Maternity: Amy Chua and Asian American Motherhood’ that Chua’s writing of the *Tiger Mother* book was driven by the market, and she is ‘as implicated in the commodification of Asian American identity and cultural practices as any “mainstream” entity’ (Lee 2016, 70-2). In her monograph *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority*,

Eleanor Ty points out that Chua has restored ‘the link between the American dream and the myth of Asians as model minorities’, ignored class diversities among Asian immigrants, and defined success as restricted to ‘attaining capital and material goods’ (Ty 2017, 9-10).

While these discussions emphasise the socio-political context of the book, there is an interesting sentence from *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* that suggests its origins are literary:

Like every Asian American woman in her late twenties, I had the idea of writing an epic novel about mother-daughter relationships spanning several generations, based loosely on my own family’s stories (Chua 2011a, 30).

This excerpt suggests how influential mother-daughter narratives such as Kingston’s have been among Asian American women that ‘every Asian American woman’ has this urge to write. But the more important implication is that her book on the Tiger Mother could be Chua’s attempt at ‘an epic **novel** about mother-daughter relationships’. Read in this light, the ‘I’ in this book is a narrator, not necessarily the autobiographical Amy Chua, and the events it narrates are not necessarily to be taken literally, but as exercises in a now familiar mode of writing about Chinese American mothers and daughters. Almost all the positive or negative comments on Chua’s book mainly focus on the mothering style, presuming it to be a ‘how-to’ book, while I argue that this book has performative aspects and its genre remains ambiguous.

Chua’s book is full of uncertainties and paradoxes. The most obvious example is her definition of the Tiger Mother, which she claims to be a construct of Chinese or Asian tradition (Chua 2011b), although what she tells us in *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is quite another story:

I’m using the term “Chinese mother” loosely. I recently met a supersuccessful white guy from South Dakota (you’ve seen him on television), and after comparing notes we decided that his working-class father had definitely been a Chinese mother. I know some Korean, Indian, Jamaican, Irish, and Ghanaian parents who qualify too. (Chua 2011a, 4)

Here it appears that the term is less linked to a specific cultural tradition, but applies far more widely. Any strict parent, not necessarily immigrant, from any cultural background and of either gender, can be a ‘Chinese mother’. The fact that she

obfuscates the two terms ‘Tiger Mother’ and ‘Chinese mother’ indicates Chua’s intention of using ethnic elements to tag her writing. Further evidence of the unfixed nature of Chua’s text is the account of her family history. Although the narrator is a second-generation Chinese American, she emphasises her Chinese ancestral culture and she foregrounds an heirloom of her family, an interpretation of the *I Ching* by her ancestor Chua Wu Neng. *I Ching* embodies the basic philosophical thinking in ancient China, as represented by the concept of yin and yang. *I Ching* has fascinated Western scholars such as the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and the psychologist Karl Jung, and more influentially, was adopted by popular artists like Bob Dylan, who praised it as ‘the only thing that is amazingly true, period’ (quoted from Smith 2012, 199). Its popular cultural appeal is marked by its appearance as a Chinese mentor’s name ‘I Ching’ in *Wonder Woman* in the late 1960s.

Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan also value this book. For example, Kingston mentions *I Ching* in both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, and in *Tripmaster Monkey*, she writes that ‘The Mathematics of life and death and time [...] make sense numerologically, the way that the *I Ching* and the periodic table do’ (Kingston 1990, 101). In *The Opposite of Fate*, Amy Tan tells a true story of her late friend Pete, who was fascinated by *I Ching* (Tan 2003b, 41-60). It could not be a mere coincidence that Chua’s narrator mentions it as a heritage from her family; this allusion functions as a response to Kingston’s and Tan’s artistic inspiration. I would suggest that the central philosophical idea in this canon – that everything is in an ever-changing state – symbolises the fluidity of Chinese American identities and has been adopted by all three authors as a principle of survival in their writings.

When dwelling on her family history, Chua’s narrator’s attitude towards her father’s parenting seems to be quite contradictory. At first glance, the father seems to be a typical Chinese patriarch and his children lead a miserable life. The narrator tells us that her father received ‘his Ph.D. in less than two years’ (Chua 2011a, 16), a stereotypical model of the hardworking and nerdy Chinese American for his daughters. The narrator and her sisters are ‘never allowed to sleep over at [their] friends’ houses’, and ‘an A-minus was unthinkable’ even when other students only got Bs (Chua 2011a, 16). Her father also sounds gloomy when telling her, ‘You will marry a non-Chinese over my dead body’ (Chua 2011a, 18). This might even be called child abuse by some Western standards, however, there seems to be another side to her childhood memories:

I found strength and confidence in my peculiar family. We started off as outsiders together, and we discovered America together, becoming Americans in the process. [...] I also remember how excited he [father] was introducing us to tacos, sloppy joes, Dairy Queen, and all-you-can-eat buffets, not to mention sledding, skiing, crabbing, and camping. (Chua 2011a, 17)

Obviously, this is a harmonious family life, full of fun and joy. The father does not seem to be a weird Chinese patriarch who forces his children to study, beats them up if they disobey him, and threatens to disown them if they marry a non-Chinese. On the contrary, he is quite open-minded and likes trying new experiences and exploring new places; he devotes his time to playing with his children. The narrator cautiously hides her Jewish boyfriend for two years before telling her parents that she was dating him; she reports 'they were in shock' (Chua 2011a, 132) at first, but change their minds later, with her father and her husband becoming best friends. Another example is that her parents change their negative attitudes towards disabled people after they had a daughter born with disease and cultivated her into a Special Olympics gold medal winner. These contradictory descriptions can be regarded as Chua's deliberate exaggeration of Chinese parents' characteristics to rationalise her narrator becoming a Tiger Mother due to the putative heritage from her parents. Chua's statement of the family history thus becomes more of a fiction that caters to readers' imagination, both of the narrator's eminent ancestor and of her rigid father.

What is more, the 'Generation Decline' theory, which the Tiger Mother uses as the reason of her parenting style in this book is also quite contradictory. 'Generation Decline' is based on a Chinese saying that 'prosperity can never last for three generations' (Chua 2011a, 20). In the narrator's family, her parents are the immigrant generation, who are hardworking and thrifty and strict with their children; her own generation are American-born professionals, who 'will not be as strict with their children as their parents were with them' (Chua 2011a, 21); the next generation are born in middle class families and enjoy individual rights, but may risk a downward movement. In order to keep her children in the middle class, the Tiger Mother decides to practice Chinese style mothering.

However, the solution to counteract generational decline is full of contradictions. The narrator says that

Classical music was the opposite of decline, the opposite of laziness, vulgarity, and spoiledness. It was a way for my children to achieve something I hadn't. But it was also a tie-in to the high cultural tradition of my ancient ancestors. (Chua 2011a, 22-3)

I do not think classical music is the opposite of laziness, but playing musical instruments does need mechanical practice and repetition, which is a test for a person's willpower. Playing the piano needs strength from fingers and harmony between hands and feet (foot pedal included), and playing the violin needs a long period of practice to achieve accuracy. As I have mentioned previously with regard to Jing-mei Woo in *The Joy Luck Club*, it is very hard to cheat when playing a musical instrument. However, the piano and violin are two instruments that are typically related with fine taste. As a reward for hard practise, a child who plays a classical musical instrument may cultivate an artistic aura which is appreciated by the middle-upper class. In this way, a minority child can become a member of the elite camp when he or she displays the good qualities of diligence, persistence and, of course intelligence. The piano and violin training of the two daughters in Chua's book is 'a vehicle to demonstrate their educated status, their cultural sophistication, and their erudite tastes' as many Chinese immigrants do to retain their middle class status (Wang 2011, 133), rather than connecting to the so-called high cultural tradition of her ancestors since the two musical instruments are typical of Western style. The Tiger Mother's two girls, Sophia and Louisa, just like the daughters in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*, are trained to be ready to fit into mainstream society. Chua's Tiger Mothering cannot be taken seriously as an authentic representation of traditional Chinese mothering, and her playing with Chinese features reveals her identity formation as a Chinese American who has been assimilated but still finds Chinese culture a useful race card to play at times. The 'Generation Decline' theory is more like a wordplay, fooling readers into believing that playing the piano and the violin belongs to Chinese culture.

Mother-daughter Narratives in a Tiger Den

Perhaps *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is only Amy Chua's attempt at a fictionalised tale of mothers and daughters, based on her own experiences; however, general readers take it for granted that her descriptions are factual, and that the narrator is identical with the author. The consequence is that Amy Chua, the Tiger Mother assumed by mainstream readers, became notorious. Similar to Kingston's and Tan's performances of Chinese American identity, Chua's performance initiated a train of consequences,

including interviews, reviews, TV adaptations, education reforms, and even death threats (Shaitly 2014). ‘Bad Reviews can close a Broadway or West End show’ (Schechner 2013, 248): attacks and death threats from angry readers also affected Amy Chua’s performative play. The following section discusses how Chua and her daughters perform in public, partly to remedy her image, and how Chua came to be considered more as an enabling figure, rather than a harsh mother, for her daughters.

Unlike Kingston and Tan, who usually represent the daughters in their works, Amy Chua mostly writes from a mother’s perspective, and there is no daughters’ first-person response in her book. However, Chua’s show did not stop when her book was completed; her mother-daughter narratives are carried out at a different level, almost like a form of reality show. In this performance, Chua role-plays the Tiger Mother character in the book, although she is not necessarily identical to the narrator. Chua and her daughters collaboratively extend the life of her book from written text to a broader platform through the medium of the television chat show. This can be seen as an upgrading of Kingston’s and Tan’s simulation of mother-daughter conversation to the level of the everyday, a way to attract the mainstream attention, as well as a response to the bad reviews and death threats. In this way, Chua and her daughters are able to reach more audiences than the traditional written form thanks to the rapid development of media technologies.

What Does the Tiger Cub Say?

When readers and critics are busy criticising Chua’s cruelty or praising her strictness towards her daughters, their perspectives are based on the presumption that this book is Chua’s memoir and therefore this is her real-life parenting style. This is similar to the pen war about the authenticity of the Chinese representations in Kingston’s and Tan’s works: both were examined as facts rather than literary creations. Just as Frank Chin and his group focused on the errors in Kingston’s and Tan’s use of Chinese sources, general readers pinpoint the details of parenting in Chua’s book and tag them as Chinese tradition.

Shortly after the *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* was published and attacked by both mainstream readers and Chinese Americans (e.g. Su 2011; Maslin 2011), Chua’s elder daughter Sophia stood up for her mother, arguing that the Tiger Mother is not such a demonic type. In an article titled ‘Why I Love My Strict Chinese Mom’, Sophia wrote

a letter to her mother as the book's narrator, stating 'people don't get your humor', and 'No outsider can know what our family is really like' (Chua-Rubinfeld 2011). She said how much she appreciates Chua's strict parenting which has made her more independent. When Sophia felt nervous about appearing in a piano competition, her mother encouraged her 'Soso, you worked as hard as you could. It doesn't matter how you do' (Chua-Rubinfeld 2011). In another interview in the same year, Sophia told the audiences that her mother did not even know what university she had applied for and therefore she was not a bad mother as people assumed her to be (Wall Street Journal 2011). In her defence of her mother, Sophia has hinted that Chua's book is not necessarily the representation of their real family life: the strict mothering is a kind of humour that needs to be savoured, a type of exaggeration that cannot be taken literally.

Amy Chua, when being exposed in front of the camera, appears more like an actor than a scholar or a mother, one who is playing with mainstream audiences about the myth of overachieving Asian American children, while her daughter Sophia, who is apparently a very intelligent young lady and has inherited Chua's acting talent, speaks eloquently and logically in an interview. I am not accusing the mother and the daughter of being fake; the point is not to judge whether they are telling the truth or just playing a game, but rather that their stance has already blurred the boundary between reality and show.

It is possible that Sophia took it upon herself to make up for Chua's bad reputation among some readers, or to 'explain' her mother to the world as the fictional daughters of Kingston's and Tan's works do. Her identity as a hybrid Chinese Jewish American also positions her outside the mainstream, and therefore she herself needs to struggle for success and to have 'two faces', showing her modified face towards mainstream audiences. Her co-performance with Chua not only relieves pressure on Chua but also gains popularity for herself.

In 2011, Sophia started writing a blog called 'A New Tiger in Town', claiming herself as 'daughter of the Tiger Mother' (About Sophia & Her Blog). In the blog, she defended her mother's book 'as satire, revealed a hilarious anecdote about her mother being lazy, and set forth her ideas about college all in a few words' (Susan 2011). As a teenager, Sophia was quite courageous to face the public and defend her mother who has been demonised by the media. It suggests that both mother and daughter have been

participating in defining a literary (not realist) construct of Chineseness. Later, Sophia began her university life at Harvard, where, according to media coverage, her mother did not interfere in her personal life, and she enjoyed the freedom to have a boyfriend, go to parties and join a sorority (Stern 2016). After graduating from Harvard, Sophia pursued her studies at Yale Law School, and is currently running a business called ‘Tiger Cub Tutoring’ (Nextshark Editorial Staff 2016). In the website for her business, Sophia again proudly mentions her mother, the bestseller *Tiger Mother*, and points out that

It’s wrong to think that disciplined and determined teens must be boring. It’s elitist to think that people who couldn’t backpack through Asia or start a Shakespearean theater troupe don’t deserve admission to the world’s best schools. It’s blind to ignore the fact that, while conventional American culture encourages self-promotion and self-expression, many immigrant cultures still promote outward humility and self-deprecation. (Tiger Cub Tutoring)

This statement, together with the business name ‘Tiger Cub Tutoring’ is an excellent piece of self-promotion. The tag *Tiger Mother* that Chua bears does not hinder Sophia from achieving, but becomes a brand that Sophia can make use of, just like the mother and daughter in *The Woman Warrior*, in which the mother is harsh to the daughter while the daughter becomes independent under the influence of her mother’s warrior spirit and is able to tell unconventional stories inspired by her mother’s versions. ‘Tiger Cub’ may suggest that Sophia is going to be strict towards her students or be a very competitive business woman. While using her mother’s *Tiger* brand may run the risk of being labelled a typical Asian money-driven enterprise, Sophia also cleverly points out that her service fees are fairly low, only 60 dollars per hour, when ‘wealthy children growing up in Connecticut are able to afford \$400 per hour tutors’ (Nextshark Editorial Staff 2016). Sophia is not being humble and self-deprecating as the stereotype expects of Asian offspring, but is indulging in self-promotion at every stage. This is her survival strategy, borrowing from her mother to gain attention, a strategy that bears some similarities to Kingston’s and Tan’s display of Chinese culture.

There is another video of a conversation between Amy Chua and Sophia posted by Chua on facebook in 2016, where Sophia interviewed Chua as a part of a series called *Talk to Me* by another mother-daughter team, Arianna Huffington (the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *The Huffington Post*) and her daughter Christina. In this video,

Sophia asked Chua three questions. In response to the first question about her drive in life, Chua brings out her immigrant experiences during childhood when she and her family were treated as outsiders and made fun of – a situation she could not control, which led her to resort to something that she could control: working hard in school. Sophia reckons this discrimination towards immigrants is a kind of humiliation but her mother always treats it with humour. This is another time Sophia affirms Chua's humorous tone, referring to her playful attempt that has already outsmarted numerous readers when publishing *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The second question is what Chua wants her daughters to do and the reply is that they should never have regrets. This may explain why Chua's Tiger Mother tried to push her daughters when they were younger. Sophia finishes the interview by asking advice for life at her age. Chua offers three pieces: do not say anything bad about anybody, jealousy and pettiness are a total waste of time, and anybody who breaks your heart is not good enough for you (Chua 2016). The advice is told in a tone of a friend rather than a controlling parent, but it also reveals the concern of a mother like Brave Orchid or the Joy Luck mothers who not only hope their daughters will be academically successful but also enjoy better relationships.

This exchange bears a resemblance to the mother-daughter narratives in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, where daughters have conflicts with their mothers, but finally come to understand their mothers' good intentions and show them respect.

Conclusion

The narrator in *The Woman Warrior* inherits the spirit of Fa Mu Lan from her mother's chanting, while Jing-mei Woo in *The Joy Luck Club* meets her long lost sisters on behalf of her late mother and finally realises her mother is in her bones. Amy Chua and her daughters' dialogue has transcended the traditional written text and functions more as a performance when it can 'entertain' mainstream readers, mark their identities as minorities and seek to 'change' their marginal positions. While the Tiger Mother image may be stereotyped and mother-daughter narratives clichéd, they have endured the test of time and the market to be the very vehicle for Chinese or Asian American women to attract mainstream audiences in literary forms and beyond.

From the first-generation working class immigrant mothers in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* to the second-generation professional mother in *Battle Hymn of The Tiger Mother*, Chinese American mother characters have drawn on traditions from ancient Chinese mothering as they evolved into a new type of Chinese American style of parenting that is performative in attracting mainstream attention. The performative pervades this writing, both in the development of the characters in the works and in the stance of the authors when they are building their seemingly distinctive styles of mothering marked by mother-daughter narratives. Especially in the case of Chua, this dialogue extends beyond the written texts. In their performance, Chinese American women have crossed between their ancestral culture and American context to seek survival and visibility.

Chapter 5. Yellow Sisterhood

In Kingston's and Tan's fictional worlds, female characters always take the leading roles. In the previous chapters, I have explored female warrior and strict mother characters, both hotly discussed and mirrored in mainstream culture. Another key aspect of the women's sphere, sisterhood, has also been elaborated by both authors, but has not been examined by scholars with the same level of intensity as the woman warrior and mother characters. In this chapter, I trace the history of Chinese sisterhood, and examine how Kingston and Tan have inherited and developed Chinese sisterhood traditions in their texts, extending feminist fellowship to be Chinese/Asian American female community, while also drawing on the second wave feminist influences that developed in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s.

Sisterhood in Chinese History

Sometimes when Chinese girls get together and call themselves *jiemei*, an outsider cannot really identify the nature of the relationship amongst them: they can be actual sisters (*qin jiemei* 亲姐妹), cousins (*tang jiemei* 堂姐妹 or *biao jiemei* 表姐妹), or friends (*xiao jiemei* 小妹妹). *Jiemei*, the counterpart of sisters in Mandarin, is a profound and complex relationship amongst Chinese women.

Chinese women in the premodern period were, and continue to be, linked to traumatic representations in the West. In Western feminists' eyes, Chinese women 'were treated as sub-animals', 'brought and sold' and their 'feet were bound' (Morgan 1970, xix). Nowadays women in China almost have equal rights to men, and therefore these representations of persecuted Chinese women in Westerners' eyes sound biased, but they still can mirror the status of Chinese women in the past. Interestingly, despite their oppressed situation, women in premodern China enjoyed a tradition of forming sisterhood groups, particularly those women from rural areas who enjoyed more freedom than their upper class counterparts. Moreover, there was also a literary tradition of depicting sisterhood in Chinese history.

The earliest Chinese women's groups took the form of Buddhist worship associations which date back to the Eastern Wei period (534-550) of the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-589) (Ning Ke and Hao Chunwen 1990, 16). These earliest groups were

usually made up of dozens of women from the same village who came together out of their free will to pray for blessings (Ning Ke and Hao Chunwen 1990, 16-7). Later on, in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960), women's Buddhist groups no longer related so heavily to religion but aimed at mutual assistance. Two pieces of manuscripts were found in Dunhuang, China, which are the earliest existing literature on women's groups. The first piece 'Pelliot chinois 3489', is now kept in the National Library of France, and tells about 'Rules establishing a women's society' (Mair and Shadick 2013). The main content of this item is about assisting funeral arrangements for the group members. Another piece is kept in the British Library, describing 'Rules and purposes (chiefly to be helpful to each other) of a women's society, dating from the year 959. Contributions include oil, flour, and wine. Rites mentioned are funerals and feasts' (Giles 1957). The significance of women's associations during this period is that members were mainly from the lower class and enjoyed equal status and close relationships as quasi-sisters; members were required to follow rules and regulations of the groups, to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities, and to receive punishment if they violated the rules; these groups appeared much earlier than their Western counterparts such as women's salons in Europe (Xie Shengbao 1999).

During the late Qing dynasty and Republican China (around nineteenth century and early twentieth century), sisterhood took on new forms. With the emergence of some factories in China, networks were developed among female co-workers. For example, the sisterhood societies formed by peasant female workers of Shunde, Guangdong, earned the title of *tzu-shu nü* (*zishu nü*, 自梳女) because they 'dress[ed] their own hair' and 'either refused to marry, or, having married, refused to live with their husbands' (Topley 1975, 67); and the unmarried cotton weavers in Chuansha, Shanghai, gathered together to 'protect the women Vegetarians' economic and residential independence' (Prazniak 1986, 202). In the period between the end of the First World War and China's liberation in 1949, working class sisters bonded at the cotton mills of Shanghai. Those sisterhood societies (*jiemei hui*) in Shanghai 'developed out of the patterns of daily life, residence, and work, and reflected women's need for mutual aid and protection' and '[m]embers of a sisterhood also helped each other financially' (Honig 1986, 210-1). Not only female factory workers, but also women in rural areas had their own sisterhood associations. In Hunan, southern China, a unique relationship called *laotong* was arranged between two girls, who usually were of the same age and of

similar personalities, and who would use a particular writing system – *nüshu* (or *nu shu*) – as their own language to express joys and sorrows (Wang 2005; 2000, 145-97). Another case is Apo Tea in Jiangsu, a form of tea party groups among elder women from the same village, in which they chatted with fellow women about their daily lives while drinking tea and having snacks (Lu Ming 2013). These sisterhood associations reflect the fact that despite the inferior status of Chinese women in patriarchal institutions, they actively sought for help from fellow females for mental and financial assistance.

Another aspect of the sisterhood tradition can be found in literary works on the ‘Land of Women’, which appears in mythologies in both the East and West. In Greek mythology, Amazon women were a race of female warriors conquered and expelled from their land (Kuiper 2016). In contrast, the Land of Women in Chinese literature is portrayed as more romantic and light-hearted, though with some sinister undertones. The earliest recorded depiction can be found in *Shan hai jing*, a compilation of mythologies:

The Land of Women lies north of the Land of Shaman Xian. Two women dwell here in the water, which surrounds them. [...] Guo Pu recorded a myth about a Yellow Lake, where the women bathe and then emerge pregnant. Any sons they give birth to suddenly die after three years. (Strassberg 2002, 173)

This extremely short story is more like a fairy tale, full of exotic elements, leaving space for imagination.

There are two well-known examples in later fiction, firstly *Journey to the West* (16th century), one of the Four Great Classical Works of Chinese literature that Kingston borrowed from in *Tripmaster Monkey*. In this text four pilgrims of the Tang dynasty undergo various adventures when they travel to the Kingdom of Women. The empress there is so delighted to see the Buddhist monk Xuanzang, a handsome young man, that she proposes to marry him. There are no males in this kingdom and women have to drink the water from Child-and-Mother River to get pregnant, an incident that finds its origin in *Shan hai jing*, ‘a Yellow Lake, where the women bathe and then emerge pregnant’. The empress is a beautiful woman and the author describes her looks from the perspective of Xuanzang’s second disciple, Zhu Bajie, a monk with a lustful nature,

Brows like kingfisher hair,

And flesh like mutton jade.
Peach petals bedeck her face;
Her bun piles gold-phoenix hair.
Her eyes' cool, liquid gaze – such seductive charm.
Her hands' young, tender shoots – such dainty form.
Colors flutter from a red sash hung aslant;
Bright gleams flash forth from jade and pearl pinned high.
Don't speak of the beauty of Zhaojun,
She indeed surpasses even Xi Shi.
The willow waist bends slightly to gold-pendant sounds;
The light, lotus steps move the jadelike limbs.
The lunar goddess cannot come up to her,
Nor can the maids of Heaven compare with her.
This fair, palatial style's no common kind;
She's like Queen Mother who comes from Jasper Pool. (Anthony 2008, 379)

This gaze from Zhu Bajie stands for male fantasies towards women. The empress's wish to marry the monk shows her yearning for love and pleasure as a human being and her wish to choose her partner rather than to be chosen. However, her pursuit is doomed to fail because the monk is loyal to his pilgrimage. This may imply the author's ambivalent attitudes towards women's individuality. On the one hand, he praises her for her courage, on the other hand, he still bears the opinion that it was inappropriate for women to initiate a relationship.

Another more recent fictional Land of Women appears in Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror* (1827), also borrowed by Kingston's opening chapter, 'On Discovery', of *China Men*. In Li Ruzhen's writing, the Land of Women is not a single sex nation, but a reversed version of binary gender relationships in a patriarchal society. Women are dressed like men and become the central and superior group of the society, while men stay at home and play the roles of servants. By inverting traditional gender roles, Li

Ruzhen's attitude towards feminism seems more advanced and radical than his predecessors'.

The Land of Women in traditional Chinese fiction may be viewed as an alternative reflection of sisterhood in the male imagination. It shows that some male authors were well aware of the unfair treatment of women in a male-dominated culture, while on the other hand, they were confined by patriarchal value and taste, thus their creations turned out to be more for amusement than social criticism. Even in Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror*, the female characters only take revenge on males, rather than setting up models of gender equality. However, this type of literary depiction may mirror the fact that women in real life were actively grouping together to seek equality.

Chinese women had a more profound tradition of sisterhood which may be due to the result of 'the common practice of polygamy in ancient Chinese culture until late Qing Dynasty, within which women's affectionate relationship with each other, either among concubines or servant girls, was not only publicly allowed, but rather encouraged for the sake of maintaining familial and social stability' (He 2012, 211). Sisterhood was encouraged not out of sympathy for women, but for males' own benefit. If there had been no gender inequality, feminist movements would be redundant and sisterhood would not be promoted.

Apart from these traditions in old China, there is also an interesting phenomenon among diasporic Chinese women. In countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, Chinese women who worked as *amahs* formed associations, so this may be a feature of Chinese female migrants' stories. For example, the Cantonese *amahs* working in Singapore during the period of British rule (1819-1963) formed sisterhood organisations, which 'looked after its members socially and financially throughout their service into retirement' and 'gave these women agency and saw them through their retirement as they took care of themselves and each other financially, particularly in old age' (Gomes 2015, 103, 113).

The World of Sisterhood in Kingston's and Tan's Works

Women in Kingston's and Tan's fictional worlds form alliances like women in old China did for survival. The most obvious example is the mah-jong group in *The Joy Luck Club*. Suyuan Woo organises this group in wartime China with another three women of the leisured class. This kind of mah-jong club could not be regarded as a

typical sisterhood relationship for mutual assistance if it had not been set against the background of war. As in the chapter 'Magpies', An-mei Hsu reveals that her mother descends to being the fourth concubine from an honoured widow when she stays over one night at Wu Tsing's house playing mah-jong with him and his other wives. Mah-jong is a game which belongs to the leisured class and is a trap for An-mei's mother; however, for those women in wartime, it plays a positive role to cheer them up, forget their pains, and find solidarity, albeit temporarily. These women can afford snacks and games when the lower class are struggling for survival, but in fact, they do suffer from the war in their own way. Suyuan Woo explains their motivation for mah-jong playing:

It's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable. (Tan 1998, 24)

This philosophy of life makes sense in adversity. Instead of indulging themselves in sorrow, the women choose to gather together, healing each other as a group. Being upper-middle class women, they do not enjoy as much freedom as lower-class women in some respects due to social customs and etiquette. It seems unrealistic for them to become professional women and acquire financial independence, nor can they deal with menial work as lower-class women can. Just like Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* who fails to survive as a poverty-stricken upper-class lady, Suyuan Woo and her fellow women are unable to support themselves financially and walk away from their families. After her migration to the U.S., Suyuan meets three Chinese immigrant women in the church and reorganises a new Joy Luck Club. The new club serves as a shelter and community for the four women when they are confronted with culture shock and racial discrimination. The way the four women dress up when playing mah-jong is not dissimilar to the religious praying in ancient peasant women's society, a ritual for them to relive their past. The group continues functioning even after the hostess, Suyuan, has passed away. The other three women succeed in seeking Suyuan's lost twin girls back in China, and provide her American-born daughter Jing-mei with financial aid to meet her half-sisters. The four women are not relatives, but they are called 'aunties' by the daughters' generation as if they were from a big family. It is a Chinese tradition to call one's female elders 'aunties' whether they are acquaintances or strangers; however, Joy Luck Club aunties are closer than real aunties for the support they give, the joy they share and the culture they pass on. So the four

women sitting around the mah-jong table actually cooperate with one another rather than performing as competitors in a game.

Similarly, in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, women choose to gather together for mutual support. In the second chapter, 'White Tigers', when Fa Mu Lan is searching for the exploiters, she finds some women in a locked room, who have been abandoned by their servants. They might be the landlords' concubines who are unable to walk on their tiny bound feet. Fa Mu Lan does not treat them as she does the baron, but tries to find their parents although in vain. She cannot take them with her army, so she gives each of them 'a bagful of rice, which they sat on' (Kingston 1989b, 44). Kingston describes these women as living like 'ghosts' (Kingston 1989b, 44), implying that they are controlled by males and have no individualities. These women are in a predicament as they might come from lower-class backgrounds but have become heavily attached to the exploiting class. However, they do not give up, but group together into 'the band of swordswomen who were a mercenary army' and it is said that the escaping slave girls and daughters-in-law 'joined these witch amazons' (Kingston 1989b, 44-5). Sisterhood in this case is multi-dimensional. First, Fa Mu Lan offers the women material aid as well as spiritual inspiration as a female role model; the women form a group fighting for women's rights; and they take in more women who are persecuted. Susie Lan Cassel points out that those persecuted women in Kingston's 'are portrayed in terms of a dramatic fall coupled with a phoenix-like rise that results in a cycle of heroic evolution' (Cassel 2007, 53), showing the healing power of sisterhood for dehumanised women.

Sisterhood between Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid

Sisterhood is powerful, but sometimes it hurts. In the fourth chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, 'At the Western Palace', Moon Orchid, who has newly arrived in America from Hong Kong, is guided amiss by her sister Brave Orchid and finally becomes a lunatic and dies in this foreign country. The narrator's mother, Brave Orchid, is not a typically traditional Chinese woman. She shows her intelligence when she is in medical school with girls much younger than herself, and achieves excellent academic results and gains respect from her fellow students. After her migration to the U.S., she has to give up her profession as a doctor to work in the laundry for long hours every day. This change shows her tenacity and strong willpower. She can be seen as a

feminist character in her strife for independence; however, she is also a contradictory figure thanks to her feminist anger. She tells her sister Moon Orchid that her husband married a new wife after moving to America. Moon Orchid does not want to confront her husband, but Brave Orchid nags her to regain her rights and expel the new wife. Brave Orchid designs how her sister should catch her husband while he is with the new wife and claim her status as the Big Wife. Moon Orchid thinks it is ‘against the law to have two wives in this country’ (Kingston 1989b, 144), implying that she disagrees with Brave Orchid’s instructions as she still has some sense of the modern world, but Brave Orchid is too excited about her plan to think about her sister’s situation. She reassures Moon Orchid: ‘I’ll hit him. I’ll protect you. I’ll hit him back. The two of us will knock him down and make him listen’ (Kingston 1989b, 145). This part is quite absurd because, while on the one hand, Brave Orchid does mean to help her sister, on the other hand, she is unrealistic and indulges in vain fantasies of revenge towards the bad husband. She is unaware of Moon Orchid’s feelings, just as, in an earlier scene, she sends her children to demand ‘reparation candy’ for a perceived insult from a bemused shopkeeper. Brave Orchid has done much to help her sister: she arranges accommodation for Moon Orchid in her own house, accompanies her to seek for jobs, offers plans of revenging the bad husband, and asks her son to drive them to see the husband. However, Brave Orchid also manipulates and imposes her unrealistic will on her sister and indirectly causes her breakdown.

Moon Orchid’s tragedy is partly caused by this inadequate sisterhood and it reflects that Brave Orchid is still deeply influenced by patriarchal thinking and becomes its ally unconsciously; at this moment she is ‘a traditional woman intent on protecting her family from harm by maintaining the old traditions against the erosions of American culture’ (Smith 1999, 73). She holds the opinion that if a man has the privilege of having more than one wife, then the first wife should in turn enslave the concubines. Instead of suggesting that Moon Orchid seek a divorce, Brave Orchid persuades her sister to chase the second wife out of her husband’s house. This not only falls into the patriarchal trap but also goes against the spirit of sisterhood. Another point is that she does not respect the wishes of those she loves, but intends to ‘baby everyone’ (Kingston 1989b, 146) including her sister. This contradiction between her traditional concept of playing a dominant parental role and American individualistic values makes the sisterhood between Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid end in failure. The title of this

chapter, 'At the Western Palace', can be understood on two levels. One refers to the fact that Moon Orchid's husband has married a new wife since the Western Palace is the place where imperial concubines live, just as Brave Orchid tells her sister:

the emperors had four wives, one at each point of the compass, and they lived in four palaces. The Empress of the West would connive for power, but the Empress of the East was good and kind and full of light. You are the Empress of the East, and the Empress of the West has imprisoned the Earth's Emperor in the Western Palace. And you, the good Empress of the East, come out of the dawn to invade her land and free the Emperor. You must break the strong spell she has cast on him that has lost him the East. (Kingston 1989b, 143)

Another layer symbolises Western society, in which traditional Chinese practices do not apply. Therefore, the title points to the doomed fate of this sisterhood.

Although Brave Orchid is described as an intelligent student, a shaman, a ghost exorcist, a woman warrior and a story-teller, in this chapter, she is 'portrayed as a repressive, egotistical, insensitive tyrant who is quite capable of victimizing, silencing, and destroying other women' (Ho 1999, 130). The failure of her alliance of sisterhood with Moon Orchid reflects 'the multiple dilemmas and traumas at women's sites of struggle within conflicting discourses and institutions that continually interact to delimit their power and options in society' (Ho 1999, 131). Living in between Chinese patriarchal residues and American racial prejudices, Brave Orchid fails to adjust her feminist strength to the new context.

Mother-Daughter Storytelling as Sisterly Bonding

Another form of sisterhood portrayed by both Kingston and Tan is that of the mother-daughter storytelling tradition. Besides their friendship with peers, the mothers portrayed in Kingston's and Tan's works also rely on their daughters mentally and emotionally. They not only expect their daughters to become successful to reward their motherhood, but also need to sustain a solid connection with their offspring, who 'become the intimate link to past and future' (Ho 1999, 156) when the mothers have left the homeland and settled in America.

Brave Orchid tells the narrator about her past experiences, including that of losing two of her children in China, studying in a medical school, and practising as a doctor in the village. She has a sense of loss in America when she has to do manual work, having

no free time, compared with her past life in China. Her husband goes to America for a better life but that life turns out to be pathetic when they finally reunite there. Brave Orchid cannot communicate well in the white people's world and feels isolated. She is able to maintain her sanity by telling her children old stories, a spiritual ritual for her to relive her past life and restore ancestral culture. The narrator, by recording her mother's narratives, proves that she has listened to and translated her mother's stories with respect and understanding.

Likewise, in *The Joy Luck Club*, there are cultural gaps between Chinese mothers and Americanised daughters: mothers' weird cooking style that disgusts daughters, mothers' strange superstitious practises imposed on daughters, and mothers' overly high anticipations of their children's capabilities. In order to bridge the gap between the two generations, mothers and daughters resort to storytelling, which 'transforms structurally isolated monologues into meaningful dialogues between mother and mother, daughter and daughter, and, more important, mother and daughter and coalesces the sixteen monologues into a coherent whole' (Shen 2009, 6). Through these dialogues, mothers reveal their untold pasts and daughters get access to a better understanding of mothers. For instance, the story Suyuan Woo tells her daughter Jing-mei about how she organised a mah-jong group back in China sounds like 'a Chinese fairy tale' (Tan 1998, 25) to Jing-mei at first, but one day, Suyuan reveals a serious ending: that she lost her two babies on the way to join her former husband. This becomes Suyuan's lifelong burden and she wishes to meet her lost children again. Thanks to the Joy Luck Club aunties, the lost babies are finally contacted and the American-born Jing-mei is able to understand her mother's culture and language: "'No, tell me in Chinese,'" I interrupt. "Really, I can understand.'" (Tan 1998, 281). This shows that the resistance and reluctance from the daughter's side has disappeared. Although it comes after Suyuan's death, it is still not too late, as long as her wish has been fulfilled.

Living in an alien country and facing racial prejudice, the mothers need the device of storytelling to empower themselves. Storytelling enables the mothers to transform 'from oppression and victimization to self-affirmation and cultural survival', ensuring that their daughters 'participate in the oral tradition that shapes both a communal history and the lives of the individuals who form that community' (Huntley 2001, 94). 'Storytelling is a method that can be used to heal, to grow, and to nurture' (Chin 2005b,

150), a mutual process during which both mothers and daughters gradually reach understandings and become allies and support each other.

Compared with the traditional Land of Women in Chinese literature and women's societies among women in premodern China, Kingston's and Tan's sisterhood among women of Chinese ancestry is a modified version in several ways, as I will discuss, when the context of their works expands from premodern China to postmodern U.S. along with the progress of feminist movements in the West from the 1960s. First of all, the women who joined sisterhood groups in premodern China were mainly lower-class women, who were not so restricted by patriarchal rules and had more opportunities to go out, while in Kingston's and Tan's books, most of the women come from the upper-middle class. Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior* used to be a delicate lady in China with valuable possessions and servants. She says 'I didn't need muscles in China. I was small in China' in a nostalgic tone (Kingston 1989b, 104). This may mislead readers to presume her life in China to be comfortable and to ignore her misery. Yet Kingston narrates the hurried weddings of fortune seekers before they sailed to America at the very beginning of this book. The wives are left behind at home. They are promised that they are going to receive some money from their husbands before they reunite, but some of the husbands never come back. Brave Orchid, her sister Moon Orchid and her husband's sister – the no name woman – are all left-behind wives. Moon Orchid's husband leaves her for America and marries another wife there. She is driven mad when she finally comes to America to look for her husband and dies shortly after that. The no name woman is persecuted by her fellow villagers because she becomes pregnant when her husband is away in America. Brave Orchid has to raise her two children alone when her husband leaves to work in America, but her children die. She has to go to America to join her husband, otherwise there will be no other offspring, since her husband uses a fake identity and cannot travel between China and America. In order to go to America, Brave Orchid has to get a diploma from a medical school at the age of thirty-seven, when her fellow students are only half of her age. Brave Orchid seems to be the luckiest one among the three because she becomes a doctor after graduation and comes to America afterwards. From her storytelling to the narrator in the chapter 'Shaman', it is evident that she enjoys her experiences at the school where she has space of her own and is free from filial duty towards her husband's parents, even though she has to share a room with other girls. Her

intelligence and diligence win her respect from fellow students and she enjoys the sisterhood among them. Her career and life as a respected doctor after graduation gives her more satisfaction, representing a modern woman's ideal of having 'a room of one's own' expressed by Virginia Woolf (see Woolf 1977). But she has to give this up to join her husband in America, where she has to labour all day long. This dramatic change, along with her earlier experiences of being a living widow, demands 'greater sacrifice of her selfhood' (Wong 1993, 199), which is no less painful than the tragedies of her sister and sister-in-law. These three women in *The Woman Warrior*, although not financially disadvantaged in China, have tasted the bitterness of being abandoned at home and sacrificing their individuality. Similarly, the four mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* all have wretched pasts despite their privileged backgrounds. Suyuan Woo loses her children during the war; Lindo Jong escapes from an arranged marriage; An-mei Hsu witnesses her mother's suicide; and Ying-ying St. Clair is severely abused in her first marriage.

The shift from their status as lower-class women to the upper-middle class is more applicable to Chinese American women in a white-dominated society where their dilemma is neither domestic violence nor starvation. What makes them uneasy mainly includes racial discrimination, isolation, and homesickness, rather than financial issues and physical labour. The sisterhood among these women reflects that mental support counts more in upper-middle class females.

When Brave Orchid and the four Joy Luck mothers become immigrants in America, their social status undergoes a downward change. They become working class females. This change is caused by racial discrimination which Chinese American males have been experiencing ever since they stepped on this new land. The narrator's father in *The Woman Warrior* used to be a scholar in China, but has to do laundry work in America. Her mother Brave Orchid has to give up her profession as a doctor. The Joy Luck Club mothers turn into manual workers as well. This racial inequality is new to Chinese sisterhood when women meet in an alien country. Sisterhood groups, which used to be shelters for women from patriarchal persecution in China, now function more as communities to counteract racial biases and culture shock, to preserve homeland traditions and to recount nostalgic emotions. This echoes the zeitgeist during the second wave feminist movement when groups of women of colour were founded

and ‘a veritable explosion of writing by women of color’ appeared (Thompson 2002, 340).

A departure from the Land of Women in Chinese literary tradition, Kingston’s and Tan’s female world is not designed for male pleasure. There is no erotic description of women, no space for the male gaze. Women are portrayed as warriors under Kingston’s pen, and even the no name woman, who has committed adultery, leaves no room for sexual fantasy. This not only shows a feminist stance towards patriarchal aesthetics but also reverses the Western stereotypical opinions that Eastern women are all submissive, fragile and erotic-exotic.

Literary Sisterhood: Kingston and Marilyn Chin

Considering that the two authors were composing their works around the period from the 1970s to 1990s, when feminist movements were blossoming, the sisterhood in their works is not merely a simple imitation of the traditional Chinese style sisterly bonding, but has adapted itself to the social environment. This in turn fostered a more positive response by readers for these narratives, and the formation of a sense of fellowship between authors and readers, among both Asian American and other women. The following section will examine the interaction between authors and readers, texts and life, text and non-literary media, and consider how they build up a literary sisterhood among Asian Americans in particular.

A person does not become a writer overnight. Apart from talent, we all need some inspiration and encouragement to achieve our goals; this is also true of Chinese American writers. In some interviews, Kingston expresses the frustration she felt towards literature as a child after reading Louisa May Alcott’s book in which a Chinese male was portrayed in a caricatured way, ‘a character of fun and so stereotyped’, ‘so weird and different’ (Blauvelt 1989, 83; Hoy 1986, 62). It was not until she found Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* that she picked up writing again:

There were such wonderful illustrations of little kids that looked like me, and most importantly, written by a Chinese American woman. So, she gave me this great welcome and send-off, so I continued writing. (Kingston in Blauvelt 1989, 83)

In another interview, Kingston again comments:

For the first time I could see a person somewhat like myself in literature. I had been trying to write about people who were blond, or a beautiful redhead on her horse, because those were the people who were in the books. So I was lucky that at a young age I could see a Chinese American. (Kingston in Hoy 1986, 62)

Jade Snow Wong can be regarded as Kingston's literary forerunner. Wong wrote *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) as an autobiography, although in third-person, with the purpose of 'creating better understanding of the Chinese culture on the part of Americans' (Wong 1989, vii). The book tells about a Chinese American girl's struggle between tradition and individuality, and has achieved success among mainstream readers. In 1953, Wong was sent by the U.S. State Department on a four-month speaking tour of Asia (China was not included). The significance of Wong's autobiography lies in that it is one of the earliest books that deals with the topic of Chinese American women and it aimed to 'correct the distorted images of Chinese and Chinese Americans and created the new image of Chinese as a model minority' (Zhang 2009, 1000). However, when I tried to find this book in my university's library, I found it categorised in the sculpture section because Wong was identified as a ceramic artist in the first place, rather than as a writer. This suggests that Wong's book may not have been taken seriously as a literary work at the time of publication, but more as a political text that demonstrated that 'even a minority woman much repressed by her family could attain the American Dream' (Ling 1990, 120). It also shows that Chinese American literature was only at the stage of inception. But this seed did ignite Maxine Hong Kingston's passion for creating female images of her own community.

Having inherited the legacy of Jade Snow Wong, 'the Mother of Chinese American literature' (Ling 1990, 120), Kingston's own works have achieved great success in America, and *The Woman Warrior* has been canonised in American literature. She has become a role model for Chinese Americans, and her influence on new writers is undeniable, especially on female Asian American authors, who had been marginalised and silenced for a long time. The model Kingston inherited from Jade Snow Wong and her popularity in mainstream market provided these new authors with a kind of inspiring and encouraging literary sisterhood. The Chinese-style sisterhood in her text has extended to real life, the glue between Kingston and her readers and followers in Asian American communities.

In the early 1980s Kingston mentioned in an interview that some young female writers at UCLA told her about ‘a generic Maxine Hong Kingston rejection slip’, which basically means that they were turned down by publishers and were advised to read Kingston’s works (Blauvelt 1989, 84). This may imply the negative side of her success, that Kingston’s model has become a fixed formula for the publishers; however, the brighter side is that numerous young authors are commencing their writing career after her success. As an Asian American female role model, Kingston advises new writers to ‘write like themselves’, to seize the zeitgeist, and ‘not [to] be so affected by the market place’ (Blauvelt 1989, 84). The sharing of her writing experience reveals her anticipation for an Asian American literary upsurge in the following decades.

Among these young female writers, Marilyn Chin, a Chinese American poet, expresses her appreciation for Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*. Claiming literary kinship, she recognises *Brave Orchid* as her grandmother and *Moon Orchid* as her mother:

My whole family was in that book. All those faces, with the composite physiognomy of that first generation of Chinese American chaotic families. But it was wonderful. I think it gave us permission to go on. The book set precedent. That summer I was wallowing between law school, and becoming a poor, starving poet. So that book really made a difference in my life. And I’m certain that it made a difference in many, many lives. (Chin and Kingston 1989, 62)

Chin’s career choice to be a poet needed much courage at that time when most Asian Americans stuck to law, economics, and science for financial security and social prestige. One of her poems ‘Song of the Sad Guitar’ from her 1994 collection *The Phoenix Gone, The Terrace Empty* is dedicated to Kingston:

Song of the Sad Guitar

for Maxine Hong Kingston

In the bitter year of 1988 I was banished to San Diego, California, to become a wife there. It was summer. I was buying groceries under the Yin and Yang sign of Safeway. In the parking lot, the puppies were howling to a familiar tune on a guitar plucked with the zest and angst of the sixties. I asked the player her name.

She answered:

“Stone Orchid, but if you call me that, I’ll kill you.”

I said:

“Yes, perhaps stone is too harsh for one with a voice so pure.”

She said:

“It’s the ‘orchid’ I detest; it’s prissy, cliché and forever pink.”

From my shopping bag I handed her a Tsing Tao and urged her to play on.

She sang about hitchhiking around the country, moons and lakes, home-word-honking geese, scholars who failed the examination. Men leaving for war; women climbing the watchtower. There were courts, more courts and inner-most courts, and scions who pillaged the country.

Suddenly, I began to feel deeply about my own banishment. The singer I could have been, what the world looked like in spring, that Motown collection I lost. I urged her to play on:

Trickle, trickle, the falling rain.

Ming, ming, a deer lost in the forest

Surru, surru, a secret conversation

Hung, hung, a dog in the yard.

Then, she changed her mood, to a slower lament, trilled a song macabre, about death, about a guitar case that opened like a coffin. Each string vibrant, each note a thought. Tell me, Orchid, where are we going? “The book of changes does not signify change. The laws are immutable. Our fates are sealed.” Said Orchid – the song is a dirge and an awakening.

Two years after our meeting, I became deranged. I couldn't cook, couldn't clean. My house turned into a pigsty. My children became delinquents. My husband began a long lusty affair with another woman. The house burned during a feverish Santa Ana as I sat in a pink cranny above the garage singing, "At twenty, I marry you. At thirty, I begin hating everything that you do."

One day while I was driving down Mulberry Lane, a voice came over the radio. It was Stone Orchid. She said, "This is a song for an old friend of mine. Her name is Mei Ling. She's a warm and sensitive housewife now living in Hell's Creek, California. I've dedicated this special song for her, "The Song of the Sad Guitar."

I am now beginning to understand the song within the song, the weeping within the willow. And you, out there, walking, talking, seemingly alive – may truly be dead and waiting to be summoned by the sound of the sad guitar. (Chin 1994, 17-8)

As Cheung has discussed, the singer Stone Orchid refers to Kingston, who is herself a sister of the characters in *The Woman Warrior*: Mu Lan (Sylvan Orchid), the mother Brave Orchid, and the auntie Moon Orchid. Kingston in this poem plays the roles of Mu Lan the warrior, Brave Orchid the storyteller, and Ts'ai Yen, the singer (Cheung 2011, 244). Marilyn Chin, whose Chinese name is Mei Ling, appears as the narrator, who admires the singer Stone Orchid, 'I began to feel deeply about my own banishment. The singer I could have been', expressing her aspiration to be like the singer. In my opinion, the narrator views Stone Orchid as a feminist as she gives her a 'Tsing Tao', a Chinese brand beer, instead of a soft drink. The narrator feels sorry for her fate as a housewife at home and her experiences of being cheated on by her husband also alludes to the tragedy of Moon Orchid. By asking the singer's name and recording her song, 'Chin implicitly claims lineage to a Chinese American feminist heritage' (Cheung 2011, 244).

Apart from her poetry, Marylyn Chin also wrote a novel called *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* which renews *The Woman Warrior*. I will further discuss this work in detail in Chapter 6.

Literary Sisterhood: Tan and Her Followers

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* also attracted a phenomenal readership and enthusiasm for writing among Asian American females. One of her readers' letters detailed the ways in which readers saw themselves and their families in Tan's novel:

I had never read a book like yours that I could relate to – from the dumplings that were made with the expert twist of chopsticks to the way the “formica table was wiped down twice after dinner.” I also live with my grandma who likes to say “Ai yaa!” quite often! A few ignorant students mocking me would always cause me to wish that I had blonde hair instead of dark brown [...] You wrote many beautiful things in your book that made me realize that I was lucky to have two cultures and that some traits in the Oriental culture could never be traded for an American one. (Streitfeld 1989)

The vivid description of Chinese culture, authentic or not, evoked resonances from audiences of the similar background at a time when there were still so few Chinese American bestsellers. As Heung points out, the complicated and non-linear structure of *The Joy Luck Club* calls for ‘the reader’s construction of interconnections between motif, character, and incident’ to ‘dissolv[e] individualized character and plot’ and ‘collectiviz[e] them into an aggregate meaning existing outside the individual stories themselves’ (Heung 2009, 31). This suggests that Tan’s stories represent real Chinese American female experiences and can arouse readers’ resonance. Reading Tan’s work can grant readers a sense of belonging, as if they were the characters in the fiction, when *The Joy Luck Club* ‘breaks down the boundary between text and reader in order to proffer the notions of sisterhood as a literary construction and as a community constituted through the act of reading’ (Heung 2009, 32).

Amy Tan also became a friend and model for other female Chinese American authors, such as Lisa See, whose works mainly focus on relationships of Chinese women. See showed her admiration of Amy Tan in statements such as: ‘I also read everything Amy Tan writes. She’s a friend and a wonderful writer. *The Kitchen God’s Wife* is my favorite of Amy’s books’ (Goodreads and See 2009). The two writers travelled together to China, stayed in a village house to conduct research when they were composing different works – Tan was writing *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) and See was conceiving *Dreams of Joy* (2011) (Goodreads and See 2009; Froyd 2011). Lisa See was quite curious as to how they would each use the same materials in their separate books (Goodreads and See 2009). Tan makes it a point to acknowledge how

See ‘generously insisted that I use the name of the village pond in my book, even though Moon Pond would have been a perfect name for a village in her novel’ (Tan 2013, xii). Several years later, this ‘Moon Pond’ appears in See’s *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* (2017) (See 2017b, 226).

Bob Dylan said ‘The highest purpose of art is to inspire. What else can you do? What else can you do for anyone but inspire them?’ (Cott 1978). Kington’s and Tan’s works and experience provided new authors with the faith and inspiration to choose writing as their career. By speaking out via their artistic creations, female authors of Chinese ancestry are able to resist as a group the criticism from male writers, who attempt to ‘discredit and silence women’ (Yin 2000, 238). The male Chinese American group felt either emasculated by mainstream society or displayed jealousy at female counterparts’ popularity, which leads to their anxiety and agony. The popularity of female authors with the mass market is essential for the development of Chinese American literature as a whole and may change the socio-political status of Chinese Americans in the long run.

The Movie *The Joy Luck Club* and Chinese American Sisterhood

Apart from literary sisterhood, Chinese style sisterly bonding is also reflected in the fellowship among Chinese American women in the making of the movie *The Joy Luck Club*, both in the process of turning the book into a movie and correcting the biases towards actors of Asian origin.

Asian in American films have always been stock characters. Chinese are of no exception. Jun Xing, in *Asian America through the Lens*, summarises three types of Asian images on mainstream screens: ‘the “yellow peril” formula, the “Madame Butterfly” narratives and the Charlie Chan stories’, which represent the oriental fantasies of mainstream audiences (Xing 1998, 55). The yellow peril image can be categorised into ‘the rape narratives’ and the “Banzai” type war films’, such as the sadistic Burmese ivory king Arakau in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Cheat* (1915), and the notorious Fu Manchu (Xing 1998, 55-8). One of the most influential examples of the stereotype cast on Asian females on mainstream screens is that of *Madame Butterfly* (1904), in which a Japanese woman commits suicide after she is abandoned by her American husband. This opera, as well as its movie version (1932) is popular in the Western world for it stands for ‘the archetype of Oriental femininity’ (Xing 1998, 59).

Who would not want to see such a heart-breaking story with macho men and love-struck women? This white-male-dominated perspective narrative is offensive towards Asian Americans, and led to Henry David Hwang writing a play *M. Butterfly* (1988) to dismantle this bias. In *M. Butterfly*, a French diplomat falls in love with a Chinese Peking Opera actor and never realises that his lover is a male. *Madame Butterfly* was also adapted into the hit musical *Miss Saigon* (1989), in which the Japanese geisha is replaced by a Vietnamese prostitute. The third type of Asians is the ‘Good boy’ Charlie Chan character, in contrast to the bad Fu Manchu, which has been read as ‘the nonthreatening Asian’ – ‘a physical wimp, a sexual deviant, and a political yes-man’ (Xing 1998, 61).

Not only is the Asian representations on screens stereotyped, but also actors of Asian background have been excluded from leading roles. For example, Anna May Wong, ‘the only contemporary Chinese American actress to achieve international prominence’ (Leong 2005, 2), only had the opportunities to play stereotyped Asian female characters – dragon ladies, exotic whores, China dolls – and ‘hypersexual beings’ (Shimizu 2007, 5), such as the Mongol Slave in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924) and Dr. Fu Manchu’s daughter in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931). There is a very rare case in which a female Chinese character is portrayed as positive: the lead role O-lan in the movie *The Good Earth* (1937) based on Pearl Buck’s famous novel, about a hardworking, sacrificing and submissive wife in rural China. Although O-lan still reinforces the stereotype of Asian women in being docile and passive, this character is perhaps not so offensive because she is a proper wife and mother. Perhaps O-lan was too good to be played by an Asian female, so a white actor, Luise Rainer, was chosen to perform this character. Anna May Wong wanted to play O-lan, but it turned out that she was only invited to play the minor role of Lotus, ‘the epitome of orientalized womanhood’ (Leong 2005, 76), the seducing evil type, which she refused. This fact reveals at least three points: mainstream movies do not cast Asian actors in positive leading roles, Asian actors have been stereotyped to play whore characters, and Asian actors such as Anna May Wong still have the consciousness to protest against stereotypical roles.

In such a difficult situation for the Asian American film makers and actors, it was unimaginable to produce a mainstream movie with all Asian faces. However, in 1993 the movie *The Joy Luck Club* based on Amy Tan’s book successfully completed this

improbable mission. When reading the articles about the movie version of *The Joy Luck Club*, I usually came across three male names other than those of the cast members: they are director Wayne Wang, screenwriter Ronald Bass, and executive producer Oliver Stone. It is true that the movie could not have been made without the efforts of these three, but I would like to discuss a female producer who played an important role in making this movie, Janet Yang.

Janet Yang was born into a Chinese immigrant family in New York. Her career in Hollywood began with introducing Chinese movies to the U.S. and brokering the first sales of Hollywood movies into China (Janet Yang). During a trip to meet some publishers in New York, Yang was told by an editor about a Chinese-American-themed book, but at that time the publisher had seen only three chapters of the book. These chapters would be later included in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Yang said in an interview that 'They gave them to me and I fell in love. I then contacted Amy Tan, who started sending me chapters as she was writing them' (Byrge 2016, 191-2). In March 1988, before the book *The Joy Luck Club* was released, Yang met Tan in a café, told her how much she liked her stories and suggested a movie should be made once the book was published (Tan 2003b, 180). After the book came out and Tan met the director Wayne Wang and the screenwriter Ron Bass, in spring 1990, Yang arranged a meeting for Tan with Oliver Stone, the producer, who would help make the movie with the company, Carolco. Half a year later, after a disagreement over her contract, Tan chose to leave the deal, while Janet Yang and Oliver Stone still continued to look for financing for the project. Tan called them 'godfather and godmother' of the movie, showing her appreciation for their efforts (Tan 2003b, 182). I cannot say that the movie would not have been made without Janet Yang, but she did play a vital role in this process as a Chinese American female who had a special sensibility which found a resonance in Tan's book and who was always ready to offer help in making the movie. The cooperation between Yang and Tan is a form of sisterhood among Chinese American women, with joint efforts to promote their artistic creation.

There were many difficulties with turning *The Joy Luck Club* into a movie. These included factors such as too many characters and parallel plots, but the major issue may have been the Asian American theme itself. As Tan pointed out, the biggest obstacle was how to make a commercial movie when there were 'no big-name stars, no male lead, no car chase or trains being blown up' (Tan 2003b, 189). Amy Tan, as a

co-screenwriter, adopted the strategy of turning her book about Chinese American female stories into a universal theme. Therefore, this movie was made to show human nature through an Asian American perspective. This attempt was vulnerable to criticisms about political correctness, but Tan's ambition was to 'bring in receipts to change Hollywood's mind that movies about Asian-Americans can't be successful' and challenge the 'many negative assumptions about Asian-Americans on the big screen' (Tan 2003b, 191). And she made it, with the collaboration of her team. The movie turned out to be a box office success, reaching a wide audience, and 'many young women left the theaters in tears' (Tseo 1996, 343). Janet Yang commented years later,

The emotional impact that both the book and movie have had on several generations now cannot be underestimated. Almost on a daily basis, someone tells me about the healing effect this work has had on their lives. Amy is a rock star! Actually, believe it or not, she does play in a rock band. (Byrge 2016, 192)

The universal emotions depicted in both the book and the movie have won Amy Tan fame and fans.

The movie version of *The Joy Luck Club* may not be as profound as the original book due to the concessions made for commercial reasons and the compromises required by the adaptations for visual presentation, such as using cinematic conventions of 'voice-over narration, sentimental music, melodramatic events, sensuous cinematography' to create exoticism, as Rey Chow points out in her review, 'Ethnicity, Fantasy, and the Film *The Joy Luck Club*' (Chow 1996, 211). Also there are some misunderstandings of the movie, evidenced by its classification as 'Chick Lit' (Adams 2005, 35), and its use as a case study in a cross-cultural communications course which I experienced myself as a student and some of my colleagues in China are still doing. However, it could be credited as the first and most influential mainstream movie based on a Chinese American theme, and its success is meaningful in several ways for an Asian/Chinese American female community (Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* was released in the same year, but was generally considered a foreign language movie).

The significance of producing the movie *The Joy Luck Club* does not lie in box office success, but in building up a role model of an Asian American sisterhood alliance, in which all the main characters are played by Asian actors. The production shatters the

barriers previously experienced by Anna May Wong and other actors, when Asian actors were not given the opportunities of playing major characters or representing positive roles. The sisterly bonding among Asian American artists and performers displayed in the production of *The Joy Luck Club* extends literary sisterhood to a broader sphere, and reaches more mainstream audiences.

For example, the actor Kieu Chinh, who played the role of Suyuan Woo, is a refugee from Vietnam. Similar to the character Suyuan, who leaves her babies behind in China, Kieu Chinh was also separated from her father and brother in the war.

“That scene was like a flashback for me.” She said of the parting in “The Joy Luck Club.” “It was my own life, only now I was the parent and I could feel the pain my father felt.” (Mydans 1993)

Once a movie star in Vietnam, after she fled to the U.S. in 1975 before the fall of Saigon, Kieu Chinh could only play small roles. She hoped her role in *The Joy Luck Club* would be ‘the beginning of a revival of her acting career’ (Mydans 1993, 11). It is not hard to see that her role in this movie not only offers her an opportunity as an actor but more importantly functions as a witness of her past trauma, an aid for her mental and financial problems.

The character of the daughter Jing-mei Woo was played by an emigrant Chinese American actor Ming-Na Wen, who also felt an emotional connection to *The Joy Luck Club*: ‘For the first time, I felt I was reading something that was completely talking to me’ (Angeles 1993, H14). She said she wanted to play any part in the movie and her lead role in *The Joy Luck Club* offered her a green card into Hollywood (CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment) 2016). Embarking on her acting career from this movie, Ming-Na was later known for voice acting in the Disney movie *Mulan* and it seems that her role as Jing-mei in *The Joy Luck Club* was so impressive that her later role in the TV series *ER* (1994-2009) as a medical student is also named Jing-mei. Lauren Tom, who played the part of another daughter Lena St. Clair, appraised this movie many years later: ‘the cast and crew of *The Joy Luck Club* really paved the way for the generation right after us, Grace Park and all those people’, showing it has been much easier since for new Asian American actors to pursue their careers (Chinese American Museum 2013).

Amy Tan wrote in her book *The Opposite of Fate* that ‘Hollywood might look at *The Joy Luck Club* as a proving ground’ (Tan 2003b, 190) at a time when most Asian American movies were confined to a niche market and had difficulty in earning money. *The Joy Luck Club* gathered together for the first time many Asian American actors who had been obscure and marginalised in America, and its success opened the door for movies on Asian American female experiences to start showing on mainstream screens. For example, the movie *Saving Face* (2004) tells about a lesbian relationship and pregnancy out of wedlock in a Chinese American community. Another movie *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2011), which is loosely based on Lisa See’s novel of the same name and directed by Wayne Wang, narrates women’s relationships. Wang had expressed his reluctance to deal with Asian topics before his collaboration with Tan, but his attempt since then may prove that this field has been more welcome and lucrative with mainstream audiences after the success of *The Joy Luck Club*.

Not only did the Asian American artists star in *The Joy Luck Club*, but also the actual members of the Joy Luck Club and their friends acted as extras for this movie. Amy Tan revealed that some of the aunties and uncles she knew since childhood wanted to have a go in the movie:

Some of these women were cast as extras with more than a few blurred seconds of screen time next to a potted plant...My four-year-old niece, Melissa, received a speaking part as the daughter of Rose (Rosalind Chao). Auntie Jayne and Uncle Tuck were dinner guests at the dinner in which Waverly’s boyfriend pours soy sauce over Lindo’s favorite dish. Best of all, my mother and her boyfriend, a dapper eighty-six-year-old named T. C. Lee, had substantial parts as extras in the party scene shown at the beginning and the end of the movie. (Tan 2003b, 194-5)

These extras may not be noticed by audiences, but their presence means much to these actual members of the Joy Luck Club. Their reunion in the movie confirms the healing power of Chinese American women’s sisterhood and further strengthens their connection, which is extremely inspiring for minority women. Living away from their ancestral land, the actual members of the Joy Luck Club are like those ordinary Chinese immigrants who need to relive their past by making connections with their fellow women and make their tradition part of their everyday lives. Just like the author of *In Her Mother’s House* describing her grandmother’s routine in Chinatown:

It is no surprise that Popo [grandma] traveled to Chinatown weekly to renew her contacts with the fragments of her earlier world. In Chinatown, Popo and I would stop off for lunch to visit with her Chinese women friends who were living reminders of her women's culture and community in China – a network of women like Suyuan Woo's Joy Luck club, or Brave Orchid's colleagues at the midwife school, or Dulcie Fu's circle of cooking-consoling sewing women. (Ho 1999, 19)

Sisterhood plays an indispensable role in Chinese American women's lives, a kind of spiritual enjoyment and a ritual of sharing. It spreads from its origins in real life to literary creations and film making, and goes back to life again.

Watching the final scene of the movie *The Joy Luck Club*, when Jing-mei is meeting her two half-sisters in China, the three sisters call each other 'jiejie' (elder sister) and 'meimei' (younger sister) in Chinese, rather than 'mama' as in the book. This adaptation shifts the focus from the mother to the three sisters, implying sisterhood finally transcends the gap in space and time. No matter how long they have been separated and how different their lives, they are women of Chinese ancestry and they will be bonded together.

Conclusion

The African American critic bell hooks criticised the middle-class white feminists' attitude towards sisterhood, which is based on 'common oppression' and thus leads to divisions among women by 'sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices' (hooks 2015, 43-4). She encouraged a bond 'on the basis of shared strengths and resources', which is 'the essence of Sisterhood' (hooks 2015, 46).

In 'A Letter to Ma', a Chinese American feminist Merle Woo, who called herself a 'Yellow Feminist', expressed her anger towards white women in similar terms: 'Try to understand that our distrust is from experience, and that our distrust is powerless' (Woo 2002, 157, 160). This statement reveals that 'Yellow Feminists' have not yet been fully accepted by mainstream feminists and feel frustrated by rejection. When Kingston and Tan became popular among white readers, critics like Frank Chin accused them of being assimilated, and even female critics like Sau-ling Cynthia Wong regarded Tan's writing to be a form of 'sugar sisterhood' that catered to mainstream readers (see Wong 2009). These critics may have missed the point as Kingston's and Tan's works are not skin-deep but call for close reading and serious analysis, such as

the complicated textuality, structure and genre of the works. It is too harsh to accuse Kingston and Tan because their narratives tend to appeal to wider audiences and attract readers out of Asian American communities. Kingston and Tan reveal women's hardships and victimisation, but more importantly, they try to build up optimistic characters such as women warriors, tough mothers and supportive sisters, who share and inspire females, not only in Chinese American communities but also from other races and classes. Moreover, the interaction between their works and mainstream culture has endowed Chinese American women with more opportunities to articulate their opinions and to gain equal rights. It is a more positive sisterhood bond when it is shared with 'experience, culture, and ideas' (hooks 2015, 67), not only infused with bitterness and oppression. Therefore, Kingston's and Tan's yellow sisterhood does not simply reject mainstream feminism but makes use of and unites with it. This should not be read as a sell-out, but a strategic negotiation.

Sisterhood has no fixed definition and aspires to go beyond boundaries such as race and class. Perhaps there is no universal sisterhood that can unite all groups of women together, but as an author and activist, Kingston is trying to implement a broader bond of sisterhood with women of all colours. Kingston took part in the march on International Women's Day 2003 to protest against the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq (Democracy Now! 2003) and was arrested with her 'sister writers – Rachel Bagby, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, and Terry Tempest Williams' (Kingston 2003, 402). More recently in 2016, Kingston and Tan, as well as other writers, wrote an open letter against Donald Trump as a political candidate who 'appeals to the basest and most violent elements in society, who encourages aggression among his followers, shouts down opponents, intimidates dissenters, and denigrates women and minorities' (Altschul and Slouka 2016). Kingston and Tan have been quite active in their quest for world peace and human rights, not just restricted to the fields of women and minorities. Their works and deeds bear '[t]he spirit of Yin – a feeling of peace and love' (Kingston 2003, 402). This is a new mission for all the women warriors, an extensive responsibility of sisterhood, not only for yellow feminists but for women of all colours and their unbigoted male allies.

Chapter 6. Version 2.0: Two Updated Works

As the authors of the two most popular Chinese American works worldwide, Kingston and Tan have consolidated the matrilineal writing tradition which has had a huge influence on later writers. Wong and Ana point out the significance of *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* in the establishment of an Asian American matrilineal tradition,

It is not unusual to find readers who consider the two books practically synonymous with Asian American women's literature (or even Asian American literature), un beholden to any context. It is much more productive, not to mention intellectually defensible, however, to understand them within the framework of Asian American women's writing, and their focus on mother-daughter relationships as part of a feminist agenda to preserve memory and establish a matrilineal tradition. (Wong and Ana 1999, 195)

The works of Kingston and Tan are still being read and taught today, several decades after publication, and a host of authors have worked on similar themes and styles within new social contexts. In this chapter, I will examine two recent Chinese American literary works, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* (2009) by Marilyn Chin and *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2005) by Lisa See, and juxtapose them with *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*, to investigate how Kingston's and Tan's writing styles, particularly their adoption of Chinese cultural elements as a survival strategy, have opened up different directions and been imitated, reworked and updated by followers in the twenty-first century. This chapter also extends the discussion of literary sisterhood in Chapter 5.

Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen

Born in Hong Kong and growing up in Oregon, Marilyn Chin (b1955) is a Chinese American poet and writer. Her poetry has won numerous awards, including the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award 2015, a United Artists Foundation Fellowship, and the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship at Harvard University, to name just a few. So far she has only written one novel, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* (2009), which, like her poetry, deals with 'themes and travails of exile, loss and assimilation' (Marilyn Chin 2010).

Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen elaborates on the themes of assimilation, the generation gap, and women's trauma; its language is pungent, bold, humorous and colourful. The narrative centres on a pair of Chinese American twins, Moonie and Mei Ling, the food delivery girls of a Chinese restaurant that belongs to their family in Chinatown. The twin girls are looked after by their dominant grandma from Hong Kong, and they grow up as professional women under the twin influences of ancestral culture and American values. When I first read this book, I could not help laughing out loud at the twin girls' talking dirty and Chin's creative rewriting of Chinese tales. This is a quite similar response from my own as a Chinese reader to when I first encountered *The Woman Warrior*.

In an interview with Ken Weisner, Marilyn Chin paid homage to Maxine Hong Kingston by characterising *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* as 'a bad-girl, postmodern, absurdist update' of *The Woman Warrior* (Weisner 2012, 220). Kingston's response to Chin's work described it as 'Our story, lived and told from beginnings 10,000 years ago to present, postmodern times, lives again, told again. Marilyn Chin, Ms. Asian American Poet, is in new, top form' (quoted from Chin 2009b, back cover). Marilyn Chin's debut fiction clearly echoes *The Woman Warrior* and embodies updated information in the new context.

Before examining *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* as an updated version of *The Woman Warrior*, I will look at the similarities between the two books, and how Chin marks her inheritance of Kingston's legacy. In terms of genre, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* is written from a first-person female perspective (sometimes alternated with a third-person narrative), and is made up of 41 nonlinear tales that still work as an integrated whole, reminiscent of *The Woman Warrior*'s mix of forms. In Chin's work, the tales are in various genres, including rewritings of Aesop's fables and Don Quixote stories, as well as folktales of Chinese and Japanese origin (Chin 2009a). The interrelated stories are told from various perspectives, veering from the two girls' narration to monologues by other people, or even animals. The tales are assembled in non-linear order, changing from one time period to another. However, the stories do not turn out to be confusing, but are pieced together with a central theme – the girls' revenge – to break down stereotypes of Chinese American identity.

The first clue linking of Chin's work to Kingston's lies in the subtitle of *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* – 'A Manifesto in 41 Tales', in which the word 'manifesto' implies the process from silence to articulation through protesting for equal rights. It reveals the narrators' Americanised spirit of demanding their legal rights and changing their unprivileged status as minorities. This is also the narrator's major experiences in *The Woman Warrior*: while her ancestral culture 'defines silence as the virtue that best displays a woman's femininity', she is trying to articulate her place in white-dominant society through 'finding a voice' (Huntley 2001, 101, 104). There are similar themes typically favoured in Asian American matrilineal writings in the two works. The most obvious one is the reference to various female warrior types in Chin's book, including the swordswoman, singer and scholar. The main narrator, Moonie, is an Amazon type, regarding herself as a protector of her twin sister Mei Ling, who is always a target of males. Grandma Wong serves as a protector of the twin girls as well as of the people in the family restaurant and within the community; she will take out her cleaver whenever there is danger or enemies are nearby. Moonie and Mei Ling have to work in the family restaurant after school but still manage to enter Ivy League colleges and become successful women. Moonie, by telling her stories as a manifesto, becomes a 'famous singer', and Mei Ling becomes 'a poet/professor in southern California who is well-known for her research on immigrant erotica' (Chin 2009b, 16, 166). Both sisters, then, bear the traits of a poet, singer and warrior like the characters in *The Woman Warrior*. The second recurring theme in Chin's book is that of the migrant matriarch character, Grandma Wong, who is domineering but protective, a symbol of Chinese tradition. The matriarch also plays the role of telling stories to her offspring, like Brave Orchid in Kingston's book. These matriarchs play the significant role of preserving traditions in the domestic area when fathers are busy labouring.

Departures from *The Woman Warrior*

Thirty-three years after the release of *The Woman Warrior*, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* has witnessed the vitality and canonisation of the former; it is not a mere repetition of similar themes and style. The Chinese elements in the text have been extended following globalisation and the rise of China as an emerging power. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, in her essay 'Staying Alive: Kingston's *Woman Warrior* Afterlife and Marilyn Chin's *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*', examines the similarities between the two works and analyses the updated aspects of the latter. Wong points out several

connections between the two books: Chin's novel has doubled Kingston's protagonist into a pair of twins; Chin has avoided Kingston's mother-daughter formula and portrayed a Grandma Wong to replace the mother; Chin has supplemented a wild female sexuality which is absent in Kingston's narratives (Wong 2014). Wong's exploration of the two texts is undoubtedly inspiring for my research, but I will narrow my analysis to the Chinese cultural aspects in the two works and assess how Chin's text has echoed and updated Kingston's in the new historical context, drawing on the three connections between the two works noted in Wong's essay.

The first departure from *The Woman Warrior* in Chin's work is her adoption of the 'Double Happiness Twins' as protagonists. Wong, in her essay, explains that double happiness is a traditional Chinese symbol for luck and therefore Chin's relating the twin girls with double happiness is a challenge to the devaluation of women, and the contrasting personalities of the twins aiming to dismantle the stereotype that all Chinese Americans are the same (Wong 2014, 326). I would like to make an additional point here: that the term double happiness emphasises the harmonious qualities of a pair; the twins have distinctive characters, resembling the opposite pairs such as yin and yang in Chinese Taoist philosophy. In a Taoist yin-yang symbol, the opposites are complementary, interconnected, and interdependent. This is different from the Western binary pattern, in which the oppositions are strictly against each other. The front cover page of the book (Norton version) shows two Chinese dolls' faces, which reminds me of a chapter in *The Joy Luck Club* titled 'Double Face', in which Lindo says 'I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand' (Tan 1998, 255, 256). However, this 'Double Face' story is told by the mother generation, which does not apply to the twins in Chin's work, who are not as alienated as the former generation. The amusing double faces on the front cover page of Chin's work obviously stand for the twins, which suit the name 'Double Happiness' as well as Chin's humorous and ironic writing style quite well.



Figure 1: Kelly Blaire and Jon Shireman. Front Cover of *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*. 2009, Printed Image. Source: Figure reproduced from (Blaire and Shireman 2009).

In *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, Moonie is disciplined, while Mei Ling is wild. At the beginning of the book, Moonie describes herself as ‘a little fat Chinese girl’, ‘sad and lonely’ (Chin 2009b, 13), and she is humiliated by the Smith boys, which results in her acts of revenge towards blonde men ever afterwards. In contrast, her sister Mei Ling is a ‘Venus-man-trap’ and ‘love-goddess-slut-sister-super-vixen’ (Chin 2009b, 55), who hooks all types of males, in Moonie’s eyes. They succeed in becoming straight A students and professional women, but they are far from the model of the stereotypically well-behaved Chinese female. Mei Ling is a bad girl as she is flirtatious and seductive; Moonie turns out to be a lesbian and is always ready for a fight. The two girls’ differences are not oppositional but diverse aspects of their rebellious spirits and refusal of stereotypes of Chinese American women. Since they are portrayed as twins, their characteristics are born out of the same cultural and social background. The creation of the twins instead of a single protagonist can be regarded as a device to shatter the presumption that Chinese American women are all alike.

The second departure is that Chin introduces a more open-minded matriarch figure in Grandma Wong than the mother Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*. According to Chin, her emphasis in creating Grandma Wong was ‘to raise awareness about grandmothers’ (Weisner 2012, 219), not merely to ‘avoid the mother-daughter transmission pattern that has, over the decades, become an eye-roll-inducing cliché

about Asian American women' (Wong 2014, 327). Still, whether it is a mother or a grandmother, the matriarchal image serves the same function. In the chapter, 'Monologue: Grandmother Wong's New Year Blessings', Grandma Wong goes to visit her friends, who are all grandmothers of various races – black, Mexican, Jewish – looking after their grandchildren. The mothers are either dead or too busy making money like Moonie and Mei Ling's, unavailable for nurturing their children. The absence of these mothers may not really mean that they have retreated from the parenting role, but is likely to reflect the American society where women work outside the home. Since Chin's work is thirty years after Kingston's, a mother who is a generation younger than Brave Orchid might not be able to represent Chinese culture after China's modernisation and the world's globalisation. The replacement of the mother by the grandmother seems more an updated adaptation of the mother-daughter narratives, rather than deliberately avoiding it.

In Kingston's narrative, the mother Brave Orchid came to America from rural China with huge effort and great hardship, in order to join her husband. Her story is full of personal trauma, descending from a doctor to a laundry worker, surrounded by all kinds of 'ghosts'. With the exception of Chinese immigrants, all foreigners are ghosts in Brave Orchid's eyes. She is confined within Chinatown, refusing to know other cultures. What makes Grandma Wong different from Brave Orchid is her attitude towards other minorities as she embraces multiculturalism. Her friends include black, Mexican and Jewish grandmas, all of whom have their own traumatic experiences. She hires and protects refugee workers and poor children in her restaurant. She listens to her minority granny generation's stories, offers them comfort and promises to protect them and take over their grandchildren if they die. She also makes contributions to her community by 'ke[eping] her prices down and hir[ing] a few neighborhood teenagers to work in the kitchen and deliver take out' (Chin 2009b, 150). One of the teenagers, Jeremy, a white child from the neighbourhood, thinks 'she has always treated me like her own flesh' (Chin 2009b, 151), and another refugee worker from Cambodia, Ming, is adopted by Grandma Wong and sent to work on a degree in agricultural science. The tolerance and embrace of diverse cultures by Grandma Wong reflects the solidarity between women of colour in racist America and is in marked contrast to the ethnocentric attitude adopted by Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*. Where the

latter seems to unquestioningly adopt the racist attitudes of U.S. society, Grandma Wong displays a critical understanding of white racial and economic dominance.

The third departure of Chin's from Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is the introduction of a wild female sexuality, which in fact exists in Chinese literary tradition. Kingston portrayed a rebellious heroine Fa Mu Lan in the second chapter of *The Woman Warrior* with an ambiguous title 'White Tigers', which has some sexual connotation (see my analysis in Chapter 3). But Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is generally a warrior, who wields her willpower and martial arts to avenge her fellow villagers and to challenge the submissive stereotype of Chinese women. Chin's portrait of the 'vixen' further explores the possibility of Chinese American females changing their stereotyped image by using their sexuality, something Kingston's text hinted at but did not develop. To elaborate this point, I will make a brief introduction to the history of vixen images in Chinese folklore and literary tradition and analyse how Chin uses the vixen to challenge the frozen attitudes towards Chinese American women.

Vixen, a word that appears in the title *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, is related to an age-old tradition in Chinese literature – *Huli jing* – literally meaning fox spirits. In literary works, fox spirits generally refer to fox fairies that seduce human beings and later in popular culture, becomes a phrase to describe pretty and seductive women. In English too this term has a sexualised implication – a woman who is bold, mischievous or wild. In Chinese history, fox spirits have been portrayed in various myths and literary works. The earliest fox fairy in a Chinese folk story is the wife of Yu the Great (c. 2200 – 2101 BCE, a legendary ruler in ancient China), who is said to be a nine-tail fox (Yang and An 2005, 239). This fox fairy has not been associated with sexuality, but is highly honoured as a sacred goddess. The fox, or the vixen, is related to women because the Chinese character of the fox '狐' is made up with two parts '犭' and '瓜'; the left part indicates something related to animals, and the right part meaning melon, which symbolises womb and procreation (Li Xiaoxi 2012, 79; Liao 2015). Therefore, the image of the fox is mostly associated with females and does not contain negative connotations in the early examples.

Later, in the long feudalist period of China, fox spirits in some literary works appear to be dangerous, although most are portrayed as lovely and adorable, and the phrase fox spirit, or *Huli jing*, was gradually degraded to 'a seductive, loose, and cunning

woman' (Huntington 2000, 78). The best known bad fox spirit in Chinese folklore is Daji, who was a favourite consort of King Zhou in the Shang dynasty of ancient China. She is said to be cruel and the major cause of the destruction of the Shang dynasty. The idea that Daji is a beautiful woman whose body is possessed by a vixen can date back to the Tang dynasty and becomes the material for several fiction works during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the most famous one being *Investiture of the God* (*Fengshen Yanyi*) in the sixteenth century (Huntington 2003, 195). Daji might be the most unfavourably depicted vixen in history, but in fact she is only a scapegoat of King Zhou's tyranny since patriarchal historians tended to attribute the bad deeds to women and eunuchs.

One of the representative works that highly praises vixens is Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* in the eighteenth century. The whole book is made up of approximately 491 short stories (in some versions 494), 86 of them fox tales and more than thirty stories of romance between vixens and humans. The vixens in Pu's sketches usually have a beautiful appearance, a kind heart and supernatural power. One of the pieces, 'Miss Ying-ning, Or the Laughing Girl', portrays a fox girl, Miss Ying-ning, who is true to her husband, Mr. Wang, loyal to her ghost mother, and harsh to the neighbour who wants to seduce her. Miss Ying-ning is such a happy and outgoing girl that she is always 'in an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which she subdued only with great difficulty' (Pu Songling 1880, 118). But she 'wept bitterly' (Pu Songling 1880, 122) when she and her husband carry her foster-mother's remains to the grave. This fox girl does not follow the rules set for traditional Chinese females but has real human nature. She is wild and passionate, too innocent to know any principles that she should follow, and always ready to face the world with her optimistic laughter.

It seems to be a paradox that fox spirits in popular culture stand for bad women while they appear mostly admirable in literary works. But the situation in patriarchal society is that women were required to be submissive, to follow rules and doctrines, their personalities repressed and deprived of freedom. Good women under such circumstances are supposed to be faithful to their husbands but very conservative and may seem boring to the male, while the prostitutes can be alluring but apparently too loose. Fox spirits, to some extent, are a combination of respectable ladies and prostitutes: on the one hand, they are beautiful, wild, and passionate; on the other, they

are always willing to sacrifice themselves for the male and are able to live independently thanks to their magic power. They are the ideal women that males fantasise about but fail to find in reality. As a result, male writers resort to inventing fox fairies to express their longing for perfect women while common people look down upon fox girls, or pretend to do so, in order to stay with the mainstream judgement.

Maxine Hong Kingston, in *The Woman Warrior*, has not used the image of fox spirits, but mentions this term in Brave Orchid's monologue when she spends the night alone in the deserted room:

That must be just what you are – a Fox Spirit. You are so hairy, you must be a fox that doesn't even know how to transform itself. You're not clever for a Fox Spirit, I must say. No tricks. No blood. Where are your hanged man's rotting noose and icy breath? No throwing shoes into the rafters? No metamorphosis into a beautiful sad lady? No disguises in my dead relatives' shapes? No drowned woman with seaweed hair? No riddles or penalty games? You are a puny little boulder indeed. Yes, when I get my oil, I will fry you for breakfast. (Kingston 1989b, 71)

In *China Men*, Kingston also composes a story 'Ghostmate', in the style of Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. The young scholar in this story is amazed at the grand house that the beautiful woman owns and thinks that 'The red paper surely means a good house; a spirit woman or a fox would not have it, would she?' (Kingston 1989a, 75). Although Kingston has not stated whether this charming lady is a ghost or a fox, the lady functions as a consolation to the frustrated scholar.

Marilyn Chin has developed the tradition of fox spirit tales in English writing by presenting a spoof of the fox tale in the fifth part of her book 'Fox Girl [Beasts of Burden (Seven Fables)]'. Chin begins the story like this,

There was a so-and-so Mr. Famous Poet, who had a bad reputation around the country for sexually harassing graduate students. (Chin 2009b, 132)

So one day this poet is on a reading tour and a female Chinese graduate student 'born in Hong Kong and raised in San Francisco' (Chin 2009b, 133) has to accompany him during the tour. The moment they meet, the poet asks her for sex and she accepts to exchange her body for a tenured teaching position in California. The next scene is hilarious, as the girl turns into a red fox that makes the poet very excited. Then her revenge is performed by transforming again into a gigantic skunk and 'spray[ing] a

foul yellow varnish all over him' (Chin 2009b, 134). This fox girl quite resembles the fox spirits in Chinese literary works who are charming and cunning. She does not become a victim of Mr. Famous Poet's sex abuse, on the contrary, she seduces and defeats the poet, just like Miss Ying-ning in Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, who plays a fatal trick on the neighbour who wants to have an affair with her, by turning a piece of wood into her shape and stinging him with a scorpion (Pu Songling 1880, 121). Facing the male's evil intentions, fox girls show no fear and pretend to be ignorant but outplay the male with their intelligence.

Despite the fact that Chin does not tell us the fox girl's name, it is not hard to relate this amusing anecdote to one of the twin girls, Mei Ling. In the second part of the book, Chin describes how Mei Ling flirts with males of all colours on the way to deliver food, the hippie-dude Jesus with long blond hair, 'a huge, beautiful, seven-foot-tall Samoan Hawaiian jock', and the immigrant art student, Donny Romero (Chin 2009b, 57). Mei Ling has also attracted every male staff member in her grandma's restaurant and the boys in the neighbourhood. Her wild behaviour goes against the moral standard for a good Chinese girl in Moonie's eyes:

Mei Ling is obviously satisfying an itch, which is unheard of in immigrant behavioral history. One must not satisfy one's itch. One must sit up straight, cross one's legs, keep one's focus on one's homework and forge onward toward one's future. [...]

Exercising self-control does not mean merely exercising your vulva-sphincter muscles. Or orchestrating orgasms. Self-control means self-abnegation, means shelving the hormones and the libido, postponement of sex, courting rituals and even bowling until after law school or medical school. In short, one must not disappoint the elders. One must sew up one's gonopore pussy for the common good. (Chin 2009b, 87-8)

The twin girls are educated to suppress their sexuality so as to remain decent and live up to the expectations of their parents and the Chinese American community. This self-control is against human nature and is a residue from the patriarchal tradition in which females are supposed to preserve chastity while physical pleasure is only a privilege for males. Mei Ling's rebellious deeds are a protest against the unequal double standards of sexuality and a radical feminist triumph over patriarchal conventions.

Moonie seems to be more disciplined as a teenager and always tries to keep her sister from males, probably due to her sexual orientation, 'I don't like men. I am a latent homo, [...] I don't really like women either' (Chin 2009b, 61), but from her daydreaming soliloquy, she sounds like a feminist as well:

I'll retire with the fat pension and two hot Amazon bodyguards, one who looks like Shakira and shakes her pretty booty; and the other, perfect and refined, might pass for Halle Berry, and I will dress her up and show her at the opera and when I'm sixty-five I'll retire to Crete, become a Chinese American Georgia O'keeffe and paint giant vaginas for the rest of my life. (Chin 2009b, 61)

Shakira and Halle Berry are coloured and sexy icons, and more importantly, they are Amazon-like warriors, physically powerful women. Moonie's preference for coloured women over blonde may imply her anti-assimilationist identification with third-world feminists. Her mention of Georgia O'keeffe shows her hope that Chinese women can also challenge sexual clichés and conservative male judgement.

Moonie's coming out of the closet asserts her radical sexuality against traditional Chinese value and challenges Western binary thinking, a further progress from Kingston's androgynous woman warrior. Kingston expresses the narrator's rebellious spirit by saying 'Isn't a bad girl almost a boy' (Kingston 1989b, 47), which suggests that she is reluctant to be a girl and her gender identity may lie within a more complicated grey zone, much closer to the neutral gender rather than the absolute female/male type. Kingston's narrator has rejected traditional models of femininity by putting on man's clothing but may not clearly know how to define her gender as neutral, not female or male, which reflects the fact that the concept of androgyny was much explored by feminist theorists in the 1970s, while Chin's portrait of Moonie represents a generation more able to recognise their sexuality through various sources and enjoy more freedom to claim it than the previous generations.

Similar to vixen spirits that can perform supernatural deeds, Mei Ling and Moonie are also martial girls, exercising 'the dance of the mooncake vixen' with Grandma Wong since childhood (Chin 2009b, 71). The kung fu girl image echoes Kingston's Fa Mu Lan, but is apparently a naughtier and Dionysian version thanks to the unusual traits analysed above. Chin's vixen girls have inherited their basic features from the fox spirits of Chinese tales but also updated this unconventional female image in a Western

postmodern context. Traditional fox ladies are created out of male fantasy, while Moonie and Mei Ling seek pleasure and self-realisation. Their girl power challenges patriarchal norms and targets racial discrimination towards minority women. Compared with the tiger women by Kingston and Tan, who are daring and determined, Chin's vixen girls are more praised for their intelligence and sexuality. When the vixen girls are facing adversities, they tend to make use of their wisdom. From *White Tigers* to *Mooncake Vixens*, the twin girls in Chin's portrait extend the untold sexuality in *The Woman Warrior*.

After the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, a whole new genre named 'creative nonfiction' (Cheung and Kingston 2016) has proliferated; *The Revenge of Mooncake Vixen* can be grouped among these. Three major aspects of Chin's text, such as the Taoist concept used in creating double protagonists, the more open-minded matriarch figure who functions to maintain Chinese values, and the vixen literary tradition referenced to express female sexuality suggest a new look in the twenty-first century, four decades after Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* was canonised. The increased population of Chinese Americans and their rising social status calls for new works to aid in combating racial discrimination and entrenching their role in American society. Just like Kingston who recreates ancient Chinese tales in her American way, Marilyn Chin has inherited Kingston's experimental writing style and expressed the zeitgeist in her work: 'The recycling of tales, the reinvention of literature, is continuous and a necessary practice for keeping the art alive and for reinvigorating literature for succeeding generations' (Chin 2009a). What is more, Chin, in an interview with Parmar, explains her attempt at introducing a 'Chinese American surrealism' based on Chinese myths, folklores and philosophy theories, which is different from magical realism, a term from Latin American aesthetics, and surrealism, whose origin comes from Europe (Parmar 2014, 258). Chin further develops the connotations of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan portrayed by Kingston, adding updated Asian American popular culture to this age old heroine and granting her a more liberated spirit.

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan (2005) is a bestseller by Chinese American writer Lisa See. It tells of an unusual friendship called *laotong* between two women, Lily and Snow Flower, in the Qing dynasty of China. The story is narrated from the viewpoint

of Lily, a peasant's daughter, and tells how she becomes a matriarchal figure thanks to her tiny feet, and her relationship with her matched *laotong* friend, Snow Flower. As a friend and avowed follower of Amy Tan, Lisa See's works are also infused with various Chinese symbols. In *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, the recurring Chinese elements mainly include footbinding, *nu shu*, and *laotong*, terms exotic even to Chinese ears. In the following section, I will provide a brief introduction to these three terms in Chinese history, analyse how See represents these cultural elements in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, and discuss how See has inherited Kingston and Tan's legacies of using Chinese culture.

Footbinding, *Nu Shu*, and *Laotong*

Footbinding is a notorious practice in premodern China. Women usually began to have their feet bound at a very young age when the bones are still tender enough to break. The most admired feet were called 'three-inch golden lotuses' to describe the length and shape of the feet, and lotus feet became 'the synonym for femininity, beauty, hierarchy, and eroticism' (Wang 2000, xi). In order to have tiny feet, girls had to endure unbearable pain, pus, and a stinky odour. This practice seems morbid and perverted nowadays as the lotus feet look so ugly, having nothing to do with beauty, but back then in patriarchal China, the purpose of footbinding was to 'keep women in their place – the inner chamber – physically, mentally, and symbolically' (Wang 2000, 48). Footbinding was particularly fashionable among upper-middle class women for marriage purposes, whereas it was less strictly practised among the lower class. However, women from the lower classes 'could have hopes of moving upward socially and economically by entering a more affluent or more educated family, often as a concubine or maid' if they had their feet bound (Wang 2000, 59). Footbinding, a ritual of violence and now a shame of China, traumatised numerous women in the name of beauty, confining women in domestic areas and transforming women into 'a combination of human, beast, vegetable, and object' (Wang 2000, 4).

The most mysterious element in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* is *nu shu* (aka. *nüshu*), a written script used by women in Jiangyong County, in Hunan province of southern China (a place that is obscure even to most Chinese but is not far away from Mao Zedong's hometown). According to the summary in Zhao's essay, 'Nüshu: Chinese Women's Characters', this writing system is different from standard Chinese

written form on various levels. First, although *nu shu* writing resembles Chinese characters more than it does Roman alphabetic letters, it is a phonetic rather than ideographic script. This feature makes the meaning of the language more ambivalent than the ideographic system, since the same syllable may refer to different characters. Second, though the shapes of *nu shu* characters are derived from the standard Chinese writing system, they are usually not recognised as written words and can pass for some patterns in embroidery, weaving or on fans, thus being used by women as a secret medium to record their lives and emotions. Third, *nu shu* is the only writing system exclusive to female users (Zhao 1998).



Figure 2: Hunan Provincial Museum, Folding Fan with Inscription 'Jie Xia Hao Qing Yi' (Forging Sincere Friendship) in Nüshu Script of Jiangyong County. 2010, Digital Image. Available from: Hunan Provincial Museum (Human province Museum 2010)

Laotong is another term that is unique in southern China, and can be literally translated as 'same old', 'something like sworn sisterhood' (Wang 2000, 166). This kind of relationship was established between two girls, who usually were of the same age and similar personalities to form a fictive kinship. Women in premodern China were usually confined to domestic arenas after marriage and could only communicate with female relatives in their husbands' houses. Once married, they even had to cut off contact with their natal families, but *laotongs* and sworn sisters could be lifelong contacts. Wang summarises how Chinese girls formed a *laotong* relationship:

The procedure of forming such a relationship resembles that of marriage. First, the girl makes a list of items to check about the girl she wants to befriend – her family background, personality, age, skills, and most interestingly, her foot size. If all match her own, she will then write a letter in the secret code asking for her hand. (Wang 2000, 166-8)

It is interesting that foot size became a requirement in a female bond, and footbinding and *laotong* relationships were interrelated in such an unexpected fashion. Meanwhile, the letters between *laotongs* or sworn sisters were coded in *nu shu*, women's secret writing. '[B]y exchanging letters and singing out their stories with their lifelong female friends', *nu shu* writing 'serves not only as an important outlet for their emotion and consolation for their pain, but also as an indispensable tool to form a female literary community and support network' for *laotongs* and sworn sisters in China (Wang 2000, 164). The correspondence among sworn sisters or *laotongs* also has 'hints of homoerotic sexuality' (Wang 2000, 169).

Chinese Cultural Elements in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*

In *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, these three intertwined elements of footbinding, *nu shu* and *laotong* function as key points in the development of the story and the depiction of the main characters.

The popularity of footbinding was a miserable fact for women because only with bound feet could they marry into decent families and they had to endure such inhumane pain and sometimes even lost their lives to achieve this ugly beauty. Some girls from poor peasant households did not have bound feet because they had to do hard labour at home and became unmarriageable with big feet. Therefore, bound feet made women competitive in the marriage market, just as money and looks count nowadays. The narrator Lily in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* has witnessed how bound feet traumatised her mother:

Instead of golden lilies, Mama had ugly stumps. Instead of swaying when she walked, she balanced herself on a cane. If she put the cane aside, her four limbs went akimbo as she tried to maintain her balance. Mama was too unsteady on her feet for anyone ever to hug or kiss her. (See 2009, 14)

The morbid process of footbinding maims women's bodies and lives, confines their freedom, an ugly practice for the sake of patriarchal authority.

Under Lisa See's pen, footbinding is described as a serious ritual practice for young girls. When Lily turns six, a diviner is invited to find an auspicious date to begin binding. This diviner considers Lily to be an unusual child and suggests that her parents confer with a matchmaker, Madame Wang. It costs extra money for this peasant family to send for a matchmaker, but footbinding is so important for a girl's destiny that her parents have to invest. Madame Wang considers that it is highly likely that Lily's feet will turn into golden lilies, but she advises waiting for another year for the binding. What surprises Lily's parents is that Madame Wang promises to arrange a marriage between Lily and an upper class man as well as a *laotong* relationship with a scholar family girl, Snow Flower. In fact, this is plotted by Madame Wang, who is revealed as Snow Flower's auntie later in the novel, because she wants to rescue her niece from degradation to lower class status by arranging a *laotong* relationship. Lily is unaware of this, but she does achieve social advancement thanks to the binding of her feet and Madame Wang's arrangements.

When the footbinding ceremony really starts, Lily's mother and auntie prepare glutinous rice balls (for nutrition), miniature shoes and a set of tools including 'alum, astringent, scissors, special nail clippers, needles, and thread' (See 2009, 26). There are several steps to the binding. First, mama washes Lily's feet and rubs them with alum to limit 'blood and pus', then she pulls the bandage over her four smallest toes and rolls them underneath the foot and wraps the bandage several times until toes and heels are held together, finally, she sews the end of the bandage to avoid the binding from loosening (See 2009, 26). In the name of achieving beauty, this process is cruel and grotesque, causing women unbearable pain and misery. The binding lasts for several months until the tiny feet are formed. Lily and her cousin finally survive this, but her third sister dies from major infection.

Because of their tiny feet, Lily and Snow Flower are matched as a pair of *laotongs* by Madame Wang. However, according to Lily's understanding as a little girl, her family background is far lower than Snow Flower's, a modest peasant household versus a prestigious scholar family. In fact, her mother clearly knows that Snow Flower's family is going downward, no longer well-off, but still agrees to the match because Madame Wang promises that this *laotong* relationship would benefit Lily in finding a decent husband. Madame Wang's real purpose is to benefit her niece, Snow Flower, as a *laotong* from Lily, who is highly likely to marry into a rich family because of her

perfect feet. Therefore, their *laotong* relationship is not arranged to make them become soul mates, but is out of social and financial considerations. However, Lily and Snow Flower do build a close sisterhood and enjoy their interactions regardless of the fact that their parents and Madame Wang each aim to secure their own girl's future.

Lily and Snow Flower do not meet very frequently, so they usually communicate with each other through letters written in *nu shu*. *Nu shu*, in Lily's eyes, is her only form of rebellion, and the first time she breaks with tradition is when Snow Flower sends her the fan written with *nu shu*. *Nu shu* characters are the 'seeds' of Lily's love towards Snow Flower, presented in the form of 'a letter, a piece of weaving, or an embroidered handkerchief' (See 2009, 60). *Nu shu* provides the two girls with a harbour to exchange their ideas for the first time because this written system is exclusive to women, a place where patriarchal power fails to penetrate. In their correspondence, they mention several times that they are 'a pair of mandarin ducks' (See 2009, 45, 60, 112, 158). This expression shows that *laotong* relationship is very unique and intense, and even suggests homoeroticism because mandarin ducks always appear in pairs and are a symbol of love and devotion in Chinese culture and widely used between lovers. The erotic element is also in evidence in a scene when the two girls write *nu shu* on each other's naked bodies:

My feet – those places of so much pain and sorrow, so much pride and beauty – tingled with pleasure. We had been old sames for eight years, yet we had never been this close.
[...]

[...] I held her golden lilies in my hands, then set them to rest on my thighs. I chose the spot that had been most exquisite for me: the shallow between the ankle bone and the tendon that rose up the back of the leg. I wrote the character, which can mean *bending over, kowtowing, or prostrating oneself*. On her other ankle I traced the word *I*.

[...] My last two characters were high up on her thighs. I leaned down to concentrate on writing the most perfect characters possible. I blew on my strokes, knowing the sensation it would cause, and watched as the hair between her legs swayed in response.
(See 2009, 87)

This unusual description of a semi-sexual encounter between Lily and Snow Flower may be See's deliberate design to blur the relationship between *laotongs* and lesbian love. More importantly, footbinding, *nu shu* and *laotong* are intertwined in this scene

when Snow Flower writes the characters on Lily's feet. Their devotion to each other is expressed by the strokes of the characters and by stroking each other's bodies. This scene also implies the reason why Lily becomes so jealous when Snow Flower contacts other women.

Nu shu letters document the love between Lily and Snow Flower as a pair of *laotongs*, but are also the cause of misunderstandings and tragedy between them. When they grow up, Lily marries into a leading family in the county and later becomes the matriarch Lady Lu, while Snow Flower becomes a butcher's wife. Lily tries to interfere in Snow Flower's life and gives her lectures on how to be a better wife and how to please her husband in *nu shu* letters when she learns that Snow Flower is abused by her husband and mother-in-law. However, Snow Flower does not want to worry Lily and refuses to accept Lily's help, and therefore she sends Lily a fan with the following words: 'I cannot be what you wish. You won't have to listen to my complaints anymore. Three sworn sisters have promised to love me as I am. Write to me, not to console me as you have been doing, but to remember our happy girl-days together' (See 2009, 220). This hurts Lily because *laotong* is supposed to be a lifelong relationship, while sworn sisterhood is more casual. Failing to understand Snow Flower's real intention, Lily is infused with jealousy and hatred and betrays their *laotong* relationship.

Nu shu and *laotong* are supposed to shelter women from patriarchal control and articulate their own emotions and rights. In Lily and Snow Flower's case, however, the failure of their relationship is still caused by the pervasive patriarchal influence. As a young girl, Snow Flower yearns for freedom and individuality, reflected in her fondness for looking out of a window and watching birds fly (See 2009, 56). In contrast, Lily is frightened by Snow Flower's thoughts of freedom, and during her whole life she strictly follows the rules to be a model wife in a patriarchal society. Lily wants to regulate Snow Flower with her own criteria since she views her life as a successful one, from a peasant daughter to the respectful Lady Lu. It is not difficult to see that Lily has been enslaved and intoxicated by patriarchal thinking, her words and deeds choking Snow Flower. In this situation, their relationship no longer remains an equal one, with Lily playing a dominant role and imagining Snow Flower to be her puppet. Lily further performs her power over Snow Flower by exposing her secrets to the public, thus isolating the latter from the community and leading to her being

impoverished and physically abused. Under the influence of patriarchal institutions and out of jealousy, Lily's treachery violates the spirit of the women's bond.

It is said that the first Chinese woman recorded to arrive in the United States, Afong Moy, displayed her bound feet in a room for 50 cents per head to satisfy Western curiosity (Lee 2015, 32). This exhibition interpreted Moy as a doll full of exotic colour, further reinforcing the stereotype of Chinese culture as being inferior and backward. However, footbinding for Chinese women is linked to 'female bodily writing' (Wang 2000, 145), and is expressed in the form of *nu shu* in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*. For some Chinese women, 'feet and shoes played an important role in their self-definition and their female liaisons' (Wang 2000, 146). This is not to say that footbinding offered them opportunities to communicate with each other but to emphasise that it existed in their daily lives and it was necessary that they shared their suffering in a group. What Lisa See presents to her readers on footbinding is a torturous scene of women being yoked and enslaved in patriarchal society rather than an exotic graffiti. Through *nu shu* writing, Lily, Snow Flower, as well as other women can find a means to release 'female desire, complaints, anger, frustrated dreams, plans to escape' (Clark 2013). Footbinding, *nu shu* and *laotong* are intertwined in See's novel when women are persecuted by the violence of footbinding, which absurdly unites them into sisterly bonding and writing with women's secret codes.

Chinese American Matrilineal Writing Tradition

Given that Lisa See elaborates on Chinese topics and female experience, it is revealing to relate her writing with that of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. Walter Lim has explored how Kingston, Tan, and See (in *Shanghai Girls* (2009)) use historical events in nineteenth and twentieth century China to 'narrativize the Chinese American immigrant experience' and 'create images of a bygone era associated with poverty, political turmoil, and social upheaval' (Lim 2013, 7, 16). *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, although it narrates a period earlier than that of *Shanghai Girls* and is not relevant to immigration, can still be viewed as a reconstruction of the relationship between China and the Chinese American community, and an exploration of Chinese American women finding connection with their female ancestors.

Snow Flower is set against the historical background of Taiping Rebellion during the reign of the Qing dynasty in the middle of the nineteenth century, almost a hundred

years before the mothers in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* flee to America. It represents a period when the female ancestors are confined to patriarchal institutions, in which maternal love is expressed in an unusual way. As I have argued in chapter 4, first-generation Chinese American mothers tend to be strict with their daughters as they themselves are treated as outsiders in mainstream society and hope their daughters will realise the American dream with academic success and financial independence. In *Snow Flower*, the female ancestors of the Chinese American mothers express their love for their daughters through footbinding – the tinier the feet, the stronger the love. Lily’s mother has to break the bones of her daughters’ feet, otherwise she will become unmarriageable, which means they cannot survive in old China. When Lily’s younger sister dies from footbinding, her mother feels so heartbroken that she cries out that ‘I would rather keep her on this earth unmarried than lose her forever’ (See 2009, 32) – a feeling that is improper according to patriarchal thinking. Mother love, according to Lily’s understanding in later years, is conveyed in two Chinese characters *teng ai*, the first meaning pain and the second love (See 2009, 4). Mother teaches daughter how to endure the pains and practices of footbinding, as a way of ensuring survival and showing affection in harshness. This is not hard to understand when women are dependent on men and unable to make their own living. In fact, mother love forms a strong bond between mothers and daughters ‘through the empathy between the two bodies’ during the footbinding process (Wang 2000, 23). Compared with the Joy Luck mothers and Brave Orchid, who pass on traditions with storytelling, Lily’s mother teaches her daughter how to survive in patriarchal society with the violent practice of footbinding, which mother and daughter experience in common, a tale silently told by their deformed feet. The historical background allows Chinese American daughters to trace the trauma that their female ancestors suffer, and pay homage to them as they protest against patriarchy by using their own secret language *nu shu*.

The turmoil of wartime is also described in detail through the eyes of Lily. As a woman confined to the domestic arena, Lily regards the Taiping Rebellion as coming from ‘the outer realm’ (See 2009, 189). The war approaches her when she is visiting Snow Flower, and both have to abandon the house and escape to the mountains. In the wilderness, they have to endure freezing weather, lack of food, and the pain from their bound feet. Women’s feet were considered as extremely private parts of their bodies

at that time, but Lily has no privacy when she has to ‘unwrap, clean, and rewrap [her] feet in front of the men’ (See 2009, 197). While the war in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Woman Warrior* may be a reason for mothers to go to America to seek asylum, the Taiping Rebellion in *Snow Flower* reveals the corruption and cruelty of the late Qing dynasty where people enjoy no security and women are maltreated. For the Joy Luck mothers and Brave Orchid, the memories before wartime (or including wartime) invoke nostalgia for their ancestral roots, whereas the memory of Lily in the Qing dynasty is a further exploration of how women in patriarchal society suffer as a group who have been generally silenced in history. Therefore, the latter presents a broader view of Chinese women’s suffering than the particular family experiences of the former.

Snow Flower is a Chinese story written by a Chinese American and is full of various Chinese elements; as a result, it does risk perpetuating Western stereotypes especially when the traditions and rituals depicted appear to be exotic and the wartime scene exposes the darkness and backwardness of feudal China. Kingston and Tan have already been criticised for being self-orientalising and fake agents of Chinese culture (e.g. Chin 2005a; Ma 2000; Wong 2009), Lisa See’s work seems to be more prone to this criticism than that of her forerunners at a time when footbinding remains a national taboo and shame in China. Just like Kingston’s and Tan’s representations of Chinese elements in their works, which cannot be, and are not presented as necessarily authentic, See’s Chinese scenes are also reconstructions of imaginary ancient China for aesthetic and literary ends from the perspective of one who identifies as a Chinese American. The descriptions of women’s trauma in patriarchal old China by Kingston and Tan, together with the ideas of the second and third wave feminist movements in the West, may have influenced See’s understanding of premodern China and the Chinese American community. The ancient Chinese story, which happens in the period when there was strict boundaries between genders and classes in China, can be viewed as a metaphor of the contemporary concerns in America where women of Asian ancestry have little access to articulation, and the author’s aspiration to a secret language for women, which literally existed in old China but has now disappeared. Although footbinding is a violent practice, it is naturally linked with *nu shu* and *laotong* in See’s work. When these three phrases work together, they ‘enhanced the harmonious unity between the body and mind’ (Wang 2000, 173) instead of destroying

these women, because *nu shu* and *laotong* provide Lily and Snow Flower a space of their own as well as a sisterly bonding that is still not so easily obtained for modern women. *Nu shu* and *laotong* can be compared to the matrilineal writing tradition and literary sisterhood since Kingston and Tan, which is shared amongst Asian American female communities for support and articulation, minimising the interference from white or male authorities. The matrilineal writing tradition and literary sisterhood offers the possibility of re-establishing women's secret language by encoding their frustrations and dreams into writing that is unconventional, either in content or forms. By borrowing Chinese cultural elements such as beliefs, tales and rituals, See's writing also bears the features of a 'Chinese American surrealism', to borrow Marilyn Chin's words that describe her own writing. From Kingston's and Tan's conflicts between Chinese traditions and Chinese American experiences to See's story of ancient China, Chinese American female writers have finally gone back to their mothers' land, and realised their mothers' 'Long-Cherished Wish' (Tan 1998, 280). From wartime China to U.S. Chinatowns and to ancient China again, the journey forms a circle – a circle of life, and a circle of fulfilment.

Snow Flower and Popular Culture

In *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, there is a dish that is meaningful to Lily and Snow Flower's friendship, caramelised taro. The taro dish shares equal importance to the *laotong* contract and the secret *nu shu* fans, an indispensable part of the *laotong* ritual. Sugared taro is an extravagance for girls at that time. 'Have you had sugar, Lily? It is the best thing in the world' (See 2009, 49): this naïve statement by Snow Flower shows the rare enjoyment that the girls can experience outside their households. No wonder it aroused readers' great interest to such a point that Lisa See had to include a taro recipe on her official website. The recipe See offers is quite Western in style:

Ingredients:

Taro 750 g (or 3 1/4 cup)

White sugar 400 g (or 1 3/4 cup)

Water (little)

Directions:

Peel the taro. Trim the ends and sides of the taro to make a rectangular block. Then slice each block into one inch cubes. Deep fry with pre-heated oil until golden in color; make sure the taro cubes are cooked through. (It should be rather like a French fry in texture – a little crispy on the outside and soft on the inside.) Remove the taro and the oil from the wok. Add white sugar and a little water to the wok. Cook the syrup slowly until the surface of the liquid bubbles. I like it when it starts to caramelize and gets that nice amber color. (Be careful not to let the sugar burn.) Add the fried taro.

Now comes the tricky part.

Here's how the website recommended the next step: "Remove the wok from the fire immediately. Switch on a fan in full gear and stir the taro in the liquid in the wind. Point the air at the taro so the syrup can solidify during the stir-frying." (See)

Apparently, See found this recipe for Western and Asian American readers so that they could experience the dish that Snow Flower and Lily taste in the novel. While taro is not a conventional produce in the West and the technique of solidifying the syrup is unusual for Western cooks, the dish seems exotic and challenging to Western readers. However, in the Western world nowadays, where cooking shows are popular and food (especially dessert) consumption is huge, it is not so surprising that readers would be enthusiastic to try this new recipe. In this sense, Lisa See's work seems to cross the boundaries of traditional writing and function as a text of everyday life. Taro is not consumed in Western cooking as a usual practise, the recipe not only promotes Asian style culinary culture but also brings more potential for the popularisation of the literary work itself.

Like *The Joy Luck Club*, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* also aroused interest in the entertainment industry. In 2011, a movie based on *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* was directed by Wayne Wang, also the director of *The Joy Luck Club*, starring Li Bingbing (mainland China), Jun Ji-hyun (Korea), Russell Wong (USA), Vivian Wu (USA), and Hugh Jackman (Australia). What makes this movie striking is also the role of the two producers, Wendi Deng Murdoch (styled a 'tiger wife' in mainstream media) and Florence Sloan, two Chinese American women, wives of media tycoons, and close friends. The movie is loosely based on Lisa See's work, with Lily and Snow Flower's story functioning as the background for a modern story set in Shanghai. This paralleled

structure resembles the movie version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* adapted by Harold Pinter, but the plot seems to lose some details, perhaps too difficult for those audiences without cultural knowledge to fully understand. This might be the major reason why it was not so well-accepted in China or overseas. What is notable about the film is that it is part of the increasing trend for Chinese topics to enter the Western market, mediated through Chinese American cultural brokers. Following the movie, *nu shu* and *laotong* become newly visible in the West. It is reported that after the New York premiere of the movie, Nicole Kidman was deeply moved by *laotong* culture and expected to become Li Bingbing's *laotong* (Xinhuanet Entertainment 2011).

The mainstream investment and casting the movie attracted demonstrates the potential of Chinese American writings to come out of the niche of the Asian American community and embrace a broader market. In an extension of this globalising movement, the setting of Lisa See's novel shifted from Chinatown to China, and from the present to the past. While *laotong* and *nu shu* appear to be exotic to modern Chinese people, See's writing might be what Ien Ang called, 'a symbolic harking back to an imaginary past', when 'constructing a continuity with the ancestral past has become an increasingly popular option among overseas Chinese' (Ang 2014, 1192). And as a daughter of Chinese ancestry, See has paid visits to China many times and written about China to find her roots, just like the character Jing-mei in *The Joy Luck Club* who carries out the mission to unite with her lost sisters and more importantly to return to the motherland on behalf of her late mother.

Conclusion: From Honey Pot to Teapot?

During the Chinese Spring Festival season, 2017, a vandal ripped off some non-Western name plates in the student dorms at Columbia University in New York; a number of Chinese students were among the victims. In order to protest against this xenophobic act, Chinese students made a video called ‘Say My Name’ to introduce and explain the meaning and importance of their Chinese names. One of the students named Xu Guohao said her name originated from the heroine Mulan and embodied her parents’ wish that she ‘can be as great as a guy’ (Harry 2017). Xu Guohao’s use of Mulan when introducing her own name reflects the fact that the ancient Chinese heroine Hua Mulan has now become well-known in the West. Although I feel upset at the fact that people of Chinese ancestry are still being targeted by racists in the U.S., I am glad to see that some Chinese students are able to fight for their rights invoking women warriors such as Mulan/ Fa Mu Lan. They no longer have to be silent and helpless, but are able to call on Chinese American cultural heroes as icons of resistance. This development is at least partly due to the infiltration into U.S. popular culture of Chinese American literary texts and their offshoots.

The United States has been called a ‘melting pot’, a place where different peoples come together to form an assimilated and homogeneous race. In this melting process, it is the Anglo-Saxon culture that dominates while other elements are expected to alter to accommodate it. Ethnic groups remain marginalised and disadvantaged if they do not give up their root cultures. Although more recently the U.S. has replaced the ‘melting pot’ with cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, it still gives priority to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, as evident in the resurgence of support for President Donald Trump. In the above mentioned incident of racist vandalism at Columbia University, if a non-Western student has adopted an English name, the name plate would not have been targeted, which well reveals that racists do not tolerate diversity and that the residue of the ‘melting pot’ mentality is still permeating U.S mainstream culture.

I return to the two most influential pieces of ancient military literature in China – *The Art of War* and *Thirty-Six Stratagems* – which I mentioned in the Introduction. I argued that Kingston and Tan, as ethnic writers, use ancestral culture as the tactics of a

‘Honeypot’ to entice the mainstream, and as a result they may be able to articulate from a marginalised position, despite being fiercely attacked by fellow Chinese American critics as traitors. Unlike the melting pot, in which all the ingredients are chucked in and mingled together, a honeypot only stocks honey, which can be viewed as a metaphor of the valuable essence of certain cultures, thus being able to attract people who look to extract pleasure as well as meaning from exoticism.

From my analysis in the previous six chapters, I find that in Kingston’s and Tan’s artistic creations, the tactics of the honeypot are expressed through figures such as the female warriors, the Tiger Mothers and the yellow sisterhood, which, while they risk reinforcing certain stereotypes of Chinese, yet function to charm mainstream readers, open spaces for later artists to experiment with new art forms, and present new cultural resources for future generations of Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans. These cultural sources, along with their unique writing styles which combine traditional Chinese literary and artistic philosophies with Western postmodern techniques, make their works distinctive from mainstream writing and embody a special charisma and power. This matrilineal writing tradition has been inherited by younger Asian American writers and enables them to communicate with female audiences from different backgrounds, whether other ethnic groups or mainstream women. Their writing style, which borrows heavily from Chinese culture, can be seen as a distinctive but heuristic strategy when they are marginalised by the mainstream.

However, using Chinese culture in their creations does not mean that the authors are still attached to the ancestral culture, and refuse to be assimilated by the dominant culture in the United States. On the contrary, they have been working hard to enter mainstream society, rather than directing their stories only to audiences in China or Chinatown. The best example, which I have analysed in my Chapter 3, is the story of Hua Mulan. This legend is well-known among the Chinese, but Kingston’s version is quite different from the original: her Fa Mu Lan not only gives Westerners a sense of great novelty to see an Asian female warrior who dresses like a male, but also offers inspiration to women of Chinese ancestry. Kingston’s rewriting of the legend makes the Chinese heroine no longer unknown in the West; indeed, via *The Woman Warrior*, Mulan has become a Disney princess.

A recent essay in *New York Times* describes the story of an American couple who adopted a Chinese orphan years ago, who now bring their daughter, Shan, to visit Shanghai Disneyland to gain some access to Chinese culture. Surprisingly, the child has already become familiar with the heroine Mulan as a Disney character.

An all-female band wearing caps drooping long red feathers stood on the back of a dragon float. The women hammered kettledrums and struck a gong suspended from a pagoda. Flames burst from the pagoda's top. "Mulan," Shan explained. (Lasky 2017)

The adopted Chinese girl recognised Mulan at first sight at Shanghai Disneyland, a Western theme park located in China.

This strange incident reflects how traditional Chinese culture has been travelling around the world and coming back. In this case, it is the character Mulan that was introduced by Kingston to Westerners and further popularised via the Disney's movie. In Disneyland, influences from the East and West have worked together in the formation of the Mulan figure that Westerners are familiar with today. Likewise, the Chinese American girl Shan is also a hybrid product who learns to recognise Chinese culture from an American source. East and West cannot be completely split any more in this case; indeed they are interpenetrating. When adopting Chinese elements in their writings, Kingston and Tan have absorbed both cultures from China and America, and as a result, their Chinese elements are modified by and are modifying both the Chinese and American cultures, such as in the case of Mulan. As Eleanor Ty remarks, '[t]he tales from China are not only translated, they are also transposed and become part of North American culture' (Ty 2004, 121); Kingston's and Tan's rewritings of Chinese stories have been interacting with mainstream culture and already added different formulae to the melting pot and achieved a form of peaceful triumph over the dominant culture.

Since, I contend, Kingston and Tan have attracted readers mainly through the cultural elements in their works, it is important to examine this aspect of their work in a more comprehensive way as I do here. My research not only focuses on the textual meanings of their use of Chinese cultural elements, but more importantly, it has explored the interaction between their texts and U.S. popular culture. I argue that Kingston's and Tan's influence on the U.S. mainstream has made Chinese Americans less invisible through the parenting and feminist role models they engendered. They have also

opened up spaces for new authors to pursue their literary dreams, which is positive for the cultural visibility and influence of the Chinese American community. Compared with its presence only in radical disciplines in the 1960s, Asian American studies now has a substantive place in the academy, and Asian American authors and artists today enjoy comparatively more freedom in their creations. Because they are more likely to be accepted by mainstream audiences, they may not need to be as provocative as the former generations, although this does not mean they are being equally treated today.

Another contribution of the two authors is that they help shape the cultural identity of Chinese Americans. Kingston's question in *The Woman Warrior*, 'What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?' (Kingston 1989b, 6), shows that diaspora generations have been confused by Chineseness, and the contradictory and partial understandings gained from their parents, movies, and books, as well as mainstream popular culture. Now Kingston's and Tan's works are regarded as part of the Asian American, and indeed American, canon, a foundational source that the younger generations can draw on to constitute their cultural identities. Kingston and Tan provide positive role models for survival and success based on their own experiences, which are also more comprehensible for new generations.

Working on the edge of popular culture and literary studies, my research has considered the two authors as pioneers of popular culture, and this is especially meaningful today when written texts may not be as widely available as new media. Like the fluidity of ethnic identity, Chinese American writing today has also undergone a transformation. Unlike in earlier years, when Kingston and Tan were still seeking their identity and desperately 'claiming America' as their nation (Kim 1982, 209; Pfaff 1980, 14), the topics in Chinese American literature 'have been expanded to accommodate the energies of transnational mobility and China's rise as a major power' in the twenty-first century (Lim 2013, 12). Chinese stories now seem to be more popular than ever before, from some first-generation Chinese American writers who write about life in communist China, such as Ha Jin and Anchee Min, to narratives of revisiting China as illustrated by Amy Tan's *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) and Lisa See's *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2005) and *Dreams of Joy* (2011). Beyond this are the 1.5 generation writers (who arrived in America as children), e.g., Jenny Zhang's collective narration on immigration and assimilation in *Sour Heart* (2017),

and even the adaptation of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* as a graphic novel by Nick Bertozzi in 2017. Why would people want to read Pearl Buck again? I do not think it is just to celebrate her 125th birthday. A review of the graphic version of *The Good Earth* says that '[p]eople realized we had a lot more in common with those that we perceive as different as we may have originally thought' (Danoff 2017). Many years after Kingston and Tan have articulated their experiences to 'diversify the mainstream' (Cheung 2016, 18), the mainstream may have changed their attitudes towards Chinese, from viewing them as aliens to model minorities; however, xenophobia still exists and the notion of 'model minority' still implies prejudice. Orientalism not only happens in mainstream readers' heads, but is also constructed by Chinese American writers themselves. The newly arrived first-generation Chinese American authors mostly write about their experiences back in communist China, where they were not welcomed, and as a result, the representations of China in their writings turn out to be negative, which unavoidably fall into Orientalisation.

New Directions

I do not investigate recent first-generation Chinese American writers here as they are quite different from Kingston and Tan, and it is impossible to compare and analyse these two types in this conclusion. This is important research for the future. However, what I can do here is to note that some Chinese American writers have shifted their focus from Chinatowns to China, e.g., Tan's *The Valley of Amazement* (2015) and See's *Dreams of Joy* (2013) and *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* (2017). Tan's *The Valley of Amazement* and See's *Dreams of Joy* share several similar themes, such as mother-daughter conflict and the search for identity and women's friendship. Although the two works are set in different historical periods – the former is at the beginning of the twentieth century and the latter in the 1950s – their representations of the Chinese city Shanghai are not of the modern metropolis of today. Tan's Shanghai is a hybrid city where foreign power and local gangsters intermingle but a hybrid girl is not well accepted; See's Shanghai loses the prosperity which is described in Tan's novel and becomes politically repressed. Although the character Joy returns to her ancestral homeland to find her father as well as herself, *Dreams of Joy*, 'reinforc[es], yet once again, the American Cold War perspective on the PRC from the 1950s through the 1980s', according to Walter Lim (Lim 2013, 157).

See's recent work *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* (2017), chooses a comparatively new perspective for historical fiction about China that she and Tan have worked on. The story takes place from 1988 to 2016, a new period that Chinese American authors seldom touch upon. The narrator, Li-yan, is an Akha ethnic Chinese, who delivers her daughter before marriage, and although according to the Akha law, the baby has to be killed, she chooses to leave it near an orphanage. After a series of hardships, Li-yan becomes a Pu'er tea dealer and moves to America. She tries to find her daughter in the orphanage, only to find that the baby has been adopted by an American couple. The reunion of the mother and daughter comes twenty years later when they meet at the mother tea tree in the once remote but now modernised village in China.

Li-yan and her daughter Haley (an American name given by her adopters) are no longer like the new immigrants around the 1990s, who were searching for shelter in America; they are more like global citizens: Li-yan is free to choose her life either in the U.S. or in China because of her financial capability, and Haley, although she is adopted by an American couple, is likely to fly between America and China when she has found a partner Sean Wong, who lives in the U.S. but does tea business in China.

On Lisa See's official website of *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, there is a link to the Tea-Tasting Book Club, which guides the readers on how to drink tea and offers a historical introduction to Chinese tea. But the most important information that the link gives is how to purchase Pu'er tea from Bana Tea Company, whose owner, Linda Louie, played a vital role in the writing of this book (*The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* 2017; *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane Book Club Tea Tasting Guide* 2017). See devoted almost two paragraphs in the book's acknowledgements to Linda,

To Linda, in particular, I must add further thanks for being my guide at the World Tea Expo (twice!), introducing me to so many incredible people who helped to make the novel immeasurably better [...], her hours of translation, and training my palate. Linda is a dynamic and tireless advocate for Pu'er, and I'm now very lucky to call her my friend. (See 2017a, 366)

This seemingly commercial endorsement reveals several points: See is trying to promote Chinese tea culture in America, a likely expansion of the tea story in her book; she is showing her gratitude to her fellow Chinese American female entrepreneur, who is not only good at business but also helped See find her muse; See and the tea company

enjoy mutual benefits from this club and this is meaningful for promoting Chinese culture and enhancing the social status of Chinese Americans.

See's promotion of the Bana Tea Company also reflects the fact that nowadays Chinese Americans have more contact with mainland China, where they can purchase Chinese products such as tea leaves. They are no longer the 'Paper Sons', who could not travel between the U.S. and China freely, and they are also different from Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*, and May and Pearl in See's *Dreams of Joy* (2013), who are worried about writing letters to China that would cause trouble to both their relatives and themselves. It also reveals a tendency that contemporary Chinese American writers are linking their writing of culture to commodification: from Tan's Chinese cooking recipes to Chua's Tiger parenting and tutoring to See's Pu'er tea.

However, the setting of this novel is still quite exotic even to a mainland Chinese like me. To be honest, I had never heard about the Akha tribe before and have never explored so many legends about Pu'er tea, and as a result, I felt amazed when I was reading the book and even had the desire to go to the tea place myself. If this caters to an orientalist fantasy, then the later part of the book presents a reversal of it: a modernised Chinese village where Li-yan function as a hardworking and successful businesswoman. Li-yan and her daughter are both portrayed as intelligent and rebellious, two women warriors of the twenty-first century.

In this newly published book, orientalist and counter-orientalist gestures coexist again, just like they do in Kingston's and Tan's canonised works. In order to trick readers when Chinese Americans are still biased in the U.S. today, See has inherited Kingston's and Tan's 'Honey Pot' tactics and uses her Pu'er teapot to realise her own artistic ends. Unlike the students, mentioned above, who use Mulan as a cultural icon as a form of defiance against racism, See's use of Chinese culture is more directed towards a form of consumption. This suggests that Kingston and Tan have opened up spaces for their successors in different, at times even contradictory, directions. It remains to be seen how Kingston's and Tan's strategies will be inherited and played out in the twenty-first century.

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