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"Empowering Ghosts: Assertion of Identity through the Embracement of Myths in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*."

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Abstract: In *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Maxine Hong Kingston intertwines various myths as well as ghost stories, rooted in her Chinese origins, with her own experience as a young woman living in Western culture. In the crossings between East and West, Kingston integrates a third culture as part of her identity. This paper aims to demonstrate how Kingston's embracement of her mother's ghost stories and Chinese tales plays a significant role in the assertion of her identity as a writer. Through the retelling of the stories told by her mother, such as the Weeping Ghost of her dead aunt with no name; the Sitting Ghost that her own mother defeated in Hong Kong; the avenging of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan; and the song of the poetess Ts'ai Yen, Kingston finds the necessary strength to assert a sense of identity as both a woman and a writer. It is precisely through these supernatural elements that she finds her own voice and asserts the power of her words, reconciling in the process her split self between two cultures.

Keywords: storytelling, Chinese mythology, patriarchy, Fa Mu Lan, power of words, Ts'ai Yen.

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Empowering Ghosts: the Assertion of Identity through the Embracement of Myths and Ghost Stories in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.*

0. Introduction

Supernatural elements have always been an important inspiration for authors in various areas of the literary tradition. Aside from drawing from supernatural inspiration, myths are also part of the cultural identity of different authors throughout history. In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston intertwines various myths and ghost stories, rooted in her Chinese origins, with her own experience as a young woman living outside Chinese culture. Kingston vindicates her origins and conciliates her dichotomized identity through the retelling and incorporation of these myths and stories into her literary creations, merging two cultural contexts. "In Kingston's world, east and west, like yin and yang […] define themselves against each other" (Johnston 137). However, her identity as an American woman enters in conflict with her Chinese upbringing at home, creating an imbalance between her own yin and yang. The yin and yang—referred as Taijitu by people who follow the principles of Taoism—is a Chinese philosophical concept that describes opposite forces that are interconnected. It appears, along with other concepts, in *The Tao Te Ching*, a fundamental text for both philosophical and religious Taoism. The yin and yang principle advocates for maintaining an equilibrium between different forces which are naturally opposite to each other, but that can live peacefully. Through the use of her American writing style and the incorporation of Chinese mythical tales, Kingston seeks to find balance with each other, restoring the equilibrium between the East and West.

Following the Eurocentric literary canon, the presence of the supernatural to create fictional settings has caused the stigmatization of many literary works, reflecting "the dominant values of Western culture" (Jenkins 61). In Western literature, rational and realistic plots have always been considered more valuable than irrational and supernatural ones. Furthermore, the fact that women use fantasy as a coping mechanism to escape reality is the main reason the genre has been discredited. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue against male dominance in literature by using the idea of the "anxiety of authorship" (49), by which women became conscious of their inability to overcome their male precursors in literature. The idea comes from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), a canonical book that advanced a new revisionary approach to literary criticism. Bloom's central thesis is that the influence of precursor poets inspires a sense of anxiety in the creation process of living poets. Writing a few years later, in 1979, the two feminist scholars are critical with the neglect of female authorship suffered in the work of male critics. They also argue that the prevalence of male authorship over their female counterparts one of the main reasons that prevents women from becoming authors. Similarly, Ruth Jenkins draws attention to Jane

Spencer—feminist scholar and author of the influential work *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (1988)—and her depiction of women writing as romantic and fantastic. Jenkins points out the devaluation of women's fiction as unrealistic (62), proving that the rejection of fantasy derives from interlocking systems of patriarchy and Western culture.

Eastern culture is close to following the same misogynistic patterns as Western culture, yet they take pride in the use of myths as part of the tradition, something that is viewed negatively in a Western-oriented context. Even though the Chinese tradition remains highly patriarchal, it praises the figure of the female storyteller, elevating her to someone who must continue the oral mythical tradition from generation to generation.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the use of tales and stories told by her mother helps Maxine[1] to denounce the aspects of the reality with which she disagrees, thus creating a new female experience of resistance in a patriarchal culture. Precisely, it is the strong figure of the female storyteller in her Chinese ancestry that helps Kingston find her own voice and assert her own identity as a hyphenated Chinese-American. The tales transmitted by her mother, characteristic of Eastern tradition, allow her to use a mythical perspective in her writings. Thus, by applying these techniques from the East, she drifts away from the pure logic approach characteristic of Western literature. In the same way, the influence of male authorship that she experiments within Western culture plays a role in her development as a writer.

It is this mixture of East and West that allows her not only to preserve her mother's stories orally, but to shape them into her written memoirs. This paper aims to demonstrate how Kingston's mother's ghost stories and the mythical tales she borrows from the Chinese tradition play a significant role in her assertion of her dual identity. The embracement of myths as part of her identity and their insertion in her life enables her to conciliate her Chinese ancestry with her American upbringing.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston not only shapes the reality of a descendant from a first-generation Chinese migrant in America. She also merges a third element with the previous ones: the cultural tradition of the supernatural. In this way, she can reconcile a past, of which she was never a part, with a present from which she felt disconnected during her entire life. Through the retelling of the mythical and ghost stories told by her mother, including the Weeping Ghost of her dead aunt, the Sitting Ghost that her own mother defeated once in Hong Kong, the avenging of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan, and the eternal song of the poet Ts'ai Yen, Kingston asserts her identity from a–perspective that merges her characters' experiences and her own.

1. In Search of Identity through Myths

In the Western world, questions about identity are reserved to empowered groups who are privileged enough to reflect on themselves through self-examination. However, minorities such as women and ethnic groups do not belong to the previous category, and in the case of

[1] I use "Maxine" and "Kingston" to differentiate the narrator from the author in *The Woman Warrior*.

Kingston, she suffers double discrimination because of her gender and race. Kingston resorts to textual strategies in order to express her hyphenated self, embracing her identity as both a female and an ethnic writer.

She struggles to try to conciliate why "the Chinese 'I' has seven strokes" while "the American 'I' […] has only three strokes" (Kingston 150). As a woman who speaks the two languages, she can understand the correlation between the self and identity in both. The American "I" is capitalized[2] and represented with three strokes, which implies a certain level of phallocentrism, and therefore, suppresses the "I" of English-speaking women. In the case of the Chinese "I", although the ideograph is not directly related to the male sex, etymologically, the Chinese ideograph for "I" (我) means "to tie a flag […] on a Chinese ancient weapon '戈'" (Lee 109). Since weapons are associated with war and manhood, the idea of the self in Chinese is also related to masculinity, leaving the female "I" aside. This lack of identification with any form of identity leads Kingston to create her own version of the 'I.' Inspired by her mother's tales of ghosts and ancient Chinese myths, she reinvents her own version of the self, which is crucial to her development as a storyteller. José Manuel Losada defines the concept of myth as: "an oral story, symbolic, dynamic, and apparently simple, of an extraordinary event with transcendent and personal referents, which accounts for a social stratification" (930). For Kingston, these myths transmitted to her through Chinese oral tradition act as historical and cultural instruments of oppression which originate from the patriarchal rule. In a way that she is subjected to a social stratification based on gender roles. In every ghost story and myth that her mother tells her there is a strong female protagonist fighting battles alone. Maxine seems to be terrified of the tales, for she tells her mother: "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic" (Kingston 180). Yet, it is her distrust in her mother's inconsistencies that enables her to create a connection to the tradition of oral transmission in Chinese culture that allows her to find her voice, problems to denounce, and stories to tell.

The subtitle of *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts,* emphasizes Kingston's childhood insecurities. By 'ghosts' she refers to both the view that her immigrant parents have of American citizens and the real ghosts of her mother's stories. The two possibilities are referred to as abstract entities that she is not able to grasp; she does not understand American people, nor her mother's intentions with her ghosts. As a Chinese American woman, she spent her life being ignored by real American ghosts; and at home, she felt haunted by imaginary ones. Although Kingston criticizes her mother for telling confusing stories that seem not to be true but not entirely false either, it is precisely her mother's stories that inspire her to write her own tales.

Through "talking-story" (Kingston 25), as her mother describes the way of lecturing her daughter, she tries to impose her Chinese values. However, Maxine fails to relate to her lessons, because they mean nothing in her daily experience as an American citizen. Added to that, her mother gives her child contradictory messages: she teaches her how to be an obedient Chinese girl. She describes the girls in the stories in which girls are "maggots in rice," (45) meaning that in a Chinese household, girls are a financial burden. At the same

[2] For a further description of the differences between the American and Chinese "I" see Ken-fang Lee.

time "she taught [her] the song of a warrior woman" (26). Her mother, as Brave Orchid,—her Chinese name given in the novel—teaches her to be silent and a fighter at the same time, giving her the determination to assert her identity until she realizes that, in order to survive in the world she lives in, she "would have to grow up a warrior woman" (26).

2. Ghost Stories: The Weeping Ghost and The Sitting Ghost

Scholars might argue that the mother is trying to silence her daughter as a transmitter of the misogynist Chinese culture. She must hear, but she must not tell the stories told within her family circle. I would rather oppose this view by stating that her mother's stories are far from being oppressive. However, it is true that there is a sense of imposed silence for a woman in Brave Orchid's tales, specially presented by the first ghost that Maxine knows through her mother: her aunt with no name. Cheung compares Kingston's first story "No Name Woman"—about her aunt who killed herself along with her illegitimate baby in a small village in China—with the Philomela myth (Cheung 163), in which the tongue of a female victim of rape is cut off. Both women are punished "by not being allowed to speak or to be spoken about" (163). According to her mother's tale, her aunt became pregnant at a time when her husband was not in the village, he had emigrated to the U.S. and had been there for a long time. Getting pregnant for a married woman like her aunt was such a disgrace that the village decided to avenge her husband, stealing everything from her house and harassing her, while wearing masks. By covering their faces, the community implies a sentiment of duty and shared guilt for all the aggressors who must punish the woman for having a bastard.

Nevertheless, the father of the child is never called out or punished in the story. In the end, it is the female victim the only one who suffers the consequences of an illicit affair. The only possibility left for her aunt is to kill herself by drowning in the well. In that way not only does she save her last dignity and her family's name, but also achieves some kind of revenge by contaminating the water of the whole community. She kills her baby too because "Carrying the baby to the well shows loving" (Kingston 21) and seems the right thing to do with a bastard in the story; but mostly, because "It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys" (21). Brave Orchid tells Maxine this story with the intention of warning her of the consequences of what is considered as bad behavior n women. Following her Chinese upbringing in a small village, a woman carrying an illegitimate child deserved punishment for that kind of crime. Maxine's aunt was punished twice, not only by the villagers who attacked and ostracized her, but also by her own family, who must eliminate her as if "[she had] never been born", until she becomes a "dead ghost" (20). This punishment for her no name aunt goes even further and beyond death. She would remain a hungry ghost, a Weeping Ghost, as her family is prevented from feeding her out of shame. Maxine remarks how the ghost of her aunt haunts her, now that she is forced to participate in her sanction, as "the real punishment was […] the family deliberately forgetting her" (Kingston 22).

However, what was supposed to be a warning for disobedient girls in Chinese oral tradition became an encouragement to break the silence in the family by restoring her aunt's

name. The woman with no name, the Weeping Ghost who drowned herself in a well helps Maxine to escape her imposed silence devoting "pages of paper to her" (22). She stresses how "the Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute" (22). Rather than being scared of the Weeping Ghost, Maxine gains the necessary power to speak against her community, and even against her own family. Kingston betrays the confidence of her family who is commanding her not to tell anyone when she writes about her aunt in her memoirs. By questioning Chinese traditions with a Western rational mind, she is able to assert her own identity, rejecting her family's sins and embracing her aunt's Weeping Ghost with pride rather than shame. She appropriates the "No Name Woman" in her autobiography by exposing her to the world, giving her the peace that she deserves. And perhaps that is the main reason why her mother tells her a forbidden tale: not to scare Maxine, or warn her of the consequences of shameful actions, but to make her daughter find her own voice against injustices. By the mere act of talking about the unspeakable, Brave Orchid herself restores the aunt's dignity through storytelling, until she changes from being a mythical drowning ghost to a person who lived and suffered an injustice. In fact, Kingston does more than that, because writing in paper about her aunt acts as a substitute for the Chinese tradition of receiving spirit money. In that way, her aunt can calm her anger and stop being a Weeping Ghost.

Along with her contradictions, her mother liberated herself from the burden of the family secret that she was forced to carry for many years, and at the same time, she tried to impose traditional values on her daughter. Rather than imposing complete silence over her daughter, Brave Orchid wanted her to be able to speak and stand for herself by telling her about the example of a relative who was not so lucky in oppressive China, a country her parents fled. She wanted her daughter to never become like "maggots in rice" (Kingston 45) like her aunt, who ended up being a Weeping Ghost because of the repressive community in which she lived. When Maxine confronts her mother about why she cut her tongue when she was born, her answer was: "I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language" (148), a statement that Maxine questions by saying: "The Chinese say 'a ready tongue is an evil'" (148). Again her mother's contradictions confuse her, it does not make sense for a Chinese mother to transmit her tradition and go against it at the same time. By the act of slicing her fraenum, Brave Orchid intends to give her daughter the power of words, instead of encouraging her to perpetuate the imposed silence for women. Even though her mother's stories had somehow a negative impact on her as a child, motivated by her fear of ghost stories that she could not comprehend, Maxine felt "very proud that [her] mother committed such a powerful act upon [her]" (Kingston 148). Since Kingston intertwines reality with fiction, whether her mother really cut her tongue or not is unknown. However, the act of "freeing" her fraenum, even as a metaphor, has great significance for her, as it meant the beginning of her power assertion through storytelling.

It is her mother who not only gave her the power of words, but also helped her to embrace Chinese myths and the tradition of ghost stories as part of her identity, since Brave Orchid herself is the greatest example Maxine can have of a woman who attains identity through ghosts. She uses her mother's ghost story in China to fight her own demons, in the

same way that her mother defeated hers. Brave Orchid confronted a Sitting Ghost when she was studying medicine in Hong Kong. Despite being loyal to science, she used ghosts and explained them, questioning not their supernatural origins, but rather their mischievous motives. She embraced ghosts as part of her culture and identity, only being a threat to her when they harassed her environment, not because of their mere existence.

As a woman who was more than ten years older than the other girls in the medical school, she overflowed them with her self-confidence. While the other girls were afraid of the ghost, Brave Orchid decided to spend the night in the haunted room. She refused talismans claiming that "If [she took] charms, then the ghosts will hide from [her]" because "What is there to be afraid of?" […] What could a ghost do to [her]?" (Kingston 66). Being afraid not only once, but Brave Orchid was also able to scare the ghost by herself:

> 'You will not win, Boulder,' she spoke to the ghost. 'You do not belong here. And I will see to it that you leave. When morning comes, only one of us will control this room, Ghost, and that one will be me' […] 'Do you know what gift I will bring you? I'll get fire, Ghost' […] I've heard of you Sitting Ghosts before. Yes, people have lived to tell about you. You kill babies you cowards. You have no power over a strong woman.' (Kingston 68)

Brave Orchid defeated the ghost with the power of her words and strong identity as a brave woman. She is the version of a traditional mother, born and raised in the values of the China that she left behind; yet she wants her daughter to learn how to fight ghosts. As Brave Orchid became the woman "who has fought the ghosts and won" (69), Kingston intends to become the woman who fights her own ghosts: her alienation as a woman who is told to be a slave in the patriarchal rule while she learns "the song of a warrior woman" (26) at the same time.

If Brave Orchid is a contradictory woman, her own name is also conflicting in Chinese culture. 'Bravery' is a masculine quality, categorized by Taoists as "Yang"—the sun (Li 502); on the other hand, "Orchid" is a feminine quality. As flowers are associated with the beauty and the delicacy of women, orchids fit more in the category of "Yin"—the moon (502). A combination like "Brave Orchid" seems to deviate from the norm in Chinese culture, as having a name that represents femininity and masculinity at the same time. This is not common for parents to give to their child, especially a daughter. However, her mother's name becomes a paradox of her own identity by embracing bravery as not only part of her personality, but her own name. Furthermore, Brave Orchid took pride in her name as an adult and refused to erase her appellative and identity when she lived abroad. She was Brave Orchid in her small Chinese village, Brave Orchid in Hong Kong, and Brave Orchid in America: "Nor did she change her name: Brave Orchid. [...] Even when she emigrated, my mother kept Brave Orchid, adding no American name nor holding one in reserve for American emergencies" (Kingston 74). Her mother is not the tyrannical figure that oppresses and forces her to be an obedient Chinese girl with cautionary tales about dead relatives. She is an independent woman who refused to take care of her in-laws in China while she waited for her husband's call in America and went to medical school to do something for herself. She became a successful doctor and a Ghost killer in China.

Yet, she still perpetuates Chinese traditional roles and values in society when she teaches her stories to her daughter: "Throughout childhood my younger sister said, 'When I grow up, I want to be a slave,' and my parents laughed, encouraging her" (78). With Brave Orchid's inconsistencies, Maxine is forced to lose herself—the same way as her fraenum when she was born—from her mother's control.

3. Mythical tales: Asserting Identity through Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen

In her chapter "White Tigers" the myth of Fa Mu Lan—the warrior woman—acts as a vehicle to assert her hyphenated identity. Kingston resorts to the power of her imagination to create a tale in which she merges with the swordswoman Fa Mu Lan as she endures training and hardships in order to avenge her family. The legend allows Maxine to have "an unconventional way of asserting herself" (Cheung 166), embracing the Chinese myth as part of her identity.

The story of Fa Mu Lan exists in different versions throughout different periods from the Tang, Ming and Qing dynasties to the modern period in different genres ranging from ballad, novel and even vernacular play (Wong 28–29). The oldest version known is *The Ballad of Mulan* (400 AD) composed during the era of Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 AD) by an anonymous poet and transmitted orally. Hoeever, the first written recollection appeared much later, in the sixth century by Zhijiang's Gujin Yuelu (Jiang 902). In this poem Hua Mulan is a young woman who takes her father's place when he is called to fight in the army. After 12 years of fighting, she returns to her hometown. In some versions, she becomes a leader among men who never discovered her gender, in other versions, and reveals her identity as a woman to her comrades.

With Kingston's retelling of the myth, she conciliates the past with the present, the China of her ancestors and the America in which she lives. In Kingston's version of the tale, Fa Mu Lan—embodied by Kingston herself—undergoes many trials, tests, and endurance in the hands of two elder tutors. She learns to "make [her] mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes," (Kingston 34) and by extension, use her imagination to look for solutions when she feels trapped. In a dream which lasts fifteen years, she acquires not only wisdom but also strength. Not until she "could point at the sky and make a sword appear [was she] ready to leave" (37) the mountain where she trained; it is the full control of her weapon that completes her power.

Similar to female authors of the past who needed to disguise themselves behind a male pseudonym, Kingston hides behind the armor and the sword of a male warrior. Fa Mu Lan becomes an alter ego in which she has the power to wield her own sword, therefore she can fight against her ghosts and insecurities through this version of the self. Her imagination and storytelling converted into her memoirs is the strongest weapon that she uses to cope with her alienation from the world. It is through the embracement of myths and their realization in paper that she asserts her own identity.

Kingston's idea of revenge differs from her version of Fa Mu Lan. In her dream, she is a powerful warrior who is a master in martial arts and a woman trained in war. She fights

injustices, gets married, and has a baby too; all of that without forgetting her main agenda of avenging her family. The ideal warrior woman for her is the juxtaposition of the roles of soldier and wife. In her tale, she only hid from duty "when [she] gave birth" (Kingston 42), and returned after to battle. She even brought her baby to war with her, embracing her motherhood; she is a strong woman who took pride in her role as a mother without shame or inferiority. In fact, wifehood and motherhood empower her in battle instead of subordinating her to a life behind the front line to protect her baby. She is powerful enough to display how "the umbilical cord flew with the red flag" (42). A woman warrior is proud of her womanhood, a quality that Kingston vindicated with her retelling of the myth. Her version of Fa Mu Lan is a woman who she can identify with, attaining her identity as a strong Chinese woman instead of a silent and obedient one.

However, she does not completely identify with Fa Mu Lan. Empowerment through a weapon is what her mother taught her and what she glorified about women warrior's tales, but Kingston does not identify with physical violence. Unlike her mother—who confronted ghosts face to face without even taking a talisman with her—Kingston substitutes the sword of the woman warrior with a pen. Despite the fact that Fa Mu Lan and Kingston do not wield the same weapon, they share something in common, the power of words:

> The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—'chink' words and 'gook' words too—that they do not fit on my skin. (Kingston 53)

Kingston replaces Fa Mu Lan's duties as a warrior with writing as revenge. They share words, but they do not use them in the same way. For Fa Mu Lan, the words written on her back are a bitter memory and a remembrance of her deed as a warrior avenger. For Kingston, words are an act of resistance against what her ancestors and family impose on her. Even though Fa Mu Lan is an empowered woman who embraces both wife and soldier roles, she is still compliant with her role as a devoted wife and daughter-in-law once she finishes her revenge. She kneels down in front of her father and mother-in-law, and devotes herself to them: "I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons" (Kingston 47). Not only she settles for a slave. She also enforces the patriarchal tradition of having sons over daughters. Kingston uses her words to drift away from society's expectations and female categorization, and yet, she 'feminizes' the role of a warrior by choosing the peaceful act of writing over slaughter. Through her retelling of the myth, she denounces the figure of the wife as a slave, emphasizing the author's desire to turn to the pen for revenge. Legends are meant to be immortalized, Mu Lan's words died with the end of her revenge, but Kingston's words would live from generation to generation through the telling of her stories. It is the power of imagination and storytelling that defines her identity as a writer; she intertwines purposefully reality with fiction, as she does with Chinese and American influences, because they are both part of herself as a woman and as an autobiographer.

It is in this cathartic moment in which she finds her own voice when she rewrites the story of the poet Ts'ai Yen—a Chinese young woman who is kidnapped by barbarians and forced to live with them for twelve years. She finds identification with her as a mythical woman to whom she can relate. Ts'ai Yen was forced to live among barbarians who spoke a language that she did not understand. She was obliged to have children with one stranger, and denied the opportunity of speaking her mother tongue to her offspring: "Her children did not speak Chinese. She spoke it to them […] but they imitated her with senseless singsong words and laughed" (Kingston 185). On top of that, she was mocked by them because she spoke a language that they did not understand; for her children she just produced sounds that incited laughter, because they were meaningless. In this hostile environment, she could only understand the sound of their flutes in harmony with the wind. This music perturbed Ts'ai Yen to the point that she "could not concentrate on her own thoughts" (186) until she accompanied the flutes with her own voice: "Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering" (186). Even though the barbarians did not speak Chinese, they can interpret the sorrowful tone of the song. Ts'ai Yen expresses through singing all the pain that she felt being forcefully taken away from her family and home. She transmitted in a song what she could not transmit with words in all of those years. Music does not need translation for being understood, it has an unexplainable way of reaching people, no matter the language that they speak. Despite the fact that her children had mocked her Chinese before, they "did not laugh, but eventually sang along" (186). They understood, the same way as the "barbarians", her mother's pain so they could not laugh anymore.

With this myth, Maxine ends one of her mother's stories the way she wanted, with a "symbolic reconciliation not only between mother and daughter but also between Chinese and American cultures" (Bolaki 52), since she finds peace in a song that can be understood by speakers of different languages. Finding identification with Fa Mu Lan, who holds the power of words, is not enough in her quest of a search for identity. Words need to be understood too, and as a woman who lives in-between cultures, she needs to find comprehension and acceptance from both sides. Her book is her "song" to the world; she transforms the mythical song of Ts'ai Yen as a metaphor for her autobiography. Her memoirs are the descendants of a song that does not need translation; her words to be understood by both Chinese and Americans. By embracing the myth of Ts'ai Yen, she accepts her hyphenated identity as an American Chinese woman. Her book is the product of her assertion of power through words. Since the use of the supernatural in storytelling is a shared element of many cultures, her words can reach wider audiences using myths as the core of her autobiography.

Comparing this myth with the Fa Mu Lan one and her mother's ghost stories, Maxine fully accepts her mother as a storyteller and confesses being one too, reconciling herself with her mother and her culture. Thanks to her mother she discovers that her power assertion can only be through words, and can only come from her own imagination, not imitated from other women—real or fictional—in her life. She is the only one who can name, and define

herself, as she could not find identification with any of them, she must create an identity of her own. In this sense—the same way she did not feel identified with Fa Mu Lan—she fails to find a complete identification with Ts'ai Yen: her song is filled with sorrow and anger. As she rejected vengeance in other myths, Kingston discards sadness and anger from her autobiography. It is true that she denounces with bitterness her childhood trauma and her position as an ethnic woman living in two cultures, but her final climax is closer to hope rather than a sentiment of hatred towards her upbringing, fully accepting her identity as a storyteller thanks to the embracement of the mythical tales.

The end of the book recalls the myth of Fa Mu Lan again and the words written on her back. Mu Lan gave her the strength to substitute a sword for a pen to fight for her own story; Ts'ai Yen gave her the power to create a universal piece of work, something that for once in her life does not need a translation from one language to another. Finding her voice and being able to communicate in diverse cultures makes Maxine powerful, not powerless in front of "barbarians," the same way the ghost and mythical figures of her mother's stories do not lead her to take revenge on her family or author bitter stories about lost childhood. Her "song" is about growth, about finding herself in a reality that is mixed with legend and myth, and about embracing that part of her culture that she could not relate with in the past until she construed her hyphenated identity. In the original myth, Ts'ai Yen returned to China, bringing her song with her and turning it into a well-known song among the Chinese. Instead of telling the return to her homeland, Maxine focuses on the song that "translated well" (Kingston 186). Her retelling of the myth is far from showing nostalgia for a China that she has never seen, but rather a celebration of her cross-cultural work which goes beyond Chinese or American boundaries. Kingston perpetuates in her memoirs a Chinese view of reality, owning the respect of the Americans as the "barbarians" who could not understand her in the first place. As a woman who felt invisible and misprized by both cultures during her life, being able to create her "song" for the world to read and admire was her biggest achievement. Chinese myths and ghosts are far from disconnecting her from her American self. They rather enhance her identity as a powerful woman who merged two cultures as part of the self. Kingston is able to eradicate through these empowering ghosts any kind of alienation that she felt in the past, creating a new hyphenated identity for future Chinese Americans who might struggle with the same situation.

4. Conclusion

The Woman Warrior is both an extensive description of Kingston's search for identity and the solution to it at the same time. She achieves a sense of self through the recreation of the stories of others from her perspective, giving her the control and the power that she needed to understand her place in a world where she was not either Chinese or American. As she grows up, Kingston changes her perspective towards her mother's stories from resistance: "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories" (Kingston 202); to acceptance and continuation: "I told her I also am a story-talker" (184). The embracement

of her mother's tales leads her to perpetuate those ghosts and myths that caused her trauma in the past and turn them into a piece of her soul in her future memoir. Through ghosts and tales, she is able to reconcile with a part of her identity that she had difficulty assimilating. As a second-generation immigrant, the connection with her Chinese origins is just as incorporeal as her mother's ghosts, which made her feel alienated from her own reality. She continues her mother's legacy as a Chinese storyteller by reinventing tales to fit her own experience, vindicating her identity in the process. She stops following her mother's stories obediently and starts questioning them with her own critical perspective, giving her individual twist to the stories and asserting the identity of the creator, not only the storyteller.

Each tale in her autobiography was written in order to symbolize her struggle to fit a certainly established identity which she firmly rejects. Whether with the story of the Weeping Ghost of her aunt, Brave Orchid's defeat of the Sitting Ghost, her revenge as a latest version of Fa Mu Lan, or the song of the poetess Ts'ai Yen; Kingston achieves the embracement of myths and family stories as part of her identity through the retelling of these tales. She changes the rational Western perspective characteristic of her upbringing for the mythological perspective of the Chinese to tell the story of her life. Paradoxically, her empowerment ends up being reflected by what she hated the most during her childhood, her mother's stories. Ghosts and myths allow the author to articulate a sense of the self, eradicating her feeling of alienation that she felt in the past. This final embracement completes her search for identity, her mother's stories were just tales, and her stories are a product of her life. In her memoirs, she elevates the figure of the female Chinese storyteller to a female author, in a way that her mother's myths become empowering ghosts of her own: "The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (Kingston 184).

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