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從文化混淆的「我」到駕馭雙文化的「我們」：湯亭亭的三部曲

鄭惠芳[*]

摘 要

本文探討湯亭亭著作──《女戰士》、《金山勇士》及《猴行者：他的偽書》之間的微妙關聯性，企圖指出雖然此三本著作就個別性而言，每一本皆是獨立完整的作品，而且前兩本和第三本在文類性質上尚有非小說與小說的級大差異，但儘管如此，讀者仍可將此三本著作視為三部曲。本文主張此項三部曲的閱讀策略可將個別作品中的故事串聯集結為具史詩般氣勢的華裔美國文化歷史，因此對此三本著作所共同著重的族裔文化議題，可呈現更加有趣也更為宏觀的詮釋面向。從《女戰士》到《金山勇士》到《猴行者：他的偽書》，它們之間具有的三部曲連貫性，正展現有如世代間之演化：從文化混淆又孤獨的「我」，華裔美國人一步步邁向具集體族裔歸屬感、自信並駕馭雙文化的「我們」。
關鍵詞：湯亭亭、華裔美國文學、《女戰士》、《金山勇士》、《猴行者》、三部曲

[*]長庚大學通識教育中心副教授

From Culturally Confused "I" to Bicultural "We": Maxine Hong Kingston's Trilogy

Cheang Wai Fong

Abstract

There is an interesting interrelationship between Maxine Hong Kingston's three books: The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, China Men and Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book. Even though each of these works is a self-contained book, and even though the third one is fiction completely different from the first two, which were awarded as nonfiction, this paper suggests a reading strategy that would endow Kingston's works with the depth and strength of an epic. It suggests that these three works be read as a trilogy depicting the history and fate not just of individuals, but also of the Chinese Americans.

The paper argues that though the protagonists and narrators are not identical from book to book, a sort of evolutionary development appears in the sequence of the three books, as in biological evolution, individuals change relatively little; the major changes appear between generations. This reading strategy can be useful as it encompasses a wider, almost bird's-eye-view of the whole race and identity question. The paper demonstrates that as a trilogy, Kingston's three books manifest a progression from the naive, insecure, culturally confused "I" to a sophisticated, confident and bicultural "we" for not just the protagonists, but the Chinese Americans that they represent.

Key words: Maxine Hong Kingston, Chinese American, The Woman Warrior, China Men, Tripmaster Monkey, trilogy

From Culturally Confused "I" to Bicultural "We": Maxine Hong Kingston's Trilogy

Cheang Wai Fong

Maxine Hong Kingston, honored as a "Living Treasure of Hawaii" by a Honolulu Buddhist sect (Pfaff 1), is a pioneer in Chinese American literature. Her importance in Chinese American literary history is pinpointed by Stefan Kanfer who claims that Kingston's books mark the coming of a "Chinese American Renaissance" (58). According to Amy Ling, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, Kingston's first book, created a "furor on the literary scene" (130). The fact that the book won a 1976 National Book Critic Circle Award for nonfiction signifies Kingston's recognition not only by a small group of people, but also by mainstream literary circles. Kingston's second book, China Men, won a 1981 American Book Award for nonfiction, and her third book, Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book, was received with equal zest.

There is an interesting interrelationship between these three works, even though each of them is a self-contained book. This paper suggests a reading strategy that would endow Kingston's works with epic-like depth: it proposes that these three works be read as a trilogy depicting the history and fate not just of individuals, but of a people—the Chinese Americans.

The paper argues that even though the protagonists and narrators are not identical from book to book, a sort of evolutionary development appears in the sequence of the three books, as in biological evolution, individuals change relatively little; the major changes appear between generations. Therefore, when read as a trilogy, Kingston's three books manifest a progression from the naive, insecure, culturally confused "I" to a sophisticated, confident and bicultural "we" for not just her protagonists, but the people that they represent as well.

A fact, that inevitably surfaces when Kingston's three books are put together as a trilogy, is that genre-wise, they seem incompatible. The Woman Warrior is regarded as Kingston's autobiography. Both this book and China Men were awarded as

nonfiction, while <u>Tripmaster Monkey</u> is fiction. Despite this genre difference, there is a common theme that binds these three books together. All of them are set in the same Chinese American background with the protagonists struggling for self-recognition. Actually, it is obvious that the fiction and nonfiction demarcation can hardly prevent the reader from linking the common purport of these three books together. Furthermore, fictive elements permeate the first two works of nonfictions. According to Ling, Kingston originally intended to publish <u>The Woman Warrior</u> as fiction, not as an autobiography. The eventual autobiography label was decided upon by her editors (187). Moreover, even the narrators in these two books admit that they are “talking stories,” not real history.

Kingston is the very person who first suggests that <u>The Woman Warrior</u> and <u>China Man</u> be read as "one big book." <u>The Woman Warrior</u> is, in her own words, her "mother book," and <u>China Men</u> her "father book" (Kingston, “Imagined Life” 563). She even remarks that she wrote the two almost simultaneously (Pfaff 25). Reviewers generally agree that the two books are complementary. Frances Taliferro, for instance, comments that "the two books must be read together" as they "form one whole" (76). Suzanne Juhasz states that <u>The Woman Warrior</u> is about the "search for the mother" while <u>China Men</u>, the "search for the father." These two books thus "allow a person to find home" (“Maxine” 188). As to Kingston’s third book, <u>Tripmaster Monkey</u>, Elaine H. Kim comments that it is "a continuation of sorts of Kingston's earlier work" (“Such Opposite Creatures” 87). These views support my suggestion that Kingston’s three books be read as a trilogy. <u>The Woman Warrior</u> is the “mother book,” <u>China Men</u> is the “father book,” and <u>Tripmaster Monkey</u> the children book. This reading strategy, as the paper will demonstrate, multiplies meanings significantly.

The first book in the trilogy begins with an imposition of silence: "You must not tell anyone [. . .] what I am about to tell you" (3), the “story-talker” mother demands of her listening daughter. This imposition, equivalent to a kind of suppression, remains powerful throughout the book, and highlights two crucial issues that run the gamut of the whole book: first, silence versus talk, and second, daughter versus mother. The narrator, the autobiographical Maxine, portrays her quest for identity by looking through her mother and her mother’s “talk stories” to other matriarchal figures in her mother’s version of Chinese tradition. She must not talk, and she is not able to talk until she can get rid of her mother’s imposition of silence, master the

mother's stories, and appropriate the mother's "talk story" power in her own existence in a new American context. In essence, The Woman Warrior is a story about the quest for one's identity and one's voice. This quest starts from an inward journey back to the mother's Chinese culture in her stories. The quest is completed when the heroine assimilates that culture and those stories into the new Chinese American context.

The protagonist, Maxine, starts out as a lone, culturally confused I. She yearns for her mother's ability as a "champion talker" (202), as she considers that ability a "great power" (20). Maxine repeatedly tells us that she feels "the spell of verbal power at an early age" (Cheung 165). However, the mother's dominance shuts her up. And interestingly, Maxine relates her own inability to an imaginary Chinese practice—the tongue cutting. The confused and frustrated Maxine says that she suspects that her mother cut her tongue when she was a baby. This tongue-cutting becomes a "symbol of the mother's overwhelming power over the daughter, in a sense, a castrating power" (Ling 127). The mother has indeed, as Linda Morante points out, "tampered with her daughter's speech" throughout her childhood (80). The mother's constant imposition of silence, for instance, has its psychological impact. When a later, more talkative Maxine wants to tell her mother the list in her head, her mother acts as if she hears nothing; finally she silences her: "I can't stand this whispering, senseless gabbling every night" (200).

What becomes remarkable is the mother's repeated impositions of silence: "You must not tell anyone" (1); "Don't let your father know that I told you" (5); "Don't tell anyone you had an aunt" (15). These impositions reflect an unbalanced mother-daughter relationship. According to Norman Fairclough, discourse is "a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted" (43). He asserts that "there is obviously a close connection between request and power, in that the right to request someone to do something often derives from having power" (55). The mother's direct injunctions of "must not" and "don't" reveal her dominant position, and the daughter's silence and near invisibility in the course of the mother's "story talking" reinforces the mother's dominance. The adult narrator reflects that: "In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details or said my aunt's name" (16), underlining this strong-mother/weak-daughter relationship.

At the heart of her imaginary journey lies the desire to overthrow her mother. To put it in a prototypal term borrowed from an old Greek tragedy, Maxine is grasped by the Electra complex. The mother is a suppressor who silences the daughter.

Worst of all, the stories that she keeps funneling into the daughter's ears pull the daughter back into the values of old China, some of which are terrifying to a little girl as she cannot understand the full implications of the stories.

Ghost is the key word in this story, just as the subtitle of the book, "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts," tells us. In the stories Maxine's mother tells her, there are lots of ghost-like figures. No Name Woman, for instance, is like a ghost. And the villagers who raid the family house to punish No Name Woman are also ghost-like: the people with "long hair hung it over their faces. Women with short hair made it stand up on end" (4). But her American reality is similarly haunted by ghosts. Maxine says:

> Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts, I could hardly breathe; I could hardly walk, limping my way around White Ghosts and [. . .] Black Ghosts[. . .]. (97)

The word "ghosts" which refers to both the foreigner ghosts in her American reality and the ghosts in her mother's "talk story" of Chinese past (Dasenbrock 13) indicates that neither culture is comforting. That is why when she grows up, she has to find a place in the country which is ghost-free.

Her frustration and her inability to identify with neither the Chinese culture in her mother's "talk stories" nor the American culture so thick with ghosts create a crisis. The inevitable result is not just cultural confusion, but a sense of dislocation.

Patricia Lind Blinde indicates that "individual life is always somehow governed by the accounts of 'fiction' devised by and implemented by someone else" and these accounts have power over human life because people take them to be "undeniable truths" (65). Brave Orchid's words become the fiction that dominates Maxine's life. Maxine therefore attempts to evade the limitations and the frightening aspects of her mother's stories. An important part in The Woman Warrior that manifests the young girl's anxiety is her desire to learn which part of her story is true and which part is false. She asks her mother to tell her that. But her mother simply refuses.

Eventually, she manages to overcome the cultural confusion, yet only after twenty years. She rejects the mother's imposition when she writes down the whole story (Cheung 162). This table-turning act is not the result of a sudden outburst, but a gradual condensation of her understanding of her mother's stories. She overcomes her anxiety about not being able to tell which part is fiction which part is reality, and finally she assumes control over those stories by becoming an author who writes about the stories her mother has told her.

The Woman Warrior, in this respect, is a story of initiation. Maxine turns a smothering culture into a nurturing one (Cheung 163), and she successfully emulates the mother and accomplishes a great project the significance of which is, in every aspect, similar to Helene Cixous's description of how a woman is initiated into the symbolic:

> It is in writing, from woman and towards woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the symbolic. (111)

Maxine gets her stories from her mother, and when she appropriates those stories into her own version, she gives a place to her No Name Aunt, Moon Orchid, her matriarchal predecessors and herself. The Electra complex in The Woman Warrior ends in a much more moderate tone than its original Greek version. Maxine declares that: "I told her [the mother] I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending mine" (206). This statement gives credit to her mother as her mentor. Moreover, this reveals an interesting aspect consistent with feminist ideas. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, there is "the primacy of the mother rather than the father in the process of language acquisition" (82). That is why they declare that "one can metaphorize the mouth as a womb, the Word as the child of the female power" (97). In other words, this recognition of her mother's help for her final "talk story" power accords with feminist rejection of the idea that language and writing belong to the father. As Juhasz informs us, it is only with the words that the mother has given Maxine that she is finally able to affirm her identity ("Towards a Theory of Form" 236).

Moreover, though the daughter too "talks story," she does not simply reproduce the mother's stories. She revises them to "reshape recalcitrant myths glorifying patriarchal values" and thus turns a smothering culture into a nurturing one for her (Cheung 163). By this act, she successfully emulates the mother, overcomes her cultural confusion and her fear of suffocating ghosts in her mother's stories and in her American reality. When she writes, she finds herself a voice, and an identity.

Thus viewed, The Woman Warrior is indeed a "mother book" (to use Kingston's own comment) which pays tribute to the mother and other maternal figures who have given the daughter the power of speech with which the daughter establishes her valid individual identity.

Then China Men does the complementary job. Instead of being obsessed with

herself and the mothers, the narrator starts to search for the stories of the fathers in order to understand her relationship with her father and other patriarchal figures. The Electra complex in the previous book seemingly continues. Unlike the talkative mother, the father is a taciturn man. The narrator's relationship with her father goes into another extreme because of the silence he keeps. Maxine addresses him: "You kept up silence for weeks and months [. . .]. You say with the few words and silence: No Stories. No past. No China" (14).

This "no past" taciturnity troubles Maxine as much as her mother's excessive "talk stories" have, as she understands that there must be some reason behind that "no past" silence and she wants to act as a spokeswoman for the father's grievances.

China Men is also a kind of an imaginary quest story. The narrator examines retrospectively into the past in order to rewrite the father's immigration history. Linda Ching Sledge asserts that China Men is an "oral history" in the generic sense (4). As the title of Sledge's paper, "Maxine Kingston's China Men: The Family Historian as Epic Poet," indicates, China Men is an epic. During the process of revisiting and rewriting her father's past, the narrator wins her father over to her and, most important of all, she reintegrates him into her life as a Chinese American. The voice that she tries to find for her father is the voice that she can rightfully inherit. With that voice of the father, she claims America for him. And while she is doing that, she also claims America for herself as his legitimate heir.

The most remarkable aspect in China Men is what Federic Jr. Wakeman calls the "special poetic license" the narrator uses. (42) The narrator proclaims that since the father provides her with little information, she has to invent by herself: "I'll tell you what I suppose from your silence and few words, and you can tell me if I'm mistaken. You'll just have to speak up with the real stories if I've got you wrong" (15).

Undeniably, her father's taciturnity, not unlike her mother's loquacity, distresses the young girl. Maxine suspects that what he wants from "not talking" is to punish his family (14). Verbal violence fills his language on the rare occasions when he opens his mouth. His obscenities scare the children, for instance, he slams the iron on the shirt and mutters: "Stink pig. Mother's cunt" (12). Young Maxine secretly wishes that these are only conventional expressions and that he has meant only gypsies and not woman in general (12). She implores her father to deny the Chinese bias against women and girls: "What I want from you is for you to tell me that those curses are only common Chinese sayings. That you did not mean to make me sicken at being female" (14). This concern with the misogynistic tradition of China echoes

that in The Woman Warrior. In that earlier book, the narrator is worried that her mother works in alliance with misogyny. But she finally cracks that problem.

In China Men, Maxine's relationship with her father is also a love-hate conflict like the one the narrator depicts in The Woman Warrior. This love-hate conflict must be resolved in order for her to form her valid identity, because the curses of the father are injurious to her consciousness as a female. But this love-hate basis takes a different form from the one with the mother. Juhasz informs us that the evolution of Maxine's female identity is formed "in relation to the mother through the achievement of individuation in the context of connection, in relation to the father through the understanding of separation, the creation of substitutes for connection" (“Maxine” 173). This useful perspective pinpoints that Maxine seeks to rebel against her mother’s dominance in order not to hate her while she tries to bridge the detachment her father commands so she can love him.

Language is one of the main concerns of China Men, as it is in The Woman Warrior. The use of language, as evidenced by the father’s experience from Maxine’s stance, is clearly associated with power and self-esteem. Maxine says that her father screams "wordless male screams" (13) when he has lost his job in the gambling house (251); he swears obscenities when he can't speak English to counteract the gypsies' elaborate English alibi for the police (13). In the imaginary history Maxine constructs for her father, he used to be a powerful master of language back in China. She says that his mastery of written language privileges him over his brothers as he is being exempted from manual labor. When he goes to take his imperial exam, he chants his lessons to keep himself awake and to retain his sanity. This resonates with Brave Orchid's chanting of her lessons when she fights the sitting ghost. Language proves itself powerful and useful to both parents.

This concern with language is repeatedly emphasized in the book. Maxine’s father is happiest when he is among scholars who understand his learning. Once back in the village, he is frustrated because his powers with words are not recognized by the village peasant children who are illiterate, and who spoil the word models he has made for them. When the father is in Angel Island, the poem he writes on the wall is applauded by other Chinese immigrants but when he confronts the immigration officer, he becomes ignorant: "You can't speak English, you're illiterate, no scholar, no visa" (45). These paternal experiences, echoing many of the events depicted in The Woman Warrior, demonstrate how the exercise of language is related to a sense of self-worth and power. To be able to speak out or not makes a great deal of difference.

This perspective makes the change of a silent father to a “talk story” father significant in <u>China Men</u>. In Chapter Two, "The Father From China," Maxine describes her father as a silent man. Later on, in Chapter Fourteen, "The American Father," this man tells two entertaining stories: one about a friend who steals a chicken and keeps it under his sweater, and another about two feuding poets; he also talks about a Los Angeles Massacre of Chinese (255). In fact, evolution from a silent man to a “talk story” man whom the daughter calls “the American father” manifests a change caused by the father’s progress in his social position. He finally owns his own house and business in America (255) and is, therefore, no longer homeless like No Name Woman or useless like Moon Orchid. His work in the new country endows him a sense of self-worth just as it does with his wife. This final portrayal of the successful, talking father counter-balances the portrayal of the earlier frustrated, silent father. Moreover, it signifies that the daughter ultimately understands and accepts her father.

This concern with language as related to a sense of self-worth and power also extends to other patriarchal figures in <u>China Men</u>. In Chapter Five, "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains," this concern is given full play. The American environment is suppressive. A rule where the Chinese grandfather is working forbids him to talk. A talker is punished by whipping or by a fine. Yet the cunning grandfather Bak Goong, the “talk addict” (110) still manages to shout and scold by means of disguising them as his coughs: "Get--that--horse--dust—way--from--me--you--dead--white--demon. Don't--stare--at--me--with--those--glass--eyes. I--can't take--this--life" (104). Bak Goong’s desire to express himself, as Kim observes, belongs to "indomitable spirit and expressiveness of the Cantonese" (Asian 210), which, in essence, is similar to Brave Orchid's life-saving talking power.

Ling pinpoints the significance of this cough disguised shouting: by breaking the imposed silence, Bak Goong resists the "erasure" of his identity and self-hood from history (145). Bak Goong’s “talk story” after work hours is equally important because, according to Jeffery Paul Chan, it serves to "give advice" (99) and "coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the people's common experience (226). In short, Bak Goong's keen desire to speak out demonstrates the need for a human being to express oneself. Language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility, including the style of manhood (Chan 226). The imposed silence, therefore, is a dehumanizing act that will uproot China Men’s culture and destroy their sensibility. Just as Ling asserts, "being silenced" is to be

"stifled as a human being and erased from history" (145).

Bak Goong refuses to be destroyed. He says in his diagnosis of his fellow China Men's illness: "It is a congestion from not talking. What we have to do is talk and talk" (115). Then comes the most spectacular episode in the whole book—spectacular in terms of volume. These China Men arrange a "shout party" (118) to shout their secrets into "an ear" dug into "the world" (117). The shout party symbolizes a heroic protest against white racism. King-Kok Cheung observes that "for someone besieged by silence, self-expression is a heroic act, an offensive with verbal artillery" (166). Bak Goong, as Kim points out, is also a warrior who "avenges himself with a sword forged of words" (Asian 210). Thus viewed, these China Men's verbal artillery resonates with the woman warriors' in The Woman Warrior. The "shout party" ultimately frightens the white demons and they never again punish China Men for talking. Bok Goong's defiance against unreasonable authority has finally proven useful.

The repeated emphasis on the initially frustrating yet eventually triumphant experiences of sojourner Chinese forefathers in China Men signifies the narrator's wish to declare her own triumph via her fathers. The focus on these men's language barrier manifests an anxiety that must be subdued. Both in The Woman Warrior and China Men the narrators stress the importance of being able to communicate. A verbal language outside of its communal context becomes impotent, as shown by the desperate situation of the sojourner forefathers. Even the scholar father becomes illiterate once he crosses a language boundary. And the reason that Brave Orchid cannot continue to practice medicine is that, according to Maxine, she cannot speak English. Language is thus in these stories an important determiner of a person's power (though not the only determiner). To be unable to speak up in front of the police to counteract the gypsies' story is as frustrating as not being able to speak up like No Name Woman in The Woman Warrior.

The anxiety that underlines these obsessions with language is a fear of becoming No Name Woman. The various stories in China Men prove that so much depends on language. Just as Jeffery Paul Chan and others say: "Stunt the tongue and you have lopped off the culture and sensibility" (226). That is then equivalent to becoming No Name Woman. Bak Goong is thus the male counterpart of the woman warrior in Kingston's first book.

Thus viewed, the connection between Kingston's first and second book is obvious. In China Men and The Woman Warrior, as Ling writes, "speech, language,

and stories are the bearers of history, identity, self-hood" (145). Maxine, as the “story talking” narrator in both of these books, is the master of speech and language. Kim says that she "recover[s] history from deceit and lies" (Asian 211). That is to say, she helps her people by preventing them from getting culturally confused and frustrated. When she tells stories about how the male members of her family suffered while they contributed to the building of America, she is telling her readers the particular China Men culture and sensibility. Most important of all, she is also "claiming America" (Pfaff 1) for her ancestors and for herself.

In one of the stories in China Men, the white people proclaim when the railroad is finally finished: "Only Americans could have done it" (145). The narrator then argues that her grandfather, Ah Goong, is therefore an American for "having built the railroad" (145). Maxine is in fact constructing through her father a bond that links her to all the male ancestors who are founders of America. She creates for her China Man ancestors the pride that she could share as a descendant, as a Chinese American.

Kingston’s third book, Tripmaster Monkey echoes her two earlier works as it dramatizes the quest for a valid Chinese American identity. In spite of the nonfiction/fiction difference, the common purport is obvious. Kim indicates as much, stating that "the complexities of Asian American racial identity" are "central" in Tripmaster Monkey" and that Tripmaster Monkey is a "continuation of sorts of Kingston's earlier work" (“Such Opposite Creatures” 87-88).

The quest for identity in Tripmaster Monkey does not revolve around a mother-daughter or a father-daughter relationship as it does in The Woman Warrior and China Men. It takes up a much broader view, revolving around the relationship between a Chinese American child and his community. Wittman Ah Sing is an indigenous Chinese American. He is addressed by his Chinese American community as "Jook tsing" (Bamboo head) and "Ho chi gwai jai" (251), synonyms of "native son." Wittman himself proclaims: "I am deeply indigenous here. And my mother and father are indigenous[. . .]. Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden Gate State" (327). Consequently, Wittman assumes archetypal importance as a "native son."

Unlike Maxine, the narrator in the two earlier books, Wittman is no longer a lone figure fighting his racist battle. He rejects the concept given him at the unemployment office that "an American stands alone. Alienated, tribeless, individual" (246). He considers himself backed up by his community which gives him power to enunciate his Chinese American identity. Kim points out that "Wittman Ah Sing overturns the

American image of Huck Finn as the ineffable outsider who must leave his community behind to find an individual pioneer identity. Wittman will not put an 'X' through his people" ("Such Opposite Creatures" 91). He has wanted "a tribe" since he was a kid at the theater (247). His community gives him support when he stages his play. When he gives his speech, which is actually a "crazy riff" (314), his community listens to him attentively. His parents support him. He declares that: "My parents are free spirits--I'm a descendent of free spirits" (15). Wittman's positive attitude towards his parental cultural heritage is emphasized in the book. One thing he treasures is the Chinese "talk story" tradition which links Tripmaster Monkey to Kingston's two earlier books. And the other thing that he loves is the theater-loving tradition of the Chinese people and he seeks to revive and promote it by staging his play.

In terms of immigration history, the time backdrop of Tripmaster Monkey differs from that of The Woman Warrior and China Men. Maxine's parents are first-generation immigrants who suspend America whenever they say home; Wittman's parents are fourth-generation and regard America as their home. Maxine's mother keeps funneling China into her ear; Wittman's parents have forgotten China. In short, the constitutions of their Chinese American Communities differ. Tripmaster Monkey, as Susan Currier says, is peopled with characters who "have forgotten their pasts" (429). Wittman's parents are not even sure if Wittman's grandmother is a real relative and they end up dumping the old woman. This exaggerated and surrealistic black-humor episode is symbolic. The grandmother represents the old Chinese cultural heritage that few in the new Chinese American generation understand or appreciate. This grandmother figure resonates with the grandmother in The Woman Warrior who sends a sweet taste from China to Maxine's mouth (99), and with the ghost of Mad Sao's mother from China who haunts her son to demand her filial dues in China Men (171-79). The dumping of the grandmother symbolizes a dissociation from China.

Wittman searches for his lost grandmother earnestly. When he has finally found her, he says to her: "You are a perfect and good grandmother. PoPo, you come live with me. We be cronies" (265). Being "cronies" suggests a new relationship which is not based on the old Chinese filial system. Unlike Maxine who regards her dead aunt as a "forerunner," Wittman's "crony" relationship with the grandmother suggests a new, free attitude towards the Chinese cultural heritage.

Wittman's attitude towards American reality is also remarkable when compared to young Maxine's. As a fifth generation Chinese American, Wittman is no longer haunted by ghosts as the little girl Maxine is. When he ventures into the American reality, he confronts neither "ghosts" nor "white demons," but white men, white Americans whom he looks straight in the eyes and talks to, not in Maxine's small person's voice, nor in Bak Goong's cough disguised language, but in loud and clear English.

Words, voice, language that have been the "bearer of history, identity, self-hood" (Ling 145) for Chinese Americans in the two earlier books are rendered equal significance in Tripmaster Monkey. The need for self-expression and communication with other people demonstrated in the two earlier works is not only amplified through Wittman's character, here it is brought to function in the production of a concrete work and the acquisition of a real audience.

In essence, we can say that Wittman inherited the Chinese “talk story” tradition that has been depicted in The Woman Warrior. Like Maxine, he is more than a “story talker” as he also wields his pen to write the “talk stories” down. Wittman endows great values on writing. In one of Wittman's “talk stories,” the monkey king writes to leave proof that he has been to the top of the sky:

> "I'm going to leave proof that I've been here." At the tall pillar[. . .] he pulls out one of his hairs. "Presto be-e-e-en change-o!" The hair becomes a pen wet with ink. He writes his graffito: "The greatest Wisest Man wuz here." (285)

This story echoes the concern apparent in Kingston’s two earlier books: writing is a bearer of history and self-identity. Wittman’s love for “talk story” is amplified into his love for the theater. He wants badly to become a playwright. The significance of the theater is pinpointed by Jeffery Paul Chan, who says that it "codifies" the people's common experience, and "coheres the people into a community" (226).

Tripmaster Monkey dramatizes Wittman’s frustration with his American community. The impositions of silence in both The Woman Warrior and China Men again become a concern. Wittman finds that though America is a "free country" (247), there are various kinds of injunctions of silence. The film at the employment office tells people not to ask about "perquisites and salary" right away in a job interview (246); Wittman is demoted for "disruptive at meetings" (61) because he speaks up freely while taking his management training. Besides these speech injunctions, Wittman is also troubled by what Chan and others call "the tyranny of

language" that "has been used by white culture to suppresses Asian-American culture and exclude it from operating in the mainstream of American consciousness" (202). Wittman points out that the white people use movies and television to "brainwash" (319) Chinese Americans. In their study of the effect of media, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli say that "cultivation" is worked through mass media to provide "a shared daily ritual of highly compelling and informative content" for millions of people. However, "the shape and contours of the television world rarely match objective reality, though they often do match dominant ideologies and values" (19-22). Interestingly, Wittman declares:

> Every few days they show us a movie or a t.v. episode about us owing them, therefore thankfully doing their laundry and waiting on them, cooking and serving and washing and sewing for John Wayne and the Cartwright boys at the Ponderosa. (320)

Wittman is aware that this "tyranny of language" and "brainwashing" is aimed at creating "fictions" which will support the white supremacy. In this respect, Wittman is a "fighter" of "racism," as Kim points out (Asian 151). Like Maxine, Wittman must go beneath the fictions to search for and to write his own reality. Wittman says: "[the white men are] cutting off our balls linguistically [. . .]. They depict us with an inability to say 'I' [. . .]. 'I'--that's the mean-ass motherfucker first-person pronoun of the active voice and they don't want us to have it" (318).

This obsession with "I" resonates with Maxine's concern with the word in <u>The Woman Warrior</u>, though more of a feminist concern there. Maxine declares that the Chinese slave "I" and the American bold "I" confuse her. She thus finds herself incapable of articulating the word "I." In spite of the difference in their concerns, Wittman's reclaiming of the lost "I" can be considered a response to Maxine's problem. Wittman demonstrates that only in the act of articulating "I" can "I" exist, and this idea coheres with Emile Benveniste's linguistic theory, which mentions that "'ego' is he who says 'ego'" (224). Furthermore, Wittman draws strength from his Chinese heritage to enunciate his "I," which proves that his cultural heritage is beneficial to his sense of self:

> We used to have a mighty 'I' [. . .]. At one time whenever we said 'I,' we said 'I-warrior' [. . .]. Don't let them take the fight out of our spirit and language. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I-warrior win the West and the Earth and the universe. (319)

This climactic articulation of the word "I" affirms Wittman's self-hood and echoes Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself:" "I celebrate myself, and sing myself" (28). Wittman's monologue is his song of himself. The choosing of "Wittman," a pun on "Whitman," is meaningful, and the surname "Ah Sing" carries with it connotations of a song.

However, the "I" claim is not made just for himself; Wittman is doing it in front of and on behalf of his Chinese American ethnic group--teaching them to say "I." The difference between this book and the previous ones is that Maxine defends her community and has them support her as in the Fa Mu Lan fantasy. Her struggle is to get her individual self noticed as she is conscious that she is marginalized not only in her community but also in her family. Wittman is operating more on a social level. He fights for the whole community and struggles to claim a collective identity for his people.

Therefore, besides reclaiming the lost "I," Wittman also reclaims the power to name himself and his people--he tells them to demand and invent a different name. He names himself and his people Chinese American without the hyphen, using the "Chinese" as an adjective and "American" as a noun. Kim pinpoints that this naming act is Wittman's rejection of the terms--yellow, oriental, Chinamen, celestial, Sino-American--with which "hegemonic culture" has labeled Chinese Americans ("Such Opposite Creatures"88). Walter J. Ong indicates that oral peoples commonly think of words as having "magical potency" and of names as "conveying power over things" because names give people power over what they name (32-33). By his naming act, Wittman is reclaiming the power to define himself and thus counteracting white racists' "tyranny of language" (Chan 202).

Wittman's naming act becomes doubly significant when placed side by side with the story of No Name Woman at the beginning of The Woman Warrior. By creating a name, Wittman creates an identity and claims a place where he and his people belong. Without a name, a person has no place in society. That is the case with No Name Woman. In contrast, Wittman is a full human being who knows how to make use of his language and whose final enunciation of an identity counter-balances the distressing nameless situation of No Name Woman. Therefore, Wittman's naming act can be considered as an answer to No Name Woman's distress. The end of the third book balances the beginning of the first book.

Wittman is the "artistic voice for the Asian American community, bringing everyone he knows into his extravaganza of a stage performance at the novel's end"

(Ling 155). Wittman's play is a communal form of "talk story" which reconciles various voices as each actor contributes to the formation of the script. Kim calls Wittman a "social artist who gives voice to a community of actors with the gist of his play" ("Such Opposite Creatures"89). Remarkably, the play, which contains communal voices, eventually falls back into the single voice dealing with personal views and personal life of the speaker. Wittman comes out at the end to give his monologue, trying to make his community understand him. This reminds one of Maxine's efforts to make her mother understand her by telling her her list: "If only I could let my mother know the list, she--and the world--would become more like me, and I would never be alone again" (WW 198). The presence of the single voice behind the communal voice parallels the presence of the narrators in each book. None of the narrators are invisible because their presence strengthens the stories, adding another dimension to the meaning of the stories, just as Wittman's monologue strengthens his play.

The writing act in The Woman Warrior and China Men, and the play followed by the monologue in Tripmaster Monkey are variants of the artistic expression symbolized by the song of Ts'ai Yen which Maxine honors. Deborah Homsher points out that writing is a "sneaky form of suppressed speech" (95). In Tripmaster Monkey, Wittman advances from the "sneaky form" into the "publicized form" of the art of expression and acquires an audience. Wittman's new way of expression can be compared to the song of Ts'ai Yen as both Asian Americans and white people enjoy his play, a work of art that transcends cultural boundaries.

Read as a trilogy, Kingston's three books serve to pay tribute to the power of words and language regardless of the difference between oral and written form, as either one of them is necessary to the establishment of a valid self identity. The first book in the series, The Woman Warrior, starts with a culturally confused "I." The narrator Maxine ventures into the imaginary past to seek her mother and to acknowledge the strength of her cultural heritage. The second book, China Men, continues the quest into the realm of the father. The daughter claims American for her Chinese forefathers by depicting how hard they have worked to contribute to what is now America. With such a strategy, she validates her own identity as a legitimate American, a Chinese American.

Finally, the third book, Tripmaster Monkey, reconciles the protagonist with his community and strengthens the image of a Chinese American in harmony with his community. This protagonist is no longer a lonely and culturally confused "I." He

secures communal support and loudly announces his own ethnic identity. The picture he has brought forth is a new generation of Chinese Americans, a bicultural “we”--who can enjoy their lives on the New Continent by empowering themselves with their Chinese heritage.

Thus read, The Woman Warrior, the mother book, China Men, the father book, and Tripmaster Monkey, the children book, weave a big picture. They dramatize an evolutionary development in the sequence of the three books over the generations. What has been affirmed when these three books are read as a trilogy is a progression from the naive, insecure, culturally confused "I" to a sophisticated, confident and bicultural "we" for not just the protagonists, but the people that they represent as well. Therefore, taken as a trilogy, these three books depict the culture and the sensibility of Chinese Americans with the depth and strength of an epic. Such a reading strategy enhances our appreciation of each of these three books, and increases our understanding of Chinese American culture.

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