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**Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Chinese Minority in Maxine Hong Kingston's Work**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of my paper is to analyse the novel and illustrate the question of the Chinese minority living in the U.S. The lost identity - “rootlessness” , cultural clash and the life-long dilemma whether to adapt within a new dominant society or to carry on one’s cultural heritage and similar issues related are reflected in the analysis of the internationally acclaimed debut novel *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by the author Maxine Hong Kingston, a first generation Chinese-American and the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction.

To provide background for the study of the Chinese minority living in the U.S., major reasons for their immigration are also explained.

## **Key words**

Chinese minority, assimilation, *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston M. H. , identity, cultural clash

## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce analytickým přístupem rozebírá otázky čínské menšiny žijící na území USA. Především otázka ztracené identity a kulturních rozdílů, stejně tak jako životní dilema, zda-li se přizpůsobit americké majoritní společnosti nebo pokračovat v čínské kulturní tradici, je ukázána na analýze mezinárodně uznávané prvotiny *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* od autorky Maxine Hong Kingston, první generace Američanky čínského původu a držitelky ocenění National Book Critics Circle Award právě za tento román.

Pro porozumění problémům, s kterými se čínská menšina musela vyrovnávat během svého života a zejména v procesu usazování se v USA, práce v úvodní části obsahuje nastínění hlavních důvodů čínského přistěhovalectví.

## **Klíčová slova**

čínské přistěhovalectví, asimilace, *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston M. H. , identita, kulturní rozpor

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assimilation to any culture can be a difficult process but it may be overwhelming when culture, passed on from generation to generation, utterly differentiates from the mainstream culture in which one is expected to fully adapt to. A perfect illustration of this is Maxine Hong Kingston's internationally acclaimed debut novel *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, which portrays an enormous inner struggle of a first generation Chinese-American looking for her lost identity when trying to adapt to dominant American culture.

Without any doubt, one of the biggest issues the first generation Chinese-Americans often faced was a life-long dilemma whether to stay faithful to their original Chinese cultural heritage and follow all its traditions or whether to "betray" the Chinese bloodline and follow the policy of the country they were born in, yet where, in many cases were not considered genuine Americans. In other words, they have had to tolerate the fact they have been of hyphenated identity, "neither nor that," and this represented one of the biggest struggles when trying to integrate into the mainstream of dominant American society.

The book is divided into five chapters, each of them with different characters and settings. The major characters of the novel are various women, who have made a profound impact on Kingston during her childhood and adolescence. Kingston sets herself up in the role of the narrator, describing various memories and experiences that influenced her life as a Chinese immigrants' descendant. The first chapter *No Name Woman* illustrates the importance of a Chinese community acting in accordance with the Chinese traditions, and to behave on behalf of society as a whole, and not just based on private interests. The story of *No Name Woman* is told to Kingston as a cautionary tale and "warns her against the threat of female sexuality" (Griffiths, 361). The second chapter *White Tigers* depicts an enormous struggle to assimilate into American society. *Shaman*, the third chapter, depicts Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid as a woman, who achieved a university degree but despite her education still remains the traditionalist adhering to old Chinese customs and attitudes. The story of Kingston's aunt, Moon Orchid, is depicted in *At the Western Palace* chapter. The last chapter, *A Song for a*

*Barbarian Reed Pipe* is the most personal chapter, where Kingston depicts her memories of the environment she was brought up in as a child.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, all chapters highlight the urge to solve the question of women's position within Chinese patriarchal society, illustrate the question of Chinese traditional values and depict the struggle Chinese immigrants and their offspring had to endure to adjust within dominant a American society.

Kingston's novel can be categorized as a rich blend of fiction and non-fiction, therefore it is difficult to distinguish between reality and just a "talk-story" (Kingston, 20) , stories, which Kingston heard when growing up in the Chinese community.

*The Woman Warrior* was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction and proves the Chinese to be a very unique minority. In spite of a denial of their rights and their encountering of painful experiences throughout their immigration history into the U.S., they have successfully overcome these obstacles with great dignity and determination. Being pronounced "the model minority" (Mišćević, 11), the Chinese-Americans made it through and showed the world what strong determination looks like.

Personally speaking, what I strongly admire about the Chinese immigrants is their strong will and burning ambition to persist in spite of all the bad treatment they received in a rather hostile climate. In spite of this backdrop of a painstakingly torrid journey, there is evidence that the journey was worthwhile.

## 2. MAJOR REASONS FOR IMMIGRATION AND THE FIRST PERCEPTION OF THE CHINESE

The Chinese were amongst the first immigrants to migrate to the US. According to Chin, there were three major reasons for them to come. Firstly, the European power's intrusion on China resulted in internal turmoil and emigration. Secondly, gold was discovered in California, and thirdly the demand for labour : with the rapid industrial development of the United States there was a huge and immediate demand for a large labor force (67). As Daniels explains, the first Chinese arrived in the US around 1820s, in other words, at the same time as the Germans and the Irish, however, as the author highlights, it was the Gold Rush of 1849, which, in fact, triggered meaningful Chinese immigration into the country (121, 239).

As already mentioned, the Gold Rush of 1849 was one of the main reasons why the Chinese immigrated to the US. According to H.W. Brands, for the traditional Chinese, who "revered their ancestors to a degree unheard-of elsewhere" (61) and whose "primary obligation of family life was to tend the shrine of the family dead" (61), it was extremely difficult to leave China. Such expected filial affection is also described in Kingston's novel:

My mother and father and the entire clan would be living happily on the money I had sent them. My parents bought their coffins. They would sacrifice a pig to the gods that I had returned. From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled, the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality. (Kingston, 45)

In this excerpt Kingston highlights the importance of family relations, especially the ones between parents and their children. Children, particularly sons were expected to carry on their filial duty towards their parents.

Despite the filial piety, which will be discussed in detail in chapter "The Chinese society keeping their traditions," the vision of getting from rags to riches simply overpowered the Chinese timidity and soon there were many ships sailing for San Francisco in 1849 – so appealing was the lure of *Gum Shan* – "Gold Mountain"

(Brands, 63). The issues are reflected in a pamphlet printed in Cantonese (as quoted in H.W. Brands, 63):

Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinese to come and will make him welcome. There will be big pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description...The Chinese god is there, and the agents of this house. Never fear, and you will be lucky...Money is in great plenty and to spare in America. (H.W.Brands, 63)

Naturally, the promising vision of making a fortune by working in the gold mines moved the Chinese so deeply they were able to endure anything to go to California and send money home. Similar situation of hasty departures for America in hope to find gold is reflected in Kingston's novel:

... just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings – to make sure that every young man who went 'out on the road' would responsibly come home – your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt's new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain. It was your grandfather's last trip. Those lucky enough to get contracts waved goodbye from the decks. They fed and guarded the stowaways and helped them off in Cuba, New York, Bali, Hawaii. 'We'll meet in California next year,' they said. All of them sent money home. (Kingston, the introductory page)

This excerpt also shows the importance of the Chinese men to the original patriarchal structure of a Chinese village and the need of regular sums of money to be sent back home to China, as the Chinese, mostly women staying in the village were dependant on this financial support.

As Chin says, many of the first Chinese immigrants were "considered yellow devils, who should be driven into The Pacific Ocean" (67). Additionally, they were often nicknamed "rat-eating celestials" (Gabaccia, 74). Furthermore, in H.W. Brands's view, to Americans, the first Chinese were complete strangers of the oddest appearance. Wearing silk dress and plaited pigtailed – "tonsure", they seemed "almost as exotic as Martians" (330) to them. In addition to these facts, to American ears, the Chinese spoke bizzare language difficult to understand and practised rituals, which in many cases were frowned and looked upon with suspicion (Brands, 330). Similar attitude towards the Chinese is also described in the book:

You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that. It isn't just the loudness. It is the way Chinese sounds chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian. (Kingston, 171)

The author's monologue sees Chinese language as a cacophonous blend of sounds. Kingston does not even blame Americans for wrinkling their noses with disgust when hearing Chinese. She herself states there are other immigrants' languages that sound more delightful than Chinese, the language of her ancestors and the language which she, herself spoke when very young. In this passage Kingston's father wonders why he hears loud Chinese voices from far away – is it because he understands the language or simply because the Chinese voices are loud and uncivilized in comparison to perfectly pitched American voices?

Furthermore, Kingston also describes how some of the „exotic“ eating habits looked like:

My mother has cooked for us: raccoons, skunks, hawks, city pigeons, wild ducks, wild geese, black-skinned bantams, snakes, garden snails, turtles... 'The emperors used to eat the peaked hump of purple dromedaries,' she would say. 'They used chopsticks made from rhinoceros horn, and they ate ducks' tongues and monkeys' lips.'

'Do you know what people in China eat when they have the money?' my mother began. 'They buy into a monkey feast. The eaters sit around a thick wood table with a hole in the middle. Boys bring in the monkey at the end of a pole. Its neck is in a collar at the end of the pole, and it is screaming. Its hands are tied behind it. They clamp the monkey into the table; the whole table fits like another collar around its neck. Using a surgeon's saw, the cooks cut a clean line in a circle at the top of its head. To loosen the bone, they tap with a tiny hammer and wedge here and there with a silver pick. Then an old woman reaches out her hand to the monkey's face and up to its scalp, where she tufts some hairs and lifts off the lid of the skull. The eaters spoon out the brains.'

She had one rule to keep us safe from toadstools and such: 'If it tasted good, it's bad for you,' she said. 'If it tastes bad it's good for you.' We'd have to face four- and five-day-old leftovers until we ate it all. Sometimes brown masses sat on every dish. I have seen revulsion on the faces of visitors who've caught us at meals. (Kingston, 90-92)

These excerpts show us the perception of the Chinese and their eating habits. Kingston's family is used to eating leftovers as food in China was never enough to waste. The Chinese experienced famine and poverty, that is also one of the reasons why Kingston, in her book, includes so much information about food.

For instance, China experienced long periods of famine during the Manchus dynasty. Such harsh situation contributed to a political turmoil, which is also one of the main reasons for many Chinese men to sail to the U.S. - to seek better future and to finally have an opportunity to provide their families with financial add.

Another black period in the Chinese history was The Great Famine of China, which took place between 1958 – 1961 and at least 40 millions of the Chinese died from severe starvation. Surprisingly, in the World War II, there were about 80 milions victims. ("Hunger," online)

Needless to say that these cultural differences - the exotic appearance of the Chinese immigrants, the way the Chinese sounded when speaking and also what they were able to bring onto their dinner table - contributed to the fact that the Chinese were looked down on by the Americans as soon as they reached the U.S. coast.

Either to emigrate or just to sojourn, "to work and scrimp only to be able to improve their lot in China" (Daniels, 249) must have been quite a difficult task to endure, things being as they were. Despite the fact that the first Chinese immigrants did not plan to stay in the U.S., many of them, as a matter of fact, did and tried to assimilate into a new culture. Due to the difficult conditions prevailing in China, many Chinese immigrants have never returned to their motherland and preferred to work hard and tried to adapt in the U.S., the country which for many immigrants represented the land of opportunities but also neverending working hours. Similarly, the cultural adjustment was the extreme struggle for the immigrants' descendants as well. Such a painful life journey is also described by the first generation Chinese-American author in her book:

I mustn't feel bad that I haven't done as well as the swordswoman did; after all, no bird called me, no wise old people tutored me. I have no magic beads, no water gourd sight, no rabbit that will jump in the fire when I'm hungry. I dislike armies. (Kingston, 49)

“By connecting herself to the mythical swordswoman“ (Griffiths, 367) Fa Mu Lan, the author self-justifies as she feels she did not succeed in her life path as the “swordswoman“ – her role model did. She declares she did not have anything and anyone close to help out, she just had to rely on herself, therefore her personal struggle to fully assimilate and become an American was a great success.

The intention of not settling down in the U.S. permanently and the desire of the immigrants to bring their family back to China one day is also pointed out in Kingston’s novel:

Not when we were afraid, but when we were wide awake and lucid, my mother funneled China into our ears: Kwangtung Province, New Society Village, the river Kwoo, which runs past the village. ‘Go the way we came so that you will be able to find our house. Don’t forget. Just give your father’s name, and any villager can point out our house.’ I am to return to China where I have never been. (Kingston, 76)

In this excerpt the intention of Kingston’s mother not to stay in the U.S. for the rest of her days is illustrated. She still regards China being her home and advise her children what to do when they get there. According to Kingston’s mother, it will not be difficult for her children to find their house, despite the fact the children themselves have never been there. However, in the old Chinese community, all the villagers are connected by their cultural heritage and everybody knows each other very well. Furthermore, their father, as a man, and as such significant to the village, is very well known to all the villagers, who live inside the community. Another example of “mere sojourning“ is also mentioned in the following passage:

‘Now we know,’ she told us, ‘the White Ghosts can hear Chinese. They have learned it. You mustn’t talk in front of them again. Someday, very soon, we’re going home, where there are Han people everywhere. We’ll buy furniture then, real tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time.’ (Kingston, 98)

This passage explains that for many Chinese immigrants it was their primal goal to go to the U.S. just for a certain period of time and that they planned to go back to China, where they would not have to live the immigrants’ austere way of life. In addition to this, it seems like Kingston’s mother, with regards to the very last sentence

of the passage, praised the Chinese country for being natural and traditional, the characteristics that San Francisco, has never possessed, in the Chinese eyes.

In the following chapter Chinese-American literature will be discussed, with regards to its very beginnings to present-day literature. Furthermore, literary genres typical for Chinese-American literature will be briefly mentioned, as well as its specifics.

### **3. CHINESE-AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Generally, Chinese-American literature refers to work written in English by Americans of Chinese origin. As Leong states, the first Chinese-American literature dates back to as early as the 19th century and was primarily written by Chinese workers who immigrated into the U.S. during the Gold Rush Era. Needless to say that the first literature was exclusively written in Cantonese, as most of immigrants came from Canton, one of the Chinese provinces. The literary genres included poems, novels, autobiographies, science-fiction and journals. Such works often described the painful experience the Chinese endured while staying in America and the negative light they were seen in not only by white workers, but also by whole dominant American society. However, the first Chinese-American literature did not only depict the attitudes white Americans held towards the Chinese immigrants, but also how the Western world was seen by Chinese eyes (Leong, online).

In Xiao's view, the situation of refusing and looking down on the Chinese minority did not change until the latter half of the 20th century, when Civil Rights Movement took place in the U.S. Moreover, Women's Movement, Anti-Vietnam War and Minority Rights campaigns contributed to the improvement in Sino-US relation and increased an interest in different races. Suddenly, Americans began to be aware of different cultures and they started to see the Chinese minority from a different viewpoint. In 1970's, when more and more people started to accept the idea of

globalization, they became more attentive towards Chinese-American literature. Such literature portrayed exotic places and variable ethnic dilemmas - something untouched by that time (Xiao, online). Therefore, Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sui Sin Far, Gish Jen, Iris Chang, Frank Chin – to name a few, were in demand, as in their work they often discussed the issues of ethnicity and cultural taboos.

Undoubtedly, Chinese-American literature belongs to a very specific group. What makes it so outstanding is the dilemma the authors depict in their work. As Chinese-Americans, they often find themselves in the position of being trapped between the dominant culture of their society and their own inherited subculture (Xiao, online). Being confused about what culture they actually belong to, they fight the idea of lost identity - “rootlessness.”

In other words, in their literature they usually depict stagnation between two completely different cultures and a lifelong dilemma of whether to stay loyal to the traditional China, where the authors’ ancestors originally came from, or whether to betray the Chinese bloodline and fully assimilate in an individualist America, their home. This is one of the main issues these writers describe in their work. Another specific issue the authors portray is the hopeless position of women in traditional Chinese society, especially the issue of a weak female within a patriarchal community.

However, as Xiao points out, many Chinese-American authors know remoted China just from their parents’ stories, therefore the way they picture China in their writings is sometimes highly imaginative and can be misleading for the reader (Xiao, online).

In the next chapter, one of the highly acclaimed Chinese-American authors Maxine Hong Kingston will be briefly introduced, with regards to her novel *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, which will be contextualized.

### 3.1. MAXINE HONG KINGSTON AND *THE WOMAN WARRIOR*

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in 1940 in Stockton, California. Her father came to the U.S. in 1929, first settling down in New York City, where he was a part owner of a laundry. However, the loss of his shares forced him to move to Stockton, where he was accompanied by Kingston's mother arriving from China. Kingston was born as the first of the couple's six American born children. In Stockton, the Kingston's family was the part of laundry business, too ("Redroom," online).

Suffice it to say that the working class environment, where Kingston was brought up, greatly influenced Kingston as the author of the novel *The Woman Warrior*. From the viewpoint of the first Chinese-American generation, she experiences the inner struggle when looking for her lost identity.

*The Woman Warrior* can be classified as a rich blend of biography and fantasy and is strongly shaped by talk-stories which Kingston, as a child, heard from her mother and other immigrants living in their community. This book can be also understood as a testimony about her original Chinese cultural heritage which is utterly different from her American home. The U.S. is the place where she was, in fact, born, but as a first Chinese-American generation is torn between two diverse worlds. Classification of being neither Chinese, nor American became the main topic in *The Woman Warrior*, through which the author looks for her lost identity. Within a literary field, this book has received many positive and negative reviews.

I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for contradictions. (Kingston's quote, online)

Either being envisaged by Kingston in advance or her immediate emotional reaction to negative reviews *The Woman Warrior* has received, this quote is a brilliant example of contradictive critiques discussed below.

In fact, the literary critics often argue about categorizing this novel as "non-fiction, autobiography" (Chun, 85). In Maxine Hong Kingston's China, there are spirits, snakes, dragons and mystical birds. As Kingston herself in the book confesses, due to many talk-stories she has heard, it has been very difficult for her to recognize the

boundary between reality and fantasy (Kingston, 202), not to mention the fact that Kingston has never been to China, thus all the facts she provides the readers with can be completely distant from reality. All these arguments prove that the book, under no circumstances, should be categorized as a non-fictional, autobiographical work. This point was also highlighted by writers such as Frank Chin, Ben Tong, and Jeffrey Chan, who declared that to call this work an autobiography was a marketing fraud. However, it was probably Kingston's desire to be accepted by the American mainstream audience that drove her to label her novel as a non-fiction (Chun, 86-87).

These negative reviews seem to contradict many scholars' and critics' ones. In these positive critiques, Kingston has been praised for the refreshing style and the topic she portrayed in her book. As Chun further states, "a great number of literary scholars defended the writer, saying that she had in fact helped to re-define...the tiresome distinctions between fiction and non-fiction" (86). According to Xi, Kingston should not only be "praised for her rich literary oeuvre", but "also noted for her vision of the kind of borderless world we could create if we try" (Xi, online).

In any case, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction.

#### 4. THE POSITION OF WOMEN WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY

In China, women have always been subjected to a lifetime discrimination. If, by a chance women escaped the infanticide as baby girls, there were numerous obstacles they had to face simply just due to the fact they were women. Many mothers considered sentencing their newborn daughters to death a better solution when compared to the life struggle, which they would, under these circumstances, experience as women in China. The dreadful act of infanticide, so commonly practised in China, is described in Kingston's novel:

'The midwife or a relative would take the back of a girl baby's head in her hand and turn her face into the ashes,' said my mother. 'It was very easy.' She never said she herself killed babies... (Kingston, 86)

Traditionally, women were raised in accordance with Chinese traditions, in other words, a boy-child was cherished and a girl-child was considered useless. Furthermore, as children, they got their feet bound and were often sold as slaves or prostitutes. The purpose of such terrible act was to dehumanise and humiliate women, who were regarded being less than humans. Footbinding, another callously inhumane ritual, passed on from generation to generation, is also illustrated in Kingston's book:

...My mother did the same to me and my sisters and herself. I used to believe that the expression 'caught by the short hairs' meant a captive held with a depilatory string. It especially hurt at the temples, but my mother said we were lucky we didn't have to have our **feet bound** where we were seven. Sisters used to sit on their beds and cry together, she said, as their mothers or their slaves removed the bandages for a few minutes each night and let the blood gush back into their veins. (Kingston, 9)

Footbinding dates back to the 9th century and it was not outlawed until 1912. A desired length of a perfect woman's foot was 3 inches and the aim was to cripple it into the shape reminding a "Golden Lotus." If the woman's feet were bigger than 3 inches, she could, as a matter of fact, forget about getting married to a wealthy Chinese man. If, accidentally, a woman's toes fell off when the bandages were removed once in a while, it was considered as a blessing from the God – the tinier the feet, the more desirable the woman. It goes without saying that for many women just to stand up for a moment was unbearably painful and in many cases, women had to be carried around or simply had to

crawl – another act of women’s degradation. A woman in the old China was seen as a property, not as a free human being (Nosostro, online).

According to Lim, Chinese women with their feet bound were seen as a status symbol capable of bringing honour upon the village. What is more, women were so obsessed with their perfection that they even got up in the middle of the night and began their “beauty preparation“ for the next day (Lim, online).

As teenagers, women were forced to get married to a husband they have never seen before and that was prechosen for them at the very early age of their lives. Generally, such marriage was usually not out of love, but out of convenience and its only purpose was to bring China more sons. Within the Chinese community, the husband was placed on pedestal, thus he was expected to be obeyed and followed, as showed by the author through a folk song Chinese women sang, according to a story Kingston was once told:

Marry a rooster, follow a rooster.  
Marry a dog, follow a dog.  
Married to a cudgel, married to a pestle,  
Be faithful to it. Follow it. (Kingston, 193)

A Chinese woman was taught to follow three obediences during her life – “obey her father at home, her husband after marriage, and her eldest son if she was widowed“ (Pfaelzer, 101). In addition to this, a Chinese woman found herself not only in the role of obedient servant to her husband, but also to the husband’s original family. As Kingston herself highlights, “a synonym for marriage in Chinese is ‘taking a daughter-in-law’“ (7). When a married woman lived with her husband’s family, she was obliged to revere them and serve its members. This form of exploitation is also mentioned in the book:

Free from families, my mother would live for two years without servitude. She would not have to run errands for my father’s tyrant mother with the bound feet or thread needles for the old ladies... (Kingston, 62)

This passage is devoted to Kingston’s mother. When her husband, Kingston’s father, left to the U.S. to earn money, she used her regular allowance to pay for a

school in Canton in Kwangtung City to become a doctor. Therefore for 2-year-long period she was not manipulated by her husband's family.

Also, to have certain privileges, was hard to imagine for a Chinese woman, who has never been valued, as pointed out in Kingston's novel:

Not many women got to live out the daydream of women – to have a room, even a section of a room, that only gets messed up when she messes it up herself. The book would stay open at the very page she had pressed flat with her hand, and no one would complain about the field not being plowed or the leak in the roof. (Kingston, 61)

As the excerpt above does, this one also describes Kingston's mother as the woman deprived of her basic rights, within the Chinese patriarchal society. She stays in a dormitory, she shares a room with other women and she enjoys the advantages that life without husband's presence offers her. She does not have to serve anyone, neither her husband, neither her husband's family, nobody discriminates her, things stay the way she has left them before, which is a great relief for her. What is more, she does not have to run the household, repair things or work in the fields – errands she would otherwise have to take care of.

In the case of disobedience to her husband or the husband's family, the Chinese woman was severely punished in her father's narration and as such reflected in the novel:

'Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ant nests,' my father said. 'A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that.' Confucius, the rational man. (Kingston, 193)

In this excerpt, Kingston's revulsion of the typical Chinese tradition is obvious. As never before, she is told by her father. Kingston has never visited China and all talk-stories she has ever heard about her parents' home were told her by mother only. To demonstrate womanhood, there are hardly any men characters, who would shape Kingston's personality, mentioned. This may be due to the fact that for centuries, China has been ruled by male dominant society and Kingston feels it is time to leave men out. When reading this excerpt, one can also interpret this part as striking

difference between two worlds – China being shaped by Confucius philosophy, which contradicts America following the individualist approach.

Ultimately, a Chinese woman had hardly any rights, she could not divorce or remarry, even though her husband died. On the other hand, a Chinese man was allowed to commit adultery, divorce, remarry, be polygamous and treat his wife as he found reasonable (Pfaelzer, 101). He was also permitted to kill her, if he regarded this a justifiable act. In other words, being a woman in China meant to be 'rubbish' – from the very beginning of such a tragic life to its very end.

As Küng states, a virtuous Chinese adhering to Confucius values was obliged to procreate descendants to ensure the continuity of ancestors' line. This argument justified the practice of polygamy in China (81). A woman is of no importance to men dominated society and her only function is to produce more sons. The attitude towards females is pointed out in Kingston's novel:

When one of my parents or the emigrant villagers said 'Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,' I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn't talk. I couldn't stop. 'What's the matter with her?' 'I don't know. Bad, I guess. You know how girls are. There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls.' (Kingston, 46)

In this passage, Kingston, as a student, gets straight A's and there is nobody to appreciate her effort even though she is extremely bright. She knows that the undermining of women has to do something with being Chinese, as she is constantly underestimated at home.

As Griffiths maintains, due to the anti-female attitudes that surround her, Kingston considers a female body "a demonic force" (360) which is "contaminated with death" (360). Therefore, in her stories, she "becomes a predator" haunting for its prey. Kingston often behaves in a destructive manner, participates in acts full of violence as she tries to relieve the anger caused by these prejudices (360):

Her skin was fleshy, like squid out of which the glassy blades of bones had been pulled. I wanted tough skin, hard brown skin. I had callused my hands; I had scratched dirt to blacken the nails, which I cut straight across to make stubby fingers. I gave her face a squeeze. 'Talk.' When I let go, the pink rushed back into my white thumbprint on her skin. (Kingston, 176)

This passage shows Kingston in a negative light, as the major negative force. The author victimizes a classmate, who refuses to talk and Kingston tortures her in the girls' yard as she desperately tries to make her speak. The bullied girl looks like a paper doll, so vulnerable, neat and supported at home – something Kingston secretly yearns for but has never achieved.

An imbalanced ratio thus scarcity of Chinese women is one of the major factors responsible for an increased demand for prostitutes in the U.S. Furthermore, sexual relations between Chinese men and white women were not allowed, therefore Chinese prostitutes were in demand. With reference to Mišćević, "an estimated 85 percent of the 1,784 Chinese women in San Francisco in 1860 were prostitutes" (89). According to Pfaelzer, brothels were called "convents," "hotels," or "green mansions" (92). A short poem which follows proves the invidious position the Chinese prostitutes often found themselves in:

A green mansion is a place of filth and shame  
Of lost chastity and lost virtue  
Most repulsive is it to kiss the customers on the lips  
And let them fondle every part of my body  
I hesitate, I resist;  
All the more ashamed, beyond words.  
I must by all means leave this troupe of flowers and rouge;  
Find a nice man and follow him as his woman. (Pfaelzer, 92-93)

As Pfaelzer maintains, many prostitutes were kidnapped and locked in cages or small chambers "forced to solicit men who passed by" (Pfaelzer, 93). In China, the Chinese woman "always did as she was told" (Kingston, 6). The Chinese women were used to following men under all circumstances. Such exploitation is depicted in Kingston's novel:

Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her  
to lie with him and be his secret evil. (Kingston, 6)

This passage illustrates Kingston justifying behaviour of her aunt, who is pregnant with one of the villagers. Kingston claims that the Chinese women did not act voluntarily and were forced to do things which they would, under divergent conditions, never agree with.

Despite the abolition of slavery, by performing these illegal activities, there was still slave trade in the West brought by the Chinese (Pfaelzer, 93-95). Buying a slave was nothing unusual in China, as Kingston describes in her novel:

My mother would buy her slave from a professional whose little girls stood neatly in a row and bowed together when a customer looked them over. 'How do you do, Sir?' they would sing. 'How do you do, Madam?' 'Let a little slave do your shopping for you,' the older girls chorused. 'We've been taught to bargain. We've been taught to sew. We can cook, and we can knit.' Some of the dealers merely had the children bow quietly. Others had them sing a happy song about flowers. (Kingston, 79)

Obviously, it was a matter of routine for the Chinese to buy girl slaves to help them run their household in China, however they also brought many slaves to the U.S., who then worked as prostitutes.

What impacts this had on the nation as a whole with regards to the Chinese immigrants? As Gossett explains, it is little wonder that another reason for the rejection of the Chinese would be loose morals, not to mention the opinion that the Chinese were "morally, the most debased people on the face of the earth" (290). Moreover, sexual practices which in other countries were "barely names, are in China so common that they excite no comment among the natives. Their touch is pollution, and harsh as the opinion may seem, justice to our own race demands that they should not settle on our soil" (290). Prostitution and gangs committing crimes and violence were amongst the factors responsible for the opinion on the Chinese, who were seen as "bloodthirsty gangsters, gamblers and pimps" (Mišćević, 89).

## 5. ACTS RESTRICTING THE CHINESE

The issue of prostitution was dealt with in The Page Act from 1875, which, as Gabaccia highlights, strictly excluded Chinese women who were not merchant's wives from moving to the U.S., as most of them worked as prostitutes among the bachelor Chinese population (123).

As Pfaelzer claims, the question is why the American government targeted the Chinese women, when in fact, there was "one Chinese woman for every twenty-one Chinese men" (101). The reason was simple - to keep the Chinese population as low as possible (101). Another fact is that living a life full of austerity under these unbearable conditions became rather impossible without women's presence. Thus another reason for the Chinese to leave the US.

According to Pfaelzer, the tactics which the Americans used to prevent Chinese women from entering the U.S. were cruel. Not only most of women were rejected to obtain visas (104), but were subjects to questioning immediately after their arrival to the immigration office. The situation at Angel and Ellis Island, the „ports of new hope,“ is depicted in the book:

Ellis Island had been made out of wood and iron. Here everything was new plastic, a ghost trick to lure immigrants into feeling safe and spilling their secrets. Then the Alien Office could send them right back. Otherwise, why did they lock her out, not letting her help her sister answer questions and spell her name? At Ellis Island when the ghost asked Brave Orchid what year her husband had cut off his pigtail, a Chinese who was crouching on the floor motioned her not to talk. 'I don't know,' she had said. If it weren't for that Chinese man, she might not be here today, or her husband either. She hoped some Chinese, a janitor or a clerk, would look out for Moon Orchid. Luggage conveyors fooled immigrants into thinking the Gold Mountain was going to be easy. (Kingston, 115-116)

This passage refers to the arrival of Kingston's mother's sister, Moon Orchid. Moon Orchid stayed in China while her husband shipped to the "Gold Mountain," being expected to send for his wife as soon as he settles down. However, he did not do so for thirty years, therefore Brave Orchid, Kingston's mother, decided to solve this by herself and sent for her sister to China.

It is interesting how conflicting the visions of the different coasts (even though both part of the United States) were. According to Iris Chang, Ellis Island in New York was seen as a symbol of freedom for Europeans, on the contrary, Angel Island in San Francisco was seen as a place of imprisonment, where the Chinese immigrants were jailed (148). Similarly, the situation of the Chinese immigrants experiencing the hardship when arriving in America is shown in the following poem, as quoted in Chin:

So, liberty is your national principle;  
Why do you practice autocracy?  
You don't uphold justice, you Americans,  
You detain me in prison, guard me closely.  
Your officials are wolves and tigers,  
All ruthless, all wanting to bite me.  
An innocent man implicated, such an injustice!  
When can I get out of this prison and free my mind?  
(Chin, 67)

As Pfaelzer contributes to the point, when arriving to the immigration office, women's parentage was also questioned under the threat of placing their children in orphanages or simply putting them up for adoption to white families (104). Suffice it to say that considering these difficult conditions, many Chinese women refused to follow their men across the ocean and rather decided to stay in China. Also, many Chinese men soon found another way how to entertain themselves – in the form of prostitutes, concubines and new American wives. They still sent allowance back home to China to support their original Chinese wife but had no real intention to return permanently or send for her. This situation is also showed in Kingston's work:

Moon Orchid did not say anything. For thirty years she had been receiving money from him from America. But she had never told him that she wanted to come to the United States. She waited for him to suggest it, but he never did. Nor did she tell him that her sister had been working for years to transport her here. (Kingston, 124)

The Chinese willingness to work for the lowest salaries was, indeed, an economic threat for the Americans. Therefore they pressured the Congress to pass The Exclusion Act, which would severely limit the number of coming Chinese to the country. Passed by the 47<sup>th</sup> Congress, Chinese laborers were suspended to immigrate to the U.S. for ten years, it "prohibited the naturalization of Chinese" and specifically

conditioned teachers, students, merchants and travelers who “would be admitted upon presentation of a certificate from the Chinese government“ (“Chinese immigration,“ online).

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or, having so come after the expiration of said ninety days, to remain within the United States. (“transcript, online“)

Chinese Exclusion Act is one of the historical events, which greatly shaped Kingston’s novel. Even though there are no passages, which would directly link to the Exclusion Act itself, the book is written as an enormous struggle of the first Chinese immigrants to adapt in a new, foreign country. However there were many restrictions and anti-miscegenation laws, which would purposely complicate their life.

The Chinese Exclusion Act came in law on May 6, 1882 and as Chin points out, “it was the first anti-immigration law in the history of America“ and it declares that “American immigration policy has been racist, or at a minimum racially biased.“ (68) With reference to Iris Chang, the Exclusion Act was “one of the most infamous and tragic statutes in American history“ (132) which was ever enacted. Not only it succeeded in preventing new Chinese immigrants from American shores, but it also focused on expelling the Chinese already living there. Such dark period is known as “the Driving Out“ (132) , and during this time there were a few Chinese communities “subjected to a level of violence that approached genocide“ (132). According to Gabaccia, “that restriction applied only to Chinese laborers and it was limited to 10 years“ (123).

There were many affairs consequently following passing The Exclusion Act of 1882. These events often had disastrous impact on the Chinese community. As Pfaelzer states, white miners went on strike until the Chinese miners got fired. He also adds that there were boycotts against all stores which recruited the Chinese or sell goods of Chinese origin. During these boycotts, men wore “dusters“ (259) with the name of

the business and the slogan “An enemy to white labor“ (259) and marched in front of the stores. In addition to this, several rallies took place in San Francisco, where whites demanded “relief on the Chinese plague“ (259).

According to Daniels, even though The Exclusion Act “froze the Chinese community“ (246) and “ossified the gender structure“ (246) for a long period, the Chinese community soon realized how to replenish itself. Logically, there were numerous illegal border crossings, plus the Chinese soon created an immigration fraud the community called “paper sons“ (246). According to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which came in law in 1868 and protected the rights of newly freed blacks, “all persons born...in the United States“ (246) were citizens. Therefore the Chinese born on American soil were citizens that could go and travel to China, marry and have children. As the author further points out, these children could travel back to the U.S. because they were the legal offspring of the American citizen (246).

The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 was an excellent chance for the Chinese, because it destroyed the city records, thus many Chinese claimed they were US citizens (246) . Such affair is illustrated in Kingston’s novel:

**‘DON’T TELL,**’advised my parents. ‘Don’t go to the San Francisco until they leave.’ Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake. Tell them your birth certificate and your parents were burned up in the fire. Don’t report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty. Give a new name every time you get arrested; the ghosts won’t recognize you. (Kingston, 185)

This excerpt shows us the way Kingston was instructed to act when confronted by the police. As her parents are experienced enough, Kingston is prohibited to give any information to the authorities. This excerpt begins with “Don’t tell,“ as the Kingston is made keep silent about her parents and the community. Kingston, as the first generation Chinese-American is confused and torn between her attitudes – either to hide and lie about her parents or behave according to American laws and tell the authorities the truth and betray her parents, her own blood.

Generally, the vast majority of the Chinese lived in the U.S. illegally. They lived underground lives hiding whenever the police would be close. Furthermore, many

of them lived with fake identification papers using a fake name all their life. As the author describes:

Occasionally the rumor went about that the United States immigration authorities had set up headquarters in the San Francisco or Sacramento Chinatown to urge wetbacks and stowaways, anybody here on fake papers, to come to the city and get their files straightened out. The immigrants discussed whether or not to turn themselves in. 'We might as well,' somebody would say. 'Then we'd have our citizenship for real.' 'Don't be a fool,' somebody else would say. 'It's a trap. You go in there saying you want to straighten out your papers, they'll deport you.' 'No they won't. They're promising that nobody is going to go to jail or get deported. They'll give you citizenship as a reward for turning yourself in, for your honesty.' 'Don't you believe it. So-and-so trusted them, and he was deported. They deported his children too.' (Kingston, 185)

In this passage, the immigration issues are discussed by two immigrants. The first one thinks about turning himself in and believes in what the American authorities promised when the Chinese would go and "straighten their papers out" (Kingston, 185). The second immigrant though, refuses it and discourages the first immigrant from doing so, as he/she thinks it is just a trap and he/she may be either put in a jail or deported back to China. However, in Iris Chang's view, the vast majority of the Chinese who confessed to their own status were let to stay in the country, even though from the psychological point of view, long after this dark period, one could still sense "the shadow of inquisition" (252) when walking through San Francisco Chinatown (252).

Many Chinese, in desperate hope to detract from the visible signs that set them apart from the dominant American society Americanized their name. The urge to change the original Chinese name while living in America is also portrayed in the following passage:

Nor did she change her name: Brave Orchid. Professional women have the right to use their maiden names if they like. Even when she emigrated, my mother kept Brave Orchid, adding no American name nor holding one in reserve for American emergencies. (Kingston, 77)

In this illustration, Kingston admires her mother for being brave and for not changing her name American way. Such process was, for many immigrants, essential to survive as they were mostly illegal immigrants hiding from authorities.

## 6. COMMUNISM

In addition to The Page Act and The Chinese Exclusion Act, Communist regime is another political incident, which strongly influenced this book. Affairs of 1949, which Kingston's relatives, remaining in China faced, are illustrated in Kingston's book.

Being preceded by many political incidents, in October 1949 Mao Zedong, a newly elected chairman of the new Central Government, formally declared the People's Republic of China (Terrill, 198, New York Times, online). The main principle of Communists was common ownership and production ("rise of communism", online).

As one of the Mao's policy was equality of people, he confiscated landlords' land and redistributed it amongst the poor peasants. It goes without saying that many peasants, in a desperate hope to improve their social situation often spoke against their former landlords, which resulted in numerous investigations, massacres or violent removals of the landowners from the country. It is said several million landowners were killed during this period. According to New York Times, Mao himself admitted to killing 800 000 "opponents of the regime," and many people were "executed on charges of spying and counter- revolution"(New York Times, online). As Jung Chang and Jon Halliday maintain, these investigations were mass assemblies, where many people were forced to confess being landowners. The ones, who insisted on being innocent and who claimed that they had not been counter-revolutionaries, were consequently bound and dragged to the prison or were executed. The fear caused by these assemblies was unbearable. These manifestations were an extremely difficult war of nerves, even more devastating than any other kind of torture (258). These investigations of Kingston's relatives are described in her novel:

The other letters said that my uncles were made to kneel on broken glass during their trials and had confessed to being landowners. They were all executed, and the aunt whose thumbs were twisted off drowned herself. Other aunts, mothers-in-law, and cousins disappeared... They kept asking for money. The ones in communes got four ounces of fat and one cup of oil a week, they said, and had to work from 4 A.M. to 9 P.M... The Communists gave axes to the old ladies and said, 'Go and kill yourself. You're useless. If we overseas Chinese would just send money to the Communist bank, our relatives said, they might get a percentage of it for themselves...The children were begging on the sidewalks, and mean people put dirt in their bowls. (Kingston, 50)

In this passage, Kingston's parents receive letters reporting what happened to their uncles and other relatives after they confessed to being landowners. Kingston also describes the situation in China of 1949. There was an extreme poverty and famine. As a result, Kingston's relatives regularly asked for money.

Another awkward example of what happened to the Chinese who were not willing to follow the Communist policy is also portrayed in the following paragraph:

'Starving to death, his wife and children starving to death, and he's too damned shy to raise his voice.' She left him standing by himself and afraid to return empty-handed to her. He sat under a tree to think, when he spotted a pair of nesting doves... That was where the Communists trapped him, in the tree. They criticized him for selfishly taking food for his own family and killed him, leaving his body in the tree as an example. They took the birds to a commune kitchen to be shared. (Kingston, 51)

In this paragraph, the author exemplifies a gruesome act of her uncle's murder, who was slaughtered for killing two doves and his body was displayed on the tree as an example to the passers-by. Not to share or have some private possession was against the Communist ideology.

On the other hand, as Nosostro says, there were many positive changes in China regarding women, who, in fact, benefitted of the revolution. The Communist Party liberated Chinese women as a part of China's modernization and democratization. By 1949, practice of footbinding was outlawed. In addition to this, women were not considered less than humans anymore as "husbands were not allowed to abusing their wife, have concubines, or use prostitutes." Furthermore, "marriages could no longer be arranged, and divorce was made easier to obtain" (Nosostro, online). This period, so important for women to gain their confidence back, is also depicted in the novel:

Nobody wrote to tell us that Mao himself had been matched to an older girl when he was a child and that he was freeing women from prisons, where they had been put for refusing the businessmen their parents had picked as husbands. Nobody told us that the Revolution (the Liberation) was againsts girl slavery and girl infanticide (a village-wide party if it's a boy). Girls would no longer have to kill themselves rather than get married. May the Communists light up the house on a girl's birthday. (Kingston, 190-191)

## 7. HARD WORK AS THE MEANS OF ASSIMILATION

Initially, the Chinese were recruited mainly for heavy work in the gold mines and they labored on the Central Pacific Railroad. However, gradually, they branched out into other fields - specifically fishing industry, harvesting, agriculture and shoe making (Daniels, 243). Furthermore, they worked as laundrymen, cooks, barbers, and truck gardeners (Mišćević, 69). The Chinese were good and diligent workers and were able to work long hours. An extreme diligence and hard work is also depicted in Kingston's book:

In back there was also a bedroom for the nights when they finished packaging too tired to walk home. Then five or six people would crowd into the bed together. Some slept on the ironing tables, and the small children slept on the shelves. The shades would be pulled over the display windows and the door. The laundry would become a cozy new home, almost safe from the night footsteps, the traffic, the city outside. The boiler would rest, and no ghost would know there were Chinese asleep in their laundry. (Kingston, 137-138)

The need to excel through hard work has traditionally been one of the values of Confucius teaching (Küng, 83). Generally, all the family was involved in the process with family members either changing shifts or working together, as described in the book:

My mother's most peaceful time was in the evenings when she starched the white shirts. The laundry would be clean, the grey wood floors sprinkled and swept with water and wet sawdust. She would be wringing shirts at the starch tub and not running about. My father and sisters and brothers would be at their own jobs mending, folding, packaging. (Kingston, 198)

As already mentioned, when working in the laundry, sometimes all the family was entailed. In this illustration, Kingston trails memories connected with her childhood and adolescent life.

On the contrary, even for the Chinese who were used to working hard, as the result of Confucius philosophy, work in the U.S. was an extreme (Kingston, 105). In the next passage, Kingston's mother complains about her life full of duties in America and compares it to the life in China. Kingston's mother seems to be consumed by hard

work. Furthermore, she feels she got old in America, one of the consequences of working so hard:

'I have worked too much. Human beings don't work like this in China. Time goes slower there. Here we have to hurry, feed the hungry children before we're too old to work. I feel like a mother cat hunting for its kittens. She has to find them fast because in a few hours she will forget how to count or that she had any kittens at all. I can't sleep in this country because it doesn't shut down for the night. Factories, canneries, restaurants – always somebody somewhere working through the night. It never gets done all at once here. Time was different in China.'  
(Kingston, 105-106)

## 8. TRADITIONAL VIEWS AND FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

Generally, the Chinese are filial tradition keepers and they prefer the well-being of all the community, instead of an individual. To behave on private individual lust is a crime to the Chinese (Kingston, 13). The most vivid part dealing with such topic is described in the first chapter “No Name Woman,” where Kingston’s aunt behaves on her private interests and is severely punished not only by her family, but also by the villagers, as a consequence of the attempt to have a private life:

The frightened villagers, who depended on one another to maintain the real, went to my aunt to show her a personal, physical representation of the break she had made in the ‘roundness.’ Misallying couples snapped off the future, which was to be embodied in true offspring. The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a *private life*, secret and apart from them...*Adultery*, perhaps only a mistake during good times, *became a crime* when the village needed food. (Kingston, 12-13)

“No Name Woman,” Kingston’s aunt, must face the punishment, because, by being “pregnant outside marriage, she exposed her community“ (Griffiths, 355) to possible shortage of financial add. The less financial support, the less food, which, in starvation times in China could have been the major reason for death (Kingston, 13). In anger, the villagers raid the family house and slaughter all domestic animals. Consequently, Kingston’s aunt is blamed for bringing violence into the villagers’ lives due to her irresponsible and selfish behaviour.

In Kung’s view, the respect for parents or elder people and the virtue of filial piety traditionally belongs to the values of Confucius philosophy (53). Needles to say that the old generation, Kingston’s mother and father respected the traditional Confucius teaching. The superiority of the older generation to the young Chinese is showed in the following citation:

‘You don’t even say hello to the villagers.’ ‘They don’t say hello to me.’ ‘They don’t have to answer children. When you get old, people will say hello to you.’ (Kingston, 203)

In this passage, Kingston’s mother scolds Kingston for being irreproachable and for not expressing gratitude to the older generation. According to Kung, deep

reverence for the older person and his wisdom is an essential part of Chinese history (14). In other words, not to pay honour to the older Chinese person was a moral misdemeanour. As the Chinese community survival utterly depends on its members and the way they cooperate, life cycle reminds a circle (Kingston, 12-13). The symbolic circle is also depicted in Kingston's novel, where the author highlights the importance of "roundness" in Chinese life:

The *round* moon cakes and *round* doorways, the *round* tables of graduated sizes that fit one *roundness* inside another, *round* windows and rice bowls – these talismans had lost their power to warn this family of the law : a family must be whole, faithfully keeping the descent line by having sons to feed the old and the dead, who in turn look after the family. (Kingston, 13)

Regardless of their background, there are certain Chinese customs and superstitions they adhere. Superstitions, in general, are a vital part of the Chinese cultural heritage and give the public an excellent opportunity to decode Chinese attitudes, customs, principles and religious believes ("Chinese superstitions," online). The Chinese are superstitious about numbers, colours, and auspicious animals, they believe in spirits. This is also reason for revering the old and the dead, the Chinese believe the dead will bring them good luck if they were well taken care of while alive (Kingston, 13). The fact that the Chinese society is rife with superstitious believes is proved in Kingston's work:

Recognizing the presence of great power, she asked the spirit of the white crane if it would teach her to fight. (Kingston, 19)

According to superstition, a crane represents longevity, something that the Chinese in particular have long been interested in ("PCHS," online)

The only letters they opened without fear were the ones with *red borders*, the holiday letters that mustn't carry bad news. (Kingston, 50)

In this excerpt, Kingston's parents are not afraid to open the letters with "red borders," as they believe such letters can not bring them bad luck.

In other words, red and gold are extremely promising colours. Red colour is an essential part of various celebrations, such as weddings and birthdays and other important events. As a consequence, red is also the colour of Chinese national flag ("PCHS," online).

## 9. LOST IDENTITY

Kingston is the first generation Chinese-American and is not “mere sojourning immigrant,” thus one may expect her life passing smoothly. Yet, the author herself experienced hard times to adapt. Particularly the first generation, in other words the immigrants’ children who were born in the destination country, suffered from „rootlessness“ – they did not know where they belonged, and they were often in the unpleasant position of either following the tradition represented by their immigrant parents or adapting to their home – their birthplace. Being Chinese-American meant to be somewhere in the middle, stuck between two cultures. For Americans, Chinese-Americans were never genuine Americans even though they had been, as a matter of fact, born in the U.S. For the Chinese, they were ghost-like, because they were taught by American teachers and their personality was shaped American way. Many parents wished their children adjusted to the new culture, on the other hand, they still wanted their children to carry on their Chinese cultural heritage. To bring up a child whose character is strongly influenced by the individual American environment and demand him/her to stay traditional was impossible. As a consequence, many first generation Chinese-Americans faced a dilemma and were mixed up. Kingston’s novel, “*The Woman Warrior*“, is about this dilemma she was in during her life in the U.S. Her work describes various difficulties she experienced not only towards the society, but also towards her own family. The examples are widely illustrated throughout the book:

When we had not banged lids at the last eclipse and the shadow kept receding anyway, she’d said, ‘The villagers must be banging and clanging very loudly back home in China.’ (‘On the other side of the world, they aren’t having an eclipse, Mama. That’s just a shadow the earth makes when it comes between the moon and the sun.’ ‘You’re always believing what those Ghost Teachers tell you. Look at the size of the jaws!’) (Kingston, 169)

In the dialogue mentioned above, Kingston’s mother superstitiously indoctrinates Kingston why the eclipse went away. Kingston explains to her mother there is no eclipse back in China. She knows because she attends school and is educated.

Generally, women in China “were deprived of all rights,” thus education was denied to them as well (Nosostro, online). Kingston’s mother, however, went to the college and she obtained a degree. Strikingly, even though well educated, her mother still remains a traditionalist, which is proved by her response to Kingston. The whole dialogue demonstrates a generation gap between traditional, superstitious, Chinese mother and logical, American individualist Kingston.

As mentioned before, Kingston, as the first Chinese-American experiences uncertainty of her position within society and her “insanity seems imminent”(Griffiths, 359). She interprets spirits talking inside her head as the sign of being mentally weakened. Another excerpt declares the author’s feeling of being identically lost:

I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It at our house? Probably me. (Kingston, 189)

The narrator confrontates herself with different insane women she has been surrounded by and her conclusion is she must be insane as well. She doubts her abilities as she differs greatly from her sister, who is always neat and tidy. In contrast, Kingston is a messy woman, breaks things, undergoes a mysterious illness and secretly talks to people inside her head (Griffiths, 359). She regards herself to be a family idiot, a stranger, because she is the first Chinese-American, neither Chinese, nor American.

The issue of lost identity is also recognizable in the passage, where, during her classes, Kingston is confused because of difference between English language system and Chinese ideographs. It is extremely difficult for the author to “locate herself and construct her identity“ (Lee, 108). She compares the tension between two different languages to the difference between two different cultures:

Reading out loud was easier than speaking because we did not have to make up what to say, but I stopped often, and the teacher would think I’d gone quiet again. I could not understand ‘I’. 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? (Kingston, 166)

## 10. GENERATION GAP AND CULTURE CLASH

The issue of generation gap is one of the major themes in Kingston's novel. It is not only generation gap between two generations of the same origin and living in the same society, but it is a gap between two generations being born in two culturally diversified countries. Kingston's mother, even though well educated still remains a traditionalist, however Kingston herself was born in the U.S. Kingston is Chinese-American, having different attitudes, behaving in a different way. Throughout the book, this issue is also exemplified:

**'HO CHI KUEI,'** she shouted. 'Ho Chi Kuei. Leave then. Get out, you Ho Chi Kuei. Get out. I knew you were going to turn out bad. Ho Chi Kuei.' My brothers and sisters had left the table, and my father would not look at me anymore, ignoring me...Or perhaps I've romanized the spelling wrong and it is Hao Chi Kuei, which could mean they are calling us 'Good Foundation Ghosts.' (Kingston, 204)

This citation claims a gap between mother and her daughter. An exact illustration is when Kingston's mother calls her "Ho Chi Kuei" (204), an odd name first generation Chinese-Americans got as a consequence of being born on "Gold Mountain," thus having certain privileges (Kingston, 205).

Another example of the generation gap is shown in the following excerpt, where Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid, wants Moon Orchid to rejoin her husband in the U.S. Moon Orchid's husband has lived in the U.S. for more than thirty years and even though he regularly sent allowance to his Chinese wife, he never really desired to meet her again. In this excerpt Brave Orchid carefully plans the incident in order to lure the husband, a successful brain surgeon, downstairs to meet them. The following passage offers a picture of the profound generation gap between a Chinese mother and a Chinese-American son. Notice the distance in mother's voice, especially when she refers to her own son and younger generation as "**YOU AMERICANS:**"

'Mm,' mused Brave Orchid. 'Maybe we ought to put your aunt in the middle of the street, and she can lie down with her leg bent under her.' But Moon Orchid kept shaking her head in trembling no's. 'Why don't you push her down in the intersection and pour ketchup on her? I'll run over her a little bit,' said her son. 'Stop being silly,' she said. '**YOU AMERICANS** don't take life seriously.' 'Mother, this is ridiculous. This whole thing is ridiculous.' 'Go. Do what I tell you,' she said. 'I

think your schemes will be useless, Mother.' 'What do you know about Chinese business?' she said. 'Do as I say.' (Kingston, 150-151)

Culturally speaking, the U.S. and China diverse greatly. Furthermore, not only physically, by appearance and language, but the Chinese also differ by having different attitudes and values. These disparities, which utterly set the Chinese apart from the Americans, contributed to the fact it was a painful journey for the traditional Chinese to fit in America.

As Kingston states, the Chinese are used to be extremely loud in public, but when they are at home being surrounded by the closest family, they keep silent, glare sideways and never talk about taboos (11). On the other hand, Americans, when being flattered thank the person without hesitation, which is in contrast to modest Chinese, as shown in Kingston's novel:

'You're pretty,' she said. 'Thank you, Aunt,' they answered. How vain. She marveled at their vanity. 'You play the radio beautifully,' she teased, and sure enough, they gave one another puzzled looks. She tried all kinds of compliments, and they never said, 'Oh no, you're too kind. I can't play it at all. I'm stupid. I'm ugly.' They were capable children; they could do servants' work. But they were not modest. (Kingston, 134)

This conversation shows the surprise of Moon Orchid, when she compares Chinese children and Chinese-American children, her nieces, living in Brave Orchid's house. They are too confident, they accept the compliments without refusing them or at least being surprised, which is shocking for Moon Orchid.

The following excerpt portrays culture clash between two generations: Brave Orchid, an immigrant mother, who, despite her life in the U.S. remains traditionalist, and her "American children." Brave Orchid and her children wait at the airport for their aunt, Brave Orchid's sister. Brave Orchid is very impatient and angry with her children because they do not take part in the „waiting ceremony:“

Her American children could not sit for very long. They did not understand sitting; they had wandering feet. She hoped they would get back from the pay t.v.'s or the pay toilets or wherever they were

spending their money before the plane arrived. (Kingston, the introductory page of “At the Western Palace“)

Despite the fact that Kingston is several times reminded ‘not to tell anyone’ what she is about to hear, she refuses to be a silent victim and tells everyone. As Griffiths states, Kingston gives her testimony in order to challenge injustice she encountered when living the life of the first generation Chinese-American (368). She rejects to be silenced and further traumatized and actually tells on her ancestors, as we can see in the opening passage of the book:

**‘You must not tell anyone,’** my mother said, ‘what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born.’ (Kingston, the introductory page)

The excerpt above is the very introduction of Kingston’s novel. Even though being prohibited from telling, the author breaks the rule and through her testimonial book she tells everyone. Due to the silence of Kingston’s aunt, the author “finds her own voice“ (Griffiths, 361) and finally interrupts the Chinese tradition of keeping secrets within their communities. Throughout her book, Kingston often accuses her family of not being honest with her and for “glaring sideways“ (11) whenever there was a dilemma brought up in conversation. Another example of Kingston revolting against her silent Chinese family declares Kingston being mature and valuating the issues from the different perspective:

They hit you if you wash your hair on certain days, or tap somebody with a ruler, or step over a brother whether it’s during yur menses or not. You figure out what you got hit for and don’t do it again if you figured correctly. But I think that if you don’t figure it out, it’s all right. Then you can grow up bothered by ‘neither ghosts nor deities.’ ‘Gods you avoid won’t hurt you.’ I don’t see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. Maybe they didn’t ; maybe everyone make it up as they go along. If we had to depend on being told, we’d have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death. (Kingston, 185)

In addition to this, the author rejects to blindly continue to carry the burden of being quiet and all the issues which have been bottling up inside her make “her throat burst open“ (Kingston, 201). The following passage takes place in the laundry, when all

the family gather around the table to eat dinner together and Kingston can not hide her feelings anymore. The author begins to feel revulsion against her parents and can not remain silent any longer:

‘Do you know what the Teacher Ghosts call me? They tell me I’m smart, and I can win scholarships. I can get into colleges. I’ve already applied. I’m smart. I can do all kinds of things. I know how to get A’s, and they say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself. So you don’t have to find me a keeper who’s too dumb to know a bad bargain. I’m so smart, if they say write ten pages, I can write fifteen. I can do ghost things even better than ghosts can. Not everybody thinks I’m nothing. I am not going to be a slave or a wife. Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won’t let you turn me into a slave or a wife. I’m getting out of here. I can’t stand living here anymore. It’s your fault I talk weird. The only reason I flunked kindergarten was because you couldn’t teach me English, and you gave me a zero IQ.’ (Kingston, 201)

As the title itself already suggests, ghosts play an essential role and are widely presented throughout the book (Lee, 112). In her novel, Kingston uses ‘ghosts’ in three different contexts. Firstly, her mother Brave Orchid fights the ghost and exorcises him from the college haunted dormitory room, therefore the ‘ghost’, in this passage, represents the sign of the evil spirit:

‘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.’ (Kingston, 70)

This citation declares the braveness of Kingston’s mother, when she fights the demon spirit in the Keung School, where she studies. Kingston’s mother chants the lessons to the ‘ghost’ and demonstrates herself as a powerful woman. At the end of the incident, she successfully exorcises him and the ghost wanders off (Lee, 114).

Secondly, ‘ghost’ refers to the Chinese immigrant, a foreigner, an outsider. This term is used for the Chinese person that will never fit in the dominant white American society and will be always looked upon with disgust. (Lee, 112) Not being regarded the American citizen has always been an inner struggle for Kingston. As Daniels claims, “All persons born...in the United States“ (246) automatically become citizens (246). Strikingly, even people who were not born in the U.S., but lived in the

U.S. for a considerable time were not afraid of considering the Chinese 'ghosts.' This term is also used in the passage, where Moon Orchid meets her husband:

He looked at Moon Orchid. Again the rude American eyes... 'I could get arrested if the Americans knew about you. I'M LIVING LIKE AN AMERICAN'... Moon Orchid was so ashamed, she held her hands over her face. She wished she could also hide her dappled hands. Her husband looked like one of the ghosts passing the car windows, and she must look like a ghost from China. They had indeed entered the land of ghosts, and they had become ghosts. (Kingston, 153)

In this excerpt, ghost positions reverse. To Moon Orchid's husband, Moon Orchid is the ghost from China. It is understood that her husband has fully assimilated to the life in America after 30 years and became one of Americans, for whom the Chinese were ghost-like outsiders. The most important line in the passage is the one when he maintains he lives like an American now and can not have two wives, as it is illegal, in the U.S. He does not want to have anything in common with Chinese ghosts.

At third, the term 'ghost' refers to American, who himself is perceived by the Chinese as someone who culturally differentiates, is not capable of keeping traditions and has different attitudes. As Kingston further explains:

But 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. Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts, way around the White Ghosts and their cars. There were Black Ghosts too, but they were open eyed and full of laughter, more distinct than White Ghosts. (Kingston, 97)

As Lee states, in this passage, Kingston uses this 'ghost' derogatory term on purpose, when she describes Americans as various kinds of 'ghosts.' Despite the fact that America is a synonym for 'Melting pot', one of the nicknames the United States has come to be known by throughout recent decades, she racially debases ethnic people and people of a different colour living in the U.S. The professions as taxi drivers, bus drivers and policemen have not always been done by dominant white people, so she doubts other cultures' equality (112). At the end of this passage, Kingston regards "White Ghosts" the worst 'ghosts' of all. According to her, white dominant society is not capable of showing their own feelings and are the worst of all diverse cultures.

## 11. CONCLUSION

There were many reasons why the Chinese immigrants were not desirable in the U.S. Their exotic appearance, cacophonous Chinese language they spoke and the unusual rituals they practised were major cultural differences which were, in many cases frowned upon. In addition to this, the Chinese willingness to work for lower salaries than their white fellow workers added to the deterioration in relationship between the Chinese and the general public. As a result, restriction and anti-miscegenation laws were passed on by the government and the Chinese were strongly urged to leave the U.S. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is one of the historical incidents which greatly influenced Maxine Hong Kingston's semibibliographical novel *The Woman Warrior*.

Generally, Chinese-American literature often portrays the hardships caused by being of hyphenated identity. Similarly, *The Woman Warrior* shows Maxine Hong Kingston in a difficult position of being trapped between the dominant American culture and her own Chinese subculture. Without any doubt, most Chinese immigrant parents wanted to see their children to lead happier and more fulfilled lives than they had lived. On the other hand, they still desired their children to be aware of their original cultural heritage. Needless to say that these difficult conditions resulted in feelings of "rootlessness", lost identity for many Chinese-Americans.

Furthermore, the question of generation gap and culture clash is also one of the major topics not only Kingston, but many other Chinese-American authors have illustrated in their work. Due to the diverse cultural background, there were many generational conflicts. In other words, different values than the parents' ones and the contrary believes widely contributed to a division among generations.

Finally, the position of women, particularly within the patriarchal Chinese society, has also been illustrated in Chinese-American literature. It is a fact that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* was greatly shaped by various women who had influenced her life. On the contrary, men, in general, play less important role in the novel.

## RESUMÉ

Práce se zaměřuje na analýzu života čínské menšiny žijící na území USA. Analýza je provedena na základě novely Maxine Hong Kingston *The Woman Warrior*, která v kombinaci s fakty ze sekundární literatury nastiňuje obraz postavení čínské menšiny v americké majoritní společnosti.

Většina čínských přistěhovalců, která přišla do USA před druhou světovou válkou byli chudí Číňané především z čínské provincie Kanton. Jednalo se především o muže, kteří se, díky tamním neuspokojivým podmínkám, nechali zlákat vidinou “Gold Mountain“ a odpluli do Kalifornie zajistit svým rodinám živobytí. Než však odpluli na západ, sňatky narychlo byly uzavřeny, a to z toho důvodu, aby byli muži povinováni odesílat pravidelné částky peněz zpět do Číny a byl tak zajištěn určitý životní standard v dobách chudoby a politického zmatku, které v druhé polovině 19. století v Číně vládly.

Podobně i otec Maxine Hong Kingston, Tom Lan Hong, tímto způsobem opustil rodnou Čínu a vydal se do USA – země příležitostí, která v očích všech přistěhovalců nabízela obrovské možnosti. Po několika nezdařených pokusech a po ztrátě podílů jako spolumajitel prádelny v New Yorku Tom přesídlil na západ USA, kde ho již doprovodila autorčina matka Ying, která až do této doby zůstala v rodné Číně. Tom zde po nějakou dobu provozoval kasína, v té době nelegální, poté však rodina začala podnikat v prádelně, kterou ve Stocktonu vlastnila. Netřeba dodávat, že takovéto rodinné zázemí a situace hluboce ovlivnila Maxine a její dílo *The Woman Warrior*.

Maxine Hong Kingston se narodila v roce 1940 do rodiny střední vrstvy majitelů prádelny, a to jako první z šesti dětí narozených v USA. Právě z tohoto důvodu nejen Kingston, ale i ostatní potomci, zvláště pak první generace čínských přistěhovalců trpěli syndromem ztracené identity. Tento syndrom vznikl zejména z protichůdných očekávání jejich rodičů – na jedné straně čínští přistěhovalečtí rodiče chtěli, aby jejich děti vedli šťastnější a více naplněný život bez překážek, kterým oni sami museli po příjezdu do USA čelit, na straně druhé si však přáli, aby si děti byly vědomy svého původního kulturního dědictví a pokračovali tak v čínské tradici. Samozřejmě, že výše zmíněný nátlak ze strany rodičů a celé komunity vyústil ve

zmatenost a rozpolcenost mezi dvěma kompletně odlišnými světy. Na jedné straně menšinová čínská komunita, která lpěla na dodržování tamních tradic a byla extrémně pověřčivá, na straně druhé pak americká majoritní společnost, která byla spíše individuálního charakteru a vyznání. Tyto obrovské mezikulturní rozpory pak často vedly k tomu, že potomci čínských přistěhovalců sami nevěděli, kam se vlastně zařadit a často se v nich rozvíjela dvojí osobnost. Doma, v čínské komunitě, se snažili svědomitě účastnit čínských zvyklostí a tradic, avšak podvědomě celou realitu pozorovali s americkým odstupem, který v nich vytvářel americký svět kolem nich, především však jejich americké školy, kam se pravidelně docházeli vzdělávat.

Dalo by se říci, že do určité míry domácí čínské prostředí ztěžovalo úspěšnou asimilaci do majoritní americké společnosti, kam se potomci přistěhovalců snažili zařadit. Přestože se však první generace přistěhovalců narodila v USA a podle zákonů tak měla být právoplatnými americkými občany, americká majoritní společnost je za sobě rovné nepovažovala a nahlížela na ně s pohrdáním. Ani pro původní Číňany už však tato generace nebyla jejich vlastní a i oni se na ni dívali skrz prsty. Hledání osobní identity a obrovský vnitřní boj o zařazení se do majoritní společnosti jsou jedny z hlavních témat románu *The Woman Warrior*.

Jedním z dalších problémů, kterým museli čínští přistěhovalci a další generace čelit byla generační propast a četné kulturní rozpory mezi čínskou menšinovou komunitou a americkou majoritní společností. Generační propast byla v případě čínsko-amerických přistěhovalců ještě umocněna faktem, že se jednalo o rozdíly v postojích u rodičů a dětí narozených na odlišných kontinentech. Netřeba dodávat, že díky takovýmto rozdílným názorům často docházelo k četným konfliktům mezi oběma generacemi. Zejména v díle *The Woman Warrior* se jedná o rozpor mezi Maxine a její matkou, která navzdory faktu, že dosáhla vysokoškolského vzdělání a v Číně vykonávala doktorskou profesi, stále zůstávala ženou v domácnosti a vyznávala tradiční čínské hodnoty. Jednou z nejdůležitějších tradic, kterou původní čínská společnost uznávala byla morální povinnost uctívat rodiče a obdivovat moudrost starších, jakožto i povinnost jim zajistit řádný pohřební obřad. Pověřčiví Číňané pak věřili, že pokud se během života o své rodiče a prarodiče řádně postarají, oni nad nimi pak budou držet ochrannou ruku a na oplátku je budou strážít. Především tak z důvodu

této povinnosti bylo nesmírně těžké pro čínské muže opustit rodnou Čínu a odplout do USA, avšak vidina bohatství brzy předčila jejich smysl pro povinnost a mnoho z nich se následně vydalo vstříc západnímu světu.

Nutno podotknout, že čínští přistěhovalci nikdy nebyli vítáni na území USA. Hned po dokončení centrální pacifické železnice a po vykonané práci ve zlatých dolech se bílá většina snažila všemožnými způsoby se čínských přistěhovalců zbavit. Důvodů si našla hned několik – neschopnost přizpůsobit se majoritní společnosti a také ochota pracovat za nižší platy než jiní nádeníci brzy vyústila v nenávist a pohrdání čínskou menšinou.

Během svého života na území USA si čínská menšina musela projít hned několika omezujícími zákony, jejichž cílem bylo zabránit čínským přistěhovalcům dostat se do USA a také v nejvyšší možné míře znesnadnit život čínské menšině, která žila na americkém území. Jedním z takových nařízení byl Geary Act z roku 1875, který reagoval na zvyšující se prostituci na západě USA. Jelikož čínská menšina žijící v USA byla výhradně mužského rázu, o čínské prostitutky byl stále větší zájem a ty pak byly, mnohdy nedobrovolně a za otřesných podmínek, dovezeny až ze samotné Číny. Ilegální prostituce a fakt, že v očích americké majoritní společnosti byla většina čínských žen stěhujících se do USA prostitutkami, byly dalšími důvody, proč se americká vláda snažila znemožnit příliv čínských žen na území USA. Způsoby byly různé – ženám byly buď hned zamítnuta víza a nebo byly různě konfrontovány přistěhovaleckými úředníky. Četné výslechy, věznění a hrozby odebrání dětí byly jedním z nejčastějších důvodů, proč mnoho čínských žen raději zůstalo v Číně a do USA se nikdy nepřistěhovaly. Čínští muži, často po několik let bez manželek, si však brzy našli náhrady – ve formě konkubín, prostitutek a časem i amerických manželek. Takováto situace je dopodrobna znázorněna v kapitole *At the Western Palace*.

Není žádným tajemstvím, že ženy v tradiční čínské patriarchální společnosti byly považovány za nepotřebné. Pokud nebyly zavražděny hned po samotném narození, pak během svého života v Číně musely čelit mnoha úskalím. Již jako malým děvčátkům jim byla podvazována chodidla. Tento bolestivý rituál byl prováděn jednak z důvodu zvýšení jejich sex-appealu pro budoucího manžela, tak pro pocit totální kontroly nad ženami. Pokud byla žena provdána, nebylo to z lásky, ale pro přínos původní rodině a

z důvodu zplození syna. Navíc byla žena majetkem svého manžela a ten si s ní mohl dělat, co se mu líbilo. Žena navíc musela sloužit nejen jemu, ale i celé jeho rodině, jak také Kingston ve svém díle zdůrazňuje. Ve zkratce, hlavním úkolem žen v Číně bylo následovat tři poslušnosti: poslouchat svého otce, následovat svého manžela a svého nejstaršího syna, pokud ovdověla.

Dalším vládním ustanovením, které mělo výrazně přispět k vyštvení čínských přistěhovalců byl Chinese Exclusion Act z roku 1882. Odborníci se shodují, že tento zákon dokazuje rasistickou předpojatost USA. Navíc, násilné praktiky, kterých bylo v mnoha případech použito k vyhoštění čínských přistěhovalců z území, svým charakterem připomínaly genocidu. Avšak, i po další zasazené ráně, jakou tento zákon bezesporu představoval, se čínská menšina dokázala vzpamatovat, a to vytvářením falešných identit. Navíc, požár v San Franciscu v roce 1906 zničil mnoho evidencí o čínské menšině žijící na západním pobřeží, čehož tato menšina patřičně využila. S ohledem na tyto podmínky, které jim byly vytvořeny, většina čínských přistěhovalců přijížděla do USA nelegálně a před přistěhovaleckou policií se mnohy dlouhodobě ukrývala. Jejich potomci pak měli zakázáno o čemkoliv promluvit, protože by mohli ohrozit nejen svoje vlastní rodiče, ale i celou komunitu. Také motiv mlčení je v *The Woman Warrior* několikrát zdůrazňován.

V dnešní době můžeme Čínské Američany najít v nejrůznějších sférách moderního života - kandidují do parlamentu, jsou ředitelky obrovských firem, vyhrávají Nobelovy Ceny a medaile na Olympijských hrách. Těžko si kdo dneska představí, že ještě před 100 lety byly v USA považovány za méněcenné a že mezi nimi a americkou majoritní společností docházelo k rozporům.

Podle mého názoru je čínská menšina právem nazývána "modelová menšina", jelikož navzdory všem překážkám, kterým musela během svého usazování v USA čelit, dokázala, že jejich mnohy bolestná cesta stála za vynaložené úsilí. Jedním z takových důkazů může být právě kniha *The Woman Warrior*.

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