A Journey of Working Through:
Trauma and Gender in Maxine Hong Kingston's Diaspora Trilogy

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Introduction

Perhaps the myth of sweet home is the most unshakable human construction. In many representations of home and migration, the home provides people with the original sense of safety, certainty, and ease. Exile is historically a punishment which is intended to tear one from one's accustomed social tissue to inflict suffering. In "Reflections on Exile", Edward Said described exile with an intense sadness. He viewed exile as "never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure" (186) and argued that "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (173). He viewed the "heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life" in literature and history mere "efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement" (173). Maxine Hong Kingston's work on diasporic life can indeed be said to constitute an effort to combat the trauma brought about by displacement, but neither her Chinese roots are "left behind forever" nor the trauma she suffered undermines all her achievements.

The applicability of Said's aestheticized tragic beauty in exile is also complicated by class difference. As Madelaine Hron points out, exile, a relatively old-fashioned term, applies mostly to "intellectuals or the elite", while immigrants or refugees are often seen as devalued categories (287). The image of exile is associated with the glamour of being privileged, educated, yet tortured individuals, while the term immigrant always evokes association of "depressing urban sweatshops and low-status jobs; physical, not intellectual, labor" (Edmondson 141). The focus is also biased: exiles are characterized by their alienation while stories about immigrants often emphasize their " 'success' at ‘making it' in their new homeland" (Horn 288). Kingston's diaspora trilogy covers working-class immigrants who struggled to survive and also those who made a life and their offspring who climbed the social ladder but also those who underwent serious suffering, in which the generalization and abstraction dissolves.

Global mass migration in terms of state border crossing is a modern phenomenon. It arose amid drastic changes in society: the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, the rise of the nation-state, and capitalist economic ties (Hron 286) and is driven mainly

by people seeking "economic betterment" (Anheier 879), apart from political and religious reasons. According to Helmut Anheier, there are two waves of global mass immigration: the first one from Europe to North and Latin America, which peaked in the middle and late nineteenth century, and the second from "the global South" back to Europe since 1960s (878-79). United States remains the country of destination since the first wave (Anheier 879). Chinese migrants to America were attracted by the economic prospects in America and pushed at the same time by China's domestic condition. When feudal Qing Dynasty was still indulging in its wishful fantasy of the Middle Kingdom and adopted a closed border policy, the West had finished the first industrial revolution and started expansion. The Opium Wars quickened the collapse of China's feudal society and dragged China into a painful process of modernization, characterized by invasions, warfare, government reshuffling, social movements, uprisings, bandits, crimes, and poverty. Against this backdrop, Chinese people started to migrate and formed diasporic communities overseas.

Chinese migrants went to America in large numbers in the mid-nineteenth century during the Gold Rush in California. They were mostly coastal men who went out to work and to support their families at home. They made up a large proportion of the local labor market. According to Ronald Tataki,

> By 1870, there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States. Most of them--77 percent--were in California . . . virtually all adult males, they had a greater economic significance than their numbers would indicate: in California, the Chinese represented 25 percent of the entire work force. (79)

Although contributing tremendously to the economy, the Chinese immigrants were not integrated into the local community. They were seen as cheap labor supply by local employers and were used as a means to maintain lower pay for all workers and to cut costs. Later in the construction of the transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific Railroad employed 12,000 Chinese workers, which consisted "90 percent of the entire work force" and helped cut costs by one-third (Tataki 85). However, the Chinese workers were operating under terrible conditions and exposed to life-threatening risks and difficulties in construction. Working under high pressure with low payment, the Chinese workers went on a strike in 1867, which were the

managers responded to by cutting their food supplies. The workers starved for a week and stopped the strike (Tataki 87).

In the 1870s, there was an economic downturn and high unemployment rate in the US. Although Chinese workers took up only 0.002 percent of the American population, they were blamed for it. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted to forbid Chinese workers to enter America and then expanded to "all persons of the Chinese race" (Tataki 111). The Page Act of 1875 prohibited Chinese women to enter. Chinese men were later forbidden to marry American women and to testify in court. The Literacy Act in 1917 and Emergency Quota Act in 1921 basically stopped Chinese immigration to America until in 1943 the Exclusion Act was revoked and immigration resumed.

Throughout this time, the Chinese diaspora in America lived under xenophobia, racism and stereotyping. They were seen as the "exotic, barbaric and alien", "foreigner-within" (Lowe 4-5), inferior and impossible to assimilate. After the Exclusion Act, hate crimes and anti-Chinese violence surged. Chinese people gathered in Chinatowns and started businesses such as laundries and restaurants. Tataki recorded that "one out of four employed Chinese males in the United States in 1900 was a laundryman" (93). Robert Lee observes racial images of Chinese in America, including the coolie, the yellow peril, the model minority, and argues that they "portray the Oriental as an alien body and a threat to the American national family" (8). The model minority stereotype is another form of the "yellow peril" stereotype, a way of othering based on anxiety about "economic efficiency" (Lye 5).

Maxine Hong Kingston is a second-generation Chinese American writer. Her parents come from Xinhua county, Guangdong province. Her father, a teacher back in China, was a laundryman in the US. Her mother was a midwife in China. They had two children who died before they migrated to America in 1939 and finally settled in Stockton Chinatown, California. In 1940, Kingston was born as the first child of six her parents had in America. Kingston is "a writer of diaspora" (Grice 12) and her writing involves predominantly concerns and cultural predicaments of the Chinese diaspora in America. This thesis selects three of her major works, namely *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), *China Men* (1980) and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) and regards them as Kingston's "diaspora

trilogy".[1] Of these three works, *The Woman Warrior* has received far more academic interest than the other two and the three works are seldom studied together. In this thesis, I see the three works as a trilogy for their continuity in the search for a Chinese American subjectivity and I see a linear development in Kingston's mindset at different stages of life as a psychological journey. The novels bear witness not only to Maxine Kingston's trauma while growing up but also to the collective trauma that the Chinese diaspora community has experienced and is still experiencing.

The Woman Warrior is a collection of five stories about women of Chinese ancestry. Along with the telling of their stories, it also tells the childhood experience of young Maxine growing up in Chinatown. *The Woman Warrior* defies traditional generic classification (Grice 20), although it was marketed and received awards as nonfiction. It won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction in 1976 and was listed by *Time* magazine as one of the top non-fiction books of the decade. *China Men,* which Kingston originally meant to be "one huge book" together with *The Woman Warrior*, was published separately in 1980. It won the National Book Award for Nonfiction in 1981 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction (Grice xi). Helena Grice notes that the text is "at times literature, at others biography, memoir or history, or a mixture of several modes", which Kingston herself has also asserted (49). It is a collection of eighteen stories about the narrator's male ancestors, covering their role in the first wave of Chinese immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, up until the mid-twentieth century and the Vietnam war. As Cheung remarks, it is "not only a family saga but also a Chinese American epic" (102). The third book in Kingston's diasporic trilogy is *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. It tells the story of a fifth generation Chinese American Wittman Ah Sing's struggle to fight against racism and stereotyping and his search for a resolution. It is said to be Kingston's first novel and won the PEN USA West Award for fiction (Grice xi). This thesis regards all three works as on the scale between autobiographical and fictional and the first two are positioned in between the scale.

The three works cover a long history from the very beginning of Chinese immigration to America to the migrants' living conditions by the end of the twentieth century. As such, they together give a relatively holistic picture of the Chinese

[1] Only in Weili Fan's MA thesis *Trilogy of Maxine Hong Kingston: The quest for identity and the invention of selfhood* in 1990 that I find the three works are referred to together as "trilogy".

diasporic history. They demonstrate different representations, understandings and coping strategies of trauma across generations, genders, and cultures. *The Woman Warrior* mainly deals with private and individual trauma that the first and second-generation immigrants have experienced. This thesis deals with both the character Maxine's and her mother Brave Orchid's trauma. Maxine's case shows how second-generation immigrants experience trauma in such a way that Western trauma theory applies. The mother's case is best interpreted in trauma theory's branch into postcolonial and diaspora studies. *China Men* shifts the focus onto more public, collective and historical trauma of the narrator's male ancestors. It shows how they struggle under atrocities, violence, and oppression and how the Chinese American male community is traumatized. The first two works mostly occupy themselves with the past, while in *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston explores a man's psyche undergoing present oppression and racist discourse. There is a clear development in Kingston's focus from the female to the male, from self to the other, and from the past to present, and then to the future. Through the three works, Kingston the author undertakes a journey to get over the trauma of sexism in Chinatown, the silence and absence of her father in her growing up, and her long-delayed distancing from Orientalist discourses, and decision to fight racism and to establish a cultural identity in American society.

There are two reasons why I choose to read Kingston's works from the perspective of trauma theory. The first is the lack of analysis from this perspective. Most criticisms of Kingston's works are in the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies, gender studies, culture and representation, genre disputes and postmodern narrative strategies.[2] Trauma theory, as a relatively more recent literary approach, is less applied to her works and the few scholarly works applying trauma theory focus mainly on *The Woman Warrior.*[3] There are not yet scholarly works on these three works together using trauma theory. The underlying reason might be that postcolonial trauma theory is still in the process of development and the theoretical formation and

[2] For example, David Liwei Li, Shuang Liu, Christopher B. Patterson, Su-lin Yu take a more postcolonial approach to examine cultural conflicts, identity politics, and hyphenated subjectivity. Leslie W. Rabine, Pinjia Feng, and others focus more on gender issues. The postmodern narrative techniques employed in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* are also explored (Gao Yan).

[3] Most notably Beth Vanrheenen and Ross Pudaloff (2003), Anh Hua (2006), and Jennifer Griffiths (2006), which I will elaborate in the second chapter. There are also two student Master thesises examining trauma in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men.* "From Cultural Trauma to Hybridity: The Example of Maxine Hong Kingston" by Lucia Michalcak and "The Trauma Writing in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*" by Li Hui, written in Chinese.

that the cultural differences in perceiving and representing trauma demand extra caution and familiarity with both cultures. Though I am neither trained specifically in psychoanalysis nor Chinese culture as an academic field, I would still, as a literature student with a Chinese background, like to venture into this multidisciplinary research that trauma theory has brought into being.

The second reason is the high relevance of the approach of trauma theory in addressing Kingston's effort to understand individual psychology. As Robert Eaglestone notes, trauma theory is "a critical-theoretical way of attending to and addressing the representation of human suffering and 'wounding', both literal and metaphorical, both personal and communal" (12). Kingston's stories in all three books show deep compassion towards each character's inner life. Kingston reflects when she wrote *China Men* that she "[had] gone as deeply into men's psyches as I can" (qtd. in Kim 209) as if she were a practicing therapist. During an interview by Arturo Islas, Kingston describes the writing of the first two works as an arduous psychoanalytical journey in and out of the subconscious which lasted for seven years. She describes not writing as "get[ting] far into the subconscious, where there are not word sequences" and writing as "almost mechanic: the grammar and the structure all mental and rational" (26). Kingston stresses during an interview that she is most interested in "writ[ing] about the great emotional, psychological struggles" (Fishkin 789). She even says in an interview that she is happy to be able to "look at people from the outside and not as before, always interior" (Chin M. 58). The interest in individuals' psychological stories might find its origin in Kingston's own trauma, but nonetheless Kingston's exquisite and vivid descriptions give special empathetic depth to this trilogy, which welcomes psychoanalytic readings.

This thesis falls into four chapters. The first chapter is an overview of trauma theory that will be used in this thesis. The following three chapters are devoted to the three books respectively. I did not choose one specific theorist but have borrowed from many scholars' interpretations of trauma to better understand possible approaches to the concept. However, there is still a theoretical preference in each of the analytical chapters: I will mainly use postcolonial trauma theory (Madelaine Hron and Irene Visser) and feminist trauma theory (Judith Herman and Marianne Hirsch) in *The Woman Warrior*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's theory of testimony in *China Men*, and Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race* in *Tripmaster Monkey.*

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the trauma theory that I deem relevant for this thesis. Trauma, originally as a pathological illness in psychoanalysis, entered the public sphere through the treatment of war veterans in the First and Second World Wars and then attracted academic theorization in the humanities (Ringel and R. Brandell 1-5). This chapter will introduce the important founding figures, the classical model of trauma theory represented by Cathy Caruth, and its adaptations and branchings into gender studies and postcolonial studies.

In the 1880s, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud independently found that hysteria was the result of psychological trauma (Ringel and Brandell 2). Freud claimed that the symptoms were not caused by memories of external trauma, but by repressed infantile desires of a sexual nature. Trauma was described as a painful memory of a not necessarily painful experience. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud observed that survivors left the accident scene "apparently unharmed" and the "traumatic neurosis" happened only after a period of delay. He called this temporal delay "incubation period" and this feature "latency" (84). Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness), his later formulation of compulsive repetition as caused by overwhelming events, and the talking cure, all remain central concepts in trauma theory. Although later formulations of trauma in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) marginalized Freud's model and adopted a neurobiological perspective, Freud is still a founding figure in psychoanalysis and trauma theory.

Pierre Janet contributed by describing how memory works for individuals in terms of trauma. His insights and importance was explored by Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (Bal ix). Janet distinguished narrative memory and traumatic memory. He observed that traumatic memory was too emotionally agitating to make sense, or share, or to be integrated fully into a person's consciousness. Those memories were often disassociated and become "fixed ideas" in the subconscious,

allowing neither change nor integration. They "return as physical sensations, horrifying images or nightmares, behavioral reenactments, or a combination of these" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 163-164). In serious cases, those fixed ideas might develop into separate entities as in multiple personality disorder.

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association officially included PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) in their new edition of DSM, which propelled the theorization of trauma in the humanities. Cathy Caruth's essay collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) based on the study of the Holocaust are seen as landmarks in the study of trauma in literary criticism. As "one of the central figures who helped foster the boom in cultural trauma theory in the early 1990s" (Luckhurst 4), Caruth designed what was later called "classical trauma theory" (Rothberg xiii) based on Freudian psychoanalysis and Paul de Man's poststructuralism. According to Caruth, trauma is "an overwhelming experience of sudden catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (*Unclaimed* 11). She emphasizes the Freudian notion of belatedness: "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (*Trauma* 4). It is this "*structure of its experience* or reception" rather than the event itself that defines trauma (*Trauma* 4). She describes trauma as "symptom[s] of history" that "the traumatized ... carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (*Trauma* 5). Therefore, the seriousness of trauma is showed not only in "that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (*Unclaimed* 17). Thus trauma leads to a crisis of truth and of representation (*Trauma* 6). Caruth cautions against integrating traumatic memories into narrative because in recalling, "both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall" are lost (*Trauma* 153).

The study on testimony, "that of bearing witness to a crisis or a trauma" (Felman 1), was mainly carried out by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. They addressed the

role of literature as testimony, the problems in the representation of trauma and its clinical and historical implications. Felman described the twentieth century as "a post-traumatic century" for its numerous disasters and "an era of testimony" (5). She gave Kafka's correspondence as an example of "life-testimony", which "is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*" (2). Maxine Hong Kingston's works can also be regarded as life writings and life testimony, in which the autobiographical moments, overall concerns and sentiments of her works become evidence to trace Kingston's personal psychological development.

According to Felman, testimony has three dimensions, historical, clinical and poetic (41). It functions as record-making of a historical event, though it is more "a mode of access to" than "a mode of statement of" (16) the truth. It is clinical in the sense that the starting of the testimony means a departure from it and thus the beginning of the healing process. It is poetic because it is difficult for testimonial works to maintain formal stability thus takes on experimental features (42). The three dimensions apply neatly to all three works of Kingston, for the talking about trauma marks the beginning of healing. The poetic dimension is explored in the study of the form and narrative strategy of Kingston's works, which this thesis does not include.

Psychiatrist Dori Laub describes the survivor's dilemma between "the imperative to tell" and "the collapse of witnessing" (63). He observes that in survivors there was an urgent need to try to tell their stories and to understand their past, though this is a task with serious difficulty:

> This imperative to tell and be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech. (63)

Working through the trauma of diaspora for Kingston is surely "an all-consuming life task". She spends forty years writing on the diaspora experience (Chin, M 72) and still, in *Tripmaster Monkey*, the trauma is not fully healed. According to Laub, being unable to tell or to know the past will damage one's ability to perceive oneself and hurt one's sense of relatedness with reality. The victims are trapped in their "self-imprisonment" and can only perceive the world in a distorted way (64). Laub calls this failure to be a true witness to oneself as "the collapse of witnessing" (65). Van der Kolk and Van der Hart observe that because of the lack of integration of traumatic memory, victims end up living their lives in two parallel worlds, "the realm of trauma and the ream of their current, ordinary life" (176), while Laub indicates that there would not be room for an ordinary life if the victim keeps silent in the confrontation with past trauma.

Although classic trauma theory emphasizes the impossibility to represent trauma, theorists value the role literature could play in possible recovery. Caruth claims that literature concerns "the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" and that intersection of knowing and not knowing is where literature and psychoanalysis meet (*Unclaimed* 3). Janet noticed the function of active memory long ago: "Memory is an action: essentially, it is the action of telling a story" (qtd. in Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 175). Narratives, storytelling, autobiography, memoirs and other literary or art forms all might lead to crucial integration. Felman and Laub also argue that literature can play a role in witnessing trauma: "the consequent, ongoing, as yet unresolved *crisis of history*, a crisis which in turn is translated into a *crisis of literature* insofar as literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself" (xviii). Geoffrey Hartman views literature as an equivalent of the talking cure ("Literature" 259).

Trauma literature, as a form of recounting history, also attracted historians' attention. Dominick LaCapra distinguishes historical and structural trauma based on their causes and points out the possible shifting between and danger of mixing these two kinds of trauma. According to LaCapra, historical trauma is caused by specific

historical events, while structural trauma concerns "transhistorical absence" evoked by, for example, "the separation from the (m)other, the passage from nature to culture, the eruption of the pre-oedipal or presymbolic . . . the inevitable generation of the aporia, the constitutive nature of primary melancholic loss in relation to subjectivity" (77). LaCapra warns that Caruth's paradigm to see trauma as purely individual or psychological risks obscuring "causes of historical traumas often stemming from extreme differences of wealth, status and power that facilitate oppression, abuse and scapegoating with respect to class, gender, race, or species" and hampering the "movement from victim to survivor and to social agent" (xi). If a historical trauma victim focuses exclusively on the traumatic experience rather than the historical event, he or she might get trapped in a "negative sublime" (94) and the historical trauma is turned into a structural one and the importance of the event itself is undermined. Mistaking structural trauma for historical trauma will lead to a "reductive contextualism" (82), meaning that people will seek political or social methods to reach the impossible and imaginary ideal of wholeness. It would be highly likely for them to blame a certain outsider or group and activate the binary scapegoat mechanism by "sharply dividing self and other with the source of anxiety projected onto the nefarious other" (xxvi).

Structural trauma is transhistorical and inevitable, while historical trauma is concrete, traceable and something or someone can usually be held accountable. LaCapra's theory leads to an examination of the causes of trauma and adds a historical and collective dimension to Caruth's theory. It is in terms of historical trauma that we talk about recovery because for structural trauma, it is more about enduring as a part of life. Migration might be the initial cause of a historical trauma, and the separation from homeland consists a structural one, the essential sadness Said expressed in the experience of exile. For the first generation of immigrants, for example in *The Woman Warrior*, the prolonged homesickness and melancholy accompanying immigrants and the lost cultural identity are structural traumas, while what happened along the process of migration, the dangers migrants were exposed to are the historical ones. The second generation suffers the structural dilemma of growing up between cultures

and the historical trauma of social discrimination.

LaCapra also distinguished "acting out" and "working through" and described their relationship as neither linear nor strictly dialectical. Acting out is a necessary process to working through, whereas working through doesn't necessarily mean ultimate healing but is an effort to heal:

> Acting out is compulsively repetitive. Working through involves repetition with significant difference . . . It [working through] requires going back to problems, working them over, and perhaps transforming the understanding of them. Even when they are worked through, this does not mean that they may not recur and require renewed and perhaps changed ways of working through them again. (148)

This elucidation is key to understanding the process of working through and provides me with theoretical support to analyze Kingston's struggling against the trauma of diaspora by way of literature. Kingston's working through follows a linear emphasis at different stages but not strictly so: traumas overlap, intermingle, are acted out back and forth, and do not necessarily reach a point of closure.

In the 1960s and 1970s during the second wave of feminism, women's private, personal, domestic experience were brought to public sphere and gained a new political relevance. According to Jennifer Griffiths, feminist study of trauma emphasizes trauma as a tool of patriarchal dominance and political oppression and recovery as resisting to be victimized by social norms that refuse women full citizenship ("Feminist"181). Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1994) gives an overview of psychoanalysis from the study on hysteria, to shell shock and to sextual and domestic violence and child abuse. Herman includes both the effects of one overwhelming event and that of prolonged, chronical abuse and oppression into the spectrum of traumatic disorders and formulates a three-step recovery process of "establishing safety, reconstructing trauma memory and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (3). The talking cure, the voicing and

expression of traumatic memory, is seen as the key to integration. Herman also emphasizes Breuer and Freud's observation that "recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result" (qtd. in Herman 177) and stresses the importance of detailed recounting of not only the facts, but also the feelings and emotions at the traumatic moment to fully reexperience those feelings and to reestablish the safe connection destroyed by the traumatic experience.

Laura Brown contributes to the feminist trauma theory by shifting the focus from "the public and male experiences" to less obvious forms of violence, for example, incest, domestic abuse, and rape, "the private, secret experiences that women encounter in the interpersonal realm" (102). She notices that "those everyday, repetitive, interpersonal events . . . are so often the sources of psychic pain for women" (108). She also advocates for extending feminist studies on trauma to minority groups, women and men of color, lesbian and gay groups, and people in poverty or with disabilities (102-103). Brown criticizes the reluctance to include their suffering in trauma studies functions "to maintain the myth of the willing victim of interpersonal violence, a myth that serves to uphold power relationships in a hetero-patriarchal society between women and men, between people of color and white people, between poor people and those with wealth" (105-106). The second wave of feminism eventually exposed the problem of multiple forms of oppression women of color suffer under racism, sexism and class. Kimberle Crenshaw later theorized it as intersectionality and called for a joint endeavor to fight racism and sexism (Griffiths "Feminist" 187). Maria Root proposes the term "insidious trauma" to describe "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (Brown 107), which is highly relevant in examining the harm of racist discourse. Marianne Hirsch proposes the term "postmemory" to refer to the second-generation's memory of the Holocaust, whose private life is crowded out by traumatic experiences of their parents. She recommends a distanced remembering to avoid appropriating or over-identifying with the trauma of the last generation.

Scholars in postcolonial studies seem to encounter more difficulty in

incorporating Caruth's classical model of trauma than those in gender studies. Irene Visser finds the Freudian "internal, abstract and 'unsayable' causation of trauma" lacks the "historical, political and socio-economic" dimensions postcolonial studies are based on. Stef Craps criticizes the approach's eurocentrism and argues that Caruth fails in her endeavor to "live up to this promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement" (2), to "provide the very link between cultures" which Caruth made by the end of the introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (11). Michael Rothberg also called for comparative studies to develop a "non-Eurocentric, fully historized trauma theory" (xiii). Luckhurst remarks on the development possibility of trauma theory:

> Trauma theory tries to turn criticism back towards being an ethical, responsible, purposeful discourse, listening to the wounds of the other. But if it is truly to do this, this point of convergence also needs to be the start of a divergence, of an opening out of theory to wider contexts. Trauma is intrinsically multidisciplinary: if this criticism has a future, it needs to displace older paradigms and attend to new configurations of cultural knowledge. ("Mixing" 506)

Many scholars are making efforts to do this, including the afore-mentioned Craps, Rothberg, Visser, and Anne Whitehead, and Madelaine Hron on the trauma of displacement. In this thesis I will mainly focus on the formulations made by Hron and Visser. Horn examines immigration trauma and recognizes some of the immigrant experience fits well into the classic definition of unspeakable trauma and demonstrates in PTSD symptoms as dissociation, intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks, and for a large part it is "more quotidian and chronic in nature" and involving "isolation, alienation, discrimination, poverty, or violence" (288).

Visser quotes Luckhurst in pointing out that classical trauma theory tends to focus on human vulnerability and on staying in the traumatized condition. It seems, as Luckhurst questions, "[t]o be in a frozen or suspended afterwards . . . is the only proper ethical response to trauma" (*Question* 210). Visser agrees with him and

proposes to "theorize not only melancholia and stasis but also processes inducing resilience" (279). It is in line with "what Boehmer sees as postcolonialism's emphasis on a commitment to the continuation of life" (Visser 279). Postcolonial trauma studies stresses agency, coping strategies, values and believes that help to maintain mental sanity. As Chinua Achebe observes, although colonialism is built upon the destruction of human integrity, we must understand that "the great thing about being human is our ability to face adversity down by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be no more than its agent or its victim" (qtd. in Visser 279).

Besides those scholarly researchers, I would also borrow Harold M. Ginzberg's overview of resilience in *Encyclopedia of Trauma*. He defines resilience as "the ability to adapt physiologically or psychologically to environmental changes" (547), a basic survival ability for animals. It is found more in people who view them as survivors than those who view themselves as victims. He also includes psychiatrist George Vaillant's categorization of six mature and six immature defense mechanisms, which this thesis also finds helpful. According to Vaillant, altruism, anticipation ("the realistic acceptance of or planning for future discomfort"), asceticism (restraining the self of experiencing pleasures and getting gratified from renouncing domination), humor, sublimation (redirect repressed desires to socially acceptable activities), and suppression are the six mature defenses that lead to resilience, while the six immature defenses include projection, dissociation, fantasy, passive-aggressive behaviors, acting out and hypochondriasis (qtd. in Ginzberg 547). Individuals suffering from trauma tend to adopt a mixture of those mechanisms.

Chapter 2 Against Nostalgia: The Mother and Daughter's Strength in *The Woman Warrior*

I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living.

---*The Woman Warrior*

Critics on the representation of trauma in *The Woman Warrior* mainly focus on the analysis of the character Maxine's trauma. Beth Vanrheenen and Ross Pudaloff (2003) view *The Woman Warrior* as gothic literature and link the genre of the gothic novel as a discursive site for traumatic expressions of violence and suffering. Griffiths (2006) addresses how in *The Woman Warrior* sexism causes traumatic experiences and makes the female body an uncanny place of negation, stigma, instability, even horror, and death. Anh Hua (2006) focuses on the relationship between memory and identity and how Maxine retells and revises individual, familial and collective memory to construct her Chinese Diaspora feminist identity. They employ Caruth, Laub, and Brown's theories respectively to analyze Maxine's dilemma. However, Maxine's trauma as a second-generation immigrant is caused not simply by sexism or the diasporic life, but is multilayered. Besides, in all three works, the mother Brave Orchid's trauma is left unaddressed.

In this chapter, I would like to examine both Brave Orchid's trauma of migration and Maxine's trauma as a second-generation immigrant and their respective coping strategies. The mother suffers from the trauma of migration but she manages to contain it within her psychological control. The daughter, suffering from a different set of traumas, struggles harder to cope with her situation. This thesis is interested not in comparing who suffers more but in comparing the factors at work that result in the difference in their ways of experiencing, perceiving and coping with trauma, and what might have caused these differences.

2.1 Brave Orchid: the Shaman living among ghosts

Brave Orchid is a key figure in *The Woman Warrior* and the most important influence on Maxine's growing up. She has undergone notable difficulties in life as a first-generation immigrant. She suffers from a prolonged nostalgia and melancholy, the symptoms of the structural trauma of displacement, and is also the victim of a series of historical traumas such as the difficulties caused by the immigration process, poverty, language barrier, and hard labor. When historical trauma cannot be solved, it partly turns into and strengthens the structural one.

Psychologists on migration find that traumatic events occur not only in the migration process but also happen "before, during or after dislocation" (Hron 289). Before her migration, Brave Orchid suffered the terror of war, loss of her two children and patriarchal violence against women. About the loss of children, the narrator commented briefly that Brave Orchid took time to "complete [her] feelings" in China (*WW* 60). Maxine recollects that after living in America for a long time, her parents are still haunted by the terror of war: they would "play refugees, sleeping sitting up, huddled together with their heads on each other's shoulder, their arms about each other, holding up the blanket like a little tent" (*WW* 93). The fear of death and annihilation is reenacted and repeated constantly in their life but is not further dealt with, as if dissociated and stored in "the realm of trauma" parallel to their routine life, in Van der Kolk and Van der Hart's term. Brave Orchid's experience with death in the witnessing of violence against women does not leave her obvious psychological wounds but serves as lessons for her survival and hardens her determination to obey social norms to avoid victimization.

The story of "No Name Woman" is a lasting lesson for Brave Orchid about the danger of female sexual transgression. Brave Orchid, the closest person to the aunt, witnesses the raid by the villagers and discovers the death of the aunt and her new-born baby. Their bodies "plug[ged] up the family well" (5) both literally and metaphorically, disturbing the continuity of the family stories and memory and becoming a stigma, shame, and exemplary. Their death is a strong reminder of the

deadly consequences of adultery or any transgression of the traditional female role. One will not only bring shame to and be disowned by the family, punished by the whole community, but will also be forgotten. Brave Orchid acquires this rule of survival in the local patriarchal community: obedience. Foucault theorizes social institutions as negative power, which in demanding obedience to their norms regulate and discipline individual behaviours and punish them for transgression (Leitch 1618). Witnessing the communal violence and No Name Woman's suicide, Brave Orchid learns to be a "docile subject" (Leitch 1618), aligning with the norms to avoid punishment. She does not consider the role of institutions and norms in society but chooses to side with power and mainstream for protection and survival. Brave Orchid chooses not to be "one of those the women teased for 'longing' after men" (92), regulating herself with determination to avoid any possibile danger relating to gender taboo.

Witnessing the crazy lady being stoned to death shows and most likely strengthens Brave Orchid's determination to dissociate disturbing events, to switch off by choice, to maintain her sanity and mental stability. Because the crazy lady proves that losing mental control can only lead to more violence. Brave Orchid tries to explain to the gathering people that the lady is just mad and is not a Japanese spy but the crowd does not listen. Then she "turned her back and walked up the mountain (she never treated those about to die), looked down at the mass of flesh and rocks, the sleeves, the blood flecks" (*WW* 96). Brave Orchid protects herself from going against the mob and investing in an impossible mission to save the lady and refuses to see the murder in all its bloody and horrifying details. She refuses the over-identification by witnessing trauma and stops the transmitting of trauma by witnessing by her will power.

Self-protection only makes Brave Orchid a survivor. What makes her a warrior and a shaman is the belief in her goodness, which comes from her total obedience to the gender designations of the social order at work. Strangely, the social order is not oppressing to Brave Orchid but empowers her immensely. She believes she is good, strong, dutiful, knowledgeable, street-wise and thus powerful and even invincible: "I

am brave and good. Also I have bodily strength and control. Good people do not lose to ghosts" (*WW* 73). During the night in the haunted room, Brave Orchid engages a morale-boosting, provoking speech with the ghost. She mocks, belittles and challenges it and even threatens to "fry [it] for breakfast" (71). Nietzsche's famous epigram "Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you" (69) seems not to apply in Brave Orchid's case. The monster backs away and the abyss is ridiculed.

However, the night of exorcism is still a dangerous, "life-threatening" thus potentially traumatizing act which involves a great mental battle against fear. Staring into the abyss and fighting with imaginary monsters might have briefly pulled Brave Orchid into an abyss of traumatizing experiences, but surviving it not only helps her gain communal recognition as a brave and heroic figure but also strengthens her sense of power, importance and self-value. Her fellow roommates and classmates surround her with love and comfort. They rub her hands and chant softly for her soul to come home: "Come home, come home, Brave Orchid, who has fought the ghosts and won . . . Your brother and sisters call you. Your friends call you. We need you. Return to us . . . Come back, Doctor Brave Orchid, be unafraid" (*WW* 72). Brave Orchid is rewarded and nourished with a deep sense of connection and belonging: "Her soul returned fully to her and nestled happily inside her skin, for this moment not traveling in the past where her children were nor to America to be with my father" (*WW* 72). This is the highlight of Brave Orchid's life. At this moment, she is neither living in the shadow of the past nor waiting for a better future to come. She lives happily at the moment, feeling connected and supported by the community. These acts of fighting against ghosts and calling for someone's soul to return may seem superstitious. However, the fear of ghosts, the bravery to endure the fear and the admiration and care following the act of bravery are true. Anne Whitehead observes while studying Soyinka's fiction that "Soyinka forces us to encounter a response to trauma that asserts the relevance of localized modes of belief, ritual, and understanding, thereby undermining the centrality of western knowledge and expertise" (qtd. in Visser 279).

This localized ritual is at odds with Western trauma theory about recovery but is also worth noticing.

However, Brave Orchid's peaceful life did not last long and the Japanese invasion began. Instead of waiting for her husband to come back home, she left war-torn China for America. Her career is sacrificed without hesitation for the benefit of family. The danger of traveling through the ocean and the threat of death permeates the journey. There is not much description of the mother's journey but one detail that Maxine recalls: "She was in luck. The following ship was boarded by river pirates, who kidnapped every passenger, even old ladies. 'Sixty dollars for an old lady' was what the bandits used to say" (*WW* 61). The understatement of danger carries with it a sense of humor, but it is still easy to imagine how the passengers would feel to rub shoulders with pirates and the threatening of a robbery at sea. When she lands in New York Harbor, she is asked when her husband cut off his pigtail and she cannot answer. The probably routine questioning terrifies Brave Orchid, the brave heroine, announcing ominously the beginning and keynote of her immigrant life: anxiety and fear in an unknown world, a world of ghosts in which the exorcist is rendered powerless.

Brave Orchid faces great challenges in her life in America. Hron names four main stressors immigrants and refugees face in a new environment, namely "the loss of familiar social networks, lowered socioeconomic status across the socio-educational spectrum, lack of fluency in the host language, or values and behaviors that clash with ethnic traditions" (289) and Brave Orchid suffers all of them except that she has at least the one family tie with her husband. As Brave Orchid says, "You have no idea how much I have fallen coming to America" (*WW* 77). She loses her cultural identity as a respected doctor and a loved and brave heroine and becomes an illiterate working-class laundry woman. As Hron describes, "Just as the language of the host society may not be transparent for immigrants or refugees, neither is the time, place, or culture they inhabit; these individuals survive in the ghostly shadow of their former selves" (191). Brave Orchid is unable to comprehend the present combination of time, place and people in American society, which becomes a ghostly

opaque around her, like her daughter's painting of black curtains.

What she does in America is simple: fulfill her responsibilities. She is a wife who needs to take care of her husband and support him when he is scammed out of business and remains jobless for years. She becomes a mother of six after the age of forty. She lives a frugal life and sends money back home to support families and relatives every year. She is the major laborer, and breadwinner of the household. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong defines the mother's life as a life of necessity in comparison with the daughter's extravagance as "two contrasting modes of existence and operation, one contained, survival-driven and conservation-minded, the other attracted to freedom, excess, emotional expressiveness, and autotelism" (13). Brave Orchid's life after her migration was reduced to pure necessity, her heroism worn out, and the modern, individualistic and independent Chinese woman degraded into an undignified working machine. Brave Orchid said: "I work so hard" (*WW*103), "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" (*WW* 105).

Preoccupied with working both in the laundry and at home, Brave Orchid gives up on negotiating between the two cultures. She is too practical to allow herself to be weak or confused and has no time to waste on adjusting herself. So she decides to hold on to her original Chinese conventions, traditions, and norms at home. Again, Brave Orchid refuses to identify with her difficulty. She sticks to her protection mechanism of becoming numb and sticks to the necessities. In Vaillant's work six mature defense mechanisms that could lead to resilience are identified. Brave Orchid uses at least uses four of them: altruism, anticipation, asceticism and suppression. She is altruistic, living a frugal lifestyle, is prepared always for unexpected situations, and suppresses her desire to go back to China. She dissociates her traumatic memories into the "realm of trauma" and maintains an ordinary life. In this sense, her trauma is not fully experienced and not fully reenacted. According to Caruth, dissociation and reenactment are two integral parts of a traumatic experience. Brave Orchid experiences dissociation but she does not experience full reenactment. She intervenes in the process and employs effective defense mechanisms to prevent reenactment to

happen. In this case, Brave Orchid is an example of someone who suffers great adversity but exercises successful intervention to traumatization.

Still, Brave Orchid pays for her survival by being both psychologically and physically exhausted. She suffers from chronical traumatic symptoms of psychological fatigue, nostalgia, melancholy and physical pain. Brave Orchid "felt a tiredness drag her down" when she has to "baby" everyone (*WW* 146). But she denies her psychological exhaustion. Herman observes, "Chronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of psychical calm or comfort. . . . They begin to complain, not only of insomnia and agitation, but also of numerous types of somatic symptoms" (86). Brave Orchid complains about work injuries and varicose veins as a result of working in a laundry (103) but she cannot stop working. "I can't stop working. When I stop working, I hurt. My head, my back, my legs hurt. I get dizzy. I can't stop" (*WW* 106). She suffers from nostalgia, the structural trauma of displacement and continuously talks about her wish to return to homeland: "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" (*WW* 98).

Unfortunately, Brave Orchid does not have the chance or money to go back home. She relies on her Chinese talk-stories to remind herself of the lost glory and satisfaction. What's tragic about Brave Orchid is her loneliness and sadness in her old age. She can be said to dedicate her whole life to the children, while her longing for the warmth and happiness of a traditional extended family with "six of you with your children and husbands and wives ... twenty or thirty people" (*WW* 107) are not shared by her American children. She can only imagine what an ideal family looks like, but Maxine responds to her wish by thinking that it serves the mother and father right for leaving their parents. Her testimony has no witness even in her own family. In *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid is portrayed as a tyrannical mother, an Oriental other representing "Chinese culture" and the strict patriarchal order (Mylan 132), while her experience in fighting against traumatization is of value for trauma studies.

2.2 Maxine: working through complex trauma

In 1992, Herman proposed the concept of "Complex PTSD" for the prolonged and repeated trauma especially originating from childhood, which fits quite well to Maxine's complex and multi-layered trauma. Young Maxine is faced with at least three different kinds of stressors: as a girl, she faces sexism and verbal violence in her community in Stockton Chinatown; as a child, she needs to get out of family and fit into the society; as a second-generation immigrant she has to deal with the conflict between a Chinese education and the American task of assimilation. The three stressors have different trajectories but are also deeply entangled in their influencing and pressurizing young Maxine in her growing up.

Among the three stressors, sexism in Chinatown is the most traumatic which Maxine has a hard time fighting against. Since childhood, Maxine has witnessed and experienced the systematic coercion of sexist languages and practices. There are idioms comparing girls as maggots, cowbirds, or geese and sayings about girls deserting families or having an "outward tendency" because they are going to marry away (*WW* 43-47). In the world Maxine hears about when growing up, it's useless to raise girls. Being born as a girl is not to be welcomed nor celebrated, but frowned upon or seen as a disappointment. Brave Orchid tells stories of infanticide of baby girls, "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, ...It was very easy" (*WW* 86). Her great-uncle would shout "Maggot!" to each of the six girls having dinner together and say in the most belittling, derogative and misogynistic way: "Look at the maggots chew" (191). Even her father would say that "Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ant nests ... A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him" (*WW* 193). (This, however, is explained in *China Men where the narrator says that* when men prepare to leave for the Gold Mountain, "[h]usbands and wives exchanged stories to frighten one another" (*CM* 47).) By telling the story of "No Name Woman", Brave Orchid might want to share her daughter a secret of survival, but this message is lost in the telling. Instead of helping Maxine in anyway, the story of No Name Woman

becomes the source of terror, proof of a violent, lawless, misogynist society. Erin Ninh and Abdul JanMohamed see Brave Orchid's admonition "Don't humiliate us" (*WW* 5) as a "preemptive ultimatum" (52) for Maxine to "behave or be disowned" (54). Living as a woman in that community seems full of danger in all life stages.

Maxine is deeply wounded by this violence of sexist language and stories. The fear of being punished for misbehavior or denied the right of living, of being ignored, abandoned, disowned, or sold, permeates young Maxine's consciousness. The fear is fixed in her subconscious and is reenacted as anxiety, irritation, hyper-vigilance, and paranoia. She would fall into uncontrollable fits of screaming or crying every time she heard misogynist remarks. She would "thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn't talk. I couldn't stop" (46). She screams "I'm not a bad girl" repeatedly and desperately and sometimes she could even have said, "I am not a girl" (46). She tries to dissociate from her gender and denies her femininity to avoid feeling self-loathing and guilt of being a girl. She falls into paranoia and accuses her parents of not "roll[ing] an egg on *my* face", not "throw[ing] a full-month party", not "send[ing] *my* picture to Grandmother", or not teaching her English as evidence of sexism and proof of her parents' disliking her for her gender (*WW* 46). Maxine develops passive-aggressive self-destructive behaviors. She stops earning straight A's and tries to make herself clumsy, untidy, rough, bitter, unmarriable and unsellable. "I refuse to cook. When I had to wash dishes, I would crack one or two" (47). She deliberately burns food when she cooks. "I do not feed people. I let the dirty dishes rot" (47). "I picked my nose while I was cooking and serving" (190). The gender discrimination in a backward small village might not cause mental disorder in its context but being placed in the American context, it becomes extremely enraging and traumatizing to a child with American education.

Besides resisting sexist discourse, Maxine also faces the crucial task of anchoring herself, finding her an identity between her Chinese home and American society and "to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America" (*WW* 5). The invisible world the first generation immigrants construct in Maxine's mind is postmemory, which Hirsch describes as

> the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they "remember" only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. ("Projected Memory" 8)

Maxine's postmemories are the stories about her elder relatives, the imaginary homeland, its folklore, traditions, cultural values, and norms her parents represent and even their lifestyles and habits, crowding into Maxine's life. It is necessary to point out that the mother represents a frozen image and memory of the village life and rules, which are even more hardened and fossilized by their insisting on preserving it in Chinatown on foreign land. Refusing to change, the mother sticks to her routine, her way of life, the stories she hears and remembers, and the beliefs she has, refusing reflection nor change. Brave Orchid's determined persistence in her performance of Chinese culture and her inability to explain irritates Maxine and prevents her from identifying with her mother. Brave Orchid's displaced lifestyle loses vitality and context for Maxine. Maxine wonders angrily: "Never explain. How can Chinese keep any traditions at all?" "The adults get mad, evasive, and shut you up if you ask" (185). The ambiguous stories the mother tells add greatly to the difficulty of the child's transition from home to society. The child, born and growing up on American soil, is confused by the overwhelmingly cognitively-exhausting legacy.

Some stories seem to have wounded Maxine's psyche without repair, for example, the killing of newborn baby girls (*WW* 86), the eating of weird animals and especially the monkey brain (*WW* 92). Maxine is constantly haunted and possessed by the memories of dying babies, which become fixed ideas reenacting belatedly in nightmares, fantasies, hallucinations, and flashbacks. Brave Orchid's stories with ghosts and monsters "has given me pictures to dream--nightmare babies that recur, shrinking again and again" (86). The newborn baby without anus keeps coming back to her in nightmares. Maxine constantly imagines "a naked child sitting on a modern

toilet desperately trying to perform until it died of congestion" and suffers from the hallucination of an infant crying from the bathroom (*WW* 86). Those traumatic memories do not get integrated. "To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories" (*WW* 87). Maxine chooses to dissociate herself from those traumatic memories although they visit her repeatedly and uninvitedly.

Other stories the mother passes on become the site of the daughter's resistance, for example, the No Name Woman. As Hirsch perceives, "postmemory is not an identity position, but a space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification, and projection" ("Projected Memory" 8-9). It is about how to meditate and negotiate with the other's traumatic experience and integrate into one's own life, without appropriation and maintaining a distance. When dealing with the horrific memory of the death of her no-name aunt, Maxine does not identify with her as a victim, but attributes her a feminist spirit of individualism and reconstructs her into a rebellious heroic figure. Through Maxine's reconstruction of narratives, Kingston the author relives her trauma, reexperiences the emotions, empowers and heals herself by reestablishing the sense of security and connection. These healing moments are the autobiographical moments where Maxine and Kingston are one.

Maxine not only distances herself from the traumatic memories of the first-generation women but also decides, after a long struggle, to distance herself from the mother's China, towards which she assumes an orientalist stance. She complains that Chinese people say they have eaten even if they have not and becomes "mad at the Chinese for lying so much" (21). She describes her mother’s medical certificate as having a "smell of China", "a smell that comes from long ago, far back in the brain" (58). She generalizes about China, Chinese people and culture, and describes it as ambiguous, mysterious, irrational and odd. She also acquires a negative view of China from, for example, the "disgust on American faces" when they see Chinese women shouting with big gestures and loud voices (*WW* 171). Sheryl Mylan observes that

Maxine is orientalizing and othering her mother and her mother's way of life. Here I would like to say that Maxine's orientalism is instrumental. It is a way to prevent her psyche from falling into deeper confusion and to provide her some certainty. It is much easier to choose sides than to strike a balanced point of view, which demands much more information, assessment, research and understanding that the young girl does not have. The goal is to fit into American society. If American society does not agree with the values and habits at home, the parents fail to stand up for it and memories about China are so traumatizing and unbearable, the easiest way is to see China at home as the other. The child needs certainty to anchor herself rather than keep being confused by conflicting ideas and unreliable stories. According to LaCapra, this is the scapegoating mechanism at work. Maxine faces the structural trauma to grow up between cultures, which to a point is too depressing to deal with. Maxine faces the urgency to fix it, and thus understands the structural trauma as caused by her mother and her mother's insistence on her Chinese lifestyle. In traumatization, a binary of victim and perpetrator is formed. If one sees oneself as a victim, the other would easily be seen as the responsible Other.

To Vaillant, fantasy is an immature defense mechanism because it involves withdrawing from resolving conflict and might reach an "autistic or dysfunctional level" (Ginzberg 548). However, it is Maxine's way of establishing an imaginary connection to console herself and to maintain sanity. Inspired by her mother's talk story of Fa Mu Lan that girls can be "heroines, swordswoman" (*WW* 19), Maxine imagines herself to be a "female avenger" (43), slaying unjust emperors and misogynist barons. She imagines herself growing up with ample guidance and support from an old couple who are wise, capable and helpful. She is reconnected in imagination with her parents and their food which she begins to miss (25). The Chinese elements in her fantasy are also less threatening than they seem in real life. She shows her affection towards Chinese art and traditions and reestablishes a sense of belonging that she secretly longs to have. She describes beautiful brush drawings and the dragon as a spiritual, otherworldly beast (24); Chinese language stops sounding "chingchong ugly" (171) but poetic: "the words for 'bat' and 'blessing'

homonyms" (23). She mentions Chinese ways of showing love, "I had felt loved, love pouring from their fingers when the adults tucked red money in our pockets" (30). She can only mention them in fantasy because giving recognition to Chinese ways can only add to her confusion and runs contrary to her task to fit in American society. She reestablishes connection in fantasy with her parents and her Chinese roots which she denies in real life.

Another part of Maxine's complex trauma comes from the pressure of assimilation. Young Maxine cannot speak English when she enters kindergarten, but silence at first is not a problem, "it was when I found out I had to talk that silence became a misery" (*WW* 166). As Jeehyun Lim interprets, "the innocence of muteness is lost when the narrator develops an awareness of the social function attributed to language" (52). Maxine has a hard time understanding "I" and pronouncing "here", which are symbolic of the Americanization process. The American teacher tells her every day how to read these two words and punishes her with isolation when she fails. As an American, Maxine should think in terms of an individualist "I" and meanwhile psychologically plant herself into "here" (i.e the American context with its rules and values). She attends speech therapy because not being able to speak confidently is pathological according to American standards. At last, she gains a new voice which is "steady and normal, as it is when talking to the familiar, the weak, and the small" (175).

However, the bullying scene in the bathroom shows the process of working through as back and forth. Maxine chased a silent Chinese girl into a bathroom. Possessed with the idea to help the girl speak, Maxine falls into an aggressive and uncontrollable bullying and torturing upon the girl. It is the culmination of Maxine's complex trauma acting out, a belated reenactment triggered by a certain event or person. Maxine's pent-up emotions of anger and hurt are projected to a less threatening subject. Herman observes that since an abused child has difficulty adjusting their anger, it is common for victims to "displace [one's] anger far from its dangerous source and to discharge it unfairly on those who didn't provoke it" (104). But after it, the child's self-condemnation is further aggravated and she is further

convinced of her inner badness. All the struggling of being discriminated because of her being born a girl, the violence, murder, and atrocities in her mother's talk-stories, the feeling of not being loved at home, the aversion and disgust she sees in American society that is cast on her community accumulates to a breaking point.

Maxine falls into a mysterious paralysis after the bullying, which can be read as somatization as suggested by Wong (90) and also a "psychological degradation" in Herman's term (85). She can feel no worse of herself anymore. The self-hatred is at its extreme. She collapses and surrenders because she is trapped for too long. She is trapped in her female body and the misogynist community, in being a girl and wanting to be a boy to be worthy of her parents' love She is trapped in her Chinese ethnicity but not being able to comprehend and connect with Chinese culture. She is trapped in having to acquire an American identity but still be discriminated against by American society. She suffers only because of the fact that she was born a girl in a Chinese immigrant family in America. She must be something evil, something "outside the compact of ordinary human relations, as supernatural creatures or nonhuman life forms" (Herman 105). She dreams of herself as vampire, “hunt[ing] humans down in the long woods and shadow[ing] them with my blackness" and filled with pain: " Tears dripped from my eyes, but blood dripped from my fangs, blood of the people I was supposed to love" (*WW*190). Finally, the mentally-exhausted Maxine gets what she needs: peace of mind. She "relinquishes her inner autonomy, world view, moral principles or connections with others for the sake of survival", shuts down "feelings, thoughts, initiative, and judgment" and enters into what Henry Krystal terms "robotization" (Herman 84). Maxine narrows her activities, escapes from all the stressors and returns to the state of an infant. Her parents provides her safety and care. The one year and a half of rest and isolation gives Maxine a chance to recover, and prevent her from deteriorating into total surrender when the victim loses the will to live, makes no effort to survive, and lives as living dead (Herman 85).

Maxine left her home after a failed attempt to seek help from her mother as a witness, which later turns into an argument (*WW* 197-204). The mother and daughter are unable to reach common ground because there are too many different cultural

assumptions, and both parties demand more understanding and tolerance from the other. The daughter accuses the mother: "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories" (*WW* 202). The mother is hurt by having to constantly defend and explain herself: "They [Old people] don't have to answer children. When you get old, people will say hello to you", "I didn't say you were ugly", "That's what we're supposed to say. That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite" (203). Hurting the mother adds guilt to the child. Maxine realizes the impossibility of being fully witnessed by her mother: "And suddenly I got very confused and lonely because I was at that moment telling her my list, and in the telling, it grew. No higher listener. No listener but myself" (204). Emotional involvement prevents one from being an ideal witness. Maxine leaves home and seeks witnessing through reflection and writing.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter analysed Brave Orchid and Maxine's individual trauma and the strategies they employ. Brave Orchid suffers the trauma of immigration, the loss of her former social status, and poverty. Culturally, Brave Orchid does not try to fit into American society but retreats to her small family, insisting on the way of things that she is familiar with, maintaining her stability. Individually, she shows a surprisingly high level of resilience, relying on the mature defense mechanisms that she employs at times of crisis and pressure. She lives not for herself but for her family. She devotes all her energy into maintaining the household, taking care of her six children and supporting her family and relatives back in China. In this way, she maintains her connection with Chinese culture and her community. She shows great endurance in times of adversity and determination not to be harmed psychologically by dissociating upsetting emotions and suppressing her individual needs for family and communal good which she believes could bring her value and importance.

Though not having to worry about basic needs, Maxine's growing up is always

highly emotionally stressful. She faces the depressing identity crisis and she struggles alone. As a child, she chooses immature defense mechanisms and develops serious psychological problems. However, through regression, imagination, writing and scapegoating, Maxine survives the emotional vortex, with still more things to figure out, for example, whether her blaming and distancing from China and her mother are justified.

A rough and primary observation in the mother/daughter comparison is that a collective-oriented society is more restrictive in normal times, but in times of disaster, the collective network lessens the psychological impact on each individual. An individualist society offers more freedom in normal times but it is harder for to be supported and connected when needed. In a collective society, the meaning is found in relationships while in an individualist society, individuals carry too much burden to find meaning by themselves. Classical Trauma theory applies more to Maxine's case because it shows more vulnerability of the human mind, while postcolonial and diaspora trauma studies focus more on resilience.

Chapter 3 Against Amnesia: Testimony to the Lost History in *China Men*

I want to be the voice of the voiceless.

------ Interview with MHK by Shelley Fisher Fishkin

In an interview with Paula Robinowitz, Maxine Hong Kingston explained that *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* were meant to be "one huge book" (69) and talked about reasons why they got published as two. Firstly, men and women's migration stories happen in different time and places. A large part of the diaspora history was primarily about men, who came to the Gold Mountain, an nickname for California gold mines during Gold rush, by themselves and lived in American Chinatowns as bachelors. Women stayed in China and only joined them afterward. Secondly, as Kingston said in an interview, "There was a woman's way of thinking. My men's stories seem to interfere. They were weakening the feminist point of view" (Rabinowitz 69). Although Kingston does not necessarily take an essentialist approach, she does notice a certain coherence in each gender group. As to the Chinese male immigrants, Kingston expresses her impression that "the men don't have memories. They don't remember anything. ... He [my father] is so busy making up the present, which he has to build, that he has no time for continuity from the past. It did seem as if the men were people of action" (70). Aware of the possible fallacy of generalization, she still poses an interesting question.

I would venture to link the aphasia, amnesia, and alexithymia of Chinese men to symptoms of dissociation of a kind of chronic collective trauma that has lasted more than a century and still to a certain degree persists. Caruth's description of the power of serious trauma as symptom of history seems sadly accurate for this group as she formulates, "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (*Unclaimed* 91-92). Chinese American men as a group have experienced too long a history of economic exploitation, oppression, maltreatment, discrimination, and even persecution. Their trauma at first might not have been

structural but has grown with time and become fixed; it has affected their group identity. As Kai Erikson observes, "the tissue of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body . . . creat[ing] a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost— that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up" (185). Their trauma is reenacted in many different forms: the collective ethos of low-spiritedness, lack of interest, and silence represented by Kingston's father, or the aggressive male chauvinism represented by Frank Chin, Kingston's major critic, or Wittman Ah Sing's paranoia and anger.

Kingston also observes a subtly different relationship with myth between men and women, which is also one reason that the men's stories follow a different logic and do not fit in with the women's. The men seem to have suffered too long and traumatizing times and they nearly lost their connection with their culture. They do not seem to be as involved and empowered as women in cultural or mythical stories. Kingston reflects: "They were very broken off from their background. They might not have been drawing any strength, or they may have gone against the teachings of the myth. . . . Memory just hurt them, because they can't go home" (Rabinowitz 69). I would like to link this observation to Laub's description of Holocaust as "an event without a witness" (65). He noted that the Nazi system convinced the German people, the possible outsider witnesses, of the righteousness of the Holocaust and the possible inside witnesses, the victims, of their innate otherness and inferiority. Laub concluded that this treating the self as the Other deprived people of the ability to bear witness to themselves from the inside, which was "perhaps the true meaning of annihilation" (67). It seems the Chinese American men have already lost the ability to witness themselves and only Kingston, a child who dares to say that the emperor is naked, becomes the precious witness.

This understanding and sympathizing with men's trauma is the major concern in *China Men*. It shows Kingston's evolving and widening of her feminist perspective from only focusing on female suffering to also attending to the male distress of her community. It is a switch of perspective from the female to the male and from the individual to the collective. Kingston confesses in "Personal Statement":

> To better appreciate *The Woman Warrior*, you do need to read *China Men*. You'll see that "I" achieve an adult narrator's voice. ... The feminist narrator journeys to the Land of Men. . . . "I" am nothing but who "I" am in relation to other people. In *The Woman Warrior* "I" begin the quest for self by understanding the archetypal mother. In *China Men*, "I" become more whole because of the ability to appreciate the other gender. (23-24)

By bearing witness to men's history and stories, Kingston withdraws from her strong individualist feminist stance and situates herself in the larger community of Chinese diaspora. She decides to bear witness to the collective pain and sufferings which were left unheard in history.

3.1 Kingston's imperative to know and to tell

Kingston's urge to tell is both personal and communal, both of a private nature and of public concern. *China Men* is a work of testimony with the aim to heal psychological trauma. It is Kingston's effort to understand the father and the reason for his silence, and to pacify the grudge she holds against her father for being not supportive enough, or even totally absent when she struggles hard to grow up with sanity. As Hirsch observes, "The death or elimination of the father, the brother, the husband, the male lover . . . has become either a precondition or an important preoccupation of female plots" (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 129). In "The Father from China", the daughter-narrator describes a silent, sad and angry father. "You say with the few words and the silences: No stories. No past. No China" (*CM* 14). "You screamed wordless male screams that jolted the house upright and staring in the middle of the night" (*CM* 13). Maxine addresses her father directly and seeks his response:

> 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. . . . . You fix yourself in the present, but I want to hear the stories about the rest of your life, the Chinese stories. (*CM* 14-15)

This is a daughter's yearning for connection with her father, which entails a journey through the past her father has been through, and the imprints history has made on the father. Laub asserts that "[n]one find peace in silence", and "[t]he ‘not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny" (64). The father is suffering from such a tyranny. The narrator also tries to understand the father to fill the void and vacancy of a loving parent because she belives that the father's ability to be playful and happy is damaged by something that she has yet no knowledge of (*CM* 11). Pathologically, her father's symptoms partly resemble alexithymia, meaning the inability to vocalize one's feelings, a term coined by Sifneos (1967) and employed by Henry Krystal in his study on trauma and old age. According to Krystal, alexithymia, a post-traumatic regression in expressing emotions and affect, often is accompanied by anhedonia, the inability to happy (78-79). Her father's chronical traumatic existence wounds the daughter and leaves her an intense desire to reclaim.

It is also the author's effort to reach out to connect with the male part of the diaspora community by standing up for it and voicing its pain. Laub observes that survivors have the "imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (63). One also needs to know one's community's "buried truth" to live a better and more conscious life. The act of recalling of memory and retelling of stories serves also as countermemory through which Kingston is to claim American for her Chinese American community:

> What I am doing in this new book is claiming America . . . In story after story Chinese American people are claiming American, which goes all the way from one character saying that a Chinese explorer found this place before Leif Ericsson did to another one buying a house here. (qtd. in Pfaff

14)

During an interview with Islas, Kingston expresses that the book is "a response to the legislation and racism that says we of Chinese origin do not belong here in America" (25). The author-narrator said in *China Men*: "My grandfather is an American. My father is an American. So I am an American" (58).

3.2 Tang Ao: the cross-dressed Other

The opening story of Tang Ao is a metaphor for Chinese American men's feminization and emasculation in America. Initially a light-hearted man confident of his masculinity, Tang Ao was caught by women in the Land of Women. They removed his armor and boots, chained his hands and feet, punctured his ears and bound his feet. They fed him food which gave his body feminine features and made him to serve the queen at dinner. Cheung analyzes the old lady's threat to sew Tang Ao's lips while puncturing his ears and points out that "two of the causes of silence explored throughout the book: the inability to speak and the inability to hear" (103). The threat of sewing the lips certainly shows the men's fear of being robbed of a voice and also of history, but the "inability to hear" from ear puncture is a stretch. It's more a gender mark than a metaphor of hearing.

Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour interestingly links Tang Ao's story with Fa Mu Lan's story and concludes that the former metamorphosis "has not the same positive impact on the character as Fa Mulan's cross-dressing and gender-switching. It is essentially a staging of power relations" (129). Examining this in the context of migration, it is clear that immigration influences the family pattern and in Maxine's case, produces a talking and strong mother and a silent and weak father. Psychologists of migration notice that migration constantly leads to a redefining of gender roles. Immigrant women are more willing to take menial or lowly-paid jobs and more quickly become breadwinners while their male partners remain "unemployed and

despondent" (Perez Foster 129). Migration shakes up the preexisting power relations and reshuffles gender roles.

If Judith Butler's famous gender-shifting example of the drag queen reveals the artificiality, the constructed-ness and the performative nature of gender difference, the conscious infliction of performative markers of gender in Tang Ao's story is an deliberate act of revenge and victimization. Tang Ao is feminized and racialized through the same means. He is othered and deprived of a voice. He is talked about, looked at and objectified. David L. Eng develops on the intersectionality of women of color and remarks that Asian American men are similarly "characterized by critical intersections in which racial, gendered, and economic contradictions are inseparable" (17). The Asian American female identity is also gendered and racialized, but it seems that the redefinition of gender roles caused by immigration process gives them more agency. "On Discovery" as the opening story of *China Men* also carries with it a sense of black humor. Coastal Chinese, looking for adventures and fortune, landed on American soil just to find themselves become the degraded, sexualized, racialized other.

3.3 Stories of Father, Bak Goong, and Ah Goong

Father, whom Maxine addresses as BaBa, was a rich family's favorite child since his birth because he was born with a skinny figure and skinny fingers "made for holding pens" (*CM* 16) and destined to be a traditional scholar. Scholarly man is a traditional type of Chinese masculinity, who is respected for his knowledge and meant to be in the government or culture system. In 1905, the father took China's last Imperial Examination in China and became a teacher. Then he got married and spent several years teaching. This seems mundane description but details betray the upsetting nature of the time. During the wedding night, as a tradition, the mother needed to cry wedding songs. She cried of rifles, "widows and orphans", "boys and men drafted into armies", "and leaving for the Gold Mountain" (*CM* 30). She cried for "going hungry", "(men) enjoying the barbarian lands more than home" (*CM* 31).

When guests are throwing popcorns to celebrate, "[i]n the kitchen more corn popped like distant gunfire" (*CM* 32). For most readers, popcorn is only associated with cinema and coca cola, but here the image of popcorn is defamiliarized and compared to gunfire.

The father is described to have had a frustrating time teaching in wartime and national chaos. Children lost their respect for traditional Chinese classics, values, and daily rituals. They despised "old-fashioned" aesthetic entertainment of poetry composing, found the disciplining rod amusing, and turned the school into a madhouse (*CM* 39). The father was traumatized by the naughty, restive children and began to have nightmares. His career had lost its meaning: "The books that he taught had lost their subtlety and life, puns dead from slow explanations, philosophy reduced to saws" (*CM* 39). The students were "more bestial than animals" because even "the water buffalo had let him prop a book between its horns" (*CM* 39). It was impossible to teach when students had no respect towards the teacher and the content, and BaBa converted this deep frustration into hatred toward others and himself: "Sometimes while standing in front of the bad boys, he pointed the imaginary pistol at his own head, and blew it open; then they would see the insides of his skull and know what their hate had done" (*CM* 40-41). It was the gradual crashing of the life he had built up in his youth and of his scholarly ideal which was rendered useless amid China's bloody and brutal social changes.

During the immigration process, the father might have hidden inside a crate and smuggled to America, which Maxine described and denied immediately afterwards. It was, as Maxine imagines, a painful journey. The scholarly father was stuck in the crate for a long period of time, facing danger of being caught by the "white demons" (51). If he was caught, he would have to fight and have to choose from "walking the plank, drowning, growing old in jail, being thrown overboard in chains, flogged to tell where others were hiding, hung by the neck, returned to China" (*CM* 49). It was a disgrace for a scholar by his own norms to resort to his fists to defend himself, but the times had changed. Wars destroyed the safe environment for the scholarly type of men. The experience of "the legal father" (53) was not any better: he was trapped in

the immigration station on Angel Island. Some people had been trapped there for years to wait for the quota of 100 Chinese per year. Ezat Mossallanejed refers to the situation that immigrants have to wait for years to get their claim processed as "immigration limbo", which causes "tremendous psychological tension, depression and re-traumatization for thousands of refugees especially those who were survivors of war and torture" (qtd. in Hron 290). There were people committing suicide as a result of the indefinite waiting. They wrote protest poems and "this wooden house my coffin" on the wall (56). The immigrants searching for new lives are caught between a homeland of war and turmoil and a hostile host country.

The father has endured numerous hardships in his settling down in America. He was swindled by his fellow Chinese friends out of his share of the laundry they jointly owned. He found a job in a gambling house and pretended to be the owner and went to jail for the owner as a part of his job. He failed to buy the house his family wanted, twice, because its sly owner controlled the father's family and always wanted to take advantage. When the gambling house was shut down, the father fell into depression. "He became a disheartened man. He was always home. He sat in his chair and stared, or he sat on the floor and stared. He stopped showing the boys the few kung fu moves he knew. He suddenly turned angry and quiet" (*CM* 247). The chain of setbacks had hammered the spirit out of the father. He did his best to fight and provide for the family yet he still ends up jobless. He can no longer endure any more failures and had no strength left to fight life's adversities. He have nightmares about killing his family with an ax and put bodies in heaps: "He leaves no family member alive; he or she would suffer too much being the last one" (*CM* 251). In this sympathizing, the narrator is witnessing the depth of her father's pain.

Surviving is not easy in a strange land without community support. The traditional, fragile, and sensitive scholar has to toughen himself up for the vicissitudes and dangers of immigrant life, take the responsibility of supporting a family without external help. The father experienced the same emotional and psychological exhaustion and regression as Maxine did. He has surrendered to "what is perceived as an inevitable, inescapable, immediate danger" (Krystal 80). Stern (1951) called it

"catatonoid reaction", consisting of "a paralysis of initiative, followed by varying degrees of immobilization leading to automatic obedience. At the same time, there is a 'numbing' process by which all affective and pain responses are blocked", which Robert Lifton (1967) called "psychic closing off" (qtd. in Krystal 80).

Through witnessing her father's trauma, Maxine (and also Kingston the author) develops her understanding of men. She gradually evolves out of her childish essentialist understanding of gender: "males feel no pain; males don't feel. . . . 'Boys have no feelings. It's some kind of immunity.' . . . Girls and women of all races cried and had feelings" (*CM* 251-252). From understanding the hardships of her father, she expands her understanding of the other gender and the other men of Chinese ancestry. Maxine gets over her fear that her father's angry curse is due to misogynist hatred against her mother and the girls, understands that his deep frustration comes from the constant blows of an immigrant's life and reaches consolidation. His screams, nightmares and melancholy are not an expression of his lack of love for his children, but his own traumatic experiences which deprived him of his ability to be a better parent.

The story of Bak Goong in "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains" is Maxine's testimony of the early Chinese Americans, a "tribute to the pioneers" (*CM* 90). By narrating their struggle in difficult situations, she restores her own admiration of her ancestry and resumes the connection wounded by her orientalism in *The Woman Warrior*. Maxine admires Cantonese immigrants as "revolutionaries, nonconformists" (87), and adventurous "ocean people" (*CM* 90), aligning Cantonese culture with the Western marine tradition. She also depicts their former habit of keeping a vegetable garden and their innate need to connect with the land as expressions of equally deep-rooted Chinese farmerhood. Many reasons combined to push the explorers to embark on their journey: the longing for the ocean, the drive of hunger, the eagerness to leave China at that time, the "dangerous and sick land" (*CM* 92).

Bak Goong arrived at Sandalwood Mountains as an indentured laborer, working on sugarcane plantations. Bak Goong and the other Chinese workers stayed in "work

camps" (*CM* 102). They were given a lower payment than the agent had promised, and they worked under inhumane rules, risking their health. Talking while working would get them whipped and their meager wage deducted. The "demons" changed their rules constantly to further their exploitation. Sick workers were left unattended. "Coolies" were considered as having no right to be human, or to be treated as humans. They were there for their muscles. They were subhuman and machines, entirely instrumentalized by capitalism: "Work. Work. Work. Eat. Eat. Eat. Shit and piss. Sleep. Work. Work" (100). Susan J. Brison theorizes human-inflicted trauma as a trauma of "the undoing of the self" (40). Exploitation can easily lead to this kind of trauma. It does not only destroy the victim's perception of the world and their own safety but also "sever the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity. Victims . . . are reduced to mere objects by their tormenters: their subjectivity is rendered useless and viewed as worthless " (40-41). She noted that "the disappearance of the past and the foreshortening of the future are common symptoms" of survivors because the continuity of time needs to be deconstructed and forgotten for the victims to survive the traumatizing present (43), lending insight to the men's absence of past and future.

However, Bak Goong refused to be robbed of his humanity. He was a talk addict and kept talking though he was constantly whipped for doing so (*CM* 110). He changed his strategy: he would curse one word every time he coughed. He refused to be stripped of his personality: "I wasn't born to be silent like a monk, he thought, then promptly said, 'If I knew I had to take a vow of silence. . . I would have shaved off my hair and become a monk" (*CM* 100). Bak Goong also tried to plant a garden for a sense of order (*CM* 106). Bak Goong was proud that he was a responsible and caring family man. He sent money home and "dictated a letter about how well and lighthearted he was in this Sandalwood paradise" (*CM* 106). He refused to be pitied and insisted on being a decent, able and loving person with dignity. There was also community support system in which workers take care of each other. Maxine imagines their loving quality and resilience: "They scraped one another's backs with spoons to get rid of rheumatism and arthritis. . . . They slapped the insides of one

another's elbows and knees, where tiredness collects " (*CM* 101-102). They talked stories after work about how cunning Chinese tricked honest Americans to build a triumphant atmosphere in the community and to produce laughter.

When many workers fell sick with fever or lung problems, their employer changed the rules again and decided that they had to work even when they were sick. "The demon pushed sick men out the door. He pulled a boy by the hair. Bak Goong could tell he was saying, 'Aha! I caught you malingering, you fake, lazy, sneaky chinaman' "(*CM* 115). Bak Goong tried to encourage fellow workers by reminding them of their responsibilities: "If there were only yourself, you would have the luxury of dying" (115). The collective-mindedness teaches people to evaluate the consequence of their actions on other people. When there is no reason to live for themselves, they could always live for the connections they had. "How am I going to withstand pain, plain physical hurt?" (*CM* 95), Bak Goong wondered. He organized a collective talking session and encouraged the workers to shout to the earth whatever they wanted to say until they were "empty of . . . secret, and satisfied, relieved" (*CM* 116). They chanted sweet greetings to their homeland and family memembers, confessed their mistakes and asked for forgiveness:

> "Sometimes I forget my family and go to clubs. I drink all night." "I lost all the money again." "I've become an opium addict." "I don't even look Chinese any more." "I'm sorry I ate it all by myself."
>
> . . .
>
> "I want home," Bak Goong yelled, pressed against the soil, and smelling the earth. "I want my home," the men yelled together. "I want home. Home. Home. Home. Home." (117)

Goellnicht interprets this "attempt to fill an orifice with words" as revealing "their psychological and sexual frustration caused by the exclusion laws against Chinese women" (204). Cheung continues to interpret the sexual connotation and describes it as "Bak Goong's oral penetration", "acts of heroic survival and potent imagination, the

coupling of genital imagery and the rhetoric of conquest" (109). I think the interpretive obsession about phallus carries with it an exaggeration and has the tendency to reduce the characters to only their sexual needs. Their frustration was not only sexual. They were more angry at the terrible working conditions, slave-like treatment, constant physical harm and abusive racist language. The land was what linked them to their homeland and they shout to it in the hope of being heard by their loved ones. They were seeking testimony from the land and from each other. It is an emotional catharsis and self-rescuing group therapy.

This story might be pure fiction. There might have been more people dying and more people losing hope. But Maxine needs her male ancestors to be strong, virtuous, wise and caring to counteract the racist images she gets from the white society. She makes up the story to be empowered and to assert that Chinese Americans deserve their place in history. Besides, people at the lowest social rank cannot afford melancholy and they have to “make it” or they will die in silence.

Ah Goong's traumatic experience is caused not by the railway but by the constructing of it. In *The Trauma Question*, Roger Luckhurst gives a genealogy of trauma and states that "the general scholarly consensus is that the origin of the idea of trauma was inextricably linked to the expansion of the railways in the 1860s" (21). Karolyn Steffens described that the railway embodied "almost all of industrial modernity's traits by the mid-nineteenth century: coal, iron, and steel as the raw materials of industrialization; a remapping of space... the widespread adoption of standard time... the growing mechanization of everyday life; and the increased speed of international social, political, and economic exchange" (38) and its drastic crushing power equals the psychological impact of "modernity's grave effects on the comparatively fragile human body and mind" (38). What is ironic is that the hardships of building the railroad is itself a story of dehumanization, victimization or even death of numerous working-class laborers which are all too easily ignored.

Ah Goong's story represents the collective trauma of the Chinese American railroad workers. They worked in dangerous and unprotected conditions where accidental deaths were part of everyday life. People fell from wicker baskets which

were "made stronger by the lucky words they had painted on four sides" (*CM* 131). Workers in the basket needed to ignite gunpowder manually and their life depended on how fast their fellow workers drag them away. Men were blown up and fell silently or noisily. Afterward, no extra security measures were applied. They were protected by pure chance that "It can't happen twice in a row", so the next ride down "is probably the safest one" (132). No one claims their bodies but buzzards (*CM* 132).

The workers had nightmares out of the fear of falling and they were all there by themselves. "No warm women tweaked their ears and hugged them" (132) when they were screamed in their dreams. When their work moves to a less dangerous step, the impact of the damage shows in Ah Goong. He slides to the bottom of the valley and is "overcome by beauty and fear, which shot to his penis" (133). The beauty of nature gave him an illusion of safety which sharply contrasts with the extreme fear and insecurity he had toward the dangerous, cold-blooded and brutally-violent world. The contrast of inner anxiety and outer tranquility created an immense tension that had to be released. Not endowed with Bak Goong's talent to talk to reduce psychological stress, Ah Goong can only resort to bodily catharsis to restore his psychological and psychophysical balance.

The bodily desire to release pressure was oppressed again when the task of digging a tunnel reached granite. All human mental and physical strength needed to be at work to conquer that difficulty. Ah Goong "no longer felt like it" to "fuck the world" (134). The granite is not humanly possible to break. Ah Goong said, "A man ought to be made of tougher material than flesh, ... skin is too soft. Our bones ought to be filled with iron" (134). The men hammered the granite for three years before dynamite was invented and introduced, which shortened the time to finish the railroad by fifty years but also "added more accidents and ways of dying" (136). Ah Goong never got used to the blasting, every explosion a shock with the same unrelenting impact and made him freeze. He "laughed crazily", seeing "human bodies skipped through the air like puppets"(137). Blizzard fell and the workers lost their ears and toes and fingers and blinded their eyes. Dying people wanted their fellow workers to bring their ashes down the mountains. Ah Goong worried that people would turn

cannibals. But he survived. Spring comes and revealed "thawing bodies, some standing with tools in hand" (*CM* 138).

When the railroad was completed, the more than ten thousand Chinese workers were instantly forgotten. "While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs" (145). He went on perilous exile, escaping bandits and hate crimes made rampant because of the Exclusion Act. "In China bandits did not normally kill people, the booty the main thing, but here the demons killed for fun and hate. They tied pigtails to horses and dragged chinamen" (146). He escaped a range of atrocities against Chinese workers and immigrants: the Los Angeles Massacre in 1871, Denver fire in 1880, Rock Springs Massacre in 1885. He was also haunted by the unbearable past. He suffered from mental disorders, hallucinations, and anxieties. "Explosions followed him. He heard screams and went on, saw flames outlining black windows and doors, and went on. He ran in the opposite direction from gunshots and the yell" (148).

According to Jung, the female archetype in a man's psyche is called Anima and the male archetype in a woman is Animus. Ah Goong's personality has many traits of Anima. He is far from a dominant masculine figure. He likes singing and adores girls. The patriarchy assigned gender roles and performance standards but it is a prison for both men and women. Ah Goong is also a victim of the institution of patriarchy in which his desires are mostly unmet. On the contrary, his wife is empowered by the system and is more dominant and proud of her subject position. Conforming empowers and noncompliance invites misery, regardless of gender. Ah Goong has a tender, caring and affectionate heart, for which he had a hard time living under the rigid gender assignment. He has to keep toughening up.

3.4 Conclusion

The male diaspora of Chinese ancestry includes countless cases of oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and persecution. The mythical story of Tang Ao indicates

that immigration brings serious damages to Chinese men's psyche. They are othered, objectified, sexualized and racialized. They are reduced to "flesh, to the purely physical" (Brison 44). The collective trauma rendered many Chinese men, like Maxine's father, without a past, without culture, without memory. The three men the narrator witnesses, the father, Bak Goong, and Ah Goong, are all family men, although the father's inner "family man" is silenced and murdered by the harsh life he led. By imagining those family men, Maxine connects with the loving father that she does not have. She reconnects and reconciles with the other sex who appear to be violent and misogynist in *The Woman Warrior*. Maxine heals them and herself as well. She shoulders the responsibility to claim America for them and corrects the stigma on "chinaman". She means to replace the derogatory meaning of it with a connotation of love and pride, like the term *queer*.

Chapter 4 Against Healing: Unfinished Witnessing in *Tripmaster Monkey*

When in doubt, sez Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or Thomas Mann, always do the most difficult thing.

-----*Tripmaster Monkey*

Not all of Kingston's efforts to heal and represent Chinese migrants were appreciated and understood by her peers in the Asian American literary circle. Frank Chin is among the fiercest critics. He accused Kingston of faking the famous Asian American folklore, and responds angrily to her orientalism in depicting a "hideous" Chinese culture ("Come All" 3). Chin bitterly attacked Kingston's work, commenting that the Chinese American characters she created were "Greeks holding their eyes slanty with two fingers" ("Autobiography" 124). Chin was aggressively defending the Chinese culture he thought was true and genuine.

From reading trauma theory, I come to understand that Frank Chin, as himself an exponent of Chinese male diaspora, also bears the intersectional historical and cultural trauma of the Chinese male community. Shaped by the trauma that he felt, Chin developed a strong desire to protect Chinese masculinity by being the spokesman of the Chinese male heroic tradition. This conflict between Kingston and Chin is also a process of witnessing, in which both fail to listen, like the failed witnessing between Brave Orchid and Maxine, because they were each still working on their individual trauma. However, unlike the witnessing between the mother and daughter, in the conflict with Chin, Kingston learns to be a listener. Chin's attack makes Kingston think deeper into the structure of her trauma and the resulting limitations on her perspective. Eight years after the publication of *China Men*, Kingston published her *Tripmaster Monkey,* as her "delayed reply to the haunted gender/ethnic complication" (Chang 21). It is Kingston's first complete endeavor in fiction writing and first time with a male protagonist.

In an interview, Marilyn Chin said she was surprised by the male protagonist and

Kingston responded:

> My life as a writer has been a long struggle with pronouns. For 30 years I wrote in first person singular. At a point I was thinking that I was self-centered and egotistical, solipsistic, and not very developed as a human being, nor as an artist because I can only see from this perspective. I was only interested in myself. . . . I had to overcome this self-centeredness. (58)

Kingston describes this first person narrator "I" as "claustrophobia" (58) and tried to distance herself from it. Although there are still traces of a bystanding female narrator in the book, Kingston had made this effort to not being limited.

4.1 Unescapable racism discourse

In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston seeks to work on "the identity of Chinese American today" (qtd. in Grice 88). The name of the protagonist Wittman Ah Sing echoes the canonical American poet Walt Whitman and his central claim for American identity for everyone. It is "the culmination of Kingston's frustration with the racism she had encountered as a Chinese American writer" (Grice 88). She addresses the problem of racism head on. As Anne Anlin Cheng points out, it is extremely difficult to talk about racism, especially in the US, a country built paradoxically both on slavery and the ideal of equality and freedom and a country "whose betrayals have been repeatedly covered over" (10). The genocide of Native Americans, in Werner Scoller's words, was "romanticize[d] and naturalize[d]" by "the cult of the vanishing Indians" (qtd. in Cheng 14). African Americans were seen as inherently underdeveloped and in need of being "civilized". Apart from the risk of further containment, articulating racial injury might also risk the pain being "naturalized or used against the plaintiffs", or risk being "inconvenient to a racist culture and... potentially threatening to the project of advocacy" (Cheng 14). Cheng stresses, "The path connecting injury to pity and then to contempt can be very brief. In

short, it can be damaging to say how damaging racism has been" (14).

In "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud distinguished mourning and melancholia. He observed that mourning was a healthy process of recovery, while melancholia, a stuck situation which resists to move on, to recede, or to substitute, is pathological. In mourning, the ego was intact, while melancholia consumed the ego and the situation kept worsening (Freud 249-250). Cheng reads American racism as a psychiatric condition close to melancholia and notices that "[b]y taking in the other-made-ghostly, the melancholic subject fortifies him- or herself and grows rich in impoverishment" (8). The "cannibalistic" (Freud 250) melancholy, the attack on the ego, brings "feelings of guilt, rage, and punishment" (Cheng 8). In this way, the emotional injury the victim receives from another party turns against the victim itself and is internalized, in the case of racism through racial stereotypes and disciplines. The internalization, according to Cheng, should not be seen as simply a surrender but as "embody[ing] a web of negotiation that expresses agency as well as abjection" (17). The consequences include the emotional confusion of love and hate, "the imaginative loss of a never-possible perfection", and the inferiority complex which involves "a web of self-affirmation, self-denigration, projection, desire, identification, and hostility" (Cheng 17). White preference is not simply hereditary but "travel[s] a tortuous, melancholic path of alienation, resistance, aggression and then, finally, the domestication of that aggression as 'love' " (Cheng 18).

Tripmaster Monkey showcases an eye-opening panorama of racist practices imprinted upon Asian American subjects. They are negatively marked in physiognomy, body feature, dressing code, manners, and language. The markings are fixed through popular culture, especially the movies, and permeate both their public lives as study and occupation and their private lives for example personal relationships. I won't pick them all out, for the clues are easily visible all through the book, especially in Wittman's one-man show of the ending chapter, but I will give some examples. Chinese Americans better avoid green clothes because green makes the yellow skin color stand out (44). When two Americans with Asian ancestry meet, it is described as "epicanthic eyes meeting epicanthic eyes" (31). Wittman was

questioned at a party by a woman: "Can you see out there? How can you see out of there?" (106). If the curiosity of physical difference is to a certain level understandable, the prejudice at places where it should be professional is beyond the mark. The Employment Counselor presumes that Chinese students only get "Chinese Cs" and are raised to a C because "[professors] were giving you a break who couldn't learn the language. They were trying to help out, getting the engineering majors through the liberal arts requirements" (241). His doubt on language ability is outrageous for Wittman who is a fifth-generation immigrant and has known how to use English all his life. His assuming all Chinese are engineers is stereotypical and his belittling the liberal arts is hilarious. This remark renders Wittman completely helplessness: "Monkey powers--outrage and jokes--went detumescent at the enormity of the condescension" (241), showing how racist discourse makes people doubt their whole life pursuits.

The way laughter can also be racialized struck me in particular. There are three times when Wittman's laughter is marked Chinese negatively. The first "Chinese laugh", "that please-let-it-be-a-joke giggle" (23) shows the weak, helpless and embarrassing Chinese American response to racist attacks. The second laughter occurs during the intimate interaction between Wittman and Taña.

> "Hey, wanna make out?"
>
> She didn't laugh, but looked gravely into his eyes for quite a while. "Yeah. Let's make out."
>
> "Let's swap spit," he said, but giggled his Chinese giggle. He had lost his previous cool. He firmed up his face. (*CM* 151)

This is a flirting scene but it is packed with the danger of a game of power and dominance. The Chinese giggle and his joke render him in a position of low power. Tana is in total control. Even during intimate times like this, Wittman is in danger of being gazed at and judged as indecent and nasty. It is not fair to attribute anything the white do not like in a Chinese person as "Chinese". The association only demonstrates

the power of racist discourse to penetrated into even the most private places. The third time the laughter is mentioned is when the job officer showed him the job appraisal he got about his anti-consumerist tendency. As a beatnik in the 60s, he refuses to "fight for capitalism". (238). But somehow "He giggled. The Government man did not smile in return. Wittman should contain himself, shrink his head, shrink his face, but he let out another baboonish heh heh heh. The Chinese giggle" (238). He is still afraid to claim his American identity. His typical beat generation mocking of consumerism is seen as Chinese only because of his Asian face. There are cross-cultural studies in social psychology and linguistics about the way humor conveys social meanings, which I will not go into detail.[4] In China, laughter is used as a way of self-reservation to avoid conflict and diminish confrontation to achieve "harmony" in interpersonal relationships.

4.2 Wittman Ah Sing's fighting melancholy

Everyday racialized cultural differences, in visible and invisible forms, has been a shadow on Chinese Americans that refuses to go away. This exhausting melancholy eats at their egos. Wittman is one of the victims. The novel opens with Wittman's wondering about suicide. Cheng quotes Paul Gilroy and interprets that "for the powerless, the association of death with freedom is not one of mere morbidity . . . but also a choice . . . an active act of will in a situation devoid of will" (20). Like slavery, the racialization of the Asian minority "depends on the [object] being alive"; then "the threat of suicide in this context bespeaks an unlawful act of rebellion and self-assertion" (20). The same seeking of agency and freedom in suicide happens in the story of "No Name Woman".

Racism and emasculation anxiety lead to Wittman's suffering from fear, hypersensitivity, paranoia, hallucinations and at times drives him on the verge of

[4] For example, the essay collections *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters* published in 2012 and *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture* in 2013.

schizophrenia. A walk in the garden to Wittman is a perilous survival test. The wild strawberry by the road to him is a drop of blood of some wounded person and might be "poison" to eliminate him (*TM* 5-6). He is agitated and wants to "bite into an eraser" (*TM* 6) at the sight of "the stained polar bears" in the zoo because the dirtiness is always associated with his folks. The yelling of a man at his dog seems to have a lingering and uncanny effect on Ah Sing the mere passerby. The curse "Bitch animal. ... You hear me? You cuntless bitch" (*TM* 6) stays in the scene continue to exert threatening messages to Ah Sing. He draws console from fantasizing that he hears from a radio station about African American artists draw inspiration from Chinese opera (41).

There are three occasions in *Tripmaster Monkey* that Wittman is driven close to schizophrenia, complete loss of control, and madness. The first time he has "gone ape" (42) is when he failed to find a listening ear from Nanci after exercising his best patience. The second time is when he overhears "Every Mexican in town has one" (*TM* 214) and laughter that he identifies on hearing race jokes. He goes paranoid and confronts the diners aggressively. The third time is when his masculinity is battered again because he cannot help Taña when Taña complains about work. He is a poor Chinese and "can't be her rescuer" (219). Not being able to uphold his manly dignity makes him feel that he is being emasculated. He descends into desperate fantasy. "The curtain opens . . . the great killer ape in chains sees the audience. Bloodshot eyes roll, sharp teeth gnash. Roar! Roar! He opens his mouth wide like in the silent movies" (221). The chains are his racial background, his status of poverty, his flagging self-esteem, his trapping in his masculinity. The racialized other is at the same time animalized frequently and is associated with various animal images, "Bitch", "blue boar", "great killer ape".

American society, famous for its individualism, is not a friendly place toward individuals. Individualism might have helped in turning people into pious protestants or capitalist employees, it also renders people lonely and isolated. "An American stands alone. Alienated, tribeless, individual. To be a successful American, leave your tribe, your caravan, your gang, your partner, your village cousins, your refugee family

that you're making the money for, leave them behind" (246). It is hard to find a sense of community and connectedness, which is essential for any recovery from trauma. As Herman points out, "Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery" (197).

However, it is not easy for Wittman to seek witness. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator described Wittman's factual or halucinated encounter with a little girl:

> Some children were climbing rocks. A little girl, who was at the top of the pile, jumped off, saying, "Don't tell *me* your personal problems." She talked like that because she copied women. "I got problems of my *own,*" she said. The kid was ruined already. A shot of hate went from him to her that ought to have felled her, but up she climbed again. (*TM* 7)

The fact that it is difficult for his suffering to be seen is highlighted here. No matter it is radical feminism or radical individualism, the supposedly innocent, soft-hearted little girl, his last chance of being witnessed, empathized or looked up to is turned into a ruthlessly independent woman warrior. His reading to the silent passengers on the metro is another confirmation of his isolatedness and the indifference of the public who are reluctant to lend a listening ear. However, "[h]e, poor monkey, was yet looking for others of his kind" (21). Wittman still insists on approaching people to look for connections.

Wittman's encountering with Nanci and Judy is disastrous but his talk with Lance and Taña helps him to be seen to enable the start of his healing process. His approaching Nanci is an act of gamble, if not suicide, for he risks opening up his wound to someone who is least likely to bear his witness. Nanci is a beautiful, educated Japanese American, but she is more Americanized than he is. She complains about the racism in her auditions when the directors want her to be real "oriental". She said "No ching-chong chinaman for me" twice (23). He felt her toughness and "(h)is

head and bod were going through contortions from merely hearing that" (23). But still, he does not give up on her, until Nanci remains perfectly untouched, unmoved and unappreciative of his poems and his most inner thoughts, which drives Wittman crazy and scares the girl away. The encounter with Judy is also an embarrassing experience. Judy's taking stereotypes as essential truth irritates Wittman, who is disillusioned with any established social construction, not to say the racial one. But more importantly, the racial signals Wittman founds in her makes her everything that he has been rejecting and running away from. He casts his acquired internalized American mainstream gaze towards her, as he is gazed by others, and dehumanizes the girl as "a blue boar" (77).

Wittman's seeks connection with his best friend Lance, a Japanese American, by provoking and challenging him. Wittman attacks Lance's conformism and his strategy of insisting on seeking his sense of belonging and acceptance from his white "friends" even if it means to keep "tak[ing] their shit"(118). Facing a challenge of a fight, Lance decides to open up and share his stories. Lance's recollection of his traumatic experience in relocation camps ended Wittman's self-pity and suicidal urges because Lance "achieved more pain than he did" (121). Being able to resist and stand pain and suffering is an admirable quality of resilience and seeing someone who experiences more traumatic events but still stays sane and normal is an encouragement for Wittman. Lance has permanently lost his memories and experiences before junior high school except for some vague fantastical impressions and images. He was "in that much pain that he has to forget almost half his life" (121). However, Lance hangs on to his sanity and humanity by the "most beautiful thing [he]'d ever heard" when (most likely in his fantasy) a Mr. Sondak says to him: "Our food is your food. Our water is your water. Our hunger is your hunger. Our stories are your stories" (125). To him, the warmth inspired by the words, even if it might be fantasized, is enough for him to strike a balance to painful real lives. Wittman is in awe with Lance's ruthless resilience, his control over his mental status, his strength to disregard all racism and maltreatment to trade for his social belonging in the material world.

Wittman is deeply touched by Lance's story but he decides Lance the

businessman's strategy is not what Wittman the artist wants. Wittman reflects that Lance's way of delivering himself through trauma and suffering is extreme to him, just as Nanci's. "Have you ever met a Japanese who wasn't a madman underneath? And each one far out in a different direction, the girls too" (120). One chooses to be purely goal-driven and completely ignore the malicious environment, one chooses to accept all the oriental discourse to not feel bad about herself. That is not Wittman's solution. His solution is to maintain his sensitivity and thus his suffering and struggle. His solution is not to pursue a quick and fast solution but to fight the hard way with his wounds in restoring the connection.

He finds connection and comfort in Taña but the relationship causes him to worry more about his manhood. His special quality of sensitiveness and melancholy draws Taña's attention and inspires her protectiveness. Wittman finally finds himself a witness who sees his pain and, even better, who sees him as artistic and romanticist, "a heartbreaker and a rover" (113). Taña melts his loneliness (113). But Taña is the stronger and more dominant party in their relationship. Taña is the one who "put her arm around his waist" and Wittman is the one who is always afraid and anxious (167). After defeated in sword fencing and ignored by Taña, Wittman falls into contemplation and begins to see his "gigantic purple penis . . . ends in a slit, like a vagina" (221). Chang calls the story a prelude and the "imaginary metamorphosis", the "sword-penis-vagina transformation" as "the climax of Wittman's gender anxiety over his economic and emotional dependence on Taña" (26-27). Chang rightly concludes Wittman from the gender perspective as a "psychologically insecure and emotionally unstable chauvinist [with] an overwhelming anxiety over gender crossing" (28).

Chang rightly points out that *Tripmaster Monkey* "destabilizes static binary oppositions such as male/female, ethnicity/gender, and racism/sexism through a constantly shifting of positions" (15). Efforts to destabilize Chinese/American opposition is visible by creating characters with levels of Americanization and levels of orientalism. However, Kingston, by constantly claiming herself American politically, by claiming his male ancestors American and by Wittman's claiming "I am

the American here. I am the American walking here" (70), strengthening the boundary of nationality. It might be especially hard in America because in America, a nation of immigrants, there is a constant tension between pluralism and a unified national identity (Desmond 63). Jane Desmond points out that "[p]hilosophies of social Darwinism, eugenics, and scientific racism" is used to justify the problematic and systematic process of turning foreigners into Americans (63).

Wittman's trip of self-healing through the restoring connection is not yet finished. He seeks to connect with his Chinese ancestries by borrowing from Chinese literary stories like the Monkey King in *Journey to the West*, stories of Guan Yu and other heroes in *Romance of Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margins*. He wants more cultural representation than "knickknacks" or "hand laundries" (27). He questions "where's our jazz? Where's our blues? Where's our ain't-taking-no-shit-from-nobody street-strutting language?" and aspires to be " the first bad-jazz China Men bluesman of America" (27). He determines for himself that he prefers to establish bonds with a community and his community is comprised of all the marginalized groups from many ethnic groups. He decides to break his alienation and also encourage others to break theirs for integration. He has faith with his "eye for human nature" (120), a precious complement to Wittman from his brother Lance. He makes laws for himself and follows them in his own will. He believes the "principle about spontaneity. Zen. Don't mull. There's divinity in flipping a coin rather than weighing debits and assets. . . . Always do the more flamboyant thing. Don't be a bookkeeper. (163) He sticks to his "way to make a life: Say Yes more often than No. Participate. . . . To be a brother, a friend, a husband to some stranger passing through" (164). He decides to follow his "philosophy of life: Do the right thing by whoever crosses your path. Those coincidental people are your people" (223). He showed the burgeoning of a pacifist ideal. And in this Kingston does give a more optimistic picture and hints on the possible transcendence of the identity crisis. Why can't the immigrants choose for themselves, to be both or to be none?

Tripmaster Monkey ends with the One-Man Show, which Grice calls "perhaps the most lengthy indictment of racist stereotyping in Asian American Literature to

date" (90-91). He gives his opinion on almost every sign of racism that he is angry about, listed as "inscrutability", "the emasculation of the Asian male", "cultural stereotyping", "linguistic stereotypes" and "filmic misrepresentation of Asians" (Grice 91). But he is not asking for a revolution, but improvements and the opportunity to be seen and heard and accepted or loved. He refuses Taña's request to be Taña's wife. He is not the strong masculine type but he still identify with his gender and needs to be respected.

The audiences witnesses this testimony with distance. They didn't take his monologue with its full impact. The audience responds sometimes with silence, sometimes with dismissal, and sometimes with understanding. The girls decide not to take offense when Wittman talks about women's cosmetics and plastic surgeries to cater to American aesthetics. They treat the monologue as "just part of a show" (312) and refuse to make it political. They don't act on Wittman's advice but still stays for his speech. Some pity him for his oversensitiveness. Some contribute what they observe. Some jokes around. Everyone joined the communal behavior art to "kiss everyone equally" to break the stereotype that "we are a people who don't kiss and don't hug" (*TM* 329). The noisy and messy crowd misinterprets Wittman's final "divorce speech" as a marriage announcement and pushed Taña onto the stage and makes the play a communal wedding party. I think Kingston makes a good decision to end Wittman's testimony in this way and it is a successful witnessing, achieved in an unconventional way: the audience understand halfway and still accepts him with tolerance. If racism creates paranoia, then it is impossible to address every case of paranoia. The sufferers needs to be confirmed in the fact of its being illusion. Besides, Kingston stresses that the racial, gender distinctions and even national identity are not as important as the presence of the community itself. The community offers a place for troubled beings to be seen, understood and supported. The carnivalesque atmosphere counteracts the isolation in society and those who do not want to struggle alone do not have to do that.

Many critics complain about the exhausting and distracting rant of Wittman. Anne Tyler calls the book "exhausting" "manic monologue", Caroline Ong complains

that it "boder[s] on the incomprehensible" and Nicci Gerrard calls it "bitter repetitious paranoia" (Grice 68). Le Anne Schreiber criticizes "the manic monkey talk" has covered "the beautiful voice of the author" (BR9). I think the improvements in her effort in understanding the psychology of ethnic minorities are more valuable. A Hussein acclaims that Kingston "penetrates the depth of the immigrant's psyche" and "[t]his obsession with talking, manic verbal invention, and tale-spinning, leads Wittman Ah Sing through the scar-pitted cityscapes of twentieth-century America " (299). In this complex book, Kingston tries to solve the controversies, arguments, and misunderstandings her books have aroused. Kingston expresses her satisfaction with this book to Marilyn Chin in an interview: she started she thinks *Tripmaster Monkey is* an "artistic and psychological improvement" and that "I am now a much less selfish person" (59), which is true. Artistically, Kingston expresses her apology to her being a radical feminist and her failure to strike a better political balance that she hopes readers could witness.

However, the task of witnessing and working through is not ended here. As Laub perceives, "[t]he testimony is inherently a process of facing loss--of going through the pain of the act of witnessing, and of the ending of the act of witnessing--which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss. It reenacts the passage through difference in such as way, however, that it allows perhaps a certain repossession of it" (74). Witnessing itself is an acting out. Every time the subject gives testimony, he or she will experience the impact of trauma again. But it is the only direction that may lead to possible healing. In another sense, resisting to be healed is a gesture of protest, of not being satisfied and accepting reconciliation.

Conclusion

This thesis examines Maxine Hong Kingston's Chinese Diaspora trilogy, *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey* within the context of trauma theory. Trauma theory is an multidisciplinary approach. The concept of trauma is material, somatic, psychic, cultural, symbolic, historical and structural, "a point at which all these currents meet" (Buelens et al 1), and trauma theory is "less a field or a methodology than a coming together of concerns and disciplines" (Buelens et al 3).

In this thesis I have sought to read Maxine Hong Kingston's works from the starting point of trauma as a coming together of political and social concerns and personal trauma healing tasks. I adopted classical trauma theory and its development in gender studies and postcolonial studies. It turns out that classical trauma theory still is a powerful tool to explain traumas of certain persons or groups: for example in this thesis, classical trauma theory solves the puzzle that Maxine wonders about Chinese American men's loss of history, memory and culture.

Another attempt my research ventured to do is the application of postcolonial trauma theory to the story of Brave Orchid in parallel with Maxine's trauma. Since many scholars concentrate on second-generation trauma, the first generation seems to lose their stories and only becomes the traumatic background of the second generation. The study of the first-generation immigrants provides a good arena of cross-cultural examination and supplements the study of the second-generation immigrants' trauma with a background which is not flat but more nuanced, complex, historically and culturally specific.

Maxine Hong Kingston proves herself to be a writer with responsibility and strength. Although she carries out an almost life-long project of claiming America for the Chinese diaspora, she still shows transcendence of the boundaries of nationality. In *The Woman Warrior*, she comforts Brave Orchid who is deep in melancholy, saying that "We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot" (107).

The universalism echoes with Said's beautiful quote from Hugo of St. Victor:

> The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (185)

Maxine Hong Kingston is the "already strong" after her three testimony to witness her diasporic life.

Immigration is a complex historical, political and social question and this thesis only attempts to understand some minds in one specific group. The struggle of immigrants are an ongoing battle but with hope. In my short two-year cross-cultural experience, I have met people who struggles in the agonies of displacement but also people who enjoy being at the intersection of multiple cultural influences and are energized by the clash of cultural differences. I sympathize with the first group and respect and am amazed by the latter. Happiness and contentment in immigrant groups is not easy to reach but it does give hope for a brighter future in regards to the inevitable interconnection created by globalization.

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